

UCLA

UCLA Electronic Theses and Dissertations

Title

The Black Male Youth Academy: Understanding the impact of a critical literacy intervention program on underserved youth

Permalink

<https://escholarship.org/uc/item/3cz3h4tk>

Author

Scorza, D'Artagnan

Publication Date

2013

Peer reviewed|Thesis/dissertation

UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA

Los Angeles

The Black Male Youth Academy:
Understanding the impact of a critical literacy
intervention program on underserved youth

A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree
Doctor of Philosophy in Education

by

D'Artagnan Jac'Qualle Scorza

2013

© Copyright by

D'Artagnan Jac'Qualle Scorza

2013

ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

The Black Male Youth Academy:
Understanding the impact of a critical literacy
intervention program on underserved youth

by

D'Artagnan Jac'Qualle Scorza

Doctor of Philosophy in Education

University of California, Los Angeles, 2013

Professor Ernest Morrell, Chair

This study explores the impact of teaching critical literacy in an urban school with a group of African American male youth. Using action research, I present a program called the Black Male Youth Academy (BMYA), a critical literacy intervention intended to serve African American males. The aims of this study were to present outcomes of youth who participated in the intervention program and to understand the utility of action research in an urban school setting. Furthermore, this study sought to understand the ways in which critical literacy could be used to advance the academic and sociopolitical development of youth in the context of the Black Male Youth Academy (BMYA), the intervention program. Finally, I present the use of critical research methodologies, such as youth participatory action research (YPAR), and discuss the usefulness of these methodologies to help address challenges facing African American male youth in urban schools.

The dissertation of D'Artagnan Jac'Qualle Scorza is approved.

Megan Franke

Marvin Lynn

Peter McLaren

Tyrone Howard

Ernest Morrell, Committee Chair

University of California, Los Angeles

This dissertation is dedicated to the many young men I worked with and to my father, brothers, cousins, uncles and friends who give me the strength to carry this work forward.

Table of Contents

ABSTRACT	II
CHAPTER ONE: DETERMINING THE LANDSCAPE.....	1
INTRODUCTION	1
CONCEPTUALIZING THE CHALLENGES OF AFRICAN AMERICAN MALE YOUTH USING SOCIOHISTORICAL PATTERNS.....	6
THE TRAGEDY OF VIOLENCE: THE CRIMINAL JUSTICE SYSTEM.....	9
SCHOOLING AND THE ACADEMIC ACHIEVEMENT “GAP”	12
THE IMPACT OF NEOLIBERALISM ON THE SCHOOLING EXPERIENCE OF AFRICAN AMERICAN MALE YOUTH	16
MOVING TO ADDRESS THE “GAP”	20
PUTTING THEORY INTO ACTION: THE BLACK MALE YOUTH ACADEMY	22
CHAPTER TWO: REFLECTING RESEARCH IN COMMUNITY	26
THE RESEARCH QUESTION	26
LITERATURE REVIEW	28
<i>Schools as Potential Tools for Liberation.....</i>	<i>28</i>
<i>Using Sociopolitical Development Theory to Advance Critical Literacy.....</i>	<i>31</i>
<i>Critical Literacy as a Tool for Liberation</i>	<i>33</i>
<i>Instructional approaches to using critical literacy.....</i>	<i>39</i>
<i>Cultural Modeling</i>	<i>40</i>
<i>Popular culture as a culturally relevant approach to critical literacy.....</i>	<i>42</i>
<i>Moving theory into practice through educational research.....</i>	<i>44</i>
<i>Advancing Civic Engagement and Youth Voice through Critical Literacy.....</i>	<i>48</i>
<i>Authentic Research and YPAR.....</i>	<i>51</i>
<i>Summary.....</i>	<i>53</i>
CHAPTER THREE: METHODOLOGICAL OVERVIEW	58
THE CHALLENGE OF RELYING UPON EXISTING METHODOLOGICAL PRACTICES.....	58
<i>Participatory Action Research</i>	<i>61</i>
OPERATIONALIZING ACTION RESEARCH FOR PARTICIPANTS.....	64
<i>The Work of the Students</i>	<i>64</i>
<i>The Work of the Teacher and Researcher.....</i>	<i>65</i>
<i>Participant Role in Research Design</i>	<i>65</i>
DATA COLLECTION.....	66
<i>Table 1. Number of Participants by School Year, Grade Level, and Year of Participation in the Program</i>	<i>69</i>
<i>Table 2. Data Collection Table</i>	<i>69</i>
<i>Table 3. Data Type Table.....</i>	<i>70</i>
IDENTIFYING THE “CRITICAL” IN CRITICAL LITERACY.....	71
<i>Table 4. Table of Terms.....</i>	<i>71</i>
<i>Table 5. Guiding Questions for Writing Analysis.....</i>	<i>73</i>
SITE DESCRIPTION	74
<i>Moving Toward Agency.....</i>	<i>75</i>
THREATS TO VALIDITY AND CHALLENGES WITH GENERALIZABILITY	75
APPROACHING LANGUAGE AND LITERACY RESEARCH	78

REFLECTION AS AN ANALYTICAL TOOL: UNDERSTANDING POSITIONALITY, POINT OF VIEW AND THE ROLE OF TEACHER VS. RESEARCHER WHILE ‘WEARING TWO HATS’	79
SIGNIFICANCE AND IMPLICATIONS.....	82
CHAPTER FOUR: THE BLACK MALE YOUTH ACADEMY: CONCEPTUALIZING AND DESIGNING A CRITICAL LITERACY INTERVENTION PROGRAM	84
DRAWING FROM PERSONAL EXPERIENCE	84
CONCEPTUALIZING A CRITICAL LITERACY PROGRAM.....	88
BUILDING THE BLACK MALE YOUTH ACADEMY (BMYA)	90
GETTING STARTED	92
<i>Table 1 - Program development over time</i>	<i>93</i>
CHAPTER FIVE: CRITICAL LITERACY DEVELOPMENT	96
DATA FROM THE 2008-2009 SCHOOL YEAR	96
CRITICAL LITERACY AS AN EXPRESSION	99
WRITTEN EXPRESSIONS OF CRITICAL LITERACY	99
SCAFFOLDING TO INCORPORATE CURRENT EVENTS INTO A CRITICAL LITERACY LESSON.....	100
<i>Table 1. – Students who responded to writing prompt for Quickwrite #9.....</i>	<i>105</i>
SCAFFOLDING CLASS DISCUSSIONS	106
<i>Table 2. – Students who responded to writing prompt for Quickwrite # 4.....</i>	<i>108</i>
SPOKEN EXPRESSIONS OF CRITICAL LITERACY.....	109
WHERE SPEECH REVEALS CRITICAL LITERACY	110
BEHAVIORAL EXPRESSIONS OF CRITICAL LITERACY.....	115
CRITICAL LITERACY LEADS TO ACTION.....	116
THERE ISN’T ALWAYS A SOLUTION.....	119
<i>Table 3. Frequency Data of Expressions of Critical Literacy Across Artifacts and Field Notes</i>	<i>122</i>
“KNOWING” AS AN EXPRESSION OF CRITICAL LITERACY.....	122
SCHOOL HAS VALUE.....	123
PEDAGOGICAL EXPRESSIONS OF CRITICAL LITERACY	125
TEACHING, LEARNING AND CHALLENGING THE EDUCATIONAL SPACE	126
KNOWLEDGE OF SELF AND ANTITHETICAL EXPRESSIONS OF CRITICAL LITERACY	128
KNOWLEDGE OF SELF AND ANTITHETICAL EXPRESSIONS: SUPPLEMENTS TO CRITICAL LITERACY	129
ON BECOMING CRITICAL.....	132
<i>Table 4. – Collective Assessment of Expressions across Modes of Expression.....</i>	<i>134</i>
TREE DIAGRAM 1: IDENTIFYING EXPRESSIONS OF CRITICAL LITERACY.....	136
TREE DIAGRAM 2: PHENOMENON RELATED TO EXPRESSIONS OF CRITICAL LITERACY.....	137
CHAPTER SIX – CULTIVATING ACADEMIC AND SOCIOPOLITICAL DEVELOPMENT	138
OPENING UP	138
DATA FROM THE 2010-2012 SCHOOL YEARS	141
FROM CRITICAL PEDAGOGY TO CRITICAL LITERACY.....	144
<i>Interpreting and understanding the word.....</i>	<i>145</i>
<i>Writing for a future.....</i>	<i>149</i>
ASSESSING THE QUANTITATIVE DATA	151
<i>Evaluating Pre-Post Data.....</i>	<i>154</i>
MEANINGFUL AND AUTHENTIC ASSESSMENT THROUGH SOCIOPOLITICAL DEVELOPMENT	156
DEVELOPING AN EMPOWERED ACADEMIC IDENTITY.....	158
BECOMING URBAN SCHOLARS: BUILDING AN IDENTITY AS RESEARCHERS AND INTELLECTUALS	159
DESCRIBING IMPACT ON STUDENT PARTICIPANTS.....	165
<i>“I didn’t expect it to be any different”</i>	<i>166</i>
<i>The turning point.....</i>	<i>168</i>

INTRODUCTION	175
SUMMARY OF FINDINGS	175
ON BECOMING A CRITICAL METHODOLOGIST	179
REFLECTING ON MY ROLE AS PARTICIPANT OBSERVER.....	181
TOWARD A GROUNDED THEORY OF ACADEMIC AND SOCIOPOLITICAL DEVELOPMENT	184
<i>Implications for literacy research.....</i>	<i>185</i>
<i>Implications for curriculum and pedagogy.....</i>	<i>188</i>
<i>Implications for urban school reform and policy.....</i>	<i>191</i>
WORKING TO ACHIEVE EQUITY	193
APPENDIX A — DESCRIPTIVE STATISTICS.....	196
APPENDIX B — BLACK MALE YOUTH ACADEMY (BMYA) SYLLABUS FOR THE 2010-2011	
ACADEMIC YEAR	203
APPENDIX C — BLACK MALE YOUTH ACADEMY CALENDAR FOR ACADEMIC YEAR 2010-2011	
.....	213
APPENDIX D — INTERVIEW PROTOCOLS.....	218
APPENDIX E — SURVEY INSTRUMENTS.....	222
REFERENCES.....	231

“Everyone looks at the finish line as a matter of just reward based on performance. The tragedy is that some of our people are not even at the starting block!”

- Patrick Roche (1994)

CHAPTER ONE: Determining the Landscape

Introduction

Educational institutions focused on standards-based education often overlook one significant need when attempting to address educational inequity: the need for effective literacy practices. This study explores the role of literacy in urban schools as it relates to African American male youth. I present an action research program called the Black Male Youth Academy to explore this phenomenon and to demonstrate the use of participatory action research as a rigorous methodological approach to data collection and reporting. In this study, I present some of the challenges African American males face in education and underscore the importance of the role schools play in creating, advancing and eliminating these challenges. I then describe and argue for the need to create educational interventions, like the Black Male Youth Academy, that use critical literacy as an academic tool to offer solutions for educators who wish to close to the achievement gap and increase educational opportunities for Black male youth.

In most academic intervention programs, the primary problem that educational scholars, practitioners and leaders attempt to overcome is the literacy gap between what a student is expected to know at any given point in time and what the student actually knows. This “literacy gap” is also the fundamental concern of nearly every school reform effort focused on improving test scores, increasing our economic competitiveness, increasing student academic engagement and helping students get into college. Many educators recognize that improving literacy, be it in the areas of math, science or English Language Arts, is a primary goal of schools. Yet, we still

find such widespread disparities in the literacy outcome of different groups of youth throughout our educational system – especially youth of color who come from low-income communities. To underscore this problem, this study will focus on African American male youth who, more than any other group, continue to lag behind their White, Latino and Asian counterparts in most traditional indicators of academic achievement (Noguera, 2008; Ladson-Billings, 1997; Aronson, Fried & Good, 2002). Even when we control for income and class, we note significant differences in performance in the areas of reading, math and science. Garibaldi (1992) argues that while much time has been devoted to discussing the plight of African American male youth, very little has been devoted to developing solutions. This study aims to do just that.

To explore the reasons behind this widespread disparity, we must understand the conditions these young men face. More often than not, African American male youth face far greater degrees of disciplinary action in schools, violence outside of school and are more likely to be diagnosed with learning disabilities or referred to special education classes (Harry & Anderson, 1994; Davis, 2003; Ferguson, 2000). Although historical forms of scientific racism that upheld the belief of African Americans as intellectually inferior (Herrnstein & Murray, 1994) have been disproved as fundamentally flawed and erroneous (Crane, 1994) — across the country, from California to New York, African American male youth experience similar educational challenges in public education (Noguera, 2008) where positive academic outcomes remain low and their expectation to fail remains high. In many ways, it seems that African American male youth, writ large, are expected to fail and thus, do so.

Educators who are concerned with this problem must work diligently to develop new methods that work to close the persistent opportunity gaps that exist between African American males and their more affluent counterparts. Educators must do this notwithstanding the

significant economic and leadership challenges many urban schools face. Many African American male youth face grave outcomes if these challenges are not directly addressed. We cannot wait and any sustained effort to close the opportunity gap will require creative thinking, hard work, strong research and a sustained commitment to these young men. Jean Anyon (1997) argues that the political economy of poor urban schools will always undercut attempts to reform urban education. Without sufficient resources, many urban schools will have a difficult time meeting the needs of their students yet, the lack of resources should not prevent us from working to address the problems faced by and within urban schools. Since many African American male youth attend these types of schools, we must consider the implications of our inaction in an environment where resources are scarce.

It is also important to note that the educational outcomes that occur in under-resourced urban schools are not solely a result of the lack of resources. Instead, pedagogical practices and curriculum are two critically important areas that impact students' willingness to learn, shape the identities of the learner and reinforce social stratification. More to the point, I argue that the literacy and teaching practices of educators as well as the learning practices of African American male youth help drive educational outcomes in the class and the school. This idea is especially important because it underscores a significant challenge that is often discussed in the teacher lounge, but rarely discussed in research literature. In this study, I will attempt to shed light upon this concern in a way that hopes to provide direction for educators who seek to understand how they can help improve educational outcomes for African American male youth.

In our society, we have acknowledged that education, or passing information from one generation to the next, is critical for the advancement of social structures and institutions. Horace Mann posited that education it is the most essential component in the creation of a good

citizen (Glass, 2000) and while some educators agree with his argument, many have and continue to wrestle with the purpose and value of education. Some believe education should be undertaken for preparation in the workforce (National Commission on Excellence in Education, 1983), while others believe it is necessary to acquire freedom and liberate oneself from the oppressor (Goodwyn & Finlay, 2003; Graham, 2005; Freire, 1993). Regardless of the intended purposes or consequences of education, very few will deny its value.

However, what we have yet to fully debate in the public sphere is the importance of the “process” of educating individuals across generations. I call this process, literacy. Literacy is not just the ability to read and write — it is instead, the process by which one comes to learn which then supports one’s ability to read and write. It is time to forge a new approach in the learning sciences that takes into consideration the multiple ways of knowing that individuals are experiencing in the information age. When we stop to acknowledge that education is important for our society, we must also acknowledge that the way we educate people within our society is just as important, if not more. We need an approach that reaffirms the value of public education and acknowledges that our methods for passing on knowledge are no longer working as well as they once did. Developing literacy and closing the knowledge gap is the “driver” in education and it is time to allow the driver to steer the vehicle.

I must also acknowledge that urban schools in America have experienced a number of educational reform efforts where one or another new idea was introduced and was popularized. Further, I admit that many educators would disagree with my argument that literacy has been ignored and counter by saying that there are a number of institutions and programs committed to helping teachers and others learn how to pass on knowledge (teacher preparation programs, Bloom’s taxonomy, Cornell Notes, Response to Intervention, the learning sciences, etc.) and that

some of these efforts have been successful. I would counter: if these efforts were truly successful — why aren't they working well for African American male youth, or low-income youth, or youth of color? Whose learning style is being measured when these efforts are being created and why then do we assume that one size will fit all students in today's learning environment where youth have an unlimited number of sources whereby they access information? Working to answer these questions will then help us explore our assumptions about literacy practices and school reform efforts while acknowledging the need for change.

Few studies articulate the ways in which various communities learn in America learn and even fewer studies focus on how African American male youth learn. Usually, studies focused on the literacy practices of African American males have been limited to topics such as Ebonics or the “dumbing down” of the learning process. In order to be more effective, educators must evaluate existing literacy practices in a context that is both historical and accurate so they might determine the type of reform efforts our schools require to improve the educational outcomes for African American male youth. By reviewing historical perspectives on educational reform, we can acquire a unique perspective about society, develop an understanding of continuity in change, determine the relationship between geography and culture and gain a deep understanding about causality through our shared humanity (Nelson, 1992, p. 466). For critical educational researchers, understanding the sociopolitical and sociohistorical context of change with regard to literacy is essential if we are to apply appropriate analyses and solutions. This understanding allows us to determine appropriate research methods in order to effectively inform learning and teaching practices, as well as school reform efforts.

Conceptualizing the Challenges of African American Male Youth using Sociohistorical Patterns

Because urban schools do not operate in a social, political, economic or cultural vacuum, we must contextualize the conditions African American male youth experience throughout the country. To do this, we will explore the demographic patterns of African Americans, which have shifted significantly over time. This shift can be observed through statistical and historical analyses. Statistics do not tell the whole story or represent the myriad of challenges facing the African American community but they do offer valuable insights into the broad social patterns of the African American household — its socioeconomic status, population trends and health factors. Taken alone, these patterns seem insignificant and without context. Upon deeper analysis, we find that they represent a larger national trend and are historically rooted in oppressive institutional practices.

According to the US Census Bureau (2010), African Americans represented nearly 14 percent of the US population at around 42 million people. Relying upon data from the American Community Survey (2004), we find that almost 60 percent of the African American population living in the United States resided in roughly ten states, namely: New York, Florida, Georgia, Texas, California, Illinois, North Carolina, Maryland, Louisiana, and Virginia. Roughly a quarter of the African American population inhabited the states of New York, Florida, and Georgia combined. Five states, New York, Florida, Georgia, Texas, and California had populations larger than 2 million. This trend in residency signifies a major shift from rural to urban life. The majority of African Americans now reside in major metropolitan areas instead of the South.

With regards to family status, roughly 30 percent of all African American households were led by a single mother; about 9 percent of non-Hispanic White households held this status. Approximately 65 percent of all African American households are family households (maintained by one or more parents), where 34 percent, age 15 and over, were married. This is compared to the overall U.S. population where the average marriage rate is 54 percent. Taken as a whole, 29 percent of African American households were married-couple households compared to 54 percent of non-Hispanic White households (ACS, US Census Bureau, 2004). At least 7 percent of African Americans, aged 30 and older, were grandparents living in the same household with their grandchildren younger than 18. In comparison, about 2 percent of non-Hispanic Whites aged 30 and older were grandparents living in the same household with their grandchildren younger than 18. About 52 percent of Black¹ grandparents who lived with their grandchildren were also responsible for their care, compared to about 45 percent of non-Hispanic² White grandparents who lived with their grandchildren. When we assess this data in whole numbers, we find that out of the 42 million African Americans, nearly 8.1 million live in households with both parents, approximately 7.1 million live in households without a parent and the remaining live in a household where only a single parent or grandparent resides (ACS, US Census Bureau, 2004).

With regards to education, around 80 percent of African Americans who were at least 25 years of age graduated from high school and at least 17 percent held bachelor's degrees. Of non-Hispanic Whites aged 25 and older, about 89 percent were high school graduates and about 30 percent held a bachelor's degree or higher. For African American males and females, about 17

¹ I use the terms Black and African American interchangeably to represent signifiers used by those of African descent who live in United States.

² Although I prefer to use the term Latino to honor the indigenous traditions of Spanish speaking Americans, Hispanic is often used throughout the United States to identify a broad range of Spanish-speaking peoples in statistical analyses, government applications and data sources such as the US Census. Furthermore, the term Latino refers to people who are Spanish speaking, but do not always identify as being of Spanish decent and may have origins in Latin America.

percent held a bachelor's degree or higher compared to about 32 percent of non-Hispanic White men and about 28 percent of non-Hispanic White women. As of 2007, the median income of African American households was about \$40,200. This was less than two-thirds of the median income of non-Hispanic White households where the income level was around \$64,400. This gap has remained constant since 1990 (US Census Bureau, 2007). While these rates are discouraging, they are not surprising given that family income and educational attainment continue to be closely related to one's level of political influence (Bartels, 2004; APSA Task Force on Inequality and American Democracy, 2004) and therefore, one's ability to create change.

In socioeconomic terms, at least 22.1 percent of African Americans live below the 2007 poverty level. This is compared to about 8 percent of non-Hispanic Whites (US Census Bureau, 2007). As of 2004, the majority of African American households, at roughly 54 percent, lived in a renter-occupied home and fewer than 46 percent lived in owner-occupied homes. As of the same period, at least 74 percent of non-Hispanic White households lived in owner-occupied homes (US Census Bureau, 2004). In nearly every indicator of health, African Americans fared the worst. This is even the case in the area of smoking: African Americans were least likely to smoke but they were most likely to die from smoking (U.S. National Center for Health Statistics, 2009).

Steinberg, Lamborn, Dornbusch and Darling (1992) found a causal relationship between parenting practices and academic achievement. These trends suggest that ongoing challenges in the African American family structure contribute to the academic outcomes we observe in youth. These empirical patterns also make clear the reality and ongoing impact of racism. African Americans remain underrepresented in higher education, overwhelmingly low income, face

increasing health risks at degrees greater than their White and even Latino counterparts. Despite these circumstances, gradual and steady improvement has occurred in the African American community since 1940. Walter Allen (1995) still finds that argued that:

Lest a false sense of complacency result, however, it must be pointed out that deprivation and disadvantage are relative concepts. Black families continue to be extremely disadvantaged relative to White families in this society. Now, as earlier in this country's history, the occupational and educational attainment, health status, housing conditions, incomes and life opportunities of White Americans are far superior to those of their Black brethren (p. 575).

Statistics do not create stories, but do offer a valuable reflection of the ongoing state of affairs in American society. Despite the incredible resiliency of the African American family, economic, social and political gaps continue to persist into the 20th century.

The Tragedy of Violence: The Criminal Justice System

Violence plays a significant role in the lives of African American males. In Pedro Noguera's (2008) *The Trouble with Black boys*, he recounts an occasion, when, while playing basketball, he and another group of Black men were distressed by an argument during the game and an escalation of anger,

I once found myself in the middle of a heated argument that nearly erupted into violence between Black men over nothing more than a basketball game...This was a typical pickup game of street ball — an informal form of recreation with no uniform or referees...As threats and arguing escalated, one man announced that he was going to his car to get his gun, at which point several of the other men and I left the court with great haste (pp. xv-xvi).

Noguera's experience typifies the daily struggle African American males endure. To fully appreciate the power of crime and violence on African American male youth, note the U.S.

Department of Justice, Bureau of Justice Statistics (BJS), 2009 Criminal Victimization analysis of violent crime affecting African American males: “Violence against males, blacks, and persons age 24 or younger occurred at higher or somewhat higher rates than the rates of violence against females, whites, and persons age 25 or older”³. Additionally, BJS identified that by “...1997, 9 percent of the black population in the U.S. was under some form of correctional supervision compared to 2 percent of the white population and over 1 percent of other races”⁴. As of December 31, 2004, there were:

...3,218 black male sentenced prison inmates per 100,000 black males in the United States compared to 1,220 Hispanic male inmates per 100,000 Hispanic males and 463 white male inmates per 100,000 white males⁵.

Relative to the entire prison population, African American males are more likely to be incarcerated than both their White and Latino counterparts combined.

Further, consider that African Americans are six times more likely to die from murder than Whites and are seven times more likely to commit murder than Whites⁶. Violence, crime and imprisonment compound the many challenges facing the African American community and negatively impact the lives of these young men.

Angela Davis (2007) points out that the

out-of-control punishment industry is an extremely effective criminalization industry, for the racial imbalance in incarcerated populations is not recognized as evidence of structural racism, but rather invoked as a consequence of the assumed criminality of black people. In other words, the criminalization process works so well precisely because of the hidden logic of racism (p. 207).

³ Source: United States Department of Justice, Bureau of Justice Statistics website. Visit: <http://bjs.ojp.usdoj.gov/index.cfm?ty=pbdetail&iid=2217>

⁴ Source: Bureau of Justice Statistics Correctional Surveys, (The National Probation Data Survey, National Prisoner Statistics, Survey of Jails, and The National Parole Data Survey) as presented, in Correctional Populations in the United States, 1997. Visit: <http://bjs.ojp.usdoj.gov/content/glance/cpracept.cfm>

⁵ Source: United States Department of Justice, Bureau of Justice Statistics website. Visit: <http://www.ojp.usdoj.gov/bjs/prisons.htm>

⁶ Source: United States Department of Justice, Bureau of Justice Statistics website. Visit: <http://www.ojp.usdoj.gov/bjs/homicide/race.htm>

It is the hidden logic of racism that contributes to the expectation of violence and crime amongst African American males and within African American communities. Both the expectation and experience of African American males as criminals reproduces the system many of these young men inherit. Furthermore, the skewing of laws, policies and practices in the criminal justice system tend to demonize African American males who often lack resources to defend themselves or who live in areas where they cannot avoid being targeted.

As we work to understand the impact of violence and crime on African American males in urban communities, we must also ask ourselves how this impacts the academic outcomes for African American male youth. We know that in some communities, students who live in low-income neighborhoods are more likely to be surrounded by violence and crime (Buka, Stichick, Birdthistle & Earls, 2001). And although the research explaining the influence of violence on academic achievement is not wide ranging, some studies suggest violence is a predictive factor explaining low academic achievement. The stated causes are: exposure to trauma (leading to the onset of depression), a reduction in wellness and an increase in post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) (Schwab-Stone, Ayers, Kaspro, Voyce, Barone, et. al., 1995). Regardless of the precise causes, we know that African American male youth who live in urban communities are greatly affected by the violence in their communities. Violence has the potential to impact a student's ability to perform academically because of traumatic experiences (Sharkey, Tirado-Strayer, Papachristos & Raver, 2012).

When we combine the socio-historical, economic and political factors affecting African American males and focus on the added impact of violence, we should not be surprised by the educational outcomes of African American male youth. Instead, we should be outraged and

committed to addressing these issues for this group of Americans. Ronnie Hopkins (1997) maintained that structured systems (i.e., schools and prisons) support social, political and economic inequality for African American males. The problem exists “[i]n city after city, in virtually every ‘hood,’ where you could well continue illustrating the tragic, endemic, and epidemic annihilation of African American males” (p. 4). In this study, the experience of African American male youth is privileged and was centralized in the data collection process as I sought to identify effective literacy practices. I believe the focus on understanding how to employ successful literacy practices with African American male youth has significant implications for the field and in urban education.

Schooling and the Academic Achievement “Gap”

In addition to the many difficulties facing African American male youth, inequities in schooling cause disproportionate underachievement in their schooling experience relative to their white male counterparts. Davis and Jordan (1994) contend that educational inequities have long-term consequences on a student’s educational future, potential employment and hope for a stable family. Consider the remarks at the 2004 National Urban League Conference in Detroit by U.S. Secretary of Education Rod Paige:

Here is one such brutal fact: The African American community is in educational crisis; a catastrophe is upon us. This is no exaggeration. For example, a new study from Northeastern University found that black male unemployment was so bad that, in 2002, one out of every four African American men, 25 percent, were idle all year long, a rate twice as high as that of white or Hispanic males. In 4th grade reading, the NAEP, referred to as the nation's report card, reports that African American students score on average, 30 points lower than their Anglo peers. In some cities, such as Washington, D.C., the gap is as high as 70 points⁷.

⁷ Source: United States Department of Education website. Visit: <http://www.ed.gov/news/pressreleases/2004/07/07222004.html>

There is more: A 2008 Schott Foundation report assessing high school graduation rates estimated that “more than half of Black males did not receive diplomas with their cohort in 2005-2006” (Schott Foundation, 2008). These outcomes are disastrous and the academic opportunity gap continues to persist, despite continued legislative and judicial action attempting to address this issue (Tate, Ladson-Billings & Grant, 1993).

John Ogbu (1987) contended that the factors that contribute to the underachievement of many underrepresented students of color are a result of societal forces, classroom practices, cultural differences and economic barriers; as such they, deny educational opportunity, prevent access to quality education and replicate social inequality. These societal forces act upon schooling frameworks to maintain the status quo and reproduce the social hierarchy. Hopkins (1997) argued that public schools are structured systems that support social, political and economic inequality for students. In his view, directly influences the prison and homicide rates amongst African American male youth. The result of this confluence comes in the multiple forms of resistance, including reactionary behavior and self-defeating resistance (Delgado Bernal & Solórzano, 2001), common among some African American male youth in educational settings.

Jonathan Kozol (1991) reasons, just as Davis and Jordan explains, that inequities in schooling create the disproportionate underachievement of youth who are asked to choose between resources:

One would not have thought that children in America would ever have to choose between a teacher or a playground or sufficient toilet paper. Like grain in a time of famine, the immense resources which the nation does in fact possess go not to the child in the greatest need but to the child of the highest bidder — the child of parents who, more frequently than not, have also enjoyed the same abundance when they were schoolchildren (pps. 79-80).

Kozol's analysis puts into perspective the relationship that students have when they are exposed to schools that lack resources and equal opportunity. Davis and Jordan (1994) add that these educational inequities have long-term consequences on students' educational future, potential employment and hopes for a stable family. The impact of these poor schooling conditions can occur as early as kindergarten and lock in educational disparity by third grade (Davis, 2003). For African American male youth, this "equity" gap continues to persist in the face of continued legislative and judicial action attempting to resolve these challenges (Perry, Steele, & Hilliard, 2003). Not only do African American students receive inequitable resources, they also deal with unforgiving school discipline policies leading to higher expulsions and suspensions, as well as academic disengagement and lower test performance. Davis and Jordan (1994) argue that some of the worst performing schools seem to serve as warehousing centers that work to build a greater capacity for sending African American male youth to prison thus creating a school to prison pipeline.

School discipline policies are not entirely to blame for the negative experiences African American male youth have in urban schools. At the core of the policy is a racial bias against Black males. In many urban schools, negative perceptions of African American male youth contribute to and perpetuate destructive cycles of social reproduction (i.e., cradle to prison pipeline). Pedro Noguera (2008) sums up the problem this way:

The trouble with Black boys is that too often they are assumed to be at risk because they are too aggressive, too loud, too violent, too dumb, too hard to control, too streetwise and too focused on sports. Such assumptions and projections have the effect of fostering the very behaviors and attitudes we find problematic and objectionable (p. xxi).

Noguera's focus on the perceptions, assumptions and projections we have of African American male youth help explain why the status quo continues unabated in urban schools and, in fact,

seems to be getting worse. In some ways, Noguera argues that society is responsible for creating the behavior African American male youth demonstrate. This behavior “justifies” the inequity in urban schooling environments where some hold the belief that African American students “get what they deserve.”

As we seek to understand why inequities in urban schools exist for African American male youth, we must start by asking ourselves did equity ever exist in the first place? In *The Urban School: A Factory for Failure*, author Ray Rist (1973) explains that

Schools have never worked very well in equipping lower-class youngsters for mobility within the social and economic spheres of American society. It is an erroneous and romanticized notion to assume that at some point in the past schools did in fact achieve their goals and only recently have begun to lag (p. 4).

Social class and racial differences have always played a role in disparate access to high quality education (Ladson-Billings & Tate IV, 1995). Kharem (2006) notes that while “debate rages over the widening and destructive gap between the elite and the rest of the citizens of the United States...[this] disparity is planned and carried out in the United States to maintain a racial hegemonic social order” (p. 138). Historically, societal institutions such as slavery and the slave codes, inhibited academic opportunity and prevented the acquisition of literacy for African Americans. Anyon (1997) argued that racial isolation and poverty caused social stratification and hindered efforts to improve urban schools. It would be an error for anyone to believe that most schools have worked for the disadvantaged populations. On the contrary, I argue that schools are doing exactly what they are intended to do — maintain social hierarchies in American society.

If we believe that schools in American society are structured to socially stratify individuals, then we cannot apply a cultural deficit analysis that situates the responsibility of school failure outside of the school system blaming those who are most disadvantaged within that system. For

example, Erickson (1987) points out some scholars have argued that in students of color, there “has been that of genetic deficit — poor children of color or of minority cultural or language background have been seen as inherently inferior, intellectually and morally, to the children of the middle class” (p. 335). Erickson went on to explain that notions of school success and failure based in cultural deficit explanations were “reprehensible to many because its ethnocentrism was cloaked in the legitimacy of social science” (Erickson, 1987, p. 355). In many ways, this explains why inequities in urban schools continue to exist — educational policymakers approach school reform with a deficit analysis resulting in stagnated policy, the lack of effective resource distribution and the perpetuation of poor living conditions. All of this has occurred despite legal actions such as *Brown v. Board* or the 1964 Civil Rights Act (Orfield & Lee, 2007) and the release of such reports as the *1966 Equality of Educational Opportunity Report*. Public policy aimed at increasing achievement, accountability and equity are inhibited because of inequity. Although much has changed in the past four decades, much more progress needs to be made to improve our educational system if we are to see systemic improvement in outcomes for African American male youth.

The Impact of Neoliberalism on the Schooling Experience of African American Male Youth

In the 1983 report *A Nation at Risk* (Gardner, 1983), alarm bells were sounded that produced a series of reform efforts intended to improve academic standards, restructure schools and advance America’s competitiveness in a global marketplace. These reforms did not ameliorate inequity but instead, intensified the existing structural problems (Deschenes, Cuban &

Tyack, 2001) as schools shifted to support the privatization of public spaces. Driven by a fear of America's loss of global intellectual superiority, reform's of the 1980's and 1990's were aimed at increasing the country's economic competitiveness, thus resulting in a policy shift pushing schools to adopt common educational standards. Federally, these policies codified in the establishment of the National Council on Education Standards and Testing (NCEST) in 1992 and the passing of GOALS 2000 during the reauthorization of Title I in 1994 (Ravitch, 1995). Each state had taken its own approach to address neoliberal policies and as a result, passed legislation similar to the federal government. Combined, the emphasis on standards based education has led to the classification of schools as high or low performing based on the degree to which students achieve on standardized tests (Townsend, 2002).

School classification systems are representative of social hierarchies and in certain underserved communities punish students for "underachieving" in a system that is not designed to support their progress. As such, the standards movement has reinforced existing educational systems and structures, while producing little to no evidence of improvement.

On the contrary, some scholars believed that common standards were a good development because the use of "routine monitoring encourages a process of self-examination and motivates educators to provide better education" (Willms, 2000, p. 237). Willms (2000) noted that

This belief is fundamental to the recent calls for 'standards-based reform', which maintains that if states set high standards for performance, and hold schools accountable to meeting those standards through performance-based monitoring, then teachers and schools will change their practices in ways that bring about better student outcomes (p. 237).

Standards-based education emphasizes accountability and performance through testing. Joseph Murphy (1989) believed that the movement towards standards-based education had yielded some degree of success because "curriculum requirements and time for learning" improved when

educators within the movement relied upon the existing organizational structure of schools (p. 213). It is essentially a business model: students have a limited amount of time to learn and therefore must be taught on a synchronized schedule if schools are to help America catch up to the rest of the world.

What we have come to learn about the standards based educational reform movement is interesting — educational reform impacts different groups of students in different ways. Deschenes, Cuban and Tyack (2001) argued that there are always groups of students left out of the reform process during their particular historical period and add that

As we see it, these differences between schools and students is based on a mismatch between the structure of schools and the social, cultural, or economic backgrounds of students. It is not a problem of individual or cultural deficit, as many educators have argued, but this mismatch has had serious consequences for both individuals and groups of students (p. 527).

As a result, educational reform efforts play very differently on the local or national level. Standards-based reform does not account for factors such as tracking or ability grouping in schools. These efforts may lead to unintentional gap increases in performance and assessment or erroneous decisions based on ‘high stakes’ test scores (Sandholtz, Ogawa & Scribner, 2004: Townsend, 2002). Evan Murphy (1989), a staunch standards supporter, admitted that the overall yield for improvement in the categories he had measured were insignificant because of the lack of empirical evidence (p. 218). He could not prove whether standards based education worked.

Standards based education forces educators to teach dominant cultural values and historical perspectives in order to achieve better Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) or Academic Performance Index (API) scores. As a form of banking education, standards-based education penalizes educators for incorporating variety in the canon of texts and limits discourse of legitimate literacy practices (Lee, 1995). As a result, it contributes to the academic, cultural,

political and economic disenfranchisement of African American male youth. In the discourse on educational reform, Cuban (1998) contends that these implicit standards dominate political talk, influence policymakers, stifle public debate, channel financial or political support, inform goal setting and determines whose expertise are valued. We must challenge this discourse “...because the lay and professional elites, with their political savvy, use particular criteria for evaluating success and failure to frame the agenda of public problems. In doing so, they dominate which directions educational policy and funds take” thus excluding underserved communities from meaningful reform (Cuban, 1998, p. 469).

The standards movement and neo-liberal emphasis on global competitiveness have driven many of the policy changes and perspectives about what types of education to provide for American youth. By and large, the dialogue assessing academic achievement has not been beneficial to underserved or marginalized communities because of its narrow focus on accountability and standardization. This discourse creates limits on alternative approaches to learning and creates a “one size fits all” pedagogical practice in urban schools. Lee (1995) adds that while there has been progress in research literature, there is a significant lack of teaching strategies that support effective approaches to learning that serve predominantly poor, ethnic and linguistically diverse students. Neoliberalism, with its emphasis on competitiveness, privatization and globalization, has particularly detrimental impacts on students of color, as traditionally marginalized and oppressed communities continue to experience the negative effects of cultural dominance through schooling. This study attempts to challenge neoliberal discourse and reevaluate the notion of an academic achievement “gap” among African American male youth.

Moving to Address the “Gap”

The academic achievement gap is usually described simply as the test score difference between White and Asian students and other students of color (Author & Phillips, 1998). In order to understand why the test score difference exists between African American male youth and their White or Asian counterparts, we must continuously consider the cultural and historical conditions I’ve previously discussed. Further, Jean Anyon (1997) argues that racial isolation and poverty perpetuate the challenges urban schools face and frustrate the work of educators who engage in school reform efforts. She adds that sustainable urban school reform is not possible unless educational reformers address the political economy of failing cities and work with residents to create better social conditions (p. 168). Her argument supports the analysis of Hess (1999) and others who maintain that nearly 30 years of urban school reform have been disappointing at best, produced worse results in some cases and is now the status quo (Rist, 1973).

Still, other educational researchers argue that lack of instructional program coherence, insufficient implementation of the effective schools model, teacher resistance, poor principal or district leadership and a variety of other factors contribute to the failure of urban schools and reform (Corallo & McDonald, 2001; Witte & Walsh, 1990; Spillane & Thompson, 1997; Rorrer, Skrla & Scheurich, 2008). Take for example, Pauline Lipman’s investigation of Chicago’s Public Schools reform effort. Lipman (2004) reports that Chicago’s schools increased test scores and improved educational outcomes. However, she notes that the intersection between factors such as race, urban disinvestment, inadequate school funding and gentrification have a crucial impact on the lives of youth and families who attend school. Urban restructuring in Chicago,

dramatic shifts in the workforce and the drive to become a “first rate city” in a globalized society have ultimately “economized education” in such a parsimonious atmosphere, shaped policies governing urban school reform, increased inequity, perpetuated cultural hegemony of non-dominant marginalized communities and excluded political agency (Lipman, 2004). On the whole, educational reformers have been frustrated by a myriad of factors that contribute to existence of what is known as the academic achievement gap.

Although educators are individually handicapped when attempting to create systemic change, some researchers argue that there *are* things educators can do within their power to effect change within the classroom and within the school (Oakes, Rogers & Lipton, 2006). They can start by changing what happens inside of the classroom. Since African American male youth are expected to learn an overwhelmingly Eurocentric and culturally repressive curriculum, they continue to disengage and resist the schooling environment (Kharem, 2006). Educators can counter that resistance by restructuring their learning, language and curriculum practices (Maiga, 2005). To accomplish this, I argue that educators can use critical literacy in their classroom space to legitimize the cultural and linguistic practices youth bring to the classroom by incorporating culturally relevant means of expression like hip-hop (Morrell, 2002). In doing so, educators can empower African American male youth to take of the learning environment and reshape it so that it works.

The introduction of critical literacy can help combat the educational disempowerment experienced by African American male. Critical literacy fundamentally challenges the ‘*who*’ in knowledge production. As Easton (1989) points out, the relationship between literacy and knowledge production is one of control — the group that controls how knowledge is learned, produced and utilized — determines the socially constructed reality (p. 430). Critical literacy

affords students the opportunity to engage in anti-oppressive intellectual activity by critically analyzing a situation, experience or observation to draw meaning that empowers them act as Subjects in that activity. I posit that if African American male youth were provided with the tools to challenge those who control knowledge as well as the knowledge itself, they may be able to change the way their reality is constructed. Educators who are committed to teaching critical literacy can offer alternatives to dominant forms of knowledge construction by developing learning tools that allow learners to challenge hegemony. In the schooling environment, the acquisition of critical literacy may provide youth with the skills to counter hegemony and build upon a desire to increase their academic literacy in order to acquire power over their lives. With critical literacy, African American male youth may be able to see themselves as Subjects of their own academic development and in their own lives.

Putting theory into action: The Black Male Youth Academy

The Black Male Youth Academy is an action research program that uses critical literacy through youth participatory action research as a tool for academic development and social change. As an action research program, it is not a design experiment. Ann Brown (1992) describes design experiments as complex systems where engineered research environments have multiple inputs, outputs, contributions to theory and practical implications. Instead, it is an immediate and deliberate intervention that focuses on African American male youth within the public school setting. As Hopkins (1997) points out, “[e]ducation is considered to be the most accessible means for achieving social, political, economic, and cultural liberation in the United States” (p. 1). Because I hold the firm belief that education can be a tool for liberation, I

hypothesize that, used in the school setting, critical literacy can help address some of the challenges African American male youth face. In order to determine if this hypothesis is correct, I created the Black Male Youth Academy.

To understand how I came to think of the Black Male Youth Academy as an action research program, I will recount what happened during the Black male academy movement that arose during the 1980's to mid 1990's as a response to the epidemic of violence faced by the American-African community. Most of the programs were created with the intention of mitigating the cycles of academic disenfranchisement for males in the African American community. The Black male academy movement grew out of the pioneering efforts of a Detroit based public school known as the Detroit Malcolm X Academy. Created by Dr. Clifford Watson and Dr. Geneva Smitherman, this academy focused on developing an educational program in the Detroit Public School system. With the support of community members, educational organizations and officials to,

Doctors Watson and Smitherman developed a plan to holistically address the crises faced by American African male youth and created a task force to research and review which elements of an educational program would best serve African American male youth. From that task force, they created the Malcolm X Academy, focused on addressing the needs of African American male youth who they believed were condemned to cycles of destruction (Watson & Smitherman, 1996). Six guiding principles arose out of the task force and the data it collected. These principles centered on the following concepts:

1. Education must be Afrocentric — Students were expected to learn about their own heritage and understand how multiculturalism could meaningfully connect them across subject areas. This would afford students the opportunity to develop connections and experiences of African-Americans and others relating to present-day conditions.

