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Pedagogies of Wholeness: Cultivating Critical Healing Literacies with Students of Color in an Embodied English Classroom

A dissertation in partial satisfaction of the

requirements for the degree Doctor of Philosophy

in Education

by

Stephanie Michele Cariaga

2018

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2018

ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

Pedagogies of Wholeness: Cultivating Critical Healing Literacies with Students of Color in an Embodied English Classroom

by

Stephanie Michele Cariaga

Doctor of Philosophy in Education

University of California, Los Angeles, 2018

Professor Daniel Solórzano, Chair

Trauma has a significant impact on marginalized communities (Ginwright, 2016) and is an issue that should be addressed within schools (Ko et al., 2008). The problem is that schools are themselves a site of violence, where young people become disembodied from their own righteous rage and resilience (Duncan-Andrade, 2009), and teachers learn to silence their own needs in order to fully serve their students (Hydon et al., 2015). This dissertation therefore explores ways to take back the various ways of knowing we hold in our bodies, minds, and spirits, and channel them into pedagogies of wholeness, which embrace the full humanity of young people at the margins *and* the teachers who serve them, in order to heal from personal and collective pain.

Focusing on the context of an English classroom and my own teaching as a teacher/researcher, I explore the following questions:

- How do Students of Color describe the impact of trauma on their lives and learning?
- How does a teacher create and implement healing pedagogies in an English classroom?
- How do Students of Color respond to healing pedagogies in an English classroom?
- How does a teacher maintain a sustainable healing pedagogy practice?

I combine Auto-Ethnography (Chang, 2016) with Portraiture (Lightfoot & Davis, 1997) to craft blended portraits that examine my process as a teacher/researcher throughout a 20-week semester of teaching 11th–grade English at a public high school in Los Angeles. Honing in on interviews and interactions with four student participants throughout the semester, as well as my own curriculum analysis and personal reflections, the blended portraits reveal the burdens and strength Students of Color carry while navigating various worlds, and the tensions and epiphanies that arise when cultivating bravery, belonging, and critical understanding in the classroom. I offer a critical healing praxis framework, which describes (a) how I come to understand students' complex needs and design units of intimate inquiry, (b) how students engage in an embodied analysis of various texts and develop critical healing literacies, and (c) how I work towards keeping myself grounded and centered throughout this soul-demanding work.

By employing embodied frameworks, radical feminist epistemologies, and an intersectional analysis, pedagogies of wholeness push against private/public and emotional/rational binaries in schools, and offer concrete ways to help students make meaning from their pain and emotions, and uncover and meet their needs to feel fully seen, heard, and understood. Integrating critical literacy (Morrell, 2008) and socio-emotional literacy practices, critical healing literacies help students shift from being objected to false dominant narratives to becoming the subjects of their own life-affirming narratives. In turn, they are able to lessen the

weight of grief and anger, and ultimately move in the world—not from habits of fear, shame or lack, but from a deep sense of knowing, conviction, and compassion for themselves and their communities.

Keywords: healing literacies, critical pedagogy, embodied pedagogies, teacher research

The dissertation of Stephanie Michele Cariaga is approved.

Teresa McCarty

Tyrone Howard

Patrick Camangian

Daniel Solórzano, Committee Chair

University of California, Los Angeles

2018

DEDICATION

This dissertation is dedicated to:

My former students who have entrusted me with their stories
May your brilliance shine through this work,

My teachers/peoples in the struggle
May we continue to care for ourselves while caring for our students,

My mother, Gloria Consolacion Cariaga
Whose strength and love continues to carry me through.

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VITA

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CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

> *We are in need of a pedagogy that takes into account students' [and teachers'] whole selves—their minds, bodies, emotions, spiritual lives—since accounting for all these levels is necessary for the topics we teach to be most deeply understood.* (Thompson, 2017, p. 2)

Whether burdened by the pressure of standardized testing or simply untrained to help students process the lived realities they bring with them, teachers often question the role of emotion in the classroom, and end up creating "spaces that are safe from righteous rage, or worse, [designing] plans to weed out children who display it" (Duncan-Andrade, 2009, p. 9). Teachers themselves learn to compartmentalize their personal lives from their professional work, separating their own needs from those of students. For Students of Color and teachers with a critical analysis of schools, we know that this epistemological divide is not a matter of convenience, but a means for control. As Bereano states in her introduction to Audre Lorde's (1984) *Sister Outsider*:

> The white western patriarchal ordering of things requires that we believe there is an inherent conflict between what we feel and what we think . . . We are easier to control when one part of our selves is split from another . . . we [must] pay attention to those voices we have been taught to distrust, articulate what they teach us, [and] act upon what we know. (p. 9, 12)

This dissertation therefore explores ways to take back the various ways of knowing we hold in our bodies, minds, and spirits, and channel them into pedagogies of wholeness, to embrace our full humanity and heal from the personal and collective pain we carry in our lives.

Prior to this dissertation, teaching in English classrooms across Los Angeles has exposed me to the importance of healing. I think of Anna, a Latina sophomore whose attention was divided between academics and grief over two devastating losses—an older brother who was murdered in gang violence and a younger brother who was overcome by cancer—and Jocelyn, a Black queer student, whose defiance stemmed largely from the absence of her imprisoned

mother, witnessing the sexual abuse of siblings, and having to navigate a merciless foster care system. Often overcome by various forms of violence, these students would manifest these chronic stressors as apathy, rage, or an anxious inability to balance the demands of school and home. Even as these students demonstrated resilience and poured their hearts into their work, I found myself left with the same question: What are we doing as educators to address the pain, stress, and trauma behind their powerful stories? These Students of Color, like too many others, are the ones whose stories and tenacity drive me to explore pedagogy that centers individual and collective healing in an English classroom.

But I would be remiss if I said this work is just about students. This work is also very much about me: about healing the heartbreak of having been pushed out of a profession that I loved, because of the ways I felt untrained and unsupported to meet the complex needs of my students, and the ways in which schooling took a toll on my own body, mind, and spirit. To put it simply, the schools not only failed my students; they also failed me. My hope is that this dissertation can serve as an offering of reflection, intervention, and restoration: to the Students of Color who deserve more humanizing pedagogies, and to the teachers in the trenches who deserve to be whole in their work.

In this chapter, I discuss the impact of trauma on Students of Color both in and out of schools, highlighting what I call the ethical, pedagogical, epistemological and professional imperatives for centering healing in classrooms. In doing so, I argue for shifting educational discourse from a narrow focus on the mind to a holistic integration of the mind, body, and spirit to enact healing and transformation for and with Students of Color. I conclude with my research goals and questions, explanation of my study, and an overview of following chapters.

Trauma, Learning and Students of Color: A Healing Imperative in Schools

> *My dilemma, and that of other Chicana and women-of-color writers, is twofold: how to write (produce) without being inscribed (reproduced) in the dominant white structure and how to write without reinscribing and reproducing what we rebel against.* (Anzaldúa, 2015, pp. 7–8)

> *Writing is a process of discovery and perception that produces knowledge and conocimiento (insight) . . . I call this impulse the "Coyolxauqui imperative": a struggle to reconstruct oneself and heal the sustos resulting from woundings, traumas, racism, and other acts of violation.* (Anzaldúa, 2015, p. 102)

In writing this dissertation, I face the challenge of working against reinforcing deficit notions of Students of Color as plagued by trauma and therefore in need of someone to save them. Like Anzaldúa (2015) above, my purpose is to harness the power of language to disrupt and transform multiple forms of violence against marginalized peoples, which includes language itself. While my work as an educator has indeed exposed me to the issue of trauma and its impact on schools, I refuse to name this section the traditionally titled "statement of the *problem*" and instead take my inspiration from Anzaldúa to focus on a multi-layered *imperative* for healing in schools. Anzaldúa utilizes the symbol of Coyolxauhqui, the Mesoamerican lunar goddess who continually seeks wholeness, to theorize the necessary process of healing in her scholarship and activism. It is a "symbol for reconstruction and reframing, one that allows for putting the pieces together in a new way" (p. 20).

Similarly, I am committed to engage in research that reframes trauma, not as a *problem*, but as an *imperative*: first, to push back against pathologizing narratives of Students of Color and instead highlight the resistance and resilience of young people in the face of adversity; second, to recognize that young people's painful experiences, while certainly unjust and unfortunate, can also be seen as motivation and resources for new knowledge, pedagogical strategies, healing, and empowerment; and third, to underscore the urgency for praxis in research, where this scholarship

not only works towards reimagining pedagogy for Students of Color but also puts those ideas into much-needed action. My language is intent on naming the problem, but also moving to action. Although the sections below are categorized separately as ethical, pedagogical, epistemological and professional imperatives, they indeed overlap and work together to call for new, subversive pedagogies that support young people in mind, body, and spirit.

Ethical Imperative

Nationally, the impact of adverse experiences on young people is staggering: almost half of children living in the United States have experienced at least one or more kind of trauma (National Survey of Children's Health, 2011/12), and 26 percent of children across the United States will witness or experience a traumatic event by the age of four (National Center for Mental Health Promotion and Youth Violence Prevention, 2012). In the Los Angeles Unified District, a preliminary survey of sixth-graders showed that 98 percent of them have experienced one or more traumatic events in the past year, while 50 percent of students have moderate to severe symptoms of Post-Traumatic Stress Syndrome (Clough, 2015). Meanwhile, students who suffered from several adverse events filed a class-action lawsuit against the Compton Unified School district, where the U.S. district judge recently ruled that trauma could be considered a disability in schools, but refused the plaintiff's demand for the district to require mandatory trauma training for school staff (Turner, 2015).

Other scholars have explored how trauma is culturally situated and influenced by structural inequities, recognizing how children of color are at increased risk for trauma exposure (Buka et al., 2001; Norris, 1992) and that violence has a major influence on the emotional, physical and spiritual health of urban communities (Rich 2009). Smith, Yosso, and Solorzano (2011) have documented the toll that poverty, racism, and lack of employment opportunities has

taken on the mental and physical health of communities of color. Other scholars have focused on the resilience and hope urban youth continue to demonstrate in the face of adversity (Ginwright, 2016; O'Connor, Mueller, & Neal, 2014). The above national and local statistics, combined with this scholarship on the impacts of trauma on Students of Color, certainly necessitates an examination of policies and practices that can support these young people, particularly in an institution that impacts all of them—schools.

Pedagogical Imperative

While the impact of trauma has been largely delineated within the domain of mental health, there is more literature that situates trauma as an educational issue that should be addressed within schools (Jaycox et al., 2006; Ko et al., 2008). Several studies have demonstrated how trauma interferes with learning, in relation to delays in language and brain development (Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration, n.d.), decreased IQ and reading ability (Delaney-Black et al., 2002), lower grade point average (Hurt et al., 2001), decreased high school graduation rates (Grogger, 1997), and absenteeism and suspension rates (Ramirez et al., 2012). Howard and Milner (2014) recommend that teachers be "prepared in a manner that allows [students] to acquire the essential knowledge, skills, and dispositions that are uniquely situated for work in urban schools" (p. 200). Taken together, this literature calls for teachers to recognize how young people of color struggle with poverty, violence, and various oppressions in their communities, and to develop pedagogies that are both trauma-informed and culturally responsive.

Although the National Child Traumatic Stress Network advocates for more research on the impacts of trauma on diverse groups and more training in culturally-competent interventions (Ko, 2005), most trauma-informed efforts focus on culture-neutral interventions, which includes

policy advocacy (Pynoos et al., 2008) and clinical support in schools (Jaycox, 2004). There are fewer publications and programs to specifically train teachers to support young people suffering from trauma (Downey, 2007; National Child Traumatic Stress Network, 2008), which all focus solely on classroom management, and not on integrating trauma-informed care into curricular content. As a teacher who has witnessed both the limiting impact of trauma on Students of Color and learning, and the incredible potential of literacy to heal students on an individual and collective level, I explore ways that the trauma-informed literature can enhance classroom teaching, but also ways that an explicit literacy focus in an English classroom can expand the field of trauma-informed care in education.

Epistemological Imperative

The above literature states a clear case for educators to better prepare themselves to address the various traumas that Students of Color carry with them into their classrooms. Despite this, the "subtractive" nature of schools works to reduce students to cognitive machines detached from their rich history, culture and spirituality (Valenzuela, 1999), and trains teachers to ignore students' intrinsic needs and, as I have been told by numerous administrators, to "just teach."

Such epistemologies that privilege the mind derive from western philosopher Descartes' (1901) *Second Meditation*, where he claimed, "I am in the strict sense only a thing that thinks, that is, I am a mind or intelligence or intellect or reason." This foundational language continues to influence discourse around science, education, and research, where emotion and desire are deemed irrational and therefore invalid, and intellect conquers all in the search for Truth. These deficit notions of the body and emotion helped foster political ideologies that justify the "educating" of "savages" through colonialism and imperialism and the oppression of

"emotional" women through patriarchy. Anzaldúa (2002) asserts:

> Picking holes in the paradigms currently constructing reality . . . you doubt that traditional western science is the best knowledge system, the only true impartial arbiter of reality. You question its definition of progress, whose manifest destiny imperializes other peoples' energies and snuffs out their realities and hopes of a better life. (p. 560)

Within this dualistic paradigm, institutions like schools deem the body, and therefore emotions, as "not only disruptive to the canon, but also excessive in [their] disorderly movements and conduct" (Cruz, 2006, p. 62). Through this study, I disrupt what Delgado Bernal and Villapando (2002) call an "apartheid of knowledge," the institutional distinction between so-called legitimate and illegitimate ways of knowing, which "portray people of color as deficient . . . biased, and non-rigorous" (p. 169). Like other women of color feminist scholars who call for a disrupting of this mind/body split in research (Perez Huber, 2009), pedagogy (Prieto & Villenas, 2012), and praxis (Calderon et al., 2012), I bring to attention the ways that embodied knowledge can pave the path towards critical consciousness and healing in classrooms.

Professional Imperative

The literature not only calls for ethical, pedagogical and epistemological shifts in the classroom to center healing, but also a necessary examination of the impact of trauma on teachers' professional and personal well-being. Much scholarship has been dedicated to exploring the impact of working with traumatized clients on therapists and social workers and correlating professional interventions (Caringi & Pearlman, 2009), but considerably less literature specifically focuses on the role of trauma in teachers' lives (Hydon et al., 2015). While some research documents the long-standing issue of burn-out for teachers (Hakanen, Bakker, & Schaufeli, 2006), particularly for teachers of color (Ingersoll & May, 2011), emerging literature is calling for critical educators to integrate self-care and healing into their professional and social justice goals through their own inquiry (Duncan Andrade, 2011) or with other like-minded

teachers (Pour-Khorshid, 2016). In my dissertation, I explore how self-care strategies can become an integral component of teaching that centers healing for Students of Color. The processes for this kind of literacy and learning need to be made more explicit, as well as the inherent challenges and tensions English teachers must endure to meet the needs of students overwhelmed by acute and structural violence. In doing so, I explore the kinds of boundaries and self-care strategies needed to make a healing pedagogy sustainable.

Research Goals: Centering the bodymindspirit

My dissertation interrogates the epistemological and pedagogical work of an English teacher to subvert the Cartesian logic of the mind/body split to what Lara (2002) and other Chicana Feminist scholars reclaim as the *bodymindspirit*. I explore how pedagogy can help enact what scholar-activist Grace Lee Boggs (2011) calls a paradigm shift: "to be awakened to a personal and compassionate recognition of the inseparable interconnection between our minds, hearts, and bodies; between our physical and psychical well-being; and between our selves and all the other selves in our country" (pp. 33–34).

Specifically, this research focuses on my process as a teacher/researcher in understanding the lived realities of students and developing curriculum to serve needs that arise from those experiences. Epistemologically, I privilege students' experiences, my own experiences, and embodied knowledge as valuable resources for pedagogy and research. By employing a framework that integrates critical race pedagogy, critical literacy, embodied pedagogies, and women of color feminist epistemology, I shed light on dominant epistemologies that privilege cognitive knowledge and highlight more subversive ways of knowing that can guide Students of Color towards individual and collective renewal.

Research Questions and Explanation of Study

With these goals in mind, I explore the following questions, categorized by three different themes:

Trauma and Students of Color

RQ1: How do Students of Color describe the impact of trauma on their lives and learning?

Pedagogies of Healing

RQ2a: How can a teacher create and implement healing pedagogies in an English classroom?

RQ2b: How do Students of Color respond to healing pedagogies in an English classroom?

Sustainable Healing Practice

RQ3: How can a teacher maintain a sustainable healing pedagogy practice?

I focus on my experiences teaching Students of Color in my high school English class during the Fall 2017 semester. The first theme and research question seeks to understand trauma from the standpoint of Students of Color, since the voices and perspectives of Students of Color are largely invisible in the literature on trauma and learning. The second theme, Pedagogies of Healing, is informed by the understandings gathered by the first research question, where students' lived experiences largely shape the development and implementation of curriculum. I develop and reflect on pedagogies of healing in an English classroom in collaboration with students, as I collect data from student work, classroom interactions, and my own pedagogical reflections. For the third theme, I reflect on self and collective-care strategies that can address issues of compassion fatigue, vicarious trauma, and burn-out (Hydon et al., 2015). Combining

auto-ethnography (Chang, 2016) and portraiture (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis, 1997), I create three blended portraits of collective healing by synthesizing participants' stories with my process developing three units throughout the semester.

Overview of Chapters

In Chapter Two, I offer a conceptual framework that defines trauma for this particular research agenda and explores the possibilities of pedagogy that can be both trauma-informed and culturally relevant. Then, I offer a theoretical framework called a Healing Pedagogy of the Body that can fill gaps in the literature and shape my research design, analysis, and curriculum development as a teacher/researcher. In Chapter Three, I describe a pilot study that informed my methodology, then explain my choices for a blended portraiture approach, the context of my research site, and research design. Based on my findings, I introduce a Critical Healing Praxis framework in Chapter Four that serves as a skeletal structure to the blended portraits I present in Chapters Five, Six, and Seven. In these blended portraits, I provide insights into the impact of trauma on Students of Color in their own words, descriptions of curriculum design, pivotal snapshots of student-teacher interactions and healing literacies, and ways I care for myself while taking care of students. In Chapter Eight, I conclude by synthesizing findings from the blended portraits to define pedagogies of wholeness, discuss the significance of engaging in critical healing praxis for the field of education, and offer considerations for educators and researchers to apply these frameworks in their own contexts and communities.

CHAPTER TWO: CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

Overview

Despite the dearth of literature in recognizing classroom spaces as ripe for trauma-informed interventions, there is still incredible potential for classroom teachers, particularly English teachers, to gather insights from the trauma-informed literature to support Students of Color towards thriving and transformation. Howard and Milner (2014) contend that successful teachers in urban schools are able to apply three kinds of knowledge: a wide range of pedagogical strategies, an in-depth grasp of subject matter, and a full understanding of their students racial and cultural assets, values, and ways of being. Given these considerations, Part 1 of this chapter explores the following questions: First, how can English teachers re-tool their pedagogy and interactions with students to be trauma-informed? Second, how can English teachers utilize their subject matter as resources for students to heal from trauma, both individually and collectively? Third, how can English teachers implement a trauma-informed pedagogy that is culturally relevant for Students of Color?

With these questions, I engage with the literature from both trauma-informed interventions and culturally relevant pedagogy in a dialectical manner: on one hand, I emphasize the ways that literacy pedagogy can be expanded to better meet the needs of Students of Color; on the other, I highlight the important parameters English teachers must adhere to as non-clinical professionals. In other words, my focus is not to diagnose or treat student survivors of trauma, but instead on ways to better comprehend the multifaceted needs of Students of Color, support their healing process, and help empower them as learners and agents of social change.

I begin by reviewing definitions of trauma that can be relevant for Students of Color. Then, I detail several themes from trauma-informed scholarship that are most useful for English

teachers working with students who have been impacted by trauma and explore how these concepts have been and can be applied in schools. Throughout, I name the ways in which these concepts and applications are limited in understanding the culturally situated needs and appreciating the collective assets of Students of Color. Afterwards, I draw from emerging healing frameworks and pedagogies (Ginwright, 2009, 2016; Tello & Acosta, 2012) and newer iterations of culturally relevant pedagogy (Paris & Alim, 2014) to conceptualize more complex views of trauma and meaningful ways to develop trauma-informed pedagogy for Students of Color. After describing the gaps that still remain between both trauma-informed frameworks and literature on culturally relevant pedagogy, I discuss theoretical, epistemological, and practical implications for teachers interested in integrating healing pedagogies in urban schools.

I then move into the second part of this chapter to detail the theoretical framework that will inform my research and curriculum design as a teacher/researcher. I propose a Healing Pedagogy of the Body as a framework that can (a) bridge both individual and collective lived experiences of Students of Color, (b) reclaim embodied knowledge as a tool for recovery and empowerment, (c) harness the power of language to deconstruct traumatic experiences and develop narratives of healing, and (d) develop a critical praxis of wholeness in an English classroom.

Part 1: Literature Review

Defining Trauma for Students of Color

While scholars (Alim et al., 2006) document the ways in which working-class youth of color have shown signs of Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder, other scholars (Duncan-Andrade, 2009; Ginwright, 2007, 2016; Tello & Acosta, 2012) agree that this categorization falls short in acknowledging trauma as an ongoing process for urban communities, as opposed to one acute,

defining event. The term *complex trauma* (National Child Traumatic Stress Network, n.d.) may be considered more appropriate in naming the multiple traumas Students of Color endure. More specifically, theories on racial micro-aggressions (Kohli & Solorzano, 2012), Mundane Extreme Environmental Stress (Carrol, 1998) and Racial Battle Fatigue (Smith et al., 2011) explore the layered subtleties and devastating cumulative impact of stress on people of color. Tello and Acosta (2012) add the dimension of cultural genocide, linking historical and intergenerational trauma to analyze the experiences of Latino boys and men. Although not specific to race or culture, the burgeoning field of *developmental trauma* (Van der Kolk, 2014) can be helpful to educators in understanding the explicit impact of early trauma on children and their learning processes.

For this research project, I combine these definitions of trauma for Students of Color as *acute, complex, structural,* and *developmental* to acknowledge and understand the multifaceted nature of stress and trauma on young people facing different kinds of violence on a daily basis. These stressors only become compounded in schools that neither recognize the ways urban youth internalize forms of oppression, nor validate histories of resistance and resilience in the face of such abuse. It is important to define trauma as a socially situated phenomenon for young people of color that manifests itself concurrently on multiple levels—internally, interpersonally, and institutionally. It is equally important to disrupt the presumed pathology of urban communities, which can consequently disrupt this problematic stereotype:

> . . . denies the assets and resources in urban communities and those that are especially found among Black, Brown, and economically disadvantaged youth who reside therein, and might be capitalized upon for the purpose of teaching and learning. Some of these assets and resources may be in fact be found in the processes by which these youth and their families have coped productively with the specific risks they have encountered. (O'Connor, Mueller, & Neal, 2014, p.88)

The following section examines the ways that trauma-informed literature can support English teachers in unpacking and addressing needs of students facing overwhelming violence in their lives and communities. I discuss how the literature focuses on individual healing and therefore lacks a structural analysis and an appreciation for culture as a resource for healing.

Trauma-Informed Care in and out of Schools

To meet the demands of classroom spaces impacted by adverse childhood and community experiences, the following themes from trauma-informed literature appear to be helpful for English teachers: *safety, connectedness, narrative, emotional literacy,* and *autonomy.* These inter-related themes surface throughout the literature that build upon each other to develop a trauma-informed approach that can be applied to pedagogy and subject matter.

According to much of the literature of trauma-informed care, the primary goal is to help survivors of violence regain a sense of safety. Perry and Szalavitz (2009) note that stress responses must be regulated so that children can access their higher brain functions, and Van der Kolk (2014) refers to "islands of safety" as strategies survivors can take to help calm themselves down during moments of arousal. Besides these regulation methods, Herman (1997) describes highly structured support groups, where facilitators protected the group's sense of safety by clarifying norms, goals, and time limits for discussion. In response to traumatic experiences that were dominated by unpredictable danger, the goal of trauma-informed care is to guide survivors to a sense of safety through predictable structures, reliable support, and a roster of internal resources.

While there is some literature that helps teachers apply these strategies for safety within the classroom on an internal and interpersonal level (Downey, 2007), there largely lacks recognition of the influences of systems of oppression on safety. For example, for a student

who, from the moment she leaves home, has to vigilantly dodge sexual harassment on the street and in school, sees armed security officers constantly loom the campus boundaries, and regards many of her teachers as disinvested in her well-being beyond her academic success, the notion of safety has to be addressed on multiple fronts that cannot be easily addressed within the confines of one teacher's classroom. Leonardo and Porter (2010) indict classroom spaces for bolstering a mythical sense of safety for People of Color when engaging in dialogue about race; this idea can be applied to the sweeping assumption of "safe space" within schools, which oftentimes is more rhetoric than reality. In the first blended portrait I present later, I discuss in more detail what it takes to cultivate safety in a community and school that is often considered un-safe.

Inextricable from the theme of safety, connected relationships are also an integral component to trauma-informed care. Consistent loving relationships are a key factor in the literature in empowering survivors of trauma (Ginwright, 2016; Herman, 1997; Perry & Szalavitz, 2009; Van der Kolk, 2014). For these scholars, a sense of connectedness is necessary to disrupt the residual effects of trauma, which include isolation, shame and self-hatred. The literature in culturally relevant pedagogy easily echoes the importance of relationship-building and care in meeting the needs of Students of Color (Howard, 2003; Valenzuela, 1999), but also calls attention to issues that the trauma-informed literature falls short in acknowledging—namely, the ways that teacher's racial and cultural identities play a pivotal role in their ability to develop meaningful relationships with Students of Color (Howard, 2010).

Another integral component of trauma-informed care is perhaps the most relevant to English teachers: the use of narrative to reconstruct meaning from the pain of trauma and courageously express a hard-pressed truth. Van der Kolk (2014)'s description of the power of narrative illustrates the interplay between safety, connectedness, and testimony:

> Finding words where words were absent before and, as a result, being able to share your deepest pain and deepest feelings with another human being . . . in which hitherto unspoken words can be discovered, uttered, and received, is fundamental to healing the isolation of trauma. (p. 235)

Herman (1997) advises that the use of narrative is truly healing when survivors recount the traumatic events *with* the accompanying emotions that they felt not just in the past, but also in the present, as they are able to integrate their survivor stories into their current sense of self. In a similar vein, Kirkland (2014) advocates for urban school teachers to re-imagine classroom literacy practices to better serve the needs of marginalized students through genres like narratives of loss, remembrance, and mourning.

Even with the power of storytelling as a resource for healing, the trauma-informed literature is also useful in delineating the limitations of narrative in English classrooms for students who have experienced trauma. Given the primary call for safety in trauma-informed care, narrative is only useful, and even possible, when students have a genuine feeling of safety (Herman, 1997; Van der Kolk, 2014). As such, the literature cautions against students being forced to share their stories, especially if there is a possibility of re-traumatization. Once students do choose to tell their story, teachers must help students to "safely dip one toe in the water and then take it out again, thus approaching the truth gradually" (Van der Kolk, 2014, p. 245). Herman (1997) explains that telling one's story is insufficient, as the social aspect of storytelling is also crucial. While narratives can prove to be an empowering tool for students in the classroom, the trauma-informed literature agrees that it is vital for teachers to refer students who have survived various violences to the appropriate mental health services (Ko et. al, 2008). English teachers wanting to utilize healing narratives in their classrooms need to first consider their readiness to employ these important boundaries (which necessitates proper training in trauma-informed teaching), and second, must be explicit with students about the terms of

mandatory reporting in schools (which requires hard conversations with students about what they're willing, and not wiling, to share). In the second blended portrait I present later, I describe this delicate process of following up with a student who shares a difficult experience from her past.

Emotions also play a significant role in the manifestation and healing of trauma. This theme is perhaps the most important contribution from the trauma-informed literature for schools to grapple with, because of the way that the "educational system has focused nearly obsessively on cognitive development and almost completely ignored children's emotional and physical needs" (Perry & Szalavitz, 2009, p. 213). Van der Kolk (2014) lauds body awareness and mindfulness techniques as meaningful strategies that "would make an enormous difference if teachers . . . were thoroughly schooled in emotional-regulation techniques" (p. 207). Instead of shying away from the overwhelming emotions students may bring to the classroom, Herman (1997) calls for trauma-informed service providers to reframe emotions like grief as acts of courage. In the culturally relevant pedagogy literature, emotional literacy is perhaps the most under-researched, and therefore under-valued, potential tool for diminishing the achievement gap between marginalized students and their privileged counterparts. Throughout this dissertation, I explore ways to develop a more complete, humanizing pedagogy with Students of Color in an English classroom, and to utilize emotion as fuel to inspire individual and collective healing.

Autonomy, another theme found throughout the trauma-informed literature, is a challenge to schools that structurally and ideologically regard students as objects rather than subjects (Helig, Khalifa, & Tillman, 2014). Because of the perceived helplessness that results from traumatic experiences, several researchers (Harris & Fallot, 2001; Herman, 1997; Van der Kolk, 2014) propose that survivors be given ample amounts of choice and opportunities for

collaboration to reconnect them with a sense of empowerment. Still, the scholars in trauma literature fail to identify ways to "transform the root causes of stress . . . and overly rely on individual character development and social emotional learning as the antidote to building healthy, strong young people" (Ginwright, 2016, p. 16). Within the context of urban schools, where teachers are often burdened by standardized testing and crowded classrooms, it is difficult to fully value and encourage autonomy from Students of Color. Throughout the blended portraits of this dissertation, I explore ways to be creative within the confines of professional demands to give students choice within the curriculum and build collaborative opportunities in the classroom.

