Starting with Home:
Using Counter Storytelling as a Pedagogical Framework for Curriculum, Community Development, and Healing with and For Black Youth

Praxis Project Thesis: Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree of Bachelor of Arts — as part of the Community, Youth,
and Education Studies Major at Clark University

Linda Mindaye

Committee Signatures:

_____
Sarah Michaels

_____
Eric DeMeulenaere

_____
Raphael Rogers

_____
Kate Bielaczyc

This world has a way of making us
Disappear into nothing but
Punch lines
Or
Hashtags
Or
Gravestones
Something to be made examples of
As how not to be

For every time, we've had to defend an insecurity
To an unforgiving world
There is one more star in the sky
That earned her shine
The light we set our dreams on

For every time, we've had to swallow an identity "othered"
Because being alive matters
The moon wears a new crater

How magical we must be to have
the moon as
our ally
And the stars on
our front line
We live in constellations

Here is to us.
Writing our own stories
in our own voices
with our own hands
standing on our own two feet

Spoken Word has always been my way of being able to communicate with the world. For a long time, I wouldn't share my poetry with any one because it isn't always written formally or because I didn't think it was appropriate for a school setting. But the older I've gotten and the more I am working to unlearn the things schools inadvertently taught me about myself, my place in the world, and my value, I am learning how to show up as my whole self. I promised my students that I would write poems throughout my thesis because it's part of who I am. Vulnerability in educational spaces needs to be a two-way street so, shout out to my kids for helping me own that. The poem above grounds this work for me in something bigger than myself, bigger than this project. It speaks to the potential impact of conversations about centering black youth, conversations about unlearning toxic stereotypes, and working to heal the traumas that schools, the media, and our social realities have inflicted on us. So, as you join me on this process of praxis please know this is more than a just a paper. This paper is my heart. This project is my soul. This process has been a deeply personal one. As a black woman with a deep understanding of the tragic often irreversible impacts of institutional oppression on the lives of black youth specifically, I knew I was tackling something with deep roots in this country when I chose to work in education. So, when it came time to figure out what to do with this project, I knew that my positionality as a black woman who grew up poor and in an urban area, would give me an intimate perspective to offer an intervention from an insider's perspective. Although I brought that perspective and experience to this work, as I noted above, I had a lot to learn from the experience of creating this project and directly from the youth themselves, who I was privileged to learn with and from. This is the culmination of that deep intersection of experience and knowledge I brought joined with all the learning I did trying to embrace a different pedagogy while simultaneously being a student of the youth and the experiences I was creating.

Table of Contents

Before getting into any of the nitty gritty about this project, I wanted to first offer some insight into who I am, what I do, and how those things intersect to create the foundation for my research and my work as an educator.

WHO AM I?

My name is Linda Mindaye. I am an Ethiopian immigrant living in Cambridge, MA. I

identify as black woman, student, and educator among many things. From a really young age I was

hyper aware that I was different. Different from my classmates, my teachers, and most of the staff

in the schools I grew up in. I didn't come to notice such a stark difference between me and my

classmates on my own. It has been 16 years since I moved to the states and it still feels like I am

trying to find a place for myself in this country and still in every classroom I am a part of. School

never felt right to me. It was always a place that brought me great anxiety and shame. I felt like I

was always just missing the point. Like I wasn't supposed to be in the room. I spent years stumbling

through school trying to figure out how to be seen by my classmates and teachers. The curriculum

I was offered growing up made me feel like the only kinds of people who have been remarkable,

of value, or important could never look like me. It was too easy to infer that we, as students of

color, weren't remarkable and that there was no place in the world or in its history for us to be

seen as valuable. The classrooms I was in actively did not see me. That mindset fostered my relationship with school. I quickly learned or rather assumed that schools weren't made for young black immigrant girls or other marginalized students. Educational spaces didn't always take into account that I was in the room. These experiences made school a hard place to navigate. I remember thinking that school didn't feel like a space I could ever actually learn in. This feeling of not being worthy or of any value followed me.

WHAT'S THE PROBLEM I HAVE IDENTIFIED?

According to data from the National Center for Education Statistics in 2016 about 51% of all public elementary and secondary students in the U.S were non-white. In that same year around 80% of the teaching force in those schools were made up of white mostly female teachers (Geiger, 2018,). Nothing about the ways in which schools operate are cognizant of the Black students in the room. In 2015 the Brown Center Report on American Education reported that the suspension rate for Black Students was 17.8%, four times that of their white peers (Loveless, 2017) In March of 2012 the United States Department of Education put out a report that stated that although Black students made up only 18% of the population of the schools studied, they made up 35% of the suspended students and 39% of the students expelled from school ("New Data from U.S. Department 2012.) Black students don't feel safe in schools and given the stats above that is a reasonable position to hold. Similar to my experience, many Black students don't feel seen, valued or represented in their classrooms. As evident in some of the statistics above, they aren't represented in the teaching force either. A lot of the curriculum used in classrooms leave out the experiences of marginalized people, perpetuating this feeling of distrust and invisibility which can lead to disengagement. The only times Black students are really recognized for their identity is when they are singled out to speak on an experience or to be disciplined in some way (Perry &

Delpit,1998). Students of color have a deep distrust for school as it currently stands (DeMeulenaere, 2012). This problem shows up in really subtle ways. How could they want to show up to a place that is intentionally and successfully either erasing their identities/experiences or simply kicking them out of school? Racism and discrimination have been a part of the education system in America since its inception, so the problem facing Black students and their feelings of distrust and disengagement have strong deep roots in the structures, policies, and curriculums currently being used.

When a sunflower does not bloom
Do you give it extra love and light?
Do you remind it of its worth and help it thrive?
Do you nurture it, or do you blame it for not blooming?

When a blk girl does not blossom
Do you give her extra love and light?
Do you remind her of our worth and help her thrive?
Do your nurture her or do you blame her
for not blossoming with the world stacked against her?

Here is finding new and more loving roots
Here is to extra love
Here is to extra light
Here is to blossoming

This poem is about place and value. It is about individuality and learning how to care for people in unique ways. We don't blame a flower for not blooming. We change its soil, we give it more light, we take care of its needs. When Black students fail, we blame them and hold them and only them responsible. Why not change their environment? Why not give them better more tailored resources? Why not change their surroundings? How could a flower ask for something it does not know it is missing?

HOW DID I COME TO UNDERSTAND THE PROBLEM?

In the summer after 8th grade I participated in program called Civic Week in Chicago IL. Civic Week was a three-week summer program for low income students of color who were a part of different scholarship circles around the country. This program was full of firsts for me. My first time in Chicago, the first time I was surrounded by people who looked like me and had similar lived experiences. On the first night of the program the facilitators handed out journals and asked us to write down our different experiences in schools growing up. The room fell silent while people tried to ponder what they had just asked us to do. It quickly became evident that none of us could really describe what our experiences were like. The facilitator in the room who was a black woman noticed the same thing and decided to open the room up for discussion instead. She asked us to name times we felt like our voices were recognized in classrooms. The room fell eerily silent again. She followed up with "how about a time when you were asked to share an experience related to your identity." A few of my peers shared that they've been asked to speak on their blackness when they were discussing things like the civil rights movements or slavery. The rest of the discussion went similarly, her posing questions we had never considered as possibilities and the room falling silent. What she said to us at the end has stuck with me all these years and has helped to shape the foundation for who I am as a student, how I show up as an educator and what I want to investigate in this praxis project. I remember her saying something like this:

> There is no content you cannot learn if you use your context to understand it. The way you will understand the world is based on how many different stories you allow to inform your thinking. So, when you go back to your schools, speak on your experiences, hold people accountable to listening to you because the diverse lived experiences of the marginalized is the intersection of everything this world is. You are everything this world could be. There is nothing you cannot learn if you start with yourself.

