PERSPECTIVES ON URBAN EDUCATION

VOLUME 7, ISSUE 2 | FALL 2010

ISSUE THEME: Special Issue Honoring Joe Cytrynbaum

CONTENTS:

Issue Introduction 2
By Tina Collins, Raymond Gunn, and Leif Gustavson, Guest Editors

Youth Spaces and the Power and Possibility of Performance 4
By Joe Cytrynbaum

More than a Library?: Urban Poverty and an Exploratory Look at the Role of a Neighborhood Institution 22
By Carolyn Ly; Introduction by Waverly Duck

Stories of Struggle and Hope: Lived Experiences of Puerto Ricans in Chicago Schools 34
By Erica Davila

On Joyous Teaching… 47
By Catherine L. Belcher

"Supreme Efforts of Care and Honest Utterance": Grasping the Singular Power of the Spoken Word in School Spaces 49
By Kelly Wissman

The Tactics of Hope 54
By Pamela Cytrynbaum

Joe Cytrynbaum: Labor Leader 63
By Michael Janson

Umoja Joe 66
By Lila Leff

Joe Knew There Was Something Wrong 70
By Kevin Coval

Issue Introduction

By Tina Collins, Raymond Gunn, and Leif Gustavson, Guest Editors

On July 11, 2009, a good friend, colleague, and scholar, Joe Cytrynbaum, passed away unexpectedly at age 36. Joe was a remarkable person and a wonderful scholar, who was frustrated and fueled by a diverse range of issues and passions: social justice, creative expression, and youth work. Joe's life was devoted to a blend of activism, scholarship, and the arts.

To commemorate Joe's life and work, we offer readers this special issue of Penn GSE Perspectives on Urban Education Journal. Our goal was to create a multi-media, multi-modal document that weaves together the many threads of who Joe was, honoring the complexity inherent in his life and work. Joe saw the connections between social justice, creative expression, and youth work, and understood that in order to tackle societal problems, these three issues must be in play. Our hope is to show how these themes are connected in interesting and surprising ways.

We asked Joe's friends, colleagues, and other scholars to explore some of the provocative questions that he himself engaged with: What does it mean to write with youth? How can art inform the practice of teaching? How can we work collaboratively to solve pressing social problems? How are these seemingly disparate questions connected? And how did knowing Joe shape your own perspectives and actions on these issues?

Above all, our goals with this issue are to bring together the varied spheres of influence that Joe participated in and helped to cultivate, and to create a hybrid work of art that pushes the work forward and would make Joe proud. We have collected pieces from the wide range of communities where Joe worked, including not only scholarly articles, but also reflections, remembrances, audio, and poetry.

When students, colleagues, and friends visited Joe at his office, they would see this Rilke quote taped to his door:

> Be patient toward all that is unsolved in your heart and try to love the questions themselves like locked rooms and like books that are written in a very foreign tongue. Do not now seek the answers, which cannot be given you because you would not be able to live them. And the point is, to live everything. Live the questions now. Perhaps you will find them gradually, without noticing it, and live along some distant day into the answer.

Joe's passing, over a year ago now, is still an open question for many if not all of us who knew him well and loved him dearly. When reading these pieces, we sense his inquisitive nature, his boundless optimism, and his contagious humor. We can visualize him reading along, nodding, and interjecting with insightful comments. The work in this issue heeds the wisdom of Rilke to have our eyes and ears open in order to embrace the unknown and to ask the questions that lead us to distant answers. This is the way that Joe lived. This is the way that he will be remembered.

For his dissertation, Joe conducted his ethnographic field work at a large public high school in a Northeastern urban center. This school, renowned for its academic reputation, enjoys one of the most culturally diverse student bodies in the school district. Joe's study examines the (missed) opportunities urban public schools have for engaging in – and *transforming* - the highly contentious public discourse on racial, gender, class, and sexuality difference – to name a few reasons Americans often find themselves marginalized and disfranchised. In Chapter Five of the dissertation, which we have included in this issue, Joe examines two spaces within the school where students participate in cultural productions that both challenge and re-inscribe assumptions about youth identity.

We follow Joe's dissertation chapter with an essay by one of his intellectual heroes, Ralph Cintron, who responds to Joe's piece by raising our concerns about the tricky social terrain modernity offers for youth identity. The two essays by Carolyn Ly and Erica Davila, respectively, were written by scholars who did not personally know Joe but whose work is in the spirit of Joe's scholarship and activism. Ly looks at the underappreciated role of public libraries in the lives of youth in low-income urban neighborhoods. Using resistance theory and life history methods, Davila discusses the experiences of Puerto Rican public high school students in Chicago who struggle to give voice to their cultural identity in the face of a school system that threatens to silence them. We placed a blank page in the middle of the issue to represent the pause, the emptiness, and the possibility that is Joe's passing.

These thought-provoking articles are followed by three reflections from colleagues who knew Joe during his time at the University of Pennsylvania. As gentle and loving as Joe could be when working with youth, he could be equally dogged and strident when he confronted those who stood in the way of social justice. Michael Janson's piece provides one with a sense of this side of Joe's multifaceted personality. Janson illustrates the pivotal role Joe played in the formation of GET-UP (Graduate Employees Together at the University of Pennsylvania), a union for teaching assistants at the university. Catherine Belcher then ushers in three personal reflections on praxis and social justice through her work in a teacher education program in Los Angeles. Kelly Wissman investigates the teaching and writing of poetry within public school spaces, illuminating how the *work* of poetry in an Academic Interventions classroom stirs new visions of who the students and the teacher can be.

Pamela Cytrynbaum, Joe's sister, provides an intimate glimpse into the writing work that Joe did with students from Manley Career Academy High School in Chicago. Pamela's discus-

sion of Joe's 'tactics of hope' is layered and brought to life by Joe's poetry and the poetry of his students. Erin, Joe's wife, offers her own insight into several of Joe's poems in this piece, revealing how these poems were indeed graphs of Joe's mind working, a mechanism for coming to grips with his everyday life.

Lila Leff offers a remarkable glimpse of Joe at work at Umoja, the Chicago youth advocacy organization Joe joined immediately after his graduation from Penn's doctoral program in education, culture, and society – a heady title, but Leff's portrait demonstrates that, for Joe, youth work was always about the (com)passion and the joy Belcher describes so eloquently in her commentary. Joe was a fearless advocate for youth and a mentor and friend to many. The powerful voices of the young people whom Joe worked with at Umoja can be heard in the audio file from the youth-focused memorial held at Manley Career Academy in Chicago in September 2010, which includes poetry, music, and remembrances from his friends and colleagues in Chicago. The energy and impact of Joe's work with young people is also captured in the video slideshow created by Umoja Student Development Corporation and Free Spirit Media as a way to honor Joe Cytrynbaum. The photos in this video capture Joe's time working at Umoja between 2003 and 2008, and illustrate Joe's great love of youth and community and his passion for life. Both of these media pieces can be accessed from the table of contents.

We end the issue, fittingly, with Kevin Coval's powerful poem that brings together all the many facets of Joe's complex and wondrous personality into a crystal-clear image of the beautiful, smart, and magnanimous (one of Joe's favorite words) individual Joe's family, friends, students, and colleagues all knew him to be.

Dr. Christina Collins holds a joint Ph.D. in History and Education and a graduate certificate in Urban Studies from the University of Pennsylvania. From 2006-2008, she served as the Geraldine R. Dodge Post-Doctoral Fellow at the Institute on Ethnicity, Culture, and the Modern Experience at Rutgers University-Newark, and from 2008 to 2010, she was a post-doctoral fellow at Harvard's Graduate School of Education. She is currently the lead researcher and policy analyst on charter schools for the United Federation of Teachers in New York City. Her first book, *"Ethnically Qualified": Race, Merit and the Selection of Urban Teachers, 1920-1980*, will be published by Teachers College Press in January, 2011. She can be reached at tinamcollins@gmail.com

Raymond Gunn is an assistant professor of sociology at the College of Wooster. He holds a dual Ph.D. in sociology and education from the University of Pennsylvania.

Leif Gustavson, Ph.D., is an Associate Professor of Education, Coordinator of Middle School Education programs at Arcadia University, and interim Chair of the Education department. He teaches courses which explore the acts of writing and reading, how teachers and students design learning environments, and the connection between improvisational play and teaching and learning. His research explores the creative practices of youth (zine writing, graffiti, and turntablism among other forms) and how the ways in which youth learn in the everyday can inform and influence the way teachers teach. Leif is also Executive Director of Qui Vive! The Center for Writing, Book Arts, and Performance. Qui Vive offers innovative, after school writing opportunities for middle and high school aged youth in the Greater Philadelphia area. Dr. Gustavson has published articles in *The Journal of Children's Literature* and *Field Methods*. His most recent book is titled *Youth learning on their own terms: Creative practices and classroom teaching* from Routledge.

Youth Spaces and the Power and Possibility of Performance

By Joe Cytrynbaum

While the previous two chapters analyzed the limits of Franklin High's approach to bringing students together across lines of difference, this chapter looks closely at two spaces where students engaged in practices and forms of cultural production with transformative possibilities. Throughout the research process I looked for spaces where youth were, in fact, making the most of the opportunity to attend a school with peers from across the city, and from across the myriad demographics that constitute Franklin's student body. Specifically, I sought out spaces where youth came together for one of two important purposes: to cross boundaries of difference or to affirm and re-imagine identities. I glimpsed a variety of spaces within Franklin High where students engaged in one or both of these two tasks, but the two spaces I discuss in this chapter capture best the limits and possibilities of such spaces. Specifically, these spaces highlight how performative forms of cultural production both reproduced and challenged the dominant institutional dynamics with respect to difference. Students created and ran one of the spaces, Lyric, an after school hip-hop club. The other space, an Asian American Studies class, came into existence through the collective efforts of a group of Asian American students.

As I discussed in chapter one, a nascent body of theory and research on youth and schooling documents and analyzes the power and possibility of spaces created for and by youth (Fine, Weiss, & Powell, 1997; Weis & Centrie, 2002; Weis & Fine, 2000). This work calls attention to the important identity work and educative practices that take place in such spaces, and it highlights how they can provide meaningful opportunities for youth to cross borders, resist forms of oppression, and imagine and initiate transformative projects (Weis & Fine, 2000). Nonetheless, the work that takes place in youth spaces is never simple, and always fraught with contradictions:

> [We] acknowledge that there are no neutral spaces, that all spaces are 'political' insofar as they are infused with questions of power and privilege. All spaces suffer the burdens of social contradictions. None are insulated from racism, sexism, homophobia, and classism. As such, all spaces carry the capacity and power to enable, restrict, applaud, stigmatize, erase, or complicate threads of youth identity and their ethical commitments (Weis & Fine, 2000, p. xiii).

Indeed, Lyric provides an example of how a youth popular culture form can play a contradictory and at times reproductive role in structuring performative forms of cultural production in a youth space that brings students together across lines of difference. On the other hand, the Asian American Studies class demonstrates how performative forms of cultural production can enhance the transformative possibilities of spaces for youth.

Building on the youth spaces literature, I use Conquergood's (1989; 1991; 1992) synthesis of performance theory as a framework for discussing the role of performance in Lyric and the Asian American Studies class. By focusing on the role of performance, I demonstrate how performance theory can enrich the important scholarship on youth spaces. Moreover, I call attention to how forms of performance can play a significant role in supporting the social and academic work that takes place in such spaces. In addition, both the performative nature of Lyric activities, and the use of student generated performances as the culminating project for the Asian American Studies course pushed me to develop a framework that could focus and deepen my analysis of the forms of cultural production in these spaces.

Lyric and Asian American Studies had certain things in common: students created both; both involved performance; and both provided opportunities for meaningful engagement with forms of difference. On the other hand, three important differences distinguished the spaces: one site was a class, the other an extracurricular activity; one site was facilitated by a supportive adult, while the other was completely student run; finally, one focused on the experiences of a particular racial group while the other centered on a popular form of youth culture. In this chapter, I describe each youth space separately, focusing my analysis on one key performance in each: the cipher, an improvisational rap performance, and the performance project that I developed with the Asian American Studies teacher and his students. I conclude the chapter with a brief discussion of the role of leadership in structuring and facilitating the work of youth spaces.

LYRIC

> Rap, for the most part, was the common ground that was responsible for bringing us all together into one big posse. Earlier cliques separated girls from boys, the youngest from the oldest. We'd come together for the sake of rap. Whether young or old, male or female, if you could recite the lyrics to 'Rapper's Delight' in its entirety, you were the shit. Period. (T-Love, 1993, P. 309).
>
> But I didn't infiltrate black teenage society instantly. Much of my initiation came from the loose-knit bunch of kids at my school who were into hip-hop. Partly popular, partly outcasts, our interracial band

> of troublemakers grew up on hip-hop together (Wimsatt, 1994, p.25).

When I first saw flyers up around school describing a hip-hop club and inviting "poets, MC's, writers, breakers" and others to come to Lyric, I sensed that this might offer a space for me to learn something about race, culture, and a particular kind of diversity experience. I knew from my own past experiences that hip-hop has this way of moving across racial, ethnic, and class lines, bringing people together to share in the pleasure of the music and linguistic play, while also raising contentious issues around race, class, and gender. Hip-hop always struck me as a cultural movement that seemed to attract attention through its ability to synthesize provocative themes with urgency and pleasure. Indeed, scholars have explored how hip-hop, a cultural form grounded in Afro-Caribbean, Latino, and African American urban cultural production (George, 1998; Perkins, 1996; Rose, 1994), has found resonance across lines of class, race, gender, and geography both in America (Cross, 1994; Forman, 2000; Wimsatt, 1994; Guevara, 1996) and internationally (Bennett, 1999a, 1999b; Condry, 2000; Mitchell, 1995). For all these reasons, Lyric caught my interest because it sounded like a space that might provide a glimpse beneath the surface of Franklin's diversity narrative through which I might better understand how students managed the opportunities and challenges of coming together across lines of difference.

In early April, 2000, three months after first seeing the Lyric sign, I met Jamal, a lanky dread locked young man with dark olive skin, baggy cargo pants, and a loose fitting t shirt. Jamal was one the founders of Lyric, and I ran into him near the end of the school day, outside the Franklin Broadcast Network cage; he told me that he was attending some of the Lyric meetings while taking a year off from attending an Ivy League university to participate in the local City Year program. I mentioned that I had seen some of the signs advertising Lyric meetings, though I had yet to attend. Jamal enthusiastically encouraged me to attend that day's after school meeting; in the months that followed, he provided me with a wealth of information on the club and its history.

As school ended later that day, I had no trouble finding the Lyric meeting; thumping beats pulled me down the hallway to the spot. The meeting was held in an unassuming classroom with desks arrayed in a U shape, the open end of the U facing the front of the room. Passing through a group of African American male students congregated around the door, I made my way into the room and took a seat in one of the desks. Several students sat in desks or leaned against the windowsill, while two white male students and Jamal caught my attention as they free-style rapped to beats emanating from a small boom box. They stood in the front of the room and swayed to the beat, taking turns rhyming. Discussing the role of freestyling in rap, hip-hop artist T-Love (1992) offers the following:

> Freestyling is the ability to rhyme straight from the top of your head, as opposed to rappin' lyrics which have been previously written and memorized, or 'from page' as some MCs would word it. Done to a funky instrumental beat, or to human beat box, even done a cappella, it is rapping in its freest form and where rap, as we know it today, has evolved from (p.306).

Freestyling constituted the main activity of the cipher, the performative practice I detail below.

Taking in the scene, I waved to Jamal, who nodded his head in acknowledgment. As I scanned the room, I recognized a number of students from other places spaces I hung out around school, including the Gay, Lesbian, Straight, and Bisexual Alliance (GLSBA) and the South Steps. I also noted that the students in the room where a racially and gender diverse group. I saw several Asian and Latino students, although white and African American students were in the majority. The gender balance was near equal.

Jamal encouraged the students near the door to come in and join the group. As they took their seats, he rapped, "I say 'community'; you say 'service.' Community'!" and we all shouted, "Service!" He then said, "When I say 'not for', you say 'profit'. Not for!" and we all shouted "Profit!" Everyone clapped as Jamal turned off the music. Next, a tall, slender white male student with thick, wavy brown hair and a thick tuft of facial hair on his chin introduced himself as Yoseph, "a senior, and president of Lyric." He explained that the meeting would begin by going around the room and having everyone say their name, class, and what teacher would be the best emcee (rapper). I counted twenty-four people present, with several more arriving during the meeting. After the introductions, Yoseph said, "We're gonna start the meeting with the poets." He then invited anyone who had prepared a poem to take the floor.

An African American female student with hair partially dyed dark red stood and moved to the front of the room. She looked at Yoseph and asked him if she was allowed to curse, and he said yes. She prefaced her piece by stating that the poem was, "From a ho's perspective." She rocked back and forth a bit and gesticulated as she shared her poem about sex, abortion, and conflicts over men. The poem struck me as powerful, incisive, and intense as well as sophisticated and lyrical. Everyone clapped for her.

Next, a white student named Bridgett, a South Steps regular, walked up front and opened a notebook I often saw writing in, and proceeded to read several poems. One centered on love and intimacy and the other described obnoxious kids on the bus. She didn't look up as she read, but her recitation was strong. The poems were powerful, funny and angry. In one, she proclaimed her strength as a woman: "Yes, it's that time of the month and no, that's not why I express myself and my power as a woman." As with the first poet, she received applause and encouraging comments from other students.

Kai, a light-skinned African American student with glasses and dreadlocks in the early stages of development, followed Bridgett. He also read from a journal, and his poem struck me as a kind of mini-epic about "ex-

otic" tangerines—a long flowing poem about identity and spirituality and life. His delivery was full of dramatic pauses and changes in tempo. Students actually clapped and whooped supportively during some of the pauses as well as when he finished.

Several more poets followed Kai, and then Yoseph moved the meeting into group discussion on the topic of the week: race and hip-hop. He began by saying,

> What is really good about this school is that you can talk with your peers about important issues and learn from them and their perspectives, which might be different from yours. And this is kinda like class, but we all the teachers. Instead of just listening to the teacher all day, we're being creative together.

Yoseph explained that the issue of race and hip-hop could be sensitive because hip-hop is in many respects "black music", with a history similar to American jazz. A student asked about these similarities, and Yoseph suggested that both are African-American in origin. Jamal added that, "Jazz uses African beats and rhythms mixed with appropriated European music." Yoseph clarified that, "I'm not trying to say that one thing is necessarily true, but this is my understanding and opinion." As the conversation progressed, students differentiated between hip-hop, which they agreed is a culture, and rap, which signified the music industry and business. The students talked about the potential for hip-hop to really bridge cultures and become a multicultural movement. Highlighting the potential of hip-hop culture as a unifying force, Jamal said, "Look around this room!"

Some students questioned whether the popularity of hip-hop would destroy it. As they debated this question, an African American senior named Alex, another South Stepper, theorized that hip-hop, like other popular musical forms, started small and then developed through "bohemians". It then went "mainstream to the masses". He also suggested that music will always spawn and interact with grass roots movements.

As the conversation shifted to hip-hop culture, Alex suggested that all musical movements have a culture, and hip-hop is just newer. Another student pointed out that hip-hop is often not accepted in public. The students then discussed distinctions between "mainstream rappers," for example, how some of them often have negative messages about sex and making money. They agreed that this was the negative side of hip-hop. An Asian American student mentioned the song "They School" by the rap group Dead Prez. He described it as a good song that involved an interesting critique of urban education. He said it never gets played on the radio, and several students agreed to call the "so-called hip-hop radio stations" in the city and request the song.

The last part of the conversation involved sub-genres of hip-hop, like turntablism, as well as regional variation in the United States with respect to variation in popular styles of hip-hop music. In addition, they discussed the merits of lyrics as opposed to good beats, with some students admitting that there are times when, "You just want to hear some good beats, even like the Backstreet Boys." This comment generated some laughter, but several students conceded that it was a valid point. Yoseph ended the conversation by acknowledging a central challenge for hip-hop: how to keep it going without excluding people.

After the discussion, Jamal turned on the boom box and several students formed a kind of circle of rappers, taking turns free-styling to the beats. Though I didn't know it at the time, this was the cipher. Students occasionally joined the circle, while a number of students and I sat and grooved to the music. I noted a range of free-styling skills, but the students nonetheless supported one another, smiling, grooving and occasionally offering an encouraging remark. Several female students free-styled in the circle, as did students from various racial and ethnic groups. Yoseph eventually turned off the boom box, and several students proceeded with an improvised beat box ensemble. They each took turns riffing, while the others kept the beats going. I also watched a small group of students do a little break dancing. As I left the meeting an hour and a half after it began, ten students remained, free-styling and break dancing.

The subsequent meetings I attended that spring lasted from 1 1/2 to 2 hours, following a similar format to what I describe above: some freestyle rapping; then around the room with everyone introducing themselves and maybe saying something about their favorite hip-hop artists; a free style cipher; opening up for students to read their poetry; discussion of a current issue; and ending with another cipher and perhaps some break dancing. During the meetings, Jamal and Yoseph would announce when it was time to shift activities, though they didn't have a formal or consistent routine; they would subtly confer and then announce the shift. Discussions focused on significant, provocative issues, such as the WTO protests in Seattle and Washington, D.C., as well as issues that directly impacted the students' everyday lives, such as police brutality and how schools were becoming more like prisons. These meetings—led by seniors Yoseph and Jamal through the spring, and then by Kai and Bridgett and an African American student named Lila during the 2000-2001 school year—explicitly focused on Lyric as a positive space where students could come together and share their creativity and learn from each other. As Terry, an African American senior and member of Lyric explained to me,

> Lyric is getting people together and being open to other ideas. People at lyric are open to things, and try to be open. Freshman year, black, white and Asian students tended to hang out together. . . . But people in Lyric come together from different groups and they're more open-minded.

Terry's statement also subtly references part of Franklin's diversity narrative—the notion of learning about and across difference as an important and unique opportunity offered by the school. In this way, Lyric seemed to provide a microcosm of

the promise of difference at Franklin: a space where "open-minded" students had the opportunity to learn about and across forms of difference.

When Lyric started again in the fall, the new leadership expressed similar sentiments about the purpose and promise of the space. At a meeting early in the fall of 2000, Kai began by explaining Lyric to the group:

> Lyric is like a forum for people to express themselves, to maybe get feedback on poetry and flowing. It kind of came back last year, the third year, after a slow second year. It's a place where you can come and chill and get lost in the atmosphere, or get flowing or recite poetry.

Lila added, "It's a cool club for people to express themselves. It's a place of love, not like the Apollo; there's no cane and no sandman to pull you off stage."

As I continued to spend time with Lyric, I learned that the students came from a variety of racial, cultural, and economic backgrounds, as well as from across the city. They also came from a range of academic tracks. Through involvement with this space, students produced and performed a particular kind of "diversity", a "diversity" inflected with hip-hop cultural forms. Through hip-hop culture, they (re) produced and performed a range of orientations to socially significant forms of difference, particularly race, ethnicity, gender, and sexual orientation. While the club provided students with a performance venue—both in terms of the explicit performances of free-style rapping and poetry as well as the more subtle expressive stylistic performances of fashion, argot and hip-hop and popular cultural literacy—it also provided a space for social relations that formed and subsequently developed outside the temporal and spatial confines of club meetings.

In order to understand the virtues and limits of Lyric as a space where students came together across lines difference, I turn now to a discussion of Lyric's key performative practice: the cipher. I focus on the cipher because it constituted the focal practice of Lyric meetings; some meetings during the 2000-2001 school year only involved ciphering. Moreover, my analysis of the cipher captures both the possibilities and limits of performance with respect to bringing students together across lines of difference, as well as in terms of expressing forms of identity.

THE CIPHER

"Yo, Yo, Yo" uttered rhythmically, keeping time or a beat; students would speak—more of a groove—these words to mark their entrance into the improvisational freestyle space of the cipher. Standing in a circle and freestyling as hip-hop beats emanated from a small boom-box; this was ciphering. The music was always cleansed of its lyrics; beats only. The beats provided the driving background, the aural canvas on which emcees painted Jackson Pollack style improvised rhymes. In the Lyric vernacular, they "spit" or "flow" lyrics. "Yo, Yo, Yo" the cipher literally and figuratively centered Lyric meetings as a circle in the middle of the room. Students entered and exited the cipher, but a core of students always seemed to keep it moving, to rock it—the emcees, the Lyric "heads".

I first heard the term Lyric heads during the 2000-2001 school year. Lyric heads used it to describe themselves, and other students—some involved with Lyric and others who simply knew of the group—used it as well. In fact, in the winter of 2001, several students I spent time with in the Franklin Broadcast Network cage began to refer to me as a Lyric head.

The Lyric heads were all male, although two or three female students who were very involved with Lyric may have accepted the moniker. Some students suggested, explicitly and implicitly, that it marked the group's somewhat exclusive nature. Sam, an Asian American student who was involved but not a head, put it this way: "There was never a Lyric clique, but now the clique runs things. It's more intimidating to people outside the circle. Lyric was immune from the clique thing; now, even Lyric." The Lyric heads included three African American students, two white students, and one Pakistani student; but as an extended peer group, it also included two additional African American students and one Asian student. These other students attended meetings on occasion as spectators, but nonetheless spent time during lunch, free periods, and after school with the core Lyric heads. A third white male student didn't hang out with the heads very often outside of Lyric meetings, but he was a regular in the cipher during the 2000-2001 school year.

During Lyric meetings, those in the cipher bobbed their heads and shoulders to the beat or beat box, always looking away or looking down, unless the emcee spit something outrageous. They seemed to feel the flow, waiting for their chance to tap into its energy. An emcee would claim the flow and begin to spit, marking the entrance with a, "Yo, Yo, Yo" Sometimes two emcees would start the "Yo" simultaneously, but usually the individual with the more confident flow would take the cipher. As I discuss below, students often wove bits of their identities into these rhymes, referencing their race, ethnicity, gender and/or religion. The more skilled emcees never seemed to lose their flow, and they would at times rely on repetition (repeating a phrase or word) and/or bridging words ("word", "yo", "yeah", and so on) as linguistic devices to keep their flow progressing. Newer, less skilled emcees often hit verbal brick walls, stopping in mid flow with a "Damn!" or "Shit!" When this happened, the arrested emcee would usually embody the break in flow by tripping forward, backward, or standing up, thereby physically breaking from the head and shoulder bopping of the cipher. During such breaks, the emcee would sometimes laugh and / or make eye contact with others in the cipher. These breaks usually didn't stop the flow, as another emcee would verbally enter the break and get things moving again.

In one of the first meetings I attended, Yoseph expressed his sense of the cipher to the group: "Freestylin' can be empowering. It can let you vent your energy. And it's not a battle; it's all peace." Yoseph would often encourage students to enter the cipher and freestyle, emphasizing that individuals

would not be judged on their rhymes or style. When I asked him to explain the cipher to me, he said that it's, "A circle; a circle of creative energy." He told me about ciphers in the city that you could participate in to develop your skills. According to Yoseph, some of them were quite competitive and combative. Several of the Lyric founders also described early Lyric ciphers involving spectacular verbal battles. The verbal combat of such ciphers apparently involved emcees freestyling lyrics that were simultaneously self aggrandizing and disrespectful to other emcees in the cipher.

Despite Yoseph's encouragement and claims, certain elements clearly elevated an emcee's status within the cipher. While I didn't focus on this aspect of the performance during the research, comments made by various students, as well as countless hours spent watching ciphers—and audience responses—clarified two elements as critical when it came to emcee status: verbal and physical style and lyrics. In terms of the former, some students earned status through a smooth and extended style, avoiding verbal brick walls. But a loud, energized, and frenetic style could also provide a student with status. In terms of lyrics, status seemed to follow from clever and unexpected rhymes as well as the incorporation of lyrics from a previous emcee or even poet. I also noted some students gain status through outrageous violent and /or sexual subject matter. But as I discuss below, the controversial nature of such lyrics seemed to generate a limited form of status.

I turn next to a discussion of the cipher work of two specific youth that exemplifies how the cipher is a performative form that both creates possibilities for certain types of expression and identity work and limits others. In addition, this discussion calls attention to how the cipher (re)produced the disparagement of certain forms of difference.

JIM

Within the cipher, students seemed to weave a whole host of references into their flows as a way to mark and test personally significant aspects of their evolving identities. Jim, a white working class student, often flowed about sex and violence with profanity and bravado. He loved rap star Eminem, sporting shirts with his image. He also wore oversized pro sports team jerseys, football in particular—Tennessee Titan Jevon Kerse, "the Freak", because his body is so chiseled that he is a "freak" of nature, seemed his favorite.

While Jim didn't participate in Lyric during the spring of 2000, he regularly attended meetings and hung out with the Lyric heads during the 2000-2001 school year. At some point during the year, he clearly was a head. Jim was serious about emceeing. I remember a conversation with him and several other heads during lunch when he discussed recording equipment, and how he had rigged up his boom box to record himself and some friends flowing. Unlike the other Lyric heads, I never heard him read poetry.

Jim captured my attention the first time I saw him take the cipher. Dressed in baggy jeans cuffed at the ankle and a blue long sleeved button down, buttoned up but not tucked in, Jim rhymed in a kind of forceful, exclamatory style, talking about violence and sex, as well as touting his prowess as lover, fighter, and emcee—I jotted down the word "scatological" in my field notebook. As Jim flowed, I noticed that students smiled and seemed to enjoy his enthusiasm, energy, and outrageous lyrics. When he flowed that, "The Puerto Rican girls be calling me poppy," the crowd responded with laughs and hoots. His flow contrasted sharply with the more playful, pop culture referencing flows I heard in the cipher the previous spring. Even during 2000-2001, when students flowed more regularly about sex and violence, Jim set the outrageousness bar quite high. Common themes that filled his flow in the cipher as the year progressed included sexual acts, guns, and his prowess as a fighter. He also occasionally reproduced the homophobic discourse I heard at Franklin through derisively mentioning "fags" and "dykes" in his flows. Although Jim expressed his style through self-aggrandizing, violent, and at times homophobic and misogynist lyrics, many Lyric attendees couldn't seem to get enough of his flow.

As the fall progressed, it got to the point that, during some of the more crowded meetings, when 50 or more students would pack the room, the majority of whom were African-American, the shift in focus to the cipher was palpable when Jim began his minimal-bass, maximum volume, "Yo! Yo! Yo!" I remember one meeting in particular where a group of female African American students could not seem to get enough of his flow. They would perk up, smile, and laugh at his outrageousness. Indeed, his outrageousness in the cipher consistently elicited positive responses—clapping, laughter, and even hoots—from the crowd. Jim's style and the content of his flow were clearly influenced by his favorite emcee, Eminem. Eminem was also well liked by a number of Lyric students, and I noticed several African American students don t-shirts with his name and image.

Eminem, while controversial, has established himself in the hip-hop world as a talented emcee. Though his Lyrics are at times misogynist and violent, the controversy that surrounds him centers on the fact that he's white. Jim's whiteness also played an important role in his cipher work. While Jim was not at the two meetings I audio taped, I always wrote down snatches of his flows. He often flowed about whiteness, for example spitting, "All white people, are not nice people!" which elicited laughs and claps from the crowd. On another occasion, he flowed, "Let me tell you how a white boy can act: white boy can say nigger, don't give a fuck you can call me wigger!" This was not the only time Jim used the word nigger in his flow, although he was the only white student I ever heard use the word in the cipher. While I did occasionally hear students quietly express disdain for Jim's cipher work, though never to his face, about the violence, misogyny, and homophobic content of his flows, I never heard students comment on the racial content. In fact, in two separate ciphers, I heard African American male students positively reference Jim. The first time, a student approvingly wove some of Jim's content in his subsequent flow,

and the second time a student flowed about having a gun and then said, "I can spit forever Jimmy style." Jim smiled in response to the second reference.

Jim's cipher work highlighted and perhaps pushed against boundaries of the acceptable with respect to gender, sexuality, and race. His flows expressed a hyperbolic Hollywood action movie sensibility, over the top and cartoonish. Students laughed at his outrageousness in the same way, perhaps, that youth audiences laugh at the outrageous carnage and mayhem of an action or horror film. And while I hesitate to push this analysis into the realm of Jim's intentions, his cipher work seemed less ironic than playfully pop. The violent, homophobic, and misogynist content he wove into his flows struck me as an attempt to entertain—and based on student responses, he did seem to entertain—through referencing popular Hollywood and video game images that pervade the popular cultural ether. For example, I spent time on several occasions with Jim and the other Lyric heads at Mario's Pizza Shop, and I remember how they often played a violent military video game called Crisis Zone. Jim, in particular, enjoyed the game, which involved using a real looking plastic machine gun mounted on the front to shoot at people and military vehicles on the screen. My point here is that the landscape of popular (youth?) culture is full of the kind of violence, misogyny, and homophobia Jim often referenced in his cipher work. In addition, the use of the word nigger has become increasingly common among hip-hop youth across racial and ethnic groups in particular stylistically defined contexts (Akom, 2000). It's one thing to encounter this sort of imagery through mediated expressive forms like film or video games; Jim, however, brought this stuff to life in the cipher. In this way, Jim's cipher work evokes the role of the trickster:

> As soon as a world has been made, lines drawn, categories defined, hierarchies erected, then the trickster, the archetypal performer, moves to breach norms, violate taboos, turn everything upside down. By playing with social order, unsettling certainties, the trickster intensifies awareness of the vulnerability of our institutions. The trickster's playful impulse promotes a radical self-questioning critique that yields a deeper self-knowledge, the first step towards transformation (Conquergood, 1989, p.83).