Overall, the trauma-informed literature helps teachers unpack the needs behind perceived resistant behavior of students and understand how to address those needs through cultivating safety, trust, and empowerment in the classroom. English teachers can utilize narrative and emotional literacy as tools for healing, but within explicit boundaries that respect students' choices and need for safety. As a whole, this literature focuses mainly on individual healing that disregards structural influences on a person's ability to feel secure, in control, and connected with others. The next section shifts into newer frameworks that can help educators see both trauma and healing as political processes tied to identity, culture, and power.

Healing-centered Frameworks and Pedagogies

Ginwright's (2009, 2016) concept of *healing justice* offers one of the most comprehensive frameworks to understand the ways that communities of color endure and heal from trauma on internalized, interpersonal and institutional levels. He defines trauma as an ecological phenomenon where structural oppression harms whole communities and conceptualizes *radical healing* as a process that utilizes intentional relationship building, healing

dialogue circles, mindfulness strategies, and community activism. For Ginwright, the goal is to help people of color return to a sense of individual and collective hope, where he regards healing and hope-building as a political action that transforms both relationships and institutions. By balancing the personal with the political, pain and recovery, reconciliation and wellness, this framework is particularly helpful for English teachers to recognize healing as a crucial resource for social justice in the classroom. Although Ginwright does emphasize emotional literacy as a *radical healing* strategy, he under-theorizes the role emotions can be utilized as motivation for learning, restoration, and empowerment, particularly through teaching in a classroom. While his discussion of pedagogy clarifies traits necessary for teacher activists to instill hope in Students of Color, this dissertation seeks to build on those traits by explaining the complex processes teachers need to undertake on the path towards radical healing in classrooms.

In Tello and Acosta's (2012) framework of *La Cultural Cura,* or "culture heals," they maintain that healing is "inextricably linked to restoring one's true cultural identity as the foundation of well-being" (p. 24). These scholars move from a trauma-informed intervention to what they call a "healing-informed" approach that emphasizes the wisdom and ways of being within Latino and indigenous communities as necessary resources for recovery and wellness. Although focused specifically on Latino boys and men, the themes of cultural integrity and pride, individual and collective responsibility, and healthy interdependence are useful for teachers to enhance trauma-informed pedagogy in a culturally competent manner. Most notably, this literature emphasizes how these modes of healing are not new, the way trauma-informed scholarship tends to be framed, but are rather part of an existing legacy of ancestral healing and wisdom. Given the complex and continually shifting identities of students in urban schools, in

this dissertation I work towards complicating what it means to help students restore their "true cultural identity" in ways that do not essentialize culture for various Students of Color.

Culturally Relevant and Sustaining Pedagogies

Building off of early iterations of culturally relevant pedagogy (Ladson-Billings, 1995), Paris and Alim (2014) develop a sharper definition of pedagogy that stays in touch with the changing needs of marginalized students by employing what they call a *culturally sustaining pedagogy*. Calling for literacy teachers to be reflective in how they perceive student identities and ways of learning, *culturally sustaining pedagogy* can be especially helpful in accounting for the dynamic ways students respond to stress and trauma in their lives and communities, and help teachers gather a multitude of texts, media, and topics to engage youth to positively cope with such stressors. Finally, McCarty and Lee's (2014) work with indigenous youth in building *critical culturally sustaining/revitalizing pedagogy* aligns well with Tello and Acosta's (2012) healing-informed approach, which can provide a more nuanced analysis of how current schooling policies rob students of their emotional and spiritual ways of being and thinking, and advocate for the need to reclaim such assets through purposeful teaching practices.

Remaining theoretical, epistemological and practical considerations

For English teachers interested in utilizing literacy classrooms as sites for social justice, Morrell (2007) reminds us that students can only become "informed and empowered consumers of larger social collectives if they are self-actualized and if they have begun the process of healing and loving themselves" (p. 180). The trauma-informed literature can help English teachers understand important pre-cursors for such learning and empowerment, which includes safety, control, and trust. It also clarifies how narrative and relationship-building are potential components to inspire healing, as well as the necessary boundaries teachers need to respect as

they cultivate spaces of safe and empowered learning. Ginwright's (2016) and Tello and Acosta's (2012) culturally competent frameworks help situate trauma and learning within structural oppression, and embrace culture as integral resources for collective healing and hope. The expanding literature on culturally relevant pedagogy paves the path for English teachers to implement trauma-informed pedagogies that understand the ever-changing social context of trauma, learning, and healing for Students of Color. Perhaps the most significant contribution that this combined literature can make is the ability to reframe narratives of loss and victimization to ones of self-determination and collectivity.

Theoretically, English teachers, teacher educators, and schools as a whole need to consider how theories of trauma-informed care, culturally sustaining pedagogy, and others, can "refocus our thinking about urban literacy learning and challenge what counts as literacy and successful school-based literacy performance" (Kirkland, 2014, p. 408) and conceptualize healing literacies as a worthwhile genre within culturally relevant pedagogy. Epistemologically, these bodies of literature can utilize other frameworks to help educators consider how embodied knowledge like emotions can be legitimate resources of knowledge that can enhance not only cognitive learning tasks, but motivation to seek and enact social change. On a practical level, "more critical analyses and detailed descriptions are needed of how [pedagogies and literacies of healing - added] operate for different ethnic groups generally, and in learning situations specifically" (Gay, 2014, p. 302). The processes for this kind of literacy and learning need to be made more explicit, as well as the inherent challenges and tensions English teachers must endure to meet the needs of students overwhelmed by structural violence. The following questions, therefore, will inform the next section where I discuss my theoretical frameworks:

- How can individual and collective healing coincide in the English classroom?

- What does it look like to integrate cognitive and emotional processes in the classroom to redefine literacies for urban youth?
- What are the possibilities of blending the personal and the professional as an English teacher to develop a sustainable healing pedagogy practice?

I will address these concerns in the next section, where I synthesize various theoretical frameworks into what I call a Healing Pedagogy of the Body—a framework which pushes the epistemological, pedagogical, and professional boundaries of literacy development to meet the holistic needs of Students of Color and teachers who center healing in English classrooms.

Part 2: Theoretical Framework

As a woman of color/teacher/researcher, I believe in the inextricable connection between scholarship, pedagogy, and activism, which can "produce theory, method and praxis for building solidarities across diverse peoples" (Delgado-Bernal et al., 2006, p.1). Here, I blend theoretical and pedagogical frameworks to discuss several concepts that inform and weave my work together as a teacher and researcher. By blurring the distinctions between theory and practice, my work exemplifies ways that educators make sense of their own work and reclaim intellectual agency against neoliberal efforts to delegitimize teacher voice and autonomy. With an emphasis on reciprocity and wholeness, these concepts reflect the kinds of teaching practices I implement with students and the ways I gather and analyze data. After introducing several theories, I synthesize them into a framework called a Healing Pedagogy of the Body, which guides my explorations as a teacher/researcher for this dissertation.

Critical Race Theory and Critical Race Pedagogy

The achievement gap, or what Ladson-Billings (2006) prefers to call an "educational debt," continues to persist for Students of Color in K–12 schools (Howard, 2010). Recognizing

this, Critical Race Theory (CRT) in Education emerged as a framework to analyze how Students of Color navigate, resist, and persist through schooling institutions (Delgado & Stefancic, 2012). The five tenets of CRT hones in on social inequality in multiple, intersectional forms, challenges the idea of race neutrality, names injuries in order to transform institutions, provides an interdisciplinary lens that can draw upon the law, psychology, sociology, and ethnic studies, and legitimizes the lived experiences of people of color (Yosso & Solorzano, 2005). Scholars (Lynn, 1999; Lynn, Jennings, & Hughes, 2013) eventually developed Critical Race Pedagogy (CRP) as a means to explicitly move CRT into praxis, where educators could recognize race as central to a liberatory practice, understand and negotiate power dynamics within the classroom, and reflect on their own positionalities in building reciprocal relations with Students of Color. CRT and CRP's focus on the endemic and systemic nature of intersecting oppressions (Lynn et al., 2013) are helpful in defining and analyzing trauma and healing as socially situated for young people of color, as well as designing and implementing pedagogy that responds to trauma by honoring the assets that such young people bring to the classroom.

Critical Literacy

Whereas CRT and CRP derive from the law and social justice movements, Critical Literacy rose from popular education movements to utilize language and discourse as tools for liberation (Freire, 1987). Several Critical Literacy scholars redefine literacy development not as a neutral or benign process, but a social and ideological one (Street, 1984), comprising of multiple literacies that take into account the lived realities of students to critique discourse and create their own (New London Group, 1996). As Morrell (2008) states, Critical Literacy not only includes "the critical navigation of hegemonic discourse; it is also essential to the redefining of the self and the transformation of oppressive social structures" (p. 5). Besides these scholars,

I will also draw from authors like Toni Morrison and Ta-Nehisi Coates, whose literary and autobiographical work aligns with the Critical Literacy call to reclaim language and narrative as instruments to critique power and create narratives in the names of the most marginalized. While these two authors do not explicitly call themselves Critical Literacy scholars, their work can expand this theoretical and pedagogical framework to recognize the body and healing as integral to analyzing and developing a full humanizing literacy pedagogy.

Women of Color Feminist Epistemology

While both CRT, CRP and Critical Literacy are powerful frameworks to name and disrupt the injuries of various oppressions through classroom praxis, my experiences working with Students of Color as an English teacher left me still wanting ways to develop a "pedagogy that [dared] to subvert the mind/body split and [allowed] us to be whole in the classroom, and as a consequence wholehearted" (hooks, 1994, p. 193). I still desired a language, or even permission, to place pain and healing at the center of my analysis and praxis, and to position my personal struggles alongside those of my students. Here, I combine the work from Black, Chicana, and Pinay scholars into what I call Women of Color Feminist Epistemology (WCFE), a framework that can help teachers conceptualize how to integrate multiple ways of knowing and being as resources for learning and empowerment. Bridging personal and political healing, WCFE navigates numerous tensions in research and education, by challenging the over-rationalization of knowledge by reintegrating bodymindspirit (Lara, 2002) towards a theory of wholeness and negotiating between multiple dichotomies (e.g., individual/collective, insider/outsider, emotional/rational, spiritual/material) to embrace both interconnectivity and difference. As such, a WCFE paves the path for me to conceptualize individual and collective healing as resources for research and pedagogy.

Embodied Pedagogies

Most recently, higher education scholars have examined the use of contemplative strategies like meditation and yoga to deepen critical analysis in women's studies and ethnic studies courses (Berila, 2015; Thompson, 2017). These scholars draw from the theories I outlined above, calling to transforming disembodied classrooms to "embodied classrooms":

> Where we take seriously that the mind extends throughout the body and the body throughout the mind; where we attend to individual bodies, the collective body, and our bodies in space; and where we know that it is impossible to completely separate one body from another, both living bodies and those of our ancestors since our DNA and memories live in each other. Certain activities can heighten a mind-body connection . . . telling the truth, honoring body language, listening deeply. All of this gives us a chance to remember our belonging to each other and to the planet. (Berila, 2015, p. 113)

Both Berila and Thompson argue that systems of oppression cannot be dismantled simply at a cognitive level because of the ways they seep into our psyches and bodies. Embodied reflection therefore becomes important to unpacking internalized dominant narratives that come from schools, communities, and a society that promotes patriarchal, White supremacist, and hetero-normative logic. Throughout the blended portraits in this study, I use these understandings of interconnection and embodied analysis to frame curriculum design and interactions between students and me. I apply other embodied frameworks from psycho-therapists (Weller, 2015) and somatic leadership trainings to enhance literacy practices in the English classroom and cultivate more holistic pedagogies.

Part Three: Towards a Healing Pedagogy of the Body

Working in tandem, the above frameworks comprehensively help me understand the impact of trauma and its relation to race and other intersecting structures of power. They also help me recognize students in their entire wholeness, where multiple epistemologies and literacies can co-exist in an English classroom, which can then inform the development of

healing pedagogies that serve their particular, complex needs. Below, I synthesize this scholarship and propose a Healing Pedagogy of the Body as a holistic framework that can meet such needs. Exploring and integrating concepts more deeply, I discuss themes that work towards foregrounding the body as an epistemic and pedagogical resource. Focusing on the body as a (a) site of trauma and healing, (b) source of wisdom, (c) channel for narrative, and (d) tool for healing pedagogy, I hope to reclaim embodied knowledge and harness the holistic and political power of literacy in an English classroom. In doing so, I argue that privileging the body in research and pedagogy is necessary to developing a radical praxis of healing for Students of Color.

Body as Site of Trauma and Healing

> All our phrasing—race relations, racial chasm, racial justice, racial profiling, white privilege, even white supremacy—serves to obscure that racism is a visceral experience, that it dislodges brains, blocks airways, rips muscle, extracts organs, cracks bones, breaks teeth. You must never look away from this. You must always remember that the sociology, the history, the economics, the graphs, the charts, the regressions all land, with great violence, upon the body. (Coates, 2015, p. 10)

As a critical teacher/researcher, I am not interested in looking at trauma as an "incorporeal abstraction" (Anzaldúa, 2015), but as a material reality lived daily by Students of Color. Neither am I interested in erasing my own body as a teacher whose emotions, spirit, and well-being are inevitably impacted by the traumas that students bring with them into the classroom. As Coates emphasizes above, even the terms that we use to theorize violence for people of color cloud the very visceral experiences of trauma that land, ultimately, "upon the body." In fact, Coates underscores disembodiment—the inability to see, feel, control, and employ the power of one's body—as essential to understanding and dismantling racial oppression.

In articulating a Healing Pedagogy of the Body, I raise these examples of embodied ways of knowing to reflect on the need to disrupt de-contextualized understandings of trauma for Students of Color and hold space for the body within an institution that denies its epistemic and pedagogical value. Combined, CRT, WCFE, and embodied pedagogies point to the ways that colonialism, White supremacy, capitalism, and hetero-patriarchy must be analyzed from the particular, lived realities of marginalized peoples (Calderon et al., 2012; Yosso 2002). As articulated above, these lived realities cannot be understood without honing in on the body. As the explicit target of violence, the ongoing site of trauma, and a vehicle for healing, the body is essential to understanding and disrupting all forms of oppression. It is integral to understanding violence as a function of dominance, and it is central to understanding unhealed trauma as the byproduct that keeps systems of oppression intact. In exploring trauma and healing for Students of Color, the body—as belonging to the students I will be working with and referring to my own—must be at the center of this study.

Centering the body illuminates the ways that trauma manifests as an acute, complex, structural, and developmental experience for Students of Color. Utilizing a CRT framework helps me recognize trauma as a collective, endemic reality for Students of Color (Delgado & Stefancic, 2012), while a WCFE will remind me to not overlook the personal traumas experienced in students' lives (Lorde, 2012), and to not ignore the impact of students' experiences on my own bodymindspirit (Calderon et al., 2012). Additionally, these frameworks look at individual and collective healing as mutual forces to be explored and utilized as a teacher/researcher. Community Cultural Wealth (Yosso, 2005), which outlines and reclaims the collective assets of Communities of Color, can be fruitful in reframing deficit narratives of students as "damaged" by violence to a more complex portrait of young people persisting

through, and learning from, various challenges in their communities. With my work that centers the body in research and teaching, I expand and integrate embodied ways of knowing, teaching, and learning as forms of Community Cultural Wealth.

Body as Source of Wisdom

> If the psychic split of modern subjectivity is to be healed and made whole, then I must return to the place of beginnings: the body. This body has a History that it needs to unpack and reconstruct. If I want to return to the place of beginnings, I must re-trace my steps and work my way back to the wisdom of my body. (Strobel, 2010, p. 6)

In response to an "apartheid of knowledge" (Delgado Bernal & Villalpando, 2002) in education, academia, and activism, women of color scholars have theorized about the body's inherent sense of knowing (Anzaldúa, 2015; Cervantes Soon, 2014; Cruz, 2006; Lorde, 2012; Moraga, 1981). As Strobel indicates above, the body is not only a container for ancestral and historical wisdom, but a vessel through which individual and collective healing can take place. Employing CRT, WCFE, and embodied frameworks in my dissertation assists me in challenging the epistemological and pedagogical dominance of rational thinking over embodied ways of knowing. As a teacher/researcher, I explore what happens when we look to the body first to understand students' needs and develop curriculum from that starting point. I also reflect on my own embodied process for teaching and interacting with students. In doing so, I interrogate the kinds of academic, social, and transformative shifts that are made possible when educators begin with the body as a source of wisdom.

Anzaldúa's conceptualization of *conocimiento* (2002; 2015), an intricate and organic process that links self-reflection with outward action, offers me the most comprehensive healing framework to address my research and pedagogical concerns. Anzaldúa theorized *conocimiento* as a process of multiple paths that can intersect, interrupt, and ultimately work together to create a new consciousness. It is in confronting pain, and being aware of our resistance to it, that we

can find healing that leads to "awakening, insights, understandings, and courage, and the motivation to engage in concrete ways that have the potential to bring us into compassionate interactions" (Anzaldúa, 2002, p. 530). I utilize the paths of *conocimiento* as both a pedagogical and analytical tool to mark students' and my own journeys of healing in an English classroom.

I also focus on emotions as a particular embodied way of knowing in the English classroom. Outside of my chosen frameworks, several scholars have described the utility of emotions in learning and applying knowledge (Immordino-Yang & Damasio, 2007) and a sense of self (Fosha, Siegel, & Solomon, 2009). While these understandings of emotion are helpful to my project, I focus on ways that marginalized communities experience and often hide righteous anger, resentment and sadness in the face of deep injustice (Anzaldúa, 2015; Lorde, 1984). Jaggar (1989) defines these feelings as "outlaw emotions" that marginalized groups can use to challenge dominant notions and epistemologies to create individual and collective change. Utilizing embodied pedagogies helps me understand and utilize emotions as a tool for learning, connection, and transformation. Instead of suppressing emotion as a barrier to learning, I reflect on "ways to use [emotions] to fuel actions, actions that could alter the very circumstances of oppression feeding [those emotions]" (Lorde, 1988, p. 44).

I also utilize Delgado-Bernal's (1998) concept of "cultural intuition" to reflect on my own body as a point of reflection for my research and pedagogy. Delgado-Bernal describes cultural intuition as a dynamic worldview that is achieved and nurtured by multiple sources like personal, professional, and community experience, and the analytical research process. In my work, I expand the notion of cultural intuition to include the embodied processes that inform my analysis and pedagogy. As I explore what makes a sustainable healing pedagogy practice and attempt to prevent burnout, I privilege my own body in my reflections, analysis, and teaching.

Body as Channel for Narrative

> For me, writing is a gesture of the body, a gesture of creativity, a working from the inside out . . . The material body is center, and central. The body is the ground of thought. The body is a text. Writing is not about being in your head; it's about being in your body. (Anzaldúa, 2015, p. 5)

The above sections point to the need to re-envision teaching and literacy practices that genuinely connect with students' lived realities. I examine the role of the body in naming the forces of oppression, motivating students to develop critical literacy, and paving the path towards healing and freedom. As implicated by Anzaldúa above, without the body, the creative, political, and healing potential of language is left inert and infertile. By exploring a pedagogy of healing that is rooted in the body, I uncover the generative and liberatory potential of language in an English classroom. Engaging in this kind of pedagogy is certainly difficult, since I was conditioned to operate under institutions where the mind knows all, where the body "is not only disruptive to the canon, but is also excessive in its disorderly movements and conduct" (Cruz, 2006, p. 62). But as Strobel (2010) states, the body has "its own wisdom about where it wants to go and what language it wants to speak" (p. 5). My responsibility and role as a teacher/researcher is to foreground the body in the development and implementation of literacy practices, by articulating students' and my embodied processes of speaking truth to power.

Centering the body in literacy pedagogy also opens up possibilities for radical, transgressive narratives. As students learn to speak, learn, and write from the body, they produce new iterations of counter-narratives (Yosso, 2005), or alternative identity stories (Anzaldúa, 2015) that push back against pedagogical tendencies to privilege the mind. In this study, I develop pedagogies that "unveil the laws that bound [the] body" and recognize pain, emotions, and other embodied processes as catalysts for literacy practices and social change (Coates, 2015, p. 63). Centering the body in this dissertation is not simply an exercise in innovating literacy

practices, but more importantly a political act that speaks back to centuries of mis-education and reclaims the body and language as tools for freedom.

Besides transgressing epistemological, ideological, and pedagogical boundaries, a Healing Pedagogy of the Body also re-imagines new ways of being, relating, and learning in an English classroom. Women of color scholars (Anzaldúa, 2015; Nievera-Lozano, 2016; Strobel, 2010) have theorized about the healing power of narrative, where fragmented identities and histories can become whole again through a centering of emotion and spirituality. Such "body-stories" (Strobel, 2010) help students grieve through personal and historical traumas (Anzaldúa, 2015), create intimacy between peoples in common struggle (hooks, 1994), nurture a sense of safety and protection by naming the pain and the path towards healing (Morrison, 2004), and "nourish our colonized souls" (Tintiangco-Cubales & Sacramento, 2009). As these embodied narratives of healing make sense of the past, they also are able to point to the future in their ability to reconstruct new, subversive stories that bring hope and resistance.

A Healing Pedagogy of the Body therefore meets the call of Critical Literacy scholars to redefine and politicize literacy practices. To better serve students' individual needs, Morrell (2008) asks critical teachers to consider how reading and writing can help students enact self-care, where students experience:

> . . . legitimately the emotions that accompany the creation of the texts that they read . . . [and] become more willing to write to politicize and to convey the powerful and myriad emotions that are at the core of the human spirit. (p. 172)

Likewise, Kirkland (2014) challenges teachers to expand literary genres to incorporate emotions like grief into writing assignments. To serve students' collective needs, Winn (2013) calls for a Restorative English practice that heals community conflict and allows for peace-keeping. Critical teacher/researcher Camangian (2010) advocates for critically caring literacies that tap

into youth confusion and anger to disrupt cultural self-hate and transform unjust conditions. In this dissertation, I describe how I re-imagine Freire's (2000) idea of problem-posing pedagogy, where the body is used to locate personal and collective needs and develop critical analyses. Ultimately, the goal of a Healing Pedagogy of the Body is for students to deconstruct and produce "texts that allow them to feel and act more fully human in the world" (Morrell, 2008, p. 177).

Body as Tool for Healing Pedagogy

This literacy framework may begin with the body, but its reach is towards the radical integration of the bodymindspirit in the classroom and beyond. WCFE scholars have articulated pedagogies that subvert discourses of disembodiment: Pendleton Jimenez (2006) calls for a "pedagogy on the borderlands that can house the irrational, the angry, the tears, alongside the philosophical and analytical" (p.126), while Prieto and Villenas (2012) describe a *nepantla pedagogy* that thrives on liminality and can "signal uncertain terrain, crossings, moving between identities, and confronting and contesting power" (p. 424). Pinay scholars (Nievera-Lozano, 2016; Tintiangco-Cubales & Sacramento, 2009) theorize a Pinayist pedagogigal praxis that utilizes personal and global pain to incite critical analysis, pedagogy, connection, and transformation. These conceptualizations offer an appropriate lens to explore how student-teacher interactions can shift classrooms from "dualistic modes of inquiry" (Elenes, 2006, p. 216) to embrace more complex, often contradictory ways of relating, knowing, and learning. The concept of *bodymindspirit* (Lara, 2002) works to disrupt such oppressive paradigms where students and teachers can return to a sense of wholeness and connection through literacies of healing.

My own embodied learning process becomes key to developing a Healing Pedagogy of the Body. Informed by WCFE and embodied frameworks, this dissertation blurs the distinctions between what is emotional/rational and personal/professional in my work. My body and critical reflexivity become teaching tools I can use to model vulnerability, self/collective care, and radical love. With my focus on developing a sustainable healing pedagogy practice, my teaching requires a careful navigation between an openness to share with students and clear boundaries that preserve my own well-being. In the paths of conocimiento, Anzaldúa (2015) describes this place of in-between as nepantla and the role of the mediator as a nepantlera:

> In nepantla, we undergo the anguish of changing our perspectives crossing a series of cruz calles, junctures, and thresholds, some leading to a different way of relating to people and surroundings and others to the creation of a new world. Nepantleras such as artistas/activistas help us mediate these transitions, help us make the crossings, and guide us through the transformation process.

In sharing my own embodied paths toward wholeness as I work with, teach and learn from Students of Color, I explore ways that English teachers can take on the role of nepantleras, as well as the challenges that arise when diving into such a personal and political journey.

With an aim towards reciprocity, a Healing Pedagogy of the Body has the potential for both students and teachers to be whole in the classroom. As hooks (1994) states, "any classroom that employs a holistic model of learning will also be a place where teachers grow and are empowered by the process" (p. 21). My own healing process as a teacher/researcher is not just incidental to this work, but crucial—both to my own preservation and to my ability to continue serving students' needs. The concept of Racial Realism, coined by CRT pioneer Derrick Bell (1991), forcefully admonishes that racial oppression is a permanent feature of American society. As such, his thesis begrudgingly shines a light that violence, and therefore trauma, may be a permanent part of teaching students in disenfranchised communities. Bell also reminds civil

rights activists that although sweeping victories may remain elusive under the perspective of Racial Realism, the ongoing struggle for freedom is still worth fighting. Or as Anzaldúa (2002) puts it, "There is never any resolution, just the process of healing" (p. 538). Informed by this analysis, a Healing Pedagogy of the Body requires my work to not just focus on providing healing spaces for students, but to also carve spaces for my own processing, recharging, and recovery. While it is difficult to admit that trauma is perhaps endemic to working with and teaching Students of Color, this realistic stance frees educators to develop radically focused strategies in the classroom.

Combined, these intersectional and embodied frameworks give pedagogues permission to place their personal narratives alongside those they research and teach; to pay attention to righteous anger and grief as teaching tools; and to immerse an unapologetic "daring to love" (Cervantes-Soon, 2014, p. 104) throughout research and pedagogy. They support me in reintegrating *bodymindspirit* into my teaching practice and enhance my ability to genuinely connect with students' lived realities. In doing so, I legitimize alternative epistemologies, where students and teachers alike can "become motivated to overcome pain, trauma, or grief . . . [and] engender a solidarity that moves us towards a collective effort of healing, empowerment, and resistance" (Cervantes-Soon, 2014, p. 121).

CHAPTER THREE: METHODOLOGY

Given my research goals and conceptual frameworks, I needed a robust methodology that could: (a) understand the complexities of trauma and healing not as a pathological phenomenon, but as a means to better understand the needs and assets of Students of Color; (b) focus on body, mind, and spirit as epistemological and pedagogical resources; and (c) be expansive enough to center both student *and* teacher experiences in the classroom, not simultaneously, but dialectically. Moreover, I do not want to romanticize the classroom as a place of magical remedies of misery, nor do I want to simplify the work of healing as a streamlined process, especially given the constraints of teaching in disenfranchised communities. Rather, I examine the messy process of learning and teaching that can lead to spiritual and political renewal. In this chapter, I review takeaways from a pilot study that led me to frameworks able to meet these demands. Then, I describe a Blended Portraiture methodology that synthesizes Auto-Ethnography (Chang, 2016) and Portraiture (Lightfoot & Davis, 1997) to best suit my research agenda. Next, I introduce the school and classroom context where my study takes place and explain how I chose focal student participants. I then discuss how data collection coincides with curriculum development throughout a 20-week semester, and how my analysis results in three blended portraits. Afterward, I discuss limitations of this study and how future scholarship can address them.

Pilot Study: Takeaways, Limitations, and Moving Forward

Interested in exploring teacher practitioner research, I developed a pilot study that focused on pedagogy and student experiences from a middle school elective class called "Young Empowered Women." The goal of the pilot was to understand how life experiences shape students' sense of self, how pedagogical strategies could help them understand those

experiences, and how student participation in the class could impact their sense of empowerment. Utilizing ethnographic and auto-ethnographic methods (Chang, 2016; Merriam, 2009), I combined interviews, observations, and document analysis with a reflective approach that examined my process of developing and implementing a curricular unit. In order to highlight bodymindspirit as a praxis that could guide young women towards a path of empowerment, I combined two students' stories with my own narrative, pedagogical reflections, and frameworks.

My positionality as a teacher/researcher gave me both epistemic privilege and pedagogical advantage, in that the interview process helped me create a safe space for participants to share their ideas and experiences, co-create knowledge about the research topic, and strengthen my pedagogy. I was surprised by the ways in which interviewing students and analyzing their writing could help me formatively understand my participants' learning processes, by allowing me to see "student resistance" in a different light and empathize with their struggles in speaking truth to power. If I had not built phenomenological interviews into my methodology, I would not have been able to anticipate challenges, implement organic interventions, and design curriculum that met students' present needs. This dialectical method of examining students' experiences alongside my own allowed me to paint a more complex portrait of the social, pedagogical, and transformative processes happening in the classroom. That is why I insist on centering my own *and* students' experiences for this dissertation. While it will certainly be more rigorous than doing an ethnographic or auto-ethnographic study alone, it is the rigor of this hybrid approach that can precisely capture a richer story of how to develop healing pedagogies in an English classroom for and with Students of Color.

The pilot study also shed light on the ethical tensions involved in doing such an intimate kind of research with students. In working with young women of color who were still developing trust for themselves and others, I learned that this work requires a delicate balance: I had to know when to gently encourage participants to speak the pain in their hearts, and when to pause, stop asking questions, and simply accept their present position on their path towards self-recovery. I learned that this work requires an openness to be vulnerable with participants, and a commitment to setting boundaries that protect not only students' well-being, but my own as well. In the Positionality section, I discuss in more detail how Lightfoot's (1997) methodology of portraiture can support me in addressing these ethical and methodological concerns.