During the rest of that summer program we practiced telling stories—about us, about school, our families, what we knew about our lineage, etc. Not only was I able to build a beautiful circle of people who really saw me, but I learned about immigration, agriculture, cultural customs of different countries, and more. I say all this to say on a personal note starting with stories, centering our experiences created a learning environment that everyone could plug into differently and thrive in. This shouldn't be an isolated experience and it doesn't have to be. It took me flying to Chicago and spending 3 weeks with other black youth to realize that my reservations and feelings of isolation in school weren't particular to me but a really common experience for other young people who looked like me and had similar backgrounds. My experience at Civic Week intentionally cultivated a space where we, as black students felt comfortable enough to share with the larger group the different experiences we had growing up. It centered our experiences as a way to teach each of us about each other and the world beyond. That experience has greatly affected the lens I see the world through. This notion that you can learn anything if you start with yourself has translated to be a deep-rooted part of my teaching philosophy and in the practice of developing curriculum and fostering cohesive classroom communities. Learning how to construct stories has taught me how to better articulate my experiences and how to better engage with the spaces I occupy. This stance has pushed me to investigate more deeply who I am, how I show up in the world, and how I can be a resource in any classroom I am a part of.

HOW DID I MAKE THE LINK BETWEEN MY LIVED EXPPERIENCES AND THIS PROJECT?

So, when the CYES praxis course tasked my cohort to develop a praxis project that addressed a social injustice we cared about, I thought back to that summer and to all the times in high school when I found myself silenced in the classrooms that I had promised to speak up in. I

realized that not only did I not know how to create a place for myself, none of my classes felt like a real Community. I started thinking about and researching about how to use oral histories and counter stories as tools to facilitate educational spaces with. i.e how do we change the soil? How do you foster an environment that enables Black students to risk the vulnerability of sharing their lived experiences in a place they don't normally feel seen in? I wanted my praxis project to serve as a processing tool for educators interested in cultivating a different type of classroom. I spent a long time reading about different frameworks for developing curriculums in schools. Ones that were vastly different than the current models that often leave out and erase marginalized experiences not only from the actual curriculum but also the Black students in the room. But I kept running into the same walls, how do we move past theory? How do we actualize learning environments in which our black youth can be their authentic selves without fear of erasure, ridicule, or discrimination? i.e blossoming. What would classrooms look like if they were inherently founded on the ideals of social justice? What does curriculum look like in such a space? These led to additional questions about what such a space might mean for students. How would black youth feel in such a created space? How would other students feel in that space? This praxis project has been my effort to explore and examine these questions by working to actualize these new educational spaces I've been imagining. If students are able to share personal, vulnerable, powerful stories about their positionalities in educational spaces, if they learn how to tell stories and begin to understand how interconnected the world is then, hopefully, they will be able to begin to see themselves differently in educational spaces.

WHAT IS MISSING FROM THESE FRAMEWORKS?

This research sits on the shoulders of scholars grappling with school and how to make it a space for different kinds of students. Freire speaks about how much students' lives are alienated from their experience in school and how students are dehumanized. DeMeulenaere shows us that

distrust is all too common, especially in urban schools and with students of color. Critical Race Theory reveals the many ways that the voice and stories of youth of color are marginalized and generalized. These scholars and theories show the power and importance of centering the stories of youth of color. But all these pieces are missing the *how*. How do we move through the alienation, distrust and marginalization to get youth of color to be willing and able to vulnerably share their stories in educational spaces? This project seeks to fill this gap, by detailing the ways that youth come to be able to share their stories and understanding the factors that both hinder and support it.

I have these theories. I understand what counter storytelling is. I know my work needs to be grounded in Critical Race Theory. Now what? I spent a lot of time reading and learning about how people share and pass down knowledge. I read stories and talked to my elders about how they teach new ideas to people. What the readings and articles taught me are how to define what I am talking about. They taught how to develop the scope or skeleton of the kind of work I'm doing. The readings talked about the hypothetical impacts of implementing critical race methodology as a framework in educational spaces, they gave me definitions and some of the pillars under that methodology such as being social justice oriented, assuming the prevalence of racism as a systematic structure etc... What was missing from my research and all the reading I was doing is hopefully what I am doing here. Praxis. This project is where theory meets praxis. This project is the implementation of a curriculum written based on all these thoroughly researched theories and frameworks developed by the incredible scholars that I mentioned above.

WHAT AM I TRYING TO FIND OUT THROUGH THIS WORK?

There are so many questions that feel urgent and important to answer. But instead of thinking and theorizing and trying to investigate a problem, I want to instead investigate the impacts of a curriculum I have been working to develop and piece together over the past 5 years. This

curriculum is based on personal experience, tenants of Critical Race Theory and counter storytelling. It's based on things I've learned from working with youth, at college about Community (how to find it or create it if it doesn't exist), how to incorporate music and poetry to turn trauma into revolutions and the kinship I feel with black women in any space we both occupy. It is founded on different work that exists in the world about identity, power, and this idea of belonging. It's actually really based on this dream of mine that black youth can find joy in educational spaces if they are constructed differently. Thus, I set out to design and implement a curriculum for black youth that is embedded in praxis and CRT and utilizes counter storytelling. I sought to answer the following questions: with my work

- In what ways, if any, does this curriculum promote Community?

- In what ways, if any, does this curriculum foster Healing?

Through the course of the project, I have also realized that I was learning how to continually improve the curriculum as I struggled to implement it and worked to improve my practice based on the feedback from students and my own reflections. So, I also am seeking to understand as well, how to design and improve this counter storytelling curriculum. But often it feels like all of these things are happening simultaneously. So, in this paper I will do my best to capture the different moving parts of this process. Although my project is thinking about the relationship between Black youth and their classrooms, it is important to mention that I have doing this research and implementing this curriculum in out-of-school time spaces. This means I have had a lot more autonomy over how we spent our time together. The students who have been a part of this project chose to come spend their out-of-school time in this space. The flexibility that has offered me is important to keep in mind when considering implementation of this curriculum. My

choice to carry out this project in these spaces was mostly due to circumstance and accessibility, but it has been a very helpful starting point.

Homage
We've all lived many lifetimes
But every past life shows up in this one
Maybe that's why I have such an affinity
with the moon and with the stars
Because she has always felt most familiar
Like maybe in a past life we shared a tragedy
We've learned to give our pain a name
We've learned to see it coming
And understand that healing had never been just physical
Healing is soul work

In this work I am analyzing theories and frameworks that exist about race, intersectionality, and counter storytelling in hopes of actualizing them into a curriculum that cultivates Community and promotes Healing for the Black youth I work with. I am doing this praxis project through a critical, participatory action research framework, in an attempt to move past theory and into praxis. In doing so I feel it is important to pay homage and pay tribute to the scholars, educators, teachers, Community members, and youth whose labor has been interdisciplinary, Community - and youth-centered for creating these frameworks, theories and definitions. Thank you for giving us a language to understand our trauma and for laying the groundwork for us to create solutions and imagine new more inclusive worlds. Thank you for giving our pain a name. Thank you for showing us how to see it coming This poem above speaks the generational link. Every past life shows up in this one. The past is what teaches us how to care for each other, it is what gives us the language to speak on our experiences, and the very foundation from which a new world can manifest.

WHAT FRAMEWORKS/SCHOOLS OF THOUGHT AM I BUILDING FROM?