While many students seemed to find his flows entertaining, some, as I stated above, found them objectionable. As a trickster, Jim revealed an important fault line, a fissure that, with the right kind of engagement, might have opened up to productive conversations about issues of difference and power. Within the physically bounded space of Lyric this type of dialogue never developed, but some students nonetheless reflected on the meetings in ways that highlight the possibilities. For example, two weeks before graduation, I sat with Kai and three other Lyric heads on the school's front lawn. As they talked of prom, college, and the sweetly sad last days of high school, Kai said, "You know, I've been thinking that I shouldn't use the word 'gay' derisively. Some people were talking about the language in the cipher, and I realized some of it no doubt offended."

As a form of cultural production, the cipher expressed tensions around forms of difference in a way that at least opened up the possibility for productive dialogue. Indeed, as the above example suggests, some students managed to reflect on and discuss language use in the cipher, and how it might reproduce homophobic expressions and possibly make Lyric an exclusionary space. Moreover, I don't wish to judge Jim or his flows, to celebrate or condemn his cipher work. A more useful approach emphasizes how, as a trickster, Jim's cipher work potentially "opens up a privileged space for sheer deconstruction and reconstruction" (Conquergood, p.83). But the cipher, as a performative form of cultural production, seemed to limit such discussion within Lyric. To a certain extent, it seemed to actually favor reproductive discourse. Here, then, is the contradictory nature of youth spaces highlighted by Weis and Fine, and the contradictory nature of performance:

> Ethnographers are now asking, How does performance reproduce, legitimate, uphold, or challenge, critique, and subvert ideology? And with the influence of processualism, they are more and more phrasing their questions so that they embrace a both/and complexity, instead of an either/or polarization. (Conquergood, 1989, p.90)

Jim's cipher work captures the both/and complexity of ciphering as a performative form: his cultural production in the cipher both reproduced and legitimated homophobic discourse and created an opening for Kai and other students to have a critical conversation about it.

NAF

Naf ciphered with an earnestness I didn't see among other students. He participated in the first Lyric meeting I attended, and continued to participate until he graduated. Naf's early flow wasn't particularly smooth, but during my time with Lyric I noted a major improvement in his skills. This was evident when he came back from summer break to begin his senior year, and again after winter break in January of 2001. He wasn't as choppy when he spat, and his sense of rhythm seemed to have improved. I asked him about this at both junctures, commenting that he seemed to have noticeably improved his skills. He downplayed my compliment, but admitted that he practiced a great deal. As 2001 progressed, I learned that he had a rap group with two other students from his neighborhood. Naf also spent time on the internet engaged in various chat groups centering on hip-hop culture. He even mentioned exchanging lyrics on line and getting feedback via e-mail.

Naf always interacted with me in a friendly and self-effacing manner. The other Lyric heads seemed to like him, though some considered him naive. Kai once said the following about Naf:

> Naf thinks he knows a lot, like

> he's deep or something. But he's kind of having an identity crisis. Naf has a lot of potential, but he's confused and kind of in denial about stuff. And he's not too socially adept. He's annoying at times, but he can still hang.

And during a conversation on the subway with Jim and Greg, an African American student who hung with the heads but didn't participate in Lyric, Jim said that, "Naf sucks." When I expressed surprise at this and pointed out Naf's improvement, Jim conceded that, "Naf is getting better, but he still says 'yo' too much." When I asked if he had given feedback to Naf about this, Jim responded, "Naf doesn't want to hear criticism." Nonetheless, Naf was clearly a Lyric head. When he couldn't attend the meeting on the day the yearbook photographer came to take the Lyric picture for the yearbook, two students held up a sign with Naf written on it as a way to symbolically include him.

Naf was from Pakistan, and he and his family immigrated to America at some point during his childhood, although I never got all the details. He found in Lyric a space to blend his Pakistani identity with an evolving Muslim/hip-hop/American identity. While some Pakistani students found support in Franklin High's Indian and Pakistani Culture Organization, Naf found a supportive space in Lyric, and more broadly in hip-hop culture. In late May of 2000, I recall a conversation at the tree—Lyric had taken to holding ciphers at this enormous thick old tree on the north side of the school building. The tree was ideally located as a performance venue; it stood tall right next to the main path up which students walked to and from school. And as it was on a hill, it provided a significant amount of visibility, both to see and be seen. Near the end of the cipher—a cipher in which he had woven in Urdu phrases—Naf expressed doubts and insecurities about his free-styling skills. I listened with interest as Kai and Lila offered supportive words, encouraging Naf by highlighting the significance of his commitment to ciphering, and pointing out how so many folks simply watch.

I also remember how the following year Naf came to Lyric hungry and tired from fasting in observance of Ramadan. It was a particularly cold day, and he participated in the meeting without his usual verve. When the sun finally went down, he and Bill, a white student who seemed to be his closest friend among the heads, took off to Mario's so Naf could break the fast with a slice of pizza.

Naf exemplified how some students found within the performative vernacular of the cipher a relatively malleable space to explore and express elements of their identities through a multi-layered performance. First, the performative space of the cipher amplified the power of sartorial style to express identity. Students stood in the cipher, in the middle of the room, bopping and grooving, occasionally taking the cipher with physical and verbal gestures, sartorial style on full display. I saw Naf transform his sartorial style over the year and few months I knew him. During his senior year, he started to wear the baggy cuffed jeans, timberland boots, and superhero shirts—Spiderman was his favorite—characteristic of the Lyric heads. He also let his straight black hair grow out, following the coif style of choice for Lyric heads. In addition, he occasionally wore a black polyester doo-rag, an African American head wrap associated with the early days of hip-hop. Yet, Naf maintained a sartorial connection to his country of origin: during the winter of his senior year, he often ciphered with a red and white patterned cotton scarf his mother brought back from a trip to Pakistan.

Beyond the identity work expressed through his evolving sartorial style, the cipher created a spaces for Naf to express his identification with religious imagery, morality, good versus evil, God, and spirituality. He wove these themes and images into his flow, blending them, like most emcees, with self-aggrandizing images:

> Yo, yo, the Pakistani Prodigy, yo, flowing and then so and so. Different type of cats going from here to Soho. Medina, Mecca, yo it's all in there. Might as well go to, China and just visit, yo, yo, you know what I might well, use my knowledge and the text of Islamic. I might as well see I'm blasting away atomic. Lyrical bubonic, plagues in your rays.

Such flows, as well as his experimentation with free-styling in Urdu, received little comment from the other heads. Unlike spaces where speaking a language other than English might elicit derisive laughter, criticism or epithets, the cipher seemed to provide a certain level of freedom to play with and blur linguistic boundaries. Here was the promise of the cipher, how it provided a performative space for emcees to publicly explore, blend, and express certain elements of their identities.

Ciphering, as a form performance, throws into relief the poetics of identity work. Discussing the poetics of performance, Conquergood (1989) offers the following:

> Performance-centered research features the fabricated, invented, imagined, constructed nature of human realities. Cultures and selves are not given, they are made; even, like fictions, they are 'made up.' (p. 83)

This notion of fabricating and constructing identity via performance captures the power of the cipher with respect to identity work. While ciphering tended to limit or constrain the expression of some aspects of identity—for example, certain forms of sexuality—Naf's cipher work demonstrates how it nonetheless allowed for the expression of other elements.

For analytic purposes, I focused on the (re)production of divisive forms of difference in my discussion of Jim's cipher work, and identity construction in my discussion of Naf's cipher work. Both discussions clearly overlap, as Jim was crafting his identity and Naf was exploring forms of difference. And these discussions also suggest how Lyric, as a youth space, and the cipher, as a performative form of cultural production, created possibilities for identity work and dialogue about and across forms of difference, and simultaneously (re) produced misogynist and homophobic discourse. I will have more to say below about the limitations and possibilities of Lyric. I turn now to a discussion of the Asian American Studies class, a

space that provides a useful contrast to Lyric with respect to the possibilities of performance in youth spaces.

ASIAN AMERICAN STUDIES

I met Paul Lee in the spring of 1999, near the end of his second year of teaching at Franklin. I met him through my involvement with a student group that produced an annual multicultural literary magazine; Paul served as the group's faculty sponsor. A slender man in his late twenties, his standard uniform was slacks, a button down, a tie, and—on chilly days—a solid color sweater. The backpack he carried his papers and books in added to his youthful air. Paul came to Franklin directly from an Ivy League teacher education program, and he stood out among the faculty in two obvious ways: he was one of two Asian Americans out of a faculty of close to ninety, and he was, at the time, the youngest faculty member at Franklin. Both demographics factor directly into the circumstances of his hiring. The year before Paul came to Franklin, several Asian American students organized a campaign to increase the number of Asian faculty and secure an Asian studies course. Here's how the Franklin High Handbook sums up the story:

> "During winter controversy emerges from complaint lodged by two students regarding the absence of Asian American staff, history, and teaching of Mandarin. All addressed and designated to be in place for September '97" (p.259).

Paul's hiring allowed the school to address the first two issues, as he was brought in specifically to develop and teach the Asian American studies course. The unique circumstances allowed Dr. Levy to get around the district's seniority rules and hire Paul right out of graduate school.

When Paul talked about how he came to Franklin, he put a great deal of emphasis on how the situation exemplified the way students can come together to create change:

> I get frustrated because things happen, changes happen, because of students, and the students don't realize how much power they have. I mean, students are really responsible for the Asian American Studies class, and even for the hiring of the Latino counselor. I'm not saying Levy doesn't play a role, but the students really generate it.

This emphasis on student power captures a philosophical precept of Paul's approach to teaching and working with youth. He often told his students that they had power to change things, that they could come together to address issues that concerned them. On several occasions, he took interested students to protests and rallies after school in the city's Chinatown section. And the curriculum he developed—and he always seemed to be developing curriculum, experimenting with projects, and trying to shake things up—further supported this emphasis. Examples of this include everything from taking his students on a field trip to a folk art museum exhibit on social protest, to creating a social change project for his AP Government course. The latter project was particularly anomalous at Franklin, but Paul felt like he could take advantage of the fact that even though the course material was designed for a half-year, Franklin rostered it as a year-long course.

Paul also enacted his student-power philosophy through how he configured his classroom, encouraging students to take ownership of the space through decorating the room. In addition to the standard hanging of student work on the walls, each class had their own section of wall they decorated with pictures and art work that they occasionally updated. Paul also had a couch in his room that offered respite to weary students before and after school, and sometimes during class breaks. In addition, he encouraged the student groups he sponsored—in addition to the literary magazine, he served as sponsor to the Asian Students Association—to adorn the walls with posters about upcoming events and projects.

The other precept that guided Paul's teaching was the notion that people learn through teaching. He took all his classes—Freshman World History, Asian American Studies, and AP government—to teach and present projects at various local elementary and secondary schools. I was lucky enough to serve as a chaperone for many of these excursions, and this offered me a first hand understanding of how Paul worked with his students and encouraged their collaboration on the refinement of the projects. He always talked with them after to debrief and reflect, and he always solicited my feedback as well. In addition to these field trips, Paul took his classes to share their work with other classes within Franklin.

Students liked Paul, and many I spoke with named him among their favorites at Franklin high. Like several other teachers, Paul seemed to have a group of students each year who connected with him, felt comfortable, and often hung out in his classroom after school. While most of these students were Asian American, a number of white, African American, and South Asian students also found a connection with Paul.

In addition to sponsoring student groups, Paul encouraged students to organize events to share their work. For example, several of his students were involved in a local Asian American youth theater company, and he set up an event for them to come and perform at Franklin. He also helped students put on several after school open microphone and poetry events that were very well attended. And near the end of my research at Franklin, I noted a significant shift in the work of the Asian Students Association; with Paul's encouragement and support, they began to develop presentations and skits that explored stereotypes and the challenges faced by Asian American students. The students presented this work to classes at Franklin during Asian American Heritage month. Some of these students had taken the Asian American Studies course, and their involvement with the performance project clearly influenced their work on this new project.

Paul's Asian American Studies class was always a work in progress. As he told a group of students at another magnet high school assembled to watch his class perform, some of whom were

part of that school's Japanese culture elective, "Out of over 200,000 students in this district, all classes related to Asian studies are sitting in this room." In other words, there weren't any models in the district, and Paul created the Asian American Studies course from scratch. In terms of content, the course wove together and highlighted the intersections of Asian history, immigrant history, and American history, with an emphasis on social, political, and cultural issues. In addition, students learned about American immigration law, contemporary Asian American culture, and some of the more prevalent dynamics between Asian Americans and other groups, for example, African Americans and whites. Paul also peppered the course with activist stories, youth activism in particular. He worked hard to provide students with a core of knowledge on the Asian American experience, while also pushing them to explore relevant issues of their own interest. This created an opening for non-Asian American students to reflect on and explore how their experiences linked with and cut across those of Asian Americans; Paul pushed the students to recognize common ground, particularly in terms of their shared status as youth and public school students.

The four classes I spent time with—one each year over four years—were populated predominantly by Asian American students, although they were quite a diverse bunch. There were first and second generation Asian Americans who came from all over Asia: Vietnam, Laos, Korea, Cambodia, the Philippines, and China, among others. Each year several white and African American students took the class, in addition to several multi-racial and South Asian students. Every class had about twenty students and, for reasons that had to do with Franklin's curriculum, they were all sophomores and seniors. Paul did his best to bring in non-Asian American students, encouraging his freshman World History students to sign up. But numerous factors stood in the way of making the course more ethnically, racially and academically diverse. As an elective, the course carried no grade point boost, and this seemed to turn away top track students. In addition, the roster office consistently scheduled the course late in the day. This precluded athletes from taking the course, as they generally took their lunch at the end of the day so they wouldn't have to miss class due to away games. Of course, many non-Asian American students probably didn't see the class as relevant to their interests or experiences.

I turn now to a discussion and analysis of the performance project Mr. Lee and I developed over the course of four consecutive springs. Drawing on the performance metaphor, I divide the discussion into three scenes that reveal the evolution of the project and the opportunity it provided for the students. I like the notion of scenes because, as with a play, we can't see everything that happens over days or weeks or months; the scenes filter the story, capturing for the audience the important moments and turning points. Here, then, are three important moments—three scenes—that highlight the power and promise of the performance project with respect to its role in creating a space where Asian youth could challenge stereotypes and articulate complex identities, as well as explore and bridge differences. In addition, the performance project created a space for non-Asian youth to strengthen their voices and explore and express the shared challenges they face as youth.

SCENE 1: THE BIRTH OF A PROJECT

After our first meeting, Paul and I continued to chat periodically, often following meetings of the multicultural literary magazine. Several months into our relationship he asked me to accompany the Asian American Studies class on a field trip, and the two of us went out for coffee afterwards. We talked about his experiences at Franklin, my project, and recognized common ground in our politics and in our interest in supporting youth. As he shared some of his criticisms of Franklin and the challenges of being a young teacher, it was clear to both of us that this was a turning point in our relationship.

Several weeks after the turning point, we rode the subway together after school and found ourselves chatting about our college days. As we talked, I mentioned my background in theater. Paul had done some performing as well, and he took a keen interest in my description of several performance studies course I had taken as an undergraduate. When I mentioned that we always had the option in those courses of doing a written final or a performance, his interest was clearly piqued. "I've been thinking about how to use performance in my Asian American Studies class," he said. I told him about the work I had done adapting some non-fiction writing for performance, and we proceeded to brainstorm ideas for how his students might perform their final. Paul then asked if I would be willing to come to class and describe the project to his students. I agreed, and we decided to discuss the project more over the coming weeks.

Paul devised an outline of the project, devoting the entire month of May to work-shopping the student performances. He found some short pieces to serve as examples—a poem, a monologue and a very short scene—and he convinced a teacher at Brimley High, a magnet school across the city that had a Japanese culture class, to have her students host his class and serve as audience for the performances at the end of May. With all of this in place, he asked me to come in and serve as a sort of a consultant to his class. I knew some of the students, both from my field work and specifically from chaperoning for Paul, and I did my best to provide verbal and written constructive criticism.

My field notes on this experience are spotty, as I didn't think at the time that the performance project would fit into my dissertation. Nonetheless, I do remember that the performance at the magnet school across town was a success. Paul's class seemed to bond through the process, and the performances were well received at Brimley.

I played a similar role the following spring, and again the performance project felt like a success. At that point, I realized that the project offered an interesting case of the role of performance in youth spaces. Moreover, the themes Paul's students chose to

explore in their performances represented an unusual sort of meditation on difference. For example, a self identified multi-racial student explored the complexity of her identity, the pain of hearing a variety of epithets and the power of blending the different parts of herself. Her performance was intense, a spoken word poem of sorts, and received loud applause. A Vietnamese student deftly crafted a montage of scenes that expressed the challenges of immigrating, leaving family behind, as well as the gender stereotypes he experienced as a result of his interest in figure skating. Equally powerful were a series of monologues and scenes by Asian American students that simply showed the struggles and joys of life: missing grandparents, struggling in the shadow of an older brother, and the silly adventures of a student trying to acquire a Gameboy. Performing these pieces provided the students with an opportunity to share their lives and develop their voices. Just as important, performing their stories challenged stereotypes by humanizing these students' experiences for their audience. Kondo (1995), discussing the power of performance, offers a similar appraisal:

> Like so many people on the margins, Asian Americans are generally erased from realms of cultural representation. Perhaps worse, when we are depicted it is only to be stereotyped yet again, a kind of symbolic violence that influences not only how we are treated by others but also how we think of ourselves. In that light, plays, films, poetry, and novels written by Asian Americans can constitute a stunningly powerful affirmation that we exist.

Here the live aspect of theater is critical. Live performance not only constitutes a site where our identities can be enacted, it also opens up entire realms of cultural possibility, enlarging our senses of ourselves in ways that have been, for me, especially powerful. Theater shows us that Asian Americans can be other than model minorities or gangsters, lotus blossoms or dragon ladies, scientists or gardeners. We can write plays; we can perform, act, design, direct. Theater helps to widen the possibilities of how one can imagine oneself as a racialized subject at this moment in history.

Kondo highlights the power of performance both for audience and performer: Performance both "opens up entire realms of cultural possibility, enlarging our senses of ourselves" and "shows us that Asian Americans can be other than" binary stereotypes. As Paul often pointed out to his students, this was true for non-Asian American's as well, as American youth similarly faced the challenge of enlarging self and breaking stereotypes.

After this second year of performances, I recognized the relevance of the work for my inquiry. The following February, I asked Paul if I could research the project as part of my dissertation. His response: "If you want to write about this in your dissertation, that's fine. But you're not gonna sit in the back of the class and take notes; you're gonna teach with me." I agreed, and we proceeded to meet several times to work out the arrangements.

SCENE 2: REHEARSAL

Unlike my involvement with the class during the first two springs—when I came to class half a dozen times each spring to help out—I spent twenty four class periods helping Paul's students develop their pieces in the spring of 2002. In addition, Paul and I met regularly during his lunch period and after school to both discuss the progress of the students' work and plan activities.

I spent the first few class periods getting to know the students and allowing them to get to know me. Paul had them developing interactive group presentations on several Asian countries—their history and relations to America—that they would take to an elementary school and then, in revised form, a high school. This practice of having students develop presentations and lessons that they would then take to other schools captures Paul's approach to teaching learning: we learn best when we are teaching. As part of the development process, Paul asked the students to provide written and verbal feedback to each group, and I provided feedback as well. Participating in the class in this manner helped me connect with the students through developing a collaborative relationship with respect to their work.

Early on, Paul and I had also decided that I would introduce the students to a variety of basic theater games. We agreed that starting the games in March, when they where working on their presentations, would both strengthen their public speaking skills and lay a solid foundation for the performance project in May. Of the twenty-one students, two white, two African American, one bi-racial (half Asian, half white), and the rest Asian American, most had virtually no theater background. Despite their lack of experience, the majority took the games seriously. The games centered on getting the students comfortable with standing up in front of an audience, focusing on other performers while sharing the stage, centering and focusing their own energy as performers, and a small amount of improvisational story telling. In addition, we worked with the students on projecting their voices.

Near the end of April, Paul invited students from his past classes to share their performances with the current group. A dozen of his old students showed up, including several that attended college in the city and one who made a special trip from college in New York City. The alumni performances energized the group and helped them envision possibilities for their work.

On May first, Paul and I formally kicked off the performance project with the first handout. Setting the tone early, he began class with one of his intense motivational speeches:

> All year you've been going out and challenging stereotypes, in other classes and in other schools. Our goal has been for the audiences to break the stereotypes they have of you when your mouths are closed. The goal of these performances is for you to have a voice and use that voice to challenge stereotypes through telling your stories. And to make this work, you have to support each other as a group.

With these words hanging in the air,

we passed out the overview of the project, highlights from which I offer here:

> We are going to be devoting the month of May toward producing a theater piece that we will perform at Brimley High School.
>
> Each week, you will be responsible for developing a performance piece. We will devote time in class for you to prepare. At the end of the week, you should have the performance piece ready to act out in front of the class. Each performance will count as 10 points.
>
> <u>What is a performance piece?</u>
>
> Basically, each week, you should be ready to present something that you wrote in front the class in an artistic way. That could mean:
> -reading it
> -singing/rapping it
> -acting it out
> -dancing it
> -or doing something else creative...
>
> You can do the piece by yourself or with others in the class.

The rest of the hand out included encouragement for the students to connect issues from the class with their personal experiences, draw from writings they produced earlier in the semester, and directions that they be as descriptive as possible in their written scripts.

In the weeks that followed, we continued to use the games as a sort of warm up, and we spent the rest of each class supporting the students as they shared their work in front of the group. Paul required the students to submit their evolving script each week, and both of us provided written feedback. In addition, Paul, the students and I generated a brief written critique directly following each performance. In other words, after a student shared their piece, s/he would receive twenty odd scraps of paper, each with some reactions and suggestions. We also encouraged the students to ask for specific kinds of feedback based on what aspects of their piece they were struggling with. Not all the students consistently complied, but we kept emphasizing how this was part of their preparation.

Over the first two weeks, the students' work was uneven. Some students came prepared with props and ambitious scripts, and staged complicated ensemble pieces that included a narrator and scene changes. Other students opted to read poetry or monologues. And still others came unprepared and either refused to get up or found something they had written earlier the semester and simply stood in front of the class and read it. Paul tried to use both the stick of students not getting credit and the carrot of encouragement to prod tentative students up in front of the class. Some major breakthroughs occurred when the students performed their pieces for Paul's freshman world history courses. The freshman provided feedback, and the experience also helped the Asian American Studies students work through the logistics of props and scene changes and transitions, as well as the jitters of live performance. The following day, Paul's students headed to Brimley for the show. Inspired by the prior year's class' title, "Asians on Ice," the students decided to call their show, "When Asians Attack." I can't say what the title meant, but all the students seemed to find some sort of pleasure in it.

SCENE 3: "WHEN ASIANS ATTACK"

When we arrived at Brimley, two students, an African American male and an Asian male, met us at the metal detectors near the entryway and escorted us up to a classroom where the Asian American Studies students could organize and prepare. Brimley was a clean, bright four story high building built in 1924, situated in a neighborhood just north of the city's downtown core. According to our student escorts, the student body was just under 600, and, "Everyone knows each other here."

After the guides dropped us off, the students set about the task of looking over lines, adjusting props, clarifying transitions, and generally trying to relax. They practiced alone and in little groups. Karen, a white female student, ran lines with Pat, a half Korean, half white student. Sherry, Chinese-American, Nang, Cambodian-American, and Van, Vietnamese-American, practiced their rap about inter-ethnic violence and tensions, which seemed well memorized and particularly tight. Sav and Ngoc, both Cambodian-American, practiced the song they had written about friendship and love.

After checking in with the hosting teacher, Paul entered the room and we pulled the students together for a final pep talk. Paul had learned that Brimley has a no swearing policy, and he told the students that they would have to use their judgment about whether or not to edit their pieces. Paul then asked if I had anything to say, and I offered the following: "You all have worked really hard on these pieces, and it's a powerful show that covers pain and laughter and politics. I'm just really impressed with what you've put together." Paul followed this up with his own impassioned words:

> You all are so brave, and this is important work. What you are doing is showing them, the audience, that you are human beings. I didn't tell you what to say; you really chose what you wanted to share. And this show is about breaking down stereotypes.

Paul's words excited the students, and after a brief theater game warm up, we headed to the classroom where the students would perform.

The performance classroom had shiny wood floors and wood trim, and several rows of chairs were set up in such a way that the front half of the room, by the door, served as the stage. The room was rectangular, and this configuration maximized the width of the stage. A table stretched along one wall, stage right, piled with plates of strawberries, fruit salad, bananas, sliced melon, platters of hoagies, and soda. Thirty students, mostly Asian American with a few African Americans and whites, filled the seats; in addition, several teachers and a counselor stood behind the back row.

After some welcoming comments from Ms. Hirsh, a white teacher in her forties dressed in a flower print dress, Paul introduced the class and the performance project:

One of the major projects that we do throughout the year is we go around to different schools to educate people about Asian American issues. And we do this to try to challenge the stereotypes that people have of Asian Americans. For the project that we do at the end of the year, we developed a theater performance as a way of challenging not just stereotypes of Asian Americans, but stereotypes that people have of each other as high school students. In other words, the pieces that you're gonna see here today—poems, the short stories, the monologues, the plays—are all meant to address the issue of how each of these students can challenge what people think of them before they open their mouth.

After a few additional comments about how long the show would run, the intermission, and so on, Paul opened the performances: "Without further ado, I want to present to you, 'When Asians Attack!'"

The audience respectfully listened and clapped as the students made their way through the pieces. Some students still did not project their voices, and others fumbled with scripts and lines and cues and props. At times, the pacing and blocking were off. Nonetheless, there were powerful moments in each piece, and the performers supported and encouraged one another with winks, claps, smiles, and pats on the back.

A Vietnamese American student expressed her struggles with weight loss and an eating disorder through a poetic monologue:

Alone, I started to loss weight again
This time on purpose
I dropped 37 pounds and sprung 5 inches
The compliments came in sound
`

Alone, I kept going
Losing more and more
Standing at 5'5"
Weighing in at 90

Alone, I ponder
About how I lived my life
Hating the choices I made
And kicking my own ass

Alone, I laugh at my reflection
Ironic how things turn out
I once longed to be thin
Now I'm crying for my own sins

Alone, it's impossible for me to gain weight
Years of trying
But no results
Forever having to stay in my fragile state

A Korean American student reflected on the pain of epithets and her struggle to craft her identity between white friends and Korean parents:

When I was growing up I wanted to be white.
Why was it so important?
No one knew, not even myself.

I lived in a white neighborhood with my white friends.
I was different from them.
Amongst ourselves I felt like one of them.
I really didn't feel left out.
I guess.
Well, at least most of the time.
The only time I would feel alone ("different") would be whenever we went out,
I would be the only "different" person and people passing by would yell out
CHINK!...ching chong ching chong...go back to your own country!!!!
Just assuming I was Chinese.
Of course I would respond every time saying that I wasn't Chinese
But they didn't care, because I was Asian.
And in their eyes all Asians were Chinese.
I felt anger inside and didn't know how to express that anger.
I was angry cause no one understood what I was going through,
Being an Asian in an American world.
No one,
Not my parents,
who grew up in a different country with a different culture.
Not my friends,
Who were white and lived in a household with American traditions.
No one.

A white student alternated between narrating the story of her relationship with her father, his substance abuse, and his eventual disappearance from her life, and scenes of dialogue with him over the phone:

Jen: "Dad?"
Dad: "Hey!"
Jen: "Is Jules pregnant?"
Dad: "How did you find out?"
Jen: "Why didn't you tell me?"
Dad: "I wanted it to be a surprise."
Jen: "How far along is she?"
Dad: "6 months."
Jen: "I'll talk to you later dad."

Jules had a baby girl. Over the years we've become close. Jules and I have become close too. However, my father and I have become more and more distant. I don't know him anymore.

Closing the show with a powerful letter to an eight year old who was stabbed to death at his parents' Chinese restaurant, a Chinese American student whose own parents owned a restaurant expressed sorrow and frustration:

Your parents like so many other Asian parents out there probably came to this country for a better life and worked hard so that they could see you and your sister achieve great things one day. Now they will never get to see those things that all parents hope for their children, such as seeing you graduate from college or seeing you get married one day. You were only a carefree little boy like I was once, who played around at the restaurant and who enjoyed riding his scooter up and down the sidewalk. You did not deserve to die like this; you did not deserve to have your life taken over 1700 dollars.

And with that, the audience enthusiastically clapped and smiled. Paul turned to the audience for questions, and a teacher asked the students how they found the strength to open up and share so much. The students immediately gave credit to Paul, clapping for him. Paul quickly responded that it was all

their work and they deserved the credit. One student then added, "I think that everyone in the class was blown away by what other people where saying. You know, we just didn't know that such great things were gonna come out. I think everyone was kind of shocked."

Ms. Hirsh thanked the students again, and the audience gave another round of applause. A student from Brimley's school newspaper snapped several group photos, and after sharing the feast provided by Brimley and milling around and chatting with Brimley students, we returned to the prep classroom to gather our things and reflect on the day.

Both Paul's class—as a youth space of possibility—and the performance project—as a form of cultural production through which youth explored and bridged differences, challenged stereotypes, developed voices, and articulated complex identities—capture the promise of youth spaces and performance. The student's exploration of difference came both among class members and between performers and audience. As the students shared their experiences through the first stages of the project—their joys, pains, unresolved questions, and discoveries—they came to know each other in important ways. They generated bridges of empathy and insight through humanizing stories of self that revealed unique experiences of immigration and stinging epithets, as well as shared struggles with parents and with body image. With Paul's support and encouragement, the students found the strength and safety to share these stories and support one another in the process of sharpening their performances. All this helped the students develop confidence, develop their voices, and share their work with unknown students across town. In addition to exploring (and at times bridging) differences, the performance project—both the process of development and the final performance—complicated and challenged stereotypes of race, ethnicity, gender, and youth. Similarly, the performance project created a space for some students to articulate complex identities; it was such articulation that served to challenge and complicate stereotypes.

Despite its virtues, the performance project had limitations. First, some students didn't participate fully, generating only a brief poem or short monologue. Second, Paul and I struggled to find the class time to consistently provide quality feedback to all the students; things sometimes felt rushed. Finally, and perhaps most importantly, we never had the time for adequate dialogue between performers and audience; I imagine such dialogue would enrich the experience for both groups. For the audience, dialogue would have allowed questions and ideas to emerge, and for students to make connections across pieces and between themselves and specific pieces. The performers might have deepened their experience of performance by hearing such feedback from strangers, and it would have provided them with an additional opportunity to reflect on their work. Nonetheless, the performance project created an important space for students, and offers important lessons about the power of performance to support and enhance the work that takes place in youth spaces.

THINKING ACROSS YOUTH SPACES: THE ROLE OF LEADERSHIP

The Asian American Studies course—and the performance project in particular—clearly provided a space for students to challenge stereotypes and articulate complex identities, as well as explore and bridge differences. In addition, the performance project created a space for non-Asian youth to strengthen their voices and explore and express some of the challenges they face as youth. In the cipher, Lyric students expressed complex identities and glimpsed possibilities for critical conversations about divisive forms of difference. While these students didn't quite realize this potential, my analysis of their performance work points out openings for educators interested in attending to youth popular culture and performance as a means to spur conversations on race, gender, sexual orientation, and violence. Moreover, my discussion of Paul's Asian American Studies class clearly demonstrates how a supportive adult can play a key role in nurturing and fostering performance work that explores forms of difference, supports the development of youth voices, and challenge stereotypes. As Paul's leadership seems crucial in terms of structuring the types of cultural production that took place in Asian American Studies, I want to briefly compare the two spaces in terms of the role of leadership.

In many respects, the key structural distinction between Lyric and Asian American studies class was that the latter was a class led by Paul, a skilled educator. But my research also offers insight into what strong youth leadership might have provided for Lyric. As I described above, Jamal and Yoseph ran the first Lyric meetings I attended. Jamal was twenty years old, and Yoseph had actually been involved in founding Lyric. Jamal received a great deal of respect from students, both for his skills as a poet and emcee, and because, frankly he demanded it. He ran the meetings with authority, and he and Yoseph prepared the structure of each meeting beforehand. In addition, his status as a college student elevated him from the micro-politics that often infuse large American high school social scenes (Eckert, 1989; Foley, 1990). Jamal, then, served a vital role in facilitating the shape and quality of Lyric meetings, and the shift after he left was clear and significant.