In my pilot study with "Young Empowered Women," there were also important limitations that I seek to address in my dissertation. One was my inability to attentively document, analyze, and narrate the body. Often it was in the aftermath of writing field notes or transcribing interviews that I realized there were important embodied ways of learning, teaching, and interacting that were important to the story I was trying to uncover. Below, I discuss the use of "digital diaries" as both a curriculum resource and a research method to better align with the embodied epistemologies that I seek to understand in my dissertation.

Another limitation from the pilot study was the actual site—there was no counselor position at the school where I taught and researched the "Young Empowered Women" class. Because of this, the Institutional Review Board (IRB) firmly requested that I change the focus of the study from "trauma" to a more benign topic of "empowerment." While the healing-centered pedagogies I enacted in the class organically uncovered student experiences of trauma, even with the changed focus of the pilot study, I am still intent on explicitly focusing on trauma for Students of Color (as discussed in my first chapter). I do agree that this focus on trauma requires

a school site that can provide the necessary socio-emotional supports, both for students and myself. In the Site Context section, I discuss how the school site for my dissertation, with its trauma-informed mission and infrastructure, has the resources to support me with my research and pedagogical goals. Having discussed the major takeaways of my pilot study, I now turn to my Blended Portraiture approach that is best-suited for my research agenda that prioritizes an asset-based lens, relationship, embodiment, and action.

Blended Portraiture: Towards a Methodology of Wholeness

To review, these are the research questions I propose for this study:

Trauma and Students of Color

RQ1: How do Students of Color describe the impact of trauma on their lives and learning?

Pedagogies of Healing

RQ2a: How does a teacher create and implement healing pedagogies in an English classroom?

RQ2b: How do Students of Color respond to healing pedagogies in an English classroom?

Sustainable Healing Practice

RQ3: How does a teacher maintain a sustainable healing pedagogy practice?

My research questions are structured so that I can: (a) dialectically examine the identities and experiences of students and myself in an English classroom, and (b) utilize the research process to engage in a problem-posing pedagogy where students' lived realities inform my curriculum development. An auto-ethnographic approach (Chang, 2016) helps interrogate my own experiences as a teacher/researcher, but does not necessarily center student narratives and

voices as I hope to do in this project. By incorporating an auto-ethnographic approach into a Portraiture methodology (Lightfoot & Davis, 1997), I reveal the wholeness of connection between students and myself as we embark on a journey of healing together in an English classroom. With its dual focus between aesthetics and science, a search for goodness and a demand for careful scrutiny, Portraiture assists me in painting a more complete and complex narrative about the workings of trauma, healing, and literacy development for Students of Color. Here, I review the epistemic advantages of combining auto-ethnography and portraiture and discuss several examples of these methodologies that lay the foundation for my own work. I end this section by detailing how the aesthetic and scientific qualities of Portraiture meet the ethical, methodological, and epistemological concerns for my dissertation.

Auto-ethnography and Portraiture

Pushing back against positivist approaches to research that attempt to eliminate context and so-called bias, auto-ethnography and portraiture are able to develop more complex accounts of phenomenon by taking advantage of, valuing, and being transparent about context and insider knowledge (Chang, 2016; Lightfoot & Davis, 1997). Auto-ethnography utilizes personal experience to critique cultural experiences, reclaim the voices of those often unheard, and potentially heal and maneuver through suffering (Ellis & Adams, 2014). Kennedy-Lewis (2012) established how personal and professional experience can support the methodological decision-making process instead of obscuring it. As a teacher/researcher, I embrace the cultural intuition (Delgado-Bernal, 1998) I bring to my research as a veteran teacher as a "means of self-determination . . . to pushback on the sterilization of teacher experiences, highlighting the chaos of the classroom, where theory meets application" (Valdez, 2015, p. 40). Additionally, the

explicit self-narrative and reflexivity in this blended methodology is crucial to negotiating the perspectives and privileges I bring to the classroom and in my research.

In this dissertation, I also look at the reciprocal processes that happen between a teacher and her students that work towards individual and collective healing. As such, I cannot focus on my experience in the classroom alone. I triangulate my perspective by incorporating perspectives and experiences from student participants into a blended portrait. While there are foundations of portraiture that help me to understand how to tell the story of a school (Lightfoot, 1983) and of individuals and their stories of self-recovery (Lightfoot, 1994), two contemporary examples assist me in combining portraits of myself with that of my students: Valdez (2015) paints a self-portrait of her pedagogical interactions with elementary students, while Curammeng (forthcoming) uses ethnic studies portraiture to synthesize multiple portraits of Filipino teachers into a collage of narratives. Theoretically, scholars have also utilized portraiture to explore the intersections between CRT (Chapman, 2005) and Black feminisms (Dixson, 2005), which can assist me in centering race and gender in my own work. Epistemologically, Nievera-Lozano's (2016) use of embodied and sutured portraiture and Flores' (2016) Muxerista portraiture pave the path towards more holistic iterations that align with my focus on the body and healing.

The Art, Science and Intervention of Portraiture

As I detailed earlier in my theoretical framework, which I call a Healing Pedagogy of the Body, I seek to understand healing as an organic, embodied, felt, and relational process. With its emphasis on context, voice, relationships, and developing an aesthetic whole, portraiture has the capacity to capture the wholeness of bodymindspirit I am looking for in this study.

The lengthy quote below, where Lightfoot (1983) uses the metaphor of being painted by a portraitist to illuminate how portraiture captures the "essence" of its subjects, aptly parallels the kind of story and intervention I seek as a teacher/researcher. She describes how:

> . . . portraits make the subjects feel "seen" in a way they have never felt seen before, fully attended to, wrapped up in an empathetic gaze. An essential ingredient of creating a portrait is the process of human interaction. Artists must not view the subject as object, but as a person of myriad dimensions. Whether the artist sees the body stiffening and offers the woman a cup of tea, or tells the young girl that she does not have to be still like a statue, there is a recognition of the humanity and vulnerability of the subject. The artist's gaze is discerning as it searches for the essence, relentless as it tries to move past the surface images. But in finding the underside, in piercing the cover, in discovering the unseen, she offers a critical *and* generous perspective—one that is both tough and giving. (pp. 5–6)

With my focus on trauma and healing with Students of Color, I take relentless care at every step of my teaching and research process to work with my participants with respect and integrity. As an art form, portraiture has the aesthetic capacity to tell a more authentic story about my participants in their "myriad dimensions"—one that integrates nuance, contradiction and expression, and does not simply reduce students, nor my own story, to bullet points in an academic piece of writing. As a social science methodology, portraiture is systematic in its attention to balancing the aesthetic with discerning analysis and reflexivity, with a constant navigation of how various contexts and voices collude to uncover a complex story. As an intervention, portraiture regards empathy, relationships, and boundaries not just as a methodological imperative for accuracy, but as an ethical necessity that respects the "humanity and vulnerability" of participants. It balances the generous search for goodness in its subjects with a careful look into what remains hidden. It is a methodology that is gentle enough to help its participants feel seen, felt, and understood, but also tough enough to unmask the shadows that participants are perhaps unable or not wanting to see. My use of portraiture mirrors the pedagogies I develop in this study, where the stories I produce testify to the ways students heal

from the invisibility and powerlessness of various traumas, and the ways I care for myself alongside caring for my students.

Site Context: School and Classroom

My research took place at a site I call Chavez High School in a working-class neighborhood of Los Angeles, whose student body is primarily Latin@ and Black. The high school is split into three different small schools which each have a different career focus and correlating school mission. My small school site focuses on social work and health advocacy, where their mission is to "nurture, empower and inspire the future social workers and community health advocates" of their city. According to the principal and founding teachers, this mission was developed after recognizing the need to address various kinds of violence in the community. For socio-emotional support, the school has a clinic on site where social workers are on campus twice a week to work with students who are referred for treatment. The social workers also facilitate an individual or group intervention called Cognitive Behavioral Intervention for Trauma In Schools (CBITS) throughout the school year. Additionally, students are referred out for restorative justice circles and academic counseling. Teachers are given various trauma-informed professional development throughout the year, which include strategies for classroom management and self-care.

The principal and a current English teacher at the school site gave me permission to teach one period of 11th–grade English during the 2017–18 year. Besides being required to meet state standards of an American Literature course, students were required to take the Smarter Balance Test in the Spring, which incorporates expository texts with writing; write a research paper in conjunction with their U.S. History class; and participate in a work readiness program as part of the [s]11th grade curriculum. I had the freedom to choose which texts to incorporate into the

curriculum. I ended up teaching a total of 20 students, two of which moved to other schools. Eighteen of those students identify as Latin@, and two students identify as Black. The class was comprised of 7 male students and 13 female students.

With its multi-leveled infrastructure that supports students and teachers with trauma-informed care, this site was helpful in two ways: (a) offering me the professional development and counseling to support my pedagogical endeavors, and (b) providing a provocative context to examine the school structures and policies necessary to develop healing pedagogies for Students of Color. Another advantage of working at this site was the professional freedom I had to develop my own curriculum that addressed my teacher/research questions focused on healing.

Participants

With the auto-ethnographic component of my Blended Portraiture approach, I served as a participant as a teacher immersed in developing and implementing healing pedagogies, and exploring how to care for myself in that process. Throughout the semester, six focal students emerged, as they organically built relationships with me and engaged in informal and formal conversations about their personal traumas from school, family and community. After I finished teaching the English class for the fall semester, I used purposive sampling (Merriam, 2009) to ask six students to participate in a series of two interviews each, to reflect on their learning from our class and share insights about their personal lives. I chose these students as focal participants because of their diverse qualities, ranging from English language learners to native English speakers, male and female-identified, Black and Latin@, academically successful and struggling. Unfortunately, one of the students, Kaira—the only student who identified as Black in the class—was not able to participate in the interview process due to scheduling reasons.

Because of the thick description involved in portraiture and my interest in comparing

student narratives, and for the sake of feasability, I ended up choosing four of the six students to be focal participants, which I describe in detail in the blended portraits. In the portraits, I zoom in on these four students—David, Samar, Lili, and Jeremiah—to identify specific needs and corresponding curriculum to meet their meets. I also conducted three focus group interviews with students from the entire class and collected surveys to gather general feedback about the class. While I focus primarily on David, Samar, Lili, and Jeremiah in the blended portraits, I integrate interactions and feedback from other students in the class to create a more comprehensive depiction of our semester together. To protect students' identities, I have changed student participants' names to pseudonyms throughout this dissertation.

Data Collection and Curriculum

Both the curriculum I developed for the English class and the data I collected work together towards answering my research questions. In summary, I collected the following forms of data:

- 80 hour of classroom video footage, audio recordings and field notes;
- Work from four focal student participants, including journals, essays, and group projects and presentations;
- Curriculum artifacts from each unit: Lesson plans, handouts, photos from classroom rituals, classroom posters, and multi-media texts;
- 20 Analytical Memos, written or digital (selfie memos);
- Three Focus Group interviews;
- 18 End of class surveys; and
- 10 individual interviews with focal participants.

I drew from all of this data to craft three blended portrait that follow what I call units of intimate inquiry, and the student work and insights that emerge along the way, as well as the experiences I have trying to maintain a sustainable teaching practice.

Informed by California state standards, the trauma-informed themes I explored in Chapter Two, and my focus on embodied epistemologies, I designed and implemented three units throughout the semester:

- Unit 1: Healing Schools
    - Explores how schools respond to the emotions that students bring from home, and how safety and bravery is (or is not) cultivated within schools. Students and I build community with each other through engaging in textual analysis and practicing sharing feelings and needs.
- Unit 2: Healing Self
    - Utilizes Anzaldúa's (2002)"path of conocimiento" framework as a means for students to unpack painful moments in their lives and uncover new understandings and connections.
- Unit 3: Healing Grief
    - Examines personal and collective sorrow through Weller's (2015) "Five Gates of Grief" framework. Students develop and present collaborative research projects that discuss culturally-responsive ways to support clients of color to heal from various kinds of grief.

All three of these units are examined in greater detail in each of the blended portraits.

Analysis

I generated grounded theory (Straus and Corbin, 1998) by focusing on what Lightfoot (1997) calls emergent themes, by seeing how the trauma-informed themes of safety, connection, narrative, emotional literacy, and autonomy arise through the development of healing pedagogies. I used tree diagrams to compare the intersections between these themes and students' work and insights, as well as my processes for developing curriculum and engaging in self and collective care. I made sure to tease out various forms of trauma, including acute, complex, structural and developmental. From there, I constructed three blended portraits that answer my research questions, focusing on the processes, tensions, contradictions, and epiphanies that emerge from cultivating pedagogies of wholeness with students in the classroom. While I speak in past tense in this chapter to discuss my data collection and analysis, I use

present tense for the rest of my dissertation to craft a sense of urgency in the present moment of teaching in the classroom.

Positionality and Limitations

Given the research topic of trauma and focus on high school youth, one challenge of this study was to not succumb to the propensity of social science to portray marginalized groups with deficit-based narratives. To address this, I draw upon portraiture's insistence on a search for goodness, to see student participants as "knowledge bearers, as rich resources, as the best authorities on their own experience" (Lightfoot & Davis, 1997, p. 141). Lightfoot emphasizes that such a search for goodness does not stop at an idealized, simple portrayal of strengths, but one that "allows for the expression of vulnerability, weakness, prejudice, and anxiety . . . best expressed in counterpoint with the actor's strengths" (p. 141). Similarly, I also draw upon Tuck and Yang's (2014) framework of "desire narratives" to highlight pain as a powerful resource towards knowledge, where bodily sensations, emotions, and thoughts can uncover needs beneath such pain. Such a "desire narrative" aligns with my trauma-informed perspective that seeks to understand "what has happened" to trauma survivors, and not to point out "what is wrong" with them. Within this framework, this study is not about saving students from their burdens, but about my effort in supporting the participants' process of gaining wisdom from challenging experiences and returning to a sense of wholeness.

Another potential limitation of taking on a teacher/researcher role was that I was not able to take detailed observation field notes in the present moment; to note, I did transcribe audio-tapes afterwards. However, what was more important to me was the nature of relationships I built with students—to create a safe space for participants to share their ideas and experiences with me as a researcher, to co-create knowledge about the research topic, and to move towards

the essential goal of the class: to guide these young students to heal from pain and empower themselves. My positionality as a teacher-researcher, and the purposeful way that I interacted and built with students, was vital to both my methods and pedagogy, and has important implications for the kinds of work teacher-researchers engage with their participants and students. This methodology "envisions proximity, intimacy, and trust as important, if not essential to the relationships" I build with students in this study (Morrell, 2008, p.11). At the same time, Lightfoot's emphasis on constantly clarifying and negotiating boundaries within these relationships becomes key to treating my participants with care, and caring for myself in this intimate kind of research.

With my focus on Students of Color, one primary limitation to this study was my focus solely on Latin@ students. Part of this comes by virtue of my study site, where Black students are a minority amongst a Latin@-majority school, and part of it comes from scheduling limitations. Still, I regret not being able to interview Kaira to gather deeper insights to the way trauma has impacted her and the way she learns in school. Consequently, I attempt to include her presence throughout the blended portraits, where she participates in classroom discussion and gives feedback about the class. Regardless, future research should examine the impact of trauma and stress on young people who come from diverse racial, gender, and class identities.

CHAPTER FOUR: CRITICAL HEALING PRAXIS: A FRAMEWORK FOR BLENDED PORTRAITS IN AN ENGLISH CLASSROOM

Crafting portraits of healing has meant confronting the intersections of trauma, strength, contradiction, and desire that students and I bring into an English classroom. It has meant being open to the stories revealed through our bodies, witnessed through class dialogue, and written on the page. It has meant negotiating academic standards and larger goals for humanization, while balancing students' healing with my own. To do justice to the themes of personal and collective healing that have emerged in my teacher research, I need a framework that could be fluid enough to hold contradiction and explode binary thinking, while still be structured enough to delineate the patterns of literacy development and transformation happening in the classroom. This chapter offers what I call a critical healing praxis framework, which builds upon the foundations of Freirian critical pedagogy (2000) and integrates trauma/healing-informed principles (Ko et al., 2008) and embodied epistemologies (Berila, 2015; Thompson, 2017; Weller, 2015). This framework provides both a narrative and pedagogical structure for this dissertation because it offers a non-linear skeleton to organize my blended portraits of students and me interacting through curriculum, while also defining the complex processes of developing healing literacies with high school Students of Color.

I start by reviewing the critical praxis model laid out by Freire (2000) and utilized in critical literacy teacher research (Morrell, 2008). Then, I give an overview of a critical healing praxis model, which describes how I have come to understand students' needs and design units of intimate inquiry, how students engage in an embodied analysis of various texts and healing literacy practices, and how I work towards keeping myself grounded and centered throughout this soul-demanding work. I explain how each component of the framework addresses my

research questions, and then conclude with an introduction of the blended portraits that follow this chapter.

Honoring the Foundations of Critical Praxis

As I explained in my theoretical section earlier, my pedagogy is rooted in a Freirian (2000) ideology of education that (a) seeks to dismantle dehumanizing ways of learning and teaching, and (b) uses inquiry to move towards actionable steps to transform schools and the world. In my own classroom, I have found literacy to be a fertile playground to use language to shift the way we see ourselves and each other (Coffey & Cariaga, 2016). Much of my past English classrooms have followed the critical praxis model (Freire, 1987; Morrell, 2007) of identifying a societal problem to be researched and addressed through a collective action plan constructed by students. While this model has been helpful to understand interpersonal and institutional oppression, I have been left wanting a more nuanced approach to hold space for internalized forms of oppression that are deeply embedded in our bodymindspirits. As I synthesize findings into blended portraits, I have taken seriously Freire's call for critical educators to unapologetically integrate passion, anger, and heart into their praxis (as discussed in Darder, 2017).

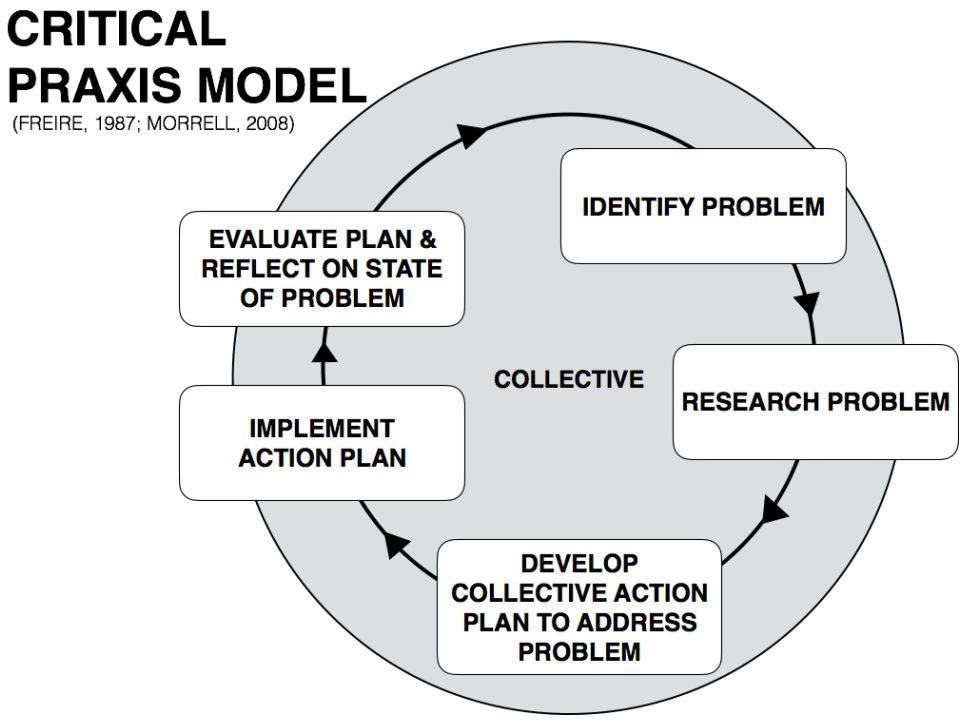


Figure 1. Critical Praxis Model.

A More Holistic Praxis Model

Seeking to hold space for all forms of oppression and an intricate process of healing, while still holding true to the liberatory objectives of critical pedagogy and critical literacy, I have developed a critical healing praxis model. This framework takes into account our bodies, minds, and spirits as resources for transformation in an English classroom. In alignment with radical feminist epistemology (Cruz, 2006; Jaggar, 1989), a critical healing praxis confronts disembodiment and the privatization of healing in schools by centering the body and making pain an explicit tool for learning.

While a critical praxis model poses collective problems, my teaching and research objectives are concerned with making space for both the self and the collective—a critical healing praxis therefore seeks to understand the relationship between caring for the self *and* community. Instead of working in sequence, this framework breathes in repeated contractions

and expansions, moving back and forth between the self and collective (see Figure 2): looking closely at personal experiences of the self, then collective history; caring for students' collective needs, then needing to reflect on my own self-care; meditating in solitude, then building solidarity with others. The dotted lines of "self" and "collective" in the critical healing praxis model represent how our notions of self and community are porous and ever-expanding, as our work of healing becomes about connecting ourselves to larger struggles for freedom beyond our classroom walls and seeing our communities as mirror reflections of our selves.

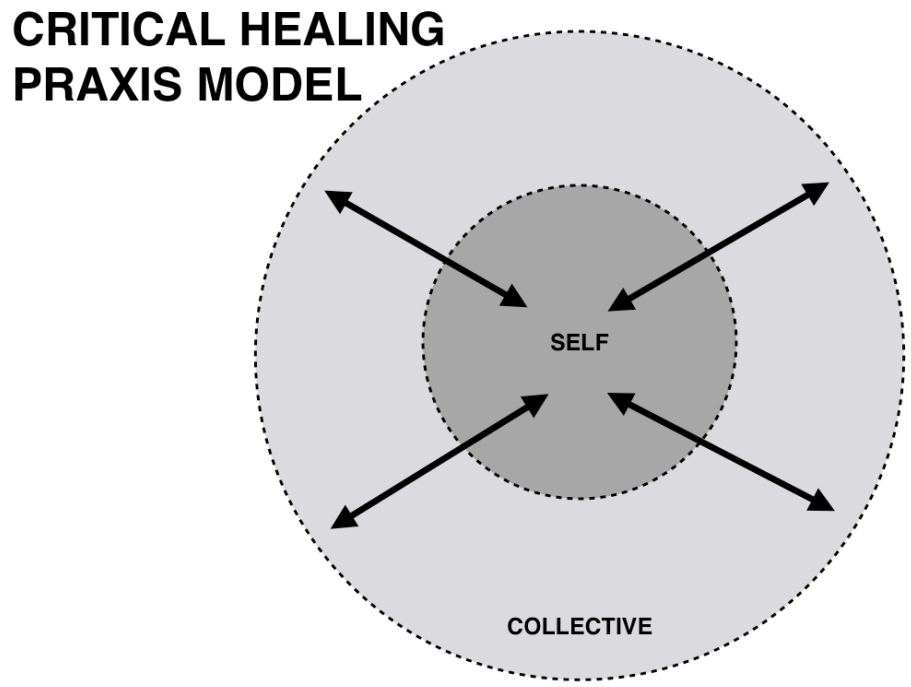


Figure 2. Critical Healing Praxis Model—Self/Collective Care.

A critical healing praxis framework follows the interactions between students' needs, my needs, and the development of a unit of intimate inquiry. Each blended portrait contains the six elements of a critical healing praxis (See Figure 3), in an order that aligns with the needs and themes as they organically arise. While the critical praxis model works linearly, a critical healing

praxis model works more fluidly, where each component moves and flexes according to what students and I need in real time.

Here, I define the six elements of a critical healing praxis and how they specifically address my research questions.

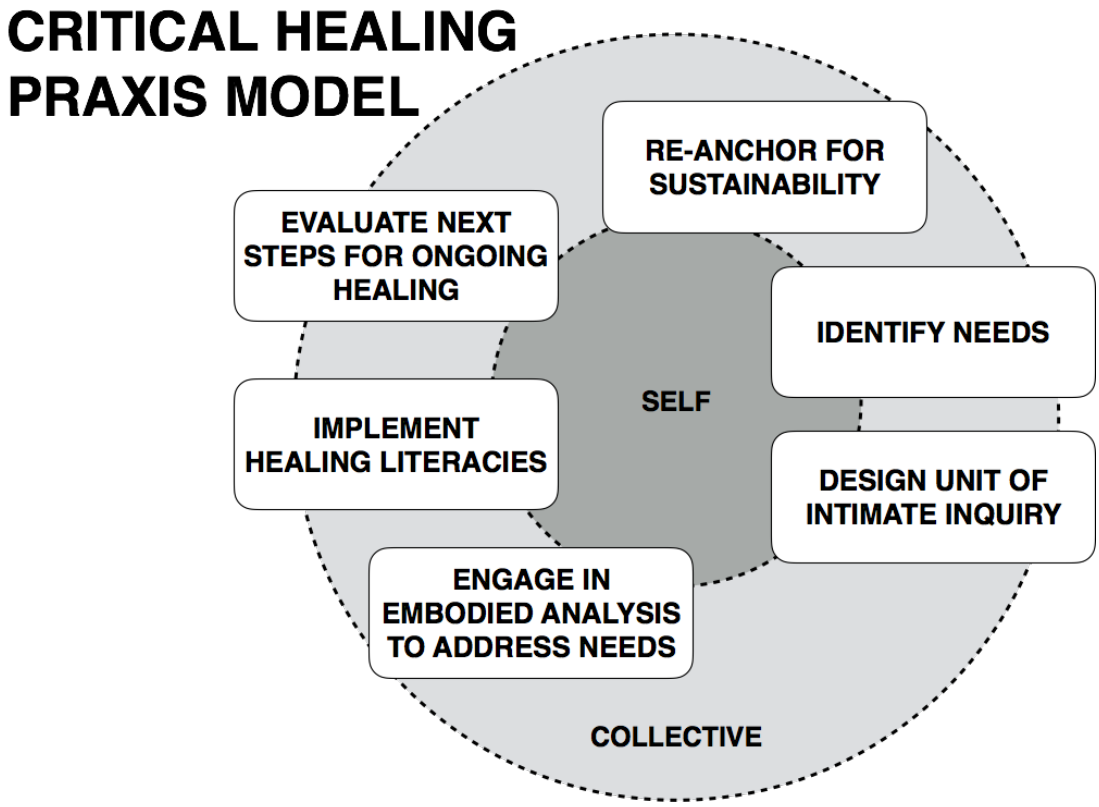


Figure 3. Critical Healing Praxis Model Elements.

Re-anchoring for Sustainability

Throughout each curricular unit, I describe how I use self and collective-care strategies to keep myself anchored amidst the pressures that inevitably and unexpectedly arise through teaching from my whole self. On my own, I use meditation, technology, and journaling to process my experiences as a teacher/researcher; collectively, I draw from an intentional network of family, sisterhood, healing practitioners, and teacher organizers to feel held, heard, and helped in work that often takes a toll on my bodymindspirit. The purpose of these re-anchoring

strategies is to support me in relieving stress, shedding limiting beliefs, and re-rooting in my purpose and community, so that I can continue to do the work. More importantly, these re-anchoring strategies become my own space of intimate inquiry where I can understand the cognitive and emotional labor it takes to be vulnerably whole, and then be able to teach and model such complex work for students in the classroom. These strategies address my third research question, which explores ways to keep a healing pedagogy practice sustainable.

Identifying Needs

When I design and engage in healing pedagogies, I have in mind the societal problems I hope to address, but I want to delve deeper into identifying the needs behind the problems we explore in class. This element answers my first two research questions, which focuses on the ways Students of Color describe the impact of trauma on their lives and learning, while determining students' specific needs that can be addressed through the curriculum I design. This approach aligns with my methodology, which replaces "damage narratives" with "desire narratives" to move away from pathologizing Students of Color (Tuck & Yang, 2014), and searches for the "goodness" in participants to emphasize the assets young people bring into the classroom (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis, 1997). It also aligns with trauma-informed frameworks (Ko et al., 2008) since I utilize emotional literacy to help students reflect on their actions, feelings, and underlying needs. This become a recursive process, where at times I figure out needs at the beginning of the semester through community building exercises, or student needs arise from class dialogue in the middle of a unit, or further needs emerge at the end. This approach works to explicitly name the processes for developing a culturally sustaining pedagogy (Paris & Alim, 2014), as I describe how I uncover authentic needs on an ongoing basis instead of assuming what students' needs are, or that they stay the same.

Designing Units of Intimate Inquiry

Throughout the semester emerges a pattern of students and myself wavering between protecting ourselves from visibility and potential harm, and opening ourselves to being witnessed and healed in community. I call these units of intimate inquiry because of the way our explorations of self, our bodies, and collective struggles challenge us to become unmasked, so that we can access our deepest emotions and desires. Below, hooks (1994) describes the ways these curricular units use language—both in our bodies and words—to heal the wounds of an apartheid of knowledge (Delgado Bernal & Villapando, 2002) that keeps us split from each other and our wholeness:

> To recognize that we touch one another in language seems particularly difficult in a society that would have us believe that there is no dignity in the experience of passion, that to feel deeply is to be inferior, for within the dualism of Western metaphysical thought, ideas are always more important than language. To heal the splitting of mind and body, we marginalized and oppressed people attempt to recover ourselves and our experiences in language. We seek to make a place for intimacy. (pp. 174–175)

These are units of intimate inquiry because of the courage it takes to risk being our full, passionate, contradictory selves in a world that prefers us to be conveniently calm and easy to control. These units challenge both students and me to weigh both the costs and connections that emerge from allowing ourselves to be fully witnessed.