In working to find theories and methods that will help to cultivate space I turn to critical race theorists Tara Yosso and Daniel Solórzano and their work using counter storytelling as an analytical framework (Solorzano & Yosso, 2002). My work is thus similarly situated within the framework of Critical Race Theory (CRT), first coined by Derrick Bell in 1976. The primary tenets of CRT are exemplified in the visual below.
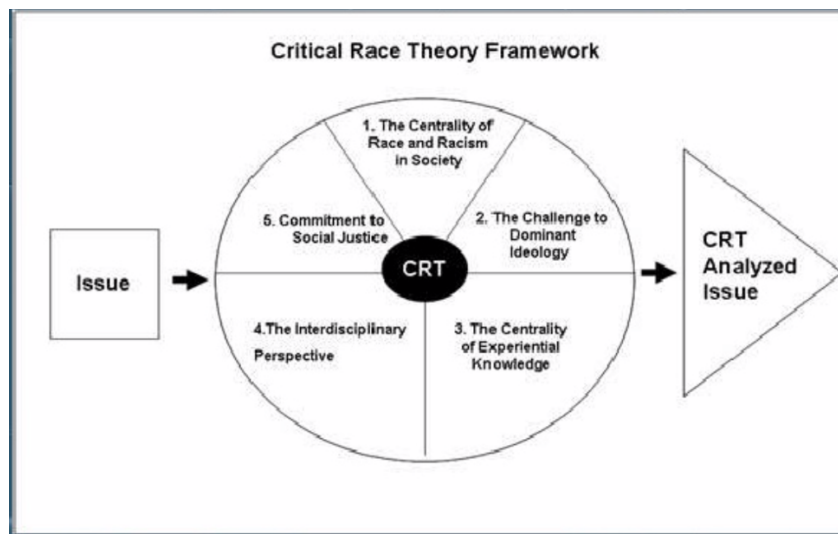
(Washington, 2012).   (Figure 1)

This image is a helpful visual to understand the process of how I understand and am thinking about the problem I identified and the potential solution as well. The first tenant of Critical Race Theory is the *Centrality of Race and Racism in Society.* In order to engage in the kind of work I want to be doing there is an accepted base line that systemic oppression (racism, classism etc..) have real life implications on marginalized people's lives. So, when we think about the problems we are working to solve and systems we are working to dismantle the second CRT tenant comes into play. When thinking about the context of this problem I am working to *challenge the dominant ideology.* In the context of my work, the dominant ideology would be something along the lines of *Black youth don't do well or feel valued in their classrooms because they are not of*

value or they are not trying hard enough to fit in. Instead, believe that the infrastructures set in

place in classrooms make it almost impossible for Black youth to exist as who they are in those

spaces. There is so much value *in experiential knowledge,* which is the third tenant of Critical Race

Theory identified in the picture. Everyone has lived experience. It is a useful resource to better

understand not only yourself but the people around you and your relationship to the world.

Nothing happens in isolation, the world is happening at the same time, this means there needs to

be a willingness to cross between disciplines to better understand the layers of a problem and also a

solution. This is the fourth tenant of Critical Race Theory, *The Interdisciplinary Perspective.* The

last tenant of Critical Race Theory is a *Commitment to Social Justice.* This tenet sort of does a

really nice job wrapping them all up. It speaks to a foundational mindset when engaging in this

work. My intention with this work and with this curriculum in a bigger picture sense is to create

space where Black youth feel safe, seen, valued, and are able to thrive. As illustrated in the diagram

above, Critical Race Theory is used to contextualize an existing problem in hopes of then working

towards a critically conscious solution. Critical Race Theory is actualized in my work in the form of

storytelling. Generally, under CRT storytelling means collecting family histories, biographies,

narratives etc. (Solórzano, & Yosso, 2002). It exposes deficit-informed research and methods that

silence and distort the actual experiences of people of color (Ladson-Billings, 2013). Critical Race

Theory and its tenets help to ground the work I am doing and the curriculum I am creating in

nontraditional forms of knowledge, ones that actually value and recognize the lived and varied

experiences of Black youth.

      Counter-storytelling is a method of telling the stories of those people whose experiences

are not often told (i.e., those on the margins of society). "The counter-story is also a tool for

exposing, analyzing, and challenging the majoritarian stories of racial privilege. Counter-stories can

shatter complacency, challenge the dominant discourse on race, and further the struggle for racial reform. Yet, counter-stories need not be created only as a direct response to majoritarian stories. As Ikemoto (1997) reminds us, "By responding only to the standard story, we let it dominate the discourse" (p. 136). "Indeed, within the histories and lives of people of color, there are numerous unheard counter-stories. Storytelling and counter-storytelling experiences can help strengthen traditions of social, political, and cultural survival and resistance" (Lynn, Yosso, & Solórzano, 2002, p. 29). There is a richness in the experiential knowledge that marginalized people have to offer the world. Shifting our perspective on what we consider and value as knowledge to include these important, often untold or ignored, stories is how we can begin to actualize new learning environments for Black students. I've learned from personal experience how powerful it can be to see and hear stories from and about people who are also marginalized. CRT scholars have worked to legitimize this notion that experiential knowledge and counter storytelling are essential and important forms of learning. This is the foundation of my question-based, counter storytelling curriculum: working to cultivate Community by asking students to bring themselves and their experiential knowledge into our educational space and see what we can create.

        "Critical methodology more specifically is directed at interrogating values and assumptions, exposing hegemony and injustice, challenging conventional social structures and engaging in social action. Therefore, the starting point of a critical researcher starts long before the actual research does." (Crotty, 1998, p. 157). It starts with understanding and trying to contextualize the problem (Refer back to Figure. 1) and working to create change through praxis that is then repeated with modification once informed by deep reflection. "In participatory action research (a cyclical process of investigation, action and evaluation which results in a change in practice), researchers do not carry out transformation for participants but with them" (Freire, 1970, p. 49). The students I am

working with are researchers as much as I am. We all understand and see the world through our individual positionality so when reflecting and doing research with youth, it is beautiful and helpful to understand how different people are interpreting the same space and material.

I have been trying to theorize and understand the problem I identified in all of its layers for a long time. The frameworks discussed have helped me begin to transition from the world of sense making and definitions into action and then back again to theory and reflection. This paper sits at the intersection of that process.

HOW AM I DEFINING ELEMENTS OF MY RESEARCH? (COMMUNITY AND HEALING)

"Our power to heal has been disturbed by slavery, poverty and now violence. We have simply forgotten that our birthright is to thrive and fully live. Our solutions to these problems have been bound by the very conditions that created them. Our goal is to disrupt our conditioning, to reimagine things that we were told were impossible and to act courageously, without apology, to heal those that need it most"
Lena Miller, Co-director Hunters Point Family
San Francisco California
Quoted in Sean Ginwright's book *Hope and Healing in Urban Education* *(2015, pg.36)*

Rudolph Ballentine in his book *Radical Healing* defines Healing as "a knitting together, a restoration of wholeness it requires that we see and accept lovingly all parts of ourselves." (Ballentine, 1999, p. 147). This definition addresses what I mean when I talk about beginning to feel full in places that have previously emotionally exhausted you. This is the action of Healing. But what I would add to this definition is that Healing is a collective experience, it is something that happens in a group of other people who share a similar positionality to you. Through sharing stories of personal experience related to identity and being able to build Community hopefully a door is opened to start that process. Shawn Ginwright in his book *Black Youth Rising: Activism and Radical Healing* writes about Healing and says that "although a long sometimes internal process, racial Healing can be defined as the process of understanding the different ways systems

of oppression have intersected to shape your lived experience and working to no longer internalize racism and learn the value of your identity as a person of color. This can happen through learning about systems of oppression and their historical context, telling/hearing stories of other marginalized folks, building strong relationships with other people who are a part of this process etc." (Ginwright, 2015, p.40) I'm also drawing on Shawn Ginwright's principles for radical Healing which are as follows

- "Culture: to enhance identity and a sense of self in relationship to the world"
- "Agency: to take action in order to change personal and social conditions"
- "Relationships: to foster and maintain strong interdependence and connect with others"
- "Meaning: To love and lead from with purpose direction and fulfillment Aspirations to create and articulate a clear and compelling."   (Ginwright, 2010, p. 84).