In an interview that took place in the spring of 2002, after Lyric disappeared, Pam, a white senior who had been involved with Lyric for several years, provided an assessment of how the space evolved:

> P: So, I liked Lyric my sophomore year [1999/2000].
> JC: What did you like about it?
> P: It was just cool. It was fun. It was like, it's like going to a free concert every week, kind of. And it's just kind of cool, and like, inspiring to do your own stuff or whatever. And then junior year [2000/2001], it was okay. It wasn't as cool last year [2000/2001].
> JC: Last year. Yeah, what was your sense of what happened last year?
> P: It kind of got weird. I don't know. It kind of got corny. I don't know. Not to put blame on any-

body, but just 260[2000/2001 senior class], the people who were running it. Like all these weird people showed up that just weren't down, I don't know.
JC: Well like, what was weird about them?
P: I don't know. It was like a whole different environment. Like, I don't know. It just wasn't as chill, I guess. And then this year it just disappeared.
JC: Yeah, I don't know what happened.
P: If I still liked it from last year, I would have tried to keep it up. But there's just nobody I didn't think, that would like, want to go. You know what I mean? Last year was just weird. It wasn't cool.
JC: Maybe is there, like, a metaphor or something for like, what was up with last year?
P: Huh. Just people started showing up that didn't really. . .
JC: Or yeah, what was it? What did it become last year?
P: I don't know. People started showing up and weren't really, either where just sitting there and not doing anything, or just like talking, and being like disrespectful. And then people who started showing up and doing, like, *gangster* rap in the middle of the cipher.
JC: Yeah.
P: And being, like, all, like, weird, and like violent about stuff, and it used to be such a peaceful thing. It was just corny. It wasn't what it was supposed to be.
JC: So yeah, what do you think it was supposed to be? When it was really good?
P: It was supposed to be a place where people who were interested in the same stuff, like hip-hop, and that whole lifestyle or whatever, could come and chill and, like, maybe draw, you know. Maybe write poetry, even though that wasn't that really that big of a thing when it first started. And like, you know, freestyle, and just show each other what they can do, and help each other freestyle, and like break dance, and like, all that stuff, and then it just got into weird poetry and bad rap.

Pam's analysis of the problems with Lyric—it's shift from a cool and supportive space where students could come to engage in a range of hip-hop activities to a space of violence, weird poetry and bad rap—captures some of the tensions that developed in the absence of Jamal, a strong leader. In fact, I recall a moment during the spring of 2000 when a student came to Lyric stoned, and proceeded to laugh and talk as one of the poets attempted to recite. Jamal wasted no time in telling the student he either needed to quiet down or leave. The student pulled himself together, and the meeting moved forward.

Part of the challenge of Lyric might have involved some of the misogynist and homophobic content that constitutes certain forms of hip-hop culture. This lead to tensions which Pam alludes to and which I witnessed as well. But as I suggest above, structured engagement with such tension and conflict holds the possibility for productive conversation. In effect, strong leadership in youth spaces can harness the pull of hip-hop and other youth cultural forms, while working to make productive use of the more controversial elements of such forms.

CONCLUSION: PERFORMANCE AND THE POSSIBILITY OF YOUTH SPACES

As the literature on youth spaces makes clear, public schools need to do more than simply allow spaces like Lyric and Asian American Studies to exist; as democratic institutions dedicated to encouraging and releasing imaginations (Greene, 1995), they need to play an active role in creating and supporting such spaces. Fine and Weis (2000) capture well the power and possibility of spaces like Lyric and Asian American Studies:

> It is in these spaces that youth engage with a kind of deliberate agency, sometimes an urgency, in which reciprocity is assumed, mastery—of spirit, arts, the body, activism—is sought, voices can be heard, and differences can be articulated; deficit models are left at the door. . . . Youth need spaces to work through the pains of oppressed identities, to explore the pleasures of not-yet identities, and to organize movements we can't even imagine (pp. xiv-xii).

Supporting such spaces will go a long way toward making sure students do more than simply get along. Indeed, they will help schools like Franklin become spaces of possibility and hope, as opposed to spaces of reproduction.

Joseph Cytrynbaum died from a cerebral aneurysm at age 37 in July of 2009. Raised in Evanston, Illinois, Joe returned to the Chicago area after receiving a Ph.D. from the University of Pennsylvania, where for his dissertation he immersed himself in the life of a Philadelphia public high school. Immediately following his doctoral work, Joe moved back to his beloved Chicago where he worked with Umoja, a youth advocacy organization, to design and execute programs not just to help students graduate from high school and move on to college, but also to help them understand their responsibility to their local and global communities. As coach to the "Louder Than a Bomb" poetry team through the Young Chicago Authors program, Joe coaxed students to write freely about their lives. After four years with Umoja, Joe accepted a teaching position in 2008 at the Northeastern Illinois University's School of Social Work. He is greatly missed by all those who were fortunate enough to cross his path.

REFERENCES

Akom, A.A. (2000). The house that race built: Some observations on the use of the word nigga, popular culture, and urban adolescent behavior. In M. Fine, and L. Weis (Eds.), *Construction sites: Excavating race, class, and gender among urban youth*, (pp. 140-157).

Bennett, A. (1999a). Rappin' on tyne: White hip hop culture in northeast England – and ethnographic study. *Sociological Review*, *47(1)*, pp. 1-24.

Bennett, A. (1999b). Hip hop am main: The localization of rap music and hip-hop culture. Media, Culture & Society, 27, pp.77-91.

Condry, I. (2000). The social production of difference: Imitation and authenticity in Japanese rap music. In H. Fehrenbach & U.G. Poiger, (Eds.), *Transactions, transgressions, transformations: American culture in Western Europe and Japan*, (pp. 166-184). New York: Berghahn Books.

Conquergood, D. (1989). Poetics, play, process, and power: The performative turn in anthropology. *Text and Performance Quarterly, 1*, pp. 82-95.

Conquergood, D. (1991). Rethinking ethnography: Toward a critical cultural politics. *Communication Monographs, 58*, pp.179-194.

Conquergood, D. (1992). Book Reviews: Ethnography, rhetoric, and performance. *Quarterly Journal of Performance, 78*, pp.80-125.

Cross, B. (1993). *It's not about a salary…rap, race +resistance in Los Angeles*. London: Verso.

Fine, M., & Weis, L. (Eds.). (2000). *Construction sites: Excavating race, class, and gender among urban youth*. New York: Teachers College Press.

Fine, M., Weis, L., & Powell, L. (1997). Communities of difference: A critical look at desegregated spaces created for and by youth. *Harvard Educational Review,67*(2), 247-284.

Forman, M. (2000). 'Represent': Race, space and place in rap music. *Popular Music, 19(1)*, 65-90.

George, N. (1998). *Hip hop America*. New York: Viking.

Greene, M. (1995). *Releasing the imagination: Essays on education, the arts, and social change*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass Publishers .

Guevara, N. (1996). Women writin' rappin' breakin'. In W.E. Perkins, (Ed.), *Droppin' science: Critical essays on rap music and hip-hop culture*, (pp.49-62). Philadelphia: Temple University Press.

Kondo, D. (1995). Poststructuralist theory as political necessity. *Amerasia Journal, 21*, 95-100.

Mitchell, T. (1995). Questions of style: Notes on Italian hip hop. *Popular Music, 14 (3)*, pp. 33-348.

Perkins, W.E. (1996). The rap attack: An introduction. In W.E. Perkins, (Ed.), *Droppin' science: Critical essays on rap music and hip-hop culture*, (pp.1-45). Philadelphia: Temple University Press.

Rose, T. (1994). Black noise: Rap music and black culture in contemporary America. Hanover, NH: Wesleyan University Press.

Weis, L., & Centrie, C. (2002). On the power of separate spaces: Teachers and students writing (righting) selves and future. *American Educational Research Journal, 39* (1), 7-36.

Wimsatt, W.U. (1994). *Bomb the suburbs*. Chicago: The Subway and Elevated Press Company.

Why Youth Culture

By Ralph Cintron, University of Illinois at Chicago

A few weeks ago I read an article by a philosopher (whose name I cannot recall) in the *New York Times* and the subsequent blog responses. The subject was Lady Gaga. Many of the responders could not fathom why a philosopher would want to waste her time on a cheap cultural icon who "clearly" was meaningless—or rather had only one meaning, namely, the commodification of meaninglessness under hyper-capitalism. They asked: Is this the irrelevance to which contemporary philosophy had sunk?? Several of the bloggers thought that "old" philosophers seemed to enjoy, perhaps even salaciously, commenting on the sexual practices of youth and making moral statements. Were they thinking of Plato?

As someone who has also written about youth culture—along with Joe, Dwight Conquergood, and many others—I would like to meditate on that theme just a bit. But before doing so, some *epideictic*. I met Joe only once, at the Palmer House in Chicago, if I recall. Rob Fairbanks on several occasions has told me that my writing had been influential on Joe. As I was reading Joe's chapter on "Youth Spaces. . .Power. . .and Performance," it was obvious that Dwight's work too was very important for Joe. Dwight had extended a hand to me early on in my career. I was shocked when he died. He was much too young. And I was shocked when I heard of Joe's death. Obviously, he was much too young. So two deaths embracing each other, even as I remain standing, was one reason for writing this. I hope, I genuinely hope, that Joe's wife and child can feel this short essay as tribute, this thing done in memory of another for the memories and well being of those closest to Joe, the chance that the child at some point may read this and know something about their father. Scholarship, research—whatever you want to call it—is a strange action: someone bequeathed something to Dwight, which he passed on to me without knowing it, and I, just maybe, passed it on to Joe, also without knowing it, and so on down the line, a thematic moving through the hands of those who may be real strangers, but in the actions of reading and writing turn out to be not so strange to each other. Again my best to Joe's wife and his family.

So, some of us have this thing about youth culture. There is so much of it in the anthropological literature and in cultural studies, wassup? (To ask "what" of anything seems a bit portentous, but a "wassup" seems to lead to less ontology, and that seems about right here.) Why does Paul Lee, the teacher and organizer of the American-Asian Studies curriculum in Joe's research, want the performances at Brimley High to "breakup stereotypes" and "articulate complex identities"? Why are stories that "enlarge the self" necessary and how do they counter marginalization? Is there some "natural" opposition between the two? Why should students be "empowered to change things"? Why do the leaders of Lyric and Asian-American Studies value resistance, agency, and the poetics of identity? Why do Fine and Weis at the end of Joe's essay talk about the importance of voices being heard, the articulation of differences, and leaving deficit models at the door? And then most intriguingly, and also at the end, why are Lyric and Asian-American Studies linked to "democratic institutions"?

These are very familiar *topoi* or thematics that seem to drive most work on youth culture. For many readers the answers to the above questions are obvious: justice and fairness are moral imperatives and acknowledging the worthiness of difference is one way to realize a more just world. I want to raise questions about their "obviousness" and frame things a little differently: why do Paul Lee and his performers and the Lyric performers believe what they believe? Why has this become their commonsense? And why isn't it everyone's commonsense, for instance, those people on the other side of the culture wars? There is a need for the making of a sympathetic, historical inquiry that maps the evolution of the liberal/progressive social imaginary, what its foundational claims are and its particular dependence on a certain interpretation of social change. Such a map, I suspect, would have a number of scattered nodes linking up a very deep network of ideas at historical junctures.

My current work offers nothing like that, but it has begun poking around. Mind you, I am not just talking about youth culture now but something much bigger than that: all the tinkering that has gone into the making of the liberal/progressive social imaginary but also its right wing counterpart. Perhaps that last phrase sounds strange, but increasingly I am beginning to believe that the tea partiers imaginary, whatever that means, (and I use them as just one example of the right) is historically joined, sort of, at the hip of liberalism/progressivism—and this is what makes modernity look a bit monstrous, unwieldy, but at the same time rather wily. In a sense modernity is trying to survive, and the struggle between the right and left is an apt sign of the fragility of this most thorough-going artifice.

So, a few riffs unsustained. That phrase "democratic institutions" mentioned earlier works well into my interpretive scheme. Some of the early modern and enlightenment writers on democracy fetishized democracy in its opposition to monarchy. Someone like Thomas Paine, for instance, is rather notorious, but even the Federalist papers written with much more sobriety framed the American democratic experience as a unique, unfolding experiment in the progress of civilization. There is a politics of enthusiasm here

that I summarize with the concept of *potentia*—that the democratic rhetorics (equality, freedom, rights, liberty, transparency, and so on) release human *potentia,* meaning that hierarchy must give way to the "will of the people," the "common man," and so on. It is this *potentia* that becomes the moral standard that replaces such older moral foundations as the "divine right of kings," and even divine right itself for a figure like Nietzsche. Today, human rights talk speaks more convincingly to our metaphysically-abandoned world, but not even human rights can abandon vestiges of transcendence, perhaps because human law has its conceptual origins in natural law. So transcendence sneaks back in. At any rate, the democratic rhetorics released a very special *energia* that continues to consume us with the belief that the world we ought to live in should be a world of opportunity for everyone. Mind you, this is a strange belief. Even a cursory glance through history and ethnographies of others, including exotic others, indicates that such notions are not necessarily common. Social order and cosmic order are often hierarchical. Even in those societies where a version of egalitarianism does appear, it is more straight forward and ad-hoc; that is, egalitarianism in these instances functions without the deep formalities and thick entwinements of laws, constitutions, and theoretical notions such as rights, the self, social contract, and so on. Ours, but not theirs, is the systemization of egalitarianism—a rather oxymoronic concept perhaps. At any rate, now that democracy has become a thorough-going, global ideal, there are no "people" outside its political arrangement or its imaginary. Democracy has become the revolutionary force that one cannot revolt against.

There is something messianic about those early accounts that reappears in the language of Paul Lee and Fine /Weis: "Youth need spaces. . .to explore the pleasures of not-yet identities, and to organize movements we can't even imagine." Democracy as a grand opening of human *potenia,* a *dynamis,* an ideology that gives foundation to the not-yet imagined and says that who we are are the not-oppressed. Indeed, the idea of oppression has moved from the early days of democratic imagining, where the physical oppressions of state power were the targets of revolt, to the later days of democratic imagining where the oppressions are of cultural bias and stereotype. And yet the same necessity, even urgency, to address what seem to be fundamental "wrongs." The messianism cannot just disappear but must keep finding "spaces" to do its work.

The curious thing about democracy is that everyone buys into it even as they buy out of it. Edmund Burke and Jeremy Bentham never fully bought into it, but neither did Xenophon, Plato, and the other oligarchs of classical Greece. It's just too careless and unpredictable—which in effect is what the liberals and progressives also felt as they saw Sarah Palin rise out of the populist nowhere. Ultimately no one quite believes in equality because we cannot truly live in it. So equality circulates less in our actions and more in our talk, particularly in those contexts where we can afford the talk of equality, that is, those contexts where equality cannot snap back on us to deliver people and ideas that we truly abhor. Hence, Yale and Harvard became the great bastions of contemporary oligarchy, sifting through the masses and training their charges to do likewise and assuring that global order will continue to be safely managed. Why aren't they under siege? In a society truly wedded to egalitarianism they would be, right? Furthermore, why did the idea of the random lot distributed to the whole citizenry not become the mechanism for choosing political candidates? Think of it: all citizens with the obligation of serving in political office for a brief time once in their lifetime, but each one chosen randomly by lot? Instead, we create two parties that function, in effect, as massive monopolies in charge of the distribution of wealth and power. They too are not exactly under siege, but sometimes they seem to be. These entities can coexist with egalitarian democracy and not seem anomalous because of some interesting moves, some rather primal and others rather subtle. On the primal end is the simple fact that we stand to lose too much in a siege: all of our economic well being, even our poverty, is tied up in the existing order. We are all financialized now—even welfare recipients. On the subtler end is that we have found ways to dampen the punch of the egalitarian side of democracy through a set of tricky terms such as "meritocracy." In sum, we buy into the democratic rhetorics even as we buy out of them.

Well, I have not said anything here that Foucault did not say much more succinctly on page 65, for those who have the 2008 Palgrave edition of his *The Birth of Biopolitics:* "Freedom is. . .constantly produced. [Liberalism] proposes to manufacture it constantly, to arouse it and produce it, [along with the] constraints and the problems of cost raised by this production." That is, democracy through its rhetorics, and in some cases its empirical successes, has produced a certain subjectivity that is far from running its course. It is thorough-going in the sense that both the right wing and left wing subscribe, for instance, to the maximization of choice. The right may put the emphasis on the marketplace and the left on state power, but the real revolution would consist of a radical reevaluation of choice. But the fear is that such a notion would diminish the human and return us to the old hegemonies of theology. But notice how some contemporary fundamentalist Christians have finessed this problem with the argument that God too wants us to prosper by maximizing choice. Modernity indeed is wily.

But let me put an end to this. The point of these incomplete riffs was to suggest that Paul Lee and his Asian-American curriculum and the performances at Lyric have deep roots in a subjectivity that keeps reproducing us. It is a contradictory subjectivity delivering, as Joe says, positives and negatives—or what I am calling our antinomic social system, our divided mind. At any rate, we are on its roller coaster inventing hip-hop culture and its kin. Youth culture, then, outlines part of that vehicle for us—but so does the tea party.

Ralph Cintron is an Associate Professor who holds a joint appointment in English and Latin American and Latino Studies at the University of Illinois at Chicago. He teaches and writes on ethnography, urban theory, social theory, rhetorical theory, and the anthropology of democracy. His current project is a book manuscript titled *Democracy as Fetish: Rhetoric, Ethnography, and the Expansion of Life* in which he pulls together long-standing fieldwork in both Eastern Europe and Latino communities in the Chicago area.

More than a Library?: Urban Poverty and an Exploratory Look at the Role of a Neighborhood Institution

By Carolyn Ly, Yale University
Introduction by Waverly Duck, University of Pittsburgh

ABSTRACT

Libraries have traditionally tended to be one of the few institutionally provided public resources for local residents in poor, urban, neighborhoods. This paper presents findings from the exploratory phase of an ongoing research project which examines, through participant observation, the "value" of a public library in a poor urban neighborhood. To what extent do residents make use of traditional library resources? What alternative functions does the library serve in the neighborhood? The findings collected have suggested that the library as a social space contains value to the immediate neighborhood in ways beyond physical utility; it holds a significant symbolic value or meaning to local residents. These findings suggest that within impoverished urban neighborhoods, locally oriented public institutions need to be recognized as fulfilling a variety of unintended functions for the surrounding community.

ARTICLE INTRODUCTION

When I read the call for papers for the special issue dedicated to the life and work of Joe Cytrybaum, I instantly thought of the work of Carolyn Ly. Carolyn Ly is a graduate student with whom I have worked for over three years. Like Joe, she values access to resources for children and is deeply concerned about the growing inequality in our inner city neighborhoods. Joe was committed to justice, a man who valued creative expression through spoken word and poetry. It followed naturally that he would be dedicated to finding artistic opportunities for inner city kids. I believe Ly's project is a fitting tribute to him and is representative of his community work and the ideals he fostered so passionately.

Ly's article presents findings from an exploratory ethnographic study that examines, through participant observation, the value and use of a public library in a poor urban neighborhood. Observing the disturbing trend of library closures due to budget shortfalls in the worst depression since the 1930s, Ly saw that the closures were occurring in predominantly poor urban neighborhoods. Since she had volunteered at numerous libraries growing up, she understood the changing landscape of their use due to information technology. Though impacted by the economic decline, the library Ly was studying, with its embedded rules of quiet and civility, continued to be a safe learning space for children and a practical resource for job searches and access to information. Ly's observations of the library teach us that the needs of libraries and communities are one and the same. Libraries are safe, accessible, and very useful community institutions where all are welcome, all of which are monumentally important in troubled urban spaces.

Challenging provincial ideas about the importance of library spaces, Ly's goal was to show that libraries have a special utility beyond book circulation. Ironically, Ly's library site almost closed due to budget cuts during the course of this study. While she doesn't mention this in the paper, she played a significant role in saving the library, attending community meetings and participating in the collection of over eight hundred signatures to save the library. Thankfully, the community won. One of my proudest moments was watching her question the mayor using data from her study, showing the library's versatile and overlooked use. It is in this spirit that she is reminiscent of Joe.

It is my sincerest hope that Joe, who was on the frontline of community activism, would appreciate a project that personifies opportunities for all children, especially those in poor urban communities. His work is a constant reminder of the importance of providing educational capital and resource opportunities for children. A man whose work has impacted children in New York, Philadelphia, and Chicago is a shining example of the role of a public intellectual. Ly and I celebrate his life and admire his work and actions. I believe Joe Cytrybaum's work with young people through artistic expression is an example of a legacy we all can appreciate and imitate. His contributions will truly be missed, and we will lead by his example.

Ly, who is in the beginning stages of this research project, graciously welcomes comments. Please send comments to Carolyn.ly@yale.edu.

As a result of the American economic crisis, local policy and decision-makers across the United States are being forced to find new ways to spread already thin budgets. Consequently, public resources such as local libraries, community centers, and arts and recreational programs, are often considered as possible services to reduce or eliminate. Comparably, this issue, particularly regarding libraries, has been of interest to British scholars for quite some time, as the role of libraries and their relevance and resourcefulness to surrounding neighborhoods has been contested in similar situations where library closures occurred due to budget cuts and economic constraints. The consideration of library service reduction and closure as options to alleviate budget constraints have been a relatively recent occurrence in the United States which may partially explain the limited research examining the role of libraries in American scholarship. During the course of this research, the city considered closing the local neighborhood library which was being observed, allowing ethnographic documentation of the process of the threatened closure, and the subsequent response by library patrons and local residents.

This article presents findings from the exploratory phase of an ongoing research project which examines, through participant observation the "value" of a public library in a poor urban neighborhood. This study examines: To what extent do residents make use of traditional library resources? What alternative functions does the library serve in the neighborhood? The goal of this project is to understand the multifaceted use of local urban libraries in an era of economic decline in many of these communities.

LITERATURE REVIEW AND CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

The American Library Association, Communication and Information Studies, along with Institutions such as the Institute of Museum and Library Services are, not surprisingly, generally the leading proponents in the United States in regards to library research. Urban Studies, Sociology, Human Ecology, Urban Planning, and Social Policy disciplines, stand to gain valuable insight on ways to utilize publicly supported social institutions such as libraries and community centers to help ameliorate social inequalities and the lack of resources within highly concentrated poor urban areas. Above and beyond the purely use-value resources of the library, this paper will present empirical evidence which supports the existing evidence that the local library not only plays a role in providing traditional resources, but additionally it has significant symbolic value attributed to its locality, or localness. In examining library closures in the UK, Proctor and Simmons (2000: 32) found that, with regards to how people feel about libraries, "It offers a resource, which, because it is local and belongs to them makes people feel valued." They go on to elaborate on the relevance of close-proximities, "Also because it is local, the local library helps give people a sense of identity and community" (2000: 32). Furthermore, Proctor, Usherwood, and Sobczyk (1996: 37) examined the effect of library closures on patrons during an employee strike in the city of Sheffield in the UK. Within their study they found evidence that there is "very high value placed on the use of the library as a social resource, particularly in communities with higher than average incidences of social and economic deprivation." Most recently, Becker et al.'s (2010:26) findings similarly support these assertions regarding marginalized communities by identifying that among those who visit the library, some of the most frequent patrons include the working poor, which they identify as those who earn 100-200 percent of the federal poverty guideline, women, and people of mixed race.[1] In one of the first and largest national studies involving public libraries, Becker et al.'s (2010) research – while primarily focuses on computer use and internet access – additionally provides key insight on more general library data that has, until recently, been scarce and on a smaller scale. These findings, in conjunction with the longer-standing body of research regarding libraries, shape the existing scientific knowledge on the role and various uses of public libraries.

One interesting finding that is specifically pertinent during the economic crisis is how the local library as a social space of existence plays a role within the larger community. More specifically, part of Proctor, Usherwood, and Sobczyk's (1996: 38) research findings indicate that a library's presence in a local community may have significant impact on local retailers and other businesses since libraries and library visits bring people to those areas more frequently. Additionally, regarding the educational aspects and contributions of the library, their report highlights that in communities in which access to "higher and further education" is less available, there is a "high potential for extended educational provision through the library service" (23, 37). Similarly, Becker et al. (2010:4) highlight that libraries are supportive of furthering the educational aspirations of patrons by providing supplementary tools including internet access and computer word processing programs, which are necessary for successful academic achievement. Supporting this claim, they provide statistics that assert that about 32.5 million people utilized technological resources at the library "to help them achieve educational goals" (6). Additionally, they found that 42 percent of the respondents between the ages of 14-18 did schoolwork on public library computers (6). The relevance of libraries as significant to their respective communities due to "wide ranging social value" beyond book circulation (Proctor & Simmons 2000:25; Bampton 1999; Proctor 1999(a); 1999(b)) is supported by the existing, primarily British, literature on public libraries and the more recent work completed in the United States (Becker et al. 2010).

Locality and Perceptions: Neighborhoods, Community, and Associated Identities

Inherent in examining the function, utility, and role of a local library, is the need to define what is meant by the term "local library." While there are some minor variations, most public library systems within the United States consist generally of a main lo-

cation, usually spatially larger with more resources, supplemented by smaller branch locations. Depending on state and municipal administrative policies the geographic lay-out of the libraries may vary. For the context of this paper, it is relevant to know that the local library being studied is in a small city which has its own city-administered and budgeted library system consisting of one main branch along with smaller branches located in various neighborhoods. The term "local library," in its broadest use within this paper, implies the immediately surrounding area and the socially accepted definition of the neighborhood which the library is a part of. [2]

An additional aspect in defining locality is the broader discussion and contextualization of the varying neighborhoods or ecological delineations within the city. Many sociological scholars who have interests in urban poverty and inequalities have attempted to define the locality of neighborhoods in varying ways in hopes of obtaining more accurate or appropriate measures for researching various social phenomena related to urban settings, and the mechanisms of poverty and inequalities which exist within these urban areas. What becomes apparent within academic disciplines such as Sociology and among varying cross-disciplinary literature is the lack of parsimony in the conceptual and working definition of "neighborhood."

The division of social spaces into neighborhood segments has been done in varying ways, ranging from techniques that have divided neighborhoods by utilizing administrative units such as census tracks and postal codes – the somewhat arbitrary nature of this approach has led to the questioning of the validity of the research technique. In 2001, Coulton et al. conducted research in which they asked residents to define neighborhood units by illustrating their perceived boundaries on a geographic neighborhood map. The results from their study suggest that the differences "between researcher and resident-defined neighborhoods are a possible source of bias in studies of neighborhood effects" (371). In support of their findings, they also emphasize that researchers have begun to acknowledge that *residential identification* (emphasis added) of neighborhood boundaries might be "more closely representative of the neighborhood construct" (Coulton et al 2001:372; Burton, Price-Spratlen, and Spencer, 1997; Elliott and Huizinga, 1990; Korbin and Coulton 1997; Meyer and Jencks, 1989; Taylor, Gottfredson, and Brower, 1984). Other research endeavors which have attempted to address and circumvent issues of arbitrary delineation of neighborhoods have created varying research techniques in ascribing boundaries based on a variety factors.[3] The newer approaches have been employed and developed in hopes of more appropriately capturing how location-specific aspects – so called "neighborhood effects" – may shape the social life of individuals. Even with the existing discrepancies regarding the varying ways of defining neighborhood boundaries within urban areas, the research findings, while somewhat varied, taken as a whole provide an unmistakable statement regarding how exceptionally salient locally-oriented and available social structures are to their neighborhoods. Therefore, while there is still debate on which methods of delineating neighborhood boundaries are most valid and appropriate, neighborhood effect studies have highlighted the crucial need to recognize the power and potential of local neighborhood resources for poor urban areas within larger city units, regardless of how we may choose to define neighborhood areas. Considering the challenges of conceptually creating a general definition of neighborhood while acknowledging that varying research questions regarding neighborhoods may have differentially appropriate ways to examine their respective questions, this analysis will cull Maria Small and Kathy Newman's (2001) discussion regarding neighborhoods in the context of urban poverty. They propose four separate but complimentary dimensions regarding neighborhoods (31):

> *(a)* as a social space, *(b)* a set of relationships, *(c)* a set of institutions, *(d)* a symbolic unit (Chaskin, 1997); or what we may think of neighborhoods alternatively as *(a)* sites, *(b)* perceptions, *(c)* networks, and *(d)* cultures. (Burton et al. 1997)

Loosely considering these four conceptual dimensions of neighborhoods may enable researchers to work-through contradicting theoretical frameworks and research findings regarding neighborhood effects and mechanisms. More recently, Patricia Hill Collins' (2010) discussion of "community" provides a new contextual way of thinking of neighborhoods which also fits within Small and Newman's dimensional conceptions. Calling for the consideration of the concept of "community" as a political construct, Collins presents arguments regarding the utility of conceptualizing "community" as a political construct and emphasizes how this re-conceptualization may influence newer possibilities regarding inequality-centered research. Within her discussion she states:

> In everyday knowledge, people often use the term community interchangeably with concepts of neighborhood. This points to the place-based underpinnings of the construct and how community is central to group identification (2010:10).

What can be inferred from the somewhat reciprocal nature of the take-for-granted understandings of neighborhood and community as interchangeable is the idea that varying conceptions of neighborhoods and communities both play a role in identity. Similarly, David J. Harding (2009) highlights the role of neighborhood as a form of social identity within his research.[4] In considering the varying definitions and conceptual approaches regarding neighborhoods, an examination of the context of use, and the possible implications regarding the interrelated-role of neighborhoods with identity claims or associations more generally, is necessary. As in the case of West Branch Library and the Midville neighborhood, examined in this paper, the concept of neighborhood therefore is both descriptive in making sense of socially understood boundaries, and also holds meaning as a political construct, in terms of its interchangeability

with the concept of community (Collins, 2010), when people make claims to institutional resources such as local public libraries. Often neighborhoods within cities must take part in battles which involve "power relations" utilizing Collins' words (2010:7), between political institutions and marginalized communities, but additionally, between marginalized groups which reside in de facto segregated neighborhoods which have dealt with persistent inequalities. What is imperative and relevant to take from this very brief and selectively pointed discussion of the ongoing, somewhat discordant and tangent-prone body of literature which deals with the umbrella term of "neighborhood," is the particular discussions which enlighten the case of the library.

A germane starting point for the case of the West Branch Library is the identification and discussion of two broad groupings regarding models which address neighborhood effects mechanisms. Research oriented towards answering questions regarding neighborhood effects mechanisms seeks to examine how varying structural level neighborhood-based social phenomena function to create unintended consequences for individual residents; the two broad model categorizations are identified as socialization mechanisms and instrumental mechanisms (Kathy Newman and Rebekah Massengill, 2001:32-35). By fusing strands of research previously mentioned, this paper aims to explore how instrumental mechanisms such as truncated social space and resources may contribute to, and influence, the ways in which the library is valued and perceived or understood within the context of the local neighborhood. These strands of research help to frame the possible ways residents understand the role of the local library, and help to enlighten how the next phase of this exploratory research project, along with other research endeavors, may proceed. More specifically, during the threat of closure, the value and possible meaning of the local library was brought to light – illustratively speaking to the significance and validity of claims of research which emphasize instrumental mechanisms within poor urban areas.

The Significance of the West Branch Library and the Midville Neighborhood

West Branch Public Library is located in the Midville neighborhood of the city of Jamesburg, in the northeastern United States.[5] Midville could arguably be designated as a "ghetto" in Doug Massey and Nancy Denton's (1998) terms. Residents of Midville and other neighborhoods in Jamesburg struggle to find jobs that can provide a living-wage. Jamesburg is a previously industrial city in the contemporary, post-industrial world, and has few jobs to offer.[6] Although Cass College is a large presence in Jamesburg and provides thousands of jobs, many people who reside outside Jamesburg compete with city residents for both unionized and non-unionized positions. As of the 2000 United States Census, Midville is located within one of the poorest neighborhood areas in Jamesburg.[7] Median household income in the Midville neighborhood was between $22,000-24,000 (in 1999 dollars) for those who resided near the West Branch Library, and about 25% of individuals and 15.5-17.7% of families, of the area were living below the poverty level, well above national averages. The Midville area is a concentrated African American neighborhood. Of all the neighborhood library locations in Jamesburg, West Branch Library is surrounded by the highest percentage of residents who are African American.

While statistics from the 2000 United States Census are dated, ethnographic observation conducted for this project seemingly supports the descriptive statistics provided in 2000. Accordingly, the 2010 Census data will likely continue to support the relevance of the descriptive characteristics provided in this paper. Additionally, there is evidence supporting the likelihood that similar descriptive trends will continue. Besides the ethnographic observations that the Midville neighborhood continues to be highly racially segregated from other areas within Jamesburg, the concentration of people who are African American in the Midville neighborhood has been an evident trend over the last few decades. Between the 1990 and 2000 Census, through a marked and visible process of gentrification, there was an increased concentration of de facto racial segregation, as the percentage of people who were African American in Midville remained relatively constant (currently at 86.4-96.8%) while other areas in Jamesburg which previously had higher percentages of African American residents in 1990 decreased.