To engage students in literacy as an act of personal and collective transformation, I discuss how I design units of intimate inquiry to build traditional literacy skills, alongside tools of emotional literacy and intersectional analysis. I describe how each unit is informed by an embodied theoretical framework that centers healing and supports students to theorize from their whole selves, while building collective power from the inside out. Diving into interdisciplinary exploration, students make meaning from multiple texts: radical feminist theory, psychology, popular culture, their body and breath, along with personal experience and traditional classroom

texts. I discuss how the three units of inquiry build upon each other's academic objectives, while deepening the connections we make with each other along the way. I also discuss how texts are chosen, and how I design assessments to gauge students' understanding of themselves and their use of literacy as a tool for empowerment. This element answers my second set of research questions, which looks at the process for developing pedagogies of healing with and for Students of Color.

Engaging in Embodied Analysis

This element addresses how students respond to the curriculum I design, where I describe the ways students engage in a collective and embodied analysis in the classroom. Using snapshots of classroom dialogue, I explore how I scaffold learning and build safety and bravery among students and me. At times, the dialogue is internal, where students use meditation and journaling exercises; at other times, the dialogue happens during a whole-class reading or activity. Whereas the previous element describes the way I design curriculum, this element describes the ways I interact with students in real time. Thompson (2017), an advocate for "teaching with tenderness," details how the body is an important source of pedagogical information:

> I have seen that I have the best chance of eliciting rich and original writing from students when I try to really understand who they are—in their bodies at this particular moment in their lives amid particular constellations of challenges they are facing now. (p. 52)

In these sections of the blended portraits, I describe the way I assess authentic needs by attuning to students' body cues alongside the words that come of their mouths. I also explain the way I integrate both my body and students' bodies as part of our conversation on healing, using integral classroom structures—like meditation exercises, stories of vulnerability, and embodied rituals (Berila, 2015; Weller, 2015)—as methods to deepen meaning-making and connection.

With such intimate reflections, I describe the natural tensions that arise from students and how I try to stay present in the moment, learning to gently negotiate students' needs with the objectives of the unit. What emerges is a classroom environment where literacy development comes from connection, attunement, and presence in the body.

Implementing Healing Literacies

In a critical praxis model, students usually implement an action plan they created from researching a community problem. In this critical healing praxis model, students enact a healing literacy practice to address needs that emerge from the unit of intimate inquiry. This element also addresses how students respond to pedagogies of healing, where I analyze students' work and their ability to heal themselves and each other. I look at the writing and connections students make, the epiphanies that emerge as a result, as well as the prior interactions and learning moments that led up to students' new understandings. These summative assessments address English Language Arts standards for writing, reading, speaking, listening, and collaborating. Simultaneously, these literacy practices serve as narrative interventions, disrupting internalized scripts of shame and isolation. Students' work becomes an affirmation of the resilience, belonging, and dignity that was already there, but that required a witness.

Steps Towards Ongoing Healing

At the end of each blended portrait, I conclude by evaluating my teaching practice and reflecting on next steps for learning and healing. This includes next steps for designing curriculum, working with students who have opened up to me, and determining necessary support for students' mental health beyond the classroom. I also evaluate how well our class community has been accountable to each others' needs and figure out next steps for deepening solidarity. Additionally, I consider ways to deepen students' intersectional analysis and

connections with each other, at a pace that honors students' autonomy and development. This process includes personal reflections, where I explore how to continue supporting students' needs while being accountable to personal boundaries and my own commitment to wellness. Much like Anzaldúa's (2015) symbol of Coyolxauhqui, the Meso-American symbol for the "ongoing process of making and unmaking" (p. 20), a critical healing praxis is about determining what limiting perceptions and ideologies need to be dismantled, and where we can carve new spaces of freedom and wholeness. This element addresses my second and third set of questions that focus on my ongoing process for developing curriculum that meets students' needs, while keeping my teaching practice sustainable.

Overview of Blended Portraits

Each of the following three chapters follows me and students on our parallel journeys towards personal and collective healing through units of learning in an English classroom. The blended portraits follow the critical healing praxis model, as I show how I design curriculum, uncover student needs, engage in embodied analysis with students, how they respond with healing literacy practices, and how all of this informs next steps for healing. I also include moments of self-centering and reflecting on my relationship to myself and students, as I enjoy and struggle with content, while navigating stressors from within and outside of the classroom. I italicize sections that serve as pivotal moments of reflection and interaction, followed by sections of analysis that discuss pertinent emerging themes.

The first portrait begins as I return to teaching from a five-year hiatus and build community and foundational literacy strategies with students in our first unit together. A student named David had become a focal participant, who taught me and others about the contradictions and connections that emerge from intentionally building safety, bravery, and belonging in a

space that is often regarded as unsafe. The second portrait documents our second unit of intimate inquiry, where students used Anzaldúa's embodied theory, called the "paths of conocimiento," to name personal experiences of pain and uncover new wisdom. I discuss the use of what I call nepantlera texts, which are stories of vulnerability that serve as bridges to move students from pain to healing. Samar surfaced as a central participant, who acted as a nepantlera (Anzaldúa, 2017) to her peers, and produced a powerful narrative that shifts self-doubt to unabashed pride. In the final portrait, students went from healing themselves through narrative-writing to healing others through a collaborative research project. This time, their topic was grief, where students grounded their inquiry in psycho-therapist Weller's (2015) concept of being "in right relationship" to grief and participated in a classroom ritual to understand their own grief so they could in turn support others experiencing loss. Lili and Jeremiah emerged as focal students, as their personal grief coincided with the classroom content.

Threaded throughout all of these blended portraits, I describe moments of solitude, reflection, frustration, affirmation, and even my own loss, where I attempt to stay grounded and motivated in this arduous labor of love. Taken together, these blended portraits demonstrate how students and I drop in to intimate inquiry, learning how to befriend our bodies and each other in the first unit, then deepen our inquiry of self in the second unit, and expand our inquiry to include a larger community in the third unit. As true blended portraits, the findings can become messy and contradictory, but what I hope remains clear is this: through pedagogies of wholeness, we can bridge traditional, critical, and socio-emotional literacy practices, embrace the whole resource of bodymindspirit that students and I bring to the classroom, make meaning from pain, emotions and desires—and in doing so, heal ourselves, our relationships, and the way we see the world.

CHAPTER FIVE: BUILDING SAFETY, BRAVERY, AND BELONGING IN OUR BODIES AND EMBODIED CLASSROOM

Pedagogies of intimacy and healing require safety. But schools have not been safe spaces for me as a former teacher, nor for my former students. At other Los Angeles public schools, we have had to navigate armed security guards to drug-sniffing dogs, racialized and gendered tensions to hostile working environments. We learned how to carve out brave spaces (Coffey & Cariaga, 2016) instead, calling out dehumanizing and de-contextualized policies and repairing harm where we could. In my mind, I knew our experiences were part of a history of schools as sites of institutional violence against marginalized peoples (Valdez, 2015). In my body, I still suffered from the guilt and grief of witnessing too many students pushed out of an institution where they never belonged in the first place. Having compromised my own health and relationships at home, and reluctantly losing faith in the work I once loved, I was forced to leave as well.

Re-entering the high school classroom five years later, what does it look like to create safety, bravery, and belonging in a place that is inherently unsafe? This first blended portrait explores how I engage with students as we dive into our first unit of intimate inquiry, titled "Healing in Schools." We begin to build community by discussing past schooling experiences, sharing collective needs, and re-imagining schools as emotionally supportive spaces. This becomes a dialectical and paradoxical process, where we use our bodies, experiences, and non-fiction texts to explore the tensions between safety and risk, and vulnerability and protection. I begin by describing my process of transitioning back into the classroom with a commitment towards wholeness, as I practice a centering exercise that helps ground students and me throughout the unit. Then, I give an overview of our "Healing Schools" unit, which centers an

embodied framework (Berila, 2015; Thompson, 2017) that examines how to cultivate safety and belonging from the inside out. I discuss classroom structures used to identify collective and individual needs, where a focal student named David emerged as he learned to befriend his own body. Next, I describe the ways David and his classmates defined safety when they analyzed two stories about students navigating trauma in and out of school. These discussions culminated in a group presentation, where David bore witness to his own traumatic past and demonstrated the need for brave spaces in schools. I conclude by offering next steps for David to deepen his path towards healing, which transitions into our next unit of intimate inquiry.

Re-Anchoring: Returning to the Classroom Whole

I have just pulled up to a space in Chavez High School's parking structure, but I don't remember much from my drive along the way. My mind has been occupied with plans for my first day of teaching: the copies I need to make, the words I need to write on the board, the questions I have for the teacher whose classroom I'm using. Under my mundane to do list, lie fears about coming back to a high school English classroom after a 5-year hiatus: Will it be as hard as it was before? Will it be different? Will I be ready?

I grab two bags of class materials out of my car and head out of the parking structure, stepping onto a beautifully manicured campus with flowerbeds encircling an amphitheatre to my left and a neat, new racetrack to my right, where a physical education class is running laps. Straight ahead, I see several trees surrounded by more flowers and circular benches—a perfect place for me to practice centering.[1] *I look around to make sure there aren't students or staff*

[1] Centering is a core practice I learned from Generative Somatics (GS), an organization that offers leadership trainings to strengthen movement work through embodied and social transformation. It involves breathing into one's center, becoming present in length, width, and depth, and ending by stating a personal commitment to healing and justice. The goal of centering is to help people gain greater access to their power and values while navigating their

nearby, since I need some space to do the practice. I'm also wary of looking strange to folks who have never done centering before, especially since I am new to the community and don't want to stand out.

I put my bags down on the benches and look at the slender tree in front of me as my anchor point. I shift my hips side to side, as I plant my feet into the ground. I take one cleansing breath in. Then out. I place my right hand on the area below my belly button and breath into my center.

Looking at the length of the tree, from its roots to the top of its branches and leaves, I drop into my own length. I use my exhale to ease my shoulders down, feel my feet held by the earth beneath me, while at the same time feeling my spine straighten and the crown of my head reach upwards. My slow breaths and the tree's quiet presence remind me that being in my length is not a performance. It's not about striving. It is more about becoming present, lengthening into my full dignity.

Next, I breathe into my width. I look at the tree's farthest leaves to the left and farthest leaves to the right, then envision the space I take up in between my shoulders, my hips, and the outer corners of my feet. My calm breath reminds me I can take up as much space as I need. I envision the side edges of my body, knowing I have boundaries that I can honor. I see the tree's branches reaching outwards, reminding me I am also connected to those around me. Mindfully breathing, I widen into space and connection.

Then, I breathe into depth. I look at the tree's trunk, imagining its back and then circling to the front. I breathe into the back of my head, the small of my back, and the back of my legs.

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personal lives and collective movements. For more info on GS, go to http://www.generativesomatics.org/. In the Re-Anchoring section of Chapter Six, I share another pivotal practice from GS.

Gratitude emerges, as I think of past students and fellow teachers behind me, and the rich history of struggle that informs who I am today. I breathe into the front of my body, relaxing my face, chest, and belly. From front to back, I deepen into the present, thankful for the past and hopeful for the future.

Breathing from center into my length, width, and depth, I invite my wholeness in to the present moment. Out loud, I say my commitment to myself and to my teaching: "I am a commitment to loving my whole self. I am a commitment to embracing the abundance within, and the abundance that surrounds me."[2]

Still breathing from center, I pick up my bags and head towards the class where I will meet students for the first time. I walk up a flight of stairs, into a central building and into the classroom—still a bit cluttered from the tasks at hand, but now focused with much more ease. With my commitments centered in my body, mind, and spirit, I feel that whatever happens—pressures and all—I am ready. I am ready to teach. I am ready to receive the gifts that come when we teach and learn from our whole selves.

So much of this centering practice is antithetical to the way I taught and was trained to teach: instead of teaching from the dignity of my whole self, I have been scrutinized for having "excessive facial expressions" during professional development meetings or being too "emotionally invested" in students; instead of looking to my own abundance of wisdom and community, I have often bought into a narrative of scarcity and competition; rather than

[2] Through internal dialogue and embodied reflection as well as collective dialogue, participants in the GS leadership training come up with commitments that align with their goals towards personal wellness and political empowerment. By ending the centering practice with vocalizing our commitments, we don't just focus on what we are fighting against; we wholeheartedly move towards what we care most about. My commitment emerges after reflecting on my experiences as a woman, mother, and teacher of color who has internalized a narrative of never being enough and always afraid to ask for help. Through my commitment, I hope to produce work that affirms my whole self and expansive community in their abundant wisdom and unconditional love.

honoring students' present needs and my capacity, I have scattered my attention between the pressure of top-down mandates and taking on too many leadership roles. Embodied educator and scholar Becky Thompson (2015) states:

> . . . beginning to understand the centrality of the body in the classroom came from realizing somewhere along the line in my academic [and teacher] training that I had left my body. And I wanted it back . . . . My own process has helped me see that how students are in their bodies often tells us much more than what they say. (p. 12)

This centering practice becomes an integral strategy for me to embody a pedagogy of wholeness, where I can befriend my bodymindspirit and bear witness to feelings and needs I have often been unable to acknowledge in the past. By making centering a consistent self-care practice, I cultivate a sense of inner belonging that does not have to depend on my outer environment. While stressors from inside and outside the classroom will inevitably emerge and change throughout the semester, I can always come back to my breath and body as refuge. Through this practice, I hope to show students that although schools can be unsafe places, we have the power to restore a sense of safety in our own bodies. From there, we can engage in a fuller dialogue about ways to heal our schools and communities.

This unit is therefore about unlearning disembodied ways of being and knowing in schools and re-imagining spaces where we can learn, teach, and heal from our fullest selves. Beth Berila (2015), a teacher/scholar who centers mindfulness in anti-oppression pedagogy, emphasizes that "the unlearning and the creation of new, liberatory possibilities are embodied processes" (p. 34). It is through my body that I learn my coping mechanisms of fight, flight and freeze, where I often find myself clenching my gut and jaw in school spaces where I do not feel safe. I also learn that I can use my breath to soften those armored places in my body and do not always have to teach from a place of fear. I become more conscious of my body's complex and often contradictory strategies of protection and belonging, which helps me attune to students'

body language and the ways their desires for safety and connection are often in conflict with one another. In the following section, I describe how our first unit is framed and scaffolded to build community through an exploration of our bodies and lived experiences in school.

Intimate Inquiry Design: Building Community and Sharing Needs

Because I have designed the entire semester for students to engage in literacy as an act of healing of self and community, I know that we must begin by building two core foundations to our work: authentic community and the well-supported paragraph. The 3-week unit is guided by the question, *How should schools respond to emotions and experiences that students bring with them from home?* This allows students to enter into dialogue around their home and schooling experiences and help me understand ways to best engage with their emotions and needs throughout the semester. At the same time, they unpack non-fiction texts that explore safety and bravery in schools, while practicing the basic building blocks of solid reading and writing.

Our guiding question also sets the stage to move from a disembodied classroom to what Berila (2015) calls an "embodied classroom," where the body—both individual and collective—becomes a central text of analysis and resource to theorize from. This informs our first community-building exercise where students learn to name their collective feelings and needs, as well as our recurring centering practice that assists students in becoming more focused, motivated, and connected learners. An embodied classroom also understands that chronic stress and complex trauma begin as unconscious stories that lie deeper than language. To nurture pedagogies of healing, Thompson (2017) declares that "this is the realm we need to communicate with when we teach, particularly about subjects that are considered taboo, sensitive, or too touchy" (p. 40). I recognize early on in class how students find it difficult to talk about their emotions, painful experiences, and even what they care about. Consequently, it

is through embodied reflection that students are able to relax, take a risk in sharing their experiences with each other, and assert their opinions about how schools should function.

I scaffold the unit for students to form their opinions about schools through dialogue with each other, with their bodies, and with texts about real schools and their attempts at implementing restorative justice. After establishing classroom needs and practicing daily embodied reflection, students annotate and write paragraphs about a news article (Kolodner, 2015) titled, "A radical Approach that Starts with Listening to Students," and a podcast story (Kolowitz, 2013**)** set in South Side Chicago, called "Harper High School." Both texts provide students with evidence to define safety while discussing the necessity of bravery in schools. Students then work in groups to synthesize their personal experiences, textual evidence, and opinions to describe what a "Brave Space School" should look like for students who are experiencing stress and trauma in their communities. All of these components are discussed in greater detail below, demonstrating how safety, bravery, and belonging depend upon the relationships we nurture with our bodies and each other.

Identifying Collective Needs

"I don't know, Miss. I can't really think of any negative or positive experiences in school," Ashley says, shrugging her shoulders.

"Huh . . . Really?" I respond incredulously. She is one of a handful of students struggling to engage in today's community building activity, as I check in with pairs of students to see what they are discussing about their prior school experiences. Perhaps students aren't fully participating because it's just the second day of class and they're still playing it cool.

Just before this, I shared a positive and negative experience from my days as a high school student, explaining how those moments made me feel, and how they either met or failed to

meet a personal need. Now, it is the students' turn to share their experiences and corresponding feelings and needs with a nearby partner. I have passed out a handout called "Feelings and Needs"[3] *to help students with specific language as they engage in discussion.*

When I ask students to share their experiences with the whole group, Alfredo talks about "a really boring teacher" in middle school and Kaira shares a positive interaction with a cheer coach. I help guide both students to unpack the feelings and needs that arose from those experiences, where underneath Alfredo's boredom was an unmet need for challenge, and underneath Kaira's joy was a fulfilled need for mentorship.

Both of their comments are fine enough to move forward with today's lesson, but there is enough disconnected energy in the air that makes me want to pause. I see three students checking messages on their phones in plain sight throughout the room. I notice that the group of boys in the back—Eli, Michael, Jeremiah, and David—is laughing about something off-topic. I'm on the verge of taking their non-participation personally, but I can feel in my gut that there is something here to explore. So I begin to probe.

"Whenever I've done this community building activity, students are usually excited to talk about how they've been treated in school. But today feels different—some of you couldn't come up with any experiences, and some of you look like your attention is somewhere else . . . Do these questions about school matter to you at all?"

A couple students look up from their phones, perhaps surprised by my sudden shift in tone, while others silently reflect on my pointed question.

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[3] The "Feelings and Needs" handout, as well as our collective practice of naming behavior, feelings snd needs with each other is inspired by training I receive from an organization called Echo Parenting & Education, which connects non-violent communication with trauma-informed care. For more information about the organization, go to https://www.echoparenting.org/

Then Kaira chimes in, "Nobody really asks us how we feel about school. And school is just whatever, anyway." Students across the room nod their head in agreement.

"Okay," I respond, appreciating Kaira's candor. "Well, for our first unit, we're going to be talking a lot about how you feel about school. Actually, we're going to be talking about our feelings a lot throughout the whole semester."

"I just keep my emotions to myself," Michael says suddenly. At first, I think his comment comes from defiance, but I notice that his knee is bouncing rapidly up and down as he speaks. He appears nervous and courageous at the same time.

"Yea, I think a lot of people do," I say in return, "because schools often aren't safe for students. It makes sense to keep your feelings to yourself. So for our next activity, I'm inviting you to share your personal needs with me and your classmates, so that we can create more safety in here together."

I proceed to pass markers out to every student and when I pass by Michael, I quietly say, "Thank you for sharing that," noticing that his jitters have started to dissipate. Then, I direct the class' attention to the whiteboard, where I've written a list of needs, based on the sheet I passed out earlier. The various needs are categorized into six groups: connection, honesty, play, peace, meaning, and autonomy. I explain that we will be brainstorming a list of class expectations based on these needs.

"Remember, from the syllabus we reviewed yesterday, you will be expected to write and share stories about yourselves, talk about healing yourself and community, do a lot of reading, writing, speaking, and listening, and a lot of collaborative work. Knowing that, what are three things you need to give yourself in order to be successful in this class? For example, I might put

a check next to 'acceptance,' because I know I can be hard on myself sometimes, and I need to accept my growth as a student."

Students take a few minutes looking at the "Feelings and Needs" sheet before walking up to the whiteboard and writing a check next to three needs. After I take a photo of their checklist, I invite students to do the same thing for their peers, and then for me as their teacher. Some students like Leticia take their time thinking carefully about what they want from others, while students like Christopher seem to haphazardly check off items to get the task done. As students finish checking needs for me as their teacher, I wonder why folks are giggling and crowding around the whiteboard. I see that someone has added the word "restroom" to the list and placed a long row of checks after it.

"Hmm. Looks like it's important for someone to go to the restroom!" I say, looking around to see if I can figure out the culprit. I gaze around and catch David coyly smiling back at me.

"Yeah, miss! When you gotta go, you gotta go!" David quips, most of the class laughing.

I am both happy that the class is starting to lighten up and annoyed that David doesn't seem to be taking this activity seriously. The period abruptly runs out of time, so I thank students for participating as they go to their next class. For the rest of the semester, I begin our class with their collective needs (see Figure 4 for compiled list) to remind students what they are responsible for giving themselves and each other, and explain how I have tailored curriculum to meet the needs they've chosen. When I mediate a class conflict or check in with a student[4] who is experiencing challenges, I also use the list to reflect on how we can better address people's

[4] See the "Identifying Samar's Needs" and "Healing Literacy in Action" sections of Chapter Six for an examination of addressing personal needs through check-ins and curriculum.

needs or repair ruptures in connection. At other times, I use the list when students become distracted or disrespectful, reminding them that I also have needs that deserve to be honored.[5]



Figure 4. Class Community Needs.

On this day, I learn that sometimes, identifying needs doesn't just come directly through class content, as I had intended for this community-building lesson, but also from being curious enough to unpack subtle student resistance. My hope for this class is to build a restorative learning environment, not a punitive one—through structures like our "class community needs" list, purposefully checking in with the whole group and individual students about how we are being accountable to each other, and also through the texts we dissect and create. In the past, I have only had students brainstorm what they need from their peers and teacher; this time, I include ways we can be accountable to our own self-care to emphasize how taking care of ourselves *and* others is inextricably tied.

[5] See the "Re-Anchoring" section in Chapter Six for more details on setting boundaries and asserting needs.

Throughout the semester, it takes numerous conversations to make this an active part of our classroom culture instead of just a feel-good list about needs, where I often have to stress the need for personal responsibility and not just the expectation of me meeting their needs for them. By consistently talking about needs—either our own or that of people we read about in class—students eventually learn to advocate for themselves, like asking for space at the beginning of class or for more time on an assignment. At the end of the semester, a majority of students cite our structure of checking in as the main reason they have learned to feel safe in our class. In a post-class survey, Ashley writes, "I can trust Mrs. C because she notices when something is wrong with one of her students. I like how I can trust her with things that are going on. I want to be able to connect with my other teachers the way I connect with Mrs. C." Out of all the needs, a majority of students appreciate being given space and support. Even David, who was not entirely invested in brainstorming needs at the beginning of the semester, learns to assert his need for space and quiet when he decides to move to another table to work on his own.

At the end of our time together, students can vocalize an appreciation for this restorative environment, but throughout the semester it is definitely a struggle shifting to new ways of relating, being, and learning that center interdependence and agency. Michael's comment about keeping his feelings to himself is symptomatic of navigating schooling institutions predisposed towards compartmentalization for the sake of control (Jaggar, 1989**)**. As I learn later from developing a relationship with Michael throughout the semester, his reluctance comes from a history of mistrusting peers and adults in his life. As Thompson **(**2017) explains, students like Michael "often need to remain disassociated from their bodies in order to survive . . . . Part of the work toward [a classroom of] social justice, then, requires a re-connection to ourselves and to others, so that our profound interdependence is both revealed and treasured." With Michael and

many other students who carry the weight of chronic stress and trauma, I have to consider the way their bodies righteously desire protection and distance, while mapping out ways to cultivate a learning space that compassionately encourages risk and healing. In the next section, I move from collective needs to individual ones, reflecting on the way embodied strategies invite a student like David to connect inwards so that he can begin to feel safer with others.

Embodied Analysis: Identifying David's Needs and Befriending the Body

David is the kind of student that feels endearing and confusing at the same time. On the one hand, he enjoys being helpful—either setting up my camera and microphone for recording class interactions, or even lightening up our often heavy class content through his occasional humorous antics. On the other hand, he tends to slip to the back corners of the classroom and isolate himself, often struggling to complete assignments with an apparent fog hanging over him. Throughout the semester, he vacillates between a contradictory desire to be seen and a fear of being seen. At times, I get frustrated with him because he will often request space but neglects to ask for help. It's not like he does not want to succeed, though: in his writing, he talks about wanting to make his parents proud and learn ways to be a community health advocate at Chavez High School. One day, he even tears up in class when I check in with students about their grades and he finds out he has a C. Surprised by his sudden expression of emotions, I take him into the hallway to affirm how hard I see him working and review the possibilities of raising his grade. He seems crushed when I calculate his highest potential grade to be a B+, and not an A, by the end of the semester.

In different conversations and written reflections, I learn that David is carrying overwhelming stress from his family, neighborhood and school. Although he constantly refers to his family as important to him, he also feels neglected and burdened by them. "My mom didn't

give me attention when I was younger," he writes for a journal about a challenging time in his life. "This taught me that no one is going to always be there for you, so you have to deal with it." This feeling of neglect also comes from an incident last year, where he learned that the person he thought was his father is actually his step-father. He tells me that he tried taking different kinds of drugs to cope with this loss but didn't like the way it felt. He also feels responsible for his younger autistic sister, whom he mainly takes care of at home because his mother and step-father work throughout the evening. On top of that, he complains about fearing for his safety in his neighborhood, because of the time he stood up to a gang-affiliated neighbor for vandalizing his family's car and the neighbor pulled a gun out in retaliation. David lives across the street from Chavez High School and worries about getting jumped on the way home, because his neighbor has friends at the same school David attends.

I fear including all of these descriptions of David's life, at the risk of feeding into stereotypes about the suffering of young people of color in disenfranchised communities—because David is so much more than the trauma he carries. With all that clouds his mind, he continues to show up and tries to be his best self each day. But I also want to be honest about the ways in which he, at seventeen years old, is essentially forced to be his own parent, his sister's caregiver, and his family's protector. As Menakem (2017) simply puts it, he has experienced the trauma of events that are "too much, too fast, [and] too soon" (p. 7), and still ongoing. So it makes perfect sense that he finds it hard to focus in class, because his body is trying to protect himself from further overwhelm.

Whether as a son, a student, or a young man of color, David navigates a world he believes to be inherently unsafe. Instead of showing him love, David believes his family judges him as a failure and liar, which explains why he chooses to keep to himself most of the time.

David extends this need for protection to his identity as a young man of Salvadoran and Mexican descent. When I ask how his Latino identity impacts him, he responds: "Some people—they probably look at me like I'm dumb, but I don't share out stuff to anybody. I just stay here and stay quiet. I'm not the person who's gonna speak up, because I don't know if something bad is gonna happen." As Weller (2015) explains, "the failure of the world to offer us comfort in the face of trauma causes us to retreat from the world. We live on our heels, cautiously assessing whether it is safe to step in; we rarely feel it is" (pp. 38–39). With further conversation and through a group presentation I detail later in this chapter, I notice that David believes his environment is a reflection of his own faults, where he often questions his own worth. Weller goes on to describe how trauma survivors often turn the harm they've experienced inwards: "The failure of others to adequately attend the painful emotional experiences we have as children is translated as a reflection on our being inherently bad and outside the embrace of love" (p. 39). The more I speak with David, the more I wonder how I can help him confront these internalized narratives of self-doubt, while holding space for the often justified fears he has about experiencing more harm.

David is one of many students in my classrooms I have struggled with, to help recognize that they are not at fault when they have experienced multiple levels of pain and oppression. Mindfulness (Berila, 2015) recognizes that these conversations cannot happen at a purely cognitive level because of the way perceptions of shame and worthlessness become deeply embedded in our psyches and bodies. "Rather than merely seeing patterns of oppression in the society around us or even in our external behaviors," Berila explains, "we can begin to recognize *how* they have insinuated themselves in our selves, bodies, and spirits. We can learn to recognize the effects in our rapid heartbeat, our anger, our deep shame or sadness" (pp. 16–17, emphasis in

original). That is the reason why I integrate centering[6] exercises (similar to the practice I described in the Re-Anchoring section earlier) to help students befriend the feelings and thoughts they hold in their bodies in order to make sense of their self-perceptions and underlying needs.

I have learned from facilitating meditation in other secondary classrooms that it does not work to just jump in to embodied practices, nor should students be forced to participate a certain way, if at all (Cariaga, forthcoming). Before I invite students to meditate, we discuss why each specific centering exercise can be helpful in alleviating stress, then I model the practice through simulations or reflections about my own practice (see Figure 4 for explanation). Then, I guide students through the meditation, asking them to settle into their bodies, locate their breath and any feelings or thoughts that are present, and use their breathing to ground themselves, let go, and uncover anything that needs their attention. Students get to choose whether they close or open their eyes. They also decide upon a comfortable position, as some stay in their chairs, stand up and lean against a wall, walk towards the window to look outside, or put their heads down. If they choose not to participate, the only requirement is that they are silent enough to respect everyone's space to go inwards. After students center, they journal about what they noticed in their practice.

I am delighted when I see students like Michael choose to close his eyes and really drop in to centering, or Leticia and Lili who place their hands on their chests and bellies to feel their breath. I have to remind myself to be centered, when students' natural reactions to laugh, distract each other with goofy looks, or talk through the meditation start to frustrate me and other

[6] I use the words "centering" and "meditation" interchangeably here to describe the classroom practice, but I specifically call it "centering" with students to demonstrate how mindfulness can help them return to their center of power and focus. The centering exercise I use with students is similar to the one I practice in the Re-Anchoring section, but does not end with a commitment statement. Instead, I ask students to reflect on what they need in the present moment after dropping into their breath and bodies.

students who want quiet. It is a continual work in progress. I am surprised when Kaira, whom I perceive to be bored from the practice, says, "I felt like the practice was helpful because it took the negativity out of my body." In fact, while most students say they thought centering was "weird" at first, most find it helpful in dealing with stress from home and school. Roxana, a relatively quiet student who is also an English language learner, says about the practice: "I felt more liberated and less pressure on my body. It was a moment I could forget everything and just relax."