When something has caused me trauma, sometimes it has taken me a long time to even realize that it happened. Granted Healing is a long internal journey but the principles of Sean Ginwright's definition of radical Healing are some of the factors that contributed to my own unlearning and Healing. This idea of restoration and wholeness that Ballentine refers to in his text also feels like an important pillar when talking about this process. In my research I am using the term "Healing" to talk about what happens when Black youth begin to feel whole again in the same spaces that have taken so much from them. I am going to use the term "Healing" to help explicate the ways in which students begin to unlearn what school has taught them about their character. Healing means joy comes back into educational spaces for Black youth and they don't feel traumatized and terrified by schools. This definition has been pieced together from the fore mentioned scholars who have articulated some of the ways I also understand Healing and my own lived experience.

The second word I want to spend time on is Community. In this work I am defining Community as a verb. An environment where people feel comfortable being their whole selves

without apology. An environment that can hold space for different kinds of voices especially quiet ones. A sense of group accountability is established and maintained by the group as a whole. Community as I am using it is a *verb*, this means it is *inherently tied to action* (something we as a collective are intentionally and actively working towards) It means we practice making sure everyone feels welcome, included, listened to, etc. Community. Community is not just a collection of people. In this context it is the practice of making sure everyone feels welcome, included, listened to, etc. by the rest of the Community. Community does not have hierarchy, I as the teacher do not have more power than any of the students in the room. This means I must practice the vulnerability I ask of my students. It means that choices that affect the whole group are made in collaboration with students and the teacher together. With this definition of Community there is always work that needs be done to maintain it once it exists. People buy in to the idea at their own pace.

I believe that Community and Healing for black youth in this context go hand in hand. I spend time defining these words because they are the themes by which I will analyze my data. I will be looking for moments in our time together when the implementation of different parts of the curriculum foster Community and/or prompt Healing in some small ways based on what I define as "Community" and "Healing". Granted given the timetable of this project I cannot with complete certainty claim that anyone has been healed. But I am hopeful that this curriculum, and the Community we build jumpstarts that process for each and every one of the brilliantly curious youth I have had the privilege of doing research with.

WHY IS MY CHOICE OF INTERVENTION THROUGH CURRICULUM AND MORE SPECIFICALLY WHY THROUGH STORIES?

The problems and inequities that exist in education can be traced back to the foundation this country is built on. Racism is intertwined into the ways the educational system in America

functions. I've chosen to intervene by creating a curriculum for a few reasons. I believe this has a direct impact on the day-to-day experiences of Black youth. I think it has a large impact on how students can engage with schools, how students develop their understanding of themselves and their place in the world. I hope that if curriculum can be created in collaboration with Black Students at the table then educational spaces can begin to feel different and safer for them. The curriculum I've developed is about how to use storytelling to do a number of things such as, a tool for Healing, a technical skill, and to help build critical consciousness in my students. There is power in knowing how to speak on your experiences, but that same skill can also teach them more about the world and their place in it. What does having the skill and confidence to understand and articulate who you are to other people do for your sense of place? Can storytelling be used when developing curriculum in any classroom so that curriculum can inherently be more inclusive from the jump? Black students should be able to exist and thrive in the classrooms they spend time in. If you start with the personal it creates an opportunity for everyone in the room to engage with the material on their own terms and opens up the classroom to be more inclusive and equitable.

This research project is in part a personal journey for me to identify the ways in which classrooms could have supported me better but also an attempt to introduce a processing tool to educational spaces that will begin a long process of unlearning and offering a new kind of environment for students of color, where everything that makes them seen as "other" becomes seen as valuable and notable instead. Classrooms/educational spaces are full of stories, by centering marginalized identities not only can students who share those identities feel like they have a stake in the room, students who don't share those experiences will also have an opportunity to learn from their peers, this is how you begin to build Community. Curriculum is more than just content and educational spaces should not be just transactional they need to actively see Black

students. It needs to be written in collaboration with Black students at the table. My experience in educational spaces as someone who holds multiple marginalized identities, who has felt unseen/voiceless in classroom spaces gives me the unique opportunity to catch the moments where that might be happening in educational spaces where I have some autonomy to foster a different kind of culture.

HOW AM I THINKING ABOUT METHODOLOGY IN TERMS OF THIS KIND OF RESEARCH?

I want my students to help inform the research. Through this approach I'm accepting that knowledge is not neutral, and no researcher can be truly objective. Pring (2000) argues that "inquiry is inseparable from politics and its aim is to emancipate the disempowered. Researchers embrace their ideology as they recognize that 'no research methodology is value free'" (Pring ,2000, p. 250). I hold that same position in my research. There is no objective truth to discover through this process. The results that come out of this research project will be true for us in the context of our work. But those results are also constructed around some of the power dynamics present in the space. Critical research methods enable realities to be critically examined from a cultural, historical and political stance. Examples include: open-ended interviews, focus groups, open-ended questionnaires, open-ended observations, and journals. These methods usually generate qualitative data. Additionally," research must create an agenda for change or reform, enhancing the lives of the participants. It must have catalytic validity" (Cohen et al., 2007, p. 139). Validity is what determines if something is or is not credible. If something has catalytic validity it means that the findings of a specific research endeavor can become a catalyst for social change.

<u>WHERE AM I DOING THIS WORK?</u>

For the past few years I have been working at an organization called Breakthrough Greater Boston. As a teaching fellow I have been given ample opportunity to cultivate learning spaces without much oversight. This has given me the space to try out different ways of teaching and holding space that has made the work I'm doing possible. Breakthrough is not my physical site but an important place where I developed a lot of my curriculum. It brings important context to how I have decided to develop my praxis project. My physical site is the Hiatt Youth Council on Clark University's campus. As the youth council coordinator, I have the capacity to create different kind of spaces. It is important to notice that both of the spaces where I am thinking about curriculum and implementing curriculum are out-of-school spaces. This has been partly due to intention and circumstance. Students of color feel more comfortable when they are not in school. It is an easier starting point for the kind of work I want to do.

Breakthrough Collaborative is an academic program that serves low income/marginalized students all across the country. Breakthrough Greater Boston works to increase educational equity by closing opportunity gaps for students and diversifying the teaching force. Students complete a rigorous application and interview process to be a part of the Breakthrough Program. During the summer Breakthrough runs a program that serves rising 7th, 8th, and 9th graders for 6 weeks. Students take 5 classes varying in subject area (Science, Math, History, Literature, and Writing). These classes are curated and taught by college students who are interested in working in education. Students and teaching fellows alike also get to participate in more traditional summer activities like camping, water balloon fights, and Community meetings where students get to share what they've been doing in their different classes. I have been a part of the Breakthrough Greater Boston family since I was in middle school myself. I grew up participating in this program and learning everything about how it works. I have been in some of kind of teaching position at

Breakthrough since I was 15 years old. I've served this past summer as head of social studies curriculum across the three sites. In previous summers, I have taught rising 7th graders and 8th graders, with class sizes ranging from 9-12 students per section (Each teaching fellow is responsible for two sections). This most recent summer I worked with a group of rising 9th graders. We spent our summer investigating the impact of storytelling and how different people use it. Although Breakthrough is not the main site of my research, it is a really important part of my positionality and where this curriculum was primarily developed.

The Hiatt Youth Council is a planning group of high school students from the Worcester area that are tasked with planning, hosting, and facilitating a Youth Summit in the spring semester. The council meets weekly for a couple hours in the Education Department of Clark University. Students who participate in the Hiatt Youth Council receive a small stipend for the work they are doing. This year we worked to host a summit that was held on April 25, 2019. The focus of this year's summit was "The Power of Youth: A Showcase of Storytelling." This is the sixth year of the summit, but the second year of the Hiatt Youth Council operating as a planning team. This council's recent formation meant that a lot of things about our Community were still being shaped and negotiated. We used elements of the curriculum developed about storytelling to investigate who they are, what that means in the world and how they could use that as a resource to plan a summit that will showcase them. Some of these activities will be explained in in the following sections.