2. Lessons must be forward looking — Lessons were intended to stress 21st century careers and jobs while highlighting African Americans and others in these career fields. Youth should be prepared and/or trained for high demand careers in engineering, computer technology, robotics and the like.
3. Curriculum should have a strong focus on language acquisition —The power of communication is taught by developing oral, written, and foreign-language skills while debate, forensic analysis of language, public speaking skills and writing helps students think critically, solve problems and resolve conflicts.
4. Civic engagement is critical — Students must be taught to accept responsibility for themselves and for bettering conditions and/or relationships at home, school, and in the community.
5. The curriculum must be holistic — It must connect to the whole person who has cognitive, aesthetic, spiritual and personal needs that need to be addressed. Strategies for meeting the unique needs of males especially in the areas of self-esteem and leadership are key.
6. The program must be pragmatic — Students will learn practical, useful skills that promote self-confidence and a sense of accomplishment. Activities that involve building, creating, constructing (Watson & Smitherman, 1991, 27-28).

Shortly after the creation of the Detroit Malcolm X Academy, organizations such as the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU) and the National Organization of Women's Education and Defense Fund (NOW) challenged the idea of an all male academic setting in a public school. They cited school desegregation cases as the basis for their opposition to gender specific academic settings. Such legal challenges made it difficult for proponents of the Black male academy movement: they could not pursue the specialized learning strategies needed by African American male youth. However, Ronnie Hopkins argued that the courts did not take into account existing gender specific programs that received public funding such as sex education courses for pregnant teenagers or males in the process of academic dismissal (Hopkins, 1997). Unfortunately, courts sided with the ACLU and NOW's argument which eventually led to the end of the all made academic setting in public education.

Dr. Watson responded directly to the criticism of groups that opposed the Academy.

Watson, the principal and founder of the Detroit Malcolm X Academy, believed that:

Certain institutions will continue to move throughout history to suppress young African American males. We see it here in terms of the district trying to do something positive for the love of children. It's not about girls against boys. It's not about Black against White. It's about salvaging our young people so that they can be productive citizens (as cited in Hopkins, Interview, 1993).

Watson articulated a rationale for a specific focus on American-African male youth. One, current models were failing. Two, there was the potential of creating a truly positive learning environment for students who needed it most. Hopkins (1997) also argued that American African male youth dominated the remedial class setting and were the most likely to drop-out, go to prison, commit homicide or die in significantly greater numbers than their female counterparts. He pushed back against the court decisions and argued that if integrated education were serving all of our youth successfully, then African American male youth would not have had such dismal outcomes.

The Detroit Malcolm X Academy served as an interesting example in my own conceptual framework. As I considered the devastating effects of what I believe is the result of institutionalized racism, I found myself compelled to act with a sense of urgency and immediacy. The challenge with traditional research is that it generally excludes the individual researcher from the impact of his or her research. We are taught to ignore the social conditions and be as objective as possible. I do not believe objectivity is possible, given my experience, and I certainly do not believe knowledge creation is isolated from social conditions. The Black Male Youth and this study are natural outcomes of an evolving research process where theory, the ecological environment of the study and my own positionality come together.

CHAPTER TWO: Reflecting Research in Community

The Research Question

Educators must begin to act with a strong sense of urgency and work hard to develop new methods that address the perniciousness of the historical, institutional and structural racism preventing African American male youth from achieving. They must do this even though significant economic and leadership challenges exist in most urban schools. I posit that if critical literacy became a tool used in the classroom space, African American male youth may have a chance to succeed even if their environment remains the same. Considering this hypothesis, I ask the following research question:

In the context of the Black Male Youth Academy (BMYA), how can critical literacy be used to advance the academic and sociopolitical development of African American male youth?

In order to answer this question, I present the Black Male Youth Academy as an action research program that analyzes the academic and sociopolitical impact on African American male youth.

Throughout this study, I anticipate that there are be multiple strands of analyses that emerge. As a result, I use the following set of sub-questions as guidelines. I focused my sub-questions in three areas, which mirror the study and be discussed in three chapters. Each area that relates to the main question is supported by the data gathered throughout the study and focused on specific chapters.

In chapter five, I focus on the process of developing critical literacy and seek to answer the following questions:

1. Can critical literacy be measured?
2. How is critical literacy defined?
3. What are ways to assess the acquisition of critical literacy skills?
4. How do we determine if someone has acquired critical literacy?
5. How do students interpret texts?

6. Have they formed a critique of traditional literacy practices?
7. Do critical literacy skills translate into behavioral or social interactions that change the way youth interact with the world?
8. Are there any social interactions that serve as examples to measure the expression of critical literacy?
 - a. If so, what are these interactions specifically?
 - b. Are there any spaces (places) that exist outside of the classroom that can serve as examples to measure expressions of critical literacy?
9. Have they developed the skills to navigate these traditional contexts in ways that promote their own literacy development?

In chapter six, I focus on academic and sociopolitical development and seek to answer the following questions:

1. How does the program attempt to foster the sociopolitical development of African American male youth through critical literacy?
 - a. What are those successes?
 - b. How are those successes measured?
 - c. How do we reframe notions of identity?
 - d. What challenges exist?
2. How does the program attempt to foster the academic development of African American male youth through critical literacy?
 - a. What are those successes?
 - b. How are those successes measured?
 - c. How do we reframe notions of identity?
 - d. What challenges exist?
3. Are students more directed to engage in forms of civic action that are related to or connected to their own literacy development?
4. Is there a measurable impact on the academic achievement of youth who participate in the Black Male Youth Academy?

In chapter seven, I focus on change in participation over time and hope to present a grounded theory in order to shed light on potential strategies to address the challenges facing African American males in education. :

The goal of asking these questions is to understand how the use of critical literacy can alter the educational environment and create a larger social impact on or for youth. Very few spaces exist in our public schools that incorporate critical literacy as part of the teacher's classroom and educational strategy. This study intends to shed light on critical literacy as a tool to empower teachers and youth to engage in transformative resistance, leading to significant changes within

the urban schooling environment. Paulo Freire and Donald Macedo (1987) argue, “literacy becomes a meaningful construct to the degree that it is viewed as a set of functions to either empower or disempower people” (p. 141). If we are to meet the needs of underserved youth, educators must work diligently to develop new strategies and spaces that support students’ acquisition of literacy and draw on intersectional research that is action oriented. We must truly evaluate how we change attitudes and thinking which ultimately results in how we change our community. To this end, it is critically important to understand if critical literacy can lead to educational empowerment for African American students and literacy practices that validate them.

Schools, or more specifically, schooling in America is the socially situated space where learning is expected to take place. It is also the place where sociocultural, sociopolitical and socioeconomic influences interact. In the following chapter, I discuss how these forces impact literacy and present a framework for literacy development based on successful learning models. I also appraise existing notions of critical theory as I argue for the need to develop practical solutions to the challenges we face in urban schools. Finally, I present a theory in educational psychology that I believe offers a unique framework for moving students towards literacy development.

Literature Review

Schools as Potential Tools for Liberation

Schooling in American was not intended to support the concept of literacy as a tool for freedom. According to Bourdieu and Passeron (1990), American schools serve as institutions

that uphold dominant culture and hegemony in textbooks and educational practices. Schooling serves as a social classification machine that inscribes and imposes legitimate exclusions and inclusions on the basis of the social order. This is often done against the will of the participants and I argue that in American society, reproduction through schooling has largely served to transmit pre-existing differences in cultural capital. Thus, schools serve as tools for social reproduction and stratification by reproducing cultural dominance, intellectual inferiority and educational divestment.

Social stratification in public education can be seen in nearly every classroom and urban schools attended by African American male youth. Because schools have largely operated to serve the needs of the dominant ruling class and are used to replicate the social order, literacy practices most often focus on sustaining the dominant values, class structure and culture (Bourdieu and Passeron, 1990). One reason for this, according to Parker and Stovall (2004), is the need to maintain white supremacy in order to sustain the social hierarchy. Schools do not exist within a vacuum. Instead, they exist as institutions of a political economy, racial bias and class inequality (Davis and Jordan, 1994). As a result, white supremacy remains entrenched in the attitudes and culture of schools. It is thus hardly surprising that African American male youth experience unfair treatment in discipline policies, overwhelmingly high special education designations and very low teacher expectations.

As I sought to identify a way to evaluate the role schools have played to foster social stratification and a way to challenge that role, I have come to rely upon critical theory to offer an important analysis and perspective to help explain this phenomenon. The use of critical theory allows a Subject the opportunity to appraise cultural and social reproduction as it relates to schools. Its emergence is contextual and lies within a larger sociohistorical framework situated

in postmodern dialogue and hyper-reality (Kincheloe & McLaren, 1994). In advancing critical thought, the scholars of the Frankfurt school sought to pursue social scientific and interdisciplinary analysis to deconstruct the social order using a Hegelian framework for dialogue and a Marxist critique of the political economy (Pongratz, 2005). This school of thought arose in response to “the devastations of World War I, postwar Germany with its economic depression marked by inflation and unemployment, and the failed strikes and protests in Germany and Central Europe” (Kincheloe & McLaren, 1994).

Critical theorists in the Frankfurt school sought to challenge constructions of knowledge, using a Foucauldian discourse analysis where reason and knowledge were not absent from sociohistorical conditions, sociocultural context or language dynamics. Their hope was to create an “emancipatory alternative to the existing social order” (Bronner & Kellner, 1989, p. 2) to help prevent the recurrence of fascism. Some scholars suggest that this emancipatory process can be done through education, but not always the formal schooling process. Pongratz (2005), for example, maintains that when critical theory is applied to education, we arrive at a “‘critical educational theory’ that is concerned with an approach to the theoretical problems of a pedagogy inspired by ‘critical theory’”(p. 155). This marriage offers a constant reflective process that evaluates the violence of hegemonic dominance imposed by institutions and educational practices.

Second generation scholars of the Frankfurt School like Habermas, and third generation theorists such as McLaren and Kellner, have moved to incorporate not only critical educational theory, but feminist theory, critical media literacies and critical race theory among others (Kellner & Share, 2005, Kincheloe & McLaren, 1994, Ladson-Billings & Tate IV, 1995). The evolution of critical theory allows for the repositioning of marginalized and oppressed groups in

order to reshape their self-expression, act within their power to challenge oppressive structures and mitigate negative consequences facing their communities. Two important factors that perpetuate social stratification are the political economy and a “pedagogy of oppression,” that work to support the social hierarchy (Freire, 1993; Lipman, 2004). In order to overcome oppressive schooling structures, we must engage in a process that challenges both the political economy and oppressive pedagogy.

Freire (1974) also believed educators should help birth a new society with critical education to help form critical attitudes and facilitate the passage from naïve to critical transitivity (p. 29). He advocates for a liberatory (critical) pedagogy that emboldens critical consciousness and so legitimizes the efforts of critical educators. As such, critical theory’s contemporary relevance lies in its ability to push educational theorists to cultivate subjectivity. This must be done in a way that is pedagogically empowering, culturally relevant and refuses the inevitability of domination. Miedema and Wardekker (1999) argue that, in pedagogy, we find a central place for a critical theory of education and sociologies of education thus allowing us to devise strategies to overcome oppression. Consequently, educators may find that by using critical theory in pedagogical spaces, students are moved toward subjectivity.

Using Sociopolitical Development Theory to Advance Critical Literacy

In order to know *how* to move students towards greater subjectivity, we now turn to understand sociopolitical development theory. Watts, Williams and Jagers (2003) have advanced a theory in the field of educational psychology arguing that sociopolitical development (SPD) is “the process by which individuals acquire the knowledge, analytical skills, emotional faculties, and the capacity for action in political and social systems necessary to interpret and

resist oppression” (p. 185). Sociopolitical development places oppression, social justice and liberation in the center of psychological development for oppressed communities. Building on the tenets of critical pedagogy, Watts, Williams and Jagers (2003) believe ideological violence — things like negative representations of Black males in the media — is at the core of oppression. They argue that in order “[t]o effectively confront oppression, it is necessary to deconstruct its subtle ideological foundations and challenge its overt abuses and deprivations” (p. 186). Furthermore, challenging one’s status as oppressed requires liberation from ideological enslavement and movement toward action.

The foundation of sociopolitical development is the development of critical consciousness. Watts, Griffith and Abdul-Alil (1999) argue, “[c]ritical consciousness is the cognitive cornerstone of sociopolitical development” (p. 257). Freire (1993) adds that it is when the oppressed “discover themselves as the ‘hosts’ of the oppressor can they contribute to the midwifery of their liberating pedagogy” (p. 48). I argue that critical literacy leads to the development of critical consciousness, a prerequisite for sociopolitical development. In keeping with Freire’s understanding that liberation increases over time, educational psychologists Watts, Williams and Jagers (2003) also put forward a theoretical framework for sociopolitical development that occurs in the following stages:

1. Acritical stage: The existing social order is thought to reflect real differences in the capabilities of group members.
2. Adaptive stage: Inequity may be acknowledged but the system maintaining it is seen as immutable. Predatory, antisocial, or accommodation strategies are employed to maintain a positive sense of self and to acquire social and material rewards.
3. Precritical stage: Complacency gives way to awareness of and concerns about equity and inequality. The value of adaptation is questioned.
4. Critical stage: There is a desire to learn more about asymmetry, injustice,

oppression, and liberation. Through this process, some will conclude that the inequity is unjust and social-change efforts are warranted.

5. Liberation stage: The experience and awareness of oppression is salient. Liberation behavior (involvement in social action and community development) is tangible and frequent. Adaptive behaviors are eschewed (Watts, Williams & Jagers, 2003, p. 188).

In sociopolitical development, we have a framework to analyze varying degrees of critical consciousness. This construction allows us to scaffold in and outside of the classroom as we engage in literacy practices intended to move youth to enact liberatory behavior.

I argue that in order to effectively move students to learn how to challenge multiple forms of oppression, we must resituate critical literacy within the theory of sociopolitical development. It is no longer sufficient to engage in classroom practices that solely validate a student's life experiences or teach them how to critically analyze oppression. Students must be engaged and immersed in a wider pedagogical process that is both empowering and effective. Critical educators must be tasked with developing interventions, redesigning curricula and pushing for spaces where critical literacy is taught and permeates current schooling structures. We must simultaneously develop empirical arguments that challenge the status quo, then share them with youth who are engaged in liberation behavior. I posit that as students consistently engage in liberation behavior, they will become transformative resisters and demand a high quality education, leading to increased academic development.

Critical Literacy as a Tool for Liberation

In order to effectively situate critical theory as a framework that can be used to advance liberatory education, we must establish an appropriate approach to learning. Packer and

Goicoechea (2000) argue that the way we theorize about human learning (using either a socio-cultural or constructivist approach), carries different ontological or epistemological assumptions and has a tremendous impact on knowledge construction, transformation and participation (p. 227). Kris Gutierrez states that a “historicized view of literacy requires a focus on activity as the unit of analysis, as activity systems are historically evolving, artifact-mediated systems” (Gutierrez, 2007, p. xi). This focus on activity systems must take into account a community’s culturally prescribed learning practices to best determine how to effectively engage students in the classroom. These analyses encourage the use of sociocultural theory as the framework through which we assess effective learning practices.

Sociocultural ‘learning’ theory, traditionally accredited to Vygotsky, contends that learning takes place in “cultural contexts, are mediated by language and other symbol systems, and can be understood when investigated in their historical development” (John-Steiner & Mahn, 1996, p. 191). Lave and Wenger (1991) argue that learning is “an integral part of generative social practice in the lived-in world” (p. 35). Fundamental to the sociocultural approach to learning as a practice is the recognition that “the human mind is mediated” and that cognition does not take place in isolation of experience (John-Steiner & Mahn, 1996). Packer and Goicoechea (2000) point out that:

Scribner (1990/1997b) identified three key aspects of the sociocultural approach to human cognition: Cognition is culturally mediated by material and semantic artifacts such as tools and signs, it is founded in purposive activity (“human action-in-the-world,” socially constituted systems of activity designed to satisfy human needs), and it develops historically as changes at the sociocultural level impact psychological organization (P. 229).

Many learning practices, which attempt to develop literacy in African American students, frequently exclude the forms of capital they bring into the learning environment and mitigate the

degree to which critical skills inform the learning community. These practices, which have narrowly constructed definitions of learning, lead to narrowly constructed approaches to learning (Meacham, 2001).

As such, Ernest Morrell and Jeff Duncan-Andrade (2002) argue that educators "...must find ways to forge meaningful relationships with students who come from different worlds, while also helping these students develop academic skills and the skills needed to become critical citizens in a multicultural democracy" (p. 88). This approach is emblematic of the necessity to understand and apply learning theory in a way that positively impacts students in underserved communities. We must rethink the way we engage and analyze forms of learning in non-dominant communities so that the best approach to pedagogy can be applied and understood. Carol Lee (1995) adds that while there has been progress in the field, there are few teaching strategies that support approaches to learning that serve predominantly poor, ethnic and linguistically diverse students. Rethinking our approach to learning and developing strategies that work is urgently needed; many educators face challenges associated with cognitive development, learning, transfer and literacy.

In this vein, critical literacy offers a unique framework that draws upon critical theory and has the potential to respond to the needs of African American male youth. Critical literacy can be linked to cultural identity and can inform attempts to create structured learning environments, situated learning and basic literacy development. Critical literacy fundamentally challenges the 'who' in knowledge production. As Easton (1989) points out, the group that controls how knowledge is learned, produced and utilized also determines the socially constructed reality (p. 430). Critical literacy provides an alternative to dominant forms of knowledge construction by developing learning tools that allow the learners to challenge

hegemony, or dominant ideology. It is inherently founded in a sociocultural learning perspective because non-dominant groups must negotiate issues of race and gender in a society that is dominated by a White patriarchal perspective. By applying a sociocultural theoretical perspective, we must not only challenge what we have learned about how the mind works, we must also connect what we know about how the learning environment influences the mind and how the individual influences the learning environment.

Critical literacy incorporates forms of critical theory, critical pedagogy, postmodernism, Critical Race Theory (CRT) and is most closely associated with Brazilian educator and philosopher Paulo Freire (Greene, 1993, p. ix-x). At the heart of critical literacy is critical pedagogy and praxis. “Literacies, like language, embed social relations of conflict as well as cooperation between classes, races, and sexes” (Collins, 1995, p. 83). Critical pedagogy helps the participant deconstruct one’s role as a contributor to oppression ideologically or otherwise. Collins (1995) notes “the development of schooled literacy has been a hegemonic project, involving the displacement of nonstandard varieties of language and a shunting aside or discrediting of alternative literacies (p. 84).

A value added approach to critical literacy is also found as we deconstruct race in learning and schooling processes. In “Toward a Critical Race Theory of Education”, Gloria Ladson-Billings and William F. Tate IV (1995) provide a Marxist, postmodern critique of race. Ladson Billings and Tate IV discuss the roles of schools in social reproduction. The intersection of law and race in education has a historical framework based in the African American tradition of liberatory education and freedom through the law. Schools were pivotal in the struggle for racial equality as African American educators and lawyers fought against Jim Crow with the landmark 1954 case *Brown v. Board*. The idea of separate but equal is inherently based in racial

prejudice and dehumanization. Understanding race through a historical and legal lens provides an additional tool that will help address the educational inequity of African American male youth.

Since literacy is an expression of class, gender and racial identities, one intention of critical literacy is to legitimate the forms of cultural and social capital students from marginalized communities bring to their learning spaces. Meacham (2001) adds that research is beginning to shift to a more encompassing definition of literacy that goes beyond narrowly constructed definitions. Thus, critical literacy incorporates a cultural perspective, language diversity, sociocultural strengths and values diverse learners. Meacham also explains that dominant political interests and power relations direct research funding and policy discussions and this serves to explain why literacy has been constructed singularly. The dominant interests of larger society devalue the incorporation of language variety in the canon of texts and limits discourse of legitimate literacy practices (Lee, 1995). Critical pedagogy incorporates a research and pragmatic approach to counteract hegemonic forms of expression and validate the social and cultural experiences of the learner.

Furthermore, a culturally sensitive approach to learning challenges knowledge that is both dominant and privileged. Linda Tillman (2002) argues that without this approach, interpretive paradigms can bias researchers' point of view and present people of color as deficient. She adds that educators must work towards a pedagogical and paradigm shift through critical analysis of one's own cultural biases and teaching strategies. Marvin Lynn (2004) argues that a Marxist class critique has dominated critical pedagogy and that critiques of race are fundamental in culture centered teaching. Critical literacy as a tool for political and cultural empowerment must incorporate the teaching practice of critical pedagogy utilizing a critical race

theory construct. African American male youth must be able to see themselves in the learning process as subjects of their own change and academic development.

Lynn (2004) also states “[c]ritical race pedagogy could be defined as an analysis of racial, ethnic and gender subordination in education that relies mostly upon perceptions, experiences and counter-hegemonic practices of educators of color” (p. 154). Inserting a discourse on race into critical pedagogy is essential to the practice of liberatory education. Tyrone Howard (2001) identifies culturally relevant pedagogy as a teaching framework that is sensitive to this dialogue on race and cultural identity. He notes that teaching strategies must employ holistic approaches to help students achieve academically and focus on cultural and linguistic integrity. Fundamental to this process was the privileging of students fund of knowledge, cultural heritage and development of critical consciousness.

In order to help foster the development of critical consciousness, African American male youth must understand the function race plays in education and society. Both Ladson-Billings and Tate (1995) have maintained that race is a central element that continues to explain inequity in the United States (p. 51). They believe that race “has not been systematically employed in the analysis of educational inequality” (p. 50) and is insufficiently addressed in educational reform strategies. Lynn and Adams (2002) support this argument noting that race is pervasive in society. By themselves, neither race nor class, are sufficient to explain the inequity experienced by African American male youth in education but together they paint a rich picture of oppression (Billings and Tate, 1995). For example, much ‘common sense’ about African Americans, Latinos and other people of color is based on deficit notions that bear severe negative impacts particularly when America’s history of slavery and structured inequality are not considered. Further, concepts of neutrality, objectivity, color blindness and meritocracy, if considered

outside of the context of America's history of inequality, may help to perpetuate those inequalities (Ladson-Billing & Tate, 1995). Therefore, African American male youth must develop a critical understanding of the role race plays in their academic and sociopolitical experiences.

A central factor in the effective use of critical literacy is the cultural relevance of its application. George Sefa Dei (1994) argues that "Afrocentricity as an alternative, nonexclusionary intellectual paradigm for educating black youths-requires a pedagogical approach that centers the black student in the discussion and analysis of the events that have shaped human history and development" (p. 19). African American male youth can ground themselves in a practice of liberatory education when their ideological development is based on knowledge of self and their views are developed utilizing critical literacy. Critical pedagogy can serve as the educator's pedagogical process and as one that allows students to actively generate and privilege their own historical tradition. This type of pedagogy is both anti-oppressive and counter hegemonic.

Instructional approaches to using critical literacy

African American male youth also engage in various learning practices. Constructivist approaches to learning are not enough to effectively design learning environments (Polman, 2006). Therefore, it is necessary to apply new approaches to learning and develop instructional designs that will help students develop deep understanding (Carver, 2006). Two instructional approaches are cultural modeling and the use of popular culture to facilitate classroom engagement. Critical literacy serves as a legitimate form of academic engagement and can be used to develop learning models and hybrid spaces. These instructional approaches also serve as examples that assist African American students with identity development and learning.

An appreciation of multiple forms of literacy allows the educator to view learning as a cultural process. “The learning sciences have not yet adequately addressed the ways that culture is integral to learning” (Nasir, Rosebery, Warren, & Lee, 2006, p. 489). Models based on critical literacy, such as Carol Lee’s cultural modeling or Ernest Morrell’s focus on popular culture as a tool to engage in learning, are good examples of the how researchers and educators can provide appropriate spaces for learning. Carol Lee (1995) focuses on culturally responsive pedagogical practices that are intellectually challenging and ethnically diverse (p. 608). Ernest Morrell (2007) uses a pedagogy of popular culture to gear learning toward social justice, prepare future teachers, develop literacy policy and facilitate student empowerment. Both Lee and Morrell expand the concept of literacy to validate the experiences of non-dominant communities, encourage the placement of learning within sociocultural contexts, critique power relation dynamics and provide a space for academic achievement in the traditional classrooms setting.

Cultural Modeling

Consider researcher Carol Lee’s (2001) effort to “...provide support for the empowerment of English departments in urban high schools through curriculum development, technology infusion, professional development, and assessment” known as the Cultural Modeling Project (p. 100). The focus of this project was to identify what she calls, ‘signifying’, “a form of discourse in the African-American community, full of irony, double entendre, satire, and metaphorical language” (Lee, 1995). The Cultural Modeling Project focused on African-American speech and methods to adopt it for use in the classroom. The project framework situates what she identifies as strategic knowledge in a way that allows the participants to identify with and negotiate literary texts. Strategic knowledge uses literary form to look for deeper meaning, interpret language and observe alternate points of view (Lee, 2001).

The project's purpose was to use signifying in order to scaffold in the classroom and build upon students' knowledge. Prior knowledge she notes, allows the reader to be invited into a literary world and negotiate the text. The project worked to engage learners in reading by engaging them in texts that were relevant to their knowledge and simultaneously develop strategies for reading. Gradually, the reader would be moved to texts that although, may not have been built on their prior knowledge, would still remain accessible because of the learning strategies they have acquired in the process. Since students bring cultural and social capital to the classroom, it is necessary for educators to confront their assumptions through their own learning process about the validity of the students' cultural experiences (Lee, 2001).

In this process, critical literacy would assist with literary reasoning and interpretation to facilitate discussion using the multiple forms of capital students bring to the class. In her study, Lee used a class to demonstrate over time how to participate in a process that facilitated learning. She acknowledges that cultural modeling was a process of shaping classroom culture by "creating community, building new norms for reading, valuing complex problems, modeling strategies for solving complex literary problems, building intertextual links, and using routine artifacts to support critical thinking (Lee, 2001). Further, as teachers challenged the students to engage, they worked to develop habits of the mind (Perkins, 1992). These habits were created through 'modeling activities' or in this case, analyzing signifying texts and having the students read and engage with texts very closely.

Lee (2001) states that this process was "central to construction of an intellectual community (p. 122). The value of cultural modeling activities privileged signifying and validated the students' various forms of knowledge. It allowed students to develop strategies to solve problems in canonical texts and receive guidance or support (Lee, 2001). Student's

engagement and development of learning strategies for critical analysis created a classroom dialogue that allowed them to challenge dominant literary themes. However, this was not isolating from the canon of literature texts. Rather, it allowed students to utilize and validate their own knowledge and experiences while deconstructing and challenging dominant forms of engagement.

Popular culture as a culturally relevant approach to critical literacy

Ernest Morrell (2007) identifies the use of popular culture in the classroom as a way to develop academic literacies, engage youth in classroom participation and facilitate empowerment. Morrell offers the perspective that for African-Americans, mastering literacy is connected to the freedom and empowerment of the community. Morrell (2007) focuses on creating practices that draw upon youth popular culture to “develop literacies of access and literacies of dissent” (p. 238). He identified the need to create pedagogical tools that help students develop a language that critiques dominant culture and create spaces for “transformative action” (p. 238). He believed students needed a process to help them develop the ability to read and write in order to understand social power relations, challenge their worldview and liberate oneself from oppression (Morrell, 2007).

Morrell and Duncan-Andrade (2002) decided to use Hip-hop as a way to draw out students’ critical analytical skills and connect them to canonical texts. Their foci were to engage youth in critical discourse centered on their lives and connect to the forms of knowledge they bring to the classroom (p. 88). Morrell and Duncan-Andrade place Hip-Hop within a historical context and legitimize its representation as a voice of resistance for urban youth. The use of Hip-Hop is situated as an educational tool whereby many rappers see themselves as having a responsibility, through voice and self-expression, to develop critical consciousness within their

communities (Morrell & Duncan-Andrade, 2002). Additionally, critical educators must acknowledge the impact Hip-Hop has had on urban youth culture and consider it as an exemplary element of social knowledge that can “be discussed, interrogated, and critiqued” (Morrell & Duncan-Andrade, 2002, p. 89).

Morrell and Duncan-Andrade designed a classroom unit that incorporated and situated Hip-hop music into an English lesson on Elizabethan literature. Their focus was to scaffold using Hip-hop as a tool for literacy, since many of the students they served were very familiar with the genre, develop skills for students to transfer as they viewed canonical texts and enable students to critique messages in popular culture. They attempted to do this by having the students review a basic understanding of poetry in a historical context to situate both Elizabethan literature and Hip-hop on a continuum. They then worked to compare a canonical poem to a Hip-hop text, analyzed the relationship, presented their arguments to their peers and received feedback. They were also expected to write an anthology of poems and critical essays on issues related to their social conditions and (Morrell & Duncan-Andrade, 2002). Morrell and Duncan-Andrade offer us a process whereby they worked to develop critical literacy.

Critical literacy is more than a process to engage African American male youth in a culturally relevant learning manner. It is a model that helps students connect to their own histories, develop a legitimate use of their own language and develop tools that allow them to navigate as members of society. Their literacies become legitimate forms of expression in a diverse set of cultural practices, languages and ideological frameworks. The use of critical literacy values students’ identity and helps them access intellectual power to challenge their social condition. It also allows educators to be more effective in the classroom by providing a

space where students can transfer knowledge and skills to a much broader academic and social context.

Engaging African American male youth in a practice of critical literacy that is culturally relevant is a powerful pedagogical tool and has the potential to empower teachers to engage their students in scaffolding activities that legitimate the forms of capital students bring to the classroom. Morrell and Duncan-Andrade described their approach as one that incorporated critical pedagogy, culturally relevant education and college level-expository writing. By using Hip-hop as a tool to facilitate transfer, they were able to relate 18th century British literature texts to the issues that faced their daily experiences. Carol Lee's cultural modeling serves as road map for scaffolding and praxis. Both methods clearly help increase student achievement, academic literacy and most importantly, allow them work towards their humanity.

The use of race based epistemologies builds cultural coherence and knowledge of self. African American male youth are motivated to succeed when the relationship between culture and schooling are deconstructed and reconstructed, building upon their cultural heritage (Ladson-Billings, 1997). Barry Osborne (1996) argues that teachers must start with the funds of knowledge that students bring into the leaning environment and they must be aware of their own subjectivity if they are counter efforts to silence or exclude students. Theory becomes practice when we develop an understanding of African American students' cultural heritage and consistently privilege this heritage through critical pedagogy.

Moving theory into practice through educational research

Because African American male youth continue to face significant academic, social and political challenges, educators must push back against existing theory so they can learn how to apply new theoretical frameworks to real life challenges. Because African American male youth are a disenfranchised and marginalized group, it is necessary to determine how critical literacy can be employed in educational strategies that help lead to liberation. With this in mind, we may be able to apply these strategies in the places where they are most needed: schools. Schools could come to serve as counter-hegemonic spaces that lead to humanization. In educational practice and in research, identifying strategies that increase students' sociopolitical and academic development through the use of critical literacy, could provide a key to transformative practices for African American male youth in education.

Building upon critical theory, the concept of individual autonomy is central to Horkheimer's conceptualization of authentic democracy (Hoy, 1994). When authentic democracy is the goal, we shift to a deconstructive approach in data collection. More specifically, educational researchers can develop authentic democracy by working to empower individuals to become critical ethnographers learning to shape their own context. Anderson (1989) identifies critical ethnography as "the convergence of two largely independent trends" (p. 250). These trends resulted from increasing epistemological attacks from sociologist and cultural anthropologists on positivist approaches to research and the emerging force of critical theory and neo-Marxist interpretivist approach to human agency and localized knowledge (Anderson, 1989, p. 251). Critical ethnography offered a "methodological vehicle" which viewed "cultural informants as more than 'victims of false consciousness'", but also as "rational social actors" with agency engaging in multiple forms of resistance (Anderson, 1989, p. 251).

Kincheloe and McLaren (1994) posit that in the postmodern condition, critical interrogation allows subjects to demystify and expose power relations in institutions where the language of democracy has been co-opted. Critical interrogation provides opportunities for subjects to become critical researchers by using critical ethnography to explore alternative distributions of power, production and relationship in the workplace and beyond. Kincheloe and McLaren (1994) offer the example of “[w]orkers [who] distribute their research findings so that the general public understands how the present organization of work has served to concentrate wealth and power in the hands of industrial leaders” (p. 148), thus subjecting workers to the whims of capitalist structures and oppressive conditions. Critical research in the workplace offers an empowering alternative that situates control within the hands of those who are traditionally excluded from positions of power.

Although the example Kincheloe and McLaren (1994) provide is based on worker and workplace relations, it can also be used in schools. Critical researcher Ernest Morrell extends this process to marginalized urban students engaged in transformative action within their schools. Morrell (2007) places critical ethnography within the intellectual reach of youth who would otherwise be considered disempowered, given the socioeconomic conditions of their communities. He draws upon the use of critical pedagogy for teachers who wish to develop powerful academic literacies with their students as the primary actors within the classroom (Morrell, 2005). Building upon Denzin, McLaren and Kincheloe, he argues that critical ethnography can be used “as a tool for understanding urban contexts and as a curriculum for research and praxis” (Morrell, 2007, p. 268). Freire (1974) argued that critical consciousness is founded in fact, is causal and is based in an empirical understanding of reality. Critical

ethnography offers the foundation for qualitative inquiry and creates the connection between critical theory, critical consciousness, research and praxis.

Qualitative inquiry and social justice must extend from critical ethnography to participatory action research. Kellner and Share (2005) argue that “[l]iteracy involves gaining the skills and knowledge to read, interpret, and produce certain types of texts and artifacts and to gain the intellectual tools and capacities to fully participate in one’s culture and society” (p. 369). To educational researchers, understanding literacy must be central in order to develop liberatory pedagogy. More specifically, participatory action research offers important access to build literacy in individuals whose voice must overcome the muting effect of oppression. Therefore, “[c]ritical literacy gives individuals power over their culture and thus enables people to create their own meanings and identities and to shape and transform the material and social conditions of their culture and society” (Kellner & Share, 2005, p. 249). Put into practice, critical literacy can be built while trying to teach students how to rely upon critical theory to engage in social inquiry, critical ethnography and participatory action research.

As a critical educational researcher, I believe that the use of research as a literacy building practice could foster critical literacy while challenging pedagogies and institutions that limit the development of critical consciousness. Morrell (2007) offers a good example of this concept as he engages youth in community-based research. He presents critical post structural ethnography as a method to situate educational research within a domain of critical research allowing for social or cultural criticism with the Subject as the primary actor. He had urban youth engaged in critical research practices while examining and utilizing new media literacies and technology. These students presented reports, documentaries and PowerPoint’s to influence elected officials, parents and educators in order to foster democratic change (Morrell, 2007).

When we combine critical (post structural) ethnography with research and literacy practices, we emerge with new and empowering pedagogies. The result for these youth was an empowering — it transformed them into experts with powerful critical voices.

Advancing Civic Engagement and Youth Voice through Critical Literacy

As we consider sociopolitical development theory and make liberatory behavior as an outcome of critical literacy, we must consider the necessary apparatuses that foster participation in a critical democracy and advance youth voice. Becoming a critical ethnographer begins with developing critical self-consciousness. According Freire (1970) marginalized groups “whose task it is to struggle for their liberation ... must acquire a critical awareness of oppression through the praxis of this struggle” (p. 51). For Freire, critical consciousness can be awakened; to achieve this, he proposes that educators use a problem-posing pedagogy to develop awareness and work toward a practice that facilitates liberation. Smith-Maddox and Solórzano (2002), refers to the three general phases of Freire’s methodology as: “(a) identify and name the social problem, (b) analyze the causes of the social problem, and (c) find solutions to the social problem” (p. 69). Thus, enacting sociopolitical development theory using problem posing pedagogy enables the development of critical literacy.

As educators come to rely upon critical literacy, we find a strong move toward revolutionary pedagogy. Freire (1970) contended that liberation is undoubtedly tied to education, politics and the acquisition of freedom. When we apply this framework, we may see that a group with less power can push against an oppressive structure to create radical social change in order to achieve freedom. In this sense, the successful use of critical literacy demonstrates the development of critical consciousness and is fundamental to sociopolitical

development. Critical educators must understand what people need to know in order to be effectively engaged in democratic participation and must be able to share how they come to understand their role in society.

Becoming civically engaged can be considered a consequence of *Conscientizacao* or “the development of the awakening of critical awareness” (Freire, 1974, p. 15). The emergence of *Conscientizacao* through a deliberate framework for teaching and learning should lead to active democratic participants. Our democracy requires sociopolitical development to humanize participants and relies upon *Conscientizacao* in order to advance social justice, promote a moral commitment to the public good and challenge dominance within a socio-cultural and socio-historical context (Goodman, 1984; Freire, 1974). In this context, educators need to work together with African American male youth to engage in shared inquiry based on their concerns within local communities.

This approach to democratic participation demands a very different kind of educational experience than the one that neoliberal policies tend to promote. It requires that civic engagement practices be identified to enrich youth voice (Kahne & Westheimer, 2003; Gibson & Levine, 2003). Such practices would incorporate the use of critical literacy in order to teach African American male youth about issues of justice and equity, affording them the opportunity to shape their academic and social experience. The goal of this effort would be to help African American male youth learn how to navigate government structures, strengthen their political engagement and encourage participation in service. With this type of relationship, educators do not simply teach students; instead, students become teachers who then educate each other through a dialectic relationship intended to act upon society in a way that humanizes both the oppressors and the oppressed.

To engage in our democracy in such a way requires a community of practice that is committed to the sociopolitical and academic advancement of youth. Jean Lave and Etienne Wenger (1991) define a community of practice as a collection of individuals mutually engaged in a common enterprise through a shared repertoire of tools and stories. They describe how new members enter existing communities and learn the norms of those groups by increasing their participation over time by sharing cultural practices, with help from existing participants, until the new members become primary participants. Lave and Wenger reason that this involvement in “legitimate peripheral participation” occurs where common need and practices are established within a group and emphasize this type of learning irrespective of “any intentional educational form” (p. 40). Their model of learning draws heavily from the work of sociocultural learning theorists who sought to reorganize the teacher and student relationship by challenging mediated learning processes (Nasir & Hand, 2006). I argue that it is important to establish a community of practice within formal learning spaces in order to restructure educational institutions and challenge hierarchical relationships, social stratification and hegemonic dominance.

I argue that in order to advance sociopolitical and academically, African American male youth must be engaged in learning that utilizes critical literacy in a way that is collective, conscious raising and active. Take as a powerful example the 1964 East Los Angeles “Blowouts”. Youth who challenged existing constructions of their social conditions brought about significant political change because of the critical pedagogical model shared with them by Sal Castro (Bernal, 2006). Their refusal to submit to subpar conditions in their schools, starting with the coffee shop dialogues to build engagement and political capital, led to a revolutionary response from parents, business owners, teachers and elected officials. These alternative public spaces created dialogue that led to resistance and subsequently, resistance that led to action. As

youth formed a social movement in East Los Angeles, participation in the democratic process significantly increased while simultaneous pressure induced systemic change (Bernal, 2006). Thus, the acquisition of critical literacy skills can occur within the individual and within the context of social interaction because learning occurs on multiple, mutually beneficial levels that are personal, interpersonal, and institutional – and that this acquisition can be analyzed by observing cultural practice (Vygotsky, 1978; Rogoff & Chavajay, 1995).

Authentic Research and YPAR

Some educational scholars hold limited notions of what counts as authentic or legitimate research. Given the various vantage points that exist in and across the field of education, it has become increasingly important to consider the impact of educational research on affected communities. Frequently, educational researchers purport to use objective methodologies that illuminate phenomenon at play within the classroom, school or system at large (i.e., statistics, focus groups, controlled design studies, etc.). Again, while important, the claim of objectivity through certain methodologies paints a partial picture of the challenges we face in the field because they tend to exclude important perspectives. Often these objective approaches to research are described as legitimate because they hold to tradition. Foucault (1980) argues that “the notion of tradition...is intended to give special temporal status to a group of phenomena that are both successive and identical (or at least similar),” and that in this process, we hold to pre-existing concepts (p. 21). The resulting temporal status privileges one group’s set of ideas over another groups ideas and limits our ability to challenging existing epistemologies as we seek answers to phenomenon.

In articulating Malcolm X’s development of critical consciousness, Theresa Perry (1996) describes the need to “consciously create a connection between old and new knowledge” (p. 69).

The critical examination of our domesticated epistemologies may allow educational researchers to explore their predisposition toward traditional forms of research. What we frequently consider traditional or “objective” research serves to legitimize certain perspectives over others and works to stifle knowledge production throughout the field. In this study, I hope to add to what we know about educational research and challenge how we come to know what we know. As a critical researcher, I argue for the need to adopt critical approaches to educational research such as participatory action research (PAR). Participatory action research utilizes community based research methods to engage participants in a collective effort to challenge the “why” behind and “who” in the production of knowledge. Further, PAR represents a challenge to traditional research because as a critical research methodology, it expands the scope *what* is investigated and *who* does the investigating (Morrell, 2006).

Participatory action research empowers those who are most impacted by social conditions to engage in a form of activist social inquiry using conceptual and intellectual tools in order to challenge those conditions and learn how to solve problems. PAR analyzes the issues that communities consider important while centering their experiential knowledge and agency in the research process. Participants utilize quantitative and qualitative methodologies to analyze data and produce knowledge while placing these participants in positions as “*subjects* and partners in the research process” (Duncan-Andrade & Morrell, 2008, p. 108). Most often, but not always, PAR is conducted with the support of academic institutions and as such, encourages participants to co-create and co-produce a research agenda that effectively defines the cause for the problem while examining solutions to address social problems (Duncan-Andrade & Morrell, 2008; Torre & Fine, 2006). When done with youth, participatory action research serves as an important

critical research methodology that centralizes the voice of youth and positions them as the experts of their own experiences (Cammarota & Fine, 2008; Morrell, 2006).

Youth participatory action research (YPAR), which builds upon critical youth studies (Ginwright & Cammarota, 2002; Giroux, 1998; Wyn & White, 1997), affords participants the opportunity to contest the authority held by traditional researchers and institutions that seek to define the educational experience of youth without including their voice (McIntyre, 2000; Schensul & Berg, 2004; Schensul, Berg, Schensul, & Sydlo, 2004; Torre & Fine, 2006). The use of YPAR helps students gain critical academic skills, utilize their agency to conduct research and enact research agendas that help them demonstrate the power of their voice in dialogue centered on educational reform (Morrell, 2006). The need for student voice in articulating the problems within their own schools and the tools and resources to be researchers who understand their social conditions from a youth-centered perspective is necessary for sociopolitical development. In this study, the use of YPAR is an important centerpiece in the Black Male Youth Academy as students work to understand, assess and create solutions that advance social justice in their schools and communities. The BMYA's use of YPAR serves as an additional approach to develop critical literacy skills and move students through a framework for academic and sociopolitical development.

Summary

Some critical theorists acknowledge that schools are tools for social reproduction (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1990). Others, such as Horkheimer, Marcuse and Adorno, argued that cultural industries (and I would argue that collectively schools constitute a cultural industry) are largely responsible for the diminution of critical consciousness (Bronner & Kellner, 1989). The

lack of critical consciousness ensures cultural domination and because schools are tools used to replicate social hierarchies, critical theory allows us to deconstruct the factors that play a large role in social reproduction. As instruments of the dominant race and class in American society, schools have contributed to the reproduction of the social order in an effort to maintain power and control over oppressed people.