David has similar sentiments, where he says, "I didn't feel like doing it at first, because I had never done anything like that. I didn't want to look dumb. But later on, I started doing the breathing because I was really tired and had a lot of stuff on my mind." Over time, David's written reflections demonstrate how he is developing an embodied language to analyze his emotions and experiences. In his second reflection, David thinks there is a "correct" way to center when he says, "I laughed but I got it together and relaxed." By the third centering exercise, I emphasize to students that this is not about breathing the way *I* think they should, but about using the breath to befriend whatever their bodies are carrying in the moment—to just be okay with who they are and where they are. Compared to David's first two reflections, the third shows a deeper reflection about his present anxieties, where he is able to notice more how his body feels and the needs underneath. It is interesting to note that a majority of students talk about being so relaxed, they feel "sleepy" by the end, as I see numerous students yawn, including David. Perhaps centering has allowed students like David to lay down their hyper-vigilance for the moment and reveal the tiredness they feel from carrying so much weight in the world. This centering practice demonstrates the dialectical relationship between safety and bravery: David feels "calm and relaxed in [his] brain" *and* courageous enough to unravel worries he has

previously preferred to hide. What I hope students take away is that centering can be a space of intimate inquiry to help them feel present and that they can belong in their bodies, even if their environment dictates otherwise. Berila (2015) explains:

> . . . in a system that does violence to marginalized groups in myriad of ways, filling ourselves with acceptance and compassion is a radical act of self-preservation. It can heal us in ways that lets us dismantle those negative messages, and as a result, lets us more powerfully fight oppression in the outer world. (p. 81)

I now turn to the next part of this chapter, where David grapples with his experiences of school as a site of oppression, and is able to re-imagine a learning environment where compassion takes precedence over control.

Healing Literacies: Defining Safe and Brave Space

A podcast called This American Life*, from National Public Radio, is playing on the speakers. We are listening to "Harper High School," a non-fiction story set in a working-class neighborhood in Chicago that has faced a particularly violent summer of student deaths. The excerpt I have chosen from the story details a student named Devonte, who accidentally shot and killed his 14-year old brother*[7] *during that summer. We listen to a school social worker named Crystal Smith attempt to build rapport with Devonte so that he can begin to heal from his overwhelming guilt.*

Students are sitting either individually or in groups at tables spread throughout the classroom, reading a transcript I have printed out from the podcast. They have highlighters in their hands, ready to annotate sections that relate to the guiding theme for today's reading: safety in schools. After social worker Ms. Smith delicately uses humor and care to connect with

[7] It should be noted that whenever class texts have topics of traumatic events and/or violence, I offer a content warning to students to remember to take care of themselves if they feel triggered and to ask for support if necessary. I also try to attune to students' body language as we read topic-sensitive texts to see if I should check in with anyone during or after the reading.

Devonte, the story comes to an important moment where she challenges Devonte to face his trauma:

> Crystal Smith: You're going to have to feel safe somewhere to talk about it.
>
> Devonte: I feel safe wherever I'm at.
>
> Crystal Smith: I'm talking about the stuff with your brother.
>
> Devonte: Oh.
>
> Crystal Smith: I'm talking about the stuff that makes you take the NyQuil at night. That you're not talking to nobody about. That's a weight that you have to carry. Do you know what it's like to carry weight?
>
> Devonte: (LAUGHS UNCOMFORTABLY)
>
> Crystal Smith: No, I'm for real. Don't nobody know every day you feel like this. And it's like, can't nobody see it. But then I can – you know what I'm saying? I see it, and I know it. But then I don't know if you're ready. You see what I'm saying? To help get some of it off.
>
> Devonte: I don't understand.
>
> Crystal Smith: I'm saying, I'm with you on what the weight feels like.

I pause the recording and see numerous students automatically highlighting the last line that Smith says—"I'm with you on what the weight feels like." I invite the class to write comments in the margins, paraphrasing what Smith means by this and how this part makes them feel.

"She's trying to build empathy with Devonte," Leticia says, as we discuss students' annotations with the whole class. "He's carrying all of this guilt from his brother being gone, and she wants him to know that he doesn't have to be alone in all that heaviness."

"Right!" I respond. "And how does this part make you all feel?"

I look around, as no one raises their hand or speaks up for a good few seconds. I decide to pull a card from a pile of index cards[8] with students' names on them. I call on David. He

[8] To honor trauma-informed tenets of predictability and autonomy, I make sure that students have already written something down or discussed the topic with a partner before I call on

scrunches his eyes, annoyed by being chosen. Eli, David's friend who sits at a table next to him, laughs that David has to speak up.

"Umm . . ." David pauses, looking at his annotations. "It made me feel surprised."

"Why?" I ask.

He audibly sighs, bothered by my probing. "Because . . . the people I've seen in schools don't care like that."

"I see," I say, noticing that David has met his threshold for speaking up today, evidenced by his head looking down and fingers tapping on the desk. I thank David and other students for sharing and transition to listening to the rest of the podcast, and then direct the class to write analysis paragraphs about the way Ms. Smith creates safety with Devonte.

This annotation practice provides ways for students to document reactions from reading about places like "Harper High School," and another reading that we did prior to this, Metropolitan High School—both of which discuss restorative strategies to addressing student emotion and trauma. Their reading, highlighting, and commentary create layers of meaning to the text, as they step into the shoes of students struggling to balance their academic and emotional needs, and indirectly step back into their own experiences with schools that may have been radically different.

Below are two paragraphs that David writes, with the help of graphic organizers, sentence starters, models of exemplar writing, teacher feedback, and revisions. As David shares later in a group presentation, he is shaped by a dehumanizing experience in middle school which leaves him mistrusting of adults and schools in general. David's analysis of the texts below helps him envision more humanizing possibilities in schools.

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students. I also give students the right to pass if they feel uncomfortable answering the question, and then check in with them individually afterwards.

Table 1.

David's analysis paragraphs.

David's Analysis Paragraphs	
Guiding Questions	Response
In "A radical approach to discipline that starts with learning asks students, How does the Metropolitan School Academy respond to students' emotions? Do you agree with this approach—why or why not?	The way Metropolitan School Academy disciplines is good because they help the students and support them. They respond to students' emotions and ask if they can talk to them. In the article, the author describes how the teachers do not yell at the students. Instead, they ask them what is wrong. One quote was, "No, I care about you a lot. I don't think I'd call the cops on you." She cares about the student and tries to see what happened with him.
How does a social worker create safety for Devonte in Harper High School? Why is it important to cultivate safety in schools?	In "Harper High School," a social worker named Crystal Smith creates safety for a student named Devonte by listening to him and what he's going through regarding his guilt. In the podcast, we learn about Devonte, a student who accidentally shot and killed his 14-year old brother. Throughout the story, Ms. Smith makes Devonte feel safe as she uses humor to explain hard times that Devonte is going through. She also says at one point, "Close that door for me, because I don't want people walking back, all up in our conversation and stuff. You know?" Ms. Smith is able to create safety for Devonte, because she listens, is humorous with him, and protects his privacy. It's important to cultivate safety in schools because some students are going through hard times. When students feel safe they're able to be happy and comfortable.

In these two reflections, David is able to realize that empathy and support are not only possible, but necessary to honoring students and what they need. In his first paragraph, David

specifically chooses a moment where a teacher does not call the police on a student who admits to taking drugs. This is significant to David, who later describes a disturbing personal experience he had with police in middle school. In the second paragraph, he is able to reflect on students' needs for compassion and autonomy, which he was not given as a student. These texts therefore lead David to understand his own experiences differently, helping him see what students deserve in schools, instead of being complacent with what they are given.

For the summative unit assessment, students work in groups to present arguments about what a "Brave Space School" should look like, based on their personal experiences and class readings. The goal is for students to demonstrate their understanding of our theme about safety and bravery in schools, while also showing how they have developed as readers and writers in crafting well-supported paragraphs. David, Samar, and Rafael come up with the name "Supportive High School," because they maintain that a brave space school supports students with their specific needs and listens to students without judgment. Samar uses the Metropolitan School reading as an example of a supportive space for students who get bullied,[9] and Rafael cites her experience with a counselor at Chavez High School who was able to help her during a difficult time in her life. When David shares, he uses his personal experience to provide a counter-example of a supportive school:

> The opposite of a brave space school would be a place where they don't pay attention to you and antagonize you. I was in class talking to my friend and this kid pushed me and I pushed him back. He started hitting me and I just stood there. The teacher got in between us and the kid hit the teacher. The counselor asked her what happened and she said I was the one that hit her. The cops came and I got handcuffed. My mom saw me and started crying. That really changed me. The officer told my mom that if the teacher was going to press charges against me, I was going to get locked up. But she didn't press charges.

[9] In the next chapter, Samar analyzes an experience of being bullied in middle school.

> I was suspended for two weeks and had to apologize to the teacher to re-enter the class. This is an example of an anti-brave space because it shows that no one wanted to listen to my part of the story. Instead of antagonizing students, a brave space school creates a place where they listen to students and trust them.

From nurturing safety in his body through our embodied inquiry, to analyzing texts about schools that provide refuge for students, David is now able to reflect on his own experiences in school and consider the ways he should have been treated instead.

Healing literacies help students bear witness to painful histories, as this is the first time David publicly shares this story. Thompson (2017) explains that "writing about trauma, is not only about developing certain analytical and organizational skills, but also about creating a tangible record that an event did, in fact, occur, while attaching emotion to the event, transforming pain into beauty" (p. 11). In this case, however, David's testimony is not about revealing beauty, but exposing the ugliness of schools that traumatize and criminalize young people and their families, making them believe they are at fault. David feels both relieved in telling his story but also uncertain about the consequences of his testimony. "It felt good to share my story, but I wasn't sure what would happen next," he tells me in an interview later. David's bravery and apprehension shows me that "safety is fragile and that it is possible—even necessary—to be honest and authentic in spaces that are not entirely safe" (Berila, 2015, p. 139). Pedagogies of wholeness require students to feel "safe enough to let down their guard, to speak, to be fully in the room" (Thompson, 2017, p. 44). The last section of this blended portrait considers what the best pedagogical steps are, once students like David begin to feel safe enough to risk vulnerability in an English classroom.

Ongoing Healing: From Bravery to Belonging

As we learn to hold space for both safety and bravery in our bodies and classroom, we develop an understanding of what it takes to cultivate compassion in schools. I design our first

unit of the semester to focus on the tensions of safety and bravery, but David's experiences demonstrate that beyond both of these needs lies a core desire for belonging. When I design the following unit, I consider the questions: How can future assignments help David continue to unpack his middle school experience and release false identities that have been imposed on him? How can I nurture a learning environment where David doesn't always have to be brave? Is it possible for him to just be?

In our next unit (which is described in more detail in the following chapter), students write personal healing narratives about a painful moment that led to new understandings. They use an embodied framework, Gloria Anzaldúa's (2002) "path of conocimiento" to analyze their experiences and uncover the wisdom that emerges from adverse experiences. Through collective analysis, writing conferences with me, and peer feedback, David writes a detailed narrative that uses one of Anzaldúa's paths to uncover a need for empathy, support, and an unshakeable love of self. At the end of his essay, he writes:

> Throughout my experience, I felt what Anzaldúa describes as the path of Arrebato, which is a moment where you are forced to be strong and overcome things that can destroy you. I found myself in this stage when my counselor and the police didn't believe me when I said, "I didn't hit my teacher." I was suffering through this time, which felt like I had no one. I wanted to break down and I needed some help from my mom because she was the only person I had. My journey towards conocimiento has led me to realize it wasn't my fault. I thought I could heal by forgetting my problems, but I realize that healing is about taking time and not putting yourself down no matter what.

Here, David's provides a counter-story (Yosso, 2005) that re-frames a narrative of presumed guilt to one of redemption. Later, David says that writing this narrative helped him heal from internalized perceptions. "I used to think I was a bad kid," he explains. "It didn't help me emotionally or physically, because I was worried about getting judged all the time—either about what I did in the past, or about what I should be doing in the future. So it really helped to tell my story, because it took off a lot of that stuff that was put on me."

Again, this assignment helps David bear witness and deepen inquiry into his needs for unconditional belonging. Before engaging in healing literacies, David presumed his story would lead to more judgment. "I never talked about that story because I felt that if I told someone, they wouldn't like me," he says. "They probably would think I did push my teacher. But later in the semester, I saw that we all helped each other out. And no matter what, even if there was a dumb question, you would still help us. And when we shared our stories, it really helped out other people too." Through the safety he builds in his own body and with me and other students, David learns that he can bring his fullest self—pain, doubts, desires and all—and still belong and be supported. He learns that he can have a positive impact when he chooses to share that whole self with others. In the next blended portrait, I describe in greater detail what it takes to guide students to re-script internalized narratives of shame and pain to affirmation and healing.

CHAPTER SIX: THIS BRIDGE CALLED OUR STORIES[10]: REWRITING REALITY THROUGH NEPANTLERA TEXTS

> *We are all wounded but we can connect through the wound that's alienated us from others. When the wound forms a citracize, the scar can become a bridge linking people split apart.* (Anzaldúa, 2005, p. 102)

In this blended portrait, I explore how various traumas and stressors lock students and myself into dehumanizing beliefs—that we are alone, unworthy, unloved, and incomplete. We carry these wounds in our stories, which are upheld in our body's memories, emotions, logic, and ways we relate to others in the classroom and beyond. Through a unit of intimate inquiry, I examine how we gently confront these narratives, unpack the perceptions inside of them, and say thank you for what they were able to protect us from. The unit is grounded in Anzaldúa's (2002; 2005) *paths of conocimiento*, where students utilize this holistic framework to analyze and re-script narratives of pain, healing, and transformation. Their stories become a bridge to move from outdated perceptions to more liberating ones, from isolation to unity, from a split bodymindspirit to a reclaimed wholeness.

I begin with an explanation of the personal narrative unit, discussing how Anzaldúa's framework sets the stage for embodied analysis and storytelling. I also explain how I structure literacy practices to center openness, autonomy, and connection as ways to understand and shift away from perceptions of shame, powerlessness, and detachment that students carry from their lived experiences. Next, I look at a moment of collective analysis during the unit where Anzaldúa's *paths of conocimiento* invite vulnerability from the class, particularly from a student named Samar. I hone in on Samar's needs as they emerge from our class discussions and

[10] This chapter specifically, and this entire dissertation generally, is inspired by the trailblazing radical women of color feminist anthologies, *This Bridge Called My Back* (1983), and *This Bridge We Call Home* (2002).

personal conversations. Afterwards, I reflect on the tensions inherent to such intimate storytelling in an English classroom and how I negotiated boundaries and re-centered throughout. I examine Samar's narrative, where she is able to rewrite a moment of internalized and interpersonal violence into one of affirmation and love. Throughout the blended portrait, I emphasize stories—from Anzaldúa's words, other multimedia texts, students, and myself—as taking on the important role of *nepantlera texts,* which serve as literary bridges for students to reclaim agency for themselves and solidarity with each other. Last, I conclude by sharing next steps for Samar and her classmates to deepen their intersectional analysis and healing, explaining how this curriculum transitions into our final unit of the semester.

Intimate Inquiry Unit Design: Our Paths of Conocimiento

As an English teacher, one of my favorite times of the academic year is teaching the requisite personal narrative unit. It has always been an opportunity to get a snapshot of students' lives and build authentic community. With my research and pedagogical intentions, I do not want to approach storytelling from a limited cognitive and apolitical lens; instead, I design the unit to frame storytelling as an embodied act of resistance. From past professional development as an English teacher and throughout my graduate academic training, I have little experiences of embodied storytelling to pull from. Developing pedagogies of healing requires me to draw from outside of my disciplines, specifically from an embodied leadership training I participated in with an organization called Generative Somatics (GS).[11]

One of the training's assignments is called the Emotional Political Autobiography, where participants share pivotal moments in their life, reflecting on the emotions and desires that surface through these memories, and how they became politicized in the process. Participants

[11] My training with GS inspires much of the centering and re-anchoring strategies I share in this dissertation. For more info on GS, go to http://www.generativesomatics.org/

write out their narratives, share their stories in a small circle of listeners, and receive loving feedback. Facilitators encouraged participants to speak and receive from our whole selves and not shy away from emerging feelings. Through a combination of bodily awareness and intentional connection with people around me, I was able to experience an abundant kind of listening that I had not felt in classrooms before. As the training facilitators reminded me to stay present in my body as I spoke, I learned to repair harms I experienced as a woman and mother of color, and rewrite a deep shame that has gotten in the way of seeing my wholeness. I articulated my need to be seen, heard, and understood in those moments. This was not about proving my worth by telling a perfectly crafted story; I knew that what I shared, how I shared it, and what I embodied as I told my story was enough. I was able to be present in my bodymindspirit as I connected pain from my past to the resilience I carry with me in the present and future.

With the same intentions towards deep listening, embodied storytelling, and a rewriting of harm, I design a personal narrative unit called "Healing Self: Our Paths of Conocimiento" to lead into the following summative assessment, objectives, and academic standards in Figure 5 below.

WRITING PROMPT

Choose a difficult and/or painful moment in your life that helped you learn something about yourself. Describe that moment in detail: What led up to that moment? What happened? How did it make you feel? How did it impact you?

Use one or more of Gloria Anzaldua's "paths of conocimiento" to analyze how this moment led to healing, new understandings, and new connections.

Advanced Credit: Use your intersectional lens to explain how parts of your identity were impacted by different kinds of power and how this lens shaped your view of the world and the strength you carry in the face of difficulties.

Objectives

- ☐ To write, edit, and publish a detailed and thoughtful analysis of a personal experience
- ☐ To courageously speak your own truth into a sense of empowerment, healing, and solidarity
- ☐ To collaborate with peers and Mrs. Cariaga to create and publish a class magazine

Common Core Standards

- CCSS.ELA-LITERACY. RI 11-12.3: Analyze a complex set of ideas or explain how ideas and events interact over the course of [multiple] texts
- CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.11-12.3: Narrative to develop real experiences through effective style
- CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.11-12.2: Explanatory text to examine ideas through analysis

Figure 5. Our Paths of Conocimiento Writing Prompt.

Instead of focusing just on narrative writing, I draw from the political aspect of the Emotional Political Autobiography assignment from GS and invite students to analyze how their story fits into a collective narrative of pain, healing and transformation. The unit begins with introducing students to the concept of an "intersectional lens," where they unpack how their different identities are impacted by systems of power and the assets they carry in their respective communities. I choose Anzaldúa's (2002) essay, "Now Let Us Shift: The Path of Conocimiento . . . Inner Work, Public Acts," as a theoretical framework because it articulates the connection between personal healing and collective empowerment and models the kinds of embodied writing I want students to demonstrate. As a class, we carefully sift through Anzaldúa's seven *paths of conocimiento*[12] as a process of multiple paths that intersect, interrupt, and ultimately

[12] It should be noted that Anzaldúa only names one "path" of conocimiento in her 2002 essay, and discusses seven "stages" that lead to new consciousness. For the purposes of this

work together to create a new personal and cultural consciousness (see Figure 6 for an explanation of the paths).

Anzaldúa's (2002, 2015) "Paths of Conocimiento"	
Path	Description
Arrebato	A sudden rupture, fragmentation, ending, and/or beginning
Nepantla	Torn between ways, ideologies, people, places, emotions, etc.
Coatlicue	A third space of despair, hopelessness, and isolation
Call to action	Breaking free from habitual coping strategies
Putting Coyolxauhqui back together	Re-integration after being split apart
Blow up	Desire to share story but world fails to live up to ideals
Spiritual activism	Holistic alliance by connecting through wounds
"In all seven spaces you struggle with the shadow, the unwanted aspects of the self . . . All seven are present within each stage, and they occur concurrently, chronologically or not." (Anzaldúa, 2002, p. 542)	

Figure 6. Anzaldúa's "Paths of Conocimiento."

Before students write their own narratives, we practice applying the paths to several *nepantlera texts* through graphic organizers, small group discussion and individual reflection. English teachers use what is often called "mentor texts" as models to demonstrate the writing process. Developing pedagogies of healing requires these mentor texts to move beyond modeling cognitive processes to also capture the emotional labor it takes to produce an intimate piece of writing. Anzaldúa (2005) discusses how "nepantleras . . . help us mediate these transitions, help us make the crossings, and guide us through the transformation process" (p. 99). I intentionally structure in *nepantlera texts* throughout the unit: I tell my own stories of pain and loss and talk about the strength it takes to share with others; I invite guest speakers to tell their own stories and apply the paths to their healing process; and I have students read excerpts from authors of color who incorporate emotions and an intersectional analysis into their

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curriculum, I use the word "paths" instead of "stages" to help students understand that these various entry points into healing and understanding are not linear and intersect with one another.

autobiographical writing. We also analyze the "Thanksgiving" episode from the comedy *Master of None,* as a *nepantlera text* to humorously lighten up the subject matter, which is discussed more in the next section. After writing multiple drafts, peer editing, and individual conferences with me, students publish their narratives in a class magazine (see Figure 7 for student-designed cover). Next, I describe how students engage in a collective analysis of the "paths of conocimiento," where multiple stories, including Samar's, emerge as a *nepantlera text* to inspire others to reflect on their own pain and healing.

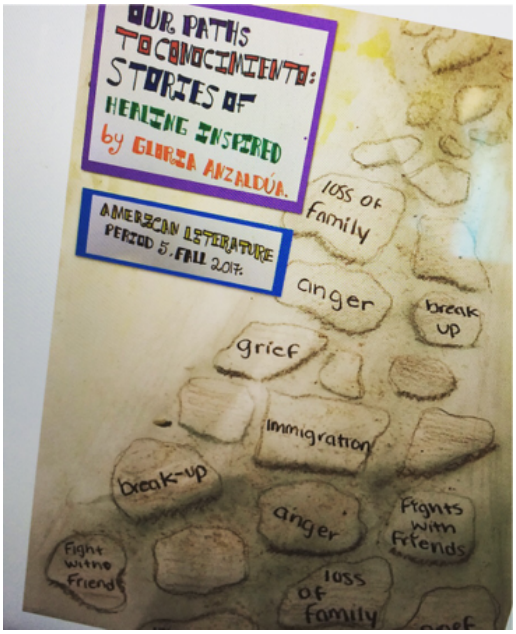


Figure 7. Our Paths to Conocimiento Student Magazine Cover.

Embodied Analysis: Nepantlera Texts as Bridges

"Ooh! Look at you, David!" Kaira hollers, as we watch a student-produced video of David with his head down looking defeated. Then in dramatic slow motion, he walks through a doorway, raises his head in pride, circles his arms above him, and beams with a smile of triumph. The whole class bursts into laughter, knowing that David is not one to be the center of

attention. He sits in the back of the classroom quietly, shaking his head in slight embarrassment, but also smiling in proud amusement. This is one of the videos student groups have prepared to demonstrate their understanding of Anzaldúa's "paths of conocimiento," which we finished reading the day before.

"Who can guess which path this video relates to?" I ask the class.

Five different students enthusiastically raise their hands, and Kaira answers, "call to action!" She explains that David's body language represents a call to action because of the way he seems "locked up in a cage" like Anzaldúa says, but then breaks free when he busts through the door. She connects the call to action to a time her mother made her feel unloved and how she wanted to escape her home.

Next, another group shares their video. We see Christopher standing in the hallway, then shake his entire body as if an earthquake has suddenly erupted and he falls to the floor. We laugh again, and students correctly guess that Christopher represents the path called "arrebato." I call on Rianna to define arrebato. She speaks so quietly that the entire class must inch in to hear her. As an English language learner, Rianna often struggles with asserting her voice in class discussions. Eventually, Melissa speaks up for Rianna and reads her writing for her: "the arrebato is about having to be strong and overcoming things that can destroy you." Christopher, who tends to explain things for Rianna even though she is capable of speaking for herself, offers an example of an arrebato: "We feel like this sometimes when you have to present in front of people, because a lot of us get shy but we still have to share." Trying to embody patience and affirm Rianna, I respond, "Yes, the arrebato is about forcing you to get out of your comfort zone. For those of us who speak different languages, it sometimes takes an arrebato to develop your confidence." Rianna looks at me knowingly, as we both smile at each other.

Now, it's Alberto's turn to show a picture that his group created. Since I previewed all of the group's videos and pictures beforehand, I give a content warning to students: "This next picture is about something pretty serious that affects many young people, maybe even some of you in this class. I know we're having fun guessing the paths, but I want to remind you to be respectful of people and their different experiences." The class waits curiously, as Alberto shows a picture of a forearm that has red lines drawn on it with a marker (see Figure 8). Students look through their quotes on the paths of conocimiento and guess that the picture represents Coatlicue, a nahuatl word that symbolizes depression, self-hate, and acknowledging deep pain.

Samar, who has been light-hearted throughout most of class, chimes in matter-of-factly: "An example of this is when my dad left Mexico to go to the States when I was six years old. It didn't affect me at first, but when I was in sixth grade I felt really lonely without him. I started cutting myself. But then I started getting into sports, and stopped."

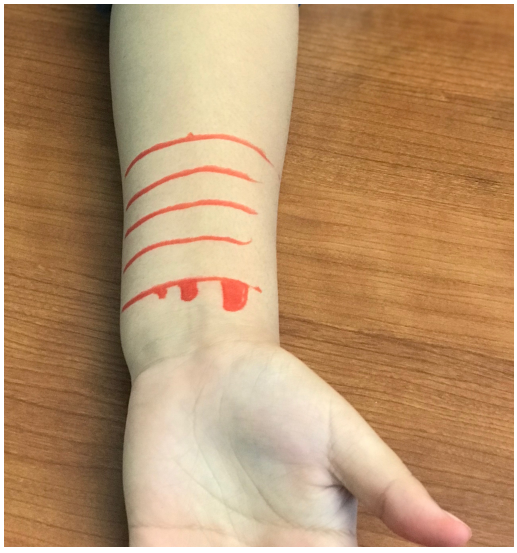


Figure 8. Depression.

With Samar's sudden vulnerability, I can feel myself reaching towards different places at once: I want to comfort Samar and her sixth grade self for what she had to endure; I want to

check in with other students whose shifts in body language could signify they've had similar struggles; I need to remind students about mandatory reporting when it comes to comments about self-harm, but also don't want to alienate Samar in the middle of her brave offering to our class. Then I breathe. I give myself a chance to re-center in the middle of my stirrings and the reflective lull in our discussion.

Slowly, I respond to Samar, "Thank you for sharing. So for our graphic organizer, can I write . . . When there's hardship in your family, it can make you feel . . . Does the word depressed sound okay?"

Simultaneously, Samar nods and David, who has been quiet up until now, yells out, "Yes!"

I continue to add, as I type into our graphic organizer for everyone to see. "But when you confront that hardship, you become stronger. Does that work, Samar?"

Samar nods yes again. Now, I see her looking off at the distance, her foot tapping on the floor. I wonder what she is thinking, now that she has revealed a part of herself to us. I take a moment to observe Samar's body language to see where the discussion should go.

I invite students to turn back to the paths of conocimiento to frame our conversation: "Anzaldúa says here that you can use energy like this to heal, that depression can challenge your tendency to withdraw and remind you to take action." I don't want to spend too much class time on Samar's comment but also want to recognize her experiences, so I continue, "Just so we don't leave Samar hanging after sharing, can you raise your hand if you know someone who has done the same thing, or has been overwhelmed by depression?"

Rafael and David slowly raise their hands, as Samar looks around, her mouth pursed in acknowledgement. "Again, Samar thank you for sharing and being courageous. Is there anything anyone else wants to say to Samar?"

There is a few-second pause before Melissa says, "Thank you for sharing."

Then Kaira jumps in more emphatically, "Thank you for sharing!"

Samar, whose attention started to drift off earlier, is now looking at Melissa and Kaira with a bright smile, and others laugh at Kaira's enthusiasm. David is laughing too, this time audibly sniffing, as if he was crying. We all laugh with David too, as Samar's vulnerability has brought us closer in this tender moment.

In this fruitful class discussion, both Anzaldúa's words and students' examples serve as *nepantlera texts* to help us investigate painful experiences from a place of openness and embodied reflection. When we read Anzaldúa's (2002) unflinching description of her struggles with depression and illness, we too are able to "confront our desconicimientos, our sombras, the unacceptable attributes and unconscious forces that a person must wrestle with to achieve integration" (p. 98). These nepantlera texts "function disruptively" (p. 84), as students are given permission to un-compartmentalize the identities and experiences they have been taught to tuck away, and the paths of conocimiento give them a language of the bodymindspirit to name their pain and longings. The students' videos and photos, as well as Samar's own tenacious body language, demonstrate how the body, too, speaks stories that can collectively produce alternative ways of knowing. The body adds both a complexity and a familiarity to our analysis, where students make deep meaning out of their lived experiences and connect easily to the visceral images, feelings, and sensations that arise. In their excitement, laughter, and compassion with

each other, they subvert an "apartheid of knowledge" (Delgado Bernal & Villapando, 2002) by using their embodied stories to reclaim knowledge and connection.