MY INTERVENTION IN MORE DETAIL: COUNTERSTORYTELLING CURRICULUM

In this next section I will sketch out what the curriculum entails by going over each units' overview and sharing some sample activities that take place in a specific unit. Although I have separated this curriculum into 6 units, they pretty naturally flow into each other and actually exist

as one. Separating them in the way I have chosen has been more for my own processing and tracking then for the functionality of the curriculum. Each "unit" has a couple guiding questions that we work as a group to answer, through conversations, journaling, self-reflection, activities etc.

Unit One: Storytelling and its purpose

Guiding Questions: What does storytelling mean? What does counter storytelling mean? What is the purpose of stories? Why do people tell stories?

Overview: This first unit is really a foundation piece to make sure that everyone is on the same page about the kind of storytelling we are referring to. This entire curriculum is mostly question and skill based so the content is subject to change to fit the students that are in the room. The purpose of this unit is multi layered. It is to help establish the power and depth of impact storytelling has in our world. It is also to help establish that the kind of storytelling we are talking about is based on experiences related to identities such as race, class, gender, citizenship, religion etc. These are the stories that are missing from the conversation. This curriculum will attempt to find new ways to bring them to the center of our learning space.

Sample Activity: *Conocimiento*

Conocimiento means knowledge in Spanish. This was an activity I actually did when I was in high school in spaces when we were first trying to create Community. In front of the room there is a poster with 20 questions on it varying from questions like "what is the story of your name" to think back to a time when you first noticed you were different, write about that moment," Students have 2 sessions to go through the questions and answer the ones they want to answer. They have the choice to write or draw their answers. The room during this activity is pretty quiet, I try to have music playing in the background. Students have the option to use markers, paints, pencils etc... to make their boards. Once everyone is done with their boards everyone takes turns explaining their board to the group.

Unit Two: Storytelling in different spaces

Guiding Questions: How does storytelling show up in our lives? Think about the places you spend time in, do you tell stories there? Do other people? What kind of stories, if any, do you hear/tell at home, in school, at the grocery store, anywhere else you spend time?

Overview: The purpose of this unit is to help bridge a gap between the foundational understanding of storytelling hopefully established in the first section and what the application of our established definitions might look like in practice. This unit is where students will be asked to share parts of their identity with their fellow classmates and find ways to relate the concepts from the first section to themselves and their day-to-day experiences. The idea being that if students are able to recognize the structure of stories, particularly stories based on identity, they can start looking for similar themes in their own lives.

Sample Activity: *Life mapping*

Create a visual timeline from when you were born until now. Include any and all events or moments that have some significance to you. You can include places you've lived, Literally anything. Please come ready to share. (It doesn't have to just be words, it can be as colorful as you would like them to be).

Unit Three: Impactful Storytelling

Guiding Questions: What is impactful storytelling? What kind of stories do you hear most often? Does how you tell story make it more or less impactful? Does who is telling a certain story matter? How do you tell an impactful story? What is a Master Narrative/Dominant Narrative? What is a counter narrative?

Overview: The purpose of this unit is for students to start identifying different kinds of stories. Students will be able to explain how storytelling relates to self/ Community advocacy because we will discuss it as a class and practice it through some activities. This unit is meant to step out of

creating definitions towards something a little less tangible, but hopefully more practical. We will talk about stereotyping, master narratives, media, and what it means for something to leave an impact.

Sample Activity: *Which story is it?*

This activity helps with defining and understanding dominant and counter narratives. Students are given different readings ex. (excerpts from school history textbooks, made up scenarios). The assignment is to work to figure out if it is telling a master narrative or a counter narrative. Depending on their answer their job it creates question that gets at the other side. So, if the story for example is telling a master narrative about a war then they would ask questions that would require us to do research to figure out the other side.

Unit Four: Storytelling and our selves

Guiding Questions: When you are asked to share something about yourself what comes to mind? What do the stories we choose to tell in certain spaces teach us about us? How much does how the world sees you affect how you perceive yourself?

Overview: At this point students have defined and worked to understand what counter stories are and what their place in the world might look like. We've talked about the value of experiential knowledge, students have seen some examples of the impact of speaking on lived experiences. So, the real fun can begin. In this unit students will practice telling stories out loud about something they feel they have experiential knowledge on. We will practice affirming each other. This unit is about recognizing the power in your body and in your voice. It is about recognizing the muscle memory of being able to recall generational and Community knowledge that you might not know you had access to. This unit works to affirm different kinds of knowledge and histories.

Sample Activity: *Affirmation Stories*

Student picks a name out of a hat. They keep the name to themselves. Once they have the name, they are asked to pay attention to that person and be prepared to share an uplifting observation or story they witness of this person during our time together. Every student shares an affirming story about the person whose name they picked out of the hat earlier. The purpose of the activity is twofold. First off students have the opportunity to practice sharing a story out loud in front of their Community and second this is part of the work to center the students in the room. Although this may not necessarily be tied to learning directly, this activity has helped to build trust and foster Community in new circles of students and maintain Community as time passes.

Unit Five: Storytelling and the world around us

Guiding Questions: What does storytelling teach us about the people in our lives, the world around us and how we understand it? What do you learn from people when they are sharing their stories? How has being intentional about how you think about storytelling impacted the way you interact with people?

Overview: Recap. Okay at this point student have learned what stories are, what counter stories are, what their potential for impact is, that there are many different kinds of knowledge out there and about how storytelling can teach them more about themselves then they may have realized. The entire world is made up of stories. In this unit we will work to learn about the world around us through storytelling. We refer back to some of the guiding questions of our second unit "storytelling in different spaces" to draw connections between ourselves, things we know and new information through listening to and watching different kinds of stories from other marginalized people.

Sample Activity: *Community Interviews*

Since the focus of this unit is on storytelling and the world around us, students practice collecting oral stories from members in our Community and see what they can learn from the people they choose to talk to. They could talk to anyone they want. This activity has been a student favorite the past few times I've run it. This particular activity is more of a project. They come up with all the questions, they pick who they want to talk to and how they want to represent whatever it is they learn from their interviewees.

<center>Unit Six: Reflection/Reflexivity</center>

Guiding Questions: What have you noticed about yourself throughout our time together? What do you think about storytelling? Has your relationship with yourself and the world around you changed in any way? Why is reflection important? What does reflective mean, how can it be a useful skill?

Overview: Not only does storytelling have the power to create Community and promote Healing in educational spaces. It can also be a reflexive tool. The lessons and methods that come out of this space can be re infused to better adapt this environment. In this last unit students will look back on all we have done and practice reflecting on our process. They will reflect on the activities we did as a class, the definitions they were introduced to, what shifts they've noticed about themselves (if any) since our time together started. It is important to note that this last unit is meant to help students feel good about walking away from our Community with the tools and skills they need in order to work to maybe foster new communities that also will affirm and hold them up the way we tried to. Throughout our time together students have learned how to ask questions of themselves, of each other, of the spaces they occupy, and especially of things that don't feel just or equitable

Sample Activity: Journaling

We journal throughout all of our time together. But the questions posed in this part of the curriculum are a lot broader and are meant to support students being reflective and looking back on our time together.

I've written this entire curriculum to take as long as 10 weeks. I have also adapted parts of it for different time frames given some circumstances. During the process of our time together students are asked to journal almost every time we meet. They are given guiding questions or prompts to help them begin to write. I require this because I believe it is a good habit to start reflecting and processing as early as possible. So even if some students choose to not stick with it, they will at least know they have the capacity and skill to do so if they decide to. I also think journaling helps you to be better at reflecting and articulating how you feel. I started writing in middle school, it evolved into spoken word, and it is something I am grateful for. This a moment where my lived experience has informed my actions and my methods.