Historically, through slavery and racism, African Americans were stripped of the power to control their lives and were transformed into property (Dubois, 1896). Although African Americans continuously won various fights to achieve their humanity, the persistence of these historical challenges continue to shape many of the outcomes we see in the lives of African American male youth. As a traditionally marginalized and oppressed community, African American male youth continue to experience negative effects of cultural dominance through schooling. Schools are now the chief battleground in the struggle for liberation. In *A Pedagogy for Liberation* (1987), a dialogue between Ira Shor and Paulo Freire notes that schools are set-up to “market” ideas and work against the development of critical thinking (p. 8). Schools serve as hegemonic delivery systems and significantly contribute to African American male academic and cultural disempowerment as well as their economic exclusion and political disenfranchisement.

Although schools have traditionally served as tools for social domination, African American liberationists have sought for them to be utilized in the fight against oppression. In *Teaching Malcolm X*, Theresa Perry (1996) situates the teachings and life of Malcolm X in the African American literary tradition. She offers a counter-narrative that directly addresses the role schools have traditionally played and sought to define a new purpose of schooling for African American students. African American students must choose to read and write themselves

into freedom. Despite the continual undervaluation of their humanity as a result of their skin color she asserts that participation in a counter-hegemonic community, one that affirms African American historic epistemology and is organized against white supremacy, served to liberate Malcolm X and could subsequently, liberate African American males (p. 3-4).

Perry's reframing of the purpose of education is a critical step in reclaiming classrooms and educational spaces. Efforts to reclaim have led to a growing identity crisis when it comes to defining the purpose of schools and public education because of the ideological struggle between neoliberal and critical educators. Because many educators have worked at different times to challenge white supremacy, Patricia Graham (2005) noted that, at various times, the purpose of schooling has been to:

...be the equalizer in a society in which the gap between the poor and the rich was growing. Sometimes the principal purpose of schooling seemed to be teaching citizenship and developing habits of work appropriate for a democratic society, while at other times its purpose seemed to be preparation for employment, which needed the same habits of work but also some academic skills (p. 1).

Graham's view points to the emergence of multiple forces at work and offers us a bit of hope. As bell hooks (2003) points out, we cannot presume to believe that racism will ever dissipate if we don't believe that anti-racists can exist.

Others argue that schools provide a space for hope, change and transformative action leading to a more just society (Giroux, 1988; Dewey, 2004). Morrell (2007) argues "educational attainment is a prerequisite for critical citizenship and professional membership in the technical, global, multicultural societies of the new century" (p. 267). Schools are the institutions utilized to initiate our youth into their roles as citizens and producers in American society. I would argue that although critical theory has informed multiple fields across social science, educational research and political thought, critical researchers are left wanting. There is a significant need to

recontextualize the role of educational research utilizing participatory action research in a post civil-rights, largely globalized and overwhelmingly technological age in order to establish a new vision for change. Although many of the insights uncovered by the Frankfurt School remain valuable today, educational researchers are in need of new methodologies to reevaluate forms of oppression, mechanisms of control and the complexities of the social order.

Critical theory must inform research methodology and literacies to challenge the legitimacy of dominant forms of knowledge production and offer liberatory modes of cultural production. Although cultural institutions are driven to help increase conformity, educational researchers must stake their territory in action research if we are to realize greater degrees of social justice. Marcuse (1964) argues in *One-Dimensional Man* that hegemony causes the individual to adapt to the existing order, rather than foster capacities for critical judgment. I argue that the use of action research and critical literacy will provide tools for educational researchers to carve out spaces that tell the story of the oppressed and challenge hegemony.

Critical literacy, sociopolitical development theory and critical theory offer important tools in the struggle for school reform. Critical pedagogy, as a classroom practice and theoretical framework, offers teachers and youth methods to challenge the banking process and become subjects in their own right. Critical literacy develops students' ability to deconstruct dominant epistemologies and utilize their voice to challenge the learning process (Collins, 1995). Critical theory allows youth and educators to challenge structures that perpetuate oppression and situate them within a large sociohistorical and cultural context (Ladson-Billings & Tate IV, 1995). When each of these practices are located within a sociopolitical development framework, a new praxis emerges for urban schools. The schooling process can be transformed into a practice that is both liberating and empowering for our youth.

Critical educators must build upon the use of critical literacy in a way that advances the sociopolitical and academic success of African American male youth. I argue that it is no longer possible to think of critical theory and educational research as being isolated from modern forms of research and knowledge production. As we become increasingly aware of the dynamics between the researcher and the researched, we must consider the possibilities available to advance social justice in education. Through participatory action research, scholars hold the potential to converge interests and ideas in profound and significant ways and lay the groundwork for large segments of society to participate as subjects in the public sphere. It is possible that through the use of critical literacy, African American male youth may be able to engage in valuable forms of social critique and social review through participatory action research. More than ever before, the need to develop young critical minds, both academically and socio-politically, must be central in the debate to reform educational institutions.

CHAPTER THREE: Methodological Overview

The Challenge of Relying Upon Existing Methodological Practices

I chose to use action research because far too often, researchers parachute into a community, collect data through observations, interviews and records and then leave that community once they are finished. It is not hard to understand why marginalized and oppressed communities reject the notion of the outside intellectual who “thinks he knows best.” Being at my research site now for six years, I have heard this repeatedly and in fact, was accused of wanting to do the same thing. Many of the teachers at the school where I conducted my research, thought I solely wanted access so that I could use them and the students for my own personal gain. It did not matter that I worked to assure them otherwise; only time and effort proved that I was in it for the long haul. When I embarked on my journey as a researcher, I made a strong commitment to the school community. They have since opened up their hearts and lives and I vowed that I would not take advantage of their trust. For six years, I have been faithful to that commitment and will ensure this remains a priority in my social inquiry as I work to shed light on educational phenomenon.

There is another problem — that of the “Ivory Tower” — meaning the over intellectualization of a problem and the inability to connect to daily experiences of the researched population. The frequent criticism here is that researchers circle the wagons in the academy and write their academic pieces for each other. Rarely do researched populations ever feel included in the intellectual activity of the academy and frequently they feel just the opposite. Again, I wanted to assure the school’s critics that I considered myself no smarter than them and that I wanted to learn with them and in concert with their lived experiences so that I would be as close

to the truth as possible. What helped me the most, was my disciplined avoidance of academic language that can be isolating and counterproductive, as it appears to create some illusion of superiority. I did my best to speak with people in a way that honored their intelligence while recognizing they were not sitting in my graduate program learning the acronyms and language of a rigorous Ph.D. program.

Then there's the problem with theory or more specifically, critical theory. In educational research, critical theory has been a valuable ally to marginalized and oppressed communities. It has afforded an important lens for social critique and individual evaluation by uncovering relations of power and challenging mass forms of domination through cultural institutions (Giroux, 2003). It offers dominant communities the opportunity to assess and contest their multiple forms of privilege while providing rationales for a shift in the dynamics of power. In many ways, it has informed sociocultural learning theory through critical pedagogy and the subsequent development of New Literacy Studies while maintaining the intent to develop critical consciousness (Petroni & Borsheim, 2008; Darder, Baltodano & Torres, 2003). It has also strengthened alternative epistemologies and provided educational researchers with the patois to challenge functionalist perspectives in education of positivist rationality (Giroux, 2003). By challenging notions of standardization, critical theory has the power to unearth the status quo while consistently immersing critical theorists in a dialectical process of questioning.

As a tradition, critical theory has influenced many valuable approaches to intellectual inquiry in educational research. Yet, it has fallen short in its ability to offer a practice to address many of the challenges faced by, and within, marginalized communities. I believe it helps to explain the "why" behind oppression, but does very little to explain the "how" to overcome oppression. Even Kincheloe and McLaren (1994) would say, "it should not be treated as a

universal grammar of revolutionary thought objectified and reduced to discrete formulaic pronouncements and strategies” (p. 104). It is precisely this lack of strategy in research or pedagogical practice that is both the strength and weakness of critical theory. By itself, it points true north but leaves the voyager without a map as she seeks to find a destination. I have yet to find someone who says they are able to *apply* critical theory within their classroom in a concise and cohesive way.

As an interpretative lens, critical theory is important because it forces us to think about the philosophical and pragmatic implications of ideas and to challenge the accrual of logic and action through a dialectical logic (Horkheimer, 1989). While it operates as an intellectual framework, critical theory seeks to build critical consciousness beyond the limitations imposed within a structured society, but contemplates the historical rationale for structure and challenges order. Furthermore, it intends to foster subjectivity and “conscientizacao” (Scherr, 2005; Freire, 1993) with a goal of helping individuals and society become more fully human through critical thought.

Some say they can teach critical theory while others argue they can embody critical theory while others still criticize this very valuable framework for its inability to be useful in educational practice. The Black Male Youth Academy therefore, is an effort to respond to these multiple perspectives in educational research. As an action research project, I wanted to develop a way to apply critical theory to educational research in order to measure sociopolitical and academic develop through critical literacy acquisition for African American male youth. Why the young Black men? Because the needs of African American males are significantly different than those of other ethnic groups and as an African American male who grew up in poverty, I

wish to use critical theory and the privilege I've acquired to help solve some of the problems facing my community.

Given the shortcomings of critical theory, there is a need for critical educational research that validates the lives and stories of African American males. By extension of critical theory, critical research has emerged using multiple methodological practices that incorporate tools such as counter storytelling, post structural ethnography, hermeneutics and action research, among others. What constitutes research is not always legitimate when attempting to represent the views of those with whom we conduct research "on". Critical educators have worked diligently to identify meaningful approaches to addressing the gap between theory and practice, but have yet to carve out a large enough space for participants to frame the issues they face within their own communities. Spaces for dialogue and agency will inevitably change the discourse around educational research in marginalized and oppressed communities in hopes that a new paradigm for engaging in research will help us understand how schools could develop effective literacy practices *with* African American male youth.

Participatory Action Research

As I wrestled with an appropriate methodological framework for this study, I recognized that I had multiple goals in mind. I wanted to capture the nuances of learning and literacy while privileging the voice of participants who would come to have ownership over the research space as a community of practice, thus enabling them to develop solutions that guide research outcomes. To accomplish these goals, this study conducts literacy research in a way that allows multiple methods to speak back to each other in order to explain phenomenon occurring within the Black Male Youth Academy. As I focus on critical research, I present observations and analyses to help explicate from the data, a grounded theory of critical literacy acquisition as it

relates to sociopolitical and academic development. Additionally, a personal goal I hold as a critical researcher is to produce knowledge that can empower participants to become agents of change in their own lives.

This study is about developing methodology to help combine multiple research goals — critical literacy analyses, the rigorous use of multiple methods and an effort to move the participant experience from the periphery to the center — utilizing action research. I shared, with participants, the same critical methodological tools I utilized in order to ensure they had a voice in the research process. Participants were able to develop a community of practice and help shape the narrative of this study. As a rigorous action researcher, I utilized both quantitative and qualitative research methods to collect and analyze data like grades, test scores, attendance records, observation data, field notes, after class reflections, audio transcriptions and student’s written work. I sought to answer questions like: How do students speak, behave or respond when they acquire critical literacy? How does their worldview shift once they have been exposed to information intended to empower them? What happens in multiple spaces when critical literacy skills are acquired? In order to answer the intended research questions, Vernon High School served as the research site and the students’ writing, speech and behavior within and around the Black Male Youth Academy is the primary units of analysis.

As I mentioned, my data collection and interpretive approach relies on the use of action research as a methodology to collect and analyze data. According to Herr and Anderson (2005), action research “is inquiry that is done by or with insiders in an organization or community, but never *to* or *on* them” (p. 3). As a framework, (McKernan, 1991) defines action research as

...the reflective process whereby in a given problem area, where one wishes to improve practice or personal understanding, inquiry is carried out by the practitioner – first, to clearly define the problem; secondly, to specify a plan of action – including the testing of hypotheses by application of action to the

problem. Evaluation is then undertaken to monitor and establish effectiveness of the action taken. Finally, participants reflect upon, explain developments, and communicate these results to the community of action researchers. Action research is systematic self-reflective scientific inquiry by practitioners to improve practice (p. 5).

Action research allows the teacher to operate as researcher where as design research would require the teacher to remain isolated from a role as central as the teacher in the operation. Furthermore, action research incorporates self-reflexive practice to where a workable theory, in the form of curriculum, and practical solutions are goals (McKernan, 1991). Both McKernan and Herr argue that the process of action research captures both the systematic and deliberate process of data collection while allowing the individual(s) being researched to help shape and direct their role in its formation. The use of action research offers a unique and reflective approach to collecting data helped me document the impact of the program while accounting for my role in the process. Although I am the principal investigator, I am also a practitioner in the space who works collaboratively with a co-teacher and students to help design the intervention model. The relationship I have to the space is a distinguishing element throughout the study. Therefore, I account for my role and positionality throughout the study.

Herr and Anderson (2005) also hold that “action research, like much grounded-theory research, is often seen as more data-driven than theory driven” (p. 71). They add that in action research, the design is emergent. In an experimental design study, the researcher approaches the environment from a clinical and top-down perspective. The action researcher on the other hand may also be an activist researcher. This would be someone who incorporates the views, values, perspectives and ideas of the participants in the study. The researcher can thus avoid exploiting the research population while making a contribution to the setting (Herr and Anderson, 1995)

and developing a democratic process whereby the voice of the participants drives the intervention.

Operationalizing Action Research for Participants

This study is, in effect, a process whereby knowledge is produced and co-created. The students, teachers and researchers collaborate on the development of program goals, activities, outcomes and data collection framework. Each participant contributes uniquely to the daily program and classroom activities — a more humanizing experience where ideas, voice and action are honored and encouraged. In the Black Male Youth Academy, action research is reflected by the multiple roles and forms of production. Students, teachers and researchers engage in a co-constructed, meaning-making and mediated environment whereby learning objectives, research goals, program activities are developed.

The Work of the Students

The students acted as co-creators and collaborators with the teacher and graduate student in order to conduct research. Their work included: setting the parameters of the problems studied in the Black Male Youth Academy; preparing and supervising the completion of several hundred surveys; conducting dozens of interviews of local officials, administrators, faculty, staff, parents, community members and students on their campus. The students also wrote reflections about their efforts, prepared PowerPoint presentations, video short films, documentaries or public service announcements about their work. Further, they presented their research at educational conferences around the country, to public and school officials as well as their families and peers.

The Work of the Teacher and Researcher

The class teacher and graduate student researcher collaborated with and provided administrative, research and other relevant support to the program and high school student participants. The teacher and graduate student acted as participant observers delivering program curriculum, content and coursework. Because the BMYA was designed as a class for which students receive course credit, both the teacher and the graduate student researcher maintained very fluid roles. In following plan *Participant Role in Research Design*, we observe the type of activity each participant conducted and the impact of said activity on the program and research design.

Participant Role in Research Design

Role	Activity	Impact on Research Design
Teacher (s)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Co-constructs curriculum • Co-constructs survey instruments • Co-constructs classroom activities • Co-constructs research questions • Co-constructs • Engages in recorded reflections 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Teachers help guide lesson plans and class activities • Teachers help serve as a resources for student developed lesson plans and activities • Teachers provide expertise, skills and information to help support students development • Teachers identify best methods to achieve outcomes and gather data • Teachers provide valuable insight into learning process and space development
Student (s)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Conducts documentary filmmaking • Co-constructs survey instruments 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Students co-construct meaning in the space • Students exhibit greater degrees of

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Co-constructs curriculum • Co-constructs classroom activities • Conducts interviews • Conducts survey • Collects statistical data • Collects visual representation of environment (media artifacts) • Produces artifacts (essays, journals, classroom assignments) • Participates in reflections 	<p>voice in program and research design</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Students co-create critical research methodologies
Researcher (s)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Conducts observations • Conducts interviews • Conducts focus groups • Co-creates evaluations • Co-creates curriculum • Co-creates the research design • Co-creates activities • Conducts reflections 	Further discussed in the next section.

The focus on operationalizing critical literacy utilizing problem posing pedagogy, YPAR and action research brings together a critical methodological framework that is replicable. Given my earlier critique of critical theory, the nature of this study affords the flexibility to develop a research design that is measurable and observable.

Data Collection

Critical literacy acquisition is the central unit of analysis. In order to measure the acquisition of critical literacy, I utilized students writing, observations and interviews. For the

purpose of this study, I examined class assignments from multiple students within the Black Male Youth Academy. This examination allowed me to address whether or not students acquired critical literacy (internal acquisition) and if it transfers into spaces outside of the classroom (external expression) (Yin, 2006). I collected and analyzed student artifacts (work products) compiled throughout the time of their participation in the project. The collected writing samples focused on assignments with questions that required students to reflect on what they learned in the classroom over the previous week. The students were required to reflect on the lessons provided from the instructor utilizing the BMYA curriculum and were expected to provide an analysis based on a prompt.

The writing assignments were important pieces of data because they afforded an opportunity to analyze whether students were acquiring critical literacy skills. I collected and analyzed student-writing samples ranging from quick-writes and journals to essays and research projects over the life of the course. Quick-writes were normally 15-20 minute long essays and required students to reflect on the lessons provided in the curriculum and offer an analysis based on a prompt. Their essays were usually much longer and generally based on research assignments students were expected to complete. Student writing assignments were very important pieces of data because they afforded an opportunity to analyze whether students acquired an understanding that incorporated critical literacy.

I collected and reviewed archival records, such as transcripts and attendance records. The use of archival records allowed me to triangulate my data and determine if there are changes in students' participation from one intermediate period to another (Yin, 2006). I also conducted direct observations and wrote field notes to study the students' change in participation both within and outside of the BMYA. The spaces I observed included the lunch yard, the home

and/or other classes. I also carried out interviews with students, parents, administrators and teachers to provide the context of the school environment and analysis of change in participation. Finally, I synthesized and analyzed all of the data to draw conclusions.

Also included in my data analysis were course reflections and field notes. These reflections were accounts of direct observations of the students' change in participation inside and outside of the classroom. I coded student artifacts, field notes and reflections according to rubrics in the following sections. It was important to define critical literacy in order to observe it, as an intellectual activity that may or may not lead to change in participation and a subsequent chart of terms is included to offer clear definitions. I also establish the frequency of either observed behavior or written analysis from which I draw conclusions about student's expression of critical literacy. Because I was also looking for expressions, and not always action, my scope of analysis is broad. This allowed me to observe phenomenon in multiple ways including verbal communication, writing, changes in participation and the like.

Fortunately, the use of action research and process of reflection afforded an opportunity to review, analyze and adjust when challenges arise. For example, when students were absent, I might have been challenged with collecting writing samples and conducting observations. Because many of the study participants have various life circumstances, there were additional challenges I did not foresee which also impacted my ability to collect data. For example, certain limitations existed because parents worked at times when it may be inconvenient to observe and/or meet with the family. Some student did not want to conduct interviews and some parents did not want to complete program intake forms where I would have been able to capture demographic data. In those cases, I relied upon observations, reflections, video and audio

transcripts in place of traditional interviews or survey instruments. Table 1 reflects the number of participants in the study over the course of 6 years.

Table 1. Number of Participants by School Year, Grade Level, and Year of Participation in the Program

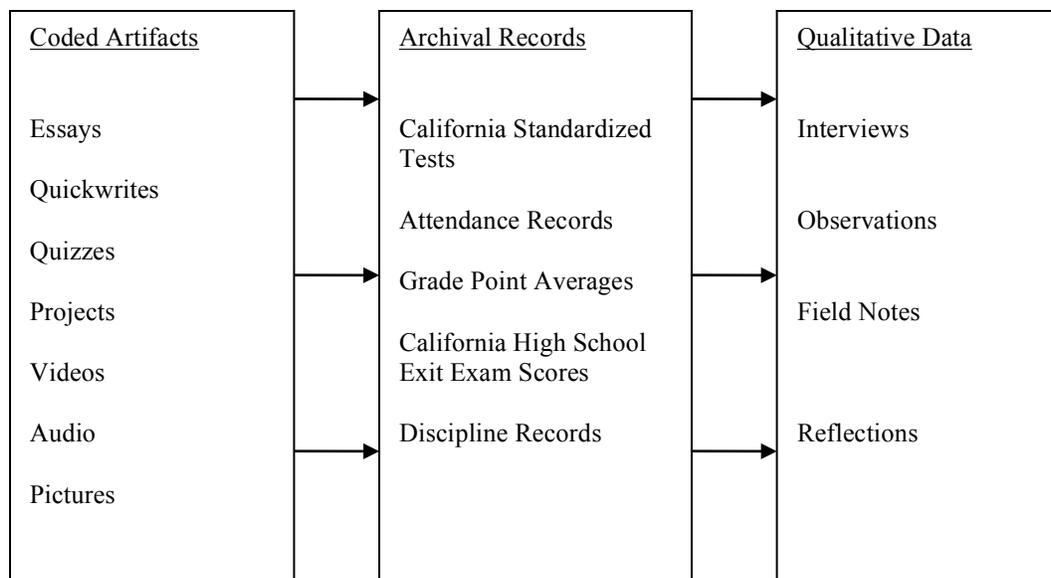
	9 th	10 th	11 th	12 th	Total
2006-2007					
1 st yr	1	8	1	0	10
					Total participants 06-07: 10
2007-2008					
1 st yr	5	3	18	4	30
2 nd yr	--	1	5	1	7
					Total participants 07-08: 37
2008-2009					
1 st yr	8	4	2	2	16
2 nd yr	--	3	3	9	15
3 rd yr	--	--	0	5	5
					Total participants 08-09: 36
2009-2010					
1 st yr	18	1	0	2	21
2 nd yr	--	4	1	0	5
3 rd yr	--	--	1	1	2
4 th yr	--	--	--	0	0
					Total participants 09-10: 28
2010-2011					
1 st yr	10	5	10	0	25
2 nd yr	--	8	1	1	10
3 rd yr	--	--	3	2	5
4 th yr	--	--	--	0	0
					Total participants 10-11: 40
2011-2012					
1 st yr	0	0	0	1	1
2 nd yr	--	3	5	6	14
3 rd yr	--	--	3	2	5
4 th yr	--	--	--	3	3
					Total participants 11-12: 23

Table 2. Data Collection Table

D A T A C H R O N O L O G Y	School Year	06-07	07-08	08-09	09-10	10-11	11-12
	Artifacts/ Writing	X	X	X	X	X	X
	Archival Records		X	X	X	X	X
	Direct Observation/ Field Notes	X	X			X	X
	Interviews	X	X			X	X
	Reflections	X	X	X	X	X	X
	Video/Audio Recordings	X	X	X	X	X	X
	Pre/Post Tests			X		X	X
	Surveys					X	X
	Legend: X=Yes						

The framework for collecting and analyzing data using both qualitative and quantitative sources will progress according to Table 3.

Table 3. Data Type Table



Additionally, I sorted and collected data as described in Table 3. Certain themes emerged based upon the data collected and included concepts focused on literacy, academics, identity and pedagogy. Using this framework, I developed observational guiding questions that matched the types of data from which I drew upon to develop my analyses.

Identifying the “Critical” in Critical Literacy

To account for the multiple ways students expressed literacy, I developed a chart of terms to describe the student’s multiple forms of expression. Table 4 represents terms that describe their verbal, pedagogical, behavioral and intrinsic expressions of critical literacy.

Table 4. Table of Terms

Terms		
Term	Abbreviation	Definition
Critical Literacy	CL	Students who engage in anti-oppressive intellectual activity by critically analyzing a

		situation, experience, observation or otherwise to draw meaning that allows them act as Subjects in that activity.
Knowledge of Self	KOS	Students understand the where/who they are in relation to their world, their class (es), their school, their families or the other.
Critical Situational Awareness	CSA	Students communicate knowledge of self and are able to express their positionality in a particular situation, but lack the language necessary to direct the receiver to an explicit meaning. The receiver must use inference and gather implicit meaning from what students are saying.
Anti-Critical Literacy	ACL	Students who utilize a deficit analysis to make meaning of a situation, text or experience.

To evaluate whether students gained critical literacy skills, I used a set of questions (rubric) to analyze their writings and academic work se in Table 5. In other words, how did I know students were gaining critical literacy skills? First, I had to understand the difference between functional literacy and critical literacy. According to Keller-Cohen (1993), there is a relationship between speaking, reading, writing and the places we learn, or our environment. The ability of an individual to successfully navigate between these functions on a day-to-day basis can be considered a starting place for functional literacy. This basic ability allows individuals to participate in social actions such as performing a transaction at a grocery store or reading and understanding an emergency exit sign. The relationship is simple and is not expected to catapult one into places of power or status. Rather, it is the foundation of capitalism and creates the necessary workforce for unskilled labor.

Still, critical literacy needs functional literacy. Participants must be able to read and write in order to learn and challenge the language of the oppressor and “wage the struggle for their liberation” (Freire, 1993, p. 49). Critical literacy empowers individuals who seek to challenge the status quo and change their circumstances. It is both a process and an outcome whereby individuals are able to use functional literacy to problematize, theorize and change their environment. In other words, critical literacy is a place where action results in change — a negotiation between theory and practice. The following questions will help guide my search for evidence of critical literacy in the student’s writings.

Table 5. Guiding Questions for Writing Analysis

<p>Guiding Questions for Writing Review</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Are students using a race, class or gender analysis in their writing? • Do students incorporate historical background in their writing? • Do students question the legitimacy of the knowledge they are taught? • Do students challenge their assumptions? • Do students argue using theory? • Do students utilize their experiences to explain their ideas? • Do students reveal their learning progress? • Do students define their terms using methodological processes? • Do students use a vocabulary that incorporates language from critical theory? • Do students express concern for their communities? • Do students provide recommendations for improving their conditions?
<p>Guiding Questions for Observable Behavior</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Are students using critical language in their conversations? • Are students problematizing scenarios, questions or ideas in class? • Are students engaging in challenging discourse with their friends? • Are students saying things that relate to what they have learned in the Black Male Youth Academy? • How are students participating in the classes and to what degree?

Site Description

This study occurs at an urban high school within the city of Vernon, California. Vernon High School (VHS) exists within the Vernon Unified School District (VUSD). Vernon was once a city that was predominantly white and has now become one of the most racially diverse locations in California. It is a comprehensive high school with few Advanced Placement (AP) and honors courses. Students are on a traditional year-round and block schedule. At the beginning of this study and according to 2000 US Census Bureau data, the city had a total population of approximately 112,600 people. The population is 46% Latino, 48% African American, and 4% White with the remaining population of mixed races⁸. There was an expected growth rate of 4.8% by 2003⁹. As of the 2010 Census, the City's demographics have shifted significantly.

The shifting population demographics are indicative of trends throughout the Los Angeles area showing a population shift to majority Latino enrollment with a decreasing African American enrollment. As of 2012, the ethnic make-up of the district is 57.3% Latino, 41% African American, 0.5% White and the remaining are of other races¹⁰. The shift in racial population has significantly impacted the ethnic diversity of the school and educational opportunities available to youth. Fifty-eight percent of the students are eligible to receive free or reduced meals and twenty-five percent of the students are English Language Learners (ELL). Of the 2006 graduating class, less than 1% of students attended a University of California and nearly 10% attended a California State University. The school was built in 1947 and was originally

⁸ <http://www.calmis.ca.gov/file/Census2000/InglewoodDP2000.pdf>

⁹ <http://quickfacts.census.gov/qfd/states/06/0636546.html>

¹⁰ <http://www.ed-data.k12.ca.us/Navigation/fsTwoPanel.asp?bottom=%2Fprofile%2Easp%3Flevel%3D06%26reportNumber%3D16>

intended to be a community college. The campus sits on 50 acres of land, can be a ten minute walk from the gate entrance to the top of the “hill” and is situated next to an elementary and middle school as a cluster within the school district.

Moving Toward Agency

The Black Male Youth Academy, as an action research program, afforded African American male youth the opportunity to participate in a culturally relevant learning environment focused on their sociopolitical and academic development. Because the curriculum incorporated critical theory and was developed with classroom tools intended to help develop critical literacy skills, the program aimed to directly address some of the larger social challenges African American male youth face. Further, the program provides a “safe space” for personal conversations, a learning environment that attempts to validate each student’s personal and cultural history, college level coursework, a caring environment and high academic expectations. Because the BMYA existed with the schooling framework for the State of California, the program incorporated California High School Exit Exam (CAHSEE) preparation, California Standardized Test preparation and basic literacy skills development.

Threats to Validity and Challenges with Generalizability

Primary challenges associated with this research study center on the issues of validity and generalizability. One might ask oneself: can I trust the outcomes of this study if the researcher is a participant and the participants are also researchers? More, in considering the impact of the approach to the study, one might also ask: how do we know if the Black Male Youth Academy,

as an “experimental treatment”, caused any effect (Shadish, Luellen & Clark, 2006)? Could there have been changes over time that we can ascribe to the design or various intervening variables? We may even ask: are these findings transferable to other environments? In this study, I do not attempt to construct or prove statistical validity, nor do I make the claim that participation in the Black Male Youth Academy accounts for all change experienced by participants. This is not that type of study. Instead, Merriam (2009) offers a straightforward answer that I believe responds very well to these concerns:

To have any effect on either the practice or the theory of a field, research studies must be rigorously conducted; they need to present insights and conclusions that ring to readers, practitioners, and other researchers (p. 210).

This study relies on multiple data points to triangulate data in order to “establish converging lines of evidence to make [the] evidence as robust as possible” (Yin, 2006, p. 115). The primary focus of incorporating multiple types of data in this action research study was to address, to the best of my ability, the issues and concerns associated with validity.

Using action research in this study afforded the opportunity to creatively combine a number of measures that are not static (Shadish & Luellen, 2006). Instead, this study relied upon a rigorous, yet flexible, approach to data collection that accounted for issues around access, control of the research space and needs of the community. For example, many of the individuals in the community required time on my part to build trust and were concerned about external parties invading their space, causing them to look bad or, even worse, tell an inaccurate story that is molded from a deficit analysis. Many marginalized and oppressed communities prefer to tell their story the way they choose to external audiences and are frequently excluded from the traditional elements of knowledge production (creation of the design or writing of the report).

This study however, incorporated the participants voice and recognized the importance of co-creating knowledge in line with the experiences and lived reality of the community.

This study recognized that traditional research expected correlative explanations, cause and effect relationships and statistical analysis to prove or disprove hypotheses. However, I would argue that traditional research attempts to impose a form of ontological and epistemological purity that excludes marginalized and oppressed communities from generating knowledge. Since research takes places within a traditional model intended to uphold what some believe is objectivity and distance, we must pursue an alternative that is more inclusive of the lived experiences of the researcher and those who are researched with. In Foucault's (1980) critique on the unity of discourse, he calls for us to reevaluate the notion of tradition.

[I]t is intended to give special temporal status to a group of phenomena that are both successive and identical (or at least similar); it makes it possible to rethink the dispersion of history in the form of the same; it allows the reduction of the difference proper to every beginning, in order to pursue without discontinuity the endless search for the origin; tradition enables us to isolate the new against a background of permanence, and to transfer its merit to originality, to genius, to the decision proper to individuals (p. 21).

In this analysis, Foucault (1980) argues that this temporal status privileges one group's set of ideas of the other. Therefore, the use of action research pushed the paradigmatic envelop in an attempt to rethink what we consider legitimate research.

Questions about generalizability and validity, although warranted, must be challenged and assessed if we are to accurately represent the views of those with whom we conduct research "on". This study reflects the need to recontextualize the role of educational research in a post civil-rights, largely globalized and technological age in order to fundamentally solve problems. Spaces like the Black Male Youth Academy offer a model that incorporates traditional research methodologies and merges them with a critical research framework. With this in mind, a new

space emerges whereby participants engage in educational discourse in partnership with researchers as we seek to understand how schools could work to be more effective in urban communities.

Approaching language and literacy research

Fundamental conceptions and notions of student success and achievement are influenced by ideas we hold about class, race and/or language. These ideas ultimately reinforce social hierarchies and are experienced in the classroom and schooling environment through neoliberal standards based education. In an environment where teachers are expected to “teach to the test”, successful literacy research practices are needed to help overcome the pedagogical constraints created through banking education. In this study, I endeavored to capture the perspectives of African American male youth and demonstrate the ways in which sociocultural literacy research played a significant role in the discourse on effective literacy and pedagogical practices. To achieve this goal, I presented, through critical discourse and activity analysis (Luke, O'Brien, & Comber, 1994; Moje & Lewis, 2007), the multiple ways students expressed their acquisition of critical literacy during their participation in the Black Male Youth Academy. As African American male youth found themselves engaged in pedagogical experiences that are neither liberating nor supportive of the capacity for learning they bring to the classroom, this study seeks to capture their expressions of critical literacy as a demonstration of the learning that took place during their participation in the Black Male Youth Academy.

Reflection as an analytical tool: Understanding positionality, point of view and the role of teacher vs. researcher while ‘wearing two hats’

Reflexivity was an important activity that both explains and helps me understand my role as a participant observer and action researcher. I was both a participant and an observer in a community of practice. At times, I was very close to the data and ran the risk of interpreting it in a less objective way. Understanding my own subjectivity allowed for a clearer depiction of what occurred and revealed inherent biases. According to Rosaldo (1994), traditional social science research requires that “the researcher must remove observer bias by becoming the emotional, cognitive, and moral equivalent of a blank slate (p. 171). However, he argues that subjectivity is a part of social analysis. It was therefore important to document and capture my experience throughout the study. I collected direct observations to describe the environment that existed without the influence of either meaning maker. I also navigated between my role as a participant observer when I captured field notes in spaces where I had no direct influence such as the lunch yard or another teacher’s classroom.

One of the challenges with the methodological approach of action research is that of positionality. Becker (1969) noted that as a function of one’s position in the group, an observer “...can interpret such statements and descriptions as indications of the individual’s perspective on the point involved” (p.249). This interpretation could result in inaccuracies but are not valueless. Since I am uniquely positioned in the school because of my history as an alumnus and as an African American male, my position afforded the leverage necessary to gain access and supported my ability to conduct research. This allowed me to have access to various forms of data I needed ranging from archival records to interviews with administrators, counselors and

teachers. Because I am also socially situated within the school as both a teacher and a researcher, I maintain certain preconceived notions about the school's culture and preexisting conditions.

Drawing from Urie Bronfenbrenner (1976), I realized that the scientific study of educational systems and processes is not that of laboratory science but of real life circumstances and situations. Bronfenbrenner believed that learning, is a function of “sets of forces, or systems, on two levels” (p. 5). The first level “comprises the relations between the characteristics of learners and the surroundings in which they live out their lives (e.g., home, school, peer group, work place, neighborhood, community)” and the second level “encompasses the relations and interconnections that exist between these environments” (p. 5). He argued that these functions — the conditions that exist and the way learners relate to those conditions — lend credence to the study of what he terms as “ecology of education.” As such, educators must incorporate and understand the existing ecological environment when attempting to design studies or interventions affecting educational environments. To support my analytical framework, I incorporated Bronfenbrenner's definitions of the learning environment to understand and utilize strategies that considered or challenged the sociopolitical, sociocultural and sociohistorical conditions of the school.

I also relied on the use of portraiture to help me understand my position within the research environment. Portraiture incorporates acknowledgement of one's social location and helps guide how one presents' his unique perspective on context using a framework for exploring behavior, thought and actions embedded in that context (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis, 1997). My position as a researcher and participant allowed me to navigate the school as an institution in both a familiar and unfamiliar way. I was able to observe the environment with a new lens and with new students, new experiences and an inquiry based approach.

Another way to address bias that comes from one's position is by identifying the frequency and distribution of phenomena. Becker (1969) goes on to explain that the use of "quasi-statistics" to argue for the likeliness of a particular occurrence. The nature of observation makes it difficult for the researcher to draw causal relationships whereby data can be interpreted directly to exact a conclusion. However, identifying the frequency of an occurrence can lead to a more accurate analysis of what actually occurs. This process does not eliminate the danger of bias, but at the very least, provides a mechanism whereby observable behavior can be identified and quantified. I utilize frequency to address this challenge and identify occurrences of critical literacy.

Lawrence-Lightfoot and Davis argue that working as a participant observer forces the researcher to confront the various forms of context (historical, personal, internal) that allows the researcher to understand whether or not change that occurs is a result of her influence (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis, 1997). In this study, I am in a space where I interacted as a participant. It was therefore critical, that I engaged in a process of analysis that, according to Lawrence-Lightfoot and Davis, balanced the aesthetic whole. This is a process of reflection that relies upon the researcher's judgment to figure out what works or what doesn't fit and what should be reconsidered or excluded (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis, 1997). I will engage in a continual process of reflection, as portraiture calls for, while using action research as a framework to collect, evaluate and interpret data.

Part of the methodology in portraiture is to capture what is occurring as an outsider with an insider's understanding (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis, 1997). Erickson (1996) notes "[t]his means paying close attention not only to one's point of view as an observer, but to one's relations with others (who one is studying and working with) and to one's relations with oneself"

(p.198). Again, it was important that I understood my own positionality within the observational environment. When this perspective is combined with portraiture, a deeper level of analysis can emerge through counter-storytelling. Ensuring that students' voices were incorporated in the analysis was critical to the successful portrayal of their behavior. For this purpose, I included interviews to capture the relationship of the meaning makers to the study (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis, 1997). Collecting data with the participants, as collaborators in the meaning making process validated and centralized their voice.

Significance and Implications

This study aimed to utilize existing research methodologies to demonstrate successful literacy practices for African American male youth thus showing the value of action research for advancing scientific knowledge and solving social challenges. Over the course of this study, I attempted to present a deeper understanding about the nuances of qualitative research and focused on presenting ways to utilize the data I have gathered in and outside of the classroom to tell a powerful story about the lives of the young people with whom I engaged. I hypothesized that the use critical literacy can be a powerful activity and can serve as a vehicle that led to transformative change. As such, this study reflects an action-based participatory observer research process.

This study will contribute to the corpus of knowledge and the field by helping to examine the way we view literacy and by offering examples of successful pedagogical practices. Morrell (2002) argues of the need to find effective ways to teach a diverse population across cultural contexts and in a way that validates the literacies within marginalized and oppressed communities. Ogbu (1992) also argues that educators must consider the multiple contexts

students learn within and account for these contexts in their educational strategy. In this regard, pedagogy and curriculum can become negotiated activities whereby the students, the teacher, the texts and the classroom exist in a contested environment inducing constant reflection. Where each student's 'fund of knowledge' (Gonzalez, Moll, & Amanti, 2005) is incorporated in the learning community and where critical consciousness is fostered. In doing so, educators may find this study useful in that it will provide tools to help them avoid letting their students "off the hook" and validate low expectations or deficit approaches to learning.

This study is fundamentally about a new type of agency that is not solely predicated on resistance or mere critiques of power structures. It is a study that seeks to understand which tools can be used to achieve a liberatory learning experience and empower African American male youth to redefine themselves outside of oppression and reimagine their future breakthrough in the interpretation of self. Although many studies have sought to explain motivation, efficacy, identity and persistence (Oyserman, Ager & Gant, 1995; Carter, 2008; Nasir, McLaughlin & Jones, 2009). I believe this study is different in that I sought to offer a more complex analysis of the relationships between identity, literacy, power and agency.

My aim is to offer practical applications to challenges facing African American male youth using a sociocultural theoretical approach founded in a "post" critical theoretical framework. This study provided an opportunity to utilize a grounded theoretical analysis of the data in order to develop a new way of theorizing agency or subjectivity. This study can serve as a model that leads to new ways of us using theory, thinking critically and operationalizing critical ideas. It has potential to offer guidance on how to conduct similar forms of research or develop spaces that can be implemented across contexts (racial, class, physical, locality, etc.) and can be passed on to teachers in other classes offering wider application to all youth.

CHAPTER FOUR: The Black Male Youth Academy: Conceptualizing and Designing a Critical Literacy Intervention Program

Drawing from personal experience

I firmly believe that my life experiences have provided a unique perspective that has informed my research. I was ushered into social action by the second grade. Ms. Gilliard, my teacher, elected me to present “I have a dream” by Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., for an assembly our class performed at 96th Street Elementary School in Watts, California. In retrospect, I acknowledge this period as the beginning of my development of a critical consciousness. At six years old, it did not occur to me how important my participation in the King assembly would be. I was unaware of class structures and did not know about the depth of social inequality. It wasn’t until a year later when my mother, sister and I were evicted and slept in the back of our car and in a homeless shelter that I began to question these things.

Around the same period, I noticed that some of my schoolmates had two parents. I asked my mother where my father was and she took me to see him. When I met him, he lived in a “halfway house”, or transitional home, after being released from prison on drug abuse charges. At seven, I still did not understand the impact of this experience (and felt somewhat oblivious to the circumstances). I had been homeless and my father was in a halfway house. My mother then decided we would be better supported if we lived with other family members. As a result, we moved from house to house and, for me, from school to school. Although I did not appreciate the constant change, moving frequently eventually taught me to be comfortable with any change.

However, because of the constant moving, I did not have a stable schooling experience. Yet, I learned that through school I would have the opportunity to positively affect my life. I decided that no matter where I went, or what happened, I would put all of my energy into school.

I did not want my children to experience what I had thus far. As a result, no matter which school I attended, the experience of learning to achieve became my goal. My involvement developed and strengthened sometime around middle school. Although I had always done well in school, my focus shifted as I was determined to achieve in my environment. I believe this is the point where most youth choose to join a gang, engage in illegal activity or become self-destructive. The difference with me was that I had family and teachers who took an interest in my success.

Through their encouragement, I learned to thrive not in spite of, but because of my social and economic conditions. When I entered high school, I joined a youth project that focused on addressing some of the negative social conditions those in my community lived in. The program was based on a self-empowerment philosophy to help address gang violence, drugs and poverty. Although the program had limited resources, its impact was tremendous on me and many of my friends. At the high school level, this program successfully engaged students like me who had experienced troubling childhoods. In the program, I traveled and spoke at anti-gun rallies. I also became involved in student government and traveled to represent my school as a student advocate. I worked with school board and city officials to address the needs of the students in my school. The desire to create positive social change is what inspired me to pursue college.

Because I had been heavily involved in high school, I expected to continue this trend when I entered college. I very quickly realized that it was virtually impossible to be involved in social change because I was not adequately prepared academically. Although I performed at a fair level my first year of college, I struggled tremendously to do so. My transition to college allowed me to recognize how underprepared many of my classmates and I were. In addition to the academic challenges, I struggled to find a new identity as I entered what seemed to be a foreign world to me. Attending UCLA, I felt out of place and was unable to make sense of my

past. I was no longer taking care of my sister or actively involved in my community, but simply attending school.

In my third year, I decided to study abroad in South Africa and this had a significant impact on me. I traveled around the country and observed conditions of poverty that challenged my perspectives on social inequity. I was led to question the abject poverty that seemed to face people around the world. As I stood in Nelson Mandela's cell, I felt connected to a much larger struggle. The trip to South Africa was important to me because it helped me to identify with other people of color who were poor, but not from America. It helped me choose an identity that challenged poverty and injustice. I returned to America, excited and ready to create change.

When I returned, I stayed in New Jersey for a brief period and this implication of this decision were very important. After the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001, I decided to take a short break from school and joined the US Navy. I was promised the ability to support my family and receive the money I needed to return and finish school. Often, the desire to attend college or achieve upward mobility is a reason urban youth join the military. Since the majority of Junior Reserve Officer Training Corps (J.R.O.T.C.) sites are in urban neighborhoods, many young African American males feel this is their sole opportunity to become successful. As a result of my military service, I did not immediately return to UCLA but instead, was deployed on a ship after basic training. A few years later, I was deployed on ground to Iraq where I witnessed the effects of US policy and imperialism. My time in the US Navy forced me to reflect on the life I wanted to live and when I returned from Iraq, I worked diligently to return to school.