Samar, in particular, takes on a powerful role of nepantlera by sharing an experience she never publicly told before. Samar is a relatively new student to the school, having attended only four weeks at Chavez High, so I later ask her what makes her comfortable sharing personal stories with the class. "I feel like every time I would come into the room, you would make me feel safe as a new student and always be there to help me," Samar says. "It felt good to tell my story and listen to others too." For Samar and other students, a pedagogy of healing requires an intentional process of nurturing safe and brave spaces (as discussed in the previous chapter), attuning to students' bodymindspirits to assess appropriate next steps for engagement, and explicitly teaching skills like empathy so that students feel fully heard and seen. It is important to not treat narratives simply as an opportunity for individual catharsis. Instead, Samar teaches us that "by redeeming [her] most painful experiences [she transforms] them into something valuable, algo para compartir, so [other students] too may be empowered" (Anzaldúa, 2002, p. 540).

In our collective analysis, an embodied reading process also becomes important in nurturing a pedagogy of healing. The "Thanksgiving" episode (Matsoukas, 2017) of *Master of None* becomes another *nepantlera text* that helps Samar continue to engage in intimate inquiry. In the episode, a Black character named Denise explores coming out to her mother in different stages of her young life. Conversations ensue around the difficulty of coming out and being safe in a Black queer body, which helps students find ways to talk about their own intersecting identities in relationship to pain and healing. As we watch the episode, I ask students to look at the actors' body language, explore how they feel as they watch the episode and how the scenes

relate to the paths of conocimiento. Below is an excerpt from Samar's analysis of Denise's story:

Table 2.

Samar's Analysis of "Thanksgiving" Episode from *Master of None.*

Samar's Analysis of "Thanksgiving" Episode from *Master of None*			
	Description of scene	My feelings	Path of conocimiento
Scene 1	Denise's mom told her to put on a dress, but Denise decides to dress herself in more masculine clothes.	This scene made me feel good because she's brave to wear what she wants.	Call to action—Denise is breaking free from what her mother and society expects of her.
Scene 2	Denise comes out to her best friend Dev and tells him she has a crush on Ericka. She doesn't want to tell her mom because she thinks her mom will be ashamed of her.	This scene makes me feel understood, because I'm going through the same thing. I'm bisexual but don't want to tell my mom.	Spiritual activism—Denise and Dev are connecting through Denise coming out.
Scene 3	Denise's mother starts crying when Denise comes out to her. Her mom says it's already hard being a Black woman. Her mom doesn't want life to be hard for her.	This scene made me feel surprised because her mom cried.	Arrebato—Denise's mom is forced to change because Denise refuses to be anything but herself.

This embodied reading process allows students to practice connecting the behavior, emotions, and needs of characters before doing the same deep meaning-making for their own final narrative. Again, Samar shares a part of herself she hadn't before—that she is afraid to tell her mother about her sexuality. Before engaging in this collective analysis, Samar assumed that coming out to her mother would automatically result in shame and disappointment. Denise's story in *Master of None*, which is based on writer and actress Lena Waithe's real story growing up in South Side Chicago, helps Samar see the possibilities of owning her sexuality, to feel loved

in it, and empathize with other perspectives like that of Denise's mother. As a nepantlera text, this episode helps:

> . . . reveal how our cultures see reality and the world . . . model the transitions our cultures will go through, carry visions for our cultures, preparing them for solutions to conflicts and the healing of wounds. (Anzaldúa, 2015, p. 83)

Denise's story acts as a mirror to Samar's realities as a young person wanting to be seen in her wholeness, and paves the path for Samar to envision a journey towards healing in her own body and with her family. While Samar eventually chooses to write about a different experience for her "Path to Conocimiento" essay, her narrative parallels a similar trajectory towards re-writing shame into pride and unconditional love.

Identifying Samar's Needs

I now turn to Samar's needs underneath the experiences and perceptions she shares with me and students throughout the semester. I learn to check in with Samar at the beginning of class when I can, since her daily mood often wavers between bubbly joy and distant fatigue. At times she will burst into class with an "Oh my god, miss, I'm having a great day!" as she waves "Hi!" to the camera I use to record classroom interaction for my research. On these days, I spend time gently reeling her focus in, reminding her how much time is left and what she needs to complete. Other times, she shows up looking preoccupied, resisting interaction. "I'm not feeling it today," she tells me. I give her options, saying "You can take a few minutes to transition into class on your own by writing in your journal or putting your head down. But eventually, I need to see work." Some days are easier for Samar to become present again, while other days she struggles throughout the period.

From writing, classroom discussions and my check in conversations with her, I learn that Samar's struggles often stem from her family. Her parents are from Mexico and she lives with

her mother. Like she shared earlier, Samar's father left when she was little. She and her father are undocumented, which prevents her father from seeing her because he lives in Mexico. "The world can be challenging because people tell me that my family doesn't belong here. Or they tell my mom to speak English because she's in America." Proud of surviving different struggles, she carries a tenacious pride that helps other students affirm their own identities. I ask her where she gets her confidence from and she replies at length:

> People think that my confidence is always up. I've been through a lot, so I just don't care about what other people say. Because are they the ones buying my shoes? Paying my bills? Buying my clothes? No! Then why should I give a fuck? But then, other things I actually care about. Like when people say, oh, you don't have a dad because of this and that. I get offended because that was part of my life and it was really hard for me. But when it's about me, I don't care. Fuck what they say!

As she speaks, she carries an exuberant dignity about her, smiling, swerving her head side to side to emphasize her words, and whipping her hair to emphasize how much she doesn't care about her "haters." We laugh together, celebrating the openness that translates from her body into her words. Her honesty is complex in its ability to express both a hard exterior of protection against criticism and a soft interior that is still wounded from her father's absence.

Samar's transparency reveals an underlying desire to be heard and helped. I ask Samar to stay afterschool the day she talked about cutting herself, and carefully ask her if she is interested in seeing a social worker at school. "Yeah, I would like that," Samar immediately responds, "because I feel like if I told my mom, she would just judge me." I break down what the process will look like: I will walk her down to the counselor's office and see who she can speak with, the social worker will likely end up telling her mother what happened to make sure she is safe at home, and that I will be in touch with the social worker as we all figure out how to best support her. A week later, I notice that Samar is especially distant in class so I check in with her again. She requests to talk to the social worker, Ms. Jones, during class, so I write her a note. I later

learn that Ms. Jones talked to Samar's mother about what transpired in sixth grade. I ask Samar how this felt and she replies, "It was scary at first, but it wasn't that bad. It feels like I don't have to hide things anymore. I feel lighter." She smiles and yawns, telling me that she hasn't been able to sleep much lately. I often feel tense in these conversations with Samar, because throughout my years of teaching, mandatory reporting has always felt rife with uncertainty. By the end of the semester, however, Samar says, "One of the things I will appreciate most is you taking the time to find help for me. I will never forget that."

Cultivating a pedagogy of healing with Samar and students like her often feels like this: constantly moving between refreshing honesty and protecting privacy, not knowing if I'm making the right decisions with students as they open up their lives to me and receiving validation that I am doing okay as their teacher. It takes a measured amount of self and collective care strategies to keep me grounded throughout this intimate inquiry with Samar and her classmates, which I now turn to in the following section.

Re-Anchoring: Setting Boundaries, Seeking Support

Along with Anzaldúa's theory of conocimiento, our supplemental texts, and students' experiences, I take on the role of nepantlera as I share various personal stories and learn to model healthy boundaries to balance the vulnerability I share throughout the unit. Going into this semester of teaching English again, I know I wanted to avoid my default tendencies to over-extend and burnout. Despite my intentions, those tendencies still show up throughout this unit. In the journal entry below, I sift through the weight of everything I am carrying—from teaching, personal life, and engaging with the world at large—and ways to manage it all from a place of self-compassion and wholeness.

> *I feel over-saturated with stories—my own which I'm trying to share openly in class, students' stories about death, depression, separation, violence, and the stories about*

> *sexual assault inundating my social media feed from the #metoo campaign. It doesn't help that the story I'm planning to share with students is about being physically and emotionally violated by a doctor after giving birth to my son.*
>
> *My shoulders and upper back feel tight and heavy. I feel like I'm handling a lot right now. I feel like I'm being broken open by learning to assert my needs in the middle of everything. I'm so tired of saying I'm tired. My body is literally slowing down and my mind can't fixate on anything long enough to do the things I need to do: write a draft of my son's birth story to share with class, plan tomorrow's lesson, give students feedback on their writing. How is it that I already feel on the verge of burnout, and it's just the middle of the semester?*
>
> *Sometimes I keep telling myself, I can just get through this day. This week. But that's not how I want to function. Just getting by. I'm supposed to be teaching students about how to thrive, not just survive.*
>
> *So what do I need? I need rest. I need to be heard. I need to back off social media because that shit is draining. I need to commit to developing relationships offline that can sustain me in this work I care about. I need to give myself permission to slow down. I need to feel joy. Peace. I need to know that I will be okay. I need to know that I am not alone. I need to know I'm loved and supported.*

In this journal entry and throughout this unit, I find myself in one of the paths of conocimiento called *nepantla*, a liminal space of contention where I am torn between my tendencies to overwork and my intentions for sustainability. As a woman and teacher of color, navigating systems of oppression and an institution that promotes productivity at the expense of connection and care, I find it painfully challenging to say "no" to the voices constantly telling me that I, alone, must keep doing more for students. But my bodymindspirit becomes a place of resistance where I am "forced to take up the task of self-redefinition . . . leading to a different way of relating to people . . . to the creation of a new world" (Anzaldúa, 2015, p. 17). Slowing down in the middle of compassion fatigue and on the brink of burnout, I have to learn to listen to my body's way of asserting boundaries when my mind wants to keep going.

Intent on loving myself in the process of lovingly teaching students, I give myself permission to sit with my feelings of inadequacy, meditate, and write what my bodymindspirit is

trying to tell me. I seek support by getting reiki sessions from community wellness practitioners to help me see what I cannot see alone. Although at times it is exhausting to do so much intentional noticing in my bodymindspirit, I slowly recognize an internalized pattern of becoming immersed in the grind of teaching, appeasing everyone else's needs before mine, and becoming resentful of others when I begin to burnout. Part of this pattern comes from a genuine place of care and passion for teaching, while much of it is wrapped up in a cultural and personal narrative that says I am too small to ask for support, there is not enough space for my own needs, and I am alone in this work. In my reiki session with a healer and friend named Angelica, I learn through breathing exercises, visualizations, and literally being held in Angelica's arms, that I can speak back to these voices: I deserve to be and am already supported; the world is expansive enough to hold students *and* my needs; and I am inextricably connected to a loving network of family and community that stretches from my earliest ancestors to my most future students and descendants. By allowing my bodymindspirit to return me to a place of abundance, gratitude, and grace, I can re-fashion my teaching to do the same. Angelica becomes my nepantlera, affirming that "it takes energy and courage to name ourselves and grow beyond cultural and self-imposed boundaries. As agents of awakening, nepantleras remind us of each other's search for wholeness" (Anzaldúa, 2005, p. 93).

Thus, I learn that setting boundaries around my wellness is not just about saying "no" to habits of over-extension, but about re-writing my internalized beliefs that I am pre-destined towards invisibility, so that I can "yes" to unapologetic self and collective care. If I am to teach students to re-imagine a more liberatory world where everyone's needs are fully seen, I must begin by first re-imagining that world for myself. So when Samar is telling me about missing her father in Mexico and I feel my body drifting away from myself because I am immersed in

Samar's sadness, I literally shift my body back in my seat to remind myself that I can understand students' needs while being centered in my own. When I can feel my body sinking from the fatigue of reading students' stories, one after another, I pause, take a break, and let my breathe release whatever pain and emotions that are not my own. When it is time for peer editing drafts of students' narratives, I facilitate a meditation exercise to ease into talking about collective needs before sharing stories with one another. After getting in touch with our breath and current feelings in our bodies, I express the following:

> *Alright y'all. Before I have you share your stories with each other, I want us to practice sharing feelings and needs with our peer editors. That way, your peer editors know how to work with you as you read your story.*
>
> *To show you how to do that, I will share my feelings, needs and story with the whole class first. During the meditation, I noticed my eyebrows were scrunched up and my breath was short. I'm feeling a little irritated because many of you were talking or goofing off at the beginning of class. Sometimes that makes me feel invisible or like I'm the only one who cares about this work. I'm assuming you care about these stories you are telling, yes? (Most of the students nod their heads). Then I need some more respect from you as we work on these stories together.*
>
> *Today, I am going to share my son's birth story, so I feel nervous too. Know that my voice might tremble because I'm nervous reading this for the first time out loud. When I read personal stories like this, young people tend to have a lot of questions right away. When I read it, I am requesting that you just sit and fully listen as I read the entire draft once. Then you can ask questions after. Can we do that?*

The students who were talkative earlier shift in their seats, as the entire class nods their heads or agrees verbally that they can meet my needs. I share my story, feeling much more present now that students have heard me out. When students share needs with their peer editors, some explain that they are scared because they have never shared these experiences before; some tell their partners they need help with grammar or an ending; others tell their partners not to laugh because the experience wasn't funny to them at the time. Our bodymindspirits become integrated into the curriculum as a resource to enhance our connections and writing process.

This classroom practice of meditating, reflecting and sharing needs becomes a collective care structure that mutually supports all of us to feel fully supported as we engage in collective intimate inquiry. Practicing shifting my internalized narratives makes me better equipped to support students in shifting their own perceptions, which I discuss in the next section, where Samar uses the paths of conocimiento to give voice to a painful and ultimately healing experience from her childhood.

Healing Literacies: Shifting Narratives and Reality

Students choose a wide range of moments to narrate and analyze in their "My Path to Conocimiento" essay: reclaiming self-worth from an unjust experience in middle school (as David demonstrated in the previous chapter), unpacking family unity that emerges from mourning the death of relatives, expressing anger at losing a brother to prison, mourning the loss of home, language, and family through migration stories, to name a few. Many of the students' stories begin with a sense of powerlessness from forces beyond their control, like illness, the prison industrial complex, and drug wars, but through a brave re-telling and re-framing are able to distinguish deep resilience and love amidst the pain. As Anzaldúa (2015) states, they "create an alternative identity story" that can hold the weight of grief, rage, and uncertainty while asserting the power that they hold personally and collectively (p. 6).

When brainstorming moments to write about, Samar lists her father's absence, her uncle's death, and a couple crossed out items, but eventually chooses an incident from elementary school. "In third grade," she explains to me in class, "I started getting bullied because of my weight. It starting to affect me a lot, so I wouldn't eat at home and would tell my mom I was full from eating at school." Samar's mother eventually learns about Samar's eating

habits after an event in her physical education class. At the beginning of her essay, Samar explains:

> We had to run four laps and I decided to run without stopping. After the first lap, I starting feeling sick and dizzy, so I started to slow down, but in one second, I passed out. When I woke up, I was in the hospital. I saw my mom with tears in her eyes like I've never seen before. I felt guilty for putting her through all this. I didn't want to look at her but she got close to me and gave me a big hug. I felt so relieved that she wasn't mad at me. She held my hands and looked straight into my eyes, and said, "Always remember that no matter what you're going through, I'm always going to be right here next to you."

We can see throughout her narrative, that Samar considers other people's emotions—feeling guilty about causing her mother pain, worrying what her classmates think of her body—while disappearing her own needs. At eight years old, Samar displaces the anger that she holds against her peers and projects them inwards, towards her own body. Practicing healing literacies in an English classroom, I am always considering Audre Lorde's (2007) words, where she says, "Anger is loaded with information and energy . . . Focused with precision, it can become a powerful source of energy serving progress and change" (p. 127). As I guide Samar to using the paths of conocimiento to make meaning from her experiences, I consider: How can Samar be more precise with her anger in order to reclaim a sense of dignity for herself?

In the following discussion during afterschool tutoring, I use a series of mirroring questions to help Samar give witness to the needs underneath her behavior as a third-grade girl. As Samar responds, she types her words into her essay draft.

> Mrs. Cariaga (C): So if you could go back and talk to your third grade self, what would you say to her?
>
> Samar (S): Talk to your mom about it. Talk to adults about it. Talk to teachers about your bulimia.
>
> C: So that what?
>
> S: So that they could stop the people that are bullying you, so you don't have think about starving yourself.
>
> C: Why do you think your third-grade self didn't talk to adults?

S: She was scared. She was scared that her bullies would do something.

C: So she was trying to protect herself?

S: Yes . . . (typing furiously away as she speaks now). This moment in my life showed me that I needed more support from my friends so that I didn't have to keep all my feelings to myself.

C: (giving Samar a moment to finish typing) . . . And what did you learn about your mother's love throughout this? What did it teach you?

S: That she's always going to be there supporting me no matter what, she's always going to be there for me as a best friend or a mom.

C: And without knowing it, you did your concluding sentence for that paragraph!

S: Oh yeah?! (smiling as she finishes typing).

Although it appears that this essay is easy for Samar to write, it is important to note that she struggles with writing in class. With her wavering emotions throughout different classes and her tendency to be distracted by peer conversations, I help Samar recognize that she needs quiet space and more flexible time to complete her work, as she writes much of her essay afterschool sitting beside me. My series of questions supports Samar's writing process in two ways: one, they give her a mirror into her third-grade self so that she can step into that moment with its accompanying feelings and needs; two, they also give her enough distance from her present self, as students can often get emotionally overwhelmed by returning to difficult moments from the past. Samar is able to practice self-empathy and still stay in the present. Balancing narrative writing with emotional literacy, these teaching strategies align with a trauma-informed lens that reminds teachers to be vigilant about re-traumatization. I also made a point to end these kinds of questions on strength and resilience; in this case, Samar, despite her fear and guilt, is able to articulate her mother's unconditional love for her.

Besides practicing self-empathy, Samar utilizes Anzaldúa's path of conocimiento to deepen her analysis. Below is the rest of her essay that adeptly utilizes the paths to make sense of her experiences. By the end, it is clear why Samar chooses to title her essay, "Warrior":

> *Throughout my experience, I felt what Anzaldúa describes as the path of Coatlicue, which is a kind of anger that forces you to acknowledge your pain. According to Anzaldúa, this path is marked by a deep sense of darkness. Behind the pain, there's a desire for happiness and respect. When those kids bullied me I felt connected to Coatlicue because I felt irritated that I couldn't have a moment of peace. When I decided to starve myself, I thought I could gain respect from other people. When I woke up in the hospital and saw my mom crying, I hated myself because I felt that I was putting her through pain. This path taught me to not hide my pain or keep my feelings to myself. I was able to become closer to my mom and gain the support I needed.*
>
> *I also experienced the path of Call to Action, which forces you to make a change and break free. Anzaldúa (2002) says,"You begin to define yourself in terms of who you are becoming, not who you have been" (p. 560). I found myself in this stage when I realized that I shouldn't care what those bullies had to say about me. At times, I wanted to use violence against them so that they could stay away. Behind those feelings, what I needed was to break free from their violent words thrown at me. I yearned for support from my friends and my mom. If I never went to the hospital, my family wouldn't have known I got bullied. This journey led me to reconnect with my mom because she taught me that no matter what I'm going through I'll always have her support. This painful moment taught me to defend myself instead of keeping things in. I learned that instead of causing harm to myself, I know that I can ask for help. Although painful experiences like these are difficult to endure, I am grateful for what this moment has taught me because if none of this had happened I would have never become the bad bitch I am now.*
>
> *I thought I could heal by starving myself but I realized that healing is about not just being healthy but feeling good about myself. My healing has been about speaking back to the voices that say I'm fat and that I'm breakable. To those voices I say, I am unbreakable, I am beautiful. Those words are more about those bullies who make themselves look bad and make me look really strong. I survived trying to kill myself. I am no longer silent. I write this story because many of people are bullied. I especially write to young women who are often silent when they're being attacked just because of their accent, color, or for just being themselves.*

Grounded in Anzaldúa's theory of conocimiento, Samar is able to transform a difficult moment into a place of possibility and transformation. The "My Path of Conocimiento" assignment allows Samar and other students to navigate multiple texts: the written text of Anzaldúa's framework to anchor her analysis, her lived experiences as text to critique socially constructions

of body image, and her emotions as text to deepen understandings about underlying needs and assets. Traditional English teachers may scoff at Samar's line, "I would never have become the bad bitch I am now." But hooks (1994) reminds us of the restorative value of words, where "there, in that location, we make English do what we want it to do . . . We make our words a counter-hegemonic speech, liberating ourselves in language" (pp. 174). Through autonomous language, Samar tells her narrative on her own terms, "creating a new description of reality and scripting a new story" (p. 123) that shifts shame to unabashed pride and individual pain to collective healing.

Ongoing Healing: Collaborative Healing and a Deeper Collective Analysis

Samar's experiences outside and inside our classroom demonstrate the urgency for pedagogies of wholeness that honor her need for autonomy, space, connection, and a flexible pace. In our last interview, Samar tells me, "I really thank you for your help, Mrs. C, because without it I wouldn't have asked to see a therapist and she helped me a lot too." Her words clarify that I cannot do this work alone as a teacher in one classroom. Healing pedagogies require a collaborative system of support where for instance, Samar is able to see the school social worker to process various family hardships, while still engaging in healing literacy practices in our class. Teaching Samar and students with parallel traumas and stressors, I realize it is not enough to refer young people for mental health support; an ongoing conversation with administrators, grade-level teachers, counselors, social workers, and extra-curricular educators is necessary to fully seeing and supporting students' needs, which often change day to day. Pedagogies of wholeness must therefore stretch beyond the classroom and become systematized into the entire school culture to truly honor the complex needs and assets students bring with them.

While Samar is able to conclude her essay by connecting her personal story to that of other young women of color, she also perceives bullying as an individual phenomenon instead of behavior that often stems from a collective history of unhealed harm. This takes us to our next and final unit, where students move from healing themselves to offering healing support to others in their community. Although the focus is on helping other people of color, my hope is that through more intimate inquiry, they can strengthen their analysis of intersectional struggle, while continuing to unpack emotions that have emerged from their stories and recognize their bodymindspirits as resources for personal and collective healing.

CHAPTER SEVEN: CREATING CONTAINERS AND RITUALS FOR HEALING GRIEF

It's about four minutes before the period is about to start, and I'm standing by the front desk of the classroom, looking down at my computer clicking through my powerpoint for the day. I look down because I know that if I look up at students I will start crying. I hear them shuffling in—Christopher is flirting with Brianna to my left, while Lili looks annoyed; the boys in the middle are cracking jokes at each other; Alberto is to my right with notebook open and ready to start the warmup. I breathe a shallow breath in, and sigh a weighted breath out, trying to keep my composure.

Two minutes have passed. The period is just about to start. I haven't even looked up yet, but tears are spilling out of my eyes now.

Suddenly, a "Miss! Are you okay?" from Lili whom I can barely see in my periphery.

I shake my head – not to answer her question, but in shame that I can't keep it together.

"No, actually I'm not," I respond and look up at Lili, smiling through tears falling down my cheek and neck. By now, other students have noticed and stop talking. The boys are still cracking jokes, but one student yells out, "Aye! Shut up! She's trying to talk to us." The whole class hushes. All eyes considerately look up at me.

A week before this, we just started our last unit, titled "Healing Grief." I didn't anticipate that I would be uprooted by my own sadness that same week when my mom was suddenly diagnosed with leukemia, a form of blood cancer. At this point, my mind tells me that this is all serendipitous fuel for the content we're learning about, which is centered on lovingly confronting loss, that this is a perfect time to model the courage it takes to remain open in

uncertainty and sorrow. But my spirit feels stuck. And my body—well, my body just can't get out of feeling heavy, head bowed, shoulders caved in, pursed lips not knowing what to say.

But I speak anyway.

"I . . . Uh . . . I'm not . . . feeling a hundred percent right now. My mom is really sick. I wasn't sure if I was coming today, but I'm here. Because I do care very much about you, and about this unit we're doing. I know that we don't have very much time left together since it's the end of the semester. My mom is doing okay. She's in the hospital getting more tests done, so I don't need to be with her right now. And I figured, that um . . . Maybe we can learn about grief together through all of this, since I know many of you are going through or have experienced your own kinds of loss."

I continue to share that I don't have the kind of focus and energy to do direct instruction today, so I need students to do group work instead. I frontload directions at the beginning of class, and invite students to decentralize leadership roles so that they can get more work done on their final projects and I can ease into supporting them at a slower pace.

I feel comfort in getting a bit of the heaviness off my chest, and even more so as I watch students get into formation with their groups, helping each other find articles on mental health support for grief, and still being their normal teenage selves talking too much every now and then, and even taking time to tell me they are sorry to hear about my mom.

In the midst of this, I notice that Jeremiah is absent again. I get a bit annoyed that his group mates are taking on his responsibilities for the project. But a student tells me that his grandfather just passed away, and I check my annoyance, wondering how I can support him but also hold him accountable to work that could help him during this time.

During class, Melissa takes me to the side and says, "Miss, you know you don't need to be here, right? We know you care about us. But if I was you, I'd be with my mom. It's okay. We got it, Miss."

As the bell rings, Lili sticks around after class and shares that her father is sick too. He has a severe spinal condition that requires hospitalization and Lili is trying to figure out how to take the bus to visit him. In our exchange, we hear the sadness and fear in each other's voices, we see how strong we are trying to be in the midst of it all, and we comfort one another that somehow it will be okay.

Francis Weller (2015), a psychotherapist whose work on grief inspired our final unit, says that "grief offers a wild alchemy that transmutes suffering into fertile ground" (p. 8). That is what I experience with students on this challenging, but ultimately transformational day—that deep sadness and a fear of loss is certainly a wild experience, one that cannot be controlled. Despite our attempts at posturing perfection and infallible strength, we learn that "loss and sorrow wear away whatever masks we attempt to present to the world." Throughout this unit, I continue to fall apart despite my own resistance, while students like Lili and Jeremiah try their best to hold it together for their families while figuring out how to meet their own academic, social and emotional needs. In its wildness, grief work has the ability to set us free from societal expectations and simply be our most authentic selves.

In this blended portrait, I explore my process teaching a final project, where student groups become mental health specialists tasked with supporting a client based on a character of color from a film, novel, or news article who is experiencing different kinds of grief. Below, I introduce two focal students, Lili and Jeremiah, and identify their needs underneath parallel journeys navigating loss, chronic stress, and complex trauma. I then examine how this final unit

allows these students, as well as myself, to dive into an intimate inquiry of some of our most pressing sorrows and uncover our deepest desires. I discuss how Weller's (2015) conceptualizations of grief offers an embodied framework to support us to be "in right relationship" with grief, then analyze a pivotal moment of collective analysis where students participate in a healing classroom ritual to transform their sorrows into renewed connection. After, I discuss how I re-anchor myself in the middle of my own grieving process and carrying the weight of other students' sadness. I then look at students' final project presentations, and how our collective body is lovingly witnessed through feedback given by community panelists. To conclude, I offer embodied pedagogical strategies to continue healing with students like Lili and Jeremiah, and advocate for grief work as a heavy yet necessary literacy practice to a pedagogy of wholeness.

Identifying Lili and Jeremiah's Needs

A new student to Chavez High School, Lili first shows up to our class five weeks into the semester. Unlike other students who take their time to acclimate to a new school, Lili arrives bright eyed, determined to make up a full unit of assignments in one weekend and ready to jump into the curriculum. Her writing reveals a deep admiration and love for her father, who left her in El Salvador with her mother when she was five years old to migrate to the United States. She describes the powerlessness of losing her father and not knowing if he would survive the dangerous trek across the desert, and the eventual elation at being reunited with him ten years later in Los Angeles. Speaking about her father with a sweet voice that often sings through her words, she says, "I feel like he's everything to me. I work hard to always be among the best students because I wanted to be my father's pride." So when Lili shares her worry about her father's illness during this final unit, I can feel the weight of her world coming undone again.

From recurring themes throughout her writing and interviews of having to be strong for her family, I can see that Lili copes through stress and trauma by doing her best to hold it all together. "I am worried about my father, but at the same time I need to be strong," she says. "I need to be strong for my brother and stepmom because they are worried too. I need to be the one to say that everything will be okay." For Lili, strength is intentionally speaking up in class to improve her English skills while helping other English language learners understand the assignments; it is showing up everyday to go above and beyond in her schoolwork while having the energy to take care of her father and younger brother's needs at home.

But being strong has its costs. Laughing at herself, she says, "I need to be strong for [my family], but at the same time I could fail because I need to show my emotions! It just gets out!" Underneath her organized exterior and happy demeanor is an earnest desire for her deepest feelings to be heard. At times, she wants her peers to hear her. "It's like I'm talking to a wall," she says when they occasionally can't understand her through her Salvadoran accent. With the turmoil she has been through since she was a child, she assumes that her friends do not have the maturity to wholly empathize with her. She explains that she needs someone who could understand what she is going through with her father:

> At some point, I need to let someone know that I feel mad. But maybe some other person could help, like you. I share it with you because I know that you are going through that moment too. Maybe you can help me to be stronger.

Her last sentence reveals the gift of healing grief: the way the slow loss of our beloved caregivers—my mother, her father—encourages us to not be alone in our heaviness, to speak through our shaken cores and express our anger at the illness that threatens to take our parents away. But I also question Lili's assumption that her peers lack the capacity to hold her grief, too, because I know that given the right environment, young folks want to be there for each other. I

consider ways to shape our final unit on healing grief to expand Lili's safety net and open up possibilities for more connection.

Simliar to Lili, Jeremiah carries a weight that combines an uncompromising love and responsibility for his family. Soft spoken and always willing to help me in the classroom, and save for his recurring absences throughout the semester, it is hard to know that he is struggling at home. Whenever he misses a day or two, he shows up afterschool working quietly on makeup assignments, asking little questions about what needs to be done. I try numerous times to check in with him but he responds with an "I'm okay miss, thank you. I got it." Throughout personal narrative writing and interviews, he shares that the court split up his family, where his three sisters live with his father and he stays with his mother. "Since I'm the only son," he remarks, "I want to make my mom proud. My dad wasn't really there to help me and put a lot of stress on me and my sisters. I want to show my mom I'm not like my dad."