What becomes evident in the brief overview of descriptive statistics and recent historical trends of the Midville neighborhood is the importance of recognizing the possible role that unique structural factors play in understanding the library as an especially important social space and resource to the local residents of a highly marginalized community.[8] In particular, the extreme systematic ghettoization of Midville over time may have significantly influenced the ways in which the community understands allocated resources, socially constructed boundaries and, accordingly, the significance of having a public space such as the West Branch Library within those perceived boundaries.[9] Accordingly, this descriptive overview in context with the aforementioned literature and theoretical insight provided by varying disciplines and lines of research, all suggest support for the assertion that marginalized and impoverished areas, which deal with constraints such as limited resources, have an even greater stake in maintaining a local neighborhood library. Local libraries are relevant for both traditional, and possibly even more importantly, non-traditional resources, which are arguably especially crucial in impoverished areas such as the Midville neighborhood in providing useful resources, and additionally, helping to construct self-worth and neighborhood identity. By bringing together the seemingly disparate bodies of research, one can quickly observe the positive and ameliorating possibilities an institutionally-supported local resource such as the library may have on poor and marginalized neighborhoods. Additionally, this paper will present empirical findings which reinforce these assertions.

METHODOLOGY

The initial methodological research approach of this study was to collect exploratory data regarding the role of the library within a poor urban neighborhood via ethnographic methods. Of the multiple branch locations within the Jamesburg library system, the Midville neighborhood's local West Branch location was selected based on the context of theoretical sampling.[10] In *The Truly Disadvantaged*, William Julius Wilson (1987) identifies that the concentration of poverty in inner-city urban areas leads to the relative greater disadvantage of those residents.[11] Additionally, he emphasized varying structural changes which have occurred since 1970 which are descriptively characteristic of the city of Jamesburg. Wilson's findings are further utilized to theoretically inform the selection of the library branch location and corresponding neighborhood within the smaller context of the city of Jamesburg; West Branch was chosen because of its location within a neighborhood that has experienced an observed trend of increasingly highly concentrated residents who are primarily African American with high rates of poverty and working poor in comparison to other branch locations situated in neighborhoods within Jamesburg.

This paper seeks to examine broadly the role of the library as a social institution and the specific type(s) of function(s) a local library fulfills. During non-routine visits to the library, shorthand field notes were recorded and were immediately extended and transcribed after each visit to the library.[12] Field visits were additionally varied by the duration of time of each visit; visits were made on various days and times to ensure that observation of library utilization were made during a variety of circumstances, i.e. during after school and non-after school hours, on weekdays and weekends, and on days with various weather conditions. Some visits were very brief (30-45 minutes), typical of regular library patrons who pop into the library to utilize the computer, and others lasted for longer durations (up to 3 hours), typical of patrons doing homework, researching, or just passing the time. These field visits provided key insight regarding the varying functions and utility of the library through observational participation, which previously had been sparsely examined by researchers outside of library and communications studies. Furthermore, the ethnographic documentation of the process of contestation to the threat of library closure additionally gives valuable exploratory insight into the relevance of the library as a local institution and possible symbolically-valued resource.

The library is an institutionally supported free public space and since it is public, there are no *physical* barriers to getting access, however researchers who practice ethnography by following the observing participant method refer to access or "getting in" as an acceptance by, and a close relationship with, research subjects (Anderson, 2001: 16005).[13] The implications of the particular inquiries during the initial phase of this project is that the type of access which was necessary is different than the style of "observing participant" ethnographies which utilize "thick description" (Geertz:1973) and are prevalent and widely accepted within contemporary sociological urban ethnography studies.[14] In contrast, this research endeavor aimed to explore the practical use and function of the social space of the West Branch Public Library – that is the unit of analysis was the *library space* and its *utility*, which could be observed without building close relationships with the library patrons.

The intentions of observing through participation at the library raised concerns about how the researcher would achieve a status of a regular library patron. More specifically, it was vital to be able to visit the library and observe library use as a patron, collecting empirical data as an observing participant of the *social space and utility* of the library, and ultimately, to blend in with the other patrons. As a library patron the researcher was conspicuously dissimilar to most of the library's other patrons who were predominantly African American. West Branch Library and the neighborhood of Midville are located within walking distance of the Cass College Campus whose student body is predominantly White, yet arguably significantly diverse in comparison to the racial make-up of the Midville neighborhood and West Branch Library patrons who are predominantly African American. However, Cass College students do not utilize West Branch as a resource as the College has its own library resources, and additionally, the main branch of the Jamesburg public library system is located equally as close to the campus as West Branch Library, has more desired resources for college students to borrow (such as current DVD's and music), and is considered as being located in a more desirable and accessible area to students. Due to the non-existent, or infrequent at best, presence of non-resident, non-African Americans at West Branch, the researcher's presence was initially quite noticeable. Yet, over the course of the study, while reading, taking field notes, and working on the computers, the librarians became more familiar, and often engaged the researcher in small talk. The combination of visiting the library more than a few times, while simultaneously engaging in library life in a similar manner to other regular library patrons, and obtaining a library card, which you must have proof of Jamesburg residency to obtain, enabled the researcher to be recognized as part of the library community by the "authorities" of the library – the librarians. Through their acceptance, they assisted the researcher in becoming part of the social space of the library; their treatment indicated to other regular library patrons that the researcher was "in."[15]

FINDINGS

The West Branch Library, a one-story brick building, has been a part of the Midville neighborhood since 1969. The all brick building is located in the middle of a strip mall known as "Midville Plaza," which also includes a variety of shops and offices. To the left of the strip mall is "G-Mart," a discount grocer, to the right, and also within the premises of the plaza parking lot, is the "Holy Testament" Church, both in separate, stand-alone buildings. A school and playground are located directly behind the plaza. The retail

and office spaces within the Midville Plaza range from high-use to currently vacant and are representative of the surrounding neighborhood's wide-ranging mix of varying conditions – new residential housing areas to dilapidated abandoned houses or corner stores bustling with constant customers to neighborhood residents hanging out on desolate streets with boarded up stores no longer occupied.

The West Branch Library is often bustling with children and teenagers who show up by foot from their local neighborhood homes and schools during peak after-school hours. However, in terms of consistent presence of patronage, the library has a constantly fluctuating characteristic; outside of the peak after-school hours (and even occasionally among those hours) it has the same characteristic mix of high use and abandonment as the rest of the strip mall of which it is part. At any given time you could easily walk into a packed library full of kids, adults and seniors, or on a nice day, into a completely empty library consisting of only staff and/or volunteers sitting at the circulation desk. These finding address indirectly the role that time and weather, as well as school and library schedules play in library attendance. Two contrasting excerpts from my field notes during the peak after school hours exemplify this:

> **Field note:**
> 3:38PM- The weather is amazing (sunny and 60's with a light breeze) it feels like the first nice day of spring. Upon entering it looks as if the library is completely empty with the exception of the two library workers sitting at the front desk. After a minute of settling in, it becomes noticeable that there is one person in the library. It is the young pre-teen boy that has been in the library before and he is inquiring about the same things –looking for books and searching online for information on starting his own business. He is wandering around looking for books on his own. He eventually seeks help again from a librarian on how to find books about "starting a business."
>
> The library is pretty busy today, its 2:45 and the entire back computer area is full with teenagers and others are sitting at the work tables and talking. There must be at least 15 people here…3:20, the children's computer area is starting to fill up; there are 6 boys crowded around three computers, and two other boys are sitting at the nearby tables talking. A man enters with a little girl and signs her in with the librarians to use the children's computer area while he reads a magazine in the reading area designated for adults.

The Neighborhood Library as an Available, Safe, Local, Public Space

The lack of consistency in presence of library patronage should not be taken as indication to the level of utility that the library provides or as indication of the amount of relevance it has for the local community. Midville residents also have the opportunity to visit the library and attend library-sponsored classes and workshops on a range of topics including informational meetings regarding mortgage foreclosures, GED and homework help, Resume How-to, children's Valentine's Day card-making craft event, and Preschool story time. As previously mentioned and observed through field visits, patrons of the library may visit it for short durations of time and spontaneously, hence, part of the value of the library is based in the basic premise and knowledge of its *existence* and the ability to utilize it at will. Somewhat inherent within this acceptance of the library's function, is the belief or view that the library is a safe place to spend time because it is the only consistently supervised public space available to residents. In addition to the West Branch Library being a source for reading materials, internet access, computing functions, informal and formal meeting space, and educational purposes, visiting the field as an observing participant enabled the collection of ethnographic data which illustrated the ways the library is also utilized for informal childcare, and as an available local space which was trusted to be safe. During observations, parents frequently would enter the library with slightly older children and sign them in to use a computer in the children's' computer area. They would then leave the library to return later, at times with purchases made from other parts of the plaza, informally utilizing the library as childcare.

Many field notes collected from library visits were marked by the constantly changing and flexible landscape of the social space within the library. A review of the data revealed that on longer visits, experiences changed as the context of library users and uses changed, at times it was extremely quiet while at other times there was a consistently low hum of whispered voices socializing and interacting. Patrons would come and go, during brief visits to utilize the free internet access on one of the library computers, use the restroom, "just to hang out,"[16] check the time, browse a national or specialized paper during a work break, or to check for new fiction and exchange a brief greeting with one of the librarians and/or volunteers. On a few occasions some patrons would quite literally walk into the library, look around as if looking to see if a particular person was around, and then walk out. During longer visits, patrons were observed utilizing the library space to study, hold informal meetings, do homework, utilize the computer for games and word processing functions, and to socialize.

Another event, which occurred during exploratory field work, and which supports the suggestion that the local library functions as, and is generally considered, an available safe space, was a shooting outside of the library in the parking lot between the library and church. The shooting occurred shortly before a field visit and interestingly, even with the occurrence, everything seemed "normal" within the library (with the exception of the main entrance being locked upon arrival) and it was not immediately evident that anything had happened until the police arrived and began talking about the shooting. The police and library workers had an exchange speculating what kind of gun might have been used during the shooting based on the bullet casings which were found. The exchange was loud enough to be heard even though they were at least 20 feet

away. The children's computer section was just as close to them and also within earshot. My field notes highlighted that there was no effort made to hide or obscure the fact that there had been a shooting incident from library patrons, which included young children, who may not have been around during the event. This assertion is not a critique of the adults' behavior; in contrast, it is emphasized due to it's suggestive nature regarding the implications towards the relationship the children in this neighborhood might have to violence: close proximity and/or relatively frequent exposure to violent events such as these which might contribute to the normalization of violence, and accordingly, provides additional insight on possible socialization mechanisms often studied in neighbor effects research.

"There were at least two shots, I thought it was popcorn at first but then a bunch of kids came running into the library" the library worker, who in future field visits was identified as a young volunteer, stated while describing the shooting to the officers. This quote demonstrates that during times of violent occurrences, local children turn to the library as a safe social space.[17] Furthermore, after the shooting, library patrons continued to utilize the library as they normally would, while the library staff regulated the entrance to the library via maintenance of the locked doors and visually assessing all patrons before allowing entrance. Within Midville, West Branch has become one of the few, if not only, safe public indoor spaces where anyone may go to and be at without question. This is especially significant to the community because there are currently no alternative indoor or outdoor multi-use places or spaces that offer the same valuable resource to the Midville neighborhood. Up until 2002, a large building directly across the street from the library nicknamed "the U House"[18] operated as a community center and "safe public space" for the Midville residents. "Safe," as defined by several people in the community, meant a place with low incidences of violence, but also a space within the community where crossing boundaries between adjacent neighborhoods without the threat of violence became possible. The social phenomenon of constrained geographic space in disadvantaged neighborhoods is illustrated most relevantly by David J. Harding's discussion of his research finding regarding two poor areas in Boston:

> Violence in these areas reinforces the neighborhood as a form of social identity, restricts adolescent boys' pool of potential friends, structures their use of geographical space, and leads younger adolescent boys to greater interaction with older adolescents and young adults on the street. (2009: 446)

Constrained social spaces consequently also truncate and limit what resources are accessible within the boundaries of the neighborhood. Similarly, with the closing of the 'U' House in 2002, the West Branch library became the only accessible public neighborhood resource. It continues to fulfill multiple functions, and accordingly, important roles for the surrounding communities' residents.

An Unexpected Threat: Neighborhood Boundaries and Claims for a Local Library

Early in the process of conducting fieldwork, which took place during the mists of the economic crisis, the mayor of the city of Jamesburg, Charles Espisito had mentioned to a local newspaper that the closing of West Branch Library was being considered as a possible option to fund a predicted budget gap for the city's next fiscal budget. Midville residents, West Branch's loyal patrons, and some residents from the wider Jamesburg area made efforts to "Save West" and prevent the library from being closed through community organizing and mobilization efforts. These efforts included a petition which garnered support of over 800 local residents within a few days, and a significant physical presence of supporters at the Mayor's public fiscal budget meeting. The community members who rallied to keep West Branch open demonstrated the varying ways that local residents value the library by signing a petition which stated:

> West has functioned as a community center since the Midville Community ['U'] House closed its doors in 2002...closing down West would add further insult to our already injured community that is struggling to heal. Furthermore, closing down West will definitely contribute to increased youth violence and crime, as the library is one of the few safe havens for our youth.

The petition utilized language that emphasized the significance of the library as an available, safe, local, public space and additionally alludes to the symbolic meaning given to the library by highlighting that residents would be "insulted" if another institutionally supported public resource such as the 'U' house was taken away.[19] Much of this same rhetoric was repeated at the Mayor's budget meeting. The following are selected excerpts from the field notes on the budget meeting:

> **Field note:**
> The room is packed and there are people occupying all the chairs and standing along the sides against the walls. Arriving early helped to provide a seat but hard copies of the Mayor's presentation of the budget had run out. Residents of Midville and West Branch Library patrons turned out to show support for the branch and donned white nametag-sized stickers which were labeled with either the phase "Save West" or "I Support the West Library" brightly printed in all capital rainbow-colored letters.
>
> The mayor goes through the upcoming fiscal year's budget page by page. He explains each Power Point slide one by one including the various factual bullet points as he goes. He is currently discussing the next fiscal year's waste management budget, people in the audience look somewhat bored, fidgety, and slightly impatient.
>
> The mayor nonchalantly slips in that "all libraries will stay open and operated by the city" as he talks about that part of the budget (this seems to be a very particu-

> lar way to phrase this announcement as no other library branch in Jamesburg besides the West Branch Library had been up for closure or even service reduction).
>
> In response to the mayor's indirect acknowledgement of West Branch Library being spared from closure during budget cuts, a library supporter assertively interrupts the mayor by yelling, "Does that include West Branch?!" After he confirms, people clap and cheer, but the response is delayed (people seemed skeptical?).

Additionally, in fighting to keep the library open, some community members made comments during the meeting to Mayor Espisito emphasizing that the library was the only resource that the Midville community had of its own in comparison to other neighborhoods. The awareness and articulation of the limited nature of *their own neighborhood* resources suggests that part of the significance placed in maintaining a neighborhood library within the area is related to preserving a local neighborhood-based identity (Proctor and Simmons, 2000:32; Proctor, Usherwood, and Sobczyk,1996: 37). One of the arguments that had let to the consideration of closing the library to fund the budget-gap was that if the branch was closed, residents could still travel to the main Center Branch library location, which debatably is within physical walking distance. However, as previously mentioned in the literature review, the awareness of constrained social spaces and violence related to constructed boundaries[20] between neighborhoods, which have practical real life repercussions, shape the ways in which individuals within the community are able and willing to negotiate travel within and between neighborhood areas (Harding 2009:446).[21]

The following quote is from the West Branch Library Manager addressing issues related to neighborhood boundaries in the process of describing and highlighting how a young library patron was concerned about how the possible ensuing library closure might affect them. What becomes apparent through the manager's comments is that there are practical implications of socially constructed boundaries between neighborhoods within the city, and that community members are aware and maintain these boundaries:

> Youth are dealing with territories right now, and it's very difficult for youth to move from one location in the city to another. For me, or anyone else to say that, "just tell the children that go to West library to go to the Foxhill Library, or go to Oakridge Library, or go to the library in Westville," well, that's a little bit more comfortable for some people than others. Um, some youth can't move from Midville to Willington, let alone from Willington to Midville to Oakridge to the Foxhill, it just doesn't operate like that. And I think that there, more people need to sit to the table and really understand that, and...and I have the children say to me all the time, the youth say: "Miss Dana, well you're one of those people that you can live in the Ville but you can work in the Tribe." And..., and I think that, that's very cutely said but I can also understand the seriousness of it. I can get it my car, or I can walk-which I do sometimes. I live four blocks away from here and I live in Willington, and then I come down here, and I work in Midville and I take that for granted. Um, but there are many youth that, you are well aware of, that just cannot walk from Willington to Midville, or any other neighborhood without it being a problem. So, that's one of the things that really, really concerns me, for someone to say, "Well, the kids from this neighborhood can just walk to another library."

These comments by the West Branch employee which directly quote a local youth illustrate explicitly the observed social phenomenon of constrained social space (Harding, 2005).[22] Midville is a neighborhood area which has invisible walls, or imagined boundaries that have *real* effects that separate and segregate. Collins (2010) calls for the reconceptualization of "community" as a political construct (bearing in mind her emphasis on the interchangeable nature of the terms neighborhood and community within everyday use, and hence relevance to this discussion), she argues that one dimension of understanding community as a political construct is recognizing the close association between community and symbolic boundary construction (24). The issues raised during the threat of closure of the local West Branch library location, provides possible exploratory support for Collins assertions regarding this dimension of community as being closely related to symbolic boundary construction and subsequently, in the case of Midville, the identity-formed vis-à-vis the neighborhood further strengthened the community as a political construct in direct regard to maintaining the West Branch library as a local, institutionally-supported resource.

CONCLUSIONS AND IMPLICATIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

Forty-one years after the original letters initially spelt, "Public Library," the new mostly green awning with blue trim now reads in bright white letters "Midville Branch Library," additionally, directly above the entrance of the library additional bright white letters read "Jamesburg Free Public Library." The façade of the formerly, all-brick exterior is now decorated with public art work in the form of a mural which celebrates the living history of the Midville neighborhood. Beyond the positive physical signs of renewal, the West Branch library still operates on reduced service hours with only a handful of rotating Saturday openings. During the period of this research project, the discount grocery store, which was once a part of the plaza was closed, and now stands empty. The only other grocer, a larger retail chain grocery store, which was located further away, but still accessible to Midville residents with out having to rely on transportation such as public bus systems, or private automobile, subsequently was also closed after being bought out by another grocery chain which deemed the location unprofitable. The continued trend of declining resources of both a public and a private nature, which

directly affects residents of Midville highlights the prevalent dangers that neighborhoods of all sizes are facing.

The findings presented in this paper are from the initial stages of a research project which provides exploratory empirical data exemplifying how non-traditional uses of a local library, that have been previously ignored or infrequently measured, are relevant in examining the role of the library as a publicly provided social institution and resource within the context of the local neighborhood. The empirical findings highlight the significance of the local library as a meaningful institutionally-supported resource for neighborhood residents in impoverished and marginalized areas. This suggests that future research endeavors concerned with urban poverty may want to examine and address the roles of various local public institutions like community centers in poor urban areas. One possible issue with this suggestion it that during this time of economic crisis, most poor urban neighborhood areas no longer have community centers of their own. Consequently, what if libraries are "the last defense" in protecting publicly-supported neighborhood institutions in the battle of budget cuts? This would seemingly make all aspects regarding libraries increasingly relevant to explore.

Furthermore, in considering Wilson's (1987) findings, if the subjects of interest are similar in many ways within a city of concentrated urban poor (i.e., characteristically homogeneous: think of large areas of Chicago, Philadelphia, L.A.), what do neighborhood boundaries then demarcate? Creative theoretical application of Small, Harding and Lamont's articulation of symbolic boundaries as being integral to social identities in similar ways as narratives, yet different in that symbolic boundaries "illuminate the cultural basis of group divisions" (2010: 17) may help to construct research approaches which will more appropriately answer questions regarding urban poverty, while still being theoretically informed by Wilson's (1987) findings through a reconceptualization of ideas regarding constructed neighborhood boundaries as more salient in considering research in urban, impoverished areas that are homogeneous in racial make-up. Further examination which supports that local neighborhood areas hold significant impact, and have a probable chance of being more relevant than city units in regards to neighborhood effects studies are needed, hence, consideration has to be given to the serious implications of the possible reallocation or division of city resources towards specific local neighborhoods. The possibility that these resources are more crucially needed and impactful in these areas should be further researched and considered.

Ongoing phases of this project seek to further examine the role of the West Branch Library as a neighborhood institution, and more broadly examine the relevance of libraries as one of the final survivors of "dying neighborhood" institutions. A secondary phase of this research project which may aide in broadening the scope and generalizabilty of the research findings and implications is a comparison to a broader, large-scale case involving the ongoing tracking of the threat of closure to the city of Philadelphia's entire library system which consists of 54 library branch locations. Additionally, continued field work with West Branch will ensue in possible conjunction with other qualitative methods such as interviews, surveys, or focus groups. Further research is needed to help better-inform policy makers and provide data-driven support regarding the relevance of neighborhood institutions like the local library.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to especially thank Waverly Duck for his ongoing support and encouragement with this project. I would like to thank: Elijah Anderson, Jeffrey Alexander, Julia Adams, Richard Breen, Rene Almeling, and Erica Chito Childs for their continued guidance. I am grateful to Nadine Amalfi, Sorcha Brophy-Warren, Anette Fasang, and Sarah Egan for helpful comments on this paper. Finally, I would like to thank all my friends and family for their unwavering support and encouragement. This ongoing research project is supported by the George W. Camp Mini Grant through the Sociology Department at Yale University.

Carolyn Ly is currently a doctoral student in Sociology at Yale University. Her research interests include: cultural sociology, urban poverty, ethnography, race and ethnicity, and Asian American Studies. Carolyn holds a master's degree in Sociology from Yale University, and a B.A. *summa cum laude* from Hunter College, City University of New York; *Phi Beta Kappa*. Currently she is working on two additional research projects, the first examines culturally-significant racialized representations of Asian Americans in film, the second addresses the processes and social mechanisms which shape racialized categorization of others within an intersectional framework. Address: P.O. Box 208265 New Haven CT 06520-8265 [email:Carolyn.ly@yale.edu]. Please contact Carolyn Ly via email if you have any inquires or suggestions regarding this project. Thank you in advance for your interest.

Waverly Duck is an Assistant Professor of Sociology at the University of Pittsburgh. His research interests focus primarily on inequality using ethnographic methods to study the orderliness of recognizable situated practices concerning race, class, age, gender and social change. That is, he is interested in the observable and locally recognized mechanisms which cause and subsequently reproduce inequality overtime.

ENDNOTES

1 The study was by Samantha Becker, Michael Crandal, Karen Fisher, Bo Kinney, Carol Landry, and Anita Rocha through the University of Washington Information School and was funded by the Institute of Museum and Library Services along with the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation.

2 "Socially accepted" refers to the local knowledge of neighborhood boundaries. While these neighborhoods are not labeled as such on a published map, a resident of the city would know of the neighborhoods and be able to identify the general areas. This is similar, on a smaller scale, to the ways in which cities such as Philadelphia, Los Angeles, or Chicago are known to have socially accepted or understood neighborhoods.

3 This includes but is not limited to: consensus of residents' perceived boundaries utilizing statistical techniques (centroid-calculated and averaged block group areas: Coultron et al, 2001); "face block" measures which break-down blocks into segments on one side of the street (Taylor, 1995); "tertiary community" units or "t-communities" which Grannis identifies as "communities defined by their internal access via pedestrian streets" (Grannis 2005: 295); and ethnographic research methods that rely on observational participation "to provide a truthful rendition and analysis of the social and cultural world of the subject"(Anderson, 2001:16006).

4 The larger focus of Harding's (2009) work examines how violence, as an influencing factor, limits or constrains geographic social spaces identified often as neighborhood boundaries in urban area, and the resulting unintended consequences to forming heterogeneous peer groups.

5 Due to the ongoing nature of this research project, while data collected for this paper was public (all observations were made in public spaces and comments are quoted from publicly published materials), all names and locations are pseudonyms.

6 For further discussion of the declining availability of jobs and the urban poor see William Julius Wilson (1996).

7 All descriptive data was obtained from the U.S. Census Bureau's American Fact Finder via thematic maps by block group with data divided into seven data classes.

8 This case includes additional analysis of historical and structural factors which are currently unpublished and due to length constraints are not presented in this paper.

9 See Jack Katz's (2010) argument encouraging historically informed (ethnographic) research and the ensuing discussion which calls for greater attention to the role of temporality within interpreting empirical data in current research, specifically ethnographic studies conducted within urban centers which Katz emphasizes are embedded in the historical trajectories of their corresponding urban centers.

10 For a brief discussion on the merits of theoretical sampling within ethnographic research see Wilson (2009: 550). See also Willer (1967).

11 See also Wilson (1996). Additionally for a discussion of the on-going research which spawned from findings presented in *The Truly Disadvantaged* see Small and Newman (2001).

12 One field note is recorded from the Mayor's budget meeting which took place at the main library branch. Additionally, some later field visits were only transcribed if observations of new and anomalous nature occurred.

13 For further discussion on the difference between "participant observation" and "observing participant" style ethnographies see Anderson, 2001: 16005-16006.

14 It is not the intention of this paper to address the validity and reliability of one approach of ethnography ("participant observation" and "observing participant") over the other. These differences are merely highlighted as referential within the discussion of this particular paper's methodological approach during this phase of the research project. For a brief discussion on the historical evolution of Urban Ethnography see Anderson (2001).

15 Their acknowledgement and then subsequent lack of attention to the researcher, someone who is visually different than the existing community members due to distinct "ethnic" features, signaled acceptance or "in" status as a patron within the social space of the library: Incidences were observed in which a few non-regular or visually different patrons visited the library and were treated with great attention by the librarians who immediately inquired about what they might need, or be looking for. Often after the initial few visits, even though occasional inquiries were made about borrowing a book or the use of a public library computer, the librarians would quickly disregard the researcher's presence after a brief greeting, which was very similar to their treatment of regular library patrons. Noted was the dif-

ference of how the library patrons marked the presence of the researcher during the first few visits but then in subsequent visits, looked up with a quick glance and returned to their own task with disinterest. The researcher does not claim to be "in" according to the definition of urban ethnographers who often aim to become close to the subjects of their studies – people. In contrast, the nature of the inquiries made during this phase of research was more so related to the institutional role and function of the library regarding utility.

16 This was a directly utilized phrased by a library patron which was recorded in a field note.

17 In recognizing that running into the library may have been the closest and easiest thing to do (although the neighboring church entrance was at least the same distance away if not closer), no claims are being made based solely on this event; instead, it is provided as supplemental evidence which may bolster the other collective empirical illustrations and theoretical arguments.

18 "The U House" was an abbreviation for the official title of "Unity Community Center"

19 It could be argued that the language of the petition supports sociological research on urban poverty, which Small and Newman (2001: 33) identify as resource models and are theoretical approaches that emphasize how the lack of various institutional resources within poor neighborhoods are instrumental mechanisms that produce neighborhood effects.

20 See also a relevant discussion on "symbolic boundaries" as discussed by Maria Small, David J. Harding, and Michèle Lamont (2010: 17) within a larger, also pertinent overview of the discussion and conceptualization of "culture" within the context of poverty research.

21 See also Newman and Massengill's discussion of Harding (2006:43).

22 The Branch Manager's statements also implicitly illustrates the social phenomena of truncated or constrained resources had the library closure ensued, since the relationship between truncated geographical space and truncated resources are interrelated. Additionally, her statement speaks indirectly to other more general discussions within neighborhood effects studies which focus of socialization mechanisms (Harding 2009; Sampson, Morenoff, and Gannon-Rowley, 2002: 446)

REFERENCES

Abbott, A. (1997). Of time and space: The contemporary relevance of the Chicago School. *Social Forces*: 75, 1149-82.

Anderson, E. (2001). Urban ethnography. *The International Encyclopedia of the Social and Behavioral Sciences* (pp. 16004-16008).

Bampton, B. (1999). Confirming What We Know. *Library Campaigner*, 61(6).

Becker, S., Crandal, M. D., Fisher, K. E., Kinney, B., Landry, C. & Rocha, A. (2010). Opportunity for all: How the American public benefits from internet access at U.S. libraries. *Institute of Museum and Library Services*. Washington, D.C.

Burton, L. M., Price-Spratlen, T., & Spencer, M. B. (1997). On ways of thinking about measuring neighborhoods: Implications for studying context and developmental outcomes for children. In J. Brooks-Gunn, G. J. Duncan, & J. L. Aber (Eds.) *Neighborhood poverty: Context and consequences for children Volume II* (pp. 132-144). New York: Russell Sage Foundation.

Collins, P. H. (2010). The new politics of community. *American Sociological Review,* 75(1), 7-30.

Coulton C. J., Korbin, J., Chan, T., & Su, M. (2001). Mapping residents' perceptions of neighborhood boundaries: a methodological note. *American Journal of Community Psychology,* 29, 371–383.

Elliot, D. & Huizinga, D. (1990). *Mediating effects of social structure in high risk neighborhoods*. Denver, CO: Youth Survey, Project Report No. 10. Boulder, CO: University of Colorado.

Geertz, C. (1973). Thick description: Toward an interpretive theory of culture. In C. Geertz (Ed.) *The interpretation of cultures: Selected essays (pp. 3-30).* New York: Basic Books.

Grannis, R. (2005). T-Communities: Pedestrian street networks and residential segregation in Chicago, Los Angeles, and New York. *City & Community*, 4(3): 295-322.

Haney, W. G., & Knowles, E. C. (1978). Perception of neighborhoods by city and suburban residents. *Human Ecology*, *6,*

201–214.

Harding D. J. (2005). *Why neighborhoods matter: structural and cultural influences on adolescents in poor communities*. PhD thesis. Cambridge: Harvard University.

Harding, D. J. (2009). Violence older peers, and the socialization of adolescent boys in disadvantaged neighborhoods. *American Journal of Sociology*, 74, 445-464.

Katz, J. (2010). Time for new urban ethnographies. *Ethnography* 11(1), 25-44.

Korbin, J. & Coulton, C. (1997). Understanding the neighborhood context for children and families: Epidemiological and ethnographic approaches. In. J. Brooks-Gunn, G. J. Duncan, & J. L. Aber. (Eds.) *Neighborhood poverty: Context and consequences for children volume II* (pp. 65-79). New York: Russell Sage Foundation.

Logan, J. R., & Collver, O. A. (1983). Residents' perceptions of suburban community differences. *American Sociological Review*, *48*(3), 428–433.

Massey, D. & Denton, N. (1998). *American apartheid: Segregation and the making of the underclass*. Boston: Harvard University Press.

Meyer, S. E., & Jencks, C. (1989). Growing up in poor neighborhoods: How much does it matter? *Science*, 17, 1441–1445.

Newman, K., & Massengill R. (2006). The texture of hardship: Qualitative sociology of poverty, 1995-2005. *Annual Review of Sociology*, 32, 423-446.

Park, R. E., Burgess, E. W., & McKenzie, R. D. (1925). *The city*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press.

Proctor, R., Usherwood, B. & Sobczyk, G. (1996). What do people do when their public library service closes down? An investigation into the impact of the Sheffield Libraries strike. *British Library Research and Development Department Report 6224*. British Library, London.

Proctor, R. (1999a). People, politics and hard decisions. *Public Library Journal*, 14(1), 2-4.

Proctor, R. (1999b). The use of the public library for learning." *Learning Resources Journal,* 15(1), 11-14.

Proctor, R. & Simmons, S. (2000). Public library closures: The management of hard decisions." *Library Management*. 21(1), 25-34.

Sampson, R. J. & Morenoff, J. D. (1997). Ecological Perspectives on the Neighborhood Context of Urban Poverty: Past and Present. In J. Brooks-Gunn, G. J. Duncan, & J. L. Aber (Eds.) *Neighborhood poverty: Context and consequences for children Volume II* (pp. 1-22). New York: Russell Sage Foundation.

Sampson R. J. & Raudenbush, S. W. (1999). Systematic social observation of public spaces: a new look at disorder in urban neighborhoods. *American Journal of Sociology,* 105, 603–651.

Sampson, R. J., Morenoff, J. D. & Gannon-Rowely, T. (2002). Assesing 'neighborhood effects': Social processes and new directions in research. *Annual Review of Sociology*. 28, 443-478.

Small, M. L. & Newman, K. (2001). Urban poverty after The Truly Disadvantaged: The rediscovery of the family, the neighborhood, and culture. *Annual Review of Sociology*, 27, 23-45.

Small, M. L., Harding, D. J., & Lamont, M. (2010). Reconsidering culture and poverty. *The ANNALS of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*, 629(6), 6-27.