I moved back to Los Angeles to return to school at UCLA. When I did so, I returned with my original intention of creating social change. Although I had learned from many of my experiences, it was at this point in my life that everything connected to provide purpose. My

view of school had shifted to become a place where I would gain the knowledge I would need to create change. Although I had worked on a degree at National University in San Diego while in the military, school acquired a new place of importance in my life. In my Education Minor courses, I learned theory that allowed me to understand and connect my past to the future. I've always known about social stratification through my own experiences; however I gained a framework to help me understand them. I learned the works of Paulo Freire, which helped me recognize my path to humanization. I became acquainted with post-modern and critical theory and began to use a problem-posing approach to critically evaluate my environment. I also connected with my experiences spiritually as I saw myself in so many of the students in the community in which I grew up.

I joined the struggle for social justice when I was six, but when I returned to UCLA, I made a conscious decision to revive my activism on campus. I joined the African Student Union (ASU) to fight for greater access to higher education for underrepresented students. It was during this time that I realized the challenges I had experience growing up were not unique to me. When I returned to my former high school to begin research, I decided to focus on the many types of students who were going through the hardships I had experienced growing up. I saw that my life and my past connected directly to theirs and as I articulated this I was able to engage with students in a manner that seemed relevant to their experience. It was recognizing the connections to the past that have allowed me to utilize my experiences to interact with high school students, more specifically African-American males, in such a way that allowed my research to become meaningful.

It is for these reasons and many more that I decided to create the Black Male Youth Academy in order to focus on research that addresses the challenges facing African-American

males. In developing the Black Male Youth Academy, I wanted to measure and capture the ways in which the educational experiences of African American male youth could create a positive shift in their sociopolitical and academic development. Given my past, I came to the conclusion that instead of waiting for educational reform, I wanted to create a model to allow educators to impact African American male youth immediately. The BMYA was created using the concept of the Black Male Academy movement as a local, in school-based approach. The intent was to identify how African American male youth can be engaged in a critical, culturally relevant and meaningful way to create change.

Conceptualizing a critical literacy program

The creation of the Black Male Youth Academy (BMYA) began more than six years ago. In the spring of 2006, I returned to my alma mater at Vernon High School in the city of Vernon to figure out how to apply what I had learned in my critical pedagogy course with African American male youth. I wanted to work with this population because of the need, because of my identification as an African American male and because of my personal commitment to social justice. As a senior in the McNair Research Scholars Program at UCLA and to complete the required research project, I created a program targeting African American male youth where my initial goal was to simply figure out which literacy practices improve educational outcomes for this population. The program became known as the Black Male Youth Academy (BMYA) in honor the work of Dr. Watson and Dr. Smitherman.

In designing the curriculum, I reached out to a number of teachers and experts in the fields of education and history. I wanted to learn about the instructional methods many teachers used in the classroom and actively work to avoid them. I chose this approach because I wanted

to prioritize the use of critical pedagogy as a potential approach to teaching and learning in traditional educational settings and did not believe most teacher preparation programs prepare teachers using critical pedagogy as a model. I worked diligently to create a program that was different from traditional classroom spaces. I knew, early on, that I wanted it to be a class and not an afterschool program because I wanted to institutionalize any success that might emerge from the project. Instead of trying to design the program like a traditional high school class, I wanted to create a college course that would take place in a high school. As a result, I created a college syllabus (see Appendix A) based on traditional seminar style graduate level courses. I wanted to foster critical dialogue while providing a structured space that allowed for work products.

Building upon the Detroit Malcolm X Academy and the work of Dr. Ernest Morrell, I designed the Black Male Youth Academy (BMYA) as a youth participatory action research program that focused on improving the academic and sociopolitical development of African American youth. My exposure to youth participatory action research came under the mentorship of Dr. Ernest Morrell. Having seen what he, John Rogers and Jeannie Oakes were able to accomplish with youth in South Los Angeles, I was inspired to use their work to move students toward change. Dr. Morrell's work had a profound impact on my thinking because I saw YPAR as a component that could help facilitate youth empowerment and teach them to address the social challenges in their communities. YPAR also became philosophically important because I saw it as a way to ground theory in the lived experience of research participants.

The BMYA existed as a space for African American male youth to participate in a specialized learning environment. The program teaches students about the history of African Americans both pre and post Columbus using critical pedagogy to help them identify their

relationship to power, to history, to their community and to personal responsibility. Students are expected to assess the community conditions using theories they learn in the classroom and to develop a research action plan to present to potential collaborators to implement their ideas for change. They are taught to use research methodologies to seek input (conduct interviews and develop surveys), document their learning process (documentary filmmaking) and propose solutions (PowerPoint presentations). Through this process, students are expected to engage in their community as public intellectuals and storytellers improving their academic skills to become better writers, thinkers and producers of knowledge.

As an action research study, the program utilizes a curriculum that incorporates critical theory as a way to cultivate sociopolitical and academic development through critical literacy. The program takes place as a class period during the advisory period and includes some focus on California High School Exit Exam (CAHSEE) preparation, California Standardized Test (CST) preparation and academic literacy development. As a way to evaluate progress, instructors used project based learning and program evaluations to assess learning. The classroom was a dynamic learning environment with many moving parts and responded to school culture, the approach to academic achievement and students' development self generated knowledge. It should also be noted that the focus on African American male youth was not to deliberately exclude students based on ethnicity or gender. The focus on African American males explicitly targeted a high need population. This approach could serve as a model to serve other marginalized communities.

Building the Black Male Youth Academy (BMYA)

Located in South Los Angeles at Vernon High School, the program is embedded in the school's master calendar as an assigned elective course that is both graded and counted toward attendance. It takes place during the advisory period, Monday through Thursday, and hosts approximately 20 -25 African American male youth in grades nine through twelve. For example, during the 2010-2011 school year, 57% of the young men were "system-involved" youth and had a grade point average (GPA) that ranged between 1.2 and 3.6. However, every student who matriculated in the program through graduation enrolled in a college/university or trade school. The curriculum incorporates utilizes critical theory in order to develop a critical perspective in youth. The program also incorporates California High School Exit Exam (CAHSEE) preparation, California Standardized Test preparation, basic academic literacy skills development and college preparation. The program works to provide a "safe in-school space" for personal conversations, a learning environment that attempts to validate each student's cultural history, access to college level coursework and a caring environment with high academic performance expectations.

The specific location studied within Vernon High School was room D-4. As of 2012, the BMYA was in its fifth year of operation at Vernon High School and course instructors utilized a culturally relevant curriculum that incorporates the use of critical pedagogy, pre-post Diasporic African history, critical theory, college-preparation education, community building activities, mentoring, identity development and character building practices to introduce critical literacy into the participants learning environment. During the fall of 2006, I walked into my former high school and asked to speak with the Principal of Vernon High School. Vernon High School, as a public high school in an urban and low-income community, has multiple ethnicities with history of academic disenfranchisement. After learning that she was sick, she directed me to speak to the Vice Principal in charge. I was told there were no vice principals, only assistant

principals and thus began my reentry into the K-12 environment. My aim that day was to get approval to work with and conduct research with a group of African American male youth.

Proposal in hand, I was ushered into the Assistant Principals office. When I met with the Assistant Principal, Ms. Joyce Rushing, she looked at me and said, “Really? What do you want?” Taken aback I said, “I know you’re really busy, but I want you to hear what I’m trying say. This is my old high school and I want to give back. I want better for these students than I had.” At the time, the school was designated as a program improvement school for failing to complete its adequate yearly progress goals (AYP). It was close to being reconstituted.

When she put down her pen, I spent an hour speaking with her about my proposal. I presented a PowerPoint detailing the action research project and program design. I was immediately put at ease when she explained that the school really needed the support. For nearly three weeks, I visited the school everyday to engage in conversations with the Assistant Principal and the Dean. In working with the administrators of Vernon High School, they became committed to the idea of developing an academic space that focused on African American male youth who needed opportunities for academic achievement — in spite of the structural deficiencies of the their educational.

Getting started

During Spring 2007, I began working with a group of approximately twenty-five African American male youth. I did so two days a week over the course of 15 weeks. It began during the second semester of the high school year and has continued to this year. We skipped Fall 2007, but restarted during the spring of 2008. When I first began, it was a voluntary class that students

could join during the advisory period and held in the Dean’s room. Since then, it has grown to become its own class running four days a week. Although the Black Male Youth Academy began as an action research project, as of the publishing date of this dissertation, it is still currently active. The following table demonstrates how the program has developed over the years.

Table 1 - Program development over time

Table 1 - Program development over time						
Year	2006 - 2007	2007 - 2008	2008 - 2009	2009 - 2010	2010 - 2011	2011 - 2012
Structure	Two days per week, One hour per day	Four days per week, One hour per day	Four days per week, One hour per day	Four days per week, One hour per day	Four days per week, One hour per day	Four days per week, One hour per day
Length	One semester, Spring	One Semester, Spring	Full Academic Year	Full Academic Year	Full Academic Year	Full Academic Year
Participants	African American male – Volunteer – Random	African American male - Volunteer - Counselor and Teacher	African American male, Volunteer - Counselor & Teacher	African American male – Volunteer – Peer recruited,	African American male – Volunteer - Peer recruited,	African American male – Volunteer - Peer recruited,

	y selected	Recommend ed	Recommend ed	Counselor & Teacher Recommend ed	Counselor & Teacher Recommend ed	Counselor & Teacher Recommend ed
Grade Levels	10 th -12 th grade	9 th -12 th grade	9 th – 12 th grade	Primarily 9 th grade	9 th -12 th grade	9 th -12 th grade

To honor the goals of an action research study, I worked diligently with students to design the classroom topics and co-facilitate the discussions. This process of co-creation in both the research design and program execution required constant reflection, curriculum review and analysis of program operations, student responses and teaching strategies. Central to the curriculum of the BMYA is an emphasis on heritage-based education with the intent to build critical literacy skills. In reading the works of critical pedagogues like Carter G. Woodson, W.E.B. Dubois, bell hooks and Paulo Freire, I wanted to approach the students with an emphasis on cultural relevance in the curriculum and problem posing pedagogy intended to get students to question their world.

I posited that the acquisition of critical literacy skills would help students engage in a process that humanized their academic experience and empowered them. Students are expected to read such theorists as Max Horkheimer, Theodore Adorno, Antonio Gramsci, Danny Solórzano, Tyrone Howard and many others. These authors help explain the “why” behind oppressive structures and the BMYA was intended to be a place that fostered opportunities to engage in internal struggle as students seek to develop knowledge of self (Cabral, 1969). While the BMYA was created with an understanding of some of the macro challenges schools face

around reform and turnaround; in practice, it applied theory on the ground in the classroom space. With a dedicated approach to address challenges facing African American male youth, the BMYA incorporates academic and sociopolitical development with an emphasis on moving from research to action.

CHAPTER FIVE: Critical Literacy Development

This chapter presents the use of qualitative research methods such as observation data, field notes, after-class reflections, audio transcriptions and students' written work to understand how multiple expressions of critical literacy play out both inside and outside of the classroom. Some of the questions I explored were: How do students speak, behave or respond when they acquire critical literacy? How does their worldview shift once they have been exposed to information intended to empower them? What happens outside of the classroom when critical literacy skills are acquired? In order to answer the intended research questions, Vernon High School served as the research site and the students writing and behaviors within/around the BMYA were the primary units of analyses.

Data from the 2008-2009 school year

In order to determine if critical literacy was being utilized in the classroom, I decided to evaluate students' writing, personal accounts and hold informal interviews. For the purpose of this study, I examined class assignments such as essays and quick-writes written within the BMYA. This examination allowed me to address whether or not students acquired critical literacy intellectually (internal acquisition) and if it transferred to spaces outside of the classroom behaviorally (external expression) (Yin, 2006). I collected and analyzed 15 weeks of student writing samples ranging from quick-writes to essays. Quick-writes were normally 15-20 minute long essays and required students to reflect on the lessons provided in the curriculum and offer an analysis based on a prompt. Student essays were usually much longer and were generally based on research assignments students were expected to complete. Student writing assignments

are the most important pieces of data because they afford an opportunity to analyze whether students acquired an understanding that incorporated critical literacy.

Also included in my data analysis are after-class reflections and field notes. These reflections were accounts of direct observations of the students' behavior inside of the classroom and in spaces outside of the classroom. Using activity and critical discourse analysis, I coded student artifacts, field notes and reflections according to the rubrics in the following sections. It was important to define critical literacy in order to observe it as an intellectual activity that may or may not lead to change in participation. It was also important to establish the frequency of either observed behavior or written analysis from which I drew conclusions about student's expression of critical literacy. Because I looked for expressions, and not always action, my scope of analysis broadened. This allowed me to observe phenomenon on multiple platforms including verbal communication, writing, changes in participation and the like.

As I began reviewing the data I collected, I noticed something was happening. My questions were focused on how students acquire critical literacy and in what context (i.e., classroom, lunch area, home, etc.). As I combed the data, certain themes or phenomena emerged. This development will be described in the following sections as "expressions of critical literacy." My assertions also evolved as I encountered multiple forms of expression in students' behavior, speech and attitudes. Although my particular focus is on expressions of critical literacy, I continuously encountered different forms of expression that required explanation. Students did not always express what I came to define as critical literacy. Instead, I noticed that I needed to develop a language to describe the student's multiple forms of expression. Accordingly, I created the following chart of terms to describe their verbal, pedagogical, behavioral, intrinsic expressions.

Chart of Terms		
Term	Abbreviation	Definition
Critical Literacy	CL	Students who engage in anti-oppressive intellectual activity by critically analyzing a situation, experience, observation or otherwise to draw meaning that allows them act as Subjects in that activity.
Knowledge of Self	KOS	Students understand the where/who they are in relation to their world, their class (es), their school, their families or the other.
Critical Situational Awareness	CSA	Students communicate knowledge of self and are able to express their positionality in a particular situation, but lack the language necessary to direct the receiver to an explicit meaning. The receiver must use inference and gather implicit meaning from what students are saying.
Anti-Critical Literacy	ACL	Students who utilize a deficit analysis to make meaning of a situation, text or experience.

Students expressed themselves and maintained an overall string of analysis regardless of whether or not they were being critical. What seemed to matter most to them was the freedom to write what they thought and how they felt using what they had learned or what they have experienced.

Critical literacy as an expression

My first assertion is largely based on the consistency of occurrences. Students express critical literacy through what they write, how they speak, ways they behave, ways they teach and in understandings they hold. I will provide examples of multiple forms of expression through vignettes and quotes. I will also provide rubrics for each section to detail the framework I used when looking to identify expressions from students. It is important to understand the terms that I use to identify phenomena occurring across different modalities of expression. These terms will be used in frequency tables and should be referenced in order to understand what types of phenomena occur.

Written Expressions of Critical Literacy

I identified points of critical literacy when there was a conceptual shift in the writing or action. At times, the concept was linked to the one before, but was delineated by a change in the student's approach to that concept. For example, if a student *wrote* about his identity as a Black man and then *spoke* about his perceptions of his family, I noted the different types of expression — writing and speech. I then applied a coding rubric as I reviewed those forms of expression and looked to see if they were using any, one or multiple identifiers from the rubric. If they were, I then marked that portion of their writing according to the chart of terms. In most cases, I also annotated why I thought a particular phrase reflected the use of critical literacy. Here are the identifiers from the rubric:

- Does the student use critical theory or theorists in their explanation/argument?

- Does the student draw connections/conclusions between their reality and the lessons in class?
- Does the student explain the “why” behind a principle/concept and connect it to his/her experience?
- Does the student analyze and explain how he/she fits into a larger social phenomenon?
- Does the student use a race, class or gender analysis in their writing?
- Does the student incorporate historical background in their writing?
- Does the student question the legitimacy of the knowledge he/she was taught?
- Does the student challenge his/her assumptions?
- Does the student utilize his/her experiences to explain his/her ideas?
- Does the student show progression in concept comprehension?
- Does the student define terms using methodological processes?
- Does the student use a vocabulary that incorporates language from critical theory?
- Does the student display care/concern for his/her communities?
- Does the student provide recommendations for improving social conditions?
- Does the student argue for Social Justice?

As evidenced above, there were multiple ways students could express critical literacy through their writing. This rubric does not presume students continually perform any of the above criteria as they write in the class or beyond. It was designed to assess their writing for any given assignment and should be considered a general guide to follow when critiquing students’ writing.

Scaffolding to incorporate current events into a critical literacy lesson

Often, an instruction strategy incorporated the use of current events to generate similarities between reality and theoretical concepts. Students were encouraged to reflect on their lives and share their perceptions freely or without penalty. The teacher is also expected to engage the

students and present problem posing questions that push them to think outside of their own experiences as they relate what they learned about race and social structure. Because the class exists within a school setting, the students were expected to write in their journals with the anticipation that they would be graded on their grammar skills, spelling ability and sentence structure. Students write with the idea that they are expected to know basic rules of English. Although this is the expectation, it does not mean that they always follow the rules or are proficient (at grade level) in their writing.

The classroom itself was decorated in specific colors around the room. An artificial border was added using construction paper in the colors of red, green and black. These colors signify African liberation and were the colors of the Black Power Movement in America. On the walls, are posters of Che Guevara, Martin Luther King Jr., Malcolm X and Miles Davis. There are pictures of the Tupac Shakur (rapper), Michael Jordon (basketball player), Reggie Bush (Football player), W.E.B. Dubois (Sociologist), tribal Africans and a variety of images intended to display the diversity of African American history and culture. Banners reading UCLA hang from the wall and there is a college section near the front whiteboard.

There were more than 35 desks in the room because the school anticipates they may be necessary at any given time. There were bookcases with readings from the Hip-Hop Think Tank at California State University Northridge, ACT/SAT preparation booklets, African American civil rights history books and newspapers detailing the “New Struggle”. In the back of the classroom, was a large timeline from Howard Zinn’s, *A People’s History of the United States*, along with positive thought evoking words in large print like: “Change”, “Hope”, “Live”, “Love” and “Inspire.” The goal was to create a sense that this space was especially created for them as they entered the room. The room was rich with material to reference and write about.

When discussions occurred, they happened within this space and context. There was a sense of safety and acceptability of individual cultural expression. The classroom space served as way to reaffirm the student's identity and offer images that challenge stereotypes. There were also a few flyers from then-Senator Barack Obama's campaign posted around the room; in the bookcase were a couple of storytelling books about his life. The presidential election had just occurred and had been discussed across news outlets and television programs. Some of the students saw the campaign flyers and came in pointing out that he had won. The flyers and media helped prompt dialogue about his win.

This week's discussion, shortly after the presidential election of 2008, was an excellent compliment to the previous week's lessons on the civil right's movement, the electoral process, voting and democracy (see Appendix A). We even had mock voting in the class and handed out "I vote" stickers to the students. Since many of them came into class discussing the election, I decided to focus the day's quick-write on their apparent interest. Incorporating student experiences and knowledge into the writing assignment was informed by my desire to scaffold lessons about privilege and democracy. I instructed the students to grab their journals and gave them the writing prompt: What does it mean to you and your future now that Barack Obama has been elected President of the United States?

Quickwrite response:

"Now that Barack Obama has been elected President of the United States, this has set higher standards for me and other Black African Americans to become anything we want to be in life. It tells the U.S. and others that whites are not the only ones that are dominant now. Also, Obama has pushed me to become something that I never would have expected. He inspired me to become a huge business manager of some company. Now, that we have a Black president, he has motivated me to get as much education as I could possibly get. Then use that educated mind for trying to make history again. I believe that since Barack

Obama has been elected President he will change the world and how other countries look at us” (BM, QW#9, 11.06.08).

The student in this vignette was a 10th grader and his name is Bradley. He understood the impact of President Obama’s election on his life and his writing serves as an important intellectual entryway into the function and purpose of literacy. His analysis included his own social location as a student, an African American, a community member, an entrepreneur and a member of an oppressed group. In his writing, he challenges his notion of self. For example, he stated, “Obama has pushed me to become something that I never would have expected.” This statement indicates that he now sees himself and his future differently because of the election. Something that seemed impossible, the election of an African American male as President of the United States, showed this student that what he may now be able to challenge his own understanding of what seemed unattainable. He believed in himself, the possibility of becoming a business manager, the need to be educated and had a desire to create history.

It is sometimes difficult to derive clear meanings from student’s writing when I do not use a framework, such as critical theory, to analyze what they are saying. It is easy to get lost in the responsibility of teaching and forget that students have deeper understandings than they are sometimes able to articulate. The election occurred in November and by that time we had covered the meaning of social oppression, the plight African American males face, theories of resistance, structural inequality and racism (see Appendix A). Bradley drew from previous class lessons to develop an analysis of why he thought this election was important. For example, he wrote, “[the election] tells the U.S. and others [society at large] that whites are not the only ones that are dominant [in charge of society] now.” Depending on how you read his analysis of the

role of “whites,” he could mean that opportunity will not be the exclusive right of white people or that Obama’s leadership signifies that blacks are capable of running society too.

Regardless of how one might interpret his writing, Bradley expressed critical literacy; he connects the role of race in society to conceptualizations of power, the importance of education, the progress of African Americans, the perception of America in the world, his notion of self and to the opportunities he now sees as possible. Another student, Robert, a 9th grader, offered this analysis to the original prompt: “There are people out there looking at a black African American as the leader of this country. Now if Barack Obama messes up as president, that will reflect on every black person in the United States of America” (RH, QW#9, 11.06.08). Robert’s statement is interesting because he views President Obama as a representative of African Americans and he exhibits an understanding of the implications Obama’s success or failure may have for his life. He then goes on to explain, “Plus, you have to look out for the White Power people that don’t like blacks or Mexicans...they look at black people as a lower class community, that they come from nothing” (RH, QW#9, 11.06.08). Robert situates his analysis of the importance of President Obama’s election in his understanding of white supremacy and his personal experiences with racism. In class discussions, he often talked about a white police officer that handcuffed him, illegally searched, detained and subsequently released him only after the officer was sure he was not a thug.

Students frequently connect their experiences with class discussions and literature on racism, oppression, white supremacy and the importance of such a historic occasion. Both Bradley and Robert represent students who use writing as a tool to express critical literacy. They both incorporated an analysis of race, a sense of historical importance, and recognition of classism in

their understanding of the occasion. Table 1 shows the number of students who wrote on this prompt and the particular phenomena found.

Table 1. – Students who responded to writing prompt for Quickwrite #9

Number of respondents out of 17 students	Expressions of CL	Expressions of KOS	Expressions of CSA	Instances of Anti-CL
14	23	7	5	1

Critical literacy was the dominant form of expression amongst the students in this assignment. Many students also expressed Knowledge of Self as they wrote because they saw themselves as a part of the election. For example, when Caliph responds to this prompt he states that

“[f]or me to have lived there through the 1st African American presidential election, only gives me more thrive to follow my dreams of becoming a famous CNN personality...Never will I second guess the ability of a black man to go after (what he) wants” (CR, QW#9, 11.06.08).

Caliph situates himself as a personal benefactor of President Obama’s election and believes his success is now possible because he now has proof that a Black man has the ability to accomplish his dreams. His statement is insightful about how he views himself as a Black man and the hope he now has. He goes on a few sentences later to add, “my future is quite bright for me, in the sense of achieving my goals” (CR, QW#9, 11.06.08). Caliph’s Knowledge of Self has deepened as a result of his view of the importance of this election and the impact it has on his life.

Scaffolding class discussions

By the third week of the program, many of our class discussions were focused on the idea of oppression as it relates to understanding schools, society and communities. Students read excerpts from Delgado Bernal and Danny Solórzano's article on *Theories of Transformational Resistance* and other excerpts from Paulo Freire's *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*. Our goals were to understand what oppression looked like on an individual level *and* on a societal level. I posed questions that encouraged them to analyze why many of them, or their peers, lived in impoverished neighborhoods, had single parent/guardian homes and attended a school with bars on the windows. The class was mixed with freshmen through seniors and there was plenty to discuss, given the diversity of their backgrounds. I instructed the students to engage the following writing prompt in their journals: Define social oppression and provide examples.

Quickwrite response:

"I believe social oppression is explained by something called Social Supremacy and there are many forms of social oppression in our community. For example the school I attend Vernon High School is an awesome example of social oppression. By stating this, I'm saying that my school is not an ordinary school. When compared to a Beverly Hills or Laguna Hills. When I walk in school, I have to go through metal detectors. When I walk in class we have windows painted and bars on our windows. We don't have enough books and desks in our classrooms to provide equal learning for students. Then on the other hand, if you step foot into one of the (white campus') it would be the complete opposite of what you see in the black communities. This is my definition of social oppression" (HV, QW#4, 10.01.08)

Humphry provides an attention-grabbing analysis of what he describes as social oppression. He begins by renaming the term to show ownership over the concept. Students were encouraged during the class discussions to act as teachers and experts of their own knowledge. In critical

pedagogy, this is known as democratic education and is the practice of liberatory education. Humphry's sense of ownership is an expression of critical literacy because he has reconceptualized the knowledge he acquired from the class literature and has placed that knowledge within his realm of understanding.

This type of intellectual activity is a form of comprehension, which may lead to an expression of critical literacy. However, the problem with Humphry's explanation is that he does not provide a logical analysis for the reader to follow. He begins his process by claiming ownership over the concept, but does not lead the reader to a logical conclusion. His explanation requires the reader to use deductive reasoning and reflects Humphry's basic challenge with functional literacy (i.e., understanding grammar, sentence construction, punctuation, etc.). This particular vignette is important because it points out the consistent challenges students face when they attempt to master new literature or concepts while lacking the language necessary to explain those concepts.

Humphry clearly understood what social oppression was because he provided examples that followed his definition and line of reasoning. He compared his school to wealthier schools and offered poignant examples as intellectual points of departure. Humphry understands that the conditions of the school are reflective of much larger problems within society. He also situates the conditions that exist within black communities as outside of the experiences of white schools. In doing so, he offers a structural analysis of oppression and racism.

What Humphry does not offer the reader is a clear connection to his examples and thought process. Because he is acquiring a new language in order to describe his experiences, he is now in a better position to articulate knowledge he already possesses. The class served as a space for him to connect theoretical concepts to his experiences in a way that is coherent. Although he

still requires further development and assistance with articulating concepts, his writing serves as an expression of critical literacy. Unfortunately, many teachers may only view Humphry’s writing as lacking in skills instead of seeing his need to develop his writing abilities as an expression of critical literacy. That means the evaluator is operating with a deficit perception of the student.

I believe this highlights why we need to incorporate training in African American Vernacular English (AAVE) so that teachers will begin to see African American students who write in a similar fashion, as valuable within their own right. If a teacher who lacks the cultural insight AAVE decides to grade this student, he or she may decide to fail him because he does not fit their expectations of a good writer and may assume he is anti-intellectual. As his writing points out, he understands the concept but lacks the skills. In my analysis, he is still critically literate because he realizes that something is unfair and wrong with the experience of walking onto campus through the metal detectors. He also juxtaposes his experience with those of students who attend predominantly white schools and identifies significant differences and expectations of student safety. As a teacher, I still expect Humphry to make conceptual links in his writing, but I also understand that it is my responsibility to help him get there by simultaneously reinforcing his intellectual successes and developing his skills. The following frequency table displays the number of occurrences for students who responded to this prompt.

Table 2. – Students who responded to writing prompt for Quickwrite # 4

Number of respondents out of 17 students	Expressions of CL	Expressions of KOS	Expressions of CSA	Instances of Anti-CL

13	14	2	0	0
----	----	---	---	---

In Table 2, there are fewer expressions of critical literacy than can be found in Table 1. Reviewing the curriculum and understanding the course’s progression may explain this. Quickwrite 4 was written in the fourth week of the course and students had limited exposure to the concepts covered in class by the ninth week. Some of the students who responded wrote very little or nothing at all and thus left me without expressions to record. I cannot prove why students wrote so little, but I think it reflects on our ability as instructors to help them master concepts. Student’s had a difficult time writing about something they did not entirely understand. However, by week nine, I observed an increased response rate and more developed set of expressions.

Spoken expressions of critical literacy

I continued to use the rubric for written expressions of critical literacy as I analyzed audio transcriptions with the addition of the following factors as I built upon my previous analysis:

- Does the student use critical language in their conversations?
- Does the student problematize scenarios, questions or ideas in class?
- Does the student engage in challenging discourse with their peers/associates?
- Does the student recount ideas that can be traced back to what they have learned in the Black Male Youth Academy?

A slight difference between the analyses of written expressions and spoken expression is found in the way students structured their use of language. I could not reasonably expect students to speak the way they write and vice versa. In some instances, I encountered a greater challenge in determining meaning between conceptual shifts because speech moves faster and has delicate

patterns that are difficult to recount through audio. The following vignette points out instances where spoken expressions occurred.

Where speech reveals critical literacy

The following vignette is based on events that occurred when students from the BMYA were escorted to take the Pre-Scholastic Aptitude Test (PSAT). In order to effectively foreshadow the vignette, I provide a detailed description of the circumstances surrounding the occurrence. Additionally, this will continue to support subsequent analyses of behavioral expressions of critical literacy. The particular day of this occurrence was Wednesday, October 14, 2008. It was the day students in the BMYA normally complete quick writes. Students wrote about their dreams and goals and were expected explain why having dreams and goals were important if they wanted to go to college.

Students were also instructed to write about an essay read in class the day before entitled, “Here I stand,” by Paul Robeson. The essay described the “power” of the Negro spirit and the ability of African Americans to overcome oppression throughout the history of America. Students wrote for nearly 30 minutes and we began a discussion about college degrees. When the discussion was over, I walked the students over to lecture hall to sign up for the PSAT. Fortunately, the school offered the exam this year and all of the students were expected to participate. As a part of the BMYA curriculum, students engaged in test preparation and discussions about the importance of college entrance exams.

About a week before the exam, teachers received a letter advising us that the PSAT was being offered for 9th -11th grade students. This was an attempt by the school to communicate widely with multiple populations. When I randomly asked students on the campus if they knew

about the exam, many responded in the negative and added that they had not been told. The letter explained to teachers that the only requirement for students to take the test would be payment in the amount of \$13 ahead of the scheduled exam. The BMYA had students from multiple grade levels and I recognized that because of the short notice, many students would have a difficult time making the payment by the deadline.

As a result, I decided to pay for the exam out of pocket and provided the names of all of the BMYA students, not including the seniors, for the sign-up list maintained by the college counseling staff. Shortly after (and on the same day), I added all of the BMYA students to the list, the 9th grade counselor, Ms. Garcia, informed me that the school ordered 100 tests and that students would no longer be required to pay for the exam. I asked if there was a process to confirm how many students were planning to participate and she indicated that there was not. In fact she added, “[b]asically we are collecting a list but we don’t know who is going to show up” (FN # 1, 10.14.08, Pg. 1). She then instructed me bring the BMYA students the morning of the exam. I agreed and then returned to my class.

On the morning of the exam and upon completion of the class discussion, I escorted all of the BMYA 9th -11th grade students who were in attendance to the lecture hall. When we arrived, I learned that none of the BMYA students were on the exam list. I also observed that many students were outside and learned that they were not on the list. The majority of the students standing outside was African American and included a mix of males and females. The majority of the students admitted to take the exam were predominantly Latino/a. At the door, one of the counselors informed me the counseling unit requested that teachers submit a list of students they believed would be prepared to take the PSAT. Unfortunately, the original list of compiled names

was insufficient because the counselors did not have 100 students signed up and had decided on a new sign-up process the day before the exam.

The counselors also prioritized 11th grade students because that grade level was qualified for the National Merit Scholars program administered through the PSAT. Three of my students were selected at this point because they were in the 11th grade. Counselors then began selecting students at random from the pool of bystanders who waited patiently outside the lecture hall for a coveted seat. Some of the BMYA students were getting upset as they observed the counselors hand selecting which students were let into the exam. One of the BMYA students observed and remarked that his peers, who had taken the exam the previous year, were being let in again. Four of the students were particularly disappointed because this instance marked the second occasion this week where they were denied access to an activity that would have supported their desire to go to college (The first occasion occurred when, after having been selected, they were asked to give up their seats for a college trip to other students because the bus was full and the counselor coordinating the trip wanted other students to attend).

The counselors completed the selection and closed off the exam to all remaining students. They then instructed all of the students to return to class and after noticing how frustrated and disappointed the BMYA students were, I instructed them to gather in a circle instead. In fact, I encouraged all of the black males who were in that area to join the circle. There were at least 12 who were left and we began a discussion. I asked the students to think about what they were learning in class and to explain what had just happened.

Discussion:

The first to speak was Donovan,

Donnovan: “This is social oppression.”

Mr. Scorza: “Yes, but why?”

Donnovan: “Because all of the people who were let in were Mexican and most of the Black people were left out.”

Gary: “Yeah Mr. Scorza, this is messed up. This the second time this happened this week. What? They don’t want us to go to college too?”

Donnovan: “Man Mr. Scorza, this isn’t fair. See (speaking to the group), this is how they treat us ‘cause were young black males.”

And we talked through why this was social oppression. I added that this was more of a form of structural racism and explained that it wasn’t that the counselors were trying to be explicitly racist, but that there was a group of people who were privileged over another group of people. A group of people had access to information that another group of people didn’t. The students argued that the test takers were predominantly Latino/a and although the counselors had the opportunity to let them in, they chose otherwise. I should mention who the counselor’s are: Mr. Carver is an African American male, who is about my age; Ms. Garcia is a Latina, also around my age; and Mr. K is a white male. Mr. Carver was in charge of the process (FN # 1, 10.14.08, Pg. # 3)

In underserved and impoverished schools, students often experience situations where their desires to achieve face impediments from lack of resources. The counselors were required to develop and implement a selection process based on the limited number of exams. They were faced with difficult choices because the school administration did not order enough exams to meet a demand they did not know existed. The initial sign-up process was voluntary and students were encouraged to apply, but were more than likely dismayed by what they perceived as a prohibitive cost and family expense. When the exam was made available to the general population and the school decided to eliminate the financial barrier, demand for the exam exceeded the pre-ordered supply. The administration believed it was acting in the best interest of the students and in doing so, inadvertently created a process whereby the most vulnerable populations were excluded.

The overwhelming majority of youth who took the exam were Latino/a and a significant proportion of African American students were denied entrance. I learned after this incident that counselors had short notice to inform students about the administration's decision to pay for the exam. As a result, they immediately went directly to the honors teachers the day before the exam and asked them to have their students show up. Although the school had a significant population of African American students, the majority of honors students are Latino/a. This process resulted in the heavy exclusion of African American students. I had enough information before the exam to recognize that the counselors were not consciously contributing to the preferential selection of students on the basis of race. However, I still recognized that there is a structural gap that not only contributed to the exclusion of the BMYA students from regular college preparation activities, but also was exacerbated by the lack of planning and informal decision-making process within the school.

This was an act of social oppression because of the type of students who were excluded, the structural inequality built into the decision-making processes, the lack of resources within the school, the lack of effective planning and the dehumanization experienced by the students who were left out. The students who immediately spoke out, Donovan and Gary, also made similar intellectual links between the counselors refusal to let them in to take the PSAT and the experience of being trapped in an oppressive environment. They were able to identify the circumstances that caused them to conclude they were being oppressed but, as in Humphry's case, lacked the language to describe the tenets of social oppression. As I responded to their comments, I explained why this situation could be interpreted as social oppression as an effort to validate both their experiences and their knowledge. Donovan and Gary, as well as the 13 other

students, knew something was amiss with the situation at hand and were able to name it, but not explain what they named in academic language.

Their verbal statements are expressions of critical literacy. They engaged in intellectual activity that questioned the intent and motivation of the counselors as they stood outside of the lecture hall. They observed the racial divide inherent in the selection process. Donovan “scaled up” his conceptualization by observing who was left out of the exam and noting that it appeared to be primarily black students. Gary connected his experience to occurrences from earlier that week and described them both as a pattern. Both Gary and Donovan personalized the experience and believed their exclusion resulted from fact that they were Black males. Although I did not know all of the details behind the circumstance, I had the benefit of knowing slightly more than the students. I explained to the students that their exclusion was more than likely a result of the structural problems that existed within the school and that their counselors were more than likely unaware of the type of impact they were having. The students continued to discuss and process through their emotions and perceptions in the larger group where they eventually reached consensus about what had occurred.

Behavioral expressions of critical literacy

In my analysis of behavioral expressions of critical literacy, I continued to build upon the identifiers used for written and spoken expression with the addition of the following factors:

- Does the student participate in their class (es) and if so, to what degree?
- Does the student respectfully engage and/or challenge the teacher’s knowledge?
- Does the student prevent others from being disruptive?
- Does the student respectfully challenge authority?

- Does the student volunteer to be called upon?
- Does the student exhibit excitement when responding to assignments?

Attempting to identify behavioral expressions of critical literacy is difficult because of the heavy reliance upon context and observer interpretation. Unlike observing students who hit other students or viewing a teacher who yells at a student during class lecture, observing behavioral expressions of critical literacy requires the observer to have some familiarity with the information to which the students have been exposed. The observer must be able to reconcile theoretical principles taught to the students with a behavioral analysis. Since I experienced these circumstances with the students, I also stood as a subject in the process and was able to draw conclusions accordingly.

Critical literacy leads to action

The next vignette has clear context and meaning since it builds upon the previous excerpt. The BMYA students were denied entrance to take the PSAT and had just engaged in a discussion where they described their experiences as oppressive. They were standing in a circle and decided that they were not satisfied by the outcome. The following vignette continues to explain what occurred after the students processed through their thoughts and emotions.

Experience:

At the point that students were upset, I said, "...this is where being empowered becomes so critical." We spoke for another 10 minutes in the circle and I began to see students building a critical awareness about what was happening in that moment. I explained what form of social oppression and racism they were experiencing. (Side note: The racism occurring didn't specifically oppose them being able to take the exam because they were African Americans-it

was a different type of racism. It was structural racism. They experienced this by default.). So we had to be clear about what kind of racism it was because they identified it (their experiences) as such.

They decided to do something and I asked them what they were going to do. Someone in the group said, “I don’t know, but we should do something about this.” And I asked, “well, isn’t the administrative office just right down the way?” And they responded “yeah”, as though a light bulb just turned on. I continued, “There are assistant principals and there are principals—why don’t you go talk to them?” The students replied, “Yeah!”

Now, they became excited about the whole process.

They walked down together to the principal’s office and said they wanted to see the principal. (Side note: I wasn’t there for this portion because I wanted to stay back so the students could take the lead for their efforts in self-advocacy...they did.). Someone said the principal wasn’t there, so I walked into the office and heard Ms. Christie, who is the secretary for the school, speaking. She said, “Why couldn’t you take the test?” The students started explaining to her what happened. She then called in one of the assistant principals. (Side note: I don’t recall her name because she is new to the school).

After the students spoke with her, they told me she said “Well, we need to figure out something for you all.” They did not feel satisfied with the answer and I was not in there with them during their discussions. I talked to them when they came out of the assistant principal’s office and then briefly spoke to the secretary, Ms. Christie. She filled me in on what the students said. As they stood discussing what just happened, I then walked over and went to the attendance office to see if I could get Mr. Hardy, who is the dean and the official class sponsor. I asked Mr. Hardy to come over and speak to the students. I told him that the students could really use him there to encourage them and then explained to him what was going on. He agreed to come. He went outside to where the students were standing to talk to them and figure out what was happening.

He started listening to them tell the story of what happened. When they finished, Mr. Hardy said, “This does not mean that you stop doing what you need to do. Now you have to continue to do what you need to do as a student. That doesn’t mean that you can throw the whole school day away because you didn’t get to take this test.” He then turned to me and asked me what was going on. I explained to him what the students said about social oppression and racism. I let him know I helped them break down what kind of racism it was. He said “good” and then went to go talk to Mr. Carver (the counselor). They wanted to sit down, so we took them to a set of benches near the attendance office. They waited patiently for him to return.

When Mr. Hardy finally came back with Mr. Carver, he began talking to them about what had occurred. He spoke to the students about the process and how teachers were supposed to submit names to the counselors and that the counselor’s lists were on a first come-first served basis. Mr. Carver added that here were mainly two classrooms and two teachers who did. We also learned that the counselors went around to the different classrooms. And Mr. Carver asked, “How many students knew about the PSATs?”

There were about 12 students there; three of them knew about the PSAT and of those three, two had signed up and given their names to the teacher (Side Note: students self reported). Of the students present, there was a mix of 9th and 10th graders. Of the three knew about it, one was an honors student and the other gave his name to the teacher and was also a friend of the honors student. The honors student name was Richard. Richard was there but had to use the restroom and could not get in when he came back because they filled up the room. So he would have taken the test if he did not need to use the restroom.

Mr. Hardy and Mr. Carver explained to the students why all of this happened and they decided to resolve it. They promised each of the students present that they would be first on the list for next year's PSAT and that they would also have access to college preparation material and support. They also promised the students first choice on the next college trip and upcoming college tours. When Mr. Hardy finished speaking, the students requested to go to the college counselor that moment. Mr. Hardy, Mr. Carver and I agreed to support the student's request. I walked them over to the college counselor where she offered advice and information about attending college. (FN #1, 10.14.08)

Behavioral expressions of critical literacy are deeply embedded in the context of the occurrence. In the preceding vignette, we observe the BMYA students engaging in activities that challenge authority and or could have been considered disobedient. Students were instructed to return to class and although they were told to do so, initially refused. In the normal functioning of an urban school, stern discipline and intense student management are emphasized components in day-to-day operations. Students who refuse to obey school orders are generally disciplined with detention or suspension. If an observer did not understand the circumstances surrounding the student's activity, he or she may be unaware of how to interpret the student's responses. Since their immediate reaction was to become frustrated, I viewed the moment as an opportunity to understand how the information they gained in the BMYA would influence their actions.

The behavioral expressions of critical literacy are best identified through observations and dialogue. For example, Donovan immediately viewed the circumstances preventing them from taking the exam as oppressive. The students did *not* say, "we're not smart enough" or "the Latino students are better students". Instead of expressing internalized racism or oppression,

they chose to express critical views that promoted their increasing value of “self”. The students’ subsequent behavior should be seen in light of the situational context and their use of language. Donovan’s views prompted a much larger dialogue amongst the group as they processed through their emotions and experiences. Although the students did not have all of the background information surrounding the situation, they immediately identified the circumstances as oppression and subsequently as racism.

The BMYA students’ identification of the PSAT circumstances as oppressive, led to their decision to march to the principal’s office. Their confrontation was with school administrators and discussions with counselors were also reflective of the steps they took to address the inequity experienced. Although I believed some form of intervention was necessary to retain their interest in building their academic success and desire to attend college, my role was to help focus their thoughts and encourage them to be productive. It is easy to lose youth to negative social elements in these moments of disappointment and I believe it was very important to help them build confidence instead. In this circumstance, the behavioral expressions of critical literacy were situated on a continuum of expression throughout the interactions between the students and the adults. The students may not have had the language to completely master the complexity of their thoughts, experiences or the environment, but they did see themselves as powerful and took action to influence their future.

There isn’t always a solution

One of the quickwrites students were asked to do had the following writing prompt: “Discuss what you have learned about the roots of slavery and explain where you may see the

effects today.” Although this was written, I have decided to use it because it is an illustration of a behavioral expression of critical literacy and is a personal account. This vignette utilizes the student’s voice to describe his situation, while highlighting the thought process and actions he took. His story is interesting because it serves as an example for a behavioral expression of critical literacy, but illustrates the limitations of such actions if one is not prepared to face them in reality.

Quickwrite:

Begin student response: What I learned about the roots of slavery is that slavery has been going on for many years and its still going on. It never was stopped. It changed its form. And the effects today is Obama. Obama overcame all odds of racist and people. Being a President is power to the Black people. I remember when I said, “Man that’s racist.” Then this Mexican said, “I thought Obama won. It wasn’t funny, but everyone was laughing. Even the black kids. I was really mad. So after class I stopped him and I told him that I didn’t like what he said in class. Then he made a smart remark saying, “Who cares, your black, I’m not. I stood there. He laughed. End of story” (JM, QW#12, Post 11/4/09).