WHAT AM I QUALIFYING AS DATA? /HOW DID I COLLET IT?

During my research I collected the following kinds of data

Audio Recordings
During every session most of our conversations were audio recorded. There was a recorder on the table in the middle of all of us.

Student Work
I collected all student work. I made copies of or took pictures of students work/group brain storms. I typed up or scanned all student written work.

Lesson Plans, Outlines, Class Materials
I have my lesson plans in all their various drafts collected. Any lesson plans that students helped to modify are accounted for. I have marked them and categorized them accordingly.

Observations
I collected field notes following every session to clarify aspects of our meeting that could not be captured in the audio recordings, such as where students sat and how they interacted with each other in the space.

Notes
-Mostly taken in between sessions when trying to plan the next session

    -ideas for activities

    -researching about how to explain something to students

    -my thoughts on how I thought the curriculum was being implemented

    -what I thought was successful or not successful about how a particular session went

IN WHAT WAYS DID COMMUNITY AND /OR HEALING SHOW UP IN OUR SPACE?

My data will mostly be presented through a series of anecdotes from my perspective because it is important to me that I don't add to the exploitation of Black youths' vulnerability for the sake of research. I want to honor and respect their vulnerability. As a black woman doing research with Black youth, I don't want to further exploit their lived experiences and traumas. So, to the best of my ability I am going to protect their willingness to share by speaking from my experience.

I would like to make something else clear, I am not researching moments where Community and Healing don't exist because there is more than enough evidence that speaks to that. Community and Healing are not common place experiences for Black youth in classrooms or in education spaces, as discussed in earlier sections of my paper. So, in the context of this work specifically I want to spend time looking at moments where there *is* Community forming or perhaps a Healing process *is starting.* Community and Healing *not* happening in classrooms is the baseline. That is the existing rhetoric, the space we created hopes to offer a counter experience.

That is not to say that our time together is always full of Community and unlearning. It means that I believe there is a lot of information and research that exists about Black students' disengagement, or distrust in classrooms already. I would like to discuss the opposite. This research project has not been linear. I have intentionally written it to be more reflective and from my perspective. The moments I have chosen to highlight in this paper are not meant to be labeled as successful or as moments of failure of my research because anything *that* happens in a space where the goal is to **unlearn** the impact of systemic oppression and redefine and learn how to value yourself is already at a disadvantage.

Since I have chosen Community and Healing to be the lenses through which I am reading my data, that is how I will be separating my data. I will share data related to my Community lens and then data about moments of Healing, in that order. I am sharing moments of Community before moments of Healing because I think it happens in that order. Sometimes they could happen simultaneously but there needs to be Community if there is going to be Healing.

COMMUNITY PART 1

The following short paragraph is a direct quote from a recording of an early session with the Hiatt Youth Council in the middle of February. We had just finished doing a few things including:

- a check in about the intentions we wanted to offer into the space for the day. (This is something we tried to do every time we met)

- Reread the Community guidelines we had written together weeks prior and asked everyone if they still felt accurate to what they wanted from the space.

- Right before this quote though we had just gone through an activity where we were all drawing ourselves three times. Once as *how we see ourselves*, once as *how we thought society saw us*, and once as *how our respective Community saw us*. I asked if any of them

wanted to share their drawings with us or share any of their thoughts about the activity itself.

After a few moments of hesitation and silence one of the students asked the group "Are we

really practicing vulnerability with each other if don't ever sit in the awkward." (One of our

guidelines was to practice vulnerability when it felt safe) Another student went on to agree

and said the following

 "I never realized how much work being in community actually takes. Like in schools we make

community guidelines in every class and they just kind of sit there throughout the year and we

don't really look at them. But this is so much work. Like we have to be really honest with each

other literally all the time. Especially because we only see each other once or twice a week. It's

easier to like to check out and be passive but that wouldn't help make us into a community and

knowing that makes me feel kind guilty cause I love this, and I want this to work. If I'm passive,

then this won't feel like the kind of community we defined."

She then proceeded to turn her drawing around for everyone to see and explained that in her

drawing of how she saw herself she only used pencil because it's the easiest to erase and forget

about. "I can't believe I just told ya'll that this is how I see myself. (referring to her drawing) Like I

don't think I could tell anybody that. Wow Ms. How did you get us to do that?"

This conversation and specific moment played out during our fifth session together. At this

point   we were working through the second unit: Storytelling in different spaces. This activity was

meant to give us a starting point for how we all thought about our positionality in relation to self,

Community, and society. It was clear even during the check-in and while re-reading the community

guidelines that everyone was fully engaging with the curriculum and activities. Because they were

asking each other questions and contributing to our discussions in really thoughtful ways. One of

the students asking the group about vulnerability was also an important moment of them taking

some ownership of the space and asking for accountability. I chose to share the bolded quote because I think it was an important transitionary moment for this particular student. It's like something clicked in her head as she was saying this out loud. Even in her body language we watched as she sat up and turned slightly more to face her Community as she kept speaking. In this quote this student is very clearly reflecting on an experience she is having in response to the question posed about really being vulnerable. Although I didn't identify body language as an important factor in creating and maintaining Community, her body language made me think that she was more comfortable in our space while sharing something that was difficult for her. When she was sharing everyone followed her with her eyes. In the moment when she explained why she used pencil, she paused as if she caught herself by surprise that she had just said that out loud. This quote and this moment in general exemplified a Community moment. She both practiced vulnerability and referred to our space as a Community. What isn't seen in this quote are how the other students engaged with her in this moment and the few moments that followed. Another student took the paper she drew herself on and started to draw over it in colorful markers, a small gesture but an important and I hope impactful one. They didn't exchange words, No one said anything after she shared but the other student drawing over her drawing of herself is an affirmation of not only her existence but how permanent it is. The purpose of this activity was for students to try thinking about where they learn about themselves and to begin to connect the dots between how they see themselves and the world in hopes of understanding how those things have been constructed for them.

COMMUNITY PART 2

The following took place during a transition period. We had just wrapped up a planning session about what they wanted to do their final projects about and were about to start

brainstorming some ice breakers for our upcoming summit. They were all talking about how much

work they had to do and how frustrated they were by their teachers and school in general. In the

midst of this conversation one of the students came across an article comparing school to learning.

She brought it up to the group and they talked about it for a while. This is the tail end of a longer

conversation.

Student 1: School is like a thing you have to do because your parents make you

Student 2: So, are you saying that if your parents said you didn't have to go you wouldn't?

Student 1: Well I mean if there was a way, I could learn without having to make myself small
        then I don't think I'd mind school

Student 3: What do you mean feel small? Like literally?

Student 1: Well I guess not literally (laughs), actually no wait yah sometimes I feel too tall
        Teachers assume imma hurt em or something

Student 2 : Same, well im not tall but I don't smile and I kinda get the feeling teachers think imma
        jump at them or something

Student 3 I hate school, sorry you guys feel like that. You're both so nice they should try talking
        to you before assuming stuff

Nothing about this conversation is inherently about Community nor was it something I was

facilitating. The question about school vs. learning was the title of an article another student had

stumbled upon and brought up to the group. But I want to point out a few things. Both Student 2

and 3 asked Student 1 questions to help her share more with them. This feels like a moment of

Community because they are holding space for her to share and pushing her to share more.

Student 1 willingly shares more about how she feels about herself in school is a moment of

vulnerability. It seemed like it also then opened the door for Student 2 to also share which is an

important development for her growth. What Student 1 shared was not easy, but it seemed to be

an easy thing to share given her casual demeanor. I sat back in this moment and watched them

take care of each other. I know this is a simple moment and an easy conversation to disregard. But this is Community in action. Student 1 is practicing vulnerability with her Community and her friends are attentively listening while offering support and comfort. Community is not always big grand gestures, it is not always obvious. It sometimes lives in the shadows of a conversation.