Taylor, R. B., Gottfredson, S. D., & Brower, S. (1984). Block crime and fear: Defensible space, social ties, and territorial functioning. *Journal of Research in Crime and Delinquency*, *21*(4), 303–331.

Taylor R. B. (1995). Street blocks with more non-residential land use have more physical deterioration: Evidence from Baltimore and Philadelphia. *Urban Affairs Review*, 31, 20-36

Willer, D. (1967). *Scientific sociology: Theory and method*. Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall.

Wilson, W. J. (1987). *The truly disadvantaged: The inner city, the underclass, and public policy*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Wilson, W. J. (1996). *When work disappears: The world of the new urban poor*. New York: Knopf.

Stories of Struggle and Hope: Lived Experiences of Puerto Ricans in Chicago Schools

By Erica Davila, Arcadia University

ABSTRACT

This qualitative research project highlights the experience of ten Latina/o students in the Chicago Public Schools (CPS). The youth interviewed attended a range of types of high schools; including schools categorized as general education high schools, college preparatory schools, magnet schools and one alternative school. The author conducted life history interviews with ten individuals who identify as Puerto Rican and experienced part or all of their high school years in CPS. The methodology of life history served to provide deeper understanding and analysis of the educational experiences surrounding peers, teachers, counselors and family. This article will provide a brief overview of historical educational practices and policies impacting Puerto Rican children that will help frame the experiences of the youth interviewed. The stories highlighted in this article focus on the youth's experiences while in high school. However, the method of life history provided many rich stories about their lived experiences outside of school which are as important in analyzing their stories of this critical time in the lives of many youth. Their stories were analyzed for a larger study (Davila, 2005) and several themes emerged in that study. In this article the themes of student agency and resistance theory are highlighted.

Introduction

> *Liberating memory represents a declaration, a hope, a discursive reminder that people do not only suffer under the mechanisms of domination, they also resist. (Freire, 1988)*

This paper highlights the school experiences of Latino students in Chicago. Education scholars have recently begun utilizing qualitative research methods and/or a critical education framework as means to gather and interpret rich data regarding the schooling experiences of Latinos. It is important to continue to grow this body of research and highlight the voices and experiences of the lived experiences of Latinos. There is much more work ahead in order to make change happen within the structure and culture of schooling to best serve Latino students' academic and social needs. This article is an attempt to begin to make that change by highlighting the voices of Latino students, specifically Puerto Ricans in Chicago, and by bringing their lived experiences to the forefront of the education research community. The lived experiences discussed in this article provide rich examples of the ways in which youth create spaces to express themselves despite being part of structures and systems that are not designed for them. The context of Puerto Ricans in Chicago is one of struggle and hope that dates back to the 1940s and is still present today. Many of these struggles and hopes are grounded in school experiences and while the school system in Chicago has a history of inequity, the Latino community in Chicago has resisted. "National attention was focused on Chicago [in June 1988] when former Secretary of Education, William Bennett, called the Chicago public school system the worst in the nation" (Vasquez, 1994 p. 13). It is critical to consider what it means to belong to any group or institution that is known as the worst in any category, nonetheless the whole nation. The stories that are shared in this article occurred in this context, yet these youth share stories of hope and provide their own insight into several themes such as fear of difference, patriarchal assumptions, the role of family in educational decisions, and the ways they resisted educational practices that were not supporting their goals. These themes are the focus of the "High School Counter Chronicles" section.

Through my experiences as a former student in the Chicago Public Schools (CPS) and as an advocate for education equity,[1] I have observed and experienced many of the inequities within the structure of CPS. The inequity starts early for many Latinos in CPS and unfortunately these inequities are found at every level of education. Some of the issues include longer waitlist for early childhood options in Latino neighborhoods, use of assessment tools that are not culturally relevant, lack of bilingual and bicultural teachers and staff, and overcrowded classrooms in many predominately Latino schools (Davila and Aviles de Bradley, 2010).

Latinos represent the fastest growing minority group in Chicago and is the largest in the country (Pew Hispanic Center, 2010). Despite this fact, Latinos in Chicago today experience

the same educational problems that many voiced concerns about back in the 1960s. The disparities impact a lot of Latino children in Chicago, as the district is not designed to function well for all its students.

During the 2009-2010 school year, 41% of CPS's students identify as Latino and 15% of teachers are Latino. In comparison, 9% of the student body identify as White and 49% of teachers identify as White. (Chicago Public Schools, 2010). The lack of Latino teachers and staff (e.g., counselors, psychologists) is a critical issue nationwide and in Chicago and research has shown the significance of having a diverse teaching faculty (Lipman, 2006). Some of the other critical issues impacting Latino children in CPS include a lack of quality early childhood opportunities, lack of bilingual curriculum and assessment tools that are culturally relevant, and high "pushout" rates (Davila and Aviles de Bradley, 2010). Many community based organizations[2] in Chicago have worked to battle issues impacting Latinos in CPS and while victories continue to come from these grass roots efforts there is still much work to be done. It is a tumultuous task to capture lived experience within an institution as large and as bureaucratic as CPS. Thus, this qualitative research project cannot highlight the experiences of the 500,000 children in the district, but only provide a glimpse of experiences unfolding within CPS.

The experiences of these youth highlight the way their agency served to help them navigate through and resist certain policies and practices that were not serving their needs. The concept and theory of resistance are useful in examining the school experiences of Puerto Ricans because resistance theory brings forth the integral role agency plays in the social oppression experienced on a daily basis in the institutionalization of schooling. Thus, to explore the schooling experiences of Puerto Ricans through the lens of resistance theory, one must understand how dominance and power work within the institution of schooling. In the US, Puerto Ricans and other oppressed groups are divided and segregated through institutional racism, classism and sexism. Only rarely do educators consider the fact that "as a collective, Puerto Ricans have the highest poverty rate, lowest house-hold incomes, and lowest labor force participation of all Latino groups in the United States" (Mercado & Moll, 2000, p.297). Therefore, in hopes to transform the current oppression of Puerto Ricans, as well as other oppressed groups, the concepts of agency and resistance need to be surfaced within the discussion of schooling.

This article will (1) discuss the theoretical and methodological frameworks of the study; (2) provide a brief discussion of the Puerto Rican experience in Chicago Public Schools; (3) highlight the lived experiences of the youth coupled with analysis; (4) present my own autobiography which will help frame my positionality in this research project; and (5) discuss implications of this research project.

Methodological and Theoretical Frameworks

Within the field of education research, life history research is an alternate method that has more recently been used in works delving into the lives inside schools, including the life stories of teachers (Darder, 2002; Nieto, 2004; Pak, 2002; Schubert and Ayers, 1992), peers (Padilla, 2003), students (Michie, 1999; Padilla, 1997; Pak, 2002), and parents (Olmedo, 1999). While these scholars have begun to complicate education research with the "messiness" of life stories, the overwhelming amount of research in education has concentrated on methods that silence the complex diverse experiences unfolding in schools. The nature of the "messiness" spills over into constructs of validity within life history research. Lather's (1986) insight on validity in a postpositivist era aids in reconstructing the concept of validity within traditional studies:

> We recognize that just as there is no neutral education there is no neutral research, we no longer need to apologize for unabashedly ideological research and its open commitment to using research to criticize and change the status quo. The development of data credibility checks to protect our research and theory construction from our enthusiasms, however, is essential in our efforts to create a self-reflexive human science (p. 67).

Lather's insight on the subjectivity of research and where validity comes from is a discussion that needs to be pushed to the forefront of education research, in other words, the complexity she describes needs to become part of the discourse. A detrimental aspect of traditional research related to the schooling experience of Latinos in public schools is rooted in cultural deficit models (Nieto, 2004). Life history research can present counter-stories that challenge homogenous perceptions. Casey (1995) states, "now it is difficult to imagine a scholar who has not noticed the many new publications featuring life stories and narratives" (p. 211). Thus the process is in motion to shift the discourse of schooling from positivist universal grand narratives to postpositivist entangled complex lives. Life history interviews conducted with ten Puerto Ricans who attended CPS constructed a story of resistance regarding their lived experiences in school, which is the focus of this article.

My own autobiography (included later in the article) helped me better understand the way in which the process of life history interviewing awakens not only the lives of the participants, but the life of the researcher as well. Listening to some of the life stories told by the participants underscored my own experiences. Juxtaposing their stories with mine presents the way their stories and mine served as dialogue within this life history research. At times, I had a shared experience while other stories exemplified the complexity of each individual's meaning to school. Although I am describing some of my stories as my own ideas about my own life, I am well aware of the natural entanglement of the conversations of the participants and other lives explored in the literature that help me frame my experiences into the larger picture of Latinos and their school experiences. Shared story telling is part of what people do during their daily conversations; it is in this context of dialogue that one exposes

their thoughts and within that process, constructs meaning. However, when the conversation of schooling is explored within education research, daily conversations are overshadowed by theoretical insights that predetermine what is supposed to happen in schools, or by enormous data sets that misrepresent the complexity and diversity of each student's life story. Accordingly, research in education can recognize the significance of the daily conversations unfolding in schools that serve as knowledge about schooling and life through methods such as life history.

In the conversations that unfolded as part of this research project, each of the participants shared some insight on their experience with a school system that worked against their needs while in high school. Some described an intentional attempt to modify the systematic school structure to help them, while others described acts of resistance without deliberate or conscious intent to resist the school system. As Freire (1988) espoused, it is the role of the critical educator to couple this discussion of critique, with one of possibility.

Resisting educational inequities that continue to plague the public schools in the US is a vital strategy of academic and social survival for Puerto Ricans, as well as other disenfranchised youth (Nieto 1998). However, within the dominant ideology in US schools, as well as other social institutions, resistant behavior has a negative connotation. Compliant students are rewarded, while students who may question policies and think critically about their interests within the structure of schooling are quickly labeled as problems. Furthermore, students from non-dominant racial and social class groups, such as Puerto Ricans, are further penalized when they resist school norms. This is supported by the fact that students in inner city schools who resist school policies are more likely to be forced to deal with law enforcement and police officers, while students in affluent schools and of the dominant class are usually disciplined within the confines of their schools (Anyon, 1997). For example, a third grader from a Chicago Public School brought a marijuana joint to school and the school officials called the Chicago police; the boy was arrested because the school did not have a current phone number on file for the eight-year old.[3] The process of disciplining this boy, according to Anyon, would have played out differently had this boy been White and affluent. Without the necessary transformation of schooling in the US to provide education in the interest of their students, students will continue to resist. Thus, educators should think critically about the strategies of resistance that students utilize within educational institutions, and how these acts of resistance along with the schools' responses to student agency/resistance speak to the development of Latinos identities within the school context. The entangled complex lives of the Puerto Rican youth that lent their experiences to this research should be placed within a context of their shared histories within the city of Chicago. The resistance of Latinos and other groups to coercive education policies must be supported and understood in historical, socio-political contexts of the lived experiences of Latinos on US soil.

Sociohistorical Context: Puerto Ricans in the "United States"

Many Puerto Ricans in the continental US have held on to their culture as a means of creating/maintaining unique identity (Nieto, 1998; Padilla, 1987; Rodriguez, 1991). This adherence to one's ethnic culture is often a tumultuous struggle due to the methods of assimilation and deculturalization that US institutions have practiced on Puerto Ricans, both on the island and in the US. Some examples include the attempt to replace Spanish with English as the majority language, or instilling US patriotic values instead of Puerto Rican (Spring, 2001). Carlos[4] (one of the interviewees) relives his experience with American patriotism in high school:

> Puerto Rican patriotism was unheard of. We always were told and also showed, you know, that America [USA] is it; we had all the flags, the pledge and also those Uncle Sam posters; there were also teachers who use to be in the Army and they would always tell us, you know, the guys, that it was the thing to do. Besides that we also had the whole Constitution test thing; I mean they make sure everyone who goes to high school knows about American patriotism. They don't care if we know math and all that. (Interview; Carlos[5], 2001)

Carlos's story on Puerto Rican patriotism is critical to put into sociopolitical context since Puerto Rico has had such a unique political relationship with the United States. While all Puerto Ricans born on the island are US citizens, the citizenship status has been described as a second class citizenship (Padilla, 1987). Although Puerto Ricans are US citizens the lived experiences of Puerto Ricans who have migrated from the island have a shared story of living on the margins in the United States (Padilla, 1987). While considering the methods of deculturalization used by the United States towards Puerto Ricans, the issue of the ways in which youth engage in identity formation within their school experiences is essential. Throughout the history of the US, many ethnic groups have faced similar issues of deculturalization, including African Americans, Japanese Americans, Native Americans and Mexican Americans to name a few (Spring, 2001) . Schools were used as instruments to assimilate all the groups mentioned into lifestyles valued in the United States, such as speaking only English and focusing on individual gains. From 1900-1930 many policies were instilled into the Puerto Rican public schools for the purpose of "Americanizing" the Puerto Ricans. Aida Negron De Montilla's book, *Americanization in Puerto Rico and the Public-School System 1900-1930*, provides a list of these policies (Spring, 2001). A few examples of such policies include:

1. Attempts to expel teachers and students who engaged in anti-United States activities;
2. Attempts to use teachers from the U.S. versus local teachers;
3. Replacing local textbooks and curricula with ones reflecting the way of life in the United States.

These policies served to marginalize Puerto Rican culture through the strategic removal of anything that could be interpreted as "Puerto Rican." The policies listed above provide a historical sociopolitical insight into the public schools in Puerto Rico. Accordingly, it is imperative to recognize the historical experiences of Puerto Ricans who were part of the public schools in Puerto Rico who then migrated to the US. Overall, it is critical to take into account the history of Puerto Ricans with the US. to gain a better understanding of the experiences Puerto Ricans face in US schools today. As Ambert and Alvarez (1992) explain, "Puerto Ricans have a unique colonial history and a unique set of circumstances that bring them to the mainland" (p.34).

In *Puerto Rican Chicago,* Felix M. Padilla (1987) recounts the historical struggles of Puerto Ricans in Chicago and current issues that continue to face the community. In discussing gentrification, Padilla suggests that Puerto Ricans were aware that their communities were being displaced and tried to resist with grassroots movements. Many communities organized forums to educate the people about their rights and to help them understand how much their homes were really worth (Rinaldo, 2002). In spite of these efforts, the gentrification of the Puerto Rican communities in Chicago is still occurring (Meiners and Reyes, 2008; Ramos-Zayas, 2003).

High School Counter-Chronicles

> *While life history may not offer definitive proof of any particular theoretical proposition, it may stand as a "negative case" that can be used to falsify theories that do not jibe with it. Life histories may cast light upon the subjective side of institutional processes. That is, they can reveal how institutional arrangements are reproduced, sometimes unwittingly, through activities that are locally meaningful to the actors involved. Because they are comparatively sensitive to the temporality of social life, life histories may produce data uniquely suited to formulating theories of general social processes like socialization and social change. Finally, life histories may serve to reveal lifestyles, points of view, and social circumstances we would otherwise never encounter. (Weinberg, 2002, pp. 75-76)*

Weinberg lends insight to the multi-layered function of life history research. I will loosely use the three functions he details above - (1) negative cases can falsify grand theories, (2) life histories provide insight into the reproduction of institutional arrangements and (3) the standpoint of the youth will bring forth issues that may otherwise be silenced . This section of the article will include four high school chronicles, each focused on a different high school experience. Some will consist of one participants' life story and other sections will include several participants' stories. I will open sets of short stories with a piece of theoretical insight that does not jibe with the life histories of the participants and close each section with an interpretive interruption. The interpretive interruption will provide a space where I can closely analyze the story without interrupting the flow of the narrative. To assist in placing these counter-chronicles in lived context, the ages of the participants and some information on their high schools are provide in Tables 1 and 2 (below).

The first set of short stories (Section A) told by the participants will exemplify Weinberg's (2002) notion of a negative case. According to Coles & Knowles (2001), life history studies are useful for understanding how 'mental constructs' can be challenged through dialogue with more experienced others. The dialogue presented here is compiled from two separate chronicles of two participants sharing their experience about multiculturalism and the strength of diversity; these stories challenge the fear of difference. Through close examination of the lived experiences unfolding in school, some participants offered stories that challenged the status quo. Assimilation is a critical concept to deconstruct within the conversation of Latino schooling experiences in the US because of the ideological indoctrination addressing "whiteness" in schools. Parker & Stovall (2004) argue that, "[a]s an ideology, White supremacy was imposed

Table 1: Ages and Schools Attended

Participants *(Pseudonyms)*	**Age at Interview**	**School(s)**
Carlos	24	Riverside[6]
Marisol	27	Riverside
Yesenia	23	Riverside & Vocational Tech
Elizabeth	25	Riversidevi
Stephanie	26	Riverside
Miguel	24	North & Alternative High
Alejandro	20	Martinez High
Rodrigo	20	City College Prep
Arlene	19	Academic High
Lillian	26	Math & Science Academy

Table 2: 1993-1994 Profiles on Chicago Public High Schools' Attended by Participants[7]

Schools *(Pseudonyms)*	**Type**	**Drop Out Rate**	**Average ACT**	**Latino**	**African American**	**White**
Riverside	General Ed	51.5%	15.8	63%	17.9%	14.7%
Vocational Tech	Vocational	22.3%	17.3	31.6%	30%	28%
North High	General Ed	44.6%	15.9	46%	14.4%	26.3%
Alternative	Alternative	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
Martinez	General Ed	61.7%	14.2	84.4%	11.5%	1.6%
City College Prep	College Prep	14.4%	20.9	31.3%	18.8%	32.2%
Math/ Science Academy	Magnet/ College Prep	19.3%	20	22.2%	29%	26.9%
Academic High	Magnet/ College Prep	6.9%	22.5	12.5%	53.5%	15.9%
Chicago Public Schools		**44.9%**	**15.9**	**27.5%**	**57%**	**11.4%**

in North America, as it was used hierarchically to rank races and justified horrific acts in the form of slavery, colonialist domination of land and populations, and forced assimilation" (p. 170).

The second section (Section B) explores the experience of deconstructing the patriarchal assumptions regarding Puerto Ricans. The life stories of two young women are entangled to shed light on the power and agency of women. The next section (Section C) offers the stories of four participants telling their experience regarding the transition from elementary to high school. Their voices speak to a practice of choosing a high school to attend based on the schools attended by other family members, offering an alternative perspective on how incoming freshmen "choose" which high school to attend. The final section (Section D) will serve as a narrative of resistance, offering a social circumstance that is silenced within the research of schooling, that is, the element of human agency within the students. In this story, a young woman shares her experience of challenging her high school counselor through a formal approach of letter writing. Altogether, the life stories highlighted below provide a glimpse of high school experiences for the participants that serve as theoretical touchstones (Becker, 2002). Becker (2002) states, "[i]f we know the case in some detail, as a life history document allows us to know it, our search is more likely to be successful; it is in this sense that the life history is a useful theoretical touchstone (p. 82)".

Diversity vs. Assimilation

> *The central question is whether the public schools can serve, as they have done in the past, as the main instrument of assimilation for the millions of Hispanic [Latino/a] youngsters who now attend them. In this regard, the current fascination with multiculturalism and diversity in public education bodes ill indeed. (Chavez, 1995)*

Arlene's insight on difference...

> I think high school prepared me for life after high school because my school had so many different types of people, and I mean we had deaf people, we had people of different races, we had rich people and your ghetto, poor people. Then you had your milder, nerdy type, and that's what the stereotype was and then... So I think it did. I think I just got... because a lot of people there were like upper-middle-upper class or kind of the more wealthy side, so I think I just got used to that whole materialistic mentality. So when I got into college I was like, okay, it doesn't have to be like that. Being able to be around difference is a good thing because you see things differently...you know what I mean?

Alejandro's memory of learning about diversity...

> I remember in high school there was a celebration for *Cinco de Mayo*, and all my Mexican friends would be going cruising with their flags and all that, like we do for the Puerto Rican parade...One year we represented with both flags the Mexican and Puerto Rican for the parade. First my friends were like no because we were not sure and then we did it. It was like we were learning from each other...and some people who do not know better are always talking smack about other people not even knowing any of their kind of people. I see that as ignorant... Me? I am always ready to learn about different people, you know?

Interpretive Interruption:

Both of these stories offer a counter chronicle to Chavez's (1995) statement regarding assimilation, these two Puerto Rican youth share experiences that speak to the ways in which many youth can experience public schools without losing their Latin identity. The magnet school Arlene attended had a range of class statuses within the school and her insight on difference highlighted this class diversity. On the other hand, Alejandro focused on the ethnic identities of himself and his peers when discussing diversity. Both of their experiences highlight the lessons we may learn in school, but in this case, the two students constructed their understandings outside of the classroom. When Arlene went to college, she used her lived experience with the students on the "more wealthy side" as an opportunity to better understand her-

self, realizing she did not have to buy into the "materialistic mentality" of her privileged counterparts. Alejandro and his friends contemplated "representing" with the Mexican and Puerto Rican flags side by side. Despite their doubts, they exercised their agency to construct a symbolic representation of Mexican and Puerto Rican unity. Altogether, Arlene and Alejandro's experiences debunk Chavez's (1995) comment above which describes the public schools as the vehicle to assimilate Latinos, because both of these Puerto Rican youth shared school experiences – albeit outside of the classroom – that highlighted diversity in public schools outside of an assimilationist ideology and within an ideology that not only supports diversity but encourages it. While Alejandro and Arlene complicate the idea of assimilation unfolding in public schools, the narratives shared in the next section complicate the discussion of gender roles for Puerto Ricans from the standpoint of the participants.

Life HerStory; Mujeres in Context

> *Puerto Rican culture traditionally stresses the importance of women submitting to male demands, and this factor may override any acculturation Puerto Rican females living in the US experience. (Orshan, 1996)*

Yesenia's story on the power of Puerto Rican women...

> I owe everything to my mom, and I saw her as a powerful Puerto Rican woman that did not fall in hard times. She always stayed on her feet and showed me, you know, to be that way. Like I remember one time when we lost my stepbrother and everyone was falling apart, she stood up for the whole family and did what she had to do. It proved to me that the power she had was not just a power to say things should be done this way or that way. It was a strong power that women have because of their life and what we go through. Now when I think about when I was in school, it makes me think of growing up, and now as a woman I see the power we have is the power my mom had...like with real life problems women are powerful, my mom, my aunts and, you know, us, the young women, I see us being able to cope and help others, not like men.

Elizabeth on her early perception of women...

> I remember being a little girl and wanting to be grown up and have a great job with a briefcase (chuckle). I always saw women as the ones in charge. Like at home, both my parents were teachers but for some reason I had the idea that my mom's job was more important and at home she was in charge too...You know, it was a women's world. Also my teachers in Puerto Rico were almost all women and I respected them. When we moved to Chicago it was even more like that because I saw all kinds of women in charge. Looking back I just really did not see like the whole women serving their men thing, our women work, you know Puerto Rican women. Now a lot of women my age are having babies and stuff and really it is not the Puerto Rican women staying home, it is more the White girls who...were brought up that way.

Interpretive Interruption:

The insight of Yesenia and Elizabeth speaks to the early perceptions they had of women. Yesenia discusses the power and strength of women to come from "their life and what we go through," while Elizabeth explains how she never experienced women being subservient to men. Both of these young Puerto Rican women construct a negative case against Orshan's (1996) comment that the subordinate position of Puerto Rican females supersedes the process of acculturation of Puerto Rican women. Although Yesenia does describe women as hard working and being able to help others unlike men, she debunks Orshan (1996) because she draws on the strength women built through their experience helping others, instead of framing their caring personalities as barriers. Yesenia illuminates the human agency at the core of this persona and the necessary role the women in her family played in keeping the family together. Bernal's (2001) work with Chicana college students and her coining of "pedagogies of the home" speaks to the strategies that Yesenia and Elizabeth shared in their stories:

> My analysis indicates that Chicana college students develop tools and strategies for daily survival within an educational system that often excludes and silences them. The communication, practices and learning that occur in the home and community, what I call pedagogies of the home, often serve as a cultural knowledge base that helps Chicana college students negotiate the daily experiences of sexist, racist, and classist microaggressions. (p.624)

The power that Yesenia and Elizabeth saw in their mothers within the context of patriarchal ideologies in the United States says a lot about the power of their "pedagogies of the home."

Following Family

> *Whether these [Latino] youngsters displayed a lot of college potential or very little, the most common situation was that no one was helping them sort out their futures in any individual way. (Immerwahr, 2003)*

Elizabeth follows her cousin...

> I actually chose that high school because I had two cousins living here, and that is where they were going. So, I kind of, I wanted to go somewhere where I had somebody I knew - I didn't want to go to any other school; by myself. So I remember one time I went to this like assembly where they had people talking to us about high school and I was not even paying attention.

Carlos follows his sister...

> From what I can remember, the main reason why I decided to go to the high school that I went to, was probably the same reason why I went to the grammar school that I went to, which was because it was the school in the neighborhood, both grammar school and high

school. When I came to Chicago I knew that it was basically you go to the school that was in the neighborhood, which was the only option that I basically had. Then for high school—in 8th grade I did really well, after 7th grade. After 6th and 7th I got moved to a regular English classroom—all English classroom during my 8th grade years. I was in a classroom and I graduated number one in my class out of 8th grade, so I did really well; I took some placement tests at different high schools, and I had the opportunity to go to different high schools, even private high schools. But my neighborhood school was not far from home when I was…again, I guess it probably had to do with my sister also because of the fact that she was already there. She went to the neighborhood high school [Riverview] high school in the city, in Chicago. She was there already, and that made it a lot easier as a transition. And even though I had the opportunities that I had, and my mother even wanted me to go, and my teachers were encouraging me. Because of what I had gone through, I think, coming from Puerto Rico to 6th grade, and then seeing the transition and how hard that was for me and how much I hated it…at first it was something really shocking, then like thinking about going to high school where I had already heard horror stories from my sister about the things that they could do to the freshmen in high school. So just thinking about all those things and her friends, listening to them about those things, and knowing that there was already her there, and her group of friends that I knew a little bit—I think all those things led to the fact that I ended up going to the high school that I ended up attending, which was [Riverview].

Lillian follows her brother…

Actually our neighborhood school was [Rathem] High School. But I guess…he had …my older brother was there; they wanted me to go there. Which is really weird because my older sister went to a Catholic School …that was actually closer to our house. And then with my older brother they decided to send him to public school and so…because they felt like it wasn't so bad, they decided to send me there. But then with my younger brother they ended up sending him also to the Catholic school.

Stephanie follows her brothers…

I went to [Riverview] High School all four years. The reason I went there: it wasn't - well, I was supposed to go to [Park] High because that was my district, but the only reason I went to [Riverview] was because all my brothers went there, so they got me in. It was the only reason I went there because of course [Riverview] was all messed up, not like [Park] High.

Interpretive Interruption:

The shared experience described above complicates the role family has on academic success/failure. Immerwahr's (2003) research with Latino high school seniors focused on the multitude of barriers these students face with college admissions. In this research Immerwahr (2003) found that while many of the parents discussed the integral role college would play in the lives of their children, many of the youth were not attending college. Many of the barriers discussed echoed the chronicles shared in this article, such as low expectations of teachers and lack of school counselors (focus of the next chronicle) . However, the stories outlined above, strongly contradict one of Immerwahr's main findings – the lack of family support. The quote at the beginning of this chronicle speaks to the fact that many of the youth in the Immerwahr (2003) study expressed a lack of guidance (from home and school) about the process of attending college, the concept of "Following Family" was not discussed and while many of the parents might have not been aware of the processes involved in selecting a college, they could have been seeking safe spaces for their kids. Given the research on the percentage of Latinos who are first generation college students, for parents college may not seem safe because there is no family to follow. More than two out of five [Latino] freshmen at four-year colleges are the first in their family to attend college, compared with about one out of five White freshmen (Schmidt, 2003).

Furthermore, while the choices of what high school to attend may have been limited for these youth, the family support present within the structure of school may have helped them better navigate their high school experience. For example, if schools can provide the support these youth need, then perhaps parents would not feel obligated to send their children to a school with which they are merely familiar without considering other factors. However, even if the school environment responded better to the students, it is difficult to determine how much the family members helping each other would compare to a supportive school environment. Therefore, the experiences shared on following family – which can also be explored at different education levels, including choosing a college – complicates the process of choosing a school. The "following family" chronicle above also serves as an example of parents resisting unwelcoming school environments. As Antrop Gonzalez, Velez and Garret (2003) found in their research with Puerto Rican youth in the Midwest.

> We are led to believe…that large comprehensive urban high schools are still inequitably structuring opportunities for Latina/o students by not working to find ways to use the community-based resources, wisdom, and knowledge that students and their families already bring to school (Antrop-Gonzalez, Velez and Garret, 2003 p.9).

The parents of the youth in the "Following Family" story made it clear that their children would attend these schools, even overlooking scholarships and the option to send their children to schools that were closer to home. The family security provided by relatives at the school, or the convenience of having multiple children at the same school, superseded the opportunity to tap into a range of high school options.

The Counselor and the (un)Counseled

> "...being placed in the low track often has long-lasting negative effects on these students, as they fall further and further behind their peers and become increasingly bored in school" (Stuart Wells and Serna 1996) .

Q: Tell me about your counselor in high school.

Elizabeth: I had a counselor and the only thing I remember [about] her [is] when I was applying for college - and I remember my stuff being delayed, and I was really worried because I wanted my stuff to be in and I remember... actually, I was a Senior, and I remember writing her this letter, and I was like...I have submitted this to you but I haven't heard anything, can you please help me out because I'm really interested in going to these colleges?

Q: So you couldn't just like walk in? You had to like, write her this letter? Did she have a heavy case load or...?

Elizabeth: She didn't; I just actually think she wasn't helping me at all; and I went and told my homeroom teacher - my division teacher is what you used to call them in high school. And she helped me with the letter; and I told her I would do this letter and really that the counselor wasn't doing anything. She wasn't helping me with my applications. So when I wrote her the letter, it was typed and all, she appeared the next morning at my division room like all concerned about how to help me. It was the letter that got her to come; she never thought I would do that, you know? A student, a kid basically, and I had to go through all that instead of her just counseling me. I mean, that was her job. But there she was even before the bell rang with a concerned look on her face, and she actually told me it was not necessary for me to write the letter! Hello! This was my future. As far as I can remember, I only saw her twice...

Q: Did she come to you and say I'm your counselor?

Elizabeth: No, I didn't have any of that.

Q: Ok, when you were meeting with her, I know it was just two times, like, what did you feel her thoughts of you were as far as being a high school student, her being your advisor, you being her advisee, that relationship?

Elizabeth: As far as I can remember twice. I don't remember having a relationship with her, like she cared about me or what I did. She was just doing her job kind of thing.

Q: Tell me more about what you think a counselor is?

Elizabeth: I kind of thought because of the word counselor, what it meant, I always wondered. And I'm like, she is supposed to be my counselor, but this doesn't feel like I'm being counseled, you know? Another story was when I was seeking something out of my school? Because I also thought within my high school schedule I could have taken more classes. I only remember like English were the ones where the good teacher was, and maybe the Math one - but it didn't even prepare me for college; but other than that; you had like these study times, where you would go into a study hall session, so there was a lot of that which was a lot of waste of time.

Q: People weren't actually studying then?

Elizabeth: People were not actually studying at all; so it was a lot of waste of time. And then my senior year when I realized what a waste of time my high school was, they had, I don't know if you know, but they had like this work program, where you take I think, one less class and then you leave early and get a part time job - it's kind of like a business thing. So I said, let me get into this so I could gain something at least....

Q: Do you remember what you did for that work/study?

Elizabeth: The business courses that I took? It was like a business course, where they taught you like, maybe a little marketing skills, or how to use the computers more - a little more technical - and then they helped you with like, job interviewing and to apply for jobs. Which then, I went out and applied for jobs, and then got this part time job at Jewel.

Q: Ok. Do you think it was geared for everybody, or for students who, maybe weren't going to college?

Elizabeth: That was geared for students who were not going to college, and for students who just wanted to work; and I knew I wanted to go to college and that was not something for me but I still went ahead and did it because I figured if I don't do this I am going to stay here in this high school with these little study halls where nobody studies; and I'd rather do something on my own...but yeah, that program was geared for a lot of high school students who were not really into school and who really just wanted to get a job right after high school, and I knew that that was not what I wanted to do, but like I said, I didn't want to stay in this school wasting time and filling up my schedule with study halls where nobody studied.

Interpretive Interruption:

Elizabeth's resistance highlights her agency in making a concerted effort to get the attention of her high school counselor and to modify the school structure to fit her needs. First, using a "vocational course" and the help of her division teacher to write a formal letter to her counselor requesting the counselor's services is a clear example of her modifying the school system. Furthermore, Elizabeth's consciousness of the uselessness of certain courses in high school and her efforts to make her courses useful highlights her agency. The counselor in Elizabeth's chronicle may have seen her as disposable but Elizabeth did not let the counselor's "ideology of disposability" (Darder, 2002) serve to dispose of her so easily.