In this quickwrite, Jerry connected what he had learned about racism and slavery to power and ethnic pride. He starts off making the argument that slavery has not ended, but has instead changed its form. He attempts to make the intellectual jump between slavery, Obama becoming President and ethnic pride, but does not help the reader follow his logic. He responded to the prompt by stating that he had learned slavery is different today, perhaps meaning it is not chattel slavery. He used Obama’s success to emphasize the difference, also perhaps suggesting the possibility of an African American US President in modern history. This would explain his next comment about ethnic pride or “power to the Black people”.

Jerry then offers an example of an occurrence in class where he challenged one of his classmates (from a different race) because Jerry viewed his experience as offensive. I interpret

this as an example of the point he may be trying to make. Jerry identified some comment or occurrence as racist and the response he received from his classmate was in line with the sentiment of living in a post-racial America. Jerry then expressed his increased frustration and surprise that the other black students in the class either did not notice the racism or were unaware that whatever had occurred could have been racist. Jerry adds that this increased his anger, probably from being offended, a sense of isolation and feeling misunderstood. Jerry's next steps become a behavioral expression of critical literacy as he then approaches the offending student by telling him that he did not appreciate what he said. Unfortunately, Jerry seemed to be met with shock when the offending student added injury to insult with a dehumanizing comment and a cynical response.

What is important in this scenario is Jerry's response to the student. His behavior showed that he directly confronted the student because he viewed the situation through the critical lens he employed. He was so dissatisfied, that he felt the need to tell the offending student how he felt (more than likely in an effort to seek an apology or to educate him). Jerry was not ready for the response he received and as such, lost confidence in his resolve, which is inferred by his comment "End of story". We are again faced with the same challenges in Jerry that we saw in Humphry, Donovan and Gary. Jerry has not mastered basic literacy to the degree that he can competently draw a logical conclusion to the point he was trying to make. This seems to be a consistent challenge across the board with students in the Academy who are underdeveloped academically. They maintain a sophisticated understanding of oppression and are able to identify it when they see or act when they feel it important to do so, but lack a clear language of expression.

Table 3. Frequency Data of Expressions of Critical Literacy Across Artifacts and Field Notes

Number of respondents - 17 students	Expressions of CL	Expressions of KOS	Expressions of CSA	Instances of Anti-CL/Resistance
QW's	158	112	18	15
Essays	37	9	6	0
FN's	12	7	3	0

“Knowing” as an Expression of Critical Literacy

It is not always easy to distinguish a student’s expression of critical literacy through writing or speech. Sometimes, it requires an understanding of who the student is and how the student’s comprehension of concepts permeates his or her speech, behavior or writings. For this reason, I’ve created an additional category entitled “Knowing” as an identifiable expression of critical literacy. This new category attempts to identify students who comprehend critical concepts, but are either unaware or explicitly incorporates that comprehension in a practical way. There are two forms of knowing, one implicit and the other is explicit.

Explicit knowledge can be expressed when a student personalizes concepts acquired in a critical space by adjusting his/her behavior, writing or speaking about how the acquired concept has meaning in his/her life. For example, a student may write or say that he understands being late to class is bad, it is a form of resistance or that he needs to change his behavior. We identify “knowing” through his speech and his recognition that his showing up to class late is a form of resistance. Implicit knowledge requires an understanding of self and is couched in the situational context. I call this critical situational awareness because students communicate knowledge of self and are able to express their positionality in a particular situation, but lack the language

necessary to direct the receiver to an explicit meaning. The receiver must use inference and gather implicit meaning from what students are saying.

School has value

In an after class group reflection, two of the BMYA volunteers, John and Sarah and I were having a discussion with a student who stayed after class. Kermit, a 10th grade student arrived to the class for the first time. His counselor assigned and the school intervention specialist assigned to the BMYA because they believed the class would be a supportive environment for him to be in, given his tumultuous home life. Kermit tells me about his background: his mother's passing, his living with a friend from a gang, why he had not attended school consistently and the difficulty he had experienced so early in his life. He goes on to explain that people have continued to disappoint him, especially his father, and engaged in a deep discussion. Sarah and John overheard our conversation and walked to join us. The following excerpt begins with a quick attempt to bring John and Sarah caught up to speed in the conversation.

Discussion:

Mr. Scorza: He said his dad was supposed to bring him money (for the bus), and instead of bringing it to him (at the school), he called the counseling office to let him know he couldn't.

Kermit: I didn't want to hear it. There you (his dad) go again, disappointing me.

Mr. Scorza: So the one person he needs most in this world is the one person who cannot or does not come through. That's why, where he is living at now is so important to him.

John: Who is he living with?

Mr. Scorza: He is staying with his friend and his girlfriend on 42nd and Central. So his friend has a kid who he (Kermit) takes care of in the morning and once that is done, he comes to school. He said that they (his friend and his friend's girlfriend) call him her (the baby's) brother—so this child is like a sister to him. (Looking at Kermit) Whether he gets here or not doesn't matter because the person who gives him a place to rest his head needs him in this way. But he also said he knows that this puts him in a bind because he knows that school is the place for him to get out of that situation.

Kermit: School has value, but it's hard for me. (FN # 6,11.02.08)

We'll start with Kermit's understanding of school as a valuable place for him. Although this was his first day of class, our discussion was focused on aspirations and mastering school. He immediately joined the BMYA and connected what he heard to our subsequent discussion. Kermit's comment implies an understanding that is based on a complex set of emotions and experiences. One of the primary reasons he attended school that day was a result of the prodding by the intervention specialist and a desire to avoid legal consequences that he and his father would face stemming from his absenteeism.

Kermit maintained multiple levels of understanding about his role and place in school. These understandings were undoubtedly operating as he entered the class. However, his discussion about why he was missing school, his willingness to be open on the first day of class and his belief in school as a valuable place were more than likely prompted by our discussion during class about school. I did request, as is customary with all new students, that he stay behind to pick up necessary coursework, fill out class forms and receive assigned reading materials. I let him know that he was in a safe space and asked him about his background. Kermit decided to be open about his life circumstances. This connection with the class during discussion and belief in

the safety of the space were very important to establish the trust needed to allow him to speak freely.

Kermit's comments represent a phenomenon I call Critical Situational Awareness (CSA). Its requisite is a critical understanding of self in relation to the other or to the world whereby this understanding manifests in the ability of an individual to situate oneself within a socioeconomic, sociopolitical or sociological context. CSA can be expressed both explicitly and implicitly, but is most often recognized as an implicit understanding that an individual holds when he or she lacks the language to express that understanding. For example, Kermit says in short, "School has value," after hearing the class discussion on how to master school in order to achieve one's dreams. He did not say my absenteeism is a result of structural inequalities built in the American system of oppression in an effort to hold black people down. On the contrary, he simply stated that school is a valuable place for him because, in the context of the previous class discussion, he realizes it is necessary in order for him to overcome the challenges he faces on a daily basis. His is faced with the obligations that come from living with friends who feed and house him, yet he maintains an understanding that he needs to be at school if he is to ever be successful.

Pedagogical Expressions of Critical Literacy

As I continued to identify multiple forms of expression, I observed students describing the learning space or deciding themselves to become teachers. Part of the value of critical pedagogy is the employment of democratic and problem posing education. This pedagogical style is best seen when students develop an ownership over the space and become teachers themselves. My role as the primary expert constantly shifts as student become experts and I become a learner. Furthermore, problem-posing education attempts to draw knowledge out of students instead of

simply telling them what they should know (banking method). Pedagogical expressions of critical literacy combine behavior, speech and writing to illuminate a student's critical understanding.

Teaching, learning and challenging the educational space

Pedagogical expressions, quite often, are observable in a student's speech or perhaps through some sort of action taken in or outside of class. In this case, we have one student's account of the pedagogical experience that occurred within the BMYA that allows for such an environment. The next vignette is from an essay students wrote based on the following questions: Why are you here? Who are we? What does it mean to be a man? What does it mean to be a black man? What does it mean to be successful? What is our condition? The succeeding excerpt, illustrates a student who took the liberty of becoming a teacher in his writing. His example is from the Quickwrite prompting students to write about the meaning of having a black president. Albeit less descriptive than a video analysis, both examples offer important glimpses into the pedagogical experiences from the student's perspective while engaged in the BMYA.

Quickwrite 1:

We are the Black Male Youth Academy (BMYA). We are the young men soon to be adults in Vernon, CA. In this class they all try and show us the right way. They show us all the greater aspects of being of becoming a man. They teach us all of the ways not just to become a statistic from the ghetto. They show us the way to be a successful black man. They show us our history, where we should be in the near future. We not only talk about history, we talk about events that may have happened yesterday. This class lets us be ourselves. (AH, Essay, 6.10.09).

Quickwrite 2:

Everyone ask me how does it feel to have a black president? I must say it feels great. It made a change already because now I can say my president is black and here for the history of the United States. I really like Barack Obama going to make a change because that was [unreadable] Speech and promise. Now he's the first black president, all eyes on him.

I feel strong about Obama because he put everyone equal: black, white, yellow, blue, gay, straight and handicapped. And that's what America needs to realize, that this is a free country. And I think Obama made it known with the Speech he made November 4, 2008. Now I must ask the Question: What do you think about the first black president. (AS, QW#9, 11.06.08)

The first student, Romeo, connected the pedagogical environment to the freedom to express himself. Part of the democratic process in education is just that, a student's ability to be comfortable enough to learn and share her knowledge. Romeo notes the personalized attention to their needs and the ultimate goal of the BMYA, to keep them from being statistics. He also notes the connection between knowing about his heritage as a black male while also knowing about current events. The African term we used to describe this concept in class was Sankofa. This means that one must know one's history in order to know one's future. Romeo's understanding of the pedagogical process of the BMYA is important because it reflects the value of having a space such as the BMYA exist inside of a structured learning environment. Freedom stems from an environment where each student is valued and cared about individually, intellectually and behaviorally. This was one of the outcomes of the use of critical pedagogy.

With the description of the pedagogical environment Romeo offers, we are able to see why Travis felt comfortable to write as a teacher. When Travis turns to the reader and asks the question at the end of his Quickwrite, he does so with the comfort and expectation that this type of writing style will be honored and welcomed. He was right. His question to the reader was reflective of the type of questions the students would ask each other during their discussions,

especially when I chose not to speak. There were frequent occasions when I would let the students lead the discussion once they felt comfortable and confident in their knowledge. I consider these pedagogical expressions of critical literacy because of the information students used as they made arguments for or against various positions.

Knowledge of self and antithetical expressions of critical literacy

Two important things occurred as I combed through the data. I began to discover that students were engaging in ways that were not exactly what I intended to find. Frequently, they would insert themselves into the story they told or the examples they were provided. This was a good way for them to connect the concepts of the class to their own lives as they examined newfound knowledge in light of their circumstances or behavior. Simultaneously, sometimes, students would write or say things that reinforced the hegemony of white supremacy (HWS) or would be flat out resistant to what they learned. In fact, more often than not, they would engage in resistant behavior while attempting to wrestle with concepts like HWS. There seemed to be a correlation between the difficulty of the material and the degree to which they became resistant.

In the following section, I briefly describe this phenomenon because I believe it offers a more genuine perspective about the place critical literacy has in a schooling environment. Unfortunately, this study is not the place to fully explore alternative expressions, which will require additional data and a longitudinal analysis. To dig a little deeper into this phenomenon, I would need data captured through video recordings of the class in order to situate multiple forms of expression in a space designed to foster critical literacy. In the meantime, I will offer two short examples to explain what I mean.

Knowledge of Self and Antithetical Expressions: Supplements to Critical Literacy

The following vignettes offer three examples of how students responded through their writing, either to prompts, something that occurred in class or simply because that's what they wanted to do. The first comes from a situation where a student in the class decided to take Romeo's phone, which was connected to a wall charger, and hide it to make him think it was stolen. Romeo became very upset during the whole episode and threatened to punch anyone who thought they were walking out of the class. The student hiding the phone, combined with Romeo's actions prevented the entire class from moving forward in the lesson. We stayed until the bell rang and eventually someone dropped it in the trashcan as we did a "search and rescue" operation. This was a disappointing session for me because the occurrences were diametrically opposed to the principles of trust I labored to create throughout the semester. Romeo's expression would be considered an expression I call Anti-Critical Literacy (Anti-CL).

The second vignette comes from Turner, a student who refused to complete the assignment and wrote it in his Quickwrite. He had come to the place where, as a senior, he no longer desired to do any work and believed it did not matter any longer because he was going to graduate regardless. This is a pretty common occurrence amongst the seniors, especially when they are convinced that any remaining assignments they receive will not cause them to fail. This type of expression is an example of resistance.

The third vignette is reflective of how students view or express the way they see themselves through their writing or otherwise. It is called Knowledge of Self (KOS) and is expressed when students understand the "where/who" they are in relation to their world, their class (es), their school, their families or the "other". KOS is generally identifiable when students use phrases

such as “I feel”, “when I”, “I know that” or any other phrase that illuminates how a student perceives herself. Terry responds to a writing prompt that asks him to explain why he is in the class and how does he view himself as a black male. He does a good job attempting to tie multiple concepts together and offers a poignant example of this categorization.

Quickwrite 1: Anti-CL

Well, niggas can learn how to stop stealing or playing as much as they do. The whole little incident could have been prevented if they or he would have just gave up the phone when I got ‘hella aggressive’. Because I really was going to punch anyone who DARED to walk out of that door before I got my Sidekick [phone] back. People may have thought I was playing but I wasn’t having it. I felt bad afterwards because one of my closest friends was involved with all the mess. So, I pretty much knew that I was going to get my phone Sidekick back. But, me being a hard ass I wanted to show my gang member status and I apologize for All of my ACTIONS. (RH, QW 8, 10.30.08)

Quickwrite 2: Resistance

Responding to the prompt: How does your school environment reflect eh themes discussed in the class. I don’t get the quick write and to tell you the truth I’m sick of talking about the same stuff. It’s making the class boring and I’m starting to not want to be a part of the class. (AS2, QW#13, 1.20.09).

Quickwrite 3: Knowledge of Self

I’m here at Vernon High because I want to be something in life. Also because I want to go to college. I’m in this class because I want to know more about myself. I see myself as a young Black Teen that’s going to be something in life. I would like to play football. I think that to be a man is the best thing that can happen to a person. It’s a blessing. I think that to be a Black Man, you will be set-up to fail and to be successful to me, you have to be Black. (TW, Essay, 6.10.09)

In the first quickwrite, we see Romeo writing about his frustration and anger. He feelings were justifiable in the circumstances and he responded in the way he believed would best

provoke a response out of the class. However, his behavior was both inappropriate and the opposite of how we discussed we should handle situations like this when they arise. Although the student who took the phone was playing a joke on him, it turned into an ugly scenario once Romeo discovered the phone had been gone and quickly morphed from a joke into a serious problem. The fact that his close friend was the perpetrator showed other students that no one can be trusted in the class, not even one's friends. Furthermore, Romeo used the term "niggas" to describe his classmates and that word is not allowed in the BMYA. In this context, he used it to deliberately demean the other black males in the class by calling them ignorant, thereby justifying his rage against who he judged as ignorant. Unfortunately, this incident occurred around the eight week of the class and helped to establish a culture of aggression when individuals felt wronged.

In responding to the writing prompt in quickwrite 2, Turner decided that he did not want to do the assignment although he knew the quickwrites were graded and considered large portions of the grade. His reaction can be viewed from multiple angles ranging from his comfortability to express himself to self-defeating resistance. I chose to view this writing sample as an act of resistance because of who assigned it to him. John, one of the BMYA assistants, had been volunteering in the class during this period and I let him cover a few lessons with the students. Turner had repeatedly mentioned that he did not like John and he was not alone in how he felt. Many of the students would ask me to not let him teach in the class and I responded by limiting this kind of interaction. I believe, in addition to how Turner genuinely felt, this instance was an example of a time when John taught a lesson and it did not go over well. Nonetheless, it counts as a form of resistance because he chose to handle his displeasure by refusing to do the work,

instead of engaging in a productive discussion. Turner's expression reflected anti-critical literacy because he engaged in behavior that was counterproductive to transformation.

Finally, the third vignette is one student's expression of how he views himself in the class and beyond. Terry began by situating himself in his school and community, but more importantly in the class. He talked about why he was in the BMYA and what he hoped to accomplish. He described his belief that black men will face challenges, but also took pride in the idea of being black. He explicated multiple concepts about his identity as it relates to his local environment and to society overall Terry's expression incorporates some aspects of critical literacy (i.e. the way black men are treated in society), but KOS does not require critical literacy to be identified as an expression. It simply requires that the individual understands himself well enough to explain where he is positioned in any given situation.

On becoming critical

Critical Literacy can be expressed and identified in multiple ways. It is reflected in thoughts, speech, writings and actions as students grapple with concepts that push their analysis beyond their initially capacity. As I have shown through this study, critical literacy can be measured and defined when one understands the context of a situation and draws connections between alternative epistemologies. We can determine the acquisition of critical literacy by identifying it as an expression and not solely as a theoretical construct. As we have observed, when students acquire critical literacy, they do not always have a mastery of the language necessary to describe what they know. In some cases, that knowledge is implicit and in others, it is explicit.

Critical literacy once acquired, transfers into multiple spaces such as the classroom or the principal's office. Its limitation is not found in four physical walls, but instead in the one intellectual wall it is originally intended to remedy. The acquisition of critical literacy is a process and a student can be on a spectrum of expression. Students can express fully developed critical concepts and at other times, express complete and total resistance. There is no guarantee critical literacy will permeate intellectual barriers, but I believe this study is useful because it shows that students are capable of accessing complicated theoretical concepts which help them challenge oppression. Critical literacy is a tool in the lives of these youth as they learn how to navigate social institutions and attempt to reframe the purpose society has in mind for them.

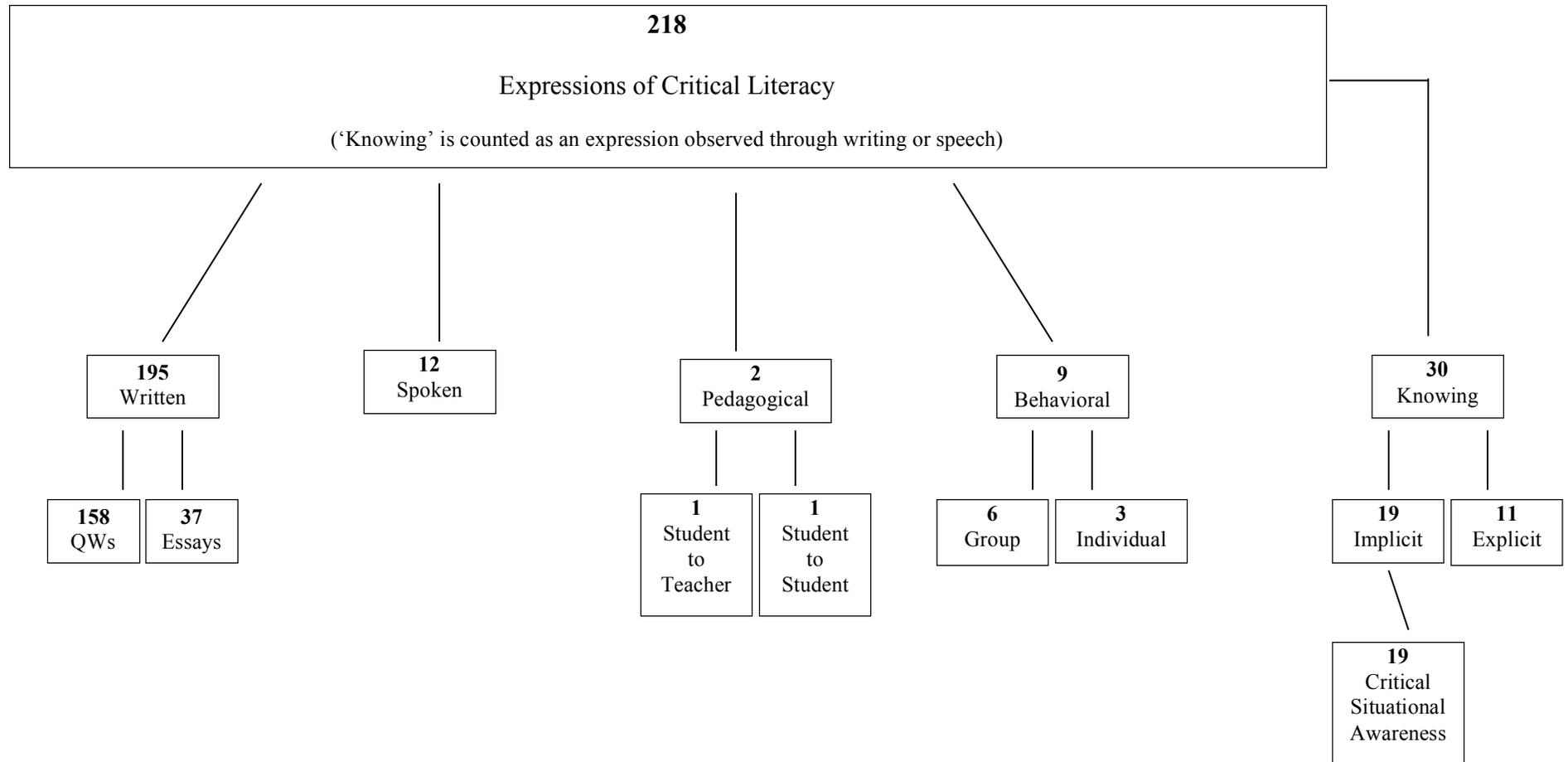
Further exploration of the use of critical pedagogy in the development of critical literacy is necessary if we want to understand the role pedagogy plays to help students reach a critical point. I do believe we begin to see change in participation over time in students as they develop a more critical outlook on life. However, changes in participation are not immediate and come as students master critical literacy across the academic disciplines in which they are engaged and as they come into spaces that reinforce their new skills. An additional benefit of employing a critical literacy curriculum seems to be the development of a deeper knowledge of self. Although students generally lacked the language necessary to describe complicated concepts, they still found ways to express how they viewed themselves in light of the new information. This is an impressive activity because it indicates that students are consistently thinking deeply on a wide range of issues.

The following frequency table displays the number of occurrences for students who responded to this prompt.

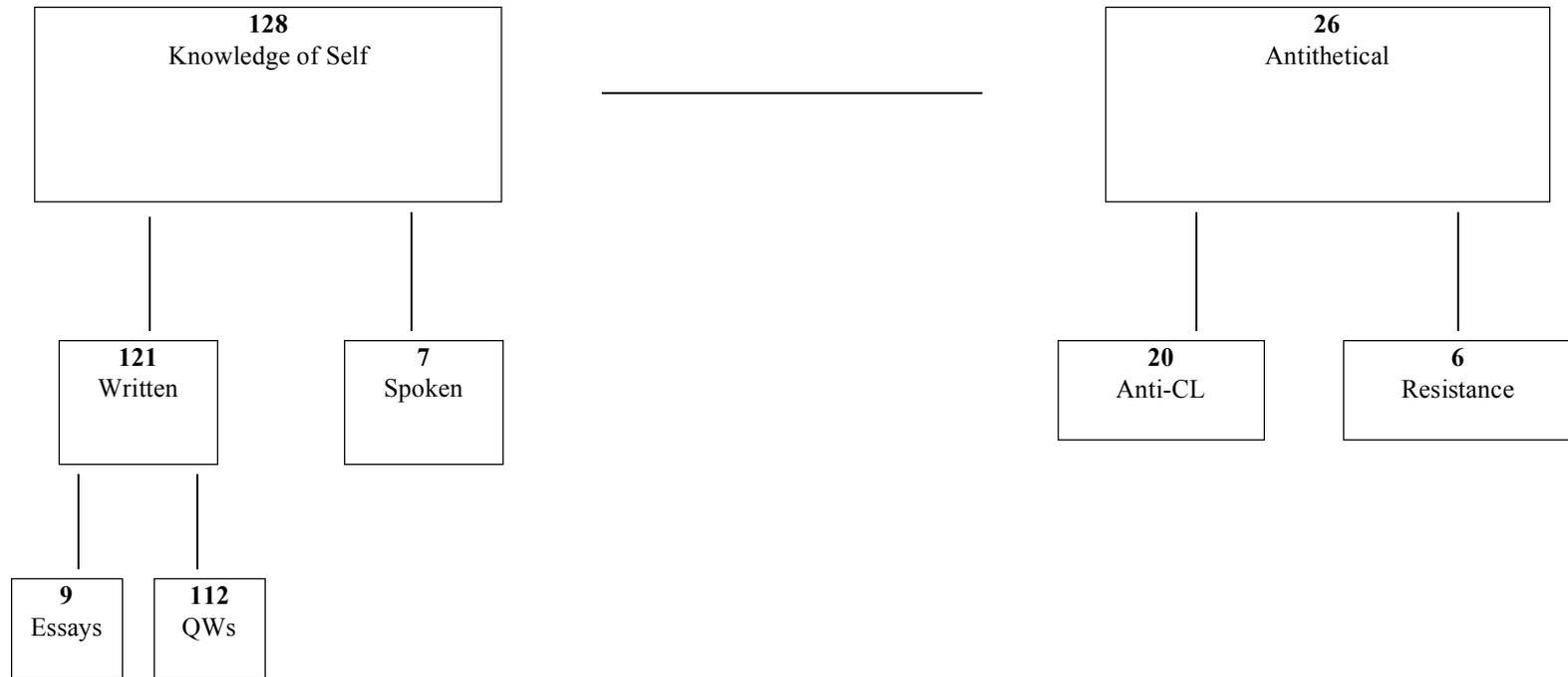
Table 4. – Collective Assessment of Expressions across Modes of Expression

		Antithetical				
		CL	CSA	KOS	Anti-CL	Resistance
Written	QW	158	18	112	10	5
	Essays	37	6	9	10	5
Behavioral	Group	5				1
	Individual	3				
Knowledge	Explicit	18				
	Implicit	11				
Pedagogical	Teaching	1				
	Learning	1				
Spoken		12				

Tree Diagram 1: Identifying Expressions of Critical Literacy



Tree Diagram 2: Phenomenon Related to Expressions of Critical Literacy



CHAPTER SIX – Cultivating Academic and Sociopolitical Development

“It’s just a matter of time before somebody come up to me and try to put a gun to my head and kill me...I pray every day that I see 17, hopefully I’ll see another year.” -Trevor, BMYA Student

Opening Up

On January 8, 2011 in Tucson, Arizona, U.S. Congresswoman Gabrielle Giffords and 18 town hall attendees were shot by Jared Lee Loughner. Of the nineteen people injured that day, six died including a chief judge and a nine-year old girl. This event made headlines across the country and sparked a national debate about gun control. The following Monday, in the BMYA, the teacher, Mr. Williams, and I decided to focus the discussion on the shooting and the students became engaged in a dialogue about the role of guns and violence. The dialogue was deeply engaging and a handful of students remained in the class pass the closing bell.

Trevor continued,

“In our community, our community is heavily based on gangs and it’s a lot of gangs out here, so they can do that all they want to, but its really not going to make a difference.

Mr. Williams responded, “Why?”

Trevor replied, “Because it ain’t going to stop like, the people out there from doing it.”

Mr. Williams retorted, “You’re not addressing the people—you’re addressing, well, how did all these guns get in the streets?”

Trevor responded, “The government.”

Mr. Scorza adds, “Who manufactures guns, who delivers guns, who sells guns on the street?”

Mr. Williams turns to Trevor, “ You’re absolutely right. You’re always going to have knuckleheads out there. You’re always going to have people out there who want to do bad stuff. But how did all of these guns end up in the community?”

What if we made it difficult, really difficult, for those guns to be sold and bought in our community or anywhere in the state so that they never filter in the community? Are there still going to be guns in the community?

Harold answered, "That would limit them."

Mr. Williams replied, "Yes, but would limit them. And slowly but surely we can start to take to task the issue of guns. Are we ever going to get completely rid of guns? No, no. It's not going to happen. But let's address the number of guns and the access to guns that people have in our community."

Mr. Scorza adds, "Do you know why fundamentally, people turn this into a front page story on Monday and they kill all their programming on the weekend after this shooting happens on Saturday? And NPR — you hear it on every radio station, on Fox, and all across the nation? There's one key principle and it's because they care more about what happens in those communities, than they care about what happens in ours. And you know what, I don't blame them because it's their community."

Mr. Williams chimes, "Mmmm hmmm."

Mr. Scorza continues, "So they are going to care. And do you know why it got into the media? Because they control the media. They have power, they have access to these types of things [holding a newspaper]. We don't have power and access to the media in the same ways they do. So we can't get up in national newspapers because we don't control them. So when they care, whatever they care about, makes the national news."

Trevor argued, "You actually, you can. If the community was to pull together and make a big issue about it."

Mr. Scorza, "So if the community cares?"

Harold jumped in, "I agree with Scorza. You got to realize ain't nothing going to change until we start caring and start doing it for ourselves."

Mr. Scorza, "that's exactly it."

Harold continued, "And like Williams said earlier, we're waiting for them to bring it to us. We have to bring it to ourselves first."

Mr. Scorza, "We are the change we're waiting for man. We are the ones who are going to be responsible for caring. That's it. No one else is going to do it for us. It's going to be up to us to make this decision (pointing to the word Care on the white board). That's it."

(Overhearing a simultaneous conversation between another student, Randy, and Mr. Williams) Mr. Scorza continued, "...and I guarantee you, Randy just said it and Williams is telling him, Randy just said 'ummm, but nothing is going to happen once we start caring' and Williams said, 'you'll be surprised'. People are waiting for us. They are tired of seeing Black males die.

Trevor says in exasperation, "I'm tired of seeing it! Shoot, I pray to God everyday. I'm glad that I just see another bright day. I mean, 17 years old. I live in a community where it's Crips on one side of the street and Bloods on the other side of the street. I go to school way in [this area] and people are like weren't you just in [that area]...It's just a matter of time before somebody comes up to me and put a gun to my head try to kill me."

As we pivot to understand the academic and sociopolitical impact on students that acquire critical literacy, Trevor's quote affords us an inside view on his experience as an African American male. His statement is a reflection of the conditions he experiences on a daily basis. The preceding dialogue in the class space offers us insight into the larger social and environment factors affecting each student's success. Further, their dialogue points to the potential shift in students' academic and sociopolitical development when we work to develop critical literacy through problem posing education. Much of the conversation from Mr. Williams centered on asking the students thought-provoking questions while the dialogue from myself sought to analyze the conditions and tie the dialogue back into the conversation about the Tucson shooting.

As students develop their critical literacy skills, the act of becoming an intellectual helps them address real and pressing issues they face within their community. These experiences are not inspired by standardized test preparation or through instruction in basic skills; they arise from an enriched learning space that push students to their intellectual boundaries and connects them to meaningful, authentic ways to express and co-construct knowledge. This chapter explores the literacy ideologies and practices that occur within the Black Male Youth Academy to facilitate sociopolitical and academic development amongst African American male youth. Further, I seek

to articulate the ways in which the use of critical literacy to foster academic and sociopolitical development supports an empowered identity and promotes civic engagement for social change across participatory spaces and domains. Given the goal of the program and study, I relied heavily upon a grounded theoretical approach (Corbin and Strauss, 2008) and the ethnographic analyses of discourse and literacy events (Gee, 2013; Heath, 1982; Street, 1984) as I seek to demonstrate the role critical literacy has as a central practice to advance academic and sociopolitical development. With this, I hope to demonstrate a grounded theory of pedagogical practice that can inform work with African American male youth.

In this chapter, I intend to offer a framework that demonstrates how critical literacy can contribute to the academic and sociopolitical empowerment of African American youth. By reviewing the use of critical literacy and its relationship to academic and sociopolitical development, I intend to answer the following questions: How does the program attempt to foster the academic and sociopolitical development of African American male youth through critical literacy? Are students more directed to engage in forms of civic action that are related to or connected to their own literacy development? Is there a measurable impact on the academic achievement of youth who participate in the Black Male Youth Academy? How do we measure “success”? I will seek answers to these questions through an investigation of multiple forms of data including literacy events, academic records and student artifacts. Finally, I will conclude with a grounded theoretical analysis of the process and practices used in the BMYA by describing the outcomes experienced by the students.

Data from the 2010-2012 School Years

Data for this chapter was drawn from the 2010-2012 school years. In the 2010-2011 school year there were 22 African American male youth in grades 9-12 and 2 teachers and in the 2011-2012 school year, there were 27 African American male youth in grades 9-12. Due to district wide budget cuts, there were two different teachers for each academic year. For the 2010-2011 school year, Mr. Williams was the lead teacher and for the 2011-2012 school year, Mr. Davis was the lead teacher. This chapter relies upon participant observations documented through field notes during classroom time, video logs and transcriptions, recorded audio interviews and transcriptions during meetings throughout the school year, various school field trips, presentations at scholarly conferences, college applications, scholarship essays, student class work products, transcripts, test scores, attendance data and media coverage.

In the beginning of the year, students were introduced to the program and given the opportunity to choose to stay. Both the teacher and I spent time reviewing the program goals, cultural practices of the class and course syllabus. During the first week, every day is spent informing students of the program, the parameters of the study, seeking consent from participants and parents while helping each of them get to know each other. The first week is also the time when we explain roles and expectations and provide a basic introduction to some of the concepts students will cover. Students are then asked if they want to remain in the course and participate in the program. For both school years, students chose to remain in the course and explore the program. Students and parents were informed that at anytime, they were welcome to not participate in the study and still remain in the course or were welcome to leave the course altogether.

Once the initial program goals were met, the teacher and I began to move through the syllabus utilizing the program curriculum (see Appendix A for an example). Whenever possible,

the teachers and I would confer prior to the start of the class about the lessons for the week. We would often meet during their preparatory periods to go over the lesson plans (if they were prepared by either of us) or construct them together. Because the study was co-constructed with the participants, I contracted a videographer to teach the students how to capture video and photographic data such as daily classroom activities as well as special events and relevant experiences. I also taught students how to use recorded audio to capture informal dialogue during the course and in non-traditional settings such as traveling on a bus while en route to a college. Each student was required to seek permission before they recorded and became expert record keepers. This activity was critically important because it served as the foundation for capturing data in this study and also trained the students in research techniques as they prepared to conduct their own studies during the course.

Each year, students choose an overarching theme for their research projects. For the 2010-2011 school year the theme was “Exploring Identity: Reflecting on the Images of Black Males in Society”. In the 2011-2012 school year, the theme was “Becoming Transformative Resisters”. The teachers and I worked with the students to develop research plans and guide them through problem, survey and interview development. Students were trained to evaluate their social conditions utilizing youth participatory action research (Cammarota & Fine, 2007; Morrell, 2008) and as instructors, we worked to guide their collection of quantitative and qualitative data. As a result, students developed and gathered hundreds of surveys, interviews, field notes and created work products such as essays, reflections, PowerPoint presentations and documentary short films. To help foster a rich analysis, I utilized data collected by and with students, archival data (i.e., transcripts, attendance records, test scores, etc.) and my own notes (reflections, observation, etc.).

From Critical Pedagogy to Critical Literacy

In order to effectively answer many of the questions this study poses, it was important to focus on critical literacy development as the central unit of analysis. I argue that neoliberal policies and standards based education ignore the importance of literacy development and force educators to comply with a banking model of education. As I mentioned before, Theresa Perry (1996) reminds us of the importance and history of literacy development in the African American community as many civil rights leaders recognized the need to read, write and speak in order to overcome oppression. Further, James Anderson (1988) documented the numerous occurrences where Black and White Americans risked their lives to help slaves learn to read and write. It is important to consider the strides scholars have made to centralize literacy and language development in educational discourse (Street, 1984; Barton and Hamilton, 1998). However, it is also necessary to recognize the need to deconstruct codes of power (Delpit, 1988) in our educational practice with marginalized communities and identify strategies such as the use of critical literacy to help develop academic and sociopolitical needs in African American male youth.

As a unit of analysis, measuring the development of critical literacy can serve as one important indicator of the change in a student's academic and sociopolitical development. Critical literacy goes beyond reading and writing - It is a set of cognitive, emotional and sociopolitical skills whereby individuals are able to understand and articulate relations of power, dominance and hegemony using media, text, artifacts, oral tradition and experience that both illuminate and disrupt internalized oppression. Have students learned to produce powerful texts?

Has their interpretation of the word and the world helped them acquire power? Are students willing and able to resist dominant structures using traditional and multi-modal genres of communication? I also hope to answer these questions by exploring how students in the BMYA came to assess, interpret and articulate the word and the world.

Interpreting and understanding the word

Freire (1993) argues that reflection is a critical part of the pedagogical process of dealing with both internalized and externalized oppression. As such, students were required to write reflections on class discussions and experiences during the program to help them detail their thoughts and perspectives. The use of reflective journaling helps youth develop their academic literacy skills throughout the course of the program because the teachers and I provided critical feedback of their writing to help them improve during the course. As students wrote responses to writing prompts and participated in writing workshops, they learned to infuse some theoretical concepts explored in the program such as oppression and power to their own communities. In a critical discussion, Jason and other students articulated their views and found ways to relate to various theoretical concepts in relevant and meaningful ways.

In moving through the curriculum, students were taught to analyze their social conditions and explore theoretical concepts such as the banking model. In one class discussion, students were asked to provide their definitions of the concept of oppression as it relates to banking education. We used *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* by Paulo Freire to discuss oppression and its relationship to dehumanization, fear and freedom. Many of the students, including Jason, one of the most vocal students in the class discussion, had much to offer:

Teacher: What is oppression?

Jason: it's abusing your authority.

Mike (to teacher): Can I ask him a question? Who do you think personally abused their power?

James: Hitler!

Mike: I personally would say George W. Bush

Carver: it means like to bully

Teacher: To bully? You said it means to bully?

Carver: Yeah

Jason: I'm trying to tell you what it means though

Teacher: Alright go ahead

Jason: The principal got authority over this whole school, right? But if he starts abusing his power then ain't none of us gonna want to come to school because we gonna feel abused because he got the power. So basically back then when like White people had power they abused us by doing us extra wrong, stuff they didn't even really need do. They did us wrong, over-wrong. So they had power, right, they had power. Let me break this down to y'all. Y'all listening? Oppressed, when you got a line to press somebody. Oppressed basically is like over pressing somebody, that's how I look at it.

Teacher: so what do y'all think, you think Jason's right?

Group: Yeahhh

Jason: I'm telling y'all, it's over-pressing somebody. When you have authority and you over-press somebody because you have authority. Like how Black people do with other Black people.

Mark: Y'all gotta listen forreal. Y'all gotta listen forreal man, as a unit. Forreal man, we gotta be a unit man, we gotta be together as one. Aye aye, we gotta come together as one in here. We gotta get some communication right here man, forreal. Or else we ain't gon never get nowhere, forreal man. Y'all got the authority to talk but y'all making us go through oppression right now.

Damian: It goes back to...

Teacher: Hold on

Mark: Nah, they not listening but I got this (stands to address class). It goes right back to you knowing your knowledge and your rights and being smart. If you're smart, can't nobody run over you...but when you're dumb, they can do whatever they wanna do to you. (FN 4.07.08)

Jason's and each student's analysis represents the synthesis and application of complex social theories to real life situations. Their discussion demonstrates how critical literacy builds upon and expands traditional academic literacies in ways that are meaningful and relevant to students. Developing critical literacy using problem posing helps students gain important academic literacy skills, learn how to analyze the world around them and encourage them to reflect on their choices as individuals and within communities.

In the BMYA, some of the class discussions focused on the concepts of masculinity and identity in order to evaluate images in the media and the impact on African American male youth. Students watched a popular YouTube video called "Lemme Smang It" and were tasked with analyzing the portrayal of young women and Black men. They were then asked to draw connections between the YouTube video and the images of Jim Crow era. After a very lively viewing, there was plenty to discuss:

James: Our Black community grows as we change. To me, that's how I look at it. We go from like the Jim Crow laws and how we were separated from eating at this restaurant with White people. To me, that's not good at all, that bothers me. How could you do that to another human if you're human? And it's like yeah; you might not care, but think about it. What if it was still going on? How would you feel now?

Teacher: Okay, Martin? (hand was raised)

Martin: Umm, I don't know if this is what you wanted to hear - but [I'm responding to] how White people went from like, talking about Black people on their own and [how] it's now Black people talking about themselves. That's what you wanted to hear?

James: I can agree with him.

Martin: Like Black people are not [just here for] entertainment. We know we're not—like that's not what really happens (referring to the video).

Student: I have a question.

Martin (continues): Not all Black people do that. But like the media gives people the impression that all Black are like that and Black people aren't like that.

Martin provided an attention-grabbing analysis that juxtaposes the individual choices and personal responsibility of African Americans to the images that are presented. He was able to articulate the degree to which personally responsibility ends and corporate dominance begins. His distinction between the role of the media and the role of the individual is an expression of critical literacy and a complex understanding of the discussion. As the sociopolitical identities of these young men are developed, it is extremely important to present an alternative positive image of African American manhood. To help advance their sociopolitical identity, the instructors of the program helped students learn how to analyze popular images in the media and compare those images to their own visions for positive self-expression.

The BMYA served as a space that facilitated critical dialogue and encouraged students to question their identities, push back against hegemony and evaluate the ways in which popular media influenced their actions. Martin understood that certain conditions led to the creation of the video the group analyzed and those conditions were reflective of ideas held within society. In his analysis, he contextualized the cause of those conditions and situated them within a historical narrative that accounted for the role racism played in the development of the African American male identity. This type of intellectual activity is a form of comprehension as he demonstrated his ability to respond intellectually. Martin's comprehension and response

expresses the use of critical literacy because he reconceptualized the knowledge he acquired from the class literature and shared that knowledge in the classroom space.

In the program, students were encouraged to act as experts of their own knowledge and facilitators utilized critical pedagogy to ensure that each student's voice was heard and their ideas were centralized in course discussions. From example, Martin's explanation afforded the facilitator the opportunity to engage and "draw out" the reasoning reflected in Martin's response while Alfredo relied on theory to position himself and his community in opposition to an oppressive narrative. Utilizing critical pedagogy in this way helps to facilitate a form of academic engagement. The discussion, which engaged students around concepts of identity, history and hegemony, demonstrated the multiple academic competencies students developed when they learn how to master new literature or concepts. The use of critical pedagogy through critical discussion and reflection helped students shift from only being exposed to academic concepts to understanding the role they play in facilitating their own academic experiences.

Writing for a future

While students were going through the course syllabus to learn about socio-historical conditions and to begin mastering critical theoretical concepts, the teachers and I never ignored the impending college application deadlines. Each fall, we focused on college preparation and worked tirelessly to ensure that students received the academic support they needed to successfully navigate the college application process. Either the teachers or myself conducted college application, personal statement and financial aid workshops and provided one-on-one support to each graduating senior. We would frequently enlist college counselors and university admissions officers to provide additional info to help the students gain a deeper understanding of

the college preparation process. To help facilitate college matriculation, we arranged college tours, admissions presentations and engagements with college students to help our students understand the academic expectations they were required to meet and the identity that students were expected to develop as scholars and intellectuals.