In conjunction with his need to prove his worthiness to his mother, Jeremiah feels the weight of being a young man of color. He writes in one of his journals that as a second-generation Mexican male, "the world can be challenging because people view you as less than nothing, so we have to prove them wrong." His dismay about his father and identity as a brown young man have become fuel to support his family. "I want to show them I'm not going to be messed up. I'm not worthless," he says. "My family is the number one thing. I want to help them and show them they really did raise someone good—not just another criminal." It appears that Jeremiah stresses much over trying not to become a stereotype or a disappointment, instead of feeling free to simply be himself. He seems most at ease goofing off with his friends, who like to tease him about having a crush on another classmate. When he is absent, his tablemates will often call him, laugh, and then hand me their phone so I can tell him to come afterschool for

makeup work. During this final unit, they tell me that Jeremiah's grandfather passed away so that I know why he has been gone longer than usual.

Like Lili, Jeremiah prefers to be the "strong" one when he and his family experience hardship. Trying to understand why he continues to be absent, I ask him what a typical day looks like when he is away from school. He describes how he attempts to fill his grandfather's role of supporting his grandmother, and the pressure he feels balancing his home and school life:

> I stay with my grandma because I know she's old and can't put a lot of weight on her feet. She has a son who lives with her but he doesn't really help her out. So I wake up, help her clean, cook, and do grocery shopping because she could barely walk. I help her lift heavy stuff, so she won't have to.
>
> It's hard to do school when you're also thinking about your family while they're at home stressing and working. I feel pressure because sometimes my family looks at me, like, "You have to do something about this!" or "How are you going to help us?" Balancing all of that out is stressful. I try to help out as much as I can, so I could be relieved of that pressure.

When I ask what he needs underneath all these overwhelming feelings, he immediately says that he needs more support and a flexible tutoring schedule afterschool. I see the immense resilience and grace it takes to literally carry the weight of his family on his shoulders and I wonder: How might we help students like Jeremiah so that they do not have to carry all of this alone? How might we complicate Lili and Jeremiah's notions of strength in the face of grief? In the following section, I describe the way I design this final unit to address these questions and meet Lili and Jeremiah's needs to be held, helped, and heard as they navigate different kinds of loss.

Intimate Inquiry Design: Being in Right Relationship to Sorrow

> *We have to be in the correct relationship with sorrow. If we drown in it, nothing happens. If we get too detached, nothing happens. We need the right amount of attention and separation to turn our grief into something vital and life-serving.* (Weller, 2015)

From the beginning of the semester, I have noticed how precarious our attention is to the present moment—whether it is in the students' constant checking of text messages and snapchats during class time, or my reluctance to stay longer in our centering meditation exercises in fear that students are bored. In the previous unit, we gave more attention to challenging moments in our lives by writing personal narratives. In this final unit, I want students to build on the ways they were able to stay present with their personal struggles to support community members to do the same for themselves, particularly around the theme of loss.

At Chavez High, all 11th graders are expected to do research as part of their grade-level interdisciplinary project that prepares students to become community health advocates. In the past, 11th–grade students have read J.D. Salinger's (1951) *Catcher in the Rye* and used novel evidence, internet research and interviews of mental health specialists to "diagnose what is wrong with Holden," the teenage protagonist, and identify school and community resources to support him. I design this final unit around a similar project that addresses English Language Arts research, writing, and reading standards[13] and community health advocacy, but reframe it to be more culturally responsive to the needs of Students of Color (see Table 3 for a comparison between the original project prompt and the one I designed). For the Healing Grief project, I specifically choose clients of color from literature, film, and news articles who have similar life experiences as students in the class, who have struggled with issues like displacement, homophobia, and community violence. Instead of diagnosing and possibly pathologizing clients of color, I invite students to focus on needs underneath specific kinds of loss. Building off of the

[13] ELA Standards include CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.WHST.11-12.7
Conduct short as well as more sustained research projects to answer a question (including a self-generated question) or solve a problem; narrow or broaden the inquiry when appropriate; synthesize multiple sources on the subject, demonstrating understanding of the subject under investigation.

previous unit that introduced the intersections between identity, relationships and power, I have students research ways to provide culturally responsive support to their clients' needs.

Table 3.

Comparing Healing Project Prompts

Original Mental Health Project Prompt	Healing Grief Project Prompt
Imagine you are a mental health professional who specializes in adolescent health. Holden is your client and you need to evaluate him. Is Holden simply exhibiting some of the symptoms of what some have called the "temporary insanity of adolescence"? Or has his grief developed into something else? Is he depressed? Anxious? Suffering from post-traumatic stress disorder? Is there evidence in the novel that he is suicidal? Using your research alongside symptoms you identify in the text, attempt to diagnose what is wrong with Holden. Then, identify the resources in your school and community where he might get the help he needs. Interview these people—the school nurse, a social worker, a guidance counselor and/or a school psychologist, for example—to see how they would help a teenager like Holden.	Imagine you are a mental health professional who specializes in the area of grief, particularly for people of color, and you've been assigned someone to support. Using a variety of sources—Francis Weller's (2015) "The Five Gates of Grief," internet research, interviews, and your own experience, determine the following: Who is your client, and what kind of grief is the character experiencing? What are assets from your client or the community your client belongs to that can support healing? Explain how you may or may not relate to your client and how you can build rapport. Identify strategies and resources where this person can get the support that he/she/they need and come up with a plan to support your client with a path towards healing. End by explaining how supporting this client can be helpful to your own community.

In designing this unit of intimate inquiry, I choose Weller's (2015) *The Wild Edge of Grief as* a theoretical text that speaks to the theme of loss, but also offers embodied language and strategies to deepen our analysis of the connection between grief and healing. Weller's work aptly unpacks ways to heal individual and collective grief, both as a layperson and a mental health specialist, which is helpful for students to understand the connection between healing their own personal pain and supporting others professionally. Throughout, Weller describes grief as

the literal weight of loss, stress, and trauma that we carry. When gently confronted and metabolized into the bodymindspirit, we learn to carry such pain with our full dignity.

For Weller (2015), an integral component of healing is a collective container that is strong enough to hold the force of sorrow. Without community to hold us, Weller asserts:

> *We become the container ourselves, and when this happens, we cannot drop into the well of grief in which we can fully let go of the sorrows we carry. We recycle our grief, moving into it and then puling it back into our bodies unreleased. (p. 74)*

For students like Lili and Jeremiah, and even for myself, we tend to hold on to our grief, which in turn shifts into shame, hidden rage, or boiling resentment. Throughout our semester together, I witness how our minds try to push these down, masking our sorrow and fear with busyness and a do-it-all mentality. Our bodies eventually give ourselves away through spilled tears, an unexpected tantrum, or unrelenting fatigue. Through collective analysis and what Weller calls healing rituals, my intention is to build a container of solidarity that can teach students that we are not alone in our sadness, and that there is a history of collective resilience that has always been available to those in need. By acting as mental health specialists through this final project, students will learn to support others in cultivating a right relationship to sorrow, and in doing so, learn to reflect on their relationship to their own pain.

Throughout the unit, I design a series of activities where students read and analyze Weller's (2015) work as a framework for their projects, reflect on their own experiences with loss, and engage in research with their peers and community to prepare for their final project presentations—all while slowly nurturing a container of solidarity and reciprocity to hold the different kinds of grief that surface throughout the unit. We begin by reading Weller's chapter on "The Five Gates of Grief" that discusses the loss of those we love, the parts of our identities that were unloved, the sorrows of the world, the sadness that stems from childhood neglect, and

the grief inherited from our ancestors. Like Anzaldúa's (2016) "paths of conocimiento" in the previous unit, these five gates help students to name emotionally loaded experiences and the needs underneath them. In groups, students then receive their clients' profiles (see Table 4), reflect on their positionality in relationship to their clients, and watch corresponding film clips to understand their clients' needs. Students research ways to support their clients by interviewing community health practitioners whom I have chosen because of their intersectional praxis, including social workers, counselors, and somatic therapists; we also practice classroom healing rituals, like altar-making, to simulate strategies for support, which are discussed further in the following section. Finally, students present their final projects at a community showcase, where I have invited experts in the field of mental health, community activism, and critical research to offer feedback and affirmations for the intimate healing work students have engaged in.

Table 4.

Client Profile for Healing Grief Unit.

Client Profiles for Healing Grief Unit				
Client	Chiron	Marilyn	Sethe	Inocente
Description of Client	The protagonist of the film *Moonlight,* Chiron is a young Black man developing his sexual identity, while facing bullying at school and challenges with his mother at home.	Informed by a news article about the impact of migration from El Salvador, Marilyn is a 17-year old young woman who tries to leave her war-torn home, but is caught by border officials on her way.	The protagonist of Toni Morrison's novel, *Beloved*. Sethe is healing from running away from slavery, and the guilt she has from killing her youngest child to prevent her from becoming a slave.	Based on the film *Inocente,* which documents the true story of a Latina teenager struggling through homelessness and finding art as a resource for healing.

While students look deeply into different facets of loss, I am challenged to face my own grief, as I choose to share stories about past and present experiences that coincide with the curriculum. Exhaustion sets in while I try to balance teaching this unit while re-organizing my life at home, as my mother undergoes a heart procedure to prepare her for chemotherapy and I scramble to find alternative childcare for my two young children. Like Weller (2015) posits, "We are made real and tangible by the experience of sorrow; as it adds substance and weight to our world" (p. 8). But the multiple pressures become disorienting as I try to figure out what I can let go of and what I can hold on to: Do I keep teaching, even though I'm drowning? Do I drop everything to be with my mom, even though I love this unit and these students? Am I doing too much? Am I not doing enough? In the Re-Anchoring section below, I explore how different self and collective care practices support me in grounding myself amidst my internal and external turmoil. Through this "ongoing conversation with grief," students and I eventually learn that there is an incredible sense of hope and purpose that lies underneath the difficult feelings and reflection.

Embodied Analysis: Rock Ceremony as Healing Ritual

"*I need a volunteer to help me simulate something about grief today, somebody strong!" I say excitedly at the front of the classroom.*

A few students raise their hands and yell out, "Ooh me!" and I choose Melissa to come up. She stands next to me and raises her eyebrows when she notices two piles of textbooks stacked on the desk.

We have just reviewed the etymology of the word "grief," as I wrote the words "grave," "heavy," and "gravity" on the whiteboard behind us. "Remember that in 'The Five Gates of

Grief', Weller talks about grief as carrying a heavy weight. What are examples of things that we carry when we are grieving?"

"Trump! Trauma!," students shout simultaneously.

"Wow, Trump! Okay! I've been mourning that since the day he got inaugurated!" I say with an obnoxious laugh, picking up a textbook and heaving it into Melissa's arms. "And yes, trauma," adding another textbook on top. "We've been talking about how trauma is overwhelming when you don't take time to heal from it."



Figure 9. Rock Ceremony.

Students continue to shout out—Domestic violence! Losing someone! Bullying!—as I dramatically stack more books on Melissa's arms for each of their examples. Melissa drops one of the books and students laugh. Melissa smacks her teeth and puts it back on her pile.

"What else? I got a lot of books! What are your clients experiencing?" I ask, curious to see what students remember from the profile of their clients they received this past week.

"Sethe feels bad for killing her baby. And she keeps having flashbacks to slavery," one student responds. I add two more books to Melissa's pile for guilt and racism.

"Marilyn had to say goodbye to her family in El Salvador, and she's not sure if she's going to see them again," Lili says. I add a couple more books for displacement and uncertainty.

"You good?" I ask Melissa, as I use my arm to push down the awkward stack of books in her arms. Melissa and the students laugh, with one of Melissa's friends yelling, "Oh! You messed up, miss!"

"It is messed up, isn't it! Now being a person of color, and someone from this community, and a young woman, does this make this stack of grief lighter or heavier?"

"Heavier," the class responds.

"So what does Melissa need?"

A few pondering seconds before Samar replies, "Support?"

"Well . . . come on then!" I say. Samar's eyes get bigger from my cue, and she runs up to help Melissa hold the books. They giggle and struggle as I now use both of my arms to weigh the books down.

"You should just drop the books!" Eli says. Melissa and Samar look at me as if asking for permission, and I shrug my shoulders, seeing what they think. Melissa and Samar pull their hands back and the textbooks spill onto the floor.

After thanking Melissa and Samar for their strength and playing along with me, I tell students that we are going to practice a healing ritual called the "rock ceremony" from Francis Weller's book to simulate a therapeutic strategy they could potentially use to support their clients healing through grief. I invite students to move their chairs into a circle and I place a basket of markers and medium-sized gray rocks in the middle. After I ask students to pick up a rock and a marker, I give directions.

"Feel the rock in your hand, feel its weight. Take a deep breath, and exhale. Again, inhale and exhale. Notice how you're feeling in your chair and how the rock feels in your hand. Think of something or somebody that you've been carrying inside. Something you feel like you want to let go of. You don't have to let go of this thing or person forever, but just for this practice.

"For me, what I'm carrying heavily today is uncertainty about my mom. The doctors are still trying to figure out what kind of cancer she has. She has an issue with her heart, so she can't start chemotherapy right away. She has to have a heart procedure. I'm going to write the word 'uncertainty' on my rock, because it doesn't feel good not knowing what's going to happen next.

"For you, I invite you to write one word that represents something you want to let go: a name, a word, an emotion, even a picture."

One student struggles and says, "Miss, what if it's a lot of stuff?" I tell him he has a good point, and tell the whole class that if they are struggling with many things, they can write the word "everything." A couple students write that word on their rock.

Lili quietly writes her name on the smooth surface of her stone. In an interview, she explains why: "I feel like the only thing holding me sometimes is myself. I can't be free to express myself so I always need to hold everything inside, and that's heavy."

Jeremiah writes "worry" on his rock. I learn that because his grandfather passed away, he is worried about his grandmother. His uncle, who lives with his grandmother, struggles with mental health and can be violent towards others. Jeremiah is worried about his grandmother's safety and feels like he should be with her instead of at school.

As I see what other students are writing—including names of family members, significant others, school stressors—I take a deep breath, sensing the gravity of different emotions in the suddenly quiet classroom. I place a clear glass bowl of water in the middle of the circle and explain its contents.

"This is going to be our container that holds all of the things we're carrying right now. I put a rose quartz in there to represent love. I also placed some of the flowers from our classroom altar, because our guest speaker Christine told us that marigolds are connected to our ancestors. Sometimes you just need to give things up to your ancestors, right? Or if that feels weird to you, think of just giving your worries to the water that's in here."

I ask Jeremiah to hold the bowl for me. I model next steps as I give directions. "You're going to look at each other's eyes. Look at the word you've written, breathe, and drop your rock in. Say thank you, and offer the bowl to the person next to you."

The hushed class switches to giggles and side conversations as students take turns awkwardly giving each other eye contact and dropping their stones into the bowl. I get frustrated by the talking and remind students that the rock ceremony will have more impact if they're quiet. Some students stop chatting and enjoy dipping their hands into the warm water and smelling the flowers inside; others continue giggling or making skeptical comments about our class ritual.

After everyone takes their turn, I place the bowl back in the middle of the circle and ask all students to come look at the words inside, seeing if they resonate with what their classmates have written down. I ask students why I had them take turns holding the container for each other.

"Because you don't have to do this by yourself?" Leticia responds.

"Right! The worst thing we can do is carry our grief alone. Often we feel like we have to carry all of this by ourselves. What this rock ceremony helps us remember is that we are not alone. We can give our worries up to the earth. Or to somebody else. Even just for a few seconds, somebody can carry it so you don't have to."

In *The Wild Edge of Grief* (2015), Weller describes the rock ceremony as a sacred practice for people to connect their experiences to a higher source. Applied to my own pedagogical practice in a school environment unaccustomed to healing rituals like this, I notice how students feel uneasy with my invitation to look each other in the eyes, get messy with rocks and water, and unload things they have been possibly hiding inside. I notice how the playfulness and humor of the first activity lightens the subject matter of our Healing Grief unit and helps ease students and myself into the more serious tone of the rock ceremony. Even with student resistance, there is also a natural curiosity between students about what everyone is going through and a subtle desire to make the invisible visible. "It was weird at first, but it felt cleansing to write down our words and put it in the water," one student shares. I ask students to say one word to represent how they are feeling after the rock ceremony. Three students say, "free." Others say "lighter," "good," "not sure," and "peaceful."

Our classroom healing ritual embodies what Weller describes as two requisite components of healing grief—containment and release. Contrary to the way Melissa had to hold all of those heavy textbooks alone, the bowl became a container of solidarity and reciprocity for students and I to name our present feelings and be given permission to let go for the moment. When I facilitated the simulation with Melissa, we had a productive conversation reviewing the kinds of grief people carry. Samar and Melissa's spontaneous letting go of the textbooks did not embody the same reverence shown when I gave students a moment to breath, deeply reflect

about their own grief and mindfully drop their rocks into the bowl. I would categorize the first activity as a classroom simulation, and the latter as a healing ritual because of the way it centers the bodymindspirit. Weller (2015) defines a ritual as "any gesture done with emotion and intention by an individual or group that attempts to connect . . . with transpersonal energies for the purposes of healing and transformation" (p. 78). Even with students' hesitance to ritual, they are able to gain a deeper connection to themselves and each other. "Through the rock ceremony, I was able to reflect on why I am my own obstacle sometimes in not allowing myself to be heard," Lili says. "I could feel the water refresh my hands and that helped me relax myself."

While healing rituals can be transformative, there are still tensions applying them in a high school English classroom. Had I not been accountable to a tight timeline and academic standards, we could have taken more time to unpack students' stories and the words they wrote for the rock ceremony. Although the glass bowl became a symbol of building a stronger class community, I know that many students have yet to trust each other and even themselves in sharing their deepest sorrows beyond writing them down. It also takes time for students to connect the dots between individual healing and the history of continued resilience of entire peoples in struggle. And that is okay. Practicing pedagogies of wholeness requires us to take time when we can, and have faith that the small steps we take towards building a robust classroom container—"a foundation upon which to come and rest" (p. 107)—are crucial gains towards our goals of collective healing. In the next section, I discuss self and collective ritual practices that supported me in healing as I hold both students' and my own grief.

Re-Anchoring: Honoring My Need to Be Held and Seen

As part of my self-care practice, I structure in time for meditation and what I call "selfie memos" before or after teaching class. After arriving to the school's parking garage, I sit in my

car and choose a ten-minute meditation from the Calm app on my phone, which is based on a theme that resonates with what I am presently feeling, then record a selfie memo using my phone camera. At times, I reflect on my nervousness or excitement going into class, or process irritations and musings from teaching students and navigating the school as a new person to the community. In the excerpts below, I document a couple moments where I am in my car, emotionally sifting through my presumed inability to balance teaching with my struggles at home and with my family.

In the second excerpt, I mention Reina, a somatic practitioner whom I have invited to be part of the Healing Grief project as a guest speaker, as well as someone whom provides me with healing sessions throughout the semester. The selfie memos become a space where I can integrate insights I have learned from sessions with Reina, where she helps me tap into the wisdom of my bodymindspirit through bodywork and cranial sacral therapy. I also mention my husband Patrick in the selfie memos, as I question my own capacity and other peoples' ability to support me in return. Although there are moments where I struggle through perceptions of not doing or being enough, I eventually allow my breath, laughter, and mirrored reflection to shift my pain into a resource for healing, transformation, and motivation to keep teaching.

November 13, 2017

I'm just really overwhelmed. I lost my keys. I searched for them for an hour and started spiraling into negative thoughts: I'm fucking up; I can't handle all this shit.

(I take a deep inhale and exhale). I did a meditation just now and recognized that I feel tense in my jaw. I have short breaths, and my eyes feel on alert.

(I close my eyes to relax them, sigh loudly, open my eyes, and scrunch my eyebrows as if worried.) I can't even think about what I'm supposed to teach today. I had all these plans. I

don't even know if I should be here. (I start tearing up, shaking my head in disapproval). I don't know how to be there for myself (wiping tears from eyes), and give myself time. I can't seem to let go of all the things I need to do with students. Like, is it that important? (I laugh at myself for wanting every little curriculum detail to be "perfect.")

(I sigh, wipe tears, and pause). But I'm here. I just need a day off, but I don't know where to start. Everything is overwhelming. I just wanna . . . I just wanna run away from everything. (Shakes head, and tears up again.) I guess I'm in flight mode, because I just want to run away but I can't even run away in my own head (laughs and tears up more).

My mom has her heart procedure tomorrow. I was thinking of printing documents at my mom's house, but I knew I would be sad because it feels empty there. Sometimes I feel like running away by escaping to my work, but now I don't even want to do that.

Being around the kids at home is overwhelming too. But then I feel like Patrick is taking on too much. I don't even know if that's true (I furrow my eyerbrows and shake my head, as if disagreeing with myself).

My mom was my support (tears up) to lighten everything and take care of stuff I can't handle alone, like taking care of the kids or making food. I miss her. I miss her a lot. This is so hard . . . I'm so tired.

(Sighs. Breathes slowly. I take a few moments to look directly at my glazed over expression in the camera).

December 5, 2017

I just finished doing a meditation in my car. I had to remind myself to pause and do this before teaching. In the meditation, there was a body scan. I noticed my eye is doing that dumb twitching thing again (laughs). When I focused on my throat, I felt sad. Grieving. I feel like

part of it was mine. I feel sad about my inability to express my own needs because I'm so busy giving to everyone else.

But I think some of the sadness is also not mine. I think it's stuff I've taken on from my mom. I massaged her yesterday in the hospital, and I feel like there's something there she's not expressing. Or maybe she's expressing it through her body. Maybe I soaked that in.

I've been soaking in a lot from students too. Michael opened up to me yesterday and shared some struggles he's had at home and with his girlfriend. I feel like Patrick is taking on so much, and he's not expressing that. I remember when I had my session with Reina, she said that I have to learn how to express my own needs so I don't take on other people's stuff.

Maybe I'm feeling compassion fatigue. I'm trying to figure out where to set boundaries. The more stress I get, the more busy I get and the more I immerse myself in giving to others because that's my sense of control and belonging. That's where my sense of competence comes from. But it also fucking drains me. I need to remember what Reina said—to resource myself. (Talking slower now, for emphasis)—Yes, re-source myself.

Clearly overwhelmed, I can see I am experiencing a compound trauma response from having to teach while my home life unravels from my mom's illness. My body and mind try to make sense of this overwhelm by combining different strategies—I want to run away and crawl into a cave, but I end up fighting my way through by organizing every detail of the students' presentation showcase and trying to stay on top of daily lesson plans and feedback for students' projects. My insistence on doing everything myself results in the symptomatic consequences of too much stress: I am easily agitated and easily forget where I placed my keys, and shake my head throughout in shame about not being able to hold it together.

Like the students during the rock ceremony, what I need is a container to hold me, to

allow me to pause amidst the seeming chaos. Taking time to meditate and express my reflections through stream of consciousness gives me a moment to feel self-contained. Weller (2015) explains how we need to "give grief a bottom . . . to catch and contain the full range of feeling attached to any emotional experience" (p. 107). When I hear the peaceful female voice guide me through a meditation and I drop into my breath and body, I feel like someone is holding my hand and comforting me, reminding me that I don't need to control everything. I can just be. My meditation practice becomes a window into the wordless stories I carry inside, feelings mixed with sensations, memories and perceptions that seek my attention. I am able to sit with the feelings of doubt and agitation, and sense them move through me like waves. I can give my anxiety just enough attention to detach from it for a moment. I gain a bit of clarity in the cloudiness of my grief.

The selfie memo becomes my own healing ritual to courageously witness myself in my wholeness, give name to my bodymindspirit, and allow myself to unravel before my eyes. I can express how although my mom is still with me in the flesh, I feel like I'm losing her; that I miss her care and her presence in my children's life and that I am struggling to make sense of it all. adrienne maree brown, a social justice facilitator, healer, and author of *Emergent Strategy: Shaping Change, Changing Worlds* (2017), a manifesto on the intersections between self and collective care, discusses the inextricable relationship between visibility and interdependence. Her passage below speaks to the ways these selfie memos help me uncover a desire to be seen and connected:

> Being seen is actually non-negotiable, though I can hide, or I can determine my level of grace and relationship in it. On so many levels, interdependence requires being seen, as much as possible, as your true self.
>
> Meaning that your capacity and need are transparent.

> Meaning even when I don't want to look in the mirror, I am (and I choose to be) open to the attention of others…
>
> I can walk towards this "being seen" and experience the beauty of releasing all that guard and protection, that miracle distortion. Or I can resist it and only be seen in moments of trauma and loss of control.
>
> But I will be seen, and the more I open to it, the gentler and more necessary that attention feels. (p. 93)

brown's words remind me that as much as I try to hide underneath my mask of productivity and infallibility, my deepest desires will find their way out. The selfie memos provide a safe and brave space for me to look directly at my reflection and speak from my truest self. Although I enter the meditation selfie memos feeling powerless, I leave them with a greater sense of autonomy and dignity from my choice to continually witness myself over and over again. I can befriend my present capacity and embrace my need to rest and re-source. The gentler I am able to witness myself in my wholeness, the more I am able to do the same for students.

The meditation and selfie memo practice also help me shed internalized narratives and shift into more liberating beliefs and actions. Throughout the selfie memos, I shake my head in disapproval whenever I express a need to take care of myself. But my body also fights against these limiting beliefs through laughter and tears. When I keep doubting Patrick's capacity to support me, my head shakes, reminding me that I actually can take up space with my needs. I give name to the compassion fatigue I have built up from selflessly giving to others. Both looking intimately at myself and giving myself enough distance from my experiences to realize that some grief is not my own, I can move forward from a deeper sense of knowing and choice, not from a fleeting trauma response of fear. As Weller (2015) states, "Our ability to drop into this interior world and do the difficult work of metabolizing sorrow is dependent on the community that surrounds us" (p. 90). Able to give myself what I need, I can in turn ask for

more attention and support from my community, instead of staying stuck in shame and isolation. Although I struggle at times with reminding myself to take time to meditate and record selfie memos, the centeredness that comes from these practices makes all the difference in my bodymindspirit and the classroom. Instead of judging myself for not spending a majority of my time lesson planning, brown's (2017) mantra of "less prep, more presence" becomes my motivation to keep pausing through meditation and reflection.

Practicing these self-care strategies allows me to see that the work of unraveling is necessary to re-creating a world of freedom, dignity, and unconditional love. I am grateful to these practices for they allow me to "come back to the world thickened, deepened, and opened by [my] time in silence and solitude" (Weller, 2015, p. 93). I can release the false narratives that keep me alone, small, and in my head. I can instead move, act, and teach from a place of abundance and conscious power, knowing that I can be grounded in my bodymindspirit and breath in its wisdom. These strategies sustain my critical healing praxis by helping me practice my own intimate inquiry, identify my most pressing needs, and embody a pedagogy of wholeness. Consequently, I am able to better teach students like Jeremiah and Lili what it means to be in right relationship to grief. Now, I move from examining the self-container I nurtured through these re-anchoring strategies to discussing the collective container that emerges from our final project showcase.

Healing Literacies: Collective Witnessing and Affirmations of Solidarity

The school library is buzzing with nervousness, excitement and focus, as student groups simultaneously present their Healing Grief projects to community panelists. Four to five students sit at tables spread around the library, clicking through powerpoint slides projected on a laptop as they present their work. Two to three panelists sit with each group, nodding their

heads, expressing an occasional "mmm" for an insightful student comment, and laughing at students' spontaneous jokes amidst heavy material.

The panelists comprise of the school's principal, Ms. Ramos, an English teacher, Ms. Ramos, and one of the psychiatric social workers, Ms. ***Paloma****. There are two more social workers from the surrounding community, a doctoral student and former high school teacher versed in Francis Weller's work, a professor of education, a restorative justice coordinator, a gender justice consultant, and a community midwife who grew up and practices in the neighborhood. I've invited Ms. Rojas, Ms. Ramos, and Ms. Palma because I am excited for students to demonstrate ways to make the school mission of community health advocacy come alive. The rest of the panelists each hold a special place in my heart, as they have been integral to my development as a mother, student, scholar, teacher, organizer and healer. I trust in every panelist's ability to hold up the container we've nurtured this past semester because they believe in and embody the ideas students are presenting.*

As I move around the room, it's Jeremiah's turn to present his portion on supporting his group's client, Chiron, from the film Moonlight. *One of his group members has just introduced Chiron, a Black queer teenager who endures bullying at school and emotional abuse at home. Jeremiah talks about the importance of reflecting on one's positionality when supporting people like Chiron. He explains similarities between he and his client: like Chiron, his community also suffers through bullying and like Chiron's mother, his uncle struggles with drug abuse.*

He then shows panelists a bubble chart that talks about building rapport with their client (See Figure 10). "I could use this common experience to connect with Chiron," he explains. He speaks using index cards diligently prepared when he stayed afterschool a few days ago. "I don't want to force him to talk, so I can ask his permission to talk about what he's going

through. It's important to make conversation with him to get to know more about him, his friends, and community. I think creating art can help him deal with his anger and depression, get free from his emotions, and open up more." His group members then take turns using Weller's "Five Gates of Grief" to unpack the kinds of loss that Chiron experiences, explaining that the roots of his suffering lie in the way his mother was unable to fully love him.