HEALING PART 1

Storytime
> *During the summer while working at Breakthrough, we took our 9th graders on a field trip to visit a college. While we were there 4 of our Muslim girls were threatened and racially profiled by security guards who did not realize they were middle school students on a field trip (Not that that would excuse their behavior). I wasn't present for the actual incident. But when we got back to our classroom, I noticed that they were particularly quiet. So, I asked them what was wrong. Instead of telling me one of the students asked me if it was okay if she journaled instead of participating in an activity we were about to do. Stunned that a student who is normally the first to complain about having to write, wanted to write I said, "yes, of course." I left them alone for a while still unaware that anything had happened. After some time passed the student who had asked to journal came back to me and just handed me her journal and said*
> *"I don't have the capacity to talk about this, but you read it if you want." I remember this line so well because we had just practiced saying it out loud the previous day as an alternative answer to no. Respecting her request, I said thank you and went to read her journal entry. Only to be stunned again at her ability to empathize with someone who had been so unkind and had made her feel unsafe.*

I don't know if this story means that she is unlearning some things or if she is Healing. What I do know is that this time around when something that made her feel uncomfortable/unsafe

happened she opted to engage with the discomfort it made her feel. That is not easy work nor was it something we necessarily practiced explicitly. What we did practice was how to step back and ask yourself how something made you feel and work to see if you could identify what it was. Her saying "I don't have the capacity to talk about this, but you read it if you want." is an example of her engaging in that thought process. She worked to actively try to process what happened and she named what was causing her to feel the way she was feeling. Healing isn't a simple equation. I don't think that just because she journaled about this specific incident, she has overcome the experience. But in this small act of love towards herself she practiced Healing. Healing is not linear, it is not something that happens once. I would like to hope that this student felt empowered about the way she chose to handle this particular situation. This particular moment didn't happen in response to something I intentionally did. It did not happen as a direct result of any particular activity. That is why I think this moment is so important to remember. She put our conversations from class and some of the tools we created to navigate the world to good use on her own terms. I know that Healing is a long internal process with many setbacks and false starts based on some of Shawn Ginwright's work about radical Healing. It requires resilience, a personal commitment to self and a Community who doesn't let you fall. Engaging in the discomfort of this experience while trying to understand and empathize with this man, is her putting our conversations about Healing into practice in a way that makes sense for her.

HEALING PART 2

This story is about me. When I started doing this project, I didn't think I had anything to heal from anymore in terms of the ways that schooling has affected me. But as I shared space with my students and worked to hold myself accountable to being as brave and vulnerable as my

students were being, I learned some things. This following short story is a moment of Healing for me that I have reflected on a lot since.

Before every session I try to answer all the questions/prompts I'm going to ask my students so that I could offer them an example of what I was looking for from them. This particular session our journal entry prompt was to write about a salient moment in school when you became aware of some part of your identity. I wrote a story that was pretty vague about a moment during my sophomore year of high school when my teacher asked me to share what I thought it must have been like for black people to live during the civil rights movement. I wrote the story pretty passively just in hopes of being able to show them an example of what I was looking for. But after I told them the story. I watched my students lean in closer to me. One of them said "yah I do that too?" I asked her what she was referring to. She said, "I talk about things that have hurt me in nonchalant ways because I don't want to make other people deal with it". I sat there stunned and almost on the verge of tears at her confidence and capacity to call me in. Another student reminded me of our norms about vulnerability and reassured me that my story was safe in this space and how important it is to learn to name the things that hurt us. (Something we had identified as an important step to Healing)

I was unsure of sharing this story in my paper because I think it is still one, I am working to grapple with. The first thing that keeps coming to mind when I try to analyze this story is how stunned and proud, I am at all of the students in the room. I've written a lot about how important it is for the Community we create to be a two-way street, and in this specific moment that was actualized in a way I did not expect. I have a lot of growing to do. I have never felt so affirmed by a Community full of students I work with then it that moment. As someone who works really hard to maintain my composure this was a particularly difficult moment for me. In a theoretical sense I

know vulnerability is hard and I know it is important to model what I want from my students. But they held me accountable not only to the space we created but to myself and my own growth. All of the students used the tools we have been practicing to invite me in to our Community. In terms of Healing this is the messy side of it. Sometimes Healing is sparked by a Community that cares about you. In order for one of my students call in me out in the way she did (*"I talk about things that have hurt me in nonchalant ways because I don't want to make other people deal with it"*) would mean she has to know me well enough to see past my words and listen to the tone in my voice. As much as it was uncomfortable for me to sit in that moment while realizing I had internalized and swallowed the impact of that experience from school. It was reassuring to know that my students had the capacity and tools to not only hold that space but to engage fully in working to help me heal.

REFLECTIONS/TAKE AWAYS

Choosing what makes sense to share and what doesn't make sense to share has been a difficult process. But I tried to make sure what I shared was diverse in its richness and context. The part titled Community Part 1 was a moment of Community sparked out of a group activity. Community Part 2 was a moment of Community that happened during a transition which I think builds on the first one. Once students began to get comfortable with the space and engaging with each other, asking follow up questions didn't feel as hard or as awkward. For the moments of Healing I chose to share, I thought it was important to show 2 different parts of that process in action. For the first anecdote of Healing was something one if the students took upon herself to initiate using some of the tools we had practiced as a group. The second anecdote about me is important for a couple reasons. First it is not only a moment that showcased Healing but Community as well. My students pushed me to address something I clearly was uncomfortable

with and created a space for me in our Community where that was okay. I chose these 4 examples to show that Community and Healing both happen in small and big ways. They actually happen more simultaneously then I had thought they would.

When I was developing this curriculum, I wasn't thinking about this idea of Community or Healing at first. What I was attempting to do last spring when I first started this project was simply to create a curriculum that evoked stories from students who are not always given the opportunity to share. What I wasn't thinking about critically and with intention then is what we would do with the stories that are told. Were they supposed to serve a purpose, or was the act of sharing enough? What was really my goal? It wasn't until the summer when students were actually sharing different stories that I realized I needed to do more for it is not enough for stories to just be shared. Stories serve a larger purpose, they help build Community. It happened pretty organically at first. Like when someone would share a story that was hard for them, another student would sit a little closer to them. Or place their hand on the back of the student sharing. So, I began to do more research about Community and this idea of feeling whole or being restored. This gave my curriculum the purpose I was looking for. It's one thing to be able to tell stories as a technical skill. It teaches students how to ask questions of the spaces they occupy. But knowing that those same skills of speaking on your experience and bringing in experiential knowledge can also help build Community and teach us how to heal from some repressed trauma is everything. So, I shifted my focus instead of just trying to create a curriculum that would help my black students exist in their problematic classrooms. Community and Healing build on and feed each other. If we create a Community where people feel comfortable being themselves and feel like they can really be vulnerable, then we can start think about how to start Healing. What I realized in this project is how important and central vulnerability is to both the creation and the maintenance of Community

and to the process of Healing. Although Healing is a deeply internal process, I have watched my students support each other and me in working to do that self-reflection and practice a kindness towards themselves and their differing degrees of trauma.

Community is not just people in a room. It has to be intentional. It has to be maintained. I learned this every time my students and I checked back in with each other and our vision for the space. When I started doing this project the only thing I understood and wanted to accomplish was that I wanted to create an environment for the students I was teaching that not only felt safe but a space that really helped them to ask themselves and answer some hard questions about identity. I wanted to find a way to help them understand the duality of being both being silenced and hyper analyzed in their respective classrooms. Before doing this research project I believed that Healing needed to happen in a different space away from where the trauma was inflicted. I couldn't wrap my head around the ides of redefining your relationship with a specific space in that way, but it has been really interesting learning alongside my students about how to re-engage with the spaces that hurt you and finding new ways to exist in those same spaces.