The students' course evaluations demonstrate the importance of their participation in the BMYA and detailed the role critical literacy played in helping them better understand the conditions they experienced on a daily basis in their schools and communities. Jeffery explained that his participation in the BMYA contributed to him "learning about important black history that we don't get taught in our other classes." Vince said that the BMYA "opens your eyes once you think critical." And Alex believed what he was learning was valuable and connected to the real world "because without the Black Male Youth Academy, I wouldn't know what I know today...how blacks are seen and put out there in the public and there's still segregation and racism out there." Each student's experience helped them see beyond their existing circumstances and ultimately, drove them to focus on the power they have to change their circumstances. This fundamental understanding of how to view the world, contributed to their academic development and spurred their desire to attend college. Vince writes in detail:

Growing up in Vernon, California, I have dealt with many life struggles but realized that family made me strong. My father had passed on Thanksgiving in 2005, which sent my family through a whirlwind. If that was not bad enough, my mother had suffered from a stroke four years later on Thanksgiving. In those times, there was not much to be thankful for. This was a major set back for my family but we still managed to move forward as a family.

I worked harder in school and stayed focused on just graduating from high school but with the help of my mentor, Mr. Scorza and the BMYA, it gave me a better understanding that college is a necessary step to success. Being part of the Black Male Youth Academy, it helped me not only become a better leader in my community and also challenged me to see life from a different perspective. As a leader, I was empowered to speak and address societal issues on my communities'

behalf on research trips to University of California Los Angeles, University of Santa Cruz, and San Diego State University.

College just is not just to improve myself but also for the betterment of my family and community. When I attend college, I will major in biology/zoology. Growing up, I always had an attraction to animals. I had many pets at home: birds, hamsters, and snakes. I was attracted to animals because of the certain ways that animals can adapt to different environments to survive. This always made me think more about my life. Learning that many environments are not the same, it is important for me to adapt to succeed in adversity. I have a big heart for animals and knowing that some species are becoming extinct, it is important to work hard to save and learn more about them. Like them, I have learned that family and community is important to save. We need each other. This scholarship will help me accomplish and attain my mission in life.

Vince identifies the BMYA as a place where he could “go to for solace” and “taught him how to be more open minded”. It is important to understand that as he participates in the program and develops critical literacy, he acknowledges his experience as necessary and empowering. He understood the need to be personally responsible for his own success. Because he was in a space designed to reaffirm his identity where “no one laughed” at him, he did not worry about acting white (Steele and Aronson, 1995).

Our use of critical literacy provided a much needed tool to help students challenge their perceptions of the world and information they processes. As students prepared for college, they demonstrated wrote about the importance and value of critical literacy in their own academic development. Further, 11 out of 12 seniors in the BMYA during the 2010-2012 school year graduated from high school and enrolled in post secondary education – a testament to successful employment of critical literacy in the academic development of students.

Assessing the Quantitative Data

A fundamental assumption of high-stakes testing and accountability movement is that knowledge students' gain in traditional academic settings will be applicable and transfer to "real world" activities in the workforce. This assumption is flawed in two respects – first, it does not provide students with opportunities to utilize knowledge in meaningful, authentic ways; and second, it ignores the historic mission of schools to prepare students to become effective democratic participants. I sought to demonstrate how the data I collected reflected student's participation in the BMYA. I also sought to demonstrate how their pedagogical experience, through meaningful engagement, motivated them to achieve in their traditional academic courses. However, when attempting to understand and review the data, I've concluded that I cannot draw a real conclusion about the relationship between students' academic success and their participation in the BMYA. There are no control or comparison groups and the data collected by the school is both inconsistent and unreliable.

However, I have decided to include a set of descriptive statistics in Appendix A to present a profile of the types of students who participated in the BMYA. Each data set is organized by type and is broken down by year. It is important to note that while multiple students participated in the program each year, access to certain types of data may not have been readily available for each student. For example, the school district shifted to a new student information system during the course of the study and the new system did not always capture all of the relevant data I required. In some cases, student test scores were not inputted in the system and in other instances; teachers may not have accurately captured attendance data. Additionally, there were occasions where additional students enrolled in the class and were transferred to another school within a short time period or did not attend the school despite their enrollment status.

While there was always a core group of youth, the idiosyncratic nature of the school's data system made it difficult to measure change in participation over time using traditional academic indicators. I have come to conclude that this study is not about measuring traditional indicators of academic success and is instead, about the ways in which critical literacy played a role in student's success. Additionally, this study is about evaluating what it means to think about success and what is possible for African American male students. This study is about what schools should be accomplishing for students and how what we measure defines what we think about African American student success. There were many intervening variables that are not taken into account when attempting to collect data in urban schooling environments.

Even though I worked diligently to capture archival data, the institution I worked with did not effectively capture the data I needed to draw conclusions. They could not capture the data I needed because of challenges with technology, parents completing forms, existing data collection systems, lack of staff and life challenges of the student population. It would be incorrect to make the assumption that by looking at the numbers you would understand what is taking place in the schooling environment or the lives of the students. These types of assumptions are frequently made and misdiagnose the challenges faced by our students in urban schools.

Because we need to come to a deeper understanding of the type of students that participated in the study, I've included descriptive statistics on their grade point average, attendance, California standardized test scores and number of college courses completed. These statistics are meant to provide context and cannot be used to draw any real conclusions linking the impact of each student's progress to their participation in the study. The goal of providing this data is to demonstrate the intellectual disconnect in our understanding between of traditional

academic performance of African American male youth and their real performance as sociopolitical agents. Standardized tests attempt to fit all students into one dominant paradigm. Using standardized data is not a good way to understand these young men and their accomplishments especially in environments where the data is highly unreliable.

Often, we measure success through a neoliberal lens and expect academic performance to come in the form of test scores, grade point averages and college course completion. To measure success in this way raises questions about the claims and judgments we make about the accomplishments of youth. In the BMYA, students demonstrated academic competencies as critically literate youth participatory action researchers. I've provided this data to push back against traditional notions of success and instead, argue for a more holistic approach to evaluate student progress. As such, Appendix A offers but one type of presentation of the young men students who participated in this study and poses even deeper questions about how we measure success.

Evaluating Pre-Post Data

Each year, I worked to capture pre- and post program data. Given the difficulty of this task, I decided to explain the possible ways to analyze the pre- and post-test data. The following synopsis provides a detailed explanation for the use of my data set and the rationale behind its inclusion or exclusion. There were three possible ways to use this data set. The first way would be to compare pre- and post-test scores for a given school year. In order for a student's data to be included, he would have to complete the pre- and post-test questionnaire for the school year being examined. Unfortunately, no post-test data were collected during 2008-2009, making it impossible to compare anyone's pre- and post-test scores for that year. During 2009-2010, only

7 students (out of 21 who were in the program that year; 67% missing data) completed both the pre- and the post-test.

During 2010-2011, only 12 students (out of 34 who were in the program that year; 65% missing data) completed both the pre- and the post-test. During 2011-2012, only 22 students (out of 32 who were in the program that year; 31% missing data) completed both the pre- and the post-test. It would be challenging to make reliable pre- and post-test comparisons given that so few students (range = 21-34 students) participated in a given school year. However, given the extent of missing data (range = 31% - 67% of participants with incomplete data within a school year), it simply isn't possible to make reliable pre- and post-test comparisons based on so few students. The results would not be meaningful because such a large percentage of the students in the study would be excluded from such an analysis due to missing data.

The second way to analyze the BMYA Pre- and Post-Test data would be to compare pre- and post-test scores for students when they were in the first year of the program, when they were in the second year of the program, and when they were in the third year of the program. In order for a student's data to be included in such an analysis, he would need to have completed a pre- and post-test questionnaire for the year of participation (i.e., first, second, or third year) being examined. Out of the 96 students who participated in our program for at least one year, only 6 students completed both a pre- and post-test during their first year of participation. Out of the 48 students who returned for a second year of participation, only 12 students completed both a pre- and post-test questionnaire during their second year of participation. Out of the 17 students who returned for a third year of participation, only 6 students completed both a pre- and post-test questionnaire during their third year of participation. I cannot reasonably compare pre- and post-test data for so few students.

The third possible way to analyze the BMYA Pre- and Post-Test data would be to compare the student's pre-test scores upon entry to the program with his post-test scores at the time he exited the program. In order for a student's data to be included in such an analysis, he would need to have completed a pre-test upon entering the program and a post-test during the year that he left the program. Out of the 96 students who participated over the course of the study, only 7 students completed a pre-test upon entry to the program and a post-test during their final year in the program. There is very little that can be done with data from only 7 students. Another way to present the BMYA Pre- and Post-Test data would be to simply report the mean scores on the pre- and post-tests. Because there are a limited number of students who completed both the pre- and post-tests for each school year and each program year, I've learned that the students who completed the pre-test are a different group of students than those who completed the post-test. It is difficult to report mean pre- and post-test scores if those means are not based on the same group of students. Because of this, I've chosen not to report mean scores for the pre- and post-tests.

Meaningful and Authentic Assessment through Sociopolitical Development

Over the course of the year, students spent dozens of hours developing research questions, conducting fieldwork, analyzing data, and creating presentations about the conditions they experienced in their schools. Within this model of project-based learning, academic literacy skill building took place organically as students prepared for meaningful, authentic assessments. Students had multiple opportunities to refine their academic skills as they continued to work on their research projects throughout the school year and prepared for new presentations, whether it be through carefully wording and re-wording interview questions, pulling powerful quotes from

an interview to put on a PowerPoint slide, summarizing the salient points from complicated social theory for an audience, or crafting demands for change that apply to various audiences.

Students from the BMYA were working hard to prepare for their presentation at the UCLA Black Male Institute Research Think Tank when in the course of completing their documentary film their high definition digital cameras were stolen from the class. When students learned of the break-in and subsequent theft, they were outraged. They argued about their next steps and decided to make their voices heard to their local elected officials. Having learned during the course about different levels of government, a smaller group of students were designated to work on a presentation on behalf of the class and take their concerns to the local school board. Students met after school for nearly a week in order to prepare for their presentation. Two students were then chosen to go to the school board meeting and speak on behalf of the whole group. At the board meeting Charles, an 11th grade BMYA student, starts by saying,

We are here tonight to make you aware of things we must change in order to improve our education at Vernon High School so that we can be successful, have the tools we need to go to college and make the social and physical ecology of our environment better.

Given the depth with which students come to master theory, conduct research and tell their story, it should be no surprise that they stand up for themselves. Charles continues,

I've been to Palos Verdes, Beverly Hills and Santa Monica and I was like wow! They have the tools they need to succeed. Their libraries are up to date. They had the staff they needed, the updated security systems. A modern computer lab and cultural activities that supported them. There is no reason we should be treated any less. We need the District to support our education.

Critical literacy leads to sociopolitical action where students can use what they learned in their research to analyze their school conditions and take humanizing steps to create change. By

deciding to respond to the theft at their school, Charles used his understanding of theory to challenge the school board to act and provide an equitable education - one that is provided to more affluent communities. Not only does the use of critical literacy support academic development – it helps students develop the kind of critical consciousness that encourages them to challenge inequalities and seek justice for their communities.

Developing an Empowered Academic Identity

There are very few conversations in the national dialogue about achievement and school reform that focus acutely on the needs of African American male youth. Frequently, models that associate academic achievement and urban youth focus on efforts to improve standardized test scores. I argue the dialogue centered on achievement needs to include strategies that increase academic self-efficacy (Bandura, 1977) and fosters culturally affirming identities. Youth will not be motivated to perform in school if they do not see themselves as students and intellectuals (Wigfield and Eccles, 2000). Furthermore, many students maintain high academic aspirations and while they aspire to graduate high school and attend college, these aspirations are inhibited by a low academic self-concept (Wigfield and Karpathian, 1991). It is possible that an increase in academic achievement results from an increase in academic motivation and engagement.

To examine the ways in which critical literacy can be used to develop students academically by motivating them and engaging them in coursework, I rely on the student artifacts, video and audio transcriptions, class discussion and field notes to observe a shift in participation over time. My goal was to illuminate the ways in which youth have made transformations in their identity as I employed critical ethnography to document how students

have adapted to various roles for themselves as evidence of transformations in identity. In order to understand this, I focused simultaneously on changes in how they saw themselves and how their view of self correlated to the assumption of different roles and responsibilities within the community of practice (Lave, 1996). I also examined key activity exchanges within the BMYA and the role the students themselves play to help shift their identities.

Becoming Urban Scholars: Building an identity as researchers and intellectuals

When students join the BMYA, they are oriented to the program through introductory lessons that explain the activities students will engage in throughout the course. From the very first day, each student is told that he is smart, he is capable of engaging in rigorous intellectual activity and that he is an activist-scholar. This branding in the very beginning is important because it establishes the cultural norms and expectations of each student's participation in the space. Oftentimes, the narrative that students hear about themselves throughout a traditional course of study is at odds with their experience in the BMYA. This experience is unfortunately very common as African American male youth experience negative stereotypes that constantly denigrate their humanity through media and sometimes in educational spaces. As one BMYA student, Damian reports, "My 9th grade Algebra teacher, Mr. Moller, yelled at me and said he wished I would fail."

In the BMYA, students are taught to understand the foundation of these perceptions and their experiences by utilizing critical theory to name phenomenon. Additionally, they learn about the potential critical research has to challenge hegemony and reshape their communities. The training students undergo to become critical youth researchers contribute to the development

of self-efficacy as they become more deeply engaged in social issues rooted in their experiences (Oakes & Rogers, 2006). Moreover, when students share their research outcomes with adult audiences through public presentations, a particularly powerful effect occurs as students' confidence builds and they come to self-identify as intellectuals.

In the spring of 2011, students in the BMYA traveled to New Orleans to present their work at the annual meeting of the American Educational Research Association (AERA). For the students that traveled, this was their first time flying across the country on an airplane and seeing the effects of structural racism outside of their own community. The students presented their data and findings on a panel session with other researchers to an audience of university faculty, schoolteachers and graduate students who listened attentively and asked important questions. After the trip, the students expressed a sense of change, both personally and academically, from the experience. Students wrote reflections about their experience and Ervin, one of the student presenters, explained "the trip to New Orleans for me was fun. The experience got us to see that the world is not just in LA or Vernon. Basically it was inspirational...the work we did for the presentations, it was fun too."

Vince, another presenter, spoke to the fun of the experience, but he also noted the skills he learned,

"Um well, what he was saying earlier about how fun it was...like New Orleans is very live and it's great but, presentation-wise, the kind of work we were doing — you got to kind of limit your fun to a certain extent because you got to get ready for your presentation with um, people who are very important. And so, um, with the presentation you got to come direct. You got to know what you're talking about. You can't stutter on your words. You can't move and fiddle around and stuff. And it's like— it's a great atmosphere."

Vince and Ervin describe the value of their experience presenting at AERA. The authentication that students experienced while participating in a public arena, from individuals who are

considered traditional researchers, helped them realize the value of their accomplishments and the power their voices carry. Their ability to present research to a professional community demonstrated a high degree of academic competency, including skills they need to participate in higher education. As students come to identify themselves as intellectuals, the critical literacy skills they gained during the process of becoming critical youth researchers developed their academic and sociopolitical goals. By achieving these goals, students can see their success not solely as an individual accomplishment, but as a proof about how students like themselves are capable of success when given meaningful opportunities.

Critical literacy serves as but one instrument that works to develop a humanizing and empowering consciousness. Successfully employed, the use of critical literacy can help encourage African American males to create change in their communities and to challenge inequities in their school. In order to effectively position critical literacy as a contributing factor to academic and sociopolitical development, I argue that we must reconsider the traditional teaching and learning practices that have come to define most classrooms around the country. Many pedagogical practices that attempt to facilitate academic development in urban youth of color, frequently exclude the forms of capital these youth bring into the learning environment and mitigate the degree to which critical skills inform the learning community. Currently employed literacy practices such as Bloom's Taxonomy or Marzano's Instructional Strategies, have narrowly constructed definitions of learning which lead to narrowly constructed approaches to learning (Meacham, 2001). This is true both in the classroom and in the research literature that promotes deficit analyses of students' learning abilities and academic underachievement. Kris Gutierrez argues that a "historicized view of literacy requires a focus on activity as the unit of analysis, as activity systems are historically evolving, artifact-mediated systems (Gutierrez,

2007, p. xi). This focus on activity systems must take into account a community's culturally prescribed learning practices to best determine how to effectively engage students in the classroom.

A central component in the effective use of critical literacy is the cultural relevance of its application. Tyrone Howard (2001) notes that teaching strategies must employ holistic approaches to help students achieve academically and focus on cultural and linguistic integrity. The use of critical literacy can help critical educators incorporate culturally sensitive approaches to learning and challenge knowledge that is both dominant and privileged through problem-posing activities. Further, the process of privileging students' funds of knowledge, cultural heritage and development of critical consciousness can serve as the educator's methodological approach to developing critical literacy by empowering students to actively generate and privilege their own historical traditions and ways of knowing. This type of activity is both anti-oppressive and counterhegemonic and leads to the development of critical literacy affording African American male youth the opportunity to ideologically ground themselves in reflective knowledge.

Critical literacy, as a tool for empowered identity development, must incorporate teaching and learning practices for the purposes of developing academic achievement in African American male youth. Ernest Morrell and Jeff Duncan-Andrade (2002) argue that educators "...must find ways to forge meaningful relationships with students who come from different worlds, while also helping these students develop academic skills and the skills needed to become critical citizens in a multicultural democracy" (p. 88). This approach is emblematic of the necessity to understand and apply learning theory in a way that positively impacts students' development of critical consciousness in underserved communities. Further, an appreciation of

multiple forms of literacy allows the educator to view learning as a cultural process (Calfee & Sperling, 2010).

Critical literacy can be linked to cultural identity and can inform attempts to create structured learning environments, situated learning and basic literacy development. Packer and Goicoechea (2000) argue that the way we theorize human learning using either a socio-cultural or constructivist approach, carry different ontological or epistemological assumptions and can have a tremendous impact on knowledge construction, transformation and participation (p. 227). Giroux (1998) argues for the importance of a critical, pedagogical process that is counter-hegemonic and validates multiple forms of expression as well as the social and cultural experiences of the learner. African American male youth must be able to see themselves as learners in charge of their own sociopolitical and academic development and because critical pedagogy intends to draw-out existing knowledge using problematization and reflection, it fits the criteria needed to facilitate a liberatory educational experience. Recognizing that constructivist approaches to learning are not sufficient to effectively design learning environments (Polman, 2006), it is necessary to apply new approaches to learning and instructional design to facilitate deep understanding (Carver, 2006).

Through its reflexivity, critical literacy development can be utilized as a legitimate form of engagement to develop learning models and hybrid spaces. Reflection, through writing and speech, offers an example of an academic practice to engage urban youth in the development of strong academic and civic identities while strengthening learning. I see this type of critical education taking place in communities of practice that utilize critical pedagogy to empower youth. Models based on this approach, such as Jeff-Duncan-Andrade and Ernest Morrell's (2008) focus on popular culture as a tool to engage in learning, are good examples of the how

researchers and educators can provide appropriate spaces for learning utilizing critical pedagogy. Morrell (2008) uses the pedagogy of popular culture to gear learning toward social justice, prepare future teachers, develop literacy policy and facilitating student empowerment. Both Duncan-Andrade and Morrell expand the use of critical pedagogy to validate the experiences of non-dominant communities, encourage the placement of learning within sociocultural contexts, critique power relation dynamics and provide a space for academic achievement in the traditional classroom setting.

Extending beyond youth empowerment and simple critiques of power relations, I argue that the use of critical literacy to develop critical youth researchers has the potential to expand academic and civic identity development while facilitating social change. Through, youth participatory action research (YPAR), African American male youth employ critical research methodologies to tell their stories and position themselves as experts in their own educational experiences (Cammarota & Fine 2008; Morrell, 2006). Methodologically, YPAR challenges traditional notions of research and academic engagement by presenting learning opportunities for African American male youth and by providing students with a space to create and enact their own research agendas. Since YPAR responds to the privilege of those who are legitimized to produce knowledge, critical educators are able to employ conceptual, intellectual and practical tools that help urban youth think differently about the nature of the problems they face and identify solution-oriented approaches. As an effective learning tool, YPAR transforms the traditional learning space by carving out room for urban youth to develop experiential knowledge, conduct research on their own experiences and act as agents of change in issues that impact them directly.

While critical literacy serves as a foundational approach to teaching and learning, the use of YPAR engages students in academic activities such as interviewing, transcribing, writing and teaching, among others. It allows a community of learners to become teachers and alter the educational discourse in and beyond their environment. Training African American male youth as action researchers helps them describe the problems they face, identify transformative research questions and enables them to master the very instruments we use in this study. This activity necessitates academic and sociopolitical development by serving as a vehicle to engage students in a learning process that is both relevant and highly instructive. This relationship between the development of critical literacy and the use YPAR provides a unique entry point to understand the academic and sociopolitical development that occurs with the BMYA.

Describing Impact on Student Participants

To further assess the role critical literacy played in the academic and sociopolitical development of students, I sought to understand the impact that students believed occurred while in the Black Male Youth Academy. Without the benefit of being able to use the results of the students' pre and post tests to demonstrate the impact the program had on their academic and sociopolitical development, I will rely upon student interviews, course surveys and student collected data to incorporate their reflections and voice on their participation in the program. Throughout the course of the study, I asked students to reflect on their participation in the program; frequently, this was either through informal and formal interviews. The conversation was captured before, during or after the course.

At the beginning of the study, I made sure to engage in the practice of receiving feedback through student reflections because of the importance to incorporate student feedback into the study design. Students interviewed each other for their documentary short films or to hold each other accountable for their participation in the community of practice. Finally, during the 2011-2012 school year, the students wanted to evaluate the impact of the program on the school at large as a component of their research process to determine if they were being effective leaders and demonstrating commitment to improving their community. In what follows, I report the results.

“I didn’t expect it to be any different”

On December 15, 2010, Caliph walked into room D-4. He was wearing skinny jeans, a purple sweater and his orange-rimmed hat was tilted to the side. Caliph was an alumnus of the Black Male Youth Academy, having graduated June 2009. He was enrolled at Common Coast Community College and he was anxious to return to the class and tell the students his story. The students in the program that year had only heard about the alumni and seemed excited to hear from one of them. Shortly after the discussion, a group of students asked Caliph if he would be willing to do an interview for their documentary short film where they were exploring issues of identity, race and manhood. Vince, the lead interviewer helped guide the interview. In this exchange, Caliph describes his impressions while participating in the Black Male Youth Academy and articulates how his views have shifted since his high school graduation.

Caliph: Ok, it felt as if they wanted to hold our hands and bring us through this process with someone that’s been there...like they said, they know what our main issues were. You know, they’ve been there. And I didn’t get that at the time.

Vince: Right.

Caliph: I didn't get that. I saw it as — I kind of wanted them to like, back up. Back up a little bit. You know, I felt like they were coming on too strong. I never had someone like that wanting to come into my life and help so much. It made you iffy at a situation. It made you like—it made you look twice at them. That was my first year in this class. I started when I was a junior. I started as a junior in this class and for the first year I hated it. Like I said, when I first got in here I wanted to leave.

I got asked what does it mean to be a Black man so many times and I couldn't answer it when I first got in the classroom. And then on that same note, when I first got in the classroom, I took everything as, 'why are we talking so much—so badly about White people?' Like that's how I saw it. Oh, we're gonna talk badly about White people. But I gotta remember I walked in in the middle of the class, I mean in the middle of the semester and I know I didn't get everything. But what I did get, I was taking it incorrectly as racism. So I went to my counselor's office all the time asking to leave — asking to leave. And if it weren't for her making me stay, I would've missed out. I would've missed out on so much.

Vince: Right

Caliph: Um, it's still a tough question to answer though—what does it mean to be a Black man—because it's complicated. To be a Black man—and on top of that to be a gay Black man— you have a lot of things that you have to live up to. No, no, there're a lot of things expected of you from other people in your family and in your community, at work. Um and I could say that this class—even though it's been two years ago—has still made me feel that my spirits are high. That I still have my “go get ‘em” attitude, you know when it comes to achieving my goals. And not listening to what other people have to say because I know me. *Because of this class, I know me.*

Vince: Right. Wow.

Caliph: Yeah. I know me because of this class and I know what I'm about and I know what I'm capable of. You know my bad days aren't necessarily what define me you know? It slows me down a bit but I still keep going. That's pretty much, that's not all I could say, but that's pretty much—that's the best things I could say right now is that this class really did define who I am. And I would've lost out on a lot of my character traits right now if it wasn't for this class and having them as mentors because I'm pushing 20 but I still come them as if I'm 16 again (laughs). So, yeah. This class was really inspirational so I dedicate anything I have to this class. That's why I told them (the student he spoke with before the interview) you don't want to waste time because after high school you can waste so much time doing nothing...and you can look back at it and look at your checklist and, you know, things are still in pencil, not in pen (laughs).

As Caliph reflects upon his experience in the BMYA, we can see the shift that occurred in his identity. His initial resistance decreased over time as he came to “know” his self. The value he derived from his experience centered on his growth and in many ways, his acknowledgement of his race and sexuality. The BMYA provided the space for him to understand what it would take to achieve his goals and then pursue them, even when he experienced challenges in his circumstances. The use of critical literacy and the content reviewed in the BMYA created enough discomfort in Caliph’s experience that it afforded him the opportunity to engage in a process that acknowledged his “issues”, “inspired” him to have a “go get ‘em” attitude and return to encourage other BMYA students to take advantage of their participation in the program. His experience serves as an example of the academic development that occurs within the program over time.

The turning point

Students from the 2008-2009 school year launched an ambitious project based on their research efforts. They decided that in order to create change within their community, they would take on their community’s designation as a “food desert”. As a result, the students started a community garden near their high school and became advocates for healthy eating in their community. The project began with the 2008-2009 cohort and grew with the 2009-2012 school years. During the same interview, one of our program facilitators, Christopher, started helping the students draw out questions from Caliph about the project. One question Christopher asked centered on the moment that Caliph’s observed a change in his participation:

Christopher: So what was the turning point?

Caliph: Umm, the turning point? I think I really—as we got more involved in our projects, you know it went from all talk to ‘hey, we’re going to plan this’. Then actually going out and doing it, that opened up, that opened the eyes of a lot of the

students. Even I'll say, I was immature or whatever, but I grew. I grew going out working in the garden, going out to umm, public rallies. That plays an effect on you because you start questioning, 'Ok, what am I doing?' You know, then you gotta look yourself in the mirror. And I think that happened with a lot of the students. They looked at themselves in the mirror and it died down.

Christopher: Hmm

Caliph: And I remember the students that was in this class. It played an effect in their other classes. I remember when they were like rowdy — loud — it wasn't like that all the time. I think that they were checking them selves and they were doing what they were doing.

Christopher: So they started acting better in other classes as a result of what was going on in here

Caliph: Yeah, a lot better.

Christopher: Just behavior? Grades?

Caliph: I would just say behavior. I never knew grades, I didn't go that deep. But I knew um, just behavior-wise.

Christopher: So what were some of the projects that you worked on? So you kinda—so you said the community garden.

Caliph: The community garden, I worked on um, I did the long beach, the California—what was the name of that? I did this, I did a political, give me one second, I'm trying to remember the name. We did the graffiti thing here.

Christopher: Like a mural?

Caliph: Yeah, we did awareness of the school campus, like what's really going on. That was fun. Some of the problems that we know that's on the campus. Selling drugs, graffiti.

Christopher: how did you do it?

Caliph: Umm I think we took, I think we did snapshots. We did snapshots. No, we replayed the scenes. Yeah, we re-enacted the scenes that we saw what was going on.

Christopher: Like a play? Or...

Caliph: No, no. Well, what happened was we tried to capture—we took pictures and we captures moments that we saw you know what was the major problems

that was going on in our school. And then we got into smaller groups and then we had to talk about the certain things that we captured. I forgot what mine was. I think it was drugs because I seen a lot of that in classrooms and stuff. And so yeah, we captured you know like the standard put the money in one hand, put the drugs in the other hand and then leave. And so we captured that scene. And we got to talk about it. And then we did the graffiti. Showed the graffiti and how tired we were of seeing it. We had it all over the room.

For Caliph, the turning point came as he began to engage in activities that challenged him to reflect on his own experiences. As a function of critical literacy, students are taught to be reflective and contemplative as they become more engaged in their daily lives. He observed a shift in his and his fellow students' behavior once they took what they had learned in the course and began to apply it to the world they lived. In the BMYA, students were taught how to understand the conditions or “problems” in their school and communities and learned the skills necessary to act upon those conditions to create change.

Each year, students in the BMYA traveled to San Diego, CA to visit a museum called Casa Del Rey Moro (“House of the Moorish King”) and to visit universities and/or colleges in the area. The field trips provided opportunities for each student to engage in activities that helped them evaluate concepts and ideas they wrestled with or were introduced to in the BMYA. After we returned from the trip, the next day in class, the teacher asked the students to describe what they learned on the trip and what they learned about themselves.

Teacher: What did you learn on this trip to San Diego Casa del Rey Moro?

Brandon: What this trip did for me is it let me know how... about my ancestors, how strong they were. All the things they accomplished even though—I though that um, Amelia Earhart, she was an aviator. And I though she was the first woman aviator pilot. And I think the lady told me um, Bessie, Bessie something, she was the first Black female aviator pilot. She used to do trick while um flying the plane. Bessie was doing more, why didn't she get more coverage than Amelia Earhart?

Teacher: Ok, what did you learn about yourself after the trip to Casa del Rey

Moro?

Brandon: About myself? Well for one, I learned that me, being as a Black man, I can do more than what I think I can and accomplish what I know I can. Like I told you on the bus, on the van, it's like the White man trying to bring you down or whatever, cause you know they say, they say, a Black man not supposed to be in a White's man's system. But no, a Black man is meant to be wherever he chooses to be if he sets that mindset to go where he wants to go. So me, I feel like I can do anything I wanna do if I set my mind. If I wanna go, I can go.

Teacher: Go ahead Travis (hand raised), what did you learn?

Travis: I learned that I'm a very strong person and no one can bring me down but myself.

Teacher: How did you figure that out?

Travis: Because there are some racists that bring Black people down. But as we seen, there's a lot of Black people that invented a lot of stuff and we don't know about it.

Teacher: Ok, Malik, tell us...what did you learn in the Academy so far? How has being in the Black Male Academy helped you learn about yourself?

Malik: Well reading, um having that reader, carrying it around, we ain't carrying it around for no reason. People ask you "What's that? What's that?" but then you carry it around it's like you're not paying attention to what everybody else is so that's gonna make you pay attention to it so when you open it up you read about your history that you don't even know about. And you find out some stuff like Capoeira was nice, um the Black power struggle. And you know just found out a lot of stuff that's not in our text books, what should be in our textbooks, and like what should be on T.V., a show or something, or like...some of the stuff in that book isn't at the Museum of Tolerance.

Teacher: Jamal, what have you learned being in the Black Male Youth Academy?

Jamal: Well I learned a lot because like being in this class it's like once you say it...like in other classrooms—I'd say out of all the classrooms other than this one—there's about 2 or 3 that have actually posters and stuff like this of our Black culture, you know. And we got classes but they don't really tell you stuff that we get in detail with. Like they'll tell you, oh, this is what happened like stuff we already know, you feel me. If we've been in here, we've gone through texts like—I ain't never knew Capoeira. Like what the fuck is a Capoeira? I ain't never knew that. Then I found out it was a dance, it was fighting way, I never knew that. You come in here and it's like bringing you back, letting you know like, this what you used to do, this where your roots came from, the way you act is the way they

used to act...so it's nothing new. Little simple stuff, like saying that you could do stuff that you never thought you could do. You just take time to learn about it and read about it. If you take time to do that, you could learn a lot of stuff about yourself. Like for one, your name. Everybody's name in here got a meaning to it. It's a website on the computer, I forgot what it's called, but you could type in your first and last name and it will tell you what it means. So it's pretty cool.

Reginald: (jumps in)...and it's like the stuff that should be in our textbooks. Like Travis said, like uh Jim Crow and the Brown vs. Board law. They didn't tell us that. Like, little things.

Teacher: Those are actually big things. Jim Crow and the Brown vs. Board law.

Reginald: That's why!

Travis: That's why...our teacher is not really good. I feel personally it's not a good thing because if it was, then they'd actually tell us about it and get us to do more research on it. They'll mention it like one or two times for a project or an essay worksheet but if we did a couple assignments on it — If we did a paper on it or looked it up on the computer...you'll go do something about it.

Teacher: Cornelius you had your hand raised, go ahead.

Cornelius: Well, when I was in this class, it made me look at everybody different. Like I don't discriminate anymore. I look at everybody the same. I don't discriminate based on anybody's race or nothing. Like for example, you know how everybody in the NBA is Black and they fight. So when we would go play an all White team, I would look at them like oh these niggas weak. But I don't do that anymore. Everybody's good and everybody's great.

Travis: it's like Remember the Titans.

Teacher: Is that just from being in here? Or in general?

Travis: Just from being in here. Now I'm like everybody's fight. Well I've been like that but now, it's like even more. It's like everybody's the same, we're just different colors.

Teacher: Did y'all feel like you were less than people before?

Travis: Yeah, I did.

Teacher: How so?

Travis: Like, like uh, like our teachers like some of us to get bad grades even when we do all the work. Then, like stuff like that. Little stuff.

Robert: It's the effort the teachers put in, basically. Like there's teachers like a White teacher like Ms. Morgan that puts effort into the students. Like she's the reason we got a string to the choir and new drums. It's like the effort that a teacher puts in. You can tell a teacher that doesn't care, a teacher that's really trying to help. We can tell, the people that care, the students and the teacher in the classroom. We can tell that you and Mr. Hardy care.

Students' exposure to critical social theories and heritage based education, such as the field trip to Casa Del Rey Moro, allowed them to name the schooling experiences that served to marginalize and prevent them from realizing their potential. Critical literacy is a central component to understand one's position in the world as one who becomes critically literate, also becomes empowered to analyze the circumstances that prevent marginalized individuals from having power and owning one's identity. Even further, students recognized through their experiences in the BMYA helped them redefine the image they held of themselves as they come to learn new ideas and as those ideas come to challenge what they know about themselves. Because the BMYA is a learning community that utilizes critical literacy, students are enabled to demonstrate and create knowledge to analyze themselves and their society in order to foster empowerment in the face of injustice.

As we can see in the student's experiences, critical literacy provides a foundation that enables academic and sociopolitical development. By itself, it opens the doors to seeing the world from multiple perspectives and allows the participant to name his experience. We can see through the students' reflections about their participation in the BMYA that there was an impact on their attitudes, identity and learning practices leading to a shift in their academic and sociopolitical development. As Jamal noted, interacting with texts and images in the classroom that he had never been exposed to, opened his mind and helped him see himself differently. As Brandon came to interact with multiple texts and images, his identity also shifted as he saw new

possibilities emerge for himself when he learned that African American history doesn't have to be excluded. Brandon and Travis gained power as they came to interact with texts and experiences that helped them reposition their experiences as Black males in school and within society. This is fundamental outcome of using critical literacy to advance academic and sociopolitical development.

CHAPTER SEVEN:

“I’ve just...now I’m just hungry for more. At first I wasn’t feeling it but now that I got comfortable and I was able to speak my mind... like I wanna just do more. It just makes me wanna do more” – Charles, 11th grade student

Introduction

Through this study, the story I sought to tell is by no means complete, but I feel positive about the first steps taken to synthesize this data into a coherent project. This study reflects a combination of a rigorous design framework and an action-based participatory observer research process. Over the course of this study, I have gained a deeper understanding about the nuances of action research. For nearly six years, I searched for a way to utilize quantitative and qualitative data I have gathered in and outside of the classroom to tell a powerful story about the lives of the young people with whom I worked. I believe that the use critical literacy can be a powerful activity and a vehicle that leads to transformative change. This analysis bears witness to the difficulties of engaging in such a research process and will hopefully spur dialogue to help advance critical research in education as scholars seek to develop a clear and concise literacy research models. To this end, I’ve worked diligently to answer my research, assess what it means to be a critical methodologist and in this chapter, I hope to shed light on the journey I took to complete this study as well as the implications for the field.

Summary of Findings

The main purpose of this study was to explore the use of critical literacy through an action research program called the Black Male Youth Academy (BMYA). I sought to answer the following research question:

In the context of the Black Male Youth Academy (BMYA), how can critical literacy be used to advance the academic and sociopolitical development of African American male youth?

The total number of participants over the course of the 6-year study were 174 African American male youth. Using action research as a framework to collect data through the use of multiple quantitative and qualitative methods, I utilized a discourse and activity analysis to understand the data. I first began by evaluating whether or not students acquired critical literacy. I found that not only did students acquire critical literacy but, that the acquisition of critical literacy occurs over time and can be on a spectrum of expression. Students are capable of accessing complicated theoretical concepts that help them challenge oppression. I also learned that critical literacy can be expressed and identified in multiple ways through thoughts, speech, writings and actions as students grapple with critical concepts.

Critical literacy, once acquired, transfers into multiple spaces such as the classroom, home or amongst peers and its expression is only limited by the individual's willingness to engage in critical reflective thought. Students can also express fully developed critical concepts and because they are on a spectrum, also express resistance and a-critical behavior. As a result, gaining critical literacy leads to sociopolitical development and occurs over time as students' experiences and reflective practices cause them to evaluate notions of self. This seems to be an additional benefit of utilizing a curriculum focused on teaching critical literacy.

As we observed, when students acquired critical literacy, they did not always master the language necessary to describe what they knew. In the BMYA, students were taught to

understand the foundation of their perceptions and their experiences by utilizing critical theory to name phenomenon. In some cases, their knowledge was expressed implicitly and in other cases, it was explicit. Although students occasionally lacked the language necessary to describe complicated concepts, they still found ways to express how they viewed themselves in light of the new information. This activity indicated that students were consistently thinking deeply on a wide range of ideas and the process of thinking deeply, helped them develop a humanizing and empowering consciousness.

I also sought to understand the methodological impact of this study on sociocultural literacy research. As a unit of analysis, critical literacy can be measured and can serve an important indicator of the change in a student's academic and sociopolitical development. We can determine the acquisition of critical literacy by identifying it as an expression and not solely as a theoretical construct. As students develop their critical literacy skills, the expressions they exhibit and act of becoming intellectuals helped them address real and pressing issues they faced within their community. As I have shown through this study, critical literacy can be measured and defined when one understands the context of a situation and draws connections between alternative epistemologies.

Furthermore, it was students' exposure to critical social theories and heritage based education that helped facilitate critical literacy acquisition and allowed them to name the experiences that served to marginalize and prevent them from realizing their humanity. Field trips also provided opportunities for students to engage in activities that helped them evaluate concepts and ideas they wrestled with or were introduced to in the BMYA. While critical literacy established the foundation for analysis, the use of YPAR engaged students in academic activities such as interviewing, transcribing, writing and teaching, among others. Through youth

participatory action research (YPAR), students employed critical literacy in the use critical research methodologies to tell their stories and position themselves as experts in their own educational experiences (Cammarota & Fine 2008; Morrell, 2006).

Throughout the course of the study, the BMYA served as a single sex, single gender space that facilitated critical dialogue and encouraged students to question their identities, push back against hegemony and evaluate the ways in which hegemony influenced their actions. The students' course evaluations demonstrated the importance of the BMYA as a dedicated space and detailed the role critical literacy played to help them understand the conditions they experienced on a daily basis in their schools and communities. I do believe students experienced change in participation over time as they developed a more critical outlook on life. This is a demonstration of sociopolitical development. However, changes in participation were not always immediate and occurred as students mastered critical literacy and participated in a community of practice that reinforced their skills. It was difficult to measure their academic development because of the idiosyncratic nature of the school's data systems and the ways in which we measure academic success. These challenges do not preclude the reality that students experienced academic growth, demonstrated academic competencies and completed the program more prepared for college.

In summary, critical literacy was a tool in the lives of African American males as they learned how to navigate social institutions and attempted to reframe the purpose society has in mind for them. In this study, critical literacy was linked to cultural identity and informed the learning environment, supported situated learning and engaged students in basic literacy development. Through the act of reflection, critical literacy can be utilized as a legitimate form of engagement to develop learning models and hybrid spaces. Reflection can occur through

writing and speech, which strengthens learning and supports academic practices meant to engage African American male youth in the development of strong academic and civic identities. As we saw through the students' experiences, critical literacy provided a foundation that enabled academic and sociopolitical development. As a tool, it helped extend students' understanding beyond simple critiques of power relations and assisted in their development as critical youth researchers. Critical literacy led to sociopolitical action where students were able to use what they learned in their research and take humanizing steps to create change in their environment. For these reasons, critical literacy has the potential to expand academic and civic identity development while facilitating social change and youth empowerment.

On Becoming a Critical Methodologist

Researching critical literacy as a unit of analysis required a concrete of understanding of critical theory. By concrete, I mean that one must understand how it applies to every day life experiences. Somewhere in the middle of the relationship between assessing critical literacy as a unit of analysis and understanding the impact of daily experiences, I had to identify and isolate the multiple intervening variables that impacted program outcomes. Teasing out the role of poverty, stemming from the political economy, was a problematic task and a significant variable that was challenging to account for within the study. Poverty has an impact on academic and sociopolitical development as well as the quantitative outcomes discussed in this study. Yet, I am unable to effectively account for the impact of poverty of academic and sociopolitical development. If a student did not eat the night before or the morning of class, he may find it hard to concentrate on what is being discussed; if a student is evicted, he may have a high absenteeism rate, thus decreasing his chances of successfully completing his course work.

Using a mixed methods action research study as this, I came to realize that another goal of this study was to figure out how to more effectively develop an appropriate type of literacy in African American male youth. Given the pervasive challenges associated with academic development in this population and the context in which they learn, the methodologies employed in this study may offer a recipe for evaluating literacy research. There are numerous variables that a controlled study might address in a setting unlike an urban school but I have to come to understand that learning does not always occur within a controlled setting. Academic and sociopolitical development is deeply contextual and is based on multiple variables that cannot always be teased out or even identified. In this study, I worked to define critical literacy and then use it as the measure of analysis of the phenomenon that occurred.

Identifying expressions of critical literacy served as the foundation of my search for academic and sociopolitical development. Student artifacts and observations provided the evidence needed to evaluate, through their own words, what they were thinking and how their thoughts connected to their experiences. The quantitative measures (i.e., GPA, test scores, attendance data, etc.) provided little evidence to determine if students were acquiring levels of critical literacy. Furthermore, grades and test scores did not effectively demonstrate whether students were developing academically as a result of their acquisition of critical literacy. These traditional indicators of “academic success” are insufficient indicators because they do not carry any real explanation of what achievement looks like. For example, a BMYA student might have a 1.7 grade point average and yet was fully capable of assembling a PowerPoint presentation and presenting data he processed after developing, distributing and collecting surveys from his peers.

The student’s successful work product is evidence of his academic development but he may not receive credit for his efforts in other academic courses within his school. Not receiving

credit for something he is capable of doing does not mean there is an “academic achievement gap” for African American male youth. Instead, it means that the system fails to capture evidence of student success and fails to reflect that evidence in the indicators we utilize to describe success. In this particular study, I argue that the use of multiple methods in place of quantitative measures traditionally used to describe success such as GPA and test scores, allows for a richer, deeper understanding of phenomena that occurred (Calfee and Sperling, 2010).

Alternatively, qualitative descriptions showed the possibility that critical literacy was a determining factor in BMYA students’ academic and sociopolitical development because their grades and test scores did not always reflect the type of growth one might expect from high quality teachers and a strong core academic program. I did not attempt to reduce the way I interpreted the data and instead aimed to situate my understanding of these young men as they would see themselves. Through their demonstration of multiple forms of expression or when a student utilized a particular lens, the relationship between what students did, said and wrote can help us understand how to best meets their needs in order to develop literacy. I would not have learned what I have come to know about critical literacy without having spent the time to understand them, their environment and their voice. In this regard, understanding critical literacy was just as much about understanding their voice and how they came to make sense of ideas.