The quote from Stuart Wells and Serna (1996) that opened this chronicle regarding the response many students have to low track courses is important to juxtapose to Elizabeth's experience. The work of Stuart Wells and

Serna (1996) provides a rich analysis of social class and tracking and many of the youth I interviewed echoed the findings of their study. However, Elizabeth builds on their research because it speaks to the agency of students to make their courses work for them even if they are considered low track classes. I want to be very clear here, I am not arguing that schools should place students like Elizabeth in low track classes. I am arguing that despite Elizabeth's placement she resisted the idea that she was not college bound. Elizabeth actually went on to college to earn a Bachelors then a Masters degree in school social work and is currently practicing in a predominately Latino public school.

The lack of counseling as a resource was an experience highlighted by the participants regardless of the type of high school they attended. Placing her experience with poor counseling within the larger context of CPS – with a severe overcrowding problem and a lack of bilingual/bicultural counselors – helps to better understand their experiences within a critique of the poor structures keeping many schools in the district barely afloat (Davila and Aviles de Bradely, 2010) .

Life History Autobiography: A Space to Entangle my Self

Stories invite us to come to know the world and our place in it (Witherell & Noddings, 1991).

I did not pick life history interviewing as a research method. It chose me. The use of storytelling during the interviews and my attempt to understand what the participants' stories meant, resulted in exploring my research within the methodological context of life history. I recall sitting in my advisor's office during my first year of graduate studies telling her stories of my school experiences, both as a teacher and a student, as they related to topics in my courses on education policy. During these conversations, I tried to figure out how the course content related to my lived experiences and pondered on the lack of education research that dealt with accounts of Puerto Rican lived experiences. While conducting the interviews, I would share my own experiences as they shared theirs. This process of learning about my *self* led me to see a place for my story and use my life history as the lens to take in the research. Unlike the ink absorbed by a piece of paper displaying a set of questions on a survey, or the statistical program that absorbs life histories by mounting lives in neat categories, the lived experiences that a life historian meddles with continues to complicate ideas, perceptions, and points of view. Within my research project, the stories shared by the participants and those I shared with them changed the way I perceived lived experience as it relates to schooling and provided me with another way to look at my own life history.

I recall feeling that I had done something wrong during my first interview, because I offered my own experiences when the participant opened up with her own stories. In hindsight, I understand why that was just the natural thing to do; a dialogue or conversation was necessary to encapsulate the meaning she held to her experiences. From then on, I was there not solely as an interviewer, as the participants were not there solely as interviewees; rather, during the conversation we were there as co-researchers. In the process of the interview, through my questions and my input, I realize the narratives from the participants are co-constructed. Padilla (2003) sheds light on his autobiographic experience within his research: "Since I wanted to make myself available to them as they were making themselves to me, the reciprocal act of inquiry afforded me the opportunity to be critical about my lived experience" (p.25).

During the analysis phase, I realized that since I came to the interview data filled with my own stories, and because I had an endless repository to my own life history, I wanted to present their stories in the section above, *High School Chronicles*, to ground their experiences within their standpoint and not that of my own. Thus, I will explore some of my own chronicles side by side with the literature and stories from the participants that help contextualize my autobiographical life history.

The sharing of the lives of the participants brought my own learning and knowing of schooling to the forefront. I heard and saw myself in the story of the lived experiences of Mexican American students in Angela Valenzuela's (1999) *Subtractive Schooling*. Her book spoke to how I encountered most of my relationships with school, including the silencing of my native tongue and the countless uncaring teachers I dealt with. What kept me going? As I reflect on my school experiences, I begin to ask myself how I survived and strived in spite of the "Subtractive" practices I encountered. I have a few theories that have been enhanced by hearing the lived experiences of the participants.

Implications: Suppression of Student Voice and Identity Development

As children are trying to navigate their way through public school systems across urban America, they are faced with thinking about who they are not only to themselves, but what others perceive them to be. Latino children trying to affirm their identities have dealt with the societal racist perceptions that saturate the culture of schools. The isolation of Latinidad in early school experiences creates barriers for the future civic participation of Latinos for generations to come.

The historical backdrop of education policies intended for Latinos in the US coupled with the work of scholars that address the discussion of identity formation in schools for Latinos from a class and race based analysis provide a glimpse of the intersection between education policy and racial/class constructions. The lack of opportunity available to Latinos in public schools sends a negative message to the Puerto Rican youth regarding their value as people.

The silencing of these student experiences with inequitable school systems tells another story about research: the story of power. Youth stories/voices/experiences unfolding in schools can inform policies and practices that function to better serve their needs. Knowledge selected for inclusion in the curriculum as a rule reflects the perspectives, tastes, and world views of powerful groups in society, while the lives and

concerns of the groups that are most marginalized are for the most part missing from the curriculum (Nieto, 2004).

While many conducting qualitative studies that explore student voice have critiqued the "romanticizing" of authenticity (Cary, 1995), student experiences must continue to be explored with various research designs that critically investigate and create space for their story. As Hones (1998) states, "[i]n a quest for an understanding of the Self and the Other, we can recover our memories, renegotiate our present, and reconsider the possibilities of change within our communities, our nation, and our world" (p.248). The stories that were shared in this article recovered the memories of a small group of Puerto Rican youth from Chicago. My hope is that educators and community members will renegotiate their present positions working with youth in urban schools and neighborhoods. Most importantly, we need to reconsider the possibility of change in those very spaces where too often children and youth are not heard or valued as integral to the policies and practices that shape the culture in urban schools and neighborhoods.

Erica R. Davila, Ph.D. is Assistant Professor of Education and Coordinator of Urban Education at Arcadia University. Her research aims to highlight lived experiences as they unfold within the school context and how focusing on students' lives can impact pedagogy and curriculum development. Dr. Davila has a doctorate and master's degree in Educational Policy Studies from the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign and a bachelor's degree in Elementary Education and Sociology from Northeastern Illinois University.

ENDNOTES

1 See Davila and Aviles de Bradley (2010) for more on the advocacy work.

2 Some of these organizations are the Neighborhood Capital Budget Group (NCBG) http://www.ncbg.org and Parents United for Responsible Education (PURE) http://pureparents.org

3 Personal conversation with CPS teacher.

4 Although the interview data have not been introduced I will use some of the data to provide a deeper understanding of the connections to the sociohistorical context.

5 All participant names are pseudonyms

6 Half of the youth attended the same school because originally I planned on completing ethnography of Riverside, but my interviewees steered me towards interviewing students in other schools.

7 Chicago Public Schools. (2010, June 9). Retrieved from https://research.cps.k12.il.us/cps/accountweb/Reports

REFERENCES

Ambert A.and Alvarez, M. (1992). *Puerto Rican Children on the Mainland.* New York: Garland Publishing.

Antrop-González, R., Vélez, W. & Garrett, T. (2003). Where are the academically successful Puerto Rican students? Five success factors of high achieving Puerto Rican high school students. *JSRI Working Paper #61,* The Julian Samora Research Institute, Michigan State University, East Lansing, Michigan.

Anyon, J. (1997). *Ghetto schooling: A political economy of urban educational reform.*

New York: Teachers College Press.

Becker, H. S. (2002). *The life history and the scientific mosaic.* In Weinberg, D. (Ed.), *Qualitative Research Methods.* (pp. 79-87). Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishers.

Bernal, D. (2001). Learning and living pedagogies of the home: The mestiza consciousness of Chicana students. *International Journal of Qualitative Studies in Education*, *14*(5), 623-639.

Cary, L. J. (1999). Unexpected stories: Life history and the limits of representation. *Qualitative Inquiry*, *5*(3), 411-427.

Casey, K. (1995). The new narrative research in education. In Apple, M. (Ed.) *Review of Research in Education*, (pp.211-253). Washington, D.C.: American Educational Research Association.

Chavez, L. (1995). What to do about immigration. *Commentary*, *99*(3), 29-36.

Coles, A. L. & Knowles, J. G. (Eds), (2001). *Lives in context: The art of life history research.* Walnut Creek, CA: AltaMira Press.

Chicago Public Schools. (2010, June 7). Retrieved from http://www.cps.edu/About_CPS/At-a-glance/Pages/At-a-glance.aspx

Chicago Public Schools. (2010, June 9). Retrieved from https://research.cps.k12.il.us/cps/accountweb/Reports

Davila, Erica R. (2005). Educational policies and practices in lived context: Puerto Ricans schooled in Chicago. Ph.D. dissertation, University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, United States -- Illinois. Retrieved June 10, 2010, from Dissertations & Theses: A&I.(Publication No. AAT 3202082).

Davila, E. and Aviles de Bradley, A. (2010) Examining education for Latinas/os in Chicago: A CRT/LatCrit approach. *Educational Foundations*, *24*(1-2), 39-58.

Darder, A. (2002). *Reinventing Paulo Freire: A pedagogy of love*. Boulder, Colorado: Westview Press.

Flores-Gonzalez, N. (2002). *School Kids/Street Kids: Identity development in Latino students*. New York: Teachers College Press.

Freire, P. (1988). Introduction: Teachers as intellectuals: Critical educational theory and the language of critique. In Giroux *Teachers as intellectuals: Toward a Critical Pedagogy of learning*. Massachusetts: Bergin & Garvey Publishers, Inc.

Hones, D. F. (1998). Known in part: The transformational power of narrative inquiry. *Qualitative Inquiry* 4(2), 225-249.

Immerwahr, J. (2003). With diploma in hand: Hispanic high school seniors talk about their future. A Report by Public Agenda. Retrieved June 1, 2010 from http://www.fresnounified.org/dept/planning/careerprep/Source.pdf

Lather, P. (1986). Issues of validity in openly ideological research: Between a rock and a soft place. *Interchange*, 17(4), 63-84.

Lipman, P. (2006). *High Stakes Education: Inequality, globalization, and urban reform*. New York: Routledge Falmer.

Meiners, E. and Reyes, B. (2008) Re-making the incarceration-nation: Naming the participation of schools in our prison industrial complex. *Penn GSE Perspectives on Urban Education*, 5 (2).

Mercado, C. & Moll, L. (2000). Student agency through collaborative research in Puerto Rican communities. In Nieto (Ed.) *Puerto Rican students in U.S. schools*. New Jersey: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, Inc.

Michie, G. (1999). *Holler if you hear me: The education of a teacher and his students*. New York: Teachers College Press.

Nieto, S. (1998). Fact and fiction: Stories of Puerto Ricans in U.S. schools. *Harvard Educational Review*, *68*(2), 133-163.

Nieto, S. (2004) *Affirming diversity: The sociopolitical context of multicultural education* 4th *ed.)* New York: Longman.

Olmedo, I. (1999). Redefining culture through the memorias of elderly Latinas. *Qualitative Inquiry,* 5(3), 353-354.

Orshan, S.A. (1996). Acculturation, perceived social support, and self-esteem in primigravida Puerto Rican teenagers. *Western Journal of Nursing Research*, (4). 460-474.

Padilla, A., (2003). Representing self at a tier one university: Conversationes entre amigos. (Doctoral dissertation, University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign). DAI-A 64/03 pp 766-1000.

Padilla, F. (1987). *Puerto Rican Chicago*. Indiana: University of Notre Dame Press.

Padilla, F. (1997). *The struggle of Latino/Latina university students in search of a liberating education*. Routledge: New York.

Pak, Y. K. (2002). *Wherever I go, I will always be a loyal American: Schooling Seattle's Japanese Americans during World War II*. New York: Routledge.

Parker, L. & Stovall, D. (2004). Actions following words: Critical race theory connects to critical pedagogy. *Educational Philosophy and Theory 36* (2) 167-182.

Pew Hispanic Center (2010) Statistical portrait of Hispanics in the United States, 2008

Retrieved June 8, 2010 from http://pewhispanic.org/factsheets/factsheet.php?FactsheetID=58

Ramos-Zayas, A. (1998). Nationalist ideologies, neighborhood-based activism, and educational spaces in Puerto Rican Chicago. *Harvard Educational Review 68,* (2), 164-191.

Rinaldo, R. (2002). "Space of resistance: The Puerto Rican Cultural Center and Humboldt Park." *Cultural Critique* 50 (2002) 135-174.

Rodriguez, C. (1991). *Puerto Ricans Born in the U.S.A.* San Francisco: Westview Press.

Schmidt, Peter. (2003). Academe's Hispanic future: The nation's largest minority group faces big obstacles in higher education, and colleges struggle to find the right ways to help. *The Chronicle of Higher Education*, 50, (14) (28 November).

Schubert, W. & Ayers, W. (Eds.), (1992). *Teacher lore: Learning from our experiences*. New York: Longman.

Spring, J. (2001). *Deculturalization and the struggle for equality: A brief history of the education of dominated cultures in the United States*. New York: McGraw-Hill.

Stuart Wells and Serna (1996). The politics of culture: Understanding local political resistance to detracking in racially mixed schools. *Harvard Educational Review* 66 (1), 93-118.

Valenzuela, A. (1999). Subtractive schooling: U.S.-Mexican youth and the politics of caring Albany, NY : State University of New York Press.

Weinberg, D. (Ed.), (2002). *Qualitative research methods*. Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishers.

Witherell, C. & Noddings, N. (Eds.), (1991). *Stories lives tell: Narrative and dialogue in education*. New York: Teachers College Press

On Joyous Teaching...

By Catherine L. Belcher, Loyola Marymount University, Los Angeles

> *Happiness and pleasure on Saturday - they come with sunlight, beach runs, good friends and long dinners. But joy, joy resides exclusively in Room 31.*
> *(Caroline, second year teacher, Los Angeles, Calif.)*

I have been much absorbed lately with thoughts of the great and unforgettable pedagogues I have known. You likely hold a similar cast of characters in your mind: the all-knowing, sly 4th grade teacher, the ecstatic history buff, the kind, wise woman who made you feel safe while she magically taught you math, the incredibly enthusiastic first year teacher who had so much to learn, but whose energy was absolutely contagious, the one who believed you could do it when you thought you couldn't, the English teacher who introduced you to Jane Austen and made it matter, the gifted artist who taught you to stand on stage and shine, the one who made you want to be a teacher.

I find that these days I can't stop thinking about them – probably because I have become a teacher of teachers and after a few years am starting to come to some understanding about what that really means. The weight of it is both welcome (I *want* this to be vitally important) and daunting. Because being a teacher of teachers in 2010 requires an understanding that while the teaching profession has always faced challenges to its professional standing ("you only work 9 months a year," "those who can't do, teach"), nothing in the past compares to the current deskilling, "technicizing" and, frankly, overt debasing of teachers. And I can see this in my students' eyes. When so much genuine enthusiasm hits such a hard, immobile wall, it gives one pause.

So, in working to put together my thoughts, and in honor of a too soon departed, joyous former classmate, I think of why I became a teacher, why I became an education professor, and of those who inspired me to work in education. I've thought a lot about the expertise of the teachers I have known, of their exceptional caring, of the years of experience. Mostly, though, I find myself thinking about the joy they showed for their work. In each of these teachers there lived an energy, a creative spirit that pervaded their efforts – a spirit I fear we are ultimately losing to scripted curriculums and standardization. The joy in educational work is leaving us, and with it, I fear the best and brightest will leave as well; either that, or they'll never come at all.

Deciding how I feel about the situation, and how it lives in my professional life, where I am positioned to serve as both advocate and critical eye, is proving a struggle. Often, I am uncomfortable with where I land.

I hold the distinct privilege of working with both preservice and novice (first and second year) teachers in urban Los Angeles. The majority are Teach for America students, which, for the purposes of this essay, only serves to provide a sense of their age (so young!) and level of perseverance (extraordinarily high). Others are traditional teacher education students working towards credentials and master degrees. I worry about all of them. Their energy, love, determination, and intellectual capacity, which should be welcomed and nurtured, are instead constantly stifled, most often *not* by the children and difficult working conditions under which they function. Those who elect to teach in today's urban classrooms expect to face complex challenges. They don't necessarily expect their joy and desire for the work to be extracted from them, quite painfully, by external entities who claim to support education and students of color. Namely (but not always and not solely), school boards, NCLB proponents, overtaxed administrators focused on test scores and standards, and burned out teachers who probably should never have worked in education in the first place.

In class, we spend a great deal of time considering all that is "wrong" with our current public education system, constantly unpacking poverty, racism, inequality and the like in classes based in critical pedagogy, practitioner research, and sociocultural analysis. Given their high stress teaching placements, I find myself a cheerleader of sorts, advocating for optimism. Teachers can be intellectuals! Teachers can conduct their own classroom research that both helps them become better practitioners and informs the field! Teachers are professionals who can progress in their work and contribute to their workplace as leaders! Teachers can help kids grow to become critical thinkers and skilled, savvy students! Teachers are advocates for social justice! Teachers are role models! It is head-rush inducing, exciting, exhausting work.

I am beginning to wonder, though, if the divide between what I want for them and the current reality of the profession is growing too wide to reconcile. After all, the particular vision of teachers and teaching I advocate is not measurable through a standardized test. I am likely proving more hopeful than real, and if that is the case, then perhaps I need to take a more honest approach with my students. However, I don't want to lose the joy, energy, and hope we share, especially since those can prove difficult to find.

Complicating the issue further, I find I am hitting a wall as well, one quite familiar to professors, established by academia. While I teach at an institution that values teaching, it is clear that I need to be getting on with other things (publishing, serving on committees). I accept the fact that I was well aware of academia's publish or perish traditions long before I became a professor, but I posit that schools of education should serve as stronger advocates for the space teaching occupies in our

careers. We are, after all, the teachers of teachers and it is time, I believe, to talk more deeply about what that truly means. Certainly, we must advocate for teaching that moves beyond traditional boundaries, that creates a classroom space where, in the words of bell hooks, we bear "witness to education as the practice of freedom" (1994, p. 11). Such teaching, based in critical pedagogy and a "quality of care" (p. 194), requires passion, dedication, and love. Hopefully, these characteristics abound in the teachers we teach, but how will we know if we do not take the journey ourselves, collaborating and reflecting with them as colleagues in the process?

The best teaching classrooms, at all levels, function as communities, as shared group experiences where co-created learning takes place. In these spaces, professors engage in the very type of teaching they espouse to their students, allowing for both an equal exchange of ideas, and grounding in the "real" world. Again, bell hooks:

> To the extent that professors bring this passion [uniting theory and practice], which has to be fundamentally rooted in a love for ideas we are able to inspire, the classroom becomes a dynamic place where transformations in social relations are concretely actualized and the false dichotomy between the world outside and the inside world of the academy disappears. (p. 195)

Such pedagogy is hard work and, much as good research, it takes *time*. It requires constant reflection and emotional energy not necessarily recognized or awarded by academia (or public schools for that matter). I'd like to imagine, though, that if university teacher education programs became loud advocates, and highly visible exemplars of break-the-mold teaching, that somehow we might break open the ever-narrowing vision of what "teaching" means. For in the end, if we, at the university level, can't manage to shift the teaching paradigm at our own institutions, how can we continue to expect it of our students?

I occasionally share my frustrations in class, and find that my students' energy and devotion to their students serves as my exemplar. In the end, my students set me straight. They may hit their own walls, but while that steals their energy, it does not diminish their dedication to their students. My students' joy in this regard is, thankfully, contagious. I asked my class of second year teachers to write to me about what "joyous teaching" meant to them, and they did so with gracious enthusiasm. Some answers reflected their exhaustion: "If I had to define joyous teaching it would probably be related to the idea of exhaling at some point throughout my day" (Jessica). Other responses reflected their depth of concern: "I would say my most joyous teaching moments come when my students get into something in a deeply emotional way" (Devin). Another reframed the question (and rightly so): " . . . but the infectious nature of joyous *learning* is what makes teaching a joy for me . . . " (Nick). A different student very simply stated, "I am learning to appreciate where they come from (Why do they yell? Why are they angry?). When I know them I learn to love them. When I learn to love them, I love to teach them" (Britt).

If we truly believe in social justice in education, at all levels, we must advocate for the space and time to allow such teacher growth to happen. I believe this begins in a fundamental determination to not forget the gifts our best teachers gave us, and to grow those in both our students and ourselves; and to decide that when we hit the wall, to hit it loudly and forcefully, in the full conviction that someday soon, it will indeed fall.

Catherine Belcher is an Assistant Professor in Language and Culture in Education at the School of Education, Loyola Marymount University, Los Angeles. She teaches and writes about urban teaching, Latino educational history, and the role of culture in the classroom. Her forthcoming book, Teaching Harry Potter: The Power of Imagination in Multicultural Classrooms (Spring 2011) explores three teachers' experiences utilizing popular culture and media to break perceived and prescribed curricular boundaries in their classrooms.

REFERENCE

hooks, bell. (1994). *Teaching to transgress: Education as the practice of freedom*. New York: Routledge.

"Supreme Efforts of Care and Honest Utterance": Grasping the Singular Power of the Spoken Word in School Spaces

By Kelly Wissman, University at Albany, State University of New York

I knew Joe Cytrynbaum as a fellow graduate student, a friend, an organizer, and a neighbor. I knew him as the student asking penetrating questions of the educational anthropologies we read in our doctoral courses. I knew him as a neighbor within our West Philadelphia surroundings, waving hello on beautiful autumn mornings and appearing at weekend get-togethers, instantly transforming them by his energy, laughter, and warmth. I knew him as the voice at the other end of my apartment building's intercom system wanting to talk about graduate student organizing, knowing intuitively and clearly that electronic organizing is only enhanced by face-to-face interactions. I think he must have known, too, that the sincerity and humanity in which he approached this work profoundly shaped the emerging movement and perhaps, too, that his own enthusiasm was both infectious and irresistible. I shared with Joe only a small number of those charged and beautiful moments. In the context of his passing, I am deeply grateful for those moments, for Joe, and for the opportunity to spend time in the presence of such light.

I also shared with Joe an interest in pursuing scholarship that explored youth work, poetry, and activism, while also sharing a continued and sober consideration of research relationships, responsibilities, and subjectivities (Gustavson & Cytrynbaum, 2003) within work that crossed differences and that was situated in struggles for educational equity and social justice. At the time I was coming to know Joe, I was beginning to teach and research a poetry and photography course with a group of adolescent girls. My research explored how the young women in the course drew upon the literacy and artistic traditions of African American women to pursue self-definition (Wissman, 2009) and social critique (Wissman, 2007) within an in-school context. Across the many hours I spent with the young women reading, writing, and sharing poetry, I was continually moved by the electric force in the quiet moments of writing and the hushed silence that overcame us as we listened to words carefully chosen and dynamically read. As the spoken words continued to flow, eventually the quiet would become punctuated by sighs of recognition, laughter, applause, and sometimes tears. Joe, who coached a spoken word team, "Louder than a Bomb," in Chicago's Manley High School, also knew the power of engaging students with poetry. One of Joe's students, Vasawa Thekingofvrworld Robinson, posted a note to Joe on Joe's Facebook page, writing of his time participating in the "Louder than a Bomb":

> sitting in a room that fit about seventy people. where our pads became skin, our pens became needles. injecting ink. it became an addiction. it became a habit. the word of the day you'll say. then we'll proceed to write about a topic. you'll grab your journal, freestyle your writings. while you took a bite of some snack that was organic. seeds, you planted. life, you didn't take for granted.

In my experience, poetry and spoken word are the generative and contagious forces for illumination, inspiration, transformation, and reflection that Joe's student suggests. It is this singular and simple power of words written, words spoken, and words heard that I reflect on when I think of the students Joe and I have been privileged to work with and come to know. June Jordan (1998), another poet and teacher who left us too soon, wrote that the U.C. Berkeley student poets with whom she worked approached the creative and social practice of poetry as an act of faith, a compact, a trust between poets and listeners, writing:

> They believe that someone will come along
> and listen to what they have tried to say.
>
> They believe that when someone comes along
> and hears what they, the poets, think
> desire, or despise, a trustworthy
> conversation will become possible
>
> They believe that important, truthful conversation
> between people fosters and defends
> the values of democratic equality
>
> They believe that other people deserve
> supreme efforts of care and honest utterance (p. 208)

In light of Joe's spirit and life's work, I would like to explore here some emerging insights related to poetry within public school spaces. These insights are drawn from work I am pursuing with an inquiry group of middle and secondary teachers who are exploring the complexities and possibilities of incorporating multimodalities into their English and Reading support classes. I have been drawn to consideration of the poetry and experiences of two boys who conveyed to me and others in the inquiry group compelling insights about the synergy between "old" and "new" literacies, between spoken words and written words, between individual creative processes and public performances. Like the student poets Jordan writes of, their work suggests this faith in the power of poetry and this yearning toward the kinds of communities that can be created by, for, and in support of words spoken and words heard.

Exploring Multimodal Literacies in an Inquiry Community

The study involves five teach-

ers from a range of rural, urban, and suburban districts. Over the course of the 2007-2008 academic year and summer, the teachers, three graduate student research assistants, and I met monthly in an inquiry community to explore adolescent literacies and to develop teacher research projects. These teachers, all of whom were members of my graduate level adolescent literacies course the previous year, developed data collection tools to learn from their students about their literacies; analyzed this data; developed curricula and projects to build on their students out-of-school literacies and lives; and utilized digital cameras, digital video, and movie-making software purchased with money from a research grant to engage their students in multimodal learning. Three teachers worked with their students to create digital poetry. One ELA teacher worked with students after school to put on a spoken word and music event that they called Java Jive; this teacher also worked with her students to create a literary art magazine. The fifth teacher, a social studies teacher, worked after school with a group of boys to create a digital video exploring the Roman empire. Here, I would like to explore the experiences of just one member of the inquiry group, Mira. (All student and teacher names are pseudonyms.)

Mira and Her Classroom

After a lengthy career teaching English in India, Mira Singh is currently in her third year teaching in a rural district in upstate New York. Mira teaches Academic Intervention Services (AIS) classes for students who have scored below expectations on the state's English Language Arts exam. She is also enrolled in a local doctoral program in literacy. She has described her previous teaching philosophy as reflecting a "New Critical" stance wherein authority and knowledge rested within the text and the teacher. As a result of her doctoral work, participation in this inquiry group, and her own professional development pursuits, she now describes herself as "moving with the times" and her pedagogy as being informed by inquiry-based learning, multimodalities, and out-of-school literacies. In interviews and through writing she has described her goals to provide students choice, agency, and ownership and to respond to her students' facility and comfort with music, images, and nonprint media.

While a participant in the inquiry group, Mira was also serendipitously working with another faculty member interested in exploring poetry and new media. To begin, Mira and her university-based co-teacher worked together to create a poetry workshop in her classroom. The students were invited to read poems by Emily Dickinson, William Carlos Williams, and others to explore imagery, tone, and word choice. Students then wrote original poems that were workshopped in the classroom. In order to create a "poem movie," or a digital poem, the students were invited to choose images and music to accompany their selected poem and to record their voices narrating their poem. Using Windows Moviemaker, the students then stitched together images, music, and spoken word, working both individually and collaboratively to orchestrate these multimodalities (Kress & Jewitt, 2003) toward the completion of their digital poems. These poems were shared with the entire class at the end of the project. After the first implementation of this project, Mira also incorporated digital poetry into her Academic Intervention Support classes on her own the following academic year.

Michael and Jared

The digital poems of two boys, Michael and Jared, provided compelling windows into their literacies and lives for both Mira and other members of our inquiry community. Both boys were 8th graders at the time of the study. Michael, who is White, was part of the first class where digital poetry was introduced. Jared, who is African American, participated in this project the following academic year. Conversations with both students, classroom observations, and interviews with Mira provide further insight into the ways in which the students took up invitations to do this kind of work and how their engagement re-shaped the social interactions within Mira's classroom. In a finding that initially surprised us, both boys embraced the opportunity within this work for reasons that were not tied only to the novelty of using new technologies and new literacies in school spaces.

In presenting these mini-cases, I am interested in how the boys embraced opportunities to pursue poetry in the service of furthering their own self-understanding; of combining words and images to reach their audience; and in shaping an in-school space as one embracing of social interactions typically not found in school spaces.

Here, first, is a link to Michael's digital poem:

http://www.urbanedjournal.org/videos/digitalpoemMichael.wmv

In interviews, Michael recounted that he "loves writing poems and song and stuff" and that he frequently writes outside of school. This project was his first opportunity to conceptualize and pursue this kind of digital poetry in school. He said, "It was awesome just to make something like that! I always wanted to do something like that, so it awesome." Asked about the inspiration for the poem, Michael told us, "My house burned down and my poem was about homeless people…'cause not a lot of people realize the aspect of people and not having homes and stuff." Michael discussed not only the process of writing and sharing his own poem, but also what he learned about other students, saying,

> It really showed off peoples' creative abilities and like their personalities in what they did in their work…Just that like you never really know how people think or feel on the inside. Just the way they look and act on the outside is totally different from the person inside them, basically.

In discussing the rhythm and intonations of the poem, Michael talked about the influence of hip hop and rap. Later in the interview, he provided even more insight into his writing process, a process Mira explores with great curiosity:

> Mira: And when you write, do you

see images, visuals?

Michael: Yeah. Yeah.

Mira: You do? That's part of it?

Michael: Yeah. Like you see it in your head and you keep going.

Mira: Okay. And does rhythm come in, too? Or does it come later? How does it flow when you are writing?

Michael: The flow is there. It starts off with a flow and then it stops and then at the end you bring it all into one flow. Like from the different flows, because I don't write all at one time. I write a little bit and when I get more I keep on writing. Whatever comes out, I don't try to rush it. I just write whatever comes to my head and if I don't have nothing else I'll just stop and try again. But whatever I write, I write to like rhythms and beats.

Through this project, Michael was able to craft a place for his writing in school, a practice he pursued outside of school, but had never brought into school. In doing so, many additional opportunities for movements across boundaries arose. His exchange with Mira is striking in that they shift traditional roles of teacher and student; Mira takes a stance as a learner from Michael and he teaches his teacher about his writing process. There is also movement here in terms of knowledge production: a life-changing experience was able to travel into school through this poem and Michael's use of poetry, images, and spoken word communicated to his fellow students how poetry can make social commentary. Significantly, Michael's out-of-school literacy practice was enriched by the multimodal component that Mira introduced and that he had never pursued before. In fact, after the project ended, Michael put this poem and others up on Youtube. Digital poetry here becomes an essential part of Michael's rich palette of literacy practices, one both welcomed and enriched by school.

Here is Jared's digital poem:

http://www.urbanedjournal.org/videos/digitalpoemJared.wmv

Unlike Michael, Jared did not consider himself a writer before this project. In his predominantly white rural school, and as a talented basketball player, Jared told us that most people saw him only as a "jock," an identity that he also seemed to embrace. After the project he remarked, "I didn't think I had it in me to write the poem, so after I wrote I was like, 'did I really write that'?" He noted that he had written poems before, but only "if [teachers] made me, but not in my free time." He said that he came to the realization that "poetry is actually kind of fun. That writing poems is, I don't know, I guess it could be a hobby or something like that. Something I could do in my free time."

To Jared, the opportunity to write a poem and receive feedback was the most appealing aspects of the project, not the movie-making component. He said, "I didn't know I could write poems that good, but I guess I can a little. I don't know. It was just fun to write a poem and to get feedback on it." Jared noted that in other English classes students rarely hear poems read out loud. For Jared, reading his poem and hearing others was significant to him and we noted in classroom observations that he played a very active role in commenting on other student's drafts, discussing the choice of images, and working with other students to construct their poems. Jared noted, "I always read my poems out loud. I'm not a stage fright type of person. I'll read other people's poems out loud if they want me to. I just do that because I like getting feedback on what people think about the poem." Asked why he did so, he commented, "'cause then you'll know what they're thinking and you can make a poem that would suit what they're thinking."

In this sense, Jared's experience in the class is valuable to him in terms of how it opened up a social experience centered around writing and discussion in the classroom he had not experienced before. Jared mentioned the importance of hearing poetry read out loud and of receiving response to his work five times in our interview. For Jared, much like Michael, poetry opened up opportunities for social interaction, for the enrichment of knowledge about other people and their experiences, and for the exploration of his own identity within a broader classroom community. While neither boy spoke specifically about his racial and gender identity, the kind of identity work that their poems reflect is compelling. Jared provides an image of himself where being a poet and a basketball player are not in conflict and the intonations in Michael's poem reveal how his work is profoundly influenced by the rhythms and social consciousness of hip hop, a tradition that might not be noticeable without this project as a shaping influence for a young man in this rural school.

"New" Literacies and "Old" Purposes: Reclaiming the Spoken

In discussing new literacies, Knobel and Lankshear (2007) note that they involve a different kind of "ethos stuff" in that they invite more participatory, collaborative, and collective ways of working and more distribution of expertise and authority. Within Mira's class, digital poetry set the stage for a classroom where participation norms and traditional ways of knowledge production were upset. Here, students' in and out-of-school literacies were a bit less dichotomized, multimodalities were encouraged, and collaborative and public sharing were encouraged in marked contrast to the individual and private writing that characterized much of the students' previous experiences of in-school learning. It could also be argued that there was space here not only for a more generative recognition of adolescents' literacies in school, but also an *enrichment* of those literacies, from Michael's newfound ability to incorporate multimodalities into his composing process to Jared's embrace of an identity as a poet and public commentator and supporter of other people's poems. Given the context of this class – given its purpose to work with students who did not do well on the state's standardized test – these attributes seem all the more strik-

ing. Rather than crafting the class in the image of a traditional "remedial" course focused on skill-building, Mira instead invited engagement with poetry, images, and spoken word. This decision correspondingly shifted focus away from deficits to strengths, from isolated skills to embodied knowledge.