Things I have learned through this project

- Community is a verb; it is inherently tied to action.

- Holding each other accountable is both a function of creating Community and maintaining it.

- Community shows up, not always in the ways you might expect.

- Healing is not always about sharing about trauma. Sometimes Healing is being able to recognize that you actually don't want to speak about something.

- Vulnerability never stops being difficult, no matter how old you get.

- Nothing about this process is happening in isolation. All of these concepts (Community, Healing, growing etc.) build on each other and not always in a linear way.

- Community felt like a natural first thing to look for and work towards in a new space. But sometimes when I think of Healing and Community in the context of this work now thinking back on it, it feels a little like a chicken vs. egg situation. Does practicing Healing create Community? Does having an established Community promote Healing? I'm still not sure what comes first.

This project has taught me a lot. It has pushed me to grow in ways I did not anticipate for myself. It took me going through this process of accounting for every step I was taking to understand that although my curriculum is about enticing stories and getting students to share and participate in our space, it was more accurately about Community and Healing. We practiced building a Community, we worked to define how we understand Healing. We practiced holding each other's vulnerabilities. This curriculum has taught me so much. It has re-affirmed how much I believe in the power of young people, their resilience and their capacity to keep on going and create more loving spaces for each other. I've learned more about what Community and Healing can look like. I've learned that Community has nothing to do with how long you've known a group of people, it has everything to do with how that space is constructed.

WHO IS THIS PAPER FOR?

The goal and intention of this paper is not to offer a quick fix to a systemic problem with roots as deep as colonization. It is the first step to a conversation about radically transforming schooling. This is meant to push educators, teachers, facilitators, students, etc... who are already engaged in working to not only imagine new alternate educational spaces but are also working to actualize them under the tenants of Critical Race Theory and with social justice frameworks. I hope this work serves as a conversation starter and as a catalyst for creating and sustaining alternative learning environments rooted in some new understandings about the space. This paper

is not meant to for anyone who doesn't have a deep belief that Black youth have the capacity to thrive and be successful in an environment that seems them as valuable. Black youth know better than anyone how to imagine and actualize new, more inclusive and socially just worlds. What they need are allies and spaces that will support them to bring their ideas to fruition.

We spend a lot of our time, energy and resources theorizing about problems. I have been in so many college classes that used my lived experience as a thought exercise. As fodder for a debate about the state of things. What people keep failing to realize or notice is that we (black and brown folk) are in the room. We are not far away, we can speak, our voices work. There just needs to be an opportunity. I am grateful for this paper and that it doesn't just continue to reiterate that the world is burning. We already know that. I want to spend time talking about love and Community. I want to learn about Healing and reflection. I want black youth to know they are loved every day. I want them to be hugged every day. This is for them, this is for me. This is for young people of color who feel overwhelmed by the weight of this world's disappointment. It is important to name the things that cause us pain. It is as important to find a way past it to name things that bring us joy. Not only is this paper the intersection of theory and practice it is also at the intersection pain and joy.

Here's to all our wear and tear
We have weathered the heaviest of rains
Everything we are is rooted in this earth
We are both broken
We have both been uprooted
Here is finding new more loving roots
We are everything we've survived and everything we have survived
We, are built out of storms

TO MY KIDS

I am unbelievably proud of all of you. It has been breathtaking watching all of you build the community you did in the short time you all have spent together. Thank you for bringing your whole selves into our space even when it has been difficult. Thank you for holding each other up and me accountable to the values we agreed upon. Thank you for trusting me and helping me to actualize a community I have only ever dreamed of. I hope as you walk away from this year you don't lose sight of your growth. I hope you never forget how loud and strong your voices are. I am in awe every day of the women you are becoming. Thank you for teaching me how to be soft. Thank you for bringing laughter in our space. Thank you for your willingness to engage in the hard conversations. Thank you for all of your vulnerability. You have made this year, this project, this life such a magical one.

With love, light, and in solidarity,

Linda Mindaye

WORK CITED

Ballentine, R. (1999). *Radical healing: Integrating the world's great therapeutic traditions to create a new transformative medicine.* Three Rivers Press (CA).

Cohen, L., Manion, L., & Morrison, K. (2002). *Research methods in education.* Routledge.

Clogan Washington. (2012, June 17). Critical race theory. Retrieved from https://www.slideshare.net/cloganwashington/critical-race-theory-13359782 (Image citation)

Crotty, M. (1989). *The foundations of social research.* London: Sage.

DeMeulenaere, E. (2012). Toward a pedagogy of trust. *Places where ALL children learn: The power of high expectation curricula with low achieving students,* 28-41.

Freire, P. (2018). *Pedagogy of the oppressed.* Bloomsbury publishing USA.

Geiger, A. (2018, August 27). Public school teachers much less racially diverse than students in US. Retrieved from https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2018/08/27/americas-public-school-teachers-are-far-less-racially-and-ethnically-diverse-than-their-students/

Ginwright, S. A. (2010). Peace out to revolution! Activism among African American youth: An argument for radical healing. *Young, 18*(1), 77-96.

Ginwright, S. A. (2015). Radically healing black lives: A love note to justice. *New directions foe student leadership,(2015(148), 33-44.*

Ginwright, S. (2015). *Hope and healing in urban education: How urban activists and teachers are reclaiming matters of the heart.* Routledge.

Hanley, M. S., Sheppard, G. L., Noblit, G. W., & Barone, T. (2013). Storytelling for Social Justice: Creating Arts-Based Counterstories to Resist Racism. In *Culturally Relevant Arts Education for Social Justice* (pp. 29-38). Routledge.

Hanley, M. S., Sheppard, G. L., Noblit, G. W., & Barone, T. (2013). Storytelling for Social Justice: Creating Arts-Based Counterstories to Resist Racism. In *Culturally Relevant Arts Education for Social Justice* (pp. 29-38). Routledge.

Huber, L. P. (2008). Building critical race methodologies in educational research: A research note on critical race testimonio. *FIU L. Rev., 4,* 159.

Ladson-Billings, G. (2013). Critical race theory—What it is not!. In *Handbook of critical race theory in education* (pp. 54-67). Routledge.

Loveless, T.(2017, March 22). 2017 Brown Center Report on American Education: International assessments. Retrieved from https://www.brookings.edu/research/2017-brown-center-report-part-i-international-assessments/

Mack, L. (2010). The philosophical underpinnings of educational research

Malagon, M. C., Huber, L. P., & Velez, V. N. (2009). Our experiences, our methods: Using grounded theory to inform a critical race theory methodology. *Seattle J. Soc. Just., 8*, 253

Merriweather Hunn, L. R., Guy, T. C., & Mangliitz, E. (2006). Who can speak for whom? Using counter-storytelling to challenge racial hegemony

New Data from U.S. Department of Education Highlights Educational Inequities Around Teacher Experience, Discipline and High School Rigor. (2012, March 06). Retrieved from https://www.ed.gov/news/press-releases/new-data-us-department-education-highlights-educational-inequities-around-teache

Perry, T., & Delpit, L. D. (Eds.). (1998). *The real Ebonics debate: Power, language, and the education of African-American children.* Beacon Press.

Pring, R. (2000). The 'false dualism'of educational research. *Journal of Philosophy of Education, 34*(2), 247-260.

Scotland, J. (2012). Exploring the Philosophical Underpinnings of Research: Relating Ontology and Epistemology to the Methodology and Methods of the Scientific, Interpretive, and Critical Research Paradigms. *English language teaching, 5*(9), 9-16.

Solórzano, D. G., & Yosso, T. J. (2002). Critical race methodology: Counter-storytelling as an analytical framework for education research. *Qualitative inquiry, 8*(1), 23-44.

Yosso, T., Villalpando, O., Delgado Bernal, D., & Solórzano, D. G. (2001). Critical race theory in Chicana/o education.