Reflecting on my role as participant observer

I recognize that as both a course facilitator and a researcher, I evaluated research through two different, sometimes conflicting, lenses. I’ve had to pay close attention to the roles I played within the class setting and within the study. Erickson (1996) notes that “[t]his means paying close attention not only to one’s point of view as an observer, but to one’s relations with others

(who one is studying and working with) and to one's relations with oneself" (p.198). For example, I find that my initial approach to a type of data, such as a student essay, is to correct for spelling, grammar and overall writing skills in order to provide feedback for each assignment. However, when I put my researcher hat on, my objective is to discover where students had given deep thought to concepts and utilized their critical literacy skills in their writing. This distinction is important because the way I view their writing changed dramatically depending upon the particular hat I wore. When wearing my hat as a course instructor, I utilized a grading schematic; and as a researcher I found I would miss much of the content and much of the students' effort using those traditional measures.

Acting as a course instructor, it would be easy to take for granted the fact that students have a voice. But, when I reviewed student work wearing the hat of a participant-observer or researcher, I found myself amazed by the depth of thought and multiple skills students exhibit in their analyses. By taking the time to get to know the young men within and outside of the settings, I could more clearly understand the context of their expressions and avoid interpreting their statements in isolation. Their voice and use of critical literacy become the central form of expression I look for, instead of their ability to follow writing standards. When I choose not to use grammar and spelling rules and instead focus on the content in students' artifacts, my perspective of their writing may shift. For example, I may feel more connected to the content, grow more interested and contemplate multiple ways to build upon and develop their skills. As a result, I relied heavily upon reflexivity to evaluate data and to work against the inherent bias I carried with me throughout the study.

Working with Mr. Williams and Mr. Hardy was invaluable because of their breadth of experience and working knowledge teaching Black male youth. Both men provided the

leadership, discipline and framework for operationalizing course content. They both carried formal teacher training and had a set of pedagogical strategies that allowed us to successfully progress through the course curriculum. Often, our roles were interchangeable as I would defer to them on classroom management and subject matter expertise and they would do the same with me. Sometimes, it was difficult to tell where our roles began and/or ended because we were deeply enmeshed in planning lessons and evaluating our progress throughout the course. Mr. Williams and I constantly explored how to best scaffold teaching critical theories and content to students in a relevant way; in one such conversation, we worked together to plan a lesson on teaching students how to define the concept of justice:

Mr. Williams: A lot of them, if you pin them up in a corner and ask them what justice is, they don't know. They don't have the idea of where justice comes from, what it looks like. What it really looks like, their concept of it is skewed. It's a reoccurring theme. Well, I mean, they know that—I mean they have their opinions, they have their own viewpoints. They know that if their brother got locked up for doing whatever then they know yeah, he did something wrong, he's going to jail. So I think they have that concept of it, but to understand it in its righteous sense is an issue.

Mr. Scorza: ...and that's why we started that today, I think. That's the first time we've ever done that. We've always started with, well, this is what oppression looks like because we know they see that. But I think the question is, what should it—what should justice look like, right? Instead of defining everything against oppression, maybe we should define everything against justice. Get them thinking about what should society really be like. And if they have ownership of that concept, maybe their behavior will begin to change. If we build them and develop them socio-politically — if we get them to start seeing these things more and more, they'll begin to act on it. And our goal is to give them the skills — to build the skills and the tools — to actually enact justice. And that's one of the reasons why I don't think we're gonna see any immediate change in behavior until they actually get skills. That's a big thing. They need skills.

Mr. Williams: I was gonna say a debate. You know, pick a side, you choose a side and switch. But giving them the idea of talking through a lot of these discussions. Like I love it when Brent can stay focused. When he can stay focused and tuned in and hone his point of view with James and allow them that dialogue that you know to go back and forth and exchange with a moderator to say ok — follow

that thought — let's follow that and carry that all the way out. I think as a group, people learn. Put them in different scenarios. Put them in groups. Like have on strips of paper whatever the topic is and have each group present that. Something like that once a week.

Mr. Scorza: We can do that next week.

Frequently, we would have these discussions after class and would explore course topics to develop activities that helped students advance throughout the program. We would wrestle with theories and work closely to develop lessons to facilitate students' academic and sociopolitical development. Both Mr. Williams and I had a commitment to working with each other and the students in a collaborative way. He would provide feedback and direction on the study and I would even stay for some of his other history classes and share lessons with his Advanced Placement students. Over the years, we developed a friendship and learned how to navigate the classroom space with one another. While I did not explicitly focus on the pedagogical practices we utilized to facilitate academic and sociopolitical develop, I intend to explore this rich area of study in subsequent efforts in order to demonstrate successful pedagogical strategies in and outside of the classroom educating Black male youth.

Toward a grounded theory of academic and sociopolitical development

Critical literacy is more than just helping students learn how to think critically. Used effectively, it offers educators a tool set to help students connect to their lived experience, develop use of their voice and engage in efforts that allow them to navigate academic, social and political barriers. It further allows educators to situate various non-dominant narratives as legitimate forms of expression in a diverse set of cultural practices, languages and ideological

frameworks (Giroux, 1999). It values student's identity and expands how we look at literacy by emphasizing academic and sociopolitical development in the learning environment. The goal is to empower students to challenge their social conditions. Utilizing critical literacy also demands educators to be more effective in the classroom by providing a space where students can act as public intellectuals and demonstrate skills beyond academic and social contexts.

I argue that the academic outcomes and shifts in sociopolitical identities of the youth who participated in the BMYA lend support to an alternative narrative. Instead of programs like the BMYA being seen as extra or having value because they can improve test scores or help students get better grades, schools should be looking at these programs to understand how students learn, develop academic competencies and produce college level work. I further argue that it is because of the successful employment of critical literacy that students developed academic capabilities and that high stakes testing does not adequately assess learning, skills or competencies. The outcomes youth demonstrate in the BMYA go far beyond test-taking and basic academic literacy development as students share the ways in which theories and research influence the way they live and express transformative youth voice.

Implications for literacy research

Through critical action research, I've come to learn that academic scholarship can foster an intimate connection between theory and practice. This intimacy emerges because the scholarship is not disconnected from the experience just as the experience is not disconnected from our subjectivity. However, through discourse, activity analysis and reflection, I have had the unique opportunity to evaluate multiple phenomena and draw out theories that may be useful as we search for solutions to the crises facing African American male youth. In evaluating the

data, I continued to ask myself questions such as: What are the different types of texts, media or experiences that help us to come to know ourselves? What role does heritage based education play in shaping our identity and how does that contribute to our actions? How have students demonstrated ways of knowing that are counter to the ways we expect them to occur? These types of questions push me to think beyond the role schools play and helped me recognize that learning and literacy development takes place in nearly every space that our students participate; from being at home with parents, at church on Sundays, with friends after school or in band practice during summer camp).

As we seek to understand student's literacy practices across activity settings, we must push against our theoretical and methodological frameworks to evaluate the effectiveness of literacy practices for African American male youth. While this study attempts to demonstrate a sociocultural approach to advancing critical literacy as a practice in and out of school settings, it does not entirely account for the pedagogical efforts employed to achieve that goal. As a result, I believe there is a need to understand how the multiple spaces students participate in create ways of knowing that students exhibit. Further, these ways of knowing may very well be counter to the ways that we, as educators, think students' should see themselves. Therefore, it is important to rethink the role that students must play in helping us reshape knowledge.

During this study, I worked to remind myself about the ways students may want to come to know themselves and to understand how literacy research can best represent the process students undergo to see themselves as learners. As some scholars point out, sociocultural influences on literacy practices are mediated by the cultural experience of learner's daily lives (Moje & Lewis, 2007, Freire, 1970). I would add that it is important to understand how a student's self-interest influences literacy practices. As Orellana (2007) suggests,

...individuals are inseparable from their contexts, that contexts and people are mutually constituted, and that when people move between discourse communities they bring their contexts with them, fundamentally altering the nature of the new spaces in which they move (p. 126).

Said another way, we tell ourselves a story about the world and the way it works and in doing so, carry that story with us into multiple spaces, places and times fundamentally responding to our own backstory about others and the context we operate within. The stories learners tell themselves about how they learn, what they're capable of learning, what others think they're not capable of learning, ultimately influence our literacy practices. Therefore, as critical researchers, we have a unique opportunity to help learners understand how our stories are influenced and mediated by contexts in order to help learners facilitate empowerment, overcome oppression, utilize their agency and build power.

There are a number of occasions where I've experienced resistance to learn from from our students — students would often say "I can't write", or "I'm not good at math". In working to understand where that resistance stems from, program facilitators were able to help mediate that resistance when students are unable to see beyond the story they tell themselves. For example, a foster student who transitions between homes and feels abandoned by his parents may come to see himself as not being worthy of love or not being worthy of care. As critical researchers, it is important to understand how this view of self impacts learning practices in youth and understand how the student's way of knowing translates into a way of being in and out of the classroom setting. When a teacher then encounters this student, that teacher has to work to understand the ways of knowing that influence the student's literacy practices. It is with this in mind, I argue literacy researchers have an important contribution to make. How can educators help our students come to see and know themselves differently and what type of training,

programs, resources, experiences, media, texts, oral traditions, heritage-based education or activities need to occur in order to facilitate effective literacy practices?

As we consider our roles as critical researchers, it is important that we “break down the barriers that often get erected between spaces such as home and school, stop focusing on easily dichotomized, bounded spaces, and consider instead the bodies, personas, of our participants as potential sites for research” (Orellana, 2007, p. 134). These barriers inhibit our ability to truly understand the ways in which students learn and recommend pedagogical practices that are useful to the populations we’re hoping to serve. As this study suggests for the African American male youth who participated in the BMYA, the use of critical literacy helped students come to know themselves in ways they had not yet fully explored. Critical literacy, as a tool for empowered identity development, must incorporate teaching and learning practices for the purposes of developing academic achievement in African American male youth. Coupled with heritage-based education and youth participatory action research (YPAR), it helped challenge the story they once told themselves and work to create a new story for their future. The implications for critical researchers lies in evaluating what it takes to facilitate this process within schooling environments when the story African American students are told is not always in line with their self-interest.

Implications for curriculum and pedagogy

In this study, I came to see the role of teachers more clearly. It is the teacher’s responsibility to understand how a student’s self interests connect to the learning environment. Critical literacy is a powerful tool that helps students and teachers evaluate the curriculum, content and pedagogical process utilized to educate students. In the context of our current neoliberal educational

environment, teachers and students need tools to push back against high-stakes testing and banking education. I would argue that teachers are responsible for helping students understand their ontological position as it relates to the world and drawing out the direction in which students see themselves headed. For example, if a student wants to be a mathematician, I would argue that the role of the teacher is to understand *what* the student needs to know about himself to become a mathematician. Additionally, the teacher is would be responsible for utilizing the tools at his or her disposal (i.e., texts, media, artifacts, experiences, oral tradition & language) to help the student discover *how* to become a mathematician. These tools are mediated through the teacher's own biases; to mitigate the influence of that bias, teachers must work to build a culturally responsive learning environment (Gay, 2000; Ladson-Billings, 1992; Baugh, 1994; Lipman, 1995).

The epistemological framework that students utilize helps determine his ontology. The way in which he comes to know himself or the composition of his being, his identity, drives the process of becoming literate. In this regard, literacy is the process of coming to know himself. Using the previous example, it is the process of becoming a mathematician. The role of the teacher is to help facilitate that process by utilizing media, text, experience, artifacts, oral tradition, experience and language to draw out the student's way of knowing, seeing and participating in his world. Each of the tools has an impact on how students learn and come to know themselves. To draw this out, teachers can ask their students, "what do you want to know about yourself?", "who or what do you want be?" or "who do you want to know yourself as?" Once these become known, the responsibility of the teacher is to provide students with the tools needed to transform their self-image.

I reason that if we rethink the role of teacher in this context of literacy development, we can challenge existing neoliberal pedagogical practices that force students to work in the best interest of others (corporations, government, parents, etc.). If we shift our practice, we might not program our students for an English class because they need it to attend college, but do so because students want to *be* powerful writers and need to learn how to read and write texts. Or maybe a student has expressed interest in being a scientist so the teacher schedules a field trip to a science museum because it provides an experience that helps the student get closer to seeing himself as a scientist. Further, I believe this can help us offer a more personalized program based on student's self-interest and provide the type of pedagogical experience that is engaging and relevant to students. It may help us avoid tracking because students educational program will be personalized and based on the current "one size fits all" approach.

Through the BMYA, the use of critical literacy helped motivate African American male youth to succeed academically as the relationship between culture and schooling was deconstructed and reconstructed, building upon their cultural heritage (Ladson-Billings, 1997). Barry Osborne (1996) argues that teachers must start with the funds of knowledge that students bring into the learning environment. I argue that they must be aware of their own subjectivity if they are to counter efforts to be silenced or excluded from effective learning environments. It is my goal to honor the tension that exists in the dialectic between theory and practice as we employ strategies grounded in critical theory. As a critical educator and researcher who seek social justice, I believe this study demonstrates the value critical literacy holds in challenge existing neoliberal conceptions of education. By honoring and consistently privileging the power of urban youth who act as agents of social change, critical literacy provides new hope — in and out of the classroom.

This study has taught me that the use of critical literacy can help students come to know themselves in multiple ways and in multiple spaces. During the course of African American male youth's participation in school, they develop an identity that can often be counterproductive to the academic and sociopolitical development. This identity is based on dominant concepts and notions of Blackness held by these young men and society at large. During their participation in the BMYA, they come to see themselves and to know themselves in different ways. Through their participation in the BMYA, they come to know themselves differently in different spaces with their and they're always having to negotiate their identity in different places as they come to develop academically and socio-politically and as they come to know themselves differently.

Implications for urban school reform and policy

This study demonstrates that critical literacy can be used to develop skills that are highly valuable in post-secondary environments and I attest that they help bridge the intellectual divide between what we consider authentic learning and the pressure schools face to produce successful outcomes. The need to create an authentic learning environment for Black male youth is ever present and new practices are required if we are to respond to the challenges African American male youth face in American society. As I've consistently argued, schools are critical institutions in the fight for social justice within education. As such, we need new models for schooling and policies that drive systemic change locally and nationally.

As a race and gender specific space, the Black Male Youth Academy served the different needs of African American male youth in a holistic way. Because the program was integrated within the school setting and was one class among many, we did not face any significant issues or concerns that could not be addressed through dialogue and engagement. Although the course

was a single-sex space, the class remained open to any student who wanted to participate including African American female and Latina/Latino youth. There was minimal and occasional participation by these populations in the class and each student enrolled in the course welcomed others into the space. While this is important to note, the dedicated space created for African American male youth provided the safety and opportunity for the young men to address and challenges facing them in a “judgment free” and supportive environment. The outcomes demonstrated through this study suggests that race and gender specific spaces, when properly integrated into the school setting, might offer real benefits in the learning environment and provide opportunities to address issues facing different student populations.

Because schools offer a unique opportunity to address issues facing our society, this study suggests that in-school based programs might provide results beyond traditional after and out of school programs. If programs like the BMYA become fully integrated in schools across the country, the potential exists for African American males to help reshape their own educational experiences and may provide long-term societal benefits such as a reduction in the school-to-prison pipeline and an increase in high school graduation and college attendance. Additionally, the use of heritage-based education in the class helped create a culturally relevant learning environment promoting positive identity development and self-efficacy. As students developed critical literacy and learned more about their history or connections to their past, they were better positioned to shape and reshape their story altering their participation. This suggests that schools can help improve opportunities for African American males by incorporating the use of heritage-based education in multiple class spaces.

Finally, the use of youth participatory action research afforded students the opportunity to engage in college level coursework and challenge the low expectations some educators held in

Vernon High School. Students demonstrated the academic competencies by producing research plans, PowerPoint presentations, surveys and documentary films and provided a counter-narrative to the dominant perceptions held about African American male youth. As students enacted social change within their community through advocacy and projects based on their research, they were able to utilize their critical literacy skills and extend their impact beyond the classroom space. Their efforts helped move their voice from the periphery of conversations to the center as they attended research conferences, town hall and school board meetings to demand change and participate in the democratic process. This suggests that schools and districts should shift away from a heavy reliance on traditional academic indicators to measure academic achievement and instead identify indicators that go beyond grades and test scores to capture the academic competencies that cannot be tested.

Working to Achieve Equity

As critical researcher, I often found myself in a deep intellectual and emotional struggle as I witnessed and experienced what I perceived as unjust educational practices in the schooling environment. While I applaud the many educators that I worked with at Vernon High School who worked diligently to do what was in the best interest of their students, I also recognize the systems that prevented successful pedagogical practices from occurring. During the course of this study, I witnessed the impact of budget cuts, furloughs, poor administrative leadership, political gamesmanship, educational code restrictions and union contract fights derail the opportunities of which students could have taken advantage had only more adults put their student's interests first. The challenge of conducting research in the midst of an educational environment that, at times, seemed to work against our goals in the BMYA was frustrating and

revealing. As a researcher, I witnessed the many times a teacher spoke negatively to a student or a principal was shifted to another school because of a school board member's personal vendetta. These experiences have informed my respect and appreciation of the role scholarship must have to shape the dialogue around school reform and Black male achievement.

I've had the opportunity to observe a shift in behavior in my students over several years and have come to expect change in participation to occur over time given the conditions within which they learn. I've observed students change their relationship to themselves and the world as they worked to develop critical perspectives expressed through their speech, their writing and their actions. These expressions of critical literacy drive the degree to which we are able to measure change in participation over time and, in doing so, become increasingly able to challenge the status quo in educational institutions. Over the course of the study, the students consistently demonstrated that their definitions of self, as they came to know themselves, changed. This change in how students defined themselves was captured and measured through their words and deeds that focused on a central problem students needed to address.

In summary, critical literacy leads to academic and sociopolitical development, and through YPAR, youth are able to develop critical consciousness and build power in marginalized communities. By offering examples of a program model such as the Black Male Youth Academy, I hope this study will generate dialogue about the nexus between critical theory, critical consciousness, the role of research in high-need communities and practice. Critical literacy helps facilitate the development of critical identities and through youth participatory action research, students engage in action that moves their experiences from the periphery to the center and shifts the focus to communities and schools, not just individual participants. The development of critical consciousness lays the groundwork for academic engagement and

sociopolitical action. Because learning is often embedded within a set of pedagogical practices and specific conditions, critical perspectives do not always equate to automatic changes in participation. Yet, hopefully, this study has demonstrated that when the development of critical literacy occurs, students are challenged to think about the way they see themselves, their position in the world and the power they hold to enact social change.

Appendix A — DESCRIPTIVE STATISTICS

SPRING WEIGHTED GPA FOR EACH SCHOOL YEAR

Means and Standard Deviations of Spring Weighted GPA for Each School Year

Table 1

School Year	N	Weighted Spring GPA M (SD)
2006-2007	8 (of 9)	1.97 (.48)
2007-2008	28 (of 31)	2.07 (.67)
2008-2009	23 (of 34)	1.75 (.72)
2009-2010	18 (of 21)	2.11 (.60)
2010-2011	27 (of 34)	2.28 (.57)
2011-2012	19 (of 34)	1.89 (.76)

Table 2

Descriptive Statistics

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
Cumulative weighted GPA S10	18	1.14	3.57	2.1117	.60487
Valid N (listwise)	18				

Table 3

Descriptive Statistics

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
Cumulative weighted GPA S11	27	1.30	3.50	2.2796	.57159
Valid N (listwise)	27				

Table 4

Descriptive Statistics

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation

Cumulative weighted GPA S12	25	.67	3.75	1.8932	.75524
Valid N (listwise)	25				

ATTENDANCE DATA FOR EACH SCHOOL YEAR

Days Present, Days Absent, and Days Absent—Unexcused as a Proportion of Total Days Enrolled by Program Year

Table 5

Descriptive Statistics					
	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
Total Days Enrolled School Year 2010-2011	33	48.00	178.00	168.0909	30.90344
Total Days Present School Year 2010-2011	33	32.00	175.00	142.3030	34.90835
Total Days Absent School Year 2010-2011	33	3.00	100.00	26.9091	19.89090
Total Unexcused Absences School Year 2010-2011	33	.00	73.00	21.4242	16.40699
Valid N (listwise)	33				

NOTE: The proportion of days present and the proportion of days absent for a given school year (highlighted above) should sum to 1.0. When the highlighted values do not sum to 1.0, this suggests that there are errors in the school records or that there were data entry errors.

Table 6**Descriptive Statistics**

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
Total Days Enrolled School Year 2011-2012	19	67.00	175.00	146.1053	44.93315
Total Days Present School Year 2011-2012	19	53.00	167.00	122.6316	39.49572
Total Days Absent School Year 2011-2012	19	2.00	61.00	20.7895	13.82260
Total Unexcused Absences School Year 2011-2012	19	.00	14.00	4.0526	4.04796
Valid N (listwise)	19				

PROGRAM PARTICIPANTS ENROLLED IN COLLEGE PREPRATORY COURSES

Percent of Program Participants Enrolled in College Preparatory Courses by School Year

Table 7

	2010-2011		2011-2012	
	Fall	Spring	Fall	Spring
% of data available	91%	79%	75%	78%
No. of Coll. Prep. Courses				
0	3.2%	0.0%	12.5%	4.0%
1	32.3%	29.6%	29.2%	28.0%
2	35.5%	40.7%	33.3%	40.0%
3	19.4%	18.5%	20.8%	28.0%
4	6.5%	7.4%	4.2%	0.0%
5	3.2%	3.7%	0.0%	0.0%

Note. The percent of data available row shows the percentage of program participants within a given school year for whom information about enrollment in college preparatory courses was available.

Table 8

Percent of Program Participants Enrolled in College Preparatory Courses by Program Year

	Year 1		Year 2		Year 3	
	Fall	Spring	Fall	Spring	Fall	Spring
% of data available	94%	83%	81%	75%	94%	88%
No. of Coll. Prep. Courses						
0	11.1%	12.5%	23.1%	11.1%	6.3%	6.7%
1	40.0%	37.5%	15.4%	22.2%	25.0%	46.7%
2	31.1%	32.5%	30.8%	38.9%	43.8%	46.7%
3	12.2%	11.3%	25.6%	25.0%	25.0%	0.0%
4	4.4%	5.0%	2.6%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%
5	1.1%	1.3%	2.6%	2.8%	0.0%	0.0%

Note. The percent of data available row shows the percentage of program participants within a given program year for whom information about enrollment in college preparatory courses was available.

PROGRAM PARTICIPANTS CALIFORNIA STANDARDIZED TEST (CST) SCORES

Table 9

Program Participants’ CST Proficiency Levels by School Year

	ELA % Available	English/ Lang. Arts	Math % Available	Math	Science % Available	Science	Soc. Sci. % Available	Social Science
Spring 2011	94% (N = 32)	A = 0.0% P = 12.5% B = 53.1% BB = 18.8% FBB = 15.6%	94% (N = 32)	A = 0.0% P = 3.1% B = 25.0% BB = 46.9% FBB = 25.0%	91% (N = 31)	A = 0.0% P = 29.0% B = 25.8% BB = 25.8% FBB = 19.4%	68% (N = 23)	A = 0.0% P = 13.0% B = 26.1% BB = 39.1% FBB = 21.7%

Note. A = Advanced; P = Proficient; B = Basic; BB = Below Basic; FBB = Far Below Basic. The “percent available” column indicates the percentage of program participants for whom test scores were available. For example, of 31 program participants during spring of 2008, English/Language Arts CST data were available for 58% (N = 18), Math CST data were available for 55% (N = 17), Science CST data were available for 45% (N = 16), and Social Science CST data were available for 45% (N = 14).

Table 10

Program Participants’ CST Proficiency Levels by Program Year

	ELA % Available	English/ Lang. Arts	Math % Available	Math	Science % Available	Science	Soc. Sci. % Available	Social Science
Year 1	55% (N = 53)	A = 0.0% P = 18.9% B = 41.5% BB = 18.9% FBB = 20.8%	54% (N = 52)	A = 0.0% P = 3.8% B = 15.4% BB = 55.8% FBB = 25.0%	51% (N = 49)	A = 2.0% P = 18.4% B = 30.6% BB = 26.5% FBB = 22.4%	23% (N = 22)	A = 0.0% P = 9.1% B = 18.2% BB = 31.8% FBB = 40.9%
Year 2	33% (N = 16)	A = 0.0% P = 6.3% B = 50.0% BB = 25.0% FBB = 18.8%	33% (N = 16)	A = 0.0% P = 0.0% B = 25.0% BB = 43.8% FBB = 31.3%	33% (N = 16)	A = 0.0% P = 18.8% B = 50.0% BB = 12.5% FBB = 18.8%	31% (N = 15)	A = 0.0% P = 13.3% B = 40.0% BB = 26.7% FBB = 20.0%
Year 3	35% (N = 6)	A = 0.0% P = 0.0% B = 50.0% BB = 16.7% FBB = 33.3%	35% (N = 6)	A = 0.0% P = 0.0% B = 50.0% BB = 16.7% FBB = 33.3%	35% (N = 6)	A = 0.0% P = 0.0% B = 33.3% BB = 16.7% FBB = 50.0%	29% (N = 5)	A = 0.0% P = 0.0% B = 0.0% BB = 20.0% FBB = 80.0%

Note. P = Proficient; B = Basic; BB = Below Basic; FBB = Far Below Basic. The “percent available” column indicates the percentage of program participants for whom test scores were available. Of the 96 participants who participated in the program for one year (i.e., Year 1), English/Language Arts CST data were available for 55% (N = 53), Math CST data were available for 54% (N = 52), Science CST data were available for 51% (N = 49), and Social Science CST data were available for 23% (N = 22). Of the 48 participants who returned for Year 2, English/Language Arts CST data were available for 33% (N = 16), Math CST data were available for 33% (N = 16), Science CST data were available for 33% (N = 16), and Social Science CST data were available for 31% (N = 15). Of the 17 participants who returned for Year 3, English/Language Arts CST data were available for 35% (N = 6), Math CST data were available for 35% (N = 6), Science CST data were available for 35% (N = 6), and Social Science CST data were available for 29% (N = 5).

Appendix B — Black Male Youth Academy (BMYA) Syllabus for the 2010-2011 Academic Year

THE BLACK MALE YOUTH ACADEMY (BMYA)
2010-2011 Academic Year at Vernon High School: South Los Angeles, CA
Mr. Williams/Mr. Scorza Advisory: Room D-4 Monday – Thursday

Course Overview

As many of us are well aware, African-American male youth face high imprisonment, recidivism and death rates. Schools contribute to this negative cycle of social reproduction through consistent *deculturalization*, reduced financial resources and the lack of a culturally relevant teaching/learning style. In order to reverse this cycle, African-American male youth must be immersed in a schooling experience that is humanizing, values their cultural heritage and creates strong opportunities for academic achievement.

Using action research, The Black Male Youth Academy (BMYA) offers a culturally relevant *pedagogy* that provides *humanizing* education and encouragement for academic success for which we advocate. We believe these elements provide the opportunity for each of you to go to the college or university of your choice. Since you are in high school, we believe opportunities for academic development promotes your ability to be a self-starter where your leadership can help inspire others to achieve as well. You will participate in activities that build community and add value to your environment through neighborhood clean up and school beautification projects. With a focus on access to higher education, this class will provide you with the tools you need to return to your neighborhoods and assist with the holistic development of your community as we all work to eradicate the negative cycles all around us. This is the ultimate goal of having you participate in the Black Male Youth Academy.

Together in this course we will build knowledge of self for personal and social transformation. At the end of this course you will be confident enough to demonstrate your knowledge of your ancestors, community, history, and the Diaspora. We will discuss topics such as our identity as Black people, issues of Manhood and Race, as well as our condition as Black people. Then we will research our history in the world generally and Vernon specifically. We will work to help you build the academic skills you need for success. Finally, we will strategize specific ways to transform society and ourselves in order to create a more just and human world.



Program Goals

- To help you set pathways for college.
- To help you become a community of leaders.
- To help you learn about your history.
- To help you develop a “critical conscious”.
- To help you become change agents of your community.



Learning Objectives/Outcomes

Knowledge of Self
 Knowledge of Ancestors
 Knowledge of Community
 Knowledge of History
 Knowledge of Diaspora
 Knowledge of Personal and Social
 Transformation

Academic Empowerment
 Higher GPA and Test Scores
 Increased Civic Engagement
 Sharpen Critical Thinking
 Set Pathways to College

In each unit, you will be presented with a list of readings to address. Through a combination of written reflections and group discussions, you will convey your thoughts in your journals and exhibit your knowledge through discussions, activities and projects. The readings will address a series of issues affecting African American male youth and will provide you with a foundation to develop critical literacy.

Class will consist of lecture and readings related to and addressing the questions presented in each unit. Questions will be broken down into key issues or components. Each component or issue will be addressed through one or any combination, of the following ways:

A lecture will provide a brief overview of the issue and will identify the two (or more) opposing lines of rhetoric commonly surrounding it. This will typically fall into a liberal/progressive vs. conservative/normative, but the utmost care and attention will be paid to present both sides of every issue in a fair and balanced manner, without providing bias or support for either “side” of the issue. These issues will be grounded in multiple historical narratives and theoretical analysis of these issues.

Various readings will be presented on the issue.

You will have opportunities to write and display your literacy through your thoughts and actions.

You are expected to participate in class discussions.

The class will analyze and discuss these issues at length and the history of each issue.

In-class debate will be held on the topic.

Course Materials

The following books are intended to help you further your understanding of the world.

Readings:

The Autobiography of Malcolm X
The Souls of Black Folk
The Pedagogy of the Oppressed
Various Reading Handouts



Course Activities

Attendance and participation in class each week is highly valued. The following descriptions outline some of the activities we plan to do in the academy.

Discussions

We will learn how to question, review and analyze images, media, writings and dialogue that is relevant to us. Sometimes we will provide these, but we also want you to bring items in as well.

Academic Preparation

The BMYA's pre-college academic preparation efforts focusing on helping you raise academic achievement levels while we work to close achievement gaps among you. Our efforts include:

Classes dedicated that offer tutoring, mentoring, college counseling and other test preparation;

Activities that help you plan for your future and advise you about potential courses of study; and

Tours to colleges, universities and institutions that directly meet your need and support your future career and life goals.

Journaling

These are short papers to engage your critical thinking skills, encourage analysis and develop your writing. Topics will vary based on an interesting reading or idea that we would like to explore.

Journals are designed to: 1) help you think about questions; 2) develop literacy; 3) focus your attention; 4) help evaluate your writing; and 5) promote confidence in your writing ability.

In your journal writing, we'd like you to briefly discuss the concepts covered in the reading or assignment. We expect you to do your best using correct grammar, sentence structure, punctuation and spelling. You should work to be critical in your and incorporate topics from the class.

Special Projects:

1): "Knowing your Ancestors" - This project will require you to ask your family some basic questions. It will also require you to learn how to conduct interviews, perform more research and apply what you learn to the course.

Part 1:

1A: Family tree

<http://www.afrigeneas.com/>

1B: Interview with the eldest member of their family

1C: Family tree (reaching farther back into history)

1D: Ancestor timeline (placing ancestors in historical context)

Part 2: 2A: Short essay explaining your understanding of your heritage and family history

Research Project:

Each year, we conduct research in our schools, communities and families to inform how we see the world. We will teach how to learn about your surroundings so you can share what you know with other people. Research participation and instructions will be discussed throughout the year and during the assigned time for the project.

Media Projects:

At random times during the year, each student will be selected to record (alone or in groups) a short radio broadcast addressing the current classroom issue/topic. The students will record, edit and master the recordings on their own using equipment and computer software provided to them by the program. Their recordings will be compiled in sets and submitted by the Black Male Youth Academy to radio station KPFK (and possibly others) for broadcast.

Course Readings:

In order to provide a deep analysis of the class readings, I am providing a set of questions that I would like each student to consider. I strongly suggest that you sketch out for each assignment some notes that indicate your answer to the following questions. The point, of

course, is to ground our discussions in a more critical and substantive analysis of the readings themselves. The outline below simply provides a method of inquiry that will facilitate a more critical reading of texts under analysis.

1. What are the basic assumptions that inform the reading?
 - a. What are the major organizing ideas?
 - b. What are the subordinate ideas?
2. What serious questions does the reading raise regarding the nature and purpose of schooling?
3. What serious omissions are left out of the article or reading? How do these distort or undermine the author's position?
4. What ideology or worldview governs the author's view?
5. In what ways does this article reinforce, extend, challenge, or oppose your own views on schooling? Be specific.



Being a Mentor

Each student will participate in the Academy's mentorship program. Younger students will be paired with older students. Older students will receive mentors from the Partner Pool of the Academy.



Questions for Readings

In order to provide a substantive analysis of the class readings, we are providing a set of questions that I would like each student to consider. We strongly suggest that you sketch out for each assignment some notes that indicate your answer to the following questions. The point, of course, is that we need to ground our discussions in a more critical and substantive analysis of the readings themselves. The outline below simply provides a method of inquiry that will facilitate a more critical reading of texts under analysis.

1. What are the basic assumptions that inform the reading?
 - a. What are the major organizing ideas?
 - b. What are the subordinate ideas?
2. What serious questions does the reading raise regarding the nature and purpose of schooling?
3. What serious omissions are left out of the article or reading? How do these distort or undermine the author's position?
4. What ideology or worldview governs the author's view?
5. In what ways does this article reinforce, extend, challenge, or oppose your own views on schooling? Be specific.



Grading

The course grade will be given on a 100-point system.

Attendance:	10%
Participation:	10%
Homework:	10%
Class Exercises:	20%
Quick Writes:	25%
Projects:	25%
Total:	100% Points



Academy Rules: Group Established Principles of Community

These are the standard principles that we will use as a community to support and advance our objectives. Additionally, feel free to add to this list throughout the year if you believe they will help us all.

Principles of Community

1. -
2. -
3. -
4. -
5. -
6. -
7. -
8. -
9. -
10. -

Glossary of Selected Freirian Terms

With the writings of Paulo Freire, a number of neologisms and old words with new meanings have been introduced into the discourse of educators. In particular, terms are derived from Marxist literature with new interpretations. The following lists some of the more common terms currently in use, together with their definitions.

Alienation: The term is derived from Marx and refers to the domination of people by owner elites, material constraints, political structures, and thought itself. Ultimately, alienation is the separation of humankind from its labor. It interferes with the production of authentic culture (see Culture). It is affected by any process which limits a person's power to know the world, and thus dehumanizes the world itself (see Humanization).

“Banking” Education: In the “banking” method of education passive learners receive deposits of pre-selected, ready-made knowledge. The learner's mind is seen as an empty vault into which the riches of approved knowledge are placed. This approach is also referred to as “digestive” and as “narrational” education.

Codification: A codification is a representation of the learner's day-to-day situations. It can be a photograph, a drawing, or even a word. As a representation, the photograph or word is an abstraction which permits dialogue leading to an analysis of the concrete reality represented. Codifications mediate between reality and its theoretical context, as well as between educators and learners who together seek to unveil the meanings of their existence.

Empowerment: Empowerment is a consequence of liberatory learning. Power is not given, but created within the emerging praxis (see Praxis) in which co-learners are engaged. The theoretical basis for this discovery is provided by critical consciousness; its expression is collective action on behalf of mutually agreed upon goals. Empowerment is distinct from building skills and competencies, these being commonly associated with conventional schooling. Education for empowerment further differs from schooling both in its emphasis on groups (rather than individuals) and in its focus on cultural transformation (rather than social adaptation).

Generative Themes/Words: Generative themes are codifications of complex experiences which are charged with political significance and are likely to generate considerable discussion and analysis. They are derived from a study of the specific history and circumstances of the learners. In a literacy program, generative themes can be codified into generative words — that is, tri-syllabic words that can be broken down into syllabic parts and used to “generate” other words. Generative words have been most useful in relation to languages which are phonetically based (e.g., Spanish, Portuguese).

Humanization: The central task in any movement toward liberation is to become more fully human through the creation of humanly-enhancing culture — in a word, “humanization.” This historical task is countered by the negative forces of dehumanization which, through oppressive manipulation and control, compromise human values for personal gain power. The task of the oppressed is to liberate themselves and, in the process, liberate their oppressors. Revolutions are humanized to the extent that the new regime confronts its tendency to replicate the oppression of

the old (see Transformation of the World). Humanism is not the same as humanization in so far as humanism is a philosophical approach that stresses understanding without addressing the social changes that need to occur before this can happen.

Libratory Education: Education which is libratory encourages learners to challenge and change the world, not merely uncritically adapt themselves to it. The content and purpose of libratory education is the collective responsibility of learners, teachers, and the community alike who, through dialogue, seek political, as well as economic and personal empowerment (see Empowerment). Programs of libratory education support and compliment larger social struggles for liberation.

Mystification: Mystification is the process by which the alienation and oppressive features of culture (see Culture) are disguised and hidden. False, superficial, and naive interpretations of culture prevent the emergence of critical consciousness (see Critical Consciousness). Educational systems are key instruments in the dissemination of mystifications, e.g., unemployment is “mystified” as personal failure rather than as a failure of the economy, thus making it difficult for the unemployed to critically understand their situation.

Participatory Research or Action Research: Participatory research or action research is an approach to social change — a process used by and for people who are exploited and oppressed. The approach challenges the way knowledge is produced with conventional social science methods and disseminated by dominant educational institutions. Through alternate methods, it puts the production of knowledge back into the hands of the people where it can infuse their struggles for social equality, and for the elimination of dependency and its symptoms: poverty, illiteracy, malnutrition, etc.

Praxis: Praxis is a complex activity by which individuals create culture and society, and become critically conscious human beings (see Culture and Critical Consciousness). Praxis comprises a cycle of action-reflection-action which is central to libratory education. Characteristics of praxis include self-determination (as opposed to homogeneity), and rationality (as opposed to chance).

Problematization: Problematization is the antithesis of “problem-solving.” In problem solving, an expert takes distance from reality and reduces it to dimensions which are amenable to treatment as though they were mere difficulties to be solved. To “problematize” is to engage a group in the task of codifying reality into symbols which can generate critical consciousness and empower them to alter their relations with nature and oppressive social forces. Problem posing is a logically prior task which allows all previous conceptualizations of a problem to be treated as questionable. Problematization recognizes that “solutions” are often difficult because the wrong problems are being addressed.

Transformation of the World: To transform the world is to humanize it (see Humanization). All transformations do not result in liberation. Transforming action could dehumanize the work with an oppressor’s curious and inventive presence (e.g., the development of the V-2 rocket in World War II). Only history reveals the problematic nature of being human and the consequences of having chosen one path over the other. The transformation of the world is humankind’s entry into history. As people

act upon the world effectively, transforming it by work, consciousness is in turn historically and culturally conditioned. Conscientization (see Conscientization) is the result of action which transforms the world and leads to humanization.

Conscientization: Conscientization is an ongoing process by which a learner moves toward critical consciousness (see Critical Consciousness). This process is the heart of libratory education. It differs from “consciousness raising” in that the latter frequently involves “banking” education — the transmission of pre-selected knowledge. Conscientization means breaking through prevailing mythologies to reach new levels of awareness — in particular, awareness of oppression, of being an “object” in a world where only “subjects” have power. The process of Conscientization involves identifying contradictions in experience through dialogue and becoming a “subject” with other oppressed subjects — that is, becoming part of the process of changing the world.

Collegiality: Collegiality is a form of social organization based on shared and equal participation of all its members. It contrasts with a hierarchical, pyramidal structure, and is represented by a series of concentric circles. Authority resides in the center-most circle, not over the others, but equidistant from each, so that authority can listen and reflect the consensus of the whole (see Consensual Governance). A collegial model has been frequently associated with libratory education programs.

Consensual Governance: Decision-making by consensus requires the discussion of issues until all are in agreement — this in contrast to decision-making by voting in which rule by the majority is imposed on those who dissent. Decision-making by consensus is time consuming and difficult. At times, consensus represents the willingness of a minority “not to oppose” a decision, but the ultimate benefit of this model is that no one is excluded by a decision. This model is characteristic of participatory democracies as occasionally exemplified in U.S. history by the town hall meeting (but not as it is artificially constructed in Clinton’s electronic town hall meetings).

Critical Consciousness: This is a level of consciousness characterized by depth in the interpretation of problems, through testing one’s own findings with openness to revision, attempting to avoid distortion when perceiving problems and preconceived notions when analyzing them, receptivity to the new without rejection of the old because it is old. In striving toward critical consciousness, the individual rejects passivity, practicing dialogue rather than polemics, and using permeable, interrogative, restless, and dialogical forms of life. Critical consciousness is brought about not through an individual or intellectual effort, but through collective struggle and praxis (see Praxis).

Culture: Culture is used in its broadest, anthropological sense as including all that is humanly fabricated, endowed, designed, articulated, conceived, or directed. Culture includes products which are humanly produced, both material (buildings, artifacts, factories, slum housing) and immaterial (ideology, value systems, mores), as well as materially derived products such as social class and the socio/political order. The key aim of libratory education is to regain dominion over the creation and use of culture.

Culture Circle (Circulo de Cultura): The circulo de cultura is a discussion group in which educators and learners use codifications (see Codification) to engage in dialogue about the reasons for their existential situation. The peer group provides the theoretical content for reflection and for transforming interpretations of reality from mere opinion to a more critical knowledge.

“Culture of Silence”: The “culture of silence” is a characteristic which Freire attributes to oppressed people in colonized countries’, with significant parallels in highly developed countries. Alienated and oppressed people are not heard by the dominant members of their society. The dominant members prescribe the words to be spoken by oppressed through control of the schools and other institutions, thereby effectively silencing the people. This imposed silence does not signify an absence of response, but rather a response which lacks a critical quality. Oppressed people internalize negative images of themselves (images created and imposed by the oppressor) and feel incapable of self-governance. Dialogue and self-government are impossible under such conditions.

Decodification (see Codification): Decodification dissolves a codification into its constituent elements and is the operation by which learners begin to perceive relationships between elements of the codification and other experiences in their day-to-day life and among the elements themselves. Thus, decodification is analysis which takes place through dialogue, revealing the previously unperceived meanings of the reality represented by that codification. Decodification is the principal work of a circulo de cultura (see Culture Circle).

Dialectic: Dialectic is a term referring to a dynamic tension within any given system and the process by which change occurs on the basis of that tension and resulting conflict. Based on the writings of Hegel, a very concept implies its negation; that is, in conceiving anything (thesis), we must be able to imagine its opposite (antithesis). Change occurs as this tension leads to a new conception of reality (synthesis). It should be noted that Marx, in contrast to some liberatory educators, postulated that such tensions and contradictions were embedded in concrete culture (thus, dialectic materialism) and not merely found in contradictions between the existential world and our thoughts about the world.

Dialogical Method: The dialogical approach to learning is characterized by co-operation and acceptance of interchangeability and mutuality in the role of teacher and learner, demanding an atmosphere of mutual acceptance and trust. In this method, all teach and all learn. This contrasts with an anti-dialogical approach which emphasizes the teacher’s side of the learning relationship and frequently results in one-way communiqués perpetuating domination and oppression. Without dialogue, there is no critical communication, and without critical communication, there can be no liberatory education.