In many ways, though, what occurred here was not only due to "new" or multimodal literacies, but also due to the invitation to engage with the most traditional mode of communication: orality. Both Michael and Jared spent little time with us talking about the technology or the software or the process of choosing images for their digital poems; rather, both were much more expansive when talking about the composing process of their own poems and about coming to know others in the class through listening to their poetry. As reflective young men, both Michael and Jared expressed desires for socially significant work and spoke frequently to how the project enabled a different kind of knowledge about themselves and other students. It seems significant that by bringing in "new" literacies to one of the oldest art forms, the students were not taken in by the new tools or technology for their own sake, but by how those tools could be used in the service of meaning making and community building.

To me, Mira, Jared, and Michael suggest that to study adolescent literacies requires an openness, a collaborative commitment, a dedication to learning with and from students and other teachers. In discussing her experience, Mira noted, "I was a student, teacher, researcher, all in one. That really, really helps and we should be open to this as teachers." The insights we learned from Jared and Michael emerged not only from Mira's classroom, but also from a community of other teachers supporting Mira in her work, and from Michael and Jared themselves. Michael, for example, responded to our question about what he would suggest to other English teachers based on his experience with the digital poetry project in this way:

> The typical English class is taking a few notes, reading the book, and then a reflection essay about the book. The thing we did in Ms. Singh's class was more open discussions and more creative, instead of like pen to the paper work, more philosophical, if I can use that word?

Michael's work and the responses to it remind me that at the heart of English education should be the drive to communicate and to wrestle with large ideas. Along with Michael, I continue to think we could be a bit more "philosophical" in our teaching and research of adolescent literacies as well as a bit more participatory, if I could use that word.

"Yeah, Yeah, I Hear That"

My time in this inquiry community has reinforced my sense of the importance of contexts for both students and for teachers to be a part of participatory communities, to write, to speak, and to be heard. Within words written, words spoken, and words heard possibilities can emerge for understanding, for change, for compassion. In considering Joe's life and legacy, I continually return to June Jordan's (1998) description of her student poets, her proclamation that they believed everyone deserved "supreme efforts of care and honest utterance" (p. 208). Joe's sister, Pamela Cytrynbaum, recounts her brother's own fierce belief and compassionate listening to her, saying:

> I would bring him the most toxic feelings, my most unproud moments, my ugliest pain, and he would be just like with his students: "Yeah, yeah, I hear that." Somehow with this incredible alchemy of empathy and sympathy and fiery brain sharpness he would just turn me all around. (Schmich, 2009)

From students seeking out poetry slams in urban centers to rural students pursuing work of depth and complexity in their marginalized and sometimes stigmatized "remedial" courses, Joe is an inspiration to work with deep integrity to create contexts for young people where their words are nurtured, brought forth, and heard. However ephemeral and however fragile those moments and spaces are, I believe they are of singular importance to our students and to our democracy. They require the commitment that inspires the best community organizers and the boldness that is at the heart of all poets. Carole Maso (2000), an eloquent and poetic voice on writing, love, and loss writes:

> As we dare to utter something, to commit ourselves, to make a mark on a page or a field of light.
>
> To incorporate this dangerous and fragile world. All its beauty. All its pain. (p. 179)

To Joe, in humble recognition of all this beauty of your life, of all this pain at your loss.

Dr. Kelly Wissman received her Ph.D. in Reading/Writing/Literacy from the University of Pennsylvania in 2005. Prior to completing her doctorate, she held various and often overlapping roles as an educator, qualitative researcher, and after school program facilitator. Dr. Wissman's research interests include literacies and literature in the lives of urban youth, gender and education, photography and literacy, and out-of-school literacies. She shares a complementary interest in feminist approaches to the teaching and theorizing of children's and young adult literature. Her research has been supported by the *National Council of Teachers of English Research Foundation* and two grants from the Faculty Research Awards Program at the University at Albany.

REFERENCES

Gustavson, L. C. & Cytrynbaum, J. D. (2003). Illuminating spaces: Relational spaces, complicity, and multisited ethnography. *Field Methods, 15* (3), 252-270.

Knobel , M. & Lankshear, C. (2007). (Eds.). *A new literacies sampler*. New York: Peter Lang.

Kress, G. & Jewitt, C. (2003). *Multimodal literacy*. New York: Peter Lang.

Jordan, J. (1998). *Affirmative acts*. New York: Doubleday.

Maso, C. (2000). *Break every rule: Essays on language, longing, and moments of desire*. Washington, D.C.: Counterpoint.

Robinson, V. T. (2009, July 14). A teacher. A mentor. A legend. Facebook posting.

Schmich, M. (2009, July 15). Brother's death hits harder than most. *Chicago Tribune*. Retrieved October 20, 2009: http://archives.chicagotribune.com/2009/jul/15/news/chi-schmich-15-jul15

Wissman, K. (2007). "Making a way": Young women using literacy and language to resist the politics of silencing. *Journal of Adolescent and Adult Literacy*, *51* (4), 340-349.

Wissman, K. (2009). Reading and becoming living authors: Urban girls pursuing a poetry of self-definition. *English Journal, 98* (3), 39-45.

The Tactics of Hope

By Pamela Cytrynbaum, Northwestern University

My name is Mr. C to the y
not afraid to cry
flows so smooth you think
that I lie
Better known as that man who
likes to teach, and I always feel
ready to make a speech
I spend most of my time trying to
avoid the rhyme because rhyme
doesn't pay
You can usually find me piecing poems
Together like high quality quilts, patches
& squares borrowed & found
my poems keep you warm & safe
I secretly wish I was a good writer
this is true
Some day I will be known for my integrity
above all else
I would like to thank my son for my rebirth
My name is Mr. C. to the Y call
me C-Baum
Better known as the man who likes
to write even when I don't
know what to say I write
and write anyway
I spend most of my time crafting
a rhyme
You can usually find me trying
to do what's write

I feel like an autumn leaf,
reddish orange & ready to fall
My mind is a spinning top
Can't quite keep it all
And now know that knowledge is
found in every small snatch of
molecular moment

****

> *"The classroom remains the most radical space of possibility in the academy." – bell hooks*

Why do so many stories of soul-sized living always include this sentence: "All of this (fill in wonderful socially-just work, innovation, extraordinary accomplishments) was actually inspired by a (fill in what kind of teacher, often high school but not always) teacher who first saw my potential and told me I could do (fill in the great work/art/writing/contribution) what I, myself, could never envision. So I'm here today because of a great teacher."

What is it about what a great teacher sees in us? How do they push/pull/lure it out of us, mirror it back to us, deepen it, and then somehow stuff it back into us in such a way that we feel complete ownership over the very skill/passion/talent/dream we could hardly even speak before? Joe Cytrynbaum, my beloved brother, was *that* teacher. Mr. C. And then some.

After his shocking and senseless

death on July 11, after the weeks of stunned numbness, the agonizing pain, I was left with the deep, aching regret for the 40 years of questions and conversations I was supposed to have with him, and now, never will. Of all the myriad questions flooding me, none haunts me more than: What makes you the great teacher you are? How do you do the extraordinary work you do, every single day, no matter the student, the obstacle, the limitations, the conflicts? How do you engage so fully; how do you compel students like some giant, beaming magnet?

How do I know he did this? Because they told me. Hundreds of students, former students, colleagues, department chairs, principals, all made sure their great Joe Stories were heard. They wrote them on Facebook. They left them on voicemails. They sent them around and around on long e-mail chains.

Scores of Joe's students came to the memorial service we held for him, for them, for us. Room for 700, more than 1,000 people packed into the room, snaked around the lobby, out the door, wanting in.

In that service, many of the most heartbreaking, heartsoaring moments came from the spoken-word poetry performances of his students.

Apparently no one could resist his relentless confidence in their learning.

Talking with and listening to his students, I found him right there. Beside them. Where he'd always been. Turns out, his magic came in both the big things and the seemingly smallest gestures that made all the difference. At the beautiful memorial service Umoja Student Development Corporation held for Joe, student after student walked up to the stage at Manley High School and performed their spoken-word poems they wrote to ease their loss and celebrate Joe's light in their lives. The poems were astonishing. There are no words to describe their words. So you simply must read them.

Vasawa "Thekingofvrworld" Robinson sparked the first flame in what became a wildfire of student verses about Joe, woven together by their love and pain, spread stratospherically through Facebook.

Vasawa titled it, simply:

A TEACHER. A MENTOR. A LEGEND

If i could fly away, what would you do? what would you say. if i could fly to a better place. would you understand......

sitting in a room that fit about seventy people. where our pads became skin, our pens became needles. injecting ink. it became an addiction. it became a habit. the word of the day you'll say. then we'll proceed to write about a topic. you'll grab your journal, freestyle your writings. while you took a bite of some snack that was organic. seeds, you planted. life, you didn't take for granted. when it came to danger you never panic. you was calm. like the seas. your spirit will forever live in me, like my lungs and kidney. when nobody didn't believe

in me. you did. you stayed on me. reminding. to applying knowledge. VR you can be so much better if you go to college. i would say it ain't that easy. he would say then VR explain it to me. he'll hear my excuse, then he'll say V is you crazy, your talented, you have a gift. saying to myself. what do Joe see in me? trying to avoid reality. using my imagination, to erase my past memories. covering it up with jokes and laughs. Joe saw my pain. He spent time after school getting to know me. playing a role. my father didn't audition for.

believe VR Custom Kickz will not just be a dream. but one day i'll own my own store. Joe didn't want you to settle for less, he wanted you to strive for more. somewhere close to excellence. becoming a father, Joe became a parent. i can honestly say i never saw Joe act Cocky and Arrogant. wait a minute. one time in the honda. when he showed off his cassette deck. his collections was Public Enemy. Rakim, to KRS-One on cassette tapes. driving through the hood. one time i even heard joe say what's good? your death was unexpected and i think everybody else would agree. that your son was the addition, you was subtracted. leaving an improper fraction. to be calculated by the ones that love you the most. i'm going to miss you. i'm going to miss the time when you dropped the S word. then real quick replace it with shute. then i said what you say. you said the S word again. following up with chute. that was funny, there's not enough space here on facebook to explain the feelings i got you. like you told me let my soul live through you. no more nothing less. as i gazed unto the sunset, it's like i can see your halo, and your wings are opening up. singing...

If i could fly away, what would you do? what would you say. if i could fly to a better place. would you understand...Yes i will. cause you was A Teacher. A Mentor. Joe you was A Legend. I will always Love You. Flipside 4 Life. Rest In Peace. -VR

Ethereal D. Watts, a former student Joe stood up for at his wedding, picked up the verse and wrote his own:

A TEACHER. A MENTOR. A LEGEND

Peace and Blessings to the FLIPSIDE FAMILY!!! Is what you would have said to us when we meet.
Why did you have to leave? A legacy you brought us, with rocky as the next best born.
A teacher who teached teachers to teach better, mental thoughts flowing from your cerebrum like a running river stream to help us better. You spoke with wisdom and much knowledge, and even had us focus on going to college.
The knowledge you spit from wherever to whoever broke down barriers, to rocking villages.
Man I miss it.....
Silly haikus sends the class laughing by the excitement in your voice when you spoke it, constant thinking while

writing was in progress. A signature move you would do: Looks up at the class while we write and flash a smile like giving us your blessing from a silent prayer.
I miss that time when I would come to the UMOJA office and you would be standing there with your arms stretched out with a smile on your face while you looked at me and said " E-REAL!!!"
And I would say "That's not my name, it's BLUE!!!" Then you would spit a funny rhyme.
Man how time flies.
A mentor because you had that gift, to better the lives of others. But you became less of a mentor and moved more over to a father to me.
I may never told u that, but it's true. I remember when you developed me into a poet, and I took up the name E-REAL for you. I remember the time I couldn't wait to get out of class just to show you the poems I wrote, and even some days I would run to your office.
And now the legend has just begun, We as in the flipside family and every single person life you impacted shall live on through US. I don't know why you had to go....... I don't know if this is a poem.....
I don't know how to move on......
You were one of my groomsmen, I thought you would be here for a while. We all thought it. But we never would have thought that we would lose you as soon as we did.
YOU ARE MY TEACHER. YOU ARE MY MENTOR. YOU ARE A LEGEND!

Ed'Juan Eddie Edwards: Is There A Meaning To Life?

Is There A Meaning To Life
Cause I No Longer Know
I Am Just A Lost Soul
Walking Down This Broken Road
I Was Told That I Was Meant For Greatness
But Now-A-Days Greatness Dies
Within A Flick Of The Wrist And The Blink Of An Eye
So Is There A Meaning To Life
When The Hopeful Becomes The Hopeless
When The All-Knowing Becomes Dumb
And When A Guardian-Angel Wings Have Been Clipped
Well If This Is So I Guess This Life I Can No Longer Deal With
For I Am Slowly Losing Hope For Better Days
It Feels As If All I Knew Is Wrong
And My Guardian-Angel Joe Cytrynbaum Is Gone
So Is There A Meaning To My Life
Because It Feels As If My Heart Is Being Ripped In Two
The Little Angel And Devil On My Shoulders No Longer Fight On Telling Me What To Do
For They Are Confused
And I Know That I Am Doing Some-Things That Can Have A Bad Impact On My Life
But I Feel That I Should Just Live With No Regrets
And Later-On I Can Deal With It
So Is There A Meaning To Life For Someone Like Me?

L'Tanya Soblessed Hamblett

SITTING HERE STILL THINKING ABOUT A GOD SENT ANGEL FROM ABOVE. HE WAS PUT ON THIS EARTH TO LEAD YOUNG ADULTS IN THE RIGHT WAY. HE INSPIRED MANY YOUNG ADULTS TO FOLLOW THEIR DREAM AND WE DID BECAUSE WE HAD SOMEONE TO BELIEVE IN US AND TELL US TO KEEP UP THE GOOD WORK. NOT ONLY HIM BUT THE UMOJA STAFF. THEY HAVE DID ALOT FOR MANLEY STUDENTS AND ME PERSONALLY MYSELF WANT TO THANK YOU ALL. WANT TO THANK YOU FOR ALL THE COUNTLESS THINGS YOU HAVE DONE FOR US. THANKING YOU FOR TAKING TIME OUT OF UR BUSY SCHEDULES TO DEAL WITH US AND OUR MESS AND GIVING US ADVICE. AND ALSO GETTING SUM OF US OUT OF TROUBLE. THANKING YOU ALL FOR BEING SO ENERGETIC, AND THAT STARTED OUR DAYS OF SCHOOL WHEN MANY OF US FELT LIKE GIVING UP OR NOT BEING THERE. THANKING YOU ALL FOR THE MANY TRIPS YOU HAVE PROVIDED FOR US TO FURTHR OUR EDUCATION OR FOR LEADERSHIP RETREATS. THANK YOU FOR THE MANY PROGRAMS: JUST US, AND WOMEN OF DESTINY , SCDC, FLIPSIDE, AND MANY MORE. YOU ALL DOESNT KNOW THE IMPACT YOU PUT ON MANLEY. YOU MADE MANLEY A BETTER SCHOOL. SO THANK YOU FROM THE BOTTOM OF MY HEART. JOE WAS THERE FOR ME WHEN MY GRANNY DIED. HE KEPT ME GOING BY SAYING HE KNEW SHE WAS A WONDERFUL PERSON BECAUSE IT SHINE THROUGH ME. AND HE DIDNT EVEN KNOW HER. BUT YOU ARE UP THERE WITH HER NOW. SO NOW YOU CAN SEE HOW WONDERFUL SHE IS. GOD SAID WELL DONE MY SERVANT, COME ON HOME WITH ME AND REST. NO MORE PAIN AND NO MORE SORROW. RIP JOE. U WILL BE DEEPLY MISSED!!!

****

A few hours after the Umoja memorial celebration I stood, with my sister(-in-law), Joe's wife, on their back porch, staring at a mountain of boxes cleared out of Joe's office. His files, notes, lesson plans, strategies, research. Right in there. Was he in there? Could I find him, somehow?

I thought if I dove into those boxes, read every single lesson plan, every note jotted in the margins, every edit he made to the lesson while he was teaching the actual lesson; if I memorized his learning outcomes, goals, methodologies, pedagogical framework; if I pored over every word of his dissertation, could I get to him? Could I get him back?

I could delve into his brain and somehow watch the magic, get the tour, find the key, the answer. How do you get under the skin of teaching excellence?

One of the countless tragedies of the loss of my brother, a personal loss I cannot yet begin to fathom, is that I never saw him teach. I can't believe it. How is that possible? We talked about teaching all the time. For hours. Yet, I never made the time or took the opportunity to observe him in the most natural of his many habitats. That is one of my life's greatest regrets.

And so this quest. Into his mind; into his mindfulness; into the wild of his energy and passion and planning and endless attention to the smallest detail.

After spending hours in my brother's teaching mind, I did indeed find marvelous lesson plans, engaging writing prompts, masterful self-advice and observations penciled in, chicken-scrawled in, crammed passionately into all the white spaces. I have so much great teaching to take into my own classrooms. And part of my question is answered.

Begin from hope. In one of Joe's daily schedules he jotted a reminder to himself about how to brainstorm a Code of Conduct. His handwritten addition: "*Frame In Positive=WE WILL*."

He began his work with students, always, with an opening ritual, a chant, something to honor their gathering. He ended with a closing ritual, same idea. It was always a privilege for him to be among his students and his colleagues. He never, ever lost that. Not in the bureaucratic twangles or the overwhelming, impossible To Do lists of his life and work: fight for justice, work for equality, revolutionize education. All to be done before lunch is over.

Another note to himself: "*Know WHY you're doing WHAT you're doing—intention*."

What is it about a great teacher? What makes this kind of teacher tic? What I know from Joe's writing and planning and revising and rethinking is that great teaching is insanely hard work. It takes extraordinary mindfulness, incredible openness, meticulous planning and yet, the wild-eyed ability to throw everything out and respond to the immediacy and organic nature of truly engaged learning. *This* isn't working. *That* got them talking and writing. Let's chuck *this* and go with *that*. This cognitively dissonant practice made my brother's teaching both full of high standards, rigorous, well-planned and structured content while also being profoundly alive, immediate, responsive, essential and deeply engaged and engaging. What student could resist being captured by this magical combination?

Jotted beneath notes on curriculum ideas, Joe wrote:

> "*The group process wk = in follow up convos outside of the group – Look @ tactics of hope.*"

Vasawa's line indelibly etched into my heart:

> *He spent time after school getting to know me. playing a role. my father didn't audition for*.

It was true. Joe spent so much time thinking and writing about the cultural, economic, musical, geopolitical, emotional, physical, literal, metaphorical, political, metaphysical place from whence his students came. In a poem responding to a "Fear of" prompt, Joe wrote one of the most heartbreaking pieces:

Fear of losing people, of
writers not returning
Fear of not challenging you
enough or
in the right way
Fear of not improving

Fear of implosion
Fear of one comment too many
the comment that broke your back
Fear of disrespect
Fear of you deciding to leave and
give up

In his poem entitled "Dilemmas," Joe grappled with finding his students where they're at, where they're from. What must it have been like to have a teacher who cared so deeply, who worked so hard to know you? It's striking how he struggled to know himself here, as well, to find his own place, role in these lives, and in the "bigger picture machinations" made invisible to his students by their need to simply survive.

Erin's Note: This poem is about 21st Place—the community in which Joe not only worked but lived. Joe naturally connects to the young people in schools and out—always aware and connected to the youth culture. In our neighborhood, from the littlest preschooler, affectionately named "Little Man" who truly adored Joe, always looking for him through our gate, always asking—"Where's Joe?" to an older boy just on the brink of ganghood—hopeful and vulnerable. This poem speaks about the older boy, our neighbor. Joe befriended him when he was ten years old or so.

Dilemmas

Guys rock the block
Have it on lock
11 years old hits the joint
I'm shocked

They corrupt him
Disrupt him from silly tac on seat transgressions
Brain cells killed
Growth stunted
As the shorty gets blunted
Laughing at clouds of collusionary, illusionary
Belonging

Up and down the alley
Watch your back
Crowns, forks and hearts
Flipped, dropped and cracked

Brick wall vernacular
Scrawled and painted, etched and scratched
Each day i decipher
Spray painted narratives in black and silver
Krylon missives give me misgivings

Hoodies cloak identities
Who are your enemies?
Men in Kevlar with shields and cuffs?
An eye for an eye for an eye for an eye for an eye etc.
Always worry bout bullets getting' ya
Can't see bigger picture machinations
Frustrate you with rap sheets
Metaphors ink your skin
Like Gwendolyn wrote, "We
Sing sin."

And the dilemmas
Begin

Mom works long late hours leaving you to figure it out
Works two jobs, three jobs
Sobs
For losses
Condescending bosses
She crosses her ankles, sighs as she rides the blue line
west
Doesn't know you joined them
At ten jumped in
Now your kin
Can't seem to win
Dilemmas continuing

Still go to church
Eyes fixed to the crucifix as you pray that Christ can fix
Oxymoronic models of misunderstood manhood
Tattooed tears you won't cry for thirteen year old killed
in a drive by as
Officer Ryan shakes his head, "Live by the sword, die by
the sword"
His cliché' untoward as
Blue lights flash a big brother blink
Politicos press flesh and don't address the
Real dilemmas

When Tupac talked of thug life he meant to inspire you
When the bullets hit did he die for you?

My young friend
I don't know how to help you

This poem, my offering
A set of cryptic images collaged to absolve you
And me
In hopes that we can be free of these
Dilemmas

I interpret his poem called "Portrait," as Joe's exploration of some of the role models he competed with for his students' respect. It feels unfinished, so I think the rest of it must be deeper in one of those boxes. But here it is. As always, I am struck by both his empathy and lack of judgment.

Erin's Note: This poem is about "Romeo", the gang leader, on 21st Place where we lived. He was a dynamic presence on our block, and certainly a magnetic personality influencing the young men and much else in our neighborhood. You could hear him coming from afar, Romeo and Joe had long, long talks all of the time. A conversation between friends. Romeo confided in Joe his stories and personal battles...

Portrait

Arms painted with cryptic phrases/
RIP'S & the organizational
/iconography, gang affiliation
And the name of your love
etched forever in blue ink on your neck
Blue Chicago Cubs hat with the
Red "C" sits/ tilted to one side/
Pit bull physique and you look 19
but I know you are 30
Your clothes hang loose/ always
Baggy/ 4x shirts and 40 inch
waist/ head shaved clean/ BIC close
Your smile cloaks the rage unleashed
by your fists/ tattooed knuckles/ tattoos
on the palms of your hands/ a
self-inflicted stigmata

A walking contradiction/ guns
you hate but know you need

He also struggled mightily with where he himself was from. E-town, Evanston, Illinois – nationally renowned for its voluntary integration efforts. Joe and I, our friends, their families, were all part of a great experiment from which we benefited enormously. Joe struggled to make sense of the disconnect – and the connections – between being an upper-middle class college professor's kid, and the lives of the working class and the marginalized African-American students we came up with.

You assume when you see me with
My white skin and fancy stroller
that I am here to displace
you, to take over the neighborhood
Push you out
I am not, and yet I am
I am part of the process
Guilty even if it isn't my intention
it doesn't need to be intentional
Because it's structural and systemic
Gentrification happens so quick
appears natural because it's so slick

From his poems I learned more about his sense of himself as outsider/insider, of his grappling with who he is, what he does, and how what he does makes him who he is.

Mr. C

I am Joe aka Mr. C. aka Joe, Josh
I spend most of my time writing
and finding ways to write
I secretly wish I had my own
school
You can usually find me at Manley or
Collins Academy or Douglas Park
or up in Evanston
I would like to thank YOU for reading
this
I will someday be known for being
a kind person

Equally stunning to me were the stories they told to introduce their poems, the moments and memories of their teacher that they carried with them up the stairs, onto the stage. These are the moments of grace, the white space between the lesson plans, the pedagogical outcomes, where the magic happened.

A young woman got up to the stage and offered a simple, elegant, life-altering teachable moment. She was too scared to perform her first poem. Couldn't do it. Shaking with fear and self doubt. She looked out, and saw her teacher, Mr. C, that big bear of a man with his gigantic, goofy smile and dancing chocolate-brown eyes so full of love, unquenchable optimism, and irresistibly deep, deep confidence in us all. What was his teaching magic? The open sesame that tripped the wire in her brain that unsealed the Pandora's Box of self-esteem and promise and hope and sheer guts?

"*He gave me the thumbs up sign*."

One young man, lanky, and taut, introduced himself by saying he never thought poetry was for him, not his thing. And then my brother cajoled him into giving it a try. So he did, clearly undone by his teacher's intense powers of compulsion. And it wasn't terrible. In fact, he thought his poem was great. So he showed it to his teacher.

Now I'm picturing my brother wrapping this kid in one of his famous bear hugs, high fives, loud, LOUD praise and affirmations all around. A heartwarming story. I'm ready to weep again. This is the secret of his greatness. Unconditional love. Total acceptance and support. . Lure them in, and then kill 'em with praise and positive reinforcement, right?

But the young man looks down at the memory, staring back at him from the floor, and says: Mr. C read it over, and pronounced it "a good place to start."

What? Are you kidding me? Crushing his spirit? Destroy him? What pedagogical playbook is this coming from?

Why would he do that?

My brother told him now the hard work of revision, of editing, of precision begins. Go back and revise it. Let me see your second draft, he told the young man, whom I assumed would then say he dropped out, reliving all the other profound rejections he'd faced, and that now he regretted the chance he never got.

But no, there was a second draft. And a third. And dozens more poems and drafts and hard work and praise earned and kept. The young man rose to the challenge, kept at it, keeps at it. Praise and confidence nobody could take away because it had been given to the student by the student – with a little help from one of the world's great teachers.

Joe, Mr. C, thought and wrote about his new baby son, and his students, in equal measure. As a father, as a teacher, he taught and wrote his way toward a kind of depth of understanding and empathy almost unfathomable.

Will his students ever know how they were known? He did not live in "their" neighborhood as politics. He lived in the neighborhood of his students as their neighbor.

I write to shed light on the
hidden/ the held back and
the pushed down/
My poems tell stories and seek to
break down/ Assumptions/
like scientific analysis, it's
calculus/ so take a breath
and listen as I christen
this poem.../
Fatherhood/
Cause poems can parent and
raise children, nourish like water
and sun
My son
Meet your first
poem......
You heard the words, and
rhymes
Metaphors and ____ verses
Energy, a stage and a mic/
In your mother's arms
the world opened again as it does
daily
Your brown green eyes
transfixed by energy emanating
from gesticulations and shifting
vocalizations modulations
Poetry
You can't even understand
the words but you understand
the story/ lyrical metaphors
but these rhymes aren't nurs-
ery
Trust me
You will soon fully compre-
hend
the poly syllabic pacifier that has
hold of your brain

Maybe the greatest lesson I take from the privileged perch of my beloved brother's mindful mind, is that right alongside hypervigilant diligence, respect for the organic interruptions of lesson plans S-curving away from you and back to your students, and exactingly high expectations, the super not-so-secret ingredient to his master teaching was, it turns out, an old family trait: An unquenchable, unstoppable passion to teach, to push yourself relentlessly to do it better, to reach them more deeply, to get right up into the grill of your students' learning. My brother and I come from a family of teachers. It is our family trade, handed down from our parents. What we learned, what we observed, what we were fed, was the essential truth of engagement. For Joe, fully engaged teaching meant not only getting into his students' heads, but into their shoes and chairs, too. He wrote right there, next to them, right with them. He walked beside them. He tried on their shoes and walked marathons in them. They watched him write, heard him perform, learned as he narrated his own anxious imperfections. And all of it kept him on fire. Kept them all on fire.

Nearly every writing prompt he gave them, he wrote, too. Tucked inside the mountain of Joe's boxes, embedded quite literally in his lesson plans and dog-eared, pen-smeared, marginalia-filled notes and schedules, are a treasure trove of hundreds of poems he wrote, alongside his students, beside them. Message: *I am of you. Our journey is the same.*

One of my great regrets is that I never saw my brother teach. I never taught with him. We never wrote about teaching together, never collaborated

on all of the ideas we explored endlessly on the phone. Somehow, finding his lesson plans, his notes, I thought I'd find him. And I did. And it is a blessed curse. Discovering his poems has been a searingly painful, wonderful gift. They are pieces of him, of his heart, we have to hold onto. But reading them, reading them, for me, is G-dawful and cruel. If I could pray, I would pray for the time when I might read them with joy and memory, with his hope, inspiration and boundless optimism, his revolutionary spirit, his vast empathy. Today they simply break my heart and make me miss him, impossibly, more.

But, they make me want to teach.

Can't write at night

Can't write can't write at night can't write right at night just can't write at night...right?
So tired real tired yet wired not inspired though I desire a fire of inspiration but I just can't seem to get my mind right to write at night. Ahight!?
Mismanaged misinformed misguided misused misunderstood not good mistaken wrists shaken cause I'm tired and it's late and I just can't fight through to write right this late at night.
So I think and think as Bob Dylan turns to Neil Young turns to Elvis Costello turns to Digable Planets turns to, "Stop, hey what's that sound? Everybody look what's going down"
And I keep it mellow through the fog and mist of my weak and tired wired shoulders and neck through this perpetual mic check
But the images and words and ideas sit tight in my dream differential, you know, that Freudian reptilian chillin dream maker. The subconscious. But I can't launch this piece of creative HUH!!!!! Back breaker of a mist twister of a written that I am unable to write tonight this night not so different than all other nights.
And I feel a little warm, a faint sweat layer on my brow—cliché' but so true sweat on my brow, dang, all I come up with is these clichés brow sweat and such.
But the warmth is actually to be exact just above my brow making my forehead gleam.
Maybe I have a fever. I definitely don't feel quite right and I really know deep down that I shouldn't write at night anyway.
And then I feel it in my chest and stomach and I need to shave. I will shave in the morning, no doubt. And I will feel tired. Because my inability to write messed up my night and ruined my sleep.
So...
where do poems come from, anyway?

10/1/07

I am a bear, hungry tired mellow
I roam Douglas Park, loops counter Clockwise
LISTENING to the underground sounds of
Sense one, a Chicago original
Or guitar roars of Sonic Youth
when I feel poetic, WILCO abstractions
make me think
Every morning I arrive at school, energized by adolescent energy and hope
See beauty and greatness clad
in white tees, black pants
or purple and khaki,
smiling hope
5 or 10 years, I will still write
and teach and learn
A little better, A little wiser
A graying bear
Always half asleep
or
half awake

Joe Cytrynbaum: Labor Leader

By Michael Janson

On a crisp fall morning in 2003, Joe Cytrynbaum donned a peculiar costume. He stood dressed as an oversized ballot box in front of College Hall, the administrative headquarters of the University of Pennsylvania. The costume consisted of large sheets of gray cardboard taped together with black lettering on the sides that read "BALLOT BOX" and fit over Joe's body so that his head came out the top of the box. The union that Joe chaired, Graduate Employees Together-University of Pennsylvania (GET-UP), was staging a protest in front of the administration building that day. The protest concerned the university administration's attempt to invalidate the results of a recent vote for a union. If the administration were successful in its attempt, the votes would never be officially counted. As such, Joe's ballot box costume was draped in paper chains, symbolizing that the votes were held in bondage by the administration's tactics.

As a high-ranking administrator approached the main entrance to College Hall, Joe turned towards him, and asked, "Why won't you count the votes?" The administrator was startled, did not respond, and started to back away. Joe awkwardly chased after him, hopping as fast as his costume would allow and asking the same simple question—"Why won't you count the votes?" The administrator was flummoxed and at a loss for words. He seemed visibly scared by this gargantuan ballot box chasing him down the brick walkway, demanding answers to its questions. As Joe continued after him, the administrator's secretary stepped in Joe's way, and pleaded, "Why won't you just leave him alone?" The crowd of protestors chuckled as the administrator scurried away, seeking a side entrance to the building.

This personal reflection, as a tribute to Joe, is a primer on the struggle in which he was involved, covering the general history of the movement and the local history at the University of Pennsylvania (Penn). Part I sketches the history of graduate employee unionization in the United States. Part II discusses the union movement at Penn and recalls Joe's involvement. Part III considers what the movement accomplished and looks toward the future. Joe was a dynamic and impassioned leader of the union. This reflection cannot do justice to his memory, but it is a small tribute to his work.

I

Teaching assistant unionization is not a new idea in the United States and it has been in practice for almost four decades at top research institutions. The first union was formed at the University of Wisconsin in 1969. During the 1970s and 1980s, unions developed at dozens of campuses across the country. Notably, Rutgers unionized in 1970 and the University of Michigan unionized in 1975.