**Appendix C — Black Male Youth Academy Calendar for Academic Year
2010-2011**

Week (2010)	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday	Sunday
Sep 6 -10	Labor Day (Holiday)	School Starts – BMYA Program Overview	BMYA Personal Introductions/ Sign-up	Principles of Community Development			
Sep 13-17	Get to know you exercise	Get to know you exercise	Get to know you exercise	Get to know you exercise			
Sep 20-24	What is Black (ness)? Discussion/ Journaling	UCLA Volunteer Day – Garden Kick-Off	YPAR - Reading: Critical Research in IDEAS Handbook	Civic Engagement - ECG		N/A	
Sep 27- Oct 1	Transformative Resistance Discussion/ Journaling	Goal Setting	YPAR - Reading: Critical Research in IDEAS Handbook	Civic Engagement - ECG	N/A	N/A	N/A
Oct 4-8	Hate the Tree - Discussion/ Journaling	Eco Maps – Relationships -	YPAR – Developing your Question	Civic Engagement - ECG	De n	N/A	
Oct 11-15	Read P. Freire – Pedagogy of the Oppressed –Ch. 2/ Journaling	Academic Preparation - Aspirations Worksheet/Do IAP's	PSAT	Civic Engagement - ECG			
Oct 18-22	Malcolm X Video Clip/ Journaling	Academic Preparation - Getting Str8 A's: How to be a good student Activity	YPAR – Developing Your Question	Civic Engagement - ECG	Camping Trip – Location: TBD	Camping Trip – Location: TBD	Camping Trip - Location: TBD
Oct 25-29	Video on Civil Rights/ Journaling	Academic Preparation - Take Notes: How to be a good student	YPAR - Structuring Arguments	Civic Engagement - ECG		Parent Meeting	

		Reading					
Nov 1-5	Watch Bastards of the Party/ Journaling	Academic Development - Literacy Test Prep	Field Trip to San Diego Museum and UCSD	Civic Engagement - ECG			
Nov 8-12	Roots Video Clip/ Journaling	Academic Development - Literacy Test Prep	YPAR - Conducting Interviews	Veteran's Day (Holiday)			

Week (2010-2011)	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday	Sunday
Nov 15-19	Student Led Discussion Topic/ Journaling	Academic Development - Literacy Test Prep	College Essay Preparation	Civic Engagement - ECG	Paintball		
Nov 22-26	Positive Results Skill Building - Leadership	Academic Development - Literacy Test Prep	Thanks Giving (Holiday)	Thanks Giving (Holiday)			
Nov 29- Dec 3	Positive Results Skill Building - Communication	Academic Development - Literacy Test Prep	YPAR – Finding Data	Civic Engagement - ECG			
Dec 6-10	Positive Results Skill Building – Self-Esteem	Academic Development - Literacy Test Prep	Field Trip to Museum of Tolerance	Civic Engagement - ECG			
Dec 13-17	Positive Results Skill Building – Peer Pressure	Academic Development - Literacy Test Prep	YPAR – Finding Data	Civic Engagement - ECG		Parent Meeting	
Dec 20-24	District Closed	District Closed	District Closed	District Closed			
Dec 27-30	District Closed	District Closed	District Closed	District Closed			

Jan 3-7	District Closed	Welcome Back Activity	Welcome Back Activity	Civic Engagement - ECG			
Jan 10-14	Read Subject on Conditions-Educational Opportunity/ Journaling	Academic Development - Literacy Test Prep	YPAR – Recording Subjects	Civic Engagement - ECG			
Jan 17-21	Martin Luther King’s Birthday/ Journaling	Academic Development - Literacy Test Prep	Field Trip to another High School	Civil Rights Celebration		Fun Activity	

Week (2011)	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday	Sunday
Jan-24-28	Read about South African Apartheid Struggle/ Journaling	Academic Development - Literacy Test Prep	YPAR -	Civic Engagement - ECG		Parent Meeting	
Jan 31 - Feb 4	Discussion/ Exercise on Hegemony/ Journaling	Academic Development - Literacy Test Prep	YPAR -	Civic Engagement - ECG			
Feb 7-11	Lincoln Day (Holiday)	Academic Development - Literacy Test Prep	YPAR -	Field Trip – College/University			
Feb 14-18	President’s Day (Holiday)	Academic Development - Literacy Test Prep	Academic Development - Literacy Test Prep	Civic Engagement - ECG		Valentines Day	
Feb 21-25	Academic Development - Literacy Test Prep	Academic Development - Literacy Test Prep	Academic Development - Literacy Test Prep	Academic Development - Literacy Test Prep		Paintball Trip	
Feb 28- Mar 4	Academic Development - Literacy Test Prep	Academic Development - Literacy Test Prep	Academic Development - Literacy Test Prep	Academic Development - Literacy Test Prep			

Mar 7-11	Testing	Testing	Testing	Testing			
Mar 14-18	Discussion/ Exercise on Classism/ Journaling	Homework Help	YPAR -	Civic Engagement - ECG			
Mar 21-25	Review Media Clip on the "N" Word/Journaling	Homework Help	YPAR -	Civic Engagement - ECG			
Mar 28- Apr 1	Student Led Discussion Topic/Journaling	Skill Building	YPAR -	Spring Break		Parent Meeting	

Week (2011)	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday	Sunday
Apr 4-8	Spring Break	Spring Break	Spring Break	Spring Break			
Apr 11-15	YPAR	YPAR	YPAR	Do Goals Worksheet	Field Trip to Berkeley	Field Trip to Berkeley	Field Trip to Berkeley
Apr-18-22	Student Led Discussion Topic/Journaling	YPAR	YPAR	Field Trip – Venice Learning Garden			
Apr 25-29	Discussion – Community Violence	YPAR	YPAR -	Civic Engagement - ECG			
May 2-6	Read Subject on Conditions- Employment Opportunity/ Journaling	YPAR	YPAR -	Civic Engagement - ECG			
May 9-13	YPAR	YPAR	YPAR -	Civic Engagement - ECG			

May 16-20	Read Subject on Conditions- Housing/ Journaling	YPAR	YPAR -	Civic Engagement - ECG			
May 23-27	Health Presentation - Discussion	YPAR	YPAR -	Civic Engagement - ECG			
May 30- Jun 3	Memorial Day	Team Up on Eco Maps – Discuss w/ Partner	Review the End of the Year Goals	Civic Engagement - ECG		Parent Meeting	
Jun 6- 10	Conduct Evaluation	Celebration	Celebration	ECG Celebration			
Jun 13-17	No Advisory (Last week of School)	No Advisory (Last week of School)	No Advisory (Last week of School)	No Advisory (Last week of School)			
Jun 21-24							
Jun 28- Jul1 (Final)							

Appendix D — Interview Protocols

Interview Protocol for Students

Purpose of this Interview:

This interview is being conducted to determine the degree to which your participation in the Black Male Youth Academy has had an impact on you. Specifically, I would like to know if you are applying what you learn in the Black Male Youth Academy to different spaces such as your social interactions, other classes and home environment.

Important Topics to Cover:

Participation in the Academy
Development of ability to be critical
Perceptions of participating in the Black Male Youth Academy

Interview

1. Tell me about your experiences in the Black Male Youth Academy?
2. Does the Black Male Youth Academy have any impact on your other classes?
3. Does the Black Male Youth Academy make a difference in how you see the world around you?
4. How do you feel after participating in the Black Male Youth Academy?
5. Are any of your relationships affected after participating in the Black Male Youth Academy?
6. Does your participation in the Black Male Youth Academy impact your academic performance? If so, how? If not, why?
7. Do you ever find information you've gained from the Black Male Youth Academy useful in other environments? If so, how?
8. What was the most important learning or insight that you gained from your participation?
9. How have you applied what you learned in the Black Male Youth Academy to your other classrooms?
10. What has been your greatest challenge trying to use the ideas you've learned in the Black Male Youth Academy?

Interview Protocol for Parents

Purpose of this Interview:

This interview is being conducted to determine the degree to which you believe your son's participation in the Black Male Youth Academy has had an impact on them at home. Specifically, I would like to know if they share what they are learning in the Black Male Youth Academy is being applied in different spaces including their classes and/or home environment.

Interview

1. How would you describe your son's academic experience at school?
2. Do you feel as if the school meets the needs of your son?
3. How would you, as a parent/guardian, describe your interaction with your son's school?
4. Has your son shared information he has learned from his participation in the BMYA?
5. How would you describe your son's experience in the Black Male Youth Academy (BMYA)?
6. Do you think the BMYA is helpful to your son's academic experience?
 - a. If so, how is it helpful?
 - b. If not, what would make the program better or more helpful?
7. Have you noticed any change in your son's behavior since he began participating in the program?
8. What, if anything, do you think the school should do to be more responsive to your son's academic and social needs?

Interview Protocol for Teachers

Purpose of this Interview:

This interview is being conducted to determine the degree to which you believe your student's participation in the Black Male Youth Academy has had an impact on them in class. Specifically, I would like to know if what they are learning in the Black Male Youth Academy is transferring across learning environments.

Interview

1. What is your name and how many years have you been teaching?
2. Which subject do you teach?
3. How would you describe your son's academic environment of the school?
4. Do you feel as if the school meets the needs of your African American students?
5. Has your student shared information he has learned from his participation in the Black Male Youth Academy (BMYA)? If so, in what ways?
6. Have you noticed any change in your student's behavior since he began participating in the program? Please explain.
7. What benefits do you feel can come from all male learning spaces?
8. Are there certain instructional approaches that you feel are unique to Black males?
9. What are the unique ways of learning that you believe males possess?
10. What are some of the most pressing issues in educating Black males?
11. Can you describe any curricular or instructional approaches that you use that are particular to Black males?

Interview Protocol for Administrators and Counselors

Purpose of this Interview:

This interview is being conducted to determine the degree to which you believe participation in the Black Male Youth Academy has impact on students who participate. Specifically, I would like to know if you've observed any difference in behavior from the students who participate in the Black Male Youth Academy and determine your overall impression.

Interview

1. What is your name
 - a. How many years have you been an administrator or counselor?
 - b.
2. How would you describe the academic environment of the school?
3. In what ways does the school work to meet the needs of your African American students?
4. What was the purpose behind creating the Black Male Youth Academy?
5. Have you observed any of the students who participate in the Black Male Youth Academy?
6. If so, have you noticed any change in your student's behavior since he began participating in the program? Please explain.
7. What benefits do you feel come from all male learning spaces?
8. Are there certain instructional approaches that you feel are unique to Black males?
9. What are some of the most pressing issues in educating Black males?
10. What variables do you use to evaluate the effectiveness of the Black Male Youth Academy?
11. Do you believe that one's race or gender contributes to teaching effectiveness?

Appendix E — Survey Instruments

Name _____

Date _____

BLACK MALE YOUTH ACADEMY – CURRICULUM COURSE PRE-ASSESSMENT

Please answer all questions as honestly as possible. The researchers for the Black Male Youth Academy will use your answers to a) craft a program plan that best suits your individual needs as a student; and to b) help shape the curriculum for the next course.

At the end of the semester, you will re-take this exact assessment tool.

Directions: Circle the answer that best describes your situation at this time.

1. I know the difference between a Bachelor's degree, Master's degree, professional and a Ph.D. degree.

Yes No Somewhat Not sure

2. I meet regularly with my teachers to go over my academic progress (i.e., NOT a counselor, or administrator).

Yes No Somewhat Not sure

3. I have talked to a college counselor about my intended field of study.

Yes No Somewhat Not sure

4. I am familiar with African American authors or writers (i.e., you are aware of their books or published articles).

Yes No Somewhat Not sure

5. I know about African Civilization before the Diaspora.

Yes No Somewhat Not sure

6. I have three or more teachers that will write me strong letters of recommendation for college.

Yes No Somewhat Not sure

7. I plan to go to college.

Yes No Somewhat Not sure

8. I plan to get a job after high school.

Yes No Somewhat Not sure

8. I am aware of funding opportunities for college.

Yes No Somewhat Not sure

9. I am knowledgeable about the college application process.

Yes No Somewhat Not sure

10. I feel prepared for the SAT.

Yes No Somewhat Not sure

11. I feel prepared for the ACT.

Yes No Somewhat Not sure

12. I feel prepared for the CAHSEE.

Yes No Somewhat Not sure

13. I feel prepared for the CST.

Yes No Somewhat Not sure

14. I know how to get straight A's in school.

Yes No Somewhat Not sure

15. My family supports my me in school.

Yes No Somewhat Not sure

16. I have a support system outside of school (my family, church, friends) to be successful.

Yes No Somewhat Not sure

17. I know about the history of gangs.

Yes	No	Somewhat	Not sure
18. I believe I will achieve my personal goals to fulfill my life.			
Yes	No	Somewhat	Not sure
19. I believe my life is valuable.			
Yes	No	Somewhat	Not sure
20. I think gangs are good for our communities.			
Yes	No	Somewhat	Not sure
21. I think learning about African American history is valuable.			
Yes	No	Somewhat	Not sure
22. I think having African American male role models is important.			
Yes	No	Somewhat	Not sure
23. I think mentorship is important.			
Yes	No	Somewhat	Not sure
24. I think having a specific place for African American males to learn together is important.			
Yes	No	Somewhat	Not sure
25. I have a support system <u>inside</u> of school (my teachers, coaches, administrators) to be successful.			
Yes	No	Somewhat	Not sure
26. I know about my family history.			
Yes	No	Somewhat	Not sure
27. I am prepared for life after high school.			
Yes	No	Somewhat	Not sure
28. I know how to manage my finances.			

Name _____

Date _____

**BLACK MALE YOUTH ACADEMY – CURRICULUM COURSE
POST-ASSESSMENT**

Please answer all questions as honestly as possible. The researchers for the Black Male Youth Academy will use your answers to a) craft a program plan that best suits your individual needs as a student; and to b) help shape the curriculum for the next course.

Directions: Circle the answer that best describes your situation at this time.

Please answer all questions as honestly as possible. The researchers for the Black Male Youth Academy will use your answers to a) craft a program plan that best suits your individual needs as a student; and to b) help shape the curriculum for the next course.

At the end of the semester, you will re-take this exact assessment tool.

Directions: Circle the answer that best describes your situation at this time.

1. I know the difference between a Bachelor’s degree, Master’s degree, professional and a Ph.D. degree.

Yes No Somewhat Not sure

2. I meet regularly with my teachers to go over my academic progress (i.e., NOT a counselor, or administrator).

Yes No Somewhat Not sure

3. I have talked to a college counselor about my intended field of study.

Yes No Somewhat Not sure

4. I am familiar with African American authors or writers (i.e., you are aware of their books or published articles).

Yes No Somewhat Not sure

5. I know about African Civilization before the Diaspora.

16. I have a support system outside of school (my family, church, friends) to be successful.

Yes No Somewhat Not sure

17. I know about the history of gangs.

Yes No Somewhat Not sure

18. I believe I will achieve my personal goals to fulfill my life.

Yes No Somewhat Not sure

19. I believe my life is valuable.

Yes No Somewhat Not sure

20. I think gangs are good for our communities.

Yes No Somewhat Not sure

21. I think learning about African American history is valuable.

Yes No Somewhat Not sure

22. I think having African American male role models is important.

Yes No Somewhat Not sure

23. I think mentorship is important.

Yes No Somewhat Not sure

24. I think having a specific place for African American males to learn together is important.

Yes No Somewhat Not sure

25. I have a support system inside of school (my teachers, coaches, administrators) to be successful.

Yes No Somewhat Not sure

26. I know about my family history.

Yes No Somewhat Not sure

27. I am prepared for life after high school.

Yes	No	Somewhat	Not sure
-----	----	----------	----------

28. I know how to manage my finances.

Yes	No	Somewhat	Not sure
-----	----	----------	----------

29. I know how to manage my time.

Yes	No	Somewhat	Not sure
-----	----	----------	----------

30. Any additional comments, questions or concerns:

REFERENCES

- Allen, W. R. (1995). African American family life in societal context: Crisis and hope. *Sociological Forum*, 10, p. 569–592.
- Anderson, J. (1988). *The education of Blacks in the South, 1860-1935*. Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press.
- Anderson, G. L. (1989). Critical ethnography in education: Origins, current status, and new directions. *Review of Educational Research*, 59, p. 249-270.
- Anyon, J. (1997). *Ghetto schooling: A political economy of urban educational reform*. New York: Teacher's College Press.
- APSA Press Release. 2004. "Leading Political Scientists Warn of Threat to American Democracy in Rare Nonpartisan Statement." Washington, D.C.: American Political Science Association. Available at www.apsanet.org/imgtest/taskforcepress.pdf.
- Aronson J., Fried C. B., Good C., (2002). Reducing the effects of stereotype threat on African American college students by shaping theories of intelligence. *Journal of Experimental Social Psychology*, 37, p. 1-13.
- Bandura, A. (1977). Self-efficacy: Toward a unifying theory of behavioral change. *Psychological Review*, 84 (2), 191-215.
- Bartels, Larry M. 2004. "Partisan Politics and the U.S. Income Distribution." Unpublished manuscript, Princeton University. Available at www.princeton.edu/~bartels/income.pdf.
- Barton, D., and Hamilton, M. (1998). *Local literacies: Reading and writing in one community*. New York: Routledge.
- Baugh, J. (1994). New and prevailing misconceptions of African American English for logic and mathematics. *Teaching diverse populations: Formulating a knowledge base*, 191-206.

- Becker, H. S. (1969). Problems of Inference and proof in participant observation. In G.J. McCall and J. L. Simmons (Eds.), *Issues in participant observation: A text and reader*. Reading, MA: Addison-Wesley, p. 245-257.
- Bernal, D. D. (2006). Rethinking Grassroots Activism. *The Subaltern Speak: Curriculum, Power, and Educational Struggles*, 141.
- Blackburn, M. & Clark, C. (Eds.) (2007). *Literacy research for political action and social change*. New York: Peter Lang.
- Bourdieu, P. & Passeron, JC. (1990). *Reproduction in Education, Society and Culture* (2nd ed.). (R. Nice, Trans.). London: Sage Publications.
- Bronfenbrenner, U. (1976). The experimental ecology of education, *Teachers College Record*, 78, p. 157-178.
- Bronner, S. E. & Kellner, D. M. (Eds.). (1989). *Critical theory and society: A reader*. New York: Routledge.
- Brown, A. L. (1992). Design experiments: Theoretical and methodological challenges in creating complex interventions in classroom settings. *The Journal of the Learning Sciences*, 2 (2), p. 141-178.
- Buka S.L., Stichick, T.L., Birdthistle I & Earls, F. (2001). Youth exposure to violence: prevalence, risks, and consequences. *American Journal of Orthopsychiatry*. 71, p. 298-310.
- Cabral, A. (1969). *Revolution in Guinea: An African people's struggle*. R. Handyside (Ed. and trans.). London: Stage 1.
- Calfee, R. & Sperling, M. (2010). *On mixed methods: Approaches to language and literacy research*. New York: Teachers College Press

California Department of Education Website (Dec. 5, 2007). Retrieved from

<http://www.cde.ca.gov/ds/sd/cb/reports.asp>

- Cammarota, J., & Fine, M. (2008). Youth participatory action research: A pedagogy for transformational resistance. In J. Cammarota & M. Fine (Eds.), *Revolutionizing education: Youth participatory action research in motion* (pp. viii, 248 p.). New York: Routledge.
- Carter, D. J. (2008). Achievement as resistance: The development of a critical race achievement ideology among Black achievers. *Harvard Educational Review*, 78 (3), p. 466–497.
- Carver, Sharon M. (2006). *Assessing for deep understanding*. In Robert K. Sawyer (Ed.), *The Cambridge handbook of learning sciences* (p. 205-221). New York: Cambridge University Press
- Collins, J. (1995). Literacy and literacies. *Annual Review of Anthropology*, 24, p. 75-93.
- Corallo, C. & McDonald, D. (2001). *What works with low-performing schools: A review of research*. Charleston, WV: AEL.
- Corbin, J., & Strauss, A. (Eds.). (2008). *Basics of qualitative research: Techniques and procedures for developing grounded theory*. Sage.
- Crane, J. (1994). Exploding the myth of scientific support for the theory of Black intellectual inferiority. *Journal of Black Psychology*, 20, p. 189-209.
- Cuban, L. (1998). How schools change reforms: Redefining reform success and failure. *Teachers College Record*, 99, p. 453-477.
- Darder, A., Baltodano, M, & Torres, R. D. (Eds.). (2003). *The critical pedagogy reader*. New York: Routledge/Falmer.
- Davis, A. (2007). Race and criminalization: Black Americans and the punishment industry. In J.

- F. Healey & E. O'Brien (Eds.). *Race, Ethnicity and Gender: Selected Readings*. 2nd Ed., Thousand Oaks, California: Pine Forge Press.
- Davis, J. E. (2003). Early schooling and academic achievement of African American males. *Urban Education*, 38 (5), p. 515-537.
- Davis, J. E. & Jordan, W. J. (1994). The effects of school context, structure, and experiences on African American males in middle and high school. *The Journal of Negro Education*, 63 (4), p. 570-587.
- Delpit, L. (1988). The silenced dialogue: Power and pedagogy in educating other people's children. *Harvard Educational Review*, 58, 280-298. (United States)
- Deschenes, S., Cuban, L., & Tyack, D. B. (2001). Mismatch: Historical perspectives on schools and students who don't fit them. *Teachers College Record*, 103 (4), p. 525-547.
- Dewey, J. (2004). *Democracy and education*. New York: Dover Publications.
- Dubois, W. E. B. (1896). *The suppression of the African slave trade to the United States of America 1638-1870*. New York: Cosimo.
- Duncan-Andrade, J. M. R. and E. Morrell (2008). The art of critical pedagogy possibilities for moving from theory to practice in urban schools. *Counterpoints*: New York, Peter Lang.
- Easton, Peter A. (1989). Structuring learning environments: Lessons from the organization of post-literacy programs. *International Review of Education*, 35 (4), p. 423-444.
- Erickson, F. (1987). Transformation and school success: The politics and culture of educational achievement. *Anthropology and Education*, 18, p. 335-356.
- Erickson, F. (1996). On the evolution of qualitative approaches in educational research: From Adam's task to Eve's. *The Australian Educational Researcher*, 23 (2), p. 1-15.

- Ferguson, A. A. (2000). *Bad boys: Public schools in the making of Black masculinity: law, meaning and violence*. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press.
- Foucault, M. (1980). *Power/Knowledge: Selected interviews and other writings: 1972-1977*. Colin Gordon (ed.) and trans. by Colin Gordon, et al. New York: Pantheon.
- Freire, P. (1970). The adult literacy process as cultural action for freedom. *Harvard Educational Review*, 40(2), 205-225.
- Freire, P. (1974). *Education for critical consciousness*. New York: Continuum.
- Freire, P. (1993). *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*. New York: Continuum
- Freire, P. & Shor, I. (1987). *A pedagogy for liberation: Dialogues on transforming education*. London: Bergin & Garvey.
- Freire, P. F. & Macedo, D. (1987). *Literacy: Reading the word and the world*. London: Routledge.
- Gardner, D. P. (1983). *A nation at risk: The imperative for educational reform*. Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office.
- Garibaldi, A. M. (1992). Educating and motivating African American males to succeed. *Journal of Negro Education*, 61, p. 4-11.
- Gay, G. 2000. *Culturally responsive teaching: Theory, research, & practice*, New York: Teachers College Press.
- Gee, J. P. (2013). *An introduction to discourse analysis: Theory and method*. Routledge.
- Gibson, C., & Levine, P. (2003). *The civic mission of schools*. New York: Carnegie Corporation of New York and the Center for Information and Research on Civic Learning.
- Ginwright, S., & Cammarota, J. (2002). New terrain in youth development: The promise of a social justice approach. *Social Justice*, 29(4), 82-95.

- Giroux, H. (1983). Theories of reproduction and resistance in the new sociology of education: A critical analysis. *Harvard Education Review*, 53, p. 257-293.
- Giroux, H. A. (1988). *Teachers as intellectuals: Toward a critical pedagogy of learning*. Granby, MA: Bergin & Garvey.
- Giroux, H. A. (1998). Hollywood and the demonization of youth: Beating up on kids. In *Channel surfing: Racism, the media, and the destruction of today's youth* (pp. 35-63). New York: St. Martin's Press.
- Giroux, H. A. (1999). Schools for sale: Public education, corporate culture, and the citizen-consumer. In *The educational forum* (Vol. 63, No. 2, pp. 140-149). Taylor & Francis Group.
- Giroux, H. A. (2003). Critical theory and educational practice. In A. Darder, M. Baltodano, & R. D. Torres (Eds.), *The critical pedagogy reader* (p. 27-56). New York: Routledge/Falmer.
- Glass, R. D. (2000). Education and the Ethics of Democratic Citizenship. *Studies in Philosophy and Education*, 19 (3), p. 275–296.
- Gonzalez, N., Moll, L., and Amanti, C. (2005). *Funds of knowledge: Theorizing practices in households, communities, and classrooms*. Lawrence Erlbaum. (United States)
- Goodman, Y. (1984). The development of initial literacy. *Awakening to literacy*, 102-109.
- Goodwyn, A., & Findlay, K. (2003). Shaping literacy in the secondary school: Policy, practice and agency in the age of the National Literacy Strategy. *British Journal of Educational Studies*, 51 (1), p. 20-35.
- Graham, P. A. (2005). *Schooling America: How the public schools meet the nation's changing needs*. New York: Oxford University Press.

- Greene, M. (1993). Foreword. In Lankshear, C., & McLaren, P. L. (Eds.) (1993). *Critical literacy: politics, praxis and the postmodern*. New York: SUNY Press.
- Gutierrez, Kris D. (2007). Historicizing literacy. In Mollie V. Blackburn & Caroline T. Clark (Eds.), *Literacy Research for Political Action and Social Change* (ix-xiii), New York: Peter Lang.
- Harry, B. & Anderson, M.G. (1994). The disproportionate placement of African American males in special education programs: A critique of the process. *Journal of Negro Education*, 63 (4), p. 602–619.
- Heath, S.B. (1983). *Ways with words: Language, life, and work in communities and classrooms*. Cambridge University Press.
- Herr, K., & Anderson, G. L. (Eds.). (2005). *The action research dissertation: A guide for students and faculty*. Sage.
- Herrnstein, R. J., & Murray, C. (1994). *The bell curve: Intelligence and class structure in American life*. New York: Free Press.
- Hess, F. M. (1999). *Spinning Wheels: The Politics of Urban School Reform*. Washington, D.C.: The Brookings Institution.
- Hooks, B. (2003). *Teaching Community: A Pedagogy of Hope*. New York: Routledge.
- Hopkins, R. (1997). *Educating Black Males: Critical lessons in schooling, community, and power*. New York: State University of New York Press, Albany.
- Horkheimer, M. (1989). The state of contemporary social philosophy and the tasks of an Institute for Social Research. In S. E. Bronner & D. M. Kellner (Eds.), *Critical theory and society: A reader* (p. 25-36). New York: Routledge.

- Howard, T. (2001). Powerful pedagogy for African American students: A case study of four teachers. *Urban Education*, 36 (2), p. 179-202.
- Hoy, D. C. (1994). Critical theory and critical history. In D. C. Hoy & T. McCarthy (Eds.), *Critical theory* (p. 101-214). Oxford, UK: Blackwell International.
- John-Steiner, V., & Mahn, H. (1996). Sociocultural approaches to learning and development: A Vygotskian framework. *Educational Psychologist*, 31, p. 191-206.
- Kahne, J. & Westheimer, J. (2003) Teaching democracy: What schools need to do. *Phi Delta Kappan* 85(1), 34–40, 57–66.
- Keller-Cohen, D. (1993). Rethinking literacy: Comparing colonial and contemporary America. *Anthropology & Education Quarterly*, 24, p. 288-307.
- Kellner, D. & Share, J. (2005). Toward critical media literacy: core concepts, debates, organization, and policy. *Discourse: Studies in the Cultural Politics of Education*, 26 (3), p. 369–386.
- Kharem, H. (2006). *A curriculum of repression: A pedagogy of racial history in the United States*. New York: Peter Lang Publishing.
- Kincheloe, J. L., & McLaren, P. L. (1994). Rethinking critical theory and qualitative research. In N. K. Denzin & Y. S. Lincoln (Eds.), *Handbook of qualitative research* (p. 138–157). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Kozol, J. (2001). *Savage Inequalities: Children in America's schools*. New York: Crown Publishers Inc.
- Ladson-Billings, G. (1992). Liberatory consequences of literacy: A case of culturally relevant instruction for African American students. *The Journal of Negro Education*, 61 (3), p. 378-391.

- Ladson-Billings, G. (1997). It doesn't add up: African American students' mathematics achievement. *Journal for Research in Mathematics Education*. 28(6), p. 607-708.
- Ladson-Billings, G. & Tate IV, W. F. (1995). Toward a critical race theory of education. *Teachers College Record*, 97 (1), p. 47-68.
- Lave, J. & Wenger, E. (1991). *Situated Learning: Legitimate Peripheral Participation*. Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, UK.
- Lawrence-Lightfoot, S & Davis, J. (1997). *The art and science of portraiture*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass
- Lee, C. D. (1995). A culturally based cognitive apprenticeship: Teaching African American high school students skills in literary interpretation. *Reading Research Quarterly*, 30 (4), p. 608-630.
- Lee, C. D. (2001). Is October Brown Chinese? A cultural modeling activity system for underachieving students. *American Educational Research Journal*, 38 (1), p. 97-141.
- Lipman, P. (1995) Bringing out the best in them: The contribution of culturally relevant teachers to education reform. *Theory Into Practice* 34(3):202–208.
- Lipman, P. (2004). *High stakes education: Inequality, globalization, and urban school reform*. New York: Routledge/Falmer.
- Luke, A., O'Brien, J., & Comber, B. (1994). Making community texts objects of study. *Australian Journal of Language and Literacy, The*, 17(2), 139.
- Lynn, M. (2004). Inserting 'race' into critical pedagogy: An analysis of race based epistemologies. *Educational Philosophy and Theory*. 36 (2), p. 153-165.
- Maiga, H. O. (2005). When the language of education is not the language of culture: The epistemology of systems of knowledge and pedagogy. In J. King (Ed.), *Black education:*

- A research and action agenda for the new century*, (p. 159–182). Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum.
- Marcuse, H. (1964). *One dimensional man*. Boston: Beacon Press.
- Marvin, L. & Adams, M. "Introductory Overview to the Special Issue Critical Race Theory and Education: Recent Developments in the Field." *Equity & Excellence in Education*. 35 (2002). 87–92
- McIntyre, A. (2000). Constructing meaning about violence, school, and community: Participatory action research with urban youth. *The Urban Review*, 32(2), 123-154.
- McKernan, J. (1991). *Curriculum action research: A handbook of methods and resources for the reflective teacher*. New York: Routledge.
- Meacham, S. J. (2001). Literacy at the crossroads: Movement, connection, and communication within the research literature on literacy and cultural diversity. *Review of Research in Education*, 25, p. 181-208.
- Merriam, S.B. (2009). *Qualitative Research: A Guide to Design and Implementation*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.
- Miedema, S., & Wardekker, W. L. (1999). Emergent identity versus consistent identity: Possibilities for a postmodern repoliticization of critical pedagogy. In T. S. Popkewitz & L. Fendler (Eds.), *Critical theories in education: Changing terrains of knowledge and politics* (p. 67–83). New York: Routledge.
- Moje, E. B., & Lewis, C. (2007). Examining opportunities to learn literacy: The role of critical sociocultural literacy research. *Reframing sociocultural research on literacy: Identity, agency, and power*, 15-48.

- Morrell, E. (2002). Toward a critical pedagogy of popular culture: Literacy development among urban youth. *Journal of Adolescent & Adult Literacy*, 46, p. 72-76.
- Morrell, E. (2005). Critical English Education. *English Education*. 37 (4), p. 312-313
- Morrell, E. (2006). Youth-Initiated Research as a Tool for Advocacy and Change in Urban Schools. In S. A. Ginwright, P. Noguera & J. Cammarota (Eds.), *Beyond Resistance!: Youth activism and community change: New democratic possibilities for practice and policy for America's youth* (pp. xxii, 377 p.). New York: Routledge.
- Morrell, E. (2007). Urban students as critical ethnographers: Critical textual production through community-based research. In J.L. Kincheloe & K. Hayes (Eds.), *Teaching city kids: Understanding and appreciating them* (p. 267–279). New York: Peter Lang.
- Morrell, E. (2008). *Critical literacy and urban youth: Pedagogies of access, dissent, and liberation*. New York: Routledge.
- Morrell, E. & Duncan-Andrade, J. M. R. (2002). Promoting Academic literacy with urban youth through engaging Hip-hop culture. *The English Journal*, 91 (6), p. 88-92.
- Morrell, E. D. (2007). Critical literacy and popular culture in urban education: Toward a pedagogy of access and dissent. In Mollie V. Blackburn & Caroline T. Clark (Eds.), *Literacy Research for Political Action and Social Change* (p. ix-xiii), New York: Peter Lang.
- Murphy, J. (1989). Educational reform in the 1980s: Explaining some surprising success. *Education Evaluation and Policy Analysis*, 11 (3), p. 209-221.
- Murphy, J. (1989). Educational reform in the 1980s: Explaining some surprising success. *Education Evaluation and Policy Analysis*, 11(3), 209-221.
- Nasir, N. S., & Hand, V. (2006). Exploring sociocultural perspectives on race, culture, and

- learning. *Review of Educational Research*, 76(4), 449–475.
- Nasir, N. S., McLaughlin, M. W., & Jones, A. (2009). What does it mean to be African American? Constructions of race and academic identity in an urban public high school. *American Educational Research Journal*, 46 (1), p. 73–114.
- Nasir, N. S., Rosebery, A. S., Warren, B. & Lee, C. (2006). Learning as a cultural process: Achieving equity through diversity. In *The Cambridge Handbook of Learning Sciences* (R. K. Sawyer, Ed.). New York: Cambridge University Press, p. 489-504.
- National Commission on Excellence in Education. (1983). *A nation at risk*. Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Education.
- Nelson, J. (1992). What goes around comes around: History education in the 1890's and 1990's, *The History Teacher*, 25, (4), p. 463-469.
- Noguera, P. (2008). *The trouble with Black boys: Essays on race, equity, and the future of public education*. 1st Ed. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.
- Oakes, J., Rogers, J. & Lipton, M. (2006). *Learning power: Organizing for education and justice*. New York: Teachers College Press.
- Ogbu, J. U. (1987). Variability in minority school performance: A problem in search of an explanation. *Anthropology and Education Quarterly*, 18 (4), p. 312-334.
- Ogbu, J. U. (1992) Understanding cultural diversity and learning. *Educational Researcher*, 21 (8), p. 5–14
- Orellana, M. F. (2007). Moving words and worlds: Reflections from “the middle.”. *Reframing sociocultural research on literacy: Identity, agency, and power*, 123-136.

- Orfield, G., & Lee, C. (2007). *Historic reversals, accelerating resegregation, and the need for new integration strategies*. Los Angeles: University of California, Los Angeles, Civil Rights Project/Proyecto Derechos Civiles.
- Osborne, A. B. (1996). Practice into theory into practice: Culturally relevant pedagogy for students we have marginalized and normalized. *Anthropology and Education Quarterly*, 27 (3), p. 285-314.
- Oyserman, L., Gant, and Ager, J. (1995). A socially contextualized model of African American identity: school persistence and possible selves. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 69, p. 1216–1232.
- Packer, M. J. & Goicoechea, J. (2000). Sociocultural and constructivist theories of learning: Ontology, not just epistemology. *Educational Psychologist*, 35 (4), p. 227-241.
- Parker, L & Stovall, D.O. (2004). Actions Following Word: Critical Race Theory Connects to Critical Pedagogy. In *Educational Philosophy and Theory*, 36 (2). Oxford: Blackwell Publishing.
- Perkins, D. (1992). *Smart schools: Better thinking and learning for every child*. New York: The Free Press.
- Perry, T. (1996). *Teaching Malcolm X: Popular culture and literacy*. New York: Routledge.
- Perry, T., Steele, C. & Hilliard, A. G. (2003). *Young, gifted, and black: Promoting high achievement among African-American students*. Boston: Beacon Press.
- Petrone, R., & Borsheim, C. (2008). “It just seems to be more intelligent”: Critical literacy in the English classroom. In L. Wallowitz (Ed.), *Critical literacy as resistance: Teaching for social justice across the secondary curriculum* (p. 179-206). New York: Peter Lang.

- Polman, J. L. (2006). Mastery and appropriation as means to understand the interplay of history learning and identity trajectories. *The Journal of the Learning Sciences*, 15 (2), p. 221-259.
- Pongratz, L. (2005). Critical theory and pedagogy: Theodor W. Adorno and Max Horkheimer's contemporary significance for a critical pedagogy. In E. Fischman, P. McClaren, H. Sunker & C. Lankshear (Eds.), *Critical theories, radical pedagogies and global conflicts*, (p. 154-163). New York: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers.
- Ravitch, D. (1995). Introduction. In D. Ravitch (Ed.), *Debating the future of American education: Do we need national standards and assessments?* (p. 1-8). Washington DC: Brookings Institution.
- Rist, R. C. (1973). *The urban school: A factory for failure*. Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press.
- Roche, P. A. (1994). Minority access to higher education: An analysis of a pipeline approach through neighborhood learning centers. *The Minnesota Experiment*. New York: University Press of America.
- Rogoff, B. (2003). *The cultural nature of human development*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Rogoff, B., & Chavajay, P. (1995). What's become of research on the cultural basis of cognitive development?. *American Psychologist*, 50(10), 859.
- Rorrer, A. K., Skrla, L., & Scheurich, J. J. (2008). Districts as institutional actors in educational reform. *Educational Administration Quarterly*, 44 (3), p. 307-357.
- Rosaldo, R (1994). Subjectivity in social analysis. In S. Seidman (Ed.), *The postmodern turn: New Perspectives on social theory* (p. 171-183). New York: Cambridge University Press.
- Rowland, G. (1993). Designing Instructional Design. *Educational Technology Research and*

Development, 41 (1), p. 79-91.

- Sandholtz, J. H., Ogawa, R. T., & Scribner, S. P. (2004). Standards gaps: Unintended consequences of local standards-based reform. *Teachers College Record*, 106, p. 1177–1202.
- Schensul, J. J., & Berg, M. J. (2004). Introduction: Research with youth. *Practicing Anthropology*, 26(2), 2-4.
- Schensul, J. J., Berg, M. J., Schensul, D., & Sydlo, S. (2004). Core elements of participatory action research for educational empowerment and risk prevention with urban youth. *Practicing Anthropology*, 26(2), 5-9.
- Scherr, A. (2005). Social subjectivity and mutual recognition as basic terms of a critical theory of education. In E. Fischman, P. McClaren, H. Sunker & C. Lankshear (Eds.), *Critical theories, radical pedagogies and global conflicts* (p. 145-163). New York: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers.
- Schott Foundation for Public Education. (2008). *Given half a chance: The Schott 50 state report on public education and Black males*. Cambridge, MA.
- Schwab-Stone, M. E., Ayers, T. S., Kaspro, W., Voyce, C., Barone, C., Shriver, T., & Weissberg, R. P. (1995). No safe haven: A study of violence exposure in an urban community. *Journal of the American Academy of Child & Adolescent Psychiatry*, 34(10), 1343-1352.
- Sefa Dei, G. J. (1994). Afrocentricity: A cornerstone of pedagogy. *Anthropology and Education Quarterly*, 25 (1), p. 3-28.
- Shadish W.R., Luellen J.K., Clark M.H. (2006). Propensity scores and quasi-experiments: A testimony to the practical side of Lee Sechrest. In Bootzin R.R., McKnight P.E. (Eds.),

- Strengthening research methodology: Psychological measurement and evaluation* (p. 143–157). Washington, DC: American Psychological Association.
- Sharkey, P. T., Tirado-Strayer, N., Papachristos, A. V., & Raver, C. C. (2012). The effect of local violence on children's attention and impulse control. *American journal of public health, 102*(12), 2287-2293.
- Smith-Maddox, R., & Solórzano, D. G. (2002). Using critical race theory, Paulo Freire's problem-posing method, and case study research to confront race and racism in education. *Qualitative Inquiry, 8*(1), 66-84.
- Spillane, J. P., & Thompson, C. L. (1997). Reconstructing concepts of local capacity: The local education agencies' capacity for ambitious instructional reform. *Education Evaluation and Policy Analysis, 19* (2), p. 185-203.
- Steele, C., and Aronson, J. (1995). Stereotype threat and the intellectual test performance of African-Americans. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 69* (5), 797-811.
- Steinberg, L., Lamborn, S. D., Dornbusch, S. M., & Darling, N. (1992). Impact of parenting practices on adolescent achievement: Authoritative parenting, school involvement, and encouragement to succeed. *Child development, 63*(5), 1266-1281.
- Street, B.E. (1984). Literacy in theory and practice. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Tate, W.F., Ladson-Billings, G., & Grant, C.A. (1993). The *Brown* decision revisited: Mathematizing social problems. *Educational Policy, 7*, p. 255-275.
- Tillman, L. (2002). Culturally sensitive research approaches: An African American perspective. *Educational Researcher, 31* (3), p. 3-12.
- Tillman, L. (2002). Culturally sensitive research approaches: An African American perspective. *Educational Researcher, 31* (3), p. 3-12.

- Torre, M., & Fine, M. (2006). Researching and resisting: Democratic policy research by and for youth. In S. A. Ginwright, P. Noguera & J. Cammarota (Eds.), *Beyond Resistance!: Youth activism and community change: New democratic possibilities for practice and policy for America's youth*. New York: Routledge.
- Townsend, B. L. (2002). Testing while Black: Standards-based school reform and African American learners. *Remedial and Special Education, 23* (4), p. 222-231.
- U.S. Census Bureau (2000). City statistics for Inglewood, CA. Retrieved from <http://www.calmis.ca.gov/file/Census2000/InglewoodDP2000.pdf>.
- U.S. Census Bureau (2004). American Community Survey, 2004. Retrieved from <http://www.census.gov/acs/www/Downloads/ACS/accuracy2004.pdf>.
- US Centers for Disease Control, National Center for Health Statistics (2009). Retrieved from <http://www.cdc.gov/nchs/index.htm>.
- US Department of Justice, Bureau of Justice Statistics. (2009). Retrieved from <http://bjs.ojp.usdoj.gov/>.
- Vygotsky, L. (1978). *Mind in society: The development of higher psychological processes*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Watson, C. & Smitherman, G. (1996). *Educating African American males: Detroit's Malcolm X Academy solution*. Chicago: Third World Press.
- Watts, R., Griffith, D., & Abdul-Adil, J. (1999). Sociopolitical development as an antidote for oppression: Theory and action. *American Journal of Community Psychology, 27*, p. 255–272.
- Watts, R., Williams, N., & Jagers, R. (2003). Sociopolitical development. *American Journal of Community Psychology, 31* (1–2), p. 185–194.

- Wigfield , A. and Eccles, J. (2000). Expectancy-value theory of achievement motivation. *Contemporary Educational Psychology*, 25, 68-81.
- Wigfield, A., and Karpathian, M. (1991). Who am I and what can I do? Children's self concepts and motivation in achievement situations. *Educational Psychologist*, 26, 233-261.
- Willms, J.D. (2000). Monitoring school performance for standards-based reform. *Evaluation and Research in Education*, 14, p. 237-253.
- Witte, J. F., & Walsh, D. J. (1990). A systematic test of the effective schools models. *Educational Evaluation and Policy Analysis*, 12 (2), p. 188-212.
- Wynn, J., White, R., 1997. Rethinking Youth. Sage, London
- Yin, R. K. (2006) *Case Study Research, Design and Methods*. Newbury Park: Sage Publications.