The issues that drove unionization of teaching assistants were the same as those that drive most union campaigns: respect, compensation, benefits, grievance procedures and a voice at work. At most Ph.D. degree granting institutions, students work as teaching assistants and research assistants as a means of sustaining themselves during their studies, which can take almost a decade. The usual compensation package includes tuition and a small salary. Typically, teaching assistants lead recitations (small discussion sections) of bigger lecture courses and, on occasion, teach their own classes.

Before the 1990s, all of the active graduate employee unions were at public universities. The campaign to organize teaching assistants at private universities did not begin in earnest until the 1990s, with Graduate Employees and Students Organization (GESO) leading the charge at Yale. GESO sought voluntary recognition by Yale, and as such did not petition the National Labor Relations Board for a government supervised union election. The first union to do this successfully was Graduate Student Organizing Committee (GSOC) at NYU in 1999. The immediate context for the movement at Penn was GSOC's path breaking campaign at NYU. The graduate employees at NYU had waged a multiyear campaign for union recognition and won their first contract in 2000.

II

The campaign to organize teaching assistants at the University of Pennsylvania began in the fall of 2000. Teaching assistants held small potluck dinners on a bi-weekly basis in West Philadelphia to discuss what issues they faced and if a union would be in their best interest. A group of TA's decided to move forward towards a union in the spring of 2001 and they formed an organizing committee. They dubbed themselves GET-UP - Graduate Employees Together at the University of Pennsylvania. Knowing how the Penn administration had fought unions in the past and the resistance that other TA's had faced at other private universities, the group reached out to three national unions for help: the American Federation of State, County and Municipal Employees (AFSCME), the American Federation of Teachers (AFT), and the United Auto Workers (UAW).

AFSCME was considered because they represented some of the other white-collar employees at Penn and were led by Thomas Cronin, a well-known progressive leader in the city. AFT was considered because they had helped teaching assistants organize at Temple University in North Philadelphia, they were long-time national leaders in graduate employee organizing, and because organizers from TUGSA (Temple University Graduate Students Association) had advised the coordinating committee in the Fall of 2000. UAW was considered because it

had led the successful campaign at NYU and organized the graduate employees at the University of California system.

After interviewing representatives from the three unions, the coordinating committee chose by a democratic vote to work with the AFT and immediately reached out to the Penn administration to build a constructive dialogue on how to determine whether a majority of the graduate employees desired a union. The committee asked the administration to be neutral during this process and allow the graduate employees to decide on their own if they wanted to unionize. The administration rebuffed this request and declared that it would actively oppose unionization.

Despite hostility from the administration, the coordinating committee found that a majority of graduate employees desired union representation. During the fall of 2001, GET-UP collected union authorization cards from approximately two-thirds of the teaching and research assistants. Because the university had refused to accept a neutral process for determining whether employees wanted a union, GET-UP followed the lead of the graduate employees at NYU and petitioned the NLRB to hold a union election. The administration contested the petition, arguing before a regional officer for the NLRB that graduate employees should not be considered "employees" under the National Labor Relations Act and as such were not entitled to a union election. The administration delayed the process, dragging out hearings before the local NLRB for months. Finally in December 2002, the regional NLRB officer made her decision, ruling that the graduate employees were in fact "employees" under the Act. As such, they were entitled to a vote on whether they wanted to elect a union to represent them.

During a cold and snowy January and February in 2003, dozens of volunteer graduate employee organizers gathered signatures on a petition affirming support for the union. In the days leading up to the election, the union was able to show that an absolute majority of the graduate employees would vote in favor of having a union. Independent and internal polling by the union indicated that the union won the vote decisively. The *Daily Pennsylvanian*, the undergraduate paper that had editorialized against the union, found that 60.4 percent of those voting in the election favored the union (Willig, 2003).

Despite these clear results, the administration refused to respect the vote and continued to litigate the matter before the NLRB. The administration argued that the regional officer's decision to authorize a vote was in error and that the election results should not be enforced. While the union continued to hold protests, petition drives, and gather community support, the administration worked to overturn existing precedent, and in doing so, destroy the legal protection for the graduate employees' right to organize.

It was in this context that Joe donned a ballot box in front of College Hall to protest the administration's refusal to count the votes cast in the union election. In June 2003, the Penn trustees gathered for their quarterly meeting. Joe and a group of GET-UP members protested outside of the meeting. As the *Daily Pennsylvanian* reported:

> Dressed as a ballot box—chained shut, to represent Penn's appeal to the national office of the National Labor Relations Board, which keeps February's union election votes from being counted—GET-UP co-chair Joe Cytrynbaum said he and his colleagues hoped to "have conversations with as many of the trustees as possible, let them know what's going on." . . . "They have the best interest of the University at heart, and so do we—we're really on the same page here," the Graduate School of Education student said. (Dube, 2003)

Later that same year, Joe and more than eighty GET-UP members rallied at the official house of the university president, Judith Rodin. Joined by members of other campus unions and Pat Eiding, president of the Philadelphia Central Labor Council, the group gathered at 8:00 AM for a "wake-up rally" to protest the administration's appeal of the union vote. Joe was there, speaking his mind: "We're not going away until the votes are counted," GET-UP Co-Chairman Joseph Cytrynbaum said. "This is how democracy works, even though we wish we shouldn't have to waste time on this—we'd rather be working on our dissertation or teaching" (Ghiselli, 2003).

Shortly thereafter, the union mobilized to protest a book signing by Rodin. Despite Rodin's refusal to meet with the union to discuss its concerns and her administration's rejection of the results of the union vote, she planned to release an edited volume entitled, "Public Discourse in America: Conversations and Community in the Twenty-First Century." Joe and about eighty GET-UP members and allies took exception, staging a raucous protest of the event and decrying what they claimed was "hypocritical" behavior on the part of Rodin (Ghiselli, 2003). Joe wore his ballot box costume and protested loudly, telling one reporter: "The book talks about civil rights . . . . [W]e want to point out that this is what we are about, too." Ibid.

Without any other way to persuade or pressure the administration to change course, the union began mobilizing for a symbolic two-day work stoppage on the one-year anniversary of the vote. After gathering support from dozens of faculty, community members and the Philadelphia City Council, the union staged a two-day work stoppage in February 2004. During this time, Joe was an energetic and impassioned leader, encouraging his fellow graduate employees to assert themselves and get their votes officially counted. He expected the support of his professional colleagues as well. The Graduate School of Education held an ethnography conference at the same time as the strike. Joe emailed the conference participants and encouraged them to join the picket lines. As the two-day demonstration strike concluded, Joe looked towards the future:

> "After this, it's time for the University to do the right thing," said Joe Cytrynbaum, a past GET-UP co-chairman and sixth-year Ph.D. candidate in the Graduate School of Education. "We hope it wouldn't come to it, but there is always the

> possibility for future striking to take place. But this was definitely the first and last time for a non-academic strike."[1] (Collins, 2004)

Despite these efforts, the Penn administration pursued its appeal of the vote and refused to recognize the union. In July 2004, the NLRB ruled that graduate employees at Brown University did not have a protected right to organize, overturning its own precedent and vacating the legal protections for the campaign at Penn (Brown University, 2004). Applying the *Brown* decision, the regional NLRB officer dismissed GET-UP's case. Through the Penn administration's efforts, the votes cast by graduate employees at Penn in February 2003 were never officially counted. Although the Penn administration could have still voluntarily recognized the union even after the *Brown* decision, it chose not to.

III

Despite the opposition of administrators at private universities, graduate employee unionization continues to grow at public universities. The number of part-time faculty continues to increase and the issues that spurred unionization have not abated. The single most important difference that the movement has made at private universities is that the working conditions for graduate employees have improved dramatically.

When Joe started at Penn, yearly salaries for graduate employees were around $12,000 and they had to pay approximately $1,200 for their own health insurance. Many admitted students taught for all of the years that they were in the doctoral program and there was no funding over the summer. Now, the entering students in arts and sciences at Penn receive close to $20,000 per year, health insurance is included, and they are only required to teach two of their first five years in the doctoral program. While not all issues have been addressed, many aspects of graduate employment have seen considerable improvement as a result of the union movement.

The political landscape has changed as well. Some administrators have begun singing a new tune, recognizing the issues that graduate employees have raised for years (Conn, 2010). Perhaps more importantly, the NLRB is now poised to overturn the decision in the *Brown* case that took away the protected right of graduate employees to organize (Jaschik, 2010).

Moreover, the movement has shown signs of rebirth at private universities. In the spring of 2010, an independent arbitrator certified that a majority of TA's at NYU supported unionization and that they wanted GSOC to represent them (Greenhouse, 2010). The NYU administration, not surprisingly, rebuffed GSOC. As a result, GSOC petitioned the NLRB for a union election (Gould-Wartofsky, 2010). The regional officer for the NLRB dismissed the petition, citing the *Brown* precedent (Office of General Counsel, 2010). Now the petition will go to the full NLRB in Washington, which will most likely overturn *Brown* and order a union election (Workplace Prof Blog, 2010). If the graduate employees succeed again at NYU, a new wave of unionization campaigns may begin.

Conclusion

Joe was a leader in this movement and he deserves a good deal of credit for what it accomplished. For many graduate employees, the movement built community, created friendships, and provided an opportunity for political engagement on a local level. More concretely, it won tangible benefits for the tens of thousands of graduate employees that followed in Joe's footsteps. Although the movement was stymied for a time, it is showing signs of rebirth.

Joe did much in his short life and he is dearly missed. He was an unfailing friend, a trusted colleague, and a labor leader—and a great one at that.

Michael Janson was Joe's colleague and friend at the University of Pennsylvania. Michael completed his Ph.D. in Political Science in 2007 and his J.D. in 2009. He is currently working in Washington, D.C.

ENDNOTE

1 By a "nonacademic strike," Joe would have meant a strike just of employees, rather than one of students or affecting student evaluations.

REFERENCES

Brown University, 342 NLRB 483, 13 July 2004.

Collins, Leah, "Strike ends with little disruption," *Daily Pennsylvanian*, 1 Mar 2004.

Conn, P., "We Need to Acknowledge the Realities of Employment in the Humanities," *Chronicle of Higher Education*, 4 Apr. 2010.

Dube, Caroline, et al, "Trustees gather at annual meeting," *Daily Pennsylvanian,* 26 June 2003.

Ghiselli, M., "Graduate students protest Rodin book signing," *Daily Pennsylvanian*, 27 Oct. 2003.

Gould-Wartofsky, M., "NYU Graduate Employees File for Union Recognition, Hope to Overturn Bush Era Ruling," *Huffington Post*, 3 May 2010.

Greenhouse, S., "Graduate Students Ask N.Y.U. to Recognize Union, *New York Times*, 27 Apr. 2010.

Jaschik, S., "An Invitation to Unionize," *Inside Higher Education*, 13 Apr. 2010.

Office of General Counsel, NLRB, "NLRB region dismisses election petition for NYU graduate students: Sets stage for reconsideration by the Board," Press Release, 8 June 2010.

Willig, Spencer, "Poll: Most Voted Yes on Union," *Daily Pennsylvanian*, 3 Mar. 2003.

Workplace Prof Blog, "Regional Director Dismisses UAW Petition to Organize NYU Graduate Assistants," 9 June 2010.

Umoja Joe

By Lila Leff, Umoja Student Development Corporation

It was spring of 2004 when Joe interviewed to become the Program Director at Umoja Student Development Corporation in Chicago. Umoja is a weird hybrid of a youth development/educational reform organization. We operate from the premise that all sustainable change (for individuals and systems) has to happen in the context of meaningful relationships; that purposeful relationships are the first step in making anything better - even the hard core, long-term impacts of poverty. Our operational formula is part art and part science. It involves moving into the most under-resourced and under-performing high schools in Chicago and walking beside students in their journey. We partner with the adults in their lives to improve their schools. We craft an experience to help students transition from the march of futility they have long ago internalized as their educational future onto a path that inspires hope and vision for their life in and after high school, imbuing it with creativity, compassion and citizenship. That's the goal in a nutshell. It's messy, complicated, beautiful and rewarding stuff.

When Joe emailed from Philly to see if he could interview at Umoja, we were at an organizational crossroads. A number of good people had come to work at Umoja over the several years we had been in existence, and they were running good programs that were making a difference in students' lives. Beyond reporting the positive feedback we got from students and our own somewhat random process of reflection, we couldn't exactly prove that what we were doing was effective, but we were pretty sure that we were on to something. The graduation and college enrollment rates for students at the high school we were embedded in had shown significant improvements since we had come on the scene. Arne Duncan, then the head of Chicago Public Schools, had been urging us to begin sharing our program models with other schools, and we were starting to dip our toe in that water. As we began planning for organizational growth, we knew that we would need a person who could run programs well. But more than that, we needed someone who could model for other staff, someone who could set the bar, embody Umoja's principles and strategies of facilitation and relationship-building with students and adults - and could ultimately teach other staff how to do it, too.

"Magnanimous," Joe said when Umoja's Chief Operating Officer Ted asked him how his co-workers from jobs of the past would describe him. We were sitting in room 113 at Manley High School; I can picture the wooden chairs and the table with big wads of gum stuck under it like an art collage and Joe sitting opposite us. Ted and I did the thing where you exchange glances without actually looking at each other and raise your eyebrows without actually raising your eyebrows. Joe was wearing a suit jacket over khakis, and the suit jacket looked like it had hardly been worn before, maybe to a Bar Mitzvah or a wedding once. He was smart and earnest and a little sweaty, in a way that made him exceedingly likeable.

After the first interview with Joe, Ted and I contemplated a variety of possibilities. Joe might turn out to be one of those guys with a Ph.D. from an Ivy League school who wants to cut his chops by actually working among the common people, showing them, based on academic research, how it all should and could be done before he returns to the ivory tower to conduct more research. Or, we imagined, when we told him that the starting salary for the position was $35,000, he might start to laugh hysterically and walk out the door. We mused that Joe's wife, after seeing his wobbly desk in a converted classroom that he shared with 11 other Umoja-ites, might club him over the head and remind him he had lots of prestigious degrees and job offers from organizations with real furniture and office space. Finally, when we could let ourselves dream a little, we believed that Joe could be the person we had been searching for, someone who could help us take our organization to the next level of vision and leadership. We tried not to get too hopeful right away in our two-hour interview in room 113 – it was only a second date after all – but it was impossible not to see that he was one of us, and Ted and I both kept smiling after he left.

Looking back, except for Joe's magnanimous comment and his suit jacket (which is the same one he wore to my wedding), much of our first encounter is blurry to me now. Lately, I have found myself recreating moments of that interview so I can keep them as part of our shared past in a sacred and protected place. But it's a lie. I don't remember the details, only the essence. First of all, you should know he was right about the magnanimous thing. He was as magnanimous as anyone I have ever known. It seeped out of him, sometimes poured, from a place that was fed by instinct as well as by the deep abiding principles and the conscious commitment that followed them. Second, you should know that he was someone who gave precious and unique gifts to the organization that I founded and am devoted to, and for that alone he has VIP seating in my heart.

But it was more than that. He was my family in that very odd and instantaneous way that has to do with a shared Jewish, middle class upbringing and the exact same sibling dynamics. "You are SO my sister!" he would say every fifth conversation, if I hadn't already jumped in to say, "You sound exactly like my brother right now!" We shared a mutually recognized, completely and obnoxiously self-righteous

certainty that we should not have to accept the world on its own terms. We believed that if we were only loud and persistent enough, the world would have to change. Together, we were incapable of having a conversation that didn't include three tangents and two side bars and at least one of us shrieking and laughing – Joe with that great, never, ever to be forgotten belly laugh that was like a yowl and a laugh at the same time. That was the easy, lovely part of our relationship.

There were other parts that were a lot more challenging. There were some areas, not many, but they were wide enough to drive a truck through, where Joe and I fundamentally disagreed, not so much on core youth development principles but more on how to execute them. Joe was big on process and compassion and giving people lots of chances. I am not that way, partially because, as the head of an organization, I can't really be that way. The truth is, of course, that I run this organization because I am drawn, by nature, to overextended situations in which the particulars are trumped by grand truths. I was always pushing on big picture organizational truths, and Joe was eternally dragging me back to the story of one kid or one staff person. I wanted him to be tougher, harsher, and quicker to enact consequences. He wanted me to demonstrate through action that I truly understood that nothing we could do as an organization mattered more than creating moments of grace with students and staff. I wanted him to move away from his direct service work with students and into an almost full-time management role. He wanted Umoja to embrace his vision for creative expression as a critical tool of youth voice, youth activism, and academic growth, and to leave him alone to do really great program work.

We compromised for four and a half years, until we couldn't compromise anymore. During that time, in addition to mutual admiration and shared vision, there were also honest and tough conversations. Joe frequently came into my office with prepared remarks about why we needed to do something differently than how I thought we needed to do it, and after every one of these conversations, Ted and I would sit in awe and agree that Joe was a principled, integrity-filled, good faith negotiator. He believed what he believed and didn't want to give in until you were a believer too. They were some of the best difficult conversations I have had in my 12 years at Umoja. Here are two examples:

One spring, in a hurried vacuum, Ted and I had scoped out programs for the following year, including staffing for the programs. Ideally, the planning process should have been more inclusive, but we were stretched for time and capacity and had developed a plan which we thought was in the best interest of students and staff. When we rolled out that particular year's plan, Joe came back with a changed proposal: Turn one of the leadership programs into a writing program, incorporate more spoken word programming, give him a role that included more direct service and keep one of the interns who he was sure was going to be a star as a full-time employee. His counter-point was detailed, thorough, and he never hid his own self-interest during the negotiation process.

By leading with his bias toward getting as much direct service time as possible within his job, I didn't have to search for a hidden agenda. He introduced it and asked that it be acknowledged as important and then rolled out why his plan made sense for Umoja. It did in fact make sense, and Ted and I re-formulated our plans and came back with a Yes to just about all of his requests. Joe, without a doubt, was one of the people who helped me begin to really internalize the value of an inclusive process. He didn't just complain that things should be done differently; he showed up with a plan for how to do things differently. Truthfully, in my early years as an organizational leader, I thought of inclusivity as this thing you did so that everyone would understand why they needed to do things your way. The fact that Joe was willing to throw down with me in a respectful, intelligent, and challenging way pushed me to grow to the next level of maturity in my own leadership.

When it came time for Joe to leave Umoja to become a professor, he was excited about his new opportunity, tortured to think of leaving his Umoja family, mature and honest in his expression, and utterly thorough in creating a good transition. By that time in his tenure at Umoja, I had asked, cajoled and really pressured him to become a different kind of organizational leader than he wanted to be. He didn't want to become a not for profit organizational "big picture" guy, but I kept telling him he could be really good and effective in that role (which was true but wasn't the point at all). Our ongoing and reoccurring conversation went something like this:

> Me: Joe, it is so important that someone does the infrastructure stuff ...You know that deserves smart people too, right?
>
> Joe: It does but it's just not me. That's just not what I want to do. It's not my passion.
>
> Me: See, so you agree that we need smart people in those roles, right? We're getting somewhere.

The invisible movie audience would groan in unison at that point in our ongoing dialogue...Why can't she listen?

Joe knew who he was, and he didn't let me convince him otherwise. It wasn't until the spring before he died that I began to truly internalize the lesson of Joe's leaving: A good organizational leader presents opportunities for growth, holds up a mirror to a promising staff person to tell them where the organization has room for them to evolve to the next level, and then lets them decide if they want that and doesn't punish them if they don't. Before I started Umoja, after doing great work at a small youth agency for 7 years, my former boss ignored me for a month when I said I was leaving, even though I had given 3 months notice. That's just not fair. When I started Umoja, I swore I wouldn't ever be that guy.

But in fact, almost a year after Joe left Umoja, honest self reflection caught up with me, and I realized that in some ways I had been that guy with Joe. We were both in tough spots, and I see that clearly now. The organiza-

tion was too small for Joe to be a high level leader without giving up the direct service work that he loved and was so gifted at, the very thing that motivated him to do the work in the first place. But he did want to keep growing in the organization, and there really wasn't another way to make that happen. He was going to have to go eventually, but rather than coaching him and supporting him to identify how and when that would happen down the road, I continued to pressure him to want what I wanted him to want up until almost the very end of his time at Umoja. I was startled out of my resistance by the true grace with which he transitioned out of the organization and his clear, continued commitment to Umoja. In the end, Joe was smart enough to know that if Umoja was to continue growing, we needed the kind of leader that I had in mind, but he was also smart and wise enough to know that it wasn't him.

In his good-bye speech to staff, Joe told his colleagues that even though he wouldn't be working at Umoja anymore, he would still be an active part of our family. It was the kind of thing that people always say when they're leaving a job, and though they are usually well-intentioned when they say it, it very rarely comes true. However, in Joe's case, he wasn't kidding. He continued to keep in touch with all the young people who had been closest to him. He co-facilitated a weekly writing program at one of our partner schools, was actively mentoring several of his former staff members, and somehow convinced his new university to provide free space for Umoja's 6-week Upward Bound Summer Academy on their campus. Joe's attitude and his actions allowed him to transition out of employment at Umoja without making any students or adults feel like they were left behind. Joe couldn't help but model the world as he wanted it to be, even while balancing his own feelings of loss at leaving Umoja, his excitement about the challenge of being a professor, and the sleep deprivation and exaltation of becoming a new father. Joe Cytrynbaum was dedicated and committed. He was passionate and loud and gestured like he was performing in a Greek amphitheater. He was serious and hysterically funny. He was honest and real. And without a doubt, Joe was magnanimous. He was and he will always be Umoja Joe. Enough said.

So often, in the fast-moving, underfunded world of youth development, staff leave, and you think the organization will grind to a halt. But instead, a new energy emerges, people step up and step in, and the world goes on, changed but not necessarily diminished. This was true when Joe left; yet since that time the gifts he gave continue to circle back as uniquely his. There is still, there will always be a Joe-sized hole at Umoja. You could argue Joe's greatest impact, the legacy of Joe, is the students he touched. Every student who knew Joe believed they were his favorite, that he was dying to hear what they had to say next, and it was true every time. Their love for him and their grief over losing him is still volleyed back and forth through poems and Facebook postings on a regular basis. I joined Facebook just so I could read what they had to say and remember how right Ted and I had been in suspecting that Joe would be a guy who loved students right and who could teach other people how to do the same.

You could also easily argue that Joe's legacy as a supervisor and a mentor of new staff – most in their first grown-up jobs – is a gift from Joe that will keep on giving. Two of his staff who are still at Umoja now, Anna and Ilana, grew up as professionals under Joe. Both are smart and gifted and are destined for greatness no matter where they go, but the particular blend of greatness they bring has the mark of Joe all over it. There are no fewer than a dozen times each month where I look at them and remember them in their first year of employment, their first jobs out of college, young and white and solidly middle class in an entirely new cultural world navigating new systems and institutions and earnestly trying to soak it all in and understand it as fast as they could. Joe translated, and he brought compassion and intellectual rigor to his translation. They read articles together in their team and individual meetings; they talked about systems, and they talked about individual kids; they watched Joe in action, and watching him allowed them to find their own best versions of themselves.

Both Anna and Ilana have stepped into a new level of organizational leadership at Umoja this year, and my joy at watching their success is only tinged with sadness that Joe doesn't get to see them continue to evolve into women who will do right at Umoja and wherever else they choose to land in their lives. The legacy Joe left me personally is that I will not try to force a vision of Anna and Ilana's future, or anyone else's for that matter, into my vision of Umoja's future. I will offer up the opportunities Umoja has for their continued growth and hope like hell they take them. And I will support their transition to new things if that's what ultimately makes sense for them. I thank Joe for that.

And I thank Joe for reminding me that putting individuals first doesn't mean losing sight of great truths. There is room for both in this world and both can happen in the context of intellectual rigor. While it's still true that good youth development organizations need people who are willing to muck around in the world of funding and infrastructure, it is also true that Joe's unique style of leadership has left Umoja with programmatic direction that remains strong and with staff who know why they do what they do, why it works, and how to teach other people to do it too. Thanks to Joe, Umoja has a set of well defined leadership competencies that define success for our students but also provide a real recipe for staff as we design new programs now and in the future. That sort of organizational leadership is at the heart of Umoja's success.

I saw Joe at his son's first birthday party the week before he died, and we said we would get together over the summer. We reviewed several of the topics we had to cover with each other. "We have so much to talk about, we'll need to prepare an agenda," I said. Or maybe he said it; it was something we regularly said to each other. I had been mulling for several months what it was I wanted to communicate to him about our relationship vis-a-vis Umoja. We had easily transitioned into peers once we were no longer working together, but I wanted or needed just a little

more resolution about the previous incarnation of our relationship. There were lingering things I wanted to thank him for, apologize for, be witness to.

I wanted to let him know that I was still learning how to lead, and it was a messy business, and I was better now than I had been then. I also wanted to tell him that I had watched two of his staff leave recently, one for law school and one for international travel, after really successful tenures at Umoja; that they had both built a solid foundation for programs that will run based on their contributions for years to come. And the two who stayed, Anna and Ilana, were both poised to be the next generation of Umoja leadership, the ones who will get us to the next place, much as Joe got us to this one. I wanted to talk with him about all four of them, knowing how proud he was of them, how humbly and confidently he had coached them to the next steps in their life.

I can almost picture the conversation that didn't happen more easily than I can remember the first time I met Joe in his suit jacket. Our respective sons would have been crawling all over the place, and we would have talked about the things we both still wanted to do on behalf of young people in our lives . . . the things we felt we had to teach . . . and the things we still needed to learn. We would have interrupted each other, shrieked a little, and talked too loudly as we were apt to do. We never got the chance to have that conversation, and so I write my words here instead. It is less satisfying but no less true. It really mattered that Joe Cytrynbaum was at Umoja. For me, as a leader and as a woman deeply committed to educational justice, I am better for knowing Joe. Umoja is a far better and richer place for children and staff as a result of the gifts Joe gave. I think he knew that. I really, really hope he knew that.

In 1997, **Lila Leff** founded Umoja Student Development Corporation, which uses a school community partnership model she developed to work with Chicago's most challenged high schools. Previously, she co-founded and directed Illinois' first federally funded School-to-Work Initiative, EDGE/UP, to assist high poverty students to succeed in high school and effectively transition to post secondary training and education. She was a Leadership Greater Chicago fellow in 2001 and currently serves on the steering committee of the University of Chicago's Consortium on Chicago School Research. She graduated with high honors from the State University of New York with a B.A. in liberal studies and a focus in English, theater, and psychology. In 2008, Lila was nominated and received a full scholarship from the HBS Club of Chicago to attend Harvard Business School's Strategic Perspectives in Nonprofit Management course. Lila has recently been selected to participate in the prestigious Global Emerging Leaders Fellowship Program through the Chicago Council on Global Affairs.

Joe Knew There Was Something Wrong

By Kevin Coval, The School of the Art Institute of Chicago

the 1st time i really talked with him, he was yelling at me. it was his first year coaching at Louder Than A Bomb and his Umjoa Manley all-boys Flipside team's first year as well. they lost. badly. a group of 8th graders scored higher them. Joe was pissed. after the bout he came to me demanding an explanation, justice, retribution, a ribbon, something for his students who worked hard and never won anything. he said the system was unfair, it should be equitable, why was their so much emphasis on competition? at this point in his dissertation, Joe was no longer talking about the slam.

Joe knew there was something wrong.

over the last 6 or so years he built a powerhouse of a poetry program at Umjoa Manley on the west side in the same neighborhood my Bubbe's family immigrated to from Poland. a neighborhood most Jews had long left except Joe and some staff at Umoja. when i talk about Louder Than A Bomb to teachers, funders, CPS Administrators i talk about how this form of spoken word and hip-hop poetry has the ability to transform the culture of a school. it can take hyper-literate student poets and elevate their social status to that of a star athlete. when i say this i am talking about Joe. about the hours and hours and days and lifetime of ridiculous freestyles and mindful critique and being a father figure to kids who never had one and brother and many times over the only man and white man students at Manley and across the city ever had the chance to see a whole and holy person in care and kindness,
Joe is a tzadik
a part time rabbi to a mixed congregation
able to mix Freire and Biggie in the same pedagogical sermon.

the last time we met
we spoke about a book Joe was writing
highlighting the hip-hop praxis of various community organizations in Chicago.
a man whose light was the brightest in the room
was constantly giving shine to others.

this is what it means to be magnanimous,
a selfless servant of the people
his presence a mirror of our future selves
what he thought and hoped and knew we could be
he would push us toward.
he saw the best in his students and peers
not cuz he was not bothered by our shortcomings
he was not immune to our shadow selves
he was not blinded to the constant barrage of injustice and dehumanizing state agents
in the lives of his students
he was wide-eyed and aware.

Joe knew something was wrong.

why else does an Ivy educated Jewish PHD from Evanston spend so much time scouring the notebooks and journals of 16 year olds in North Lawndale, kicking freestyles at Polk and Sacramento to let his students know it is scary and fun to put your creation into the world and if you mess up, stay flowing...

Joe knew something was wrong.

knew for a long time, a lifetime feeling
the all weight of what he knew
he knew his north shore suburban education should extend, not depend on which tax base you were born into,
knew that when kids are engaged fully as intelligent beings
they will excite and exceed and disappoint
regardless of what music they listen to
or what neighborhood they live in

Joe knew there was something wrong.
something wrong with his student's rising body count
something wrong with the perpetual violence threatening their walk home
something wrong with the gangs and police and sometimes home itself
something wrong with how the country stalked and tracked and warred against bodies of the youthful and colorful

Joe knew there was something wrong with this world and the world at large
He knew the threat of violence was the same for young folks on the west side
as it is on the west bank
and Joe and I, both jews,
talked about the madness of police states and the privilege
to walk freely to a family dinner or corner store, across borders
and Joe lived between borders
engaged in the practice of tikkun olam
repairing this world yes,
but better put from Joe's labor, putting the fractured and seemingly disparate pieces
of the whole together
Joe was a connector
a bridge between the academy and the block
the north shore and north lawndale
a synthesis of theory and practice
the grit and presence of everyday labor
cuz Joe showed up
in your life
his body warm and graspable
his smile and spirit infectious
his existence a mountain
to climb toward
the worlds
he saw
in you.

Joe was necessary
friend and colleague Idris Goodwin
told me today

and there is something wrong with today
cuz Joe's not here

not leaving me messages like he did on July 2
asking how he can help with Brave New Voices
and how excited he was for the 10th year of Louder Than A Bomb
and the book

and there is something wrong with today
because we have lost a soldier
on the front lines of the class room, in the community
at the administrative offices of institutions
where he fought for the integrity of people
on the people's side of justice

a fighter, like his son Rocky,
for those sometimes unable to make it into the ring

there is something wrong with today
and there will be something wrong with tomorrow

but the energy and chutzpah and drive to work hard
for what must be, lives
to achieve more and better in our lives
and in the lives of all
to right this world
to maintain and build upon Joe's tireless labor, his legacy
his ferocity to love
to throw ourselves fully and furiously
into our lives and the lives of others
to have the knowledge that there is something terribly wrong
and yet commit ourselves gorgeously
and gigantically and courageously
into the project of making it better

Kevin Coval is the author of *everyday people* (EM Press, Nov.'08) and *slingshots* (a hip-hop poetica) (EM Press, Nov. '05), named Book of the Year-finalist by The American Library Association. Coval's poems have appeared in *The Spoken Word Revolution* and T*he Spoken Word Revolution: Redux* (Source Books), *Total Chaos* (Basic Civitas), *I Speak of the City: New York City Poems* (Columbia University Press), *The Bandana Republic* (Soft Skull Press), *Chicago Tribune, Chicago Reporter, Cross Currents, Crab Orchard Review, Rattle, 2nd Ave Poetry, The Drunken Boat*, and many other periodicals and journals. Coval writes for The Huffington Post and can be heard regularly on National Public Radio in Chicago. Coval has performed on four continents in seven countries including; The Parliament of the World's Religions in Capetown, South Africa, The African Hip-Hop Festival: Battle Cry, Poetry Society of London, University of the West Indies in Jamaica, St. Xavier's College in Bombay, India, and four seasons of Russell Simmons' *HBO Def Poetry Jam*, for which he also served as artistic consultant. From Jan. 2006 to May 2007, Coval visited 26 states and more than 50 cities during the promotional tour for his first book, performing at over 150 high schools, universities, book stores, theaters, community centers and Union Halls around the country. Co-founder of *Louder Than A Bomb: The Chicago Teen Poetry Festival,* the largest youth poetry festival in the world, Coval is poet-in-residence at The Jane Addams' Hull House Museum at The University of Illinois-Chicago and poet-in-residence at The University of Chicago's Newberger Hillel Center, and teaches at The School of the Art Institute in Chicago

Penn GSE Perspectives On Urban Education
www.urbanedjournal.org
Published by the University of Pennsylvania
Graduate School of Education
3700 Walnut Street
Philadelphia, PA 19104
Copyright © 2010

Layout by Sonia M. Rosen