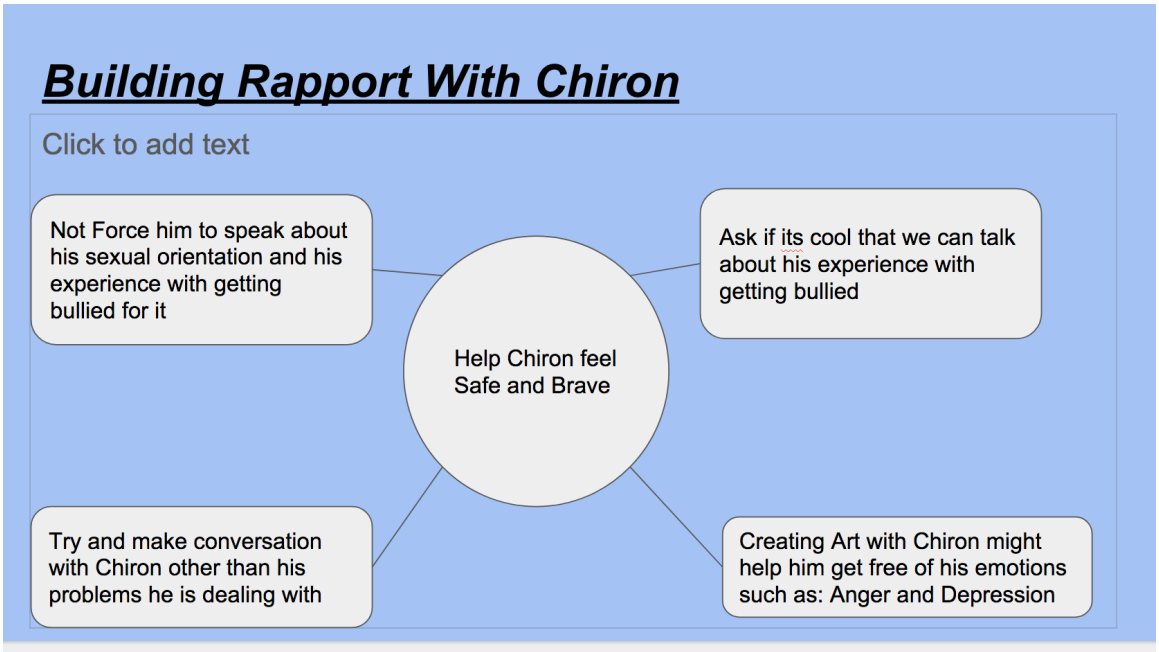


Figure 10. Building Rapport with Chiron.

In another group, Lili discusses her positionality in relationship to their client, Marilyn, who is based on a news article about a teenager who journeys across the desert from El Salvador to start a new life. Lili explains that as a young Salvadoran immigrant, she can identify with Marilyn's struggles and hopes. Another group member, Nadia, analyzes Marilyn's relationship to grief using a graphic organizer from a previous class discussion (see Figure 11). "Marilyn has a right relationship to her grief, because she has accepted the fact she has to move away from her family. She's able to talk about it with dignity, and not pretend that she's okay, but also doesn't spend too much attention on her pain," Nadia says, as she points to different

parts of the diagram. "She's not super open to getting support from the community, though. She doesn't feel safe because of the violence that happens to young women who migrate across the desert. This makes her afraid to be alone, and that's something we can help her with by finding shelter for her and helping her talk about the things she had to witness. Even when it gets hard and she gets caught by the border patrol, she still has hope."

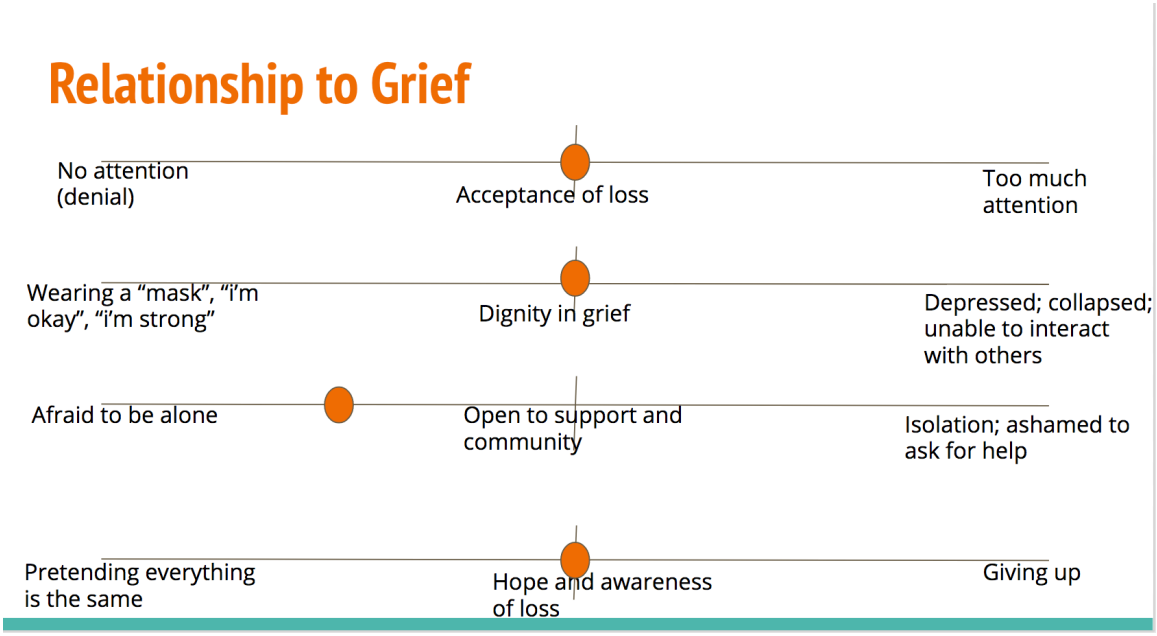


Figure 11. Relationship to Grief.

Both groups draw from class assignments and activities to provide support for their clients and are able to connect their client's needs to those of a larger community. Pointing to a political poster of a butterfly flanked by the caption "migration is beautiful," Lili explains that Marilyn could benefit from writing and sharing her story. "In our class, we wrote stories about how we overcame difficulties. This could help Marilyn get the courage to continue struggling until she achieves her goals. It can help her feel heard and help people going through the same thing." Christopher, another student, uses research to explain that people migrate to the United States because of violence, poverty, and unemployment, and talks about the need for programs to

advocate for people like Marilyn. In Jeremiah's group, he says that Chiron could participate in a monthly rock ceremony to check in with his feelings and experiences that he's carrying. Star, another group member, ends their presentation advocating for more restorative justice programs in schools to help teens like Chiron understand their anger instead of being criminalized for defending himself against bullying.

These moments from students' final presentations show how "grief work is not passive . . . [and] implies an ongoing practice of deepening, attending, and listening" (Weller, 2015, p. 5). On the students' end, they are able to deeply attend to their client's complex needs, see their personal experiences as resources for connection with their clients and describe appropriate strategies for support. On the panelists' end, their sustained attention "deepens connection between all present" (p. 83) and motivates students to proudly speak from their lived experiences.

After the presentations and short discussions between groups and the panelists, I invite everyone to stand in a circle to share gratitude and affirmations. Lenny, one of the guest panelists, says to the students, "I'm so proud of you for being so in it! It didn't feel like it was just some assignment you had to do. You are really breaking down what emotional literacy looks like. You speak like this really means something to you." The way students share their stories with their heads held high, share collaboratively with their group members, and ask the panelists questions about their line of work reflects the very themes of dignity, support, and solidarity they present about in their projects. As their words align with action, the students demonstrate how healing literacies are an embodied practice. They teach from a deep sense of care and connection.

The students are also able to redefine notions of strength. Before this final unit, Jeremiah wrote in a personal narrative, "I need to stay strong for my family, so I numb the pain." Lili shared similar sentiments about strength as keeping feelings to herself for the sake of others. When they share affirmations in our collective circle, they begin to see strength not as a mask used for protection, but an ability to be fully seen. "It takes a lot to learn and listen about this stuff," Jeremiah shares after thanking everyone for being present. "I'm proud of the class because we had the bravery to present about ourselves and others. We did something really new and that's good for us," Lili states. Noor, one of the panelists, says, "To be as vulnerable as you were takes so much courage. It's amazing that you could be so open to people who are complete strangers."

Principal Ms. Rojas and school social worker Ms. Palma share their own vulnerabilities when it is their turn to speak:

> Ms. Ramos: My tio sadly committed suicide a few years ago and that was a major tragedy for us. I had to experience my family grieving. If they had the tools that you all shared with us they would be in better places today. It's a blessing that as young people you're getting this opportunity to learn this, so that when you go through these difficult things, you're going to have these tools and hopefully each other to depend on when it happens. As well as support from Ms. Palma and Mrs. Cariaga.
>
> Ms. Paloma: This was a very difficult week for me. Sometimes as social workers, we take a lot home with us. But to be able to be a part of this space and feed off of your positive energy was really inspiring. I know it's not easy because I'm looking at these characters and the issues they bring up. It can bring out our own inner demons and trauma. For you guys to work through all of that is amazing.

Their comments expand the container of solidarity we have cultivated as a class, showing shared struggle and continued learning among students and staff. Pedagogies of wholeness are a practice of reciprocity: they not only benefit students engaged in intimate inquiry, but also help the adults here—in this case, a social worker and an administrator—to make sense of their own lives and educational commitments. These comments also show the importance of school

leadership who fully understand the need for pedagogies of healing and the need for structures of mental health support at multiple levels.

Panelists beyond the school community also affirm students' roles as teachers and activists, connecting students' work to larger legacies of struggle and hope. UCLA professor of education, Dr. Solórzano, reflects, "Being here today, I realize that our future is moving in the right direction. I want to thank not just the teachers or principal or social workers or people who serve our communities here, but also any person or group outside of this space that made your stories and work possible." Angel echoes his sentiments: "It's motivating for a social worker like me to remember what brought me to my work, and to know there's people coming behind me who will continue this work in a much more creative way." Zula, a midwife who opened her first birth center a few blocks from the school, speaks at length:

> I was once sitting here in a library with a bunch of other kids thinking about how we could make it better. Whatever *it* was. The way I ended up here (as a community midwife and a guest panelist today) is I started out where you are. We have a lot of options, some of them not so great. You've chosen to be in positive spaces and to seek out something bigger than you. I'm super proud of you for that.

Their comments help me drive home for students the intersectional and historical nature of community health advocacy, and reflect on necessary steps to move beyond ideologies of individual healing to collective healing and transformation.

As our affirmation circle continues, I am surprised at the amount of emotional gratitude directed at me from students and panelists. When almost every student and panelist takes time to offer gratitude and affirmations of my work, I can feel my body wanting to fly away—especially when this is the *students'* showcase. I remind myself that I began our circle by telling students to not shy away from receiving gratitude, to really allow our bodies to let the love sink in. So I re-center. I try my best to listen with an open heart, ready to receive.

The following comments help me feel fully seen in my labor of love. They come from a student, Samar, from the previous chapter and panelists who are former teachers and dear sisters to me, and Zula, who also happens to be the attending midwife at both of my children's births.

> Samar: I wanted to thank you Mrs. Cariaga. Before this, she reached out to me when I was going through stuff. She found someone I could talk to besides her. I could trust with her with my stuff.
>
> Malinda: Steph, I'm really proud of you . . . and I'm gonna cry now [the room laughs with her]. Because talking about grief is really hard. What we don't think about for people who do social work and teaching, is that we carry everyone else's grief. For so many of us, we leave the classroom and social work because it's so heavy and can't do it anymore. I'm so proud of the way you've made your way back and re-imagined what this work can look like so that many of us can make our way back into the classroom and continue to do the work we love to do.
>
> Noor: Holding it down as a mom and wife and student and teacher is so inspiring. I heard stories about how you created such a beautiful space for these students where they could be safe, and they knew you would text them if they were feeing some kind of way. [Looking at the class altar in the middle of circle] I have a feeling you were at Trader Joe's picking up flowers for the altar [laughing with others]! There's so much meaning behind this. I'm proud to have you as a friend.
>
> Zula: I'm thankful for Stephanie as well. Because I have seen her be magical. Be extraordinary in ways that you might not ever. But the fact that she is here giving herself to you in a way that she is, she's like literally giving you a little bit of her strength, giving a little bit of her courage, a little bit of her power, her magic, so that you then can do the same thing. I'm very thankful for you, and I love you.

These comments are intersectional affirmations that help me feel truly seen for what it takes to do this work as a mother and woman of color. As women, teachers, and a midwife of color, Malinda, Noor, and Zula understand both the heaviness and beauty of navigating multiple identities and reflect back the labor of love I often cannot see myself. They understand how difficult this work is with all of the complex layers we embody.

Altogether, the Healing Grief showcase is a reminder of how:

> . . . our activism is directly connected to our heart's ability to respond to the world. A congested heart, one burdened with unexpressed sorrow, cannot stay open to the world,

> and consequently, cannot be fully available for the healing work so needed at this time." (Weller, 2015, p. 75)

Through deep soul work and deep listening, we are able to release some sorrows that get in the way of seeing our full selves and hold each other up in the process. Students are able to see themselves in the work they presented, while panelists are able to see the their own pain and healing work in the students' projects. Through shared struggle and solidarity between students, myself, and community panelists, we are able to step fully into our wholeness, purpose and power.

Ongoing Healing: Closing the Semester and Lingering Tensions

Weller (2015) reminds us that grief work is not about responding to a singular moment, but having a continual conversation about how sorrow shapes our lives and the ways we engage with others. Thus, I find it difficult knowing that this is my final unit with students like Lili and Jeremiah, knowing that there is so much more work, stories, and needs to uncover. Even as I lament the semester nearing completion with students, I know they have tools to assist with their ongoing healing.

Underneath everything Lili has shared in her writing, projects, and interviews lies a genuine desire for expression. When looking back at the semester, Lili describes what she will remember most: "You told me to express myself and don't shy away from writing what I feel. Before, I never shared what I feel with anyone, but you were the first person to say everything will be okay. I appreciate the connections I made with my classmates and with you." As we finish our last interview together, I remind Lili about how much she has been able to express from her heart and her past, and that she has the confidence and community to keep doing so. I spontaneously offer her a centering exercise at the end, where we practice grounding to know

that we can feel supported and breathing exercises to let go of perceptions that prevent us from feeling fully heard and seen.

I offer a similar centering exercise for Jeremiah, as we end our last interview together. I can tell there is much more that Jeremiah is carrying from stressors at home, but I honor what he has chosen to share with me. Although I encourage him to see a counselor or social worker at the school, Jeremiah insists again that he is "okay." I ask if it would be helpful to close the interview with a centering exercise and he calmly agrees. Knowing that he continues to carry so much for his family, I structure the meditation to remind him that he is not alone. Asking if there's anything else he wants to share, Jeremiah states, "I was able to heal in this class because I let go of some trauma I'm dealing with. It helped to write it out. This was the best class I ever had because it helped me connect with everyone and become strong. It was a challenge, but I feel this is what all classes should be like—to bring people together." I remind him that he was already strong coming into the class, that he doesn't have to be "strong" for others all the time, and that I hope he continues to stay connected with people in the class and with me.

Ideally, I would have at least taught students for an entire year to keep digging deeper into the connections we have made in our bodymindspirits and to each other. I would have liked to also dig deeper with the ways that students' individual traumas align with larger experiences of pain and collective struggles for liberation. Instead, I end our time together by expressing my sadness at having to close this chapter of our lives together, and honoring students' ability to trust me and the process. "I never knew that this space and all of your work and stories would be so healing to me, too. I needed that so much, thank you," I say. "Please own the fact that you have these beautiful tools to help and heal yourselves first, and then give to your community. We are going through, and unfortunately, will continue to go through heavy times, personally,

politically, globally, and environmentally. But you all have given me so much hope that we will be alright. We really will."

My grief work, in tandem with students' grief work, helped return me to what matters—the continual process of shattering limiting beliefs about scarcity, isolation, and shame and re-envisioning a world full of abundance, connection, and dignity. "Through our ability to acknowledge layers of loss, we can truly discover our capacity to respond, to protect, and to restore what has been damaged," Weller (2015) declares. "Grief registers the sorrows that befall everything that matters deeply to our souls" (p. 10). Held in a container of solidarity and unconditional love, I could realize that the world is expansive enough to hold my sorrows *and* my passion for teaching. In doing so, I hope that students could envision their own worlds open up, ready to embrace whatever they need to release and express.

CHAPTER EIGHT: PEDAGOGIES OF WHOLENESS

> Are you sure, sweetheart, that you want to be well? . . . Just so's you're sure, sweetheart, and ready to be healed, cause wholeness is no trifling matter. A lot of weight when you're well. (Bambara, 1980)

The previous three blended portraits reveal just how complex it is to center personal and collective healing in an English classroom. Like Bambara communicates through her novel, *The Salt Eaters,* wholeness is heavy work—"a lot of weight" to carry students' healing alongside my own, and a lot of responsibility placed on students to trust me and each other along the way. David, Samar, Lili, and Jeremiah demonstrate the bravery it takes to look intimately at various forms of violence—from family, school, neighborhood, and society—and stay present in their bodymindspirits and our classroom. As a teacher, it also takes deep conviction to confront the epistemological violence of schools and maintain a restorative environment that honors the wisdom that comes from wholeness. As Weller (2015) aptly states, "this is both freeing and frightening . . . this is exactly what we need and what we fear" (p. 81). While it takes a lot of weight to intentionally center healing in a high school classroom, the knowledge, beauty, and transformation that arises in the process is certainly better than carrying the weight of pain alone, unexamined.

In this last chapter, I synthesize understandings from my blended portraits to define pedagogies of wholeness. I reiterate my research questions and how they are addressed through the units of intimate inquiry I describe in the portraits, then discuss the significance of this teacher research to critical literacy (Morrell, 2008), culturally sustaining pedagogy (Paris & Alim, 2014), trauma-informed schools (Ko et al., 2008), and teacher sustainability (Hydon et al. 2015). Finally, I conclude with implications for educators, schools, teacher education, and

scholarship, and advocate for a continued examination of healing for and with marginalized young people in the field of education.

Defining Wholeness

When I first embarked on this dissertation journey, I was interested in what it takes to develop pedagogies of healing for Students of Color. Eventually, I learned that my inquiry went beyond pedagogies of *healing*, or mending the wounds of trauma, and became much more about pedagogies of *wholeness*, supporting young folks to reclaim their full humanity. The interactions I share with students in this dissertation demonstrate that pedagogies of wholeness are not just about teaching. Rather, it is a way of being, relating, learning, teaching, and knowing that embraces our wholeness—of bodymindspirit, of our collective bodies in the classroom and beyond, and the inextricable connection between the past, present, and future. It is a willingness to stay present in the body, to a full range of pain, numbness and joy, and to build deep relationship with others, so that we can uncover a reservoir of wisdom and power. Honoring care for the self *and* community, it is an interdependent, reciprocal kind of teaching and learning that makes space for the needs of students *and* teacher.

Pedagogies of wholeness are founded on a critical compassion that holds concern for young people's suffering, while holding a critique of the systems of oppression that lies at the root of their pain. Healing comes from not just fighting against the material violence and dominant narratives we seek to dismantle, but more importantly from creating a world of freedom and possibility we seek to live in. From the way we relate to students, to the curriculum we design, to the kinds of knowing we draw from, to the way we show up in our classrooms, pedagogies of wholeness create the right connections and understandings to feel fully seen, heard, and understood.

The Weight of Trauma on Students of Color

On my journey towards envisioning pedagogies of wholeness, I first sought to explore how Students of Color describe the impact of trauma on their lives and learning. From my interviews with David, Samar, Lili and Jeremiah, and from our work together in an English classroom, I learn that trauma and stress often feel like a heavy weight they have to carry across intersecting worlds. Identifying as first- or second-generation Latin@s, these students describe a bifurcation of responsibility to their families and themselves. Jeremiah describes how his academic needs often conflict with his familial duties, whereas Lili, Samar, and David described hiding their emotional needs to protect them from judgment. As the only brothers in their families, David and Jeremiah find asking for support a sign of weakness, while Lili and Samar often think of their family members' needs before theirs. In a working-class community, Lili, David, and Jeremiah talk about their parents working long hours, where they each have had to take on more responsibility. Whether it is in speaking English the "right" way, or fighting off stereotypes because of their race, gender, citizenship status, sexuality or body type, they carry added burdens of wanting to prove their worth to a world in which they don't believe they belong.

These stressors become compounded with the acute traumas they name in assignments or conversations with me. David and Samar attribute the trauma they experience in elementary and middle school to a sense of guilt and shame, whereas Jeremiah and Lili each experience acute losses of home and family members. David, Jeremiah, and Samar, who each admit they have struggled with keeping their grades up, all describe the difficulty of staying both mentally and physically present in school. Lili is an exception, with her straight A's and perfect attendance, but she also exemplifies a student who is still struggling socially and emotionally despite her

academic success. Because they continue to navigate spaces that risk or cause harm—in school, at home, and in their communities—they often carry a mistrust for others that prevents many of them from asking for help. They tend to hold their emotions inside, fearing a loss of control and not wanting to overburden others with their own needs.

Through interviews and classroom content, my continued dialogue with students about the impact of trauma helps me understand the importance of being "in right relationship" (Weller, 2015) with our pain (See Figure 12). Throughout the blended portraits, students waver between giving their pain too much attention, to no attention at all; collapsing underneath the weight of pain, to hiding their pain underneath a mask; and isolating themselves, to not being able to be alone. David and Samar tend to lie on the right side of this matrix, immersed by trauma they experience at school, where they turn that violence inwards, as David internalizes an identity of guilt and Samar projects harm onto her own body. Jeremiah and Lili, on the other hand, mask their traumas by being "strong" for their families and turn their energies outward, with little time spent considering their own socio-emotional needs. Healing comes from (a) learning how to be in balance with their pain through their bodies and in community; (b) becoming present to their pain to help them uncover their deepest needs; (c) learning to have dignity while they process their pain; and (d) reclaiming a sense of internal and external belonging.

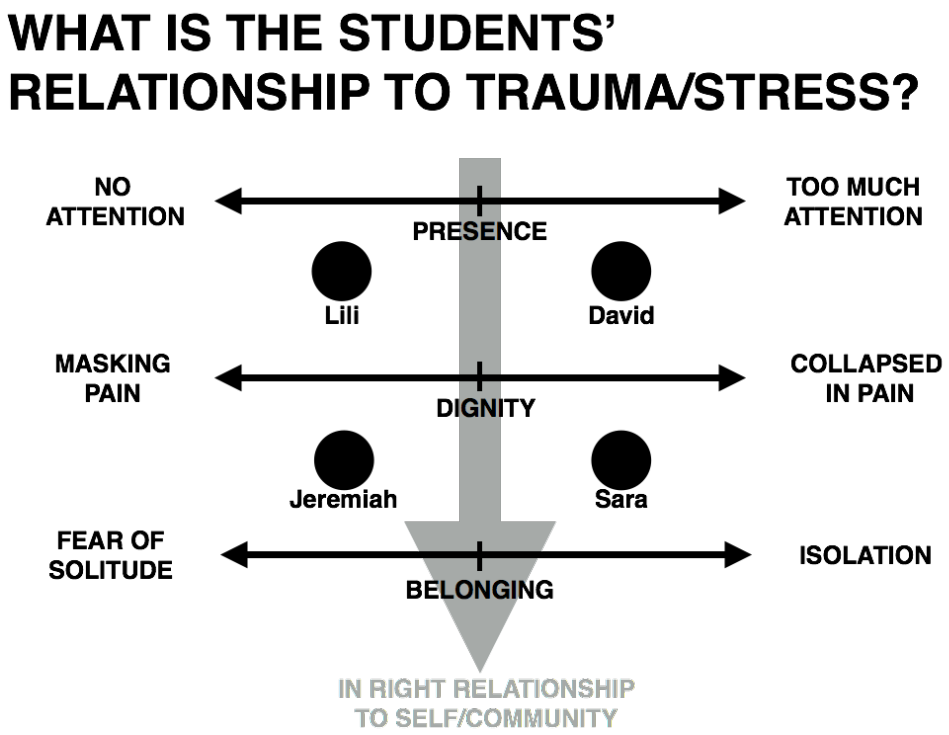


Figure 12. In Right Relationship to Self/Community.

> Weller (2015) describes the need for loving-kindness in moments like these:
>
> Bringing compassion to bear helps us relax the ever-watchful eye of self-criticism and grants us permission to reveal ourselves to others. We may need to tell our friends that we feel this constriction around our chests and throats and that we require support to ease into the full expression of our sorrows. (p. 109)

As students explore their own journeys through suffering and learn how to offer healing support to others, students reflect on their hesitation but ultimate need to take up space, ask for help, and express themselves in their full humanity. David, Samar, Lili and Jeremiah's stories are a testament to the incredible resilience young people demonstrate in spite of everything they carry on the shoulders and in their hearts. Their stories also carry great insight into the kinds of pedagogies and care they deserve in schools.

Inviting Intimate Inquiry

After getting a better understanding of students' needs, the second question I sought to answer is, how can a teacher create and implement healing pedagogies in an English classroom? Through a critical healing praxis, I describe how I identify needs, design units of intimate inquiry, engage in embodied analysis with students, implement healing literacy assessments, and determine steps for ongoing healing, while re-anchoring myself to keep my teaching practice sustainable. This model builds off of Freire's (1987) problem-posing pedagogy by taking inquiry and dialogue to an embodied, holistic level.

When I cycle through a critical healing praxis through each blended portrait, the importance of intimate inquiry shines through. I use the term "intimacy" because of the combination of closeness and vulnerability it takes for students and I to befriend our pain, bodies, and each other, and the courage it takes to do so in an institution that promotes disembodiment and detachment. With each unit of intimate inquiry—Healing Schools, Healing Self, and Healing Grief, as well as the personal reflections I engage through re-anchoring—students and I practice looking deeply at ourselves in solitude and connecting with others in solidarity (see Figure 13). Such intimacy requires an ongoing dance of bravery and safety, where we must risk revealing who we are underneath our masks, and in doing so, create a safer learning environment for others to do the same. Additionally, it requires a careful navigation of privacy and autonomy, where I give students permission to engage in intimate inquiry at their own pace and risk level.

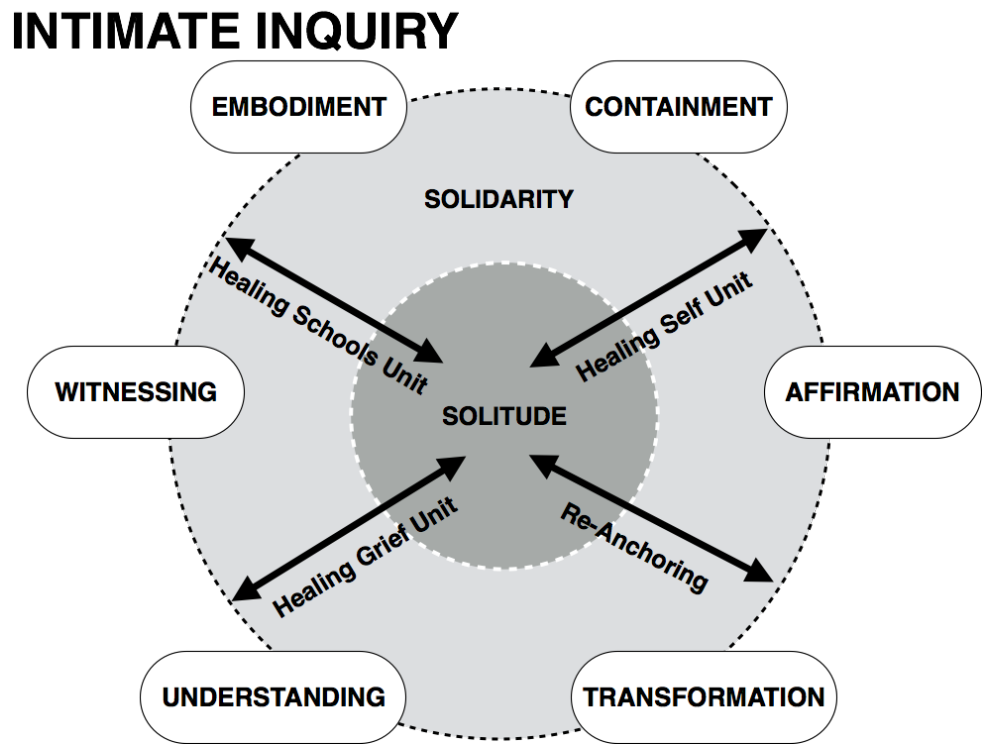


Figure 13. Intimate Inquiry.

Critical Healing Objectives

Just as pedagogies of wholeness require more than just teaching, intimate inquiry is more than just teaching to academic standards. Here, I define six of the critical healing objectives (see Figure 3) that students and I work towards when engaging in intimate inquiry. I define them separately for clarity, but the elements also overlap and work in tandem. Together, they combine traditional literacy standards, socio-emotional learning, and critical analysis towards empowering students to own their full humanity.

- **Embodiment**: Students become reflective of their own emotions and needs, so that they can bring their full selves to their work, feel more empowered in their skin and in relationship, and be more connected to what they care about. As Anzaldúa (2002) explains, embodiment is the "bodily feeling of being able to connect with inner voices/resources . . . during periods of stillness, silence, and deep listening or with

kindred others in collective actions" (x). It is through their own body and the collective body of the classroom that students can get in touch with, at the deepest level, who they are, how their perceptions have been shaped by society, and how to drop into their most authentic selves.

- **Containment**: The complex traumas that students bring with them into the classroom need "a bottom" (Weller, 2015), where their pain has a sturdy container to make a home in, instead of spilling out of control. Students learn that pain should be collectively, not individually, contained. By allowing ourselves to rest in the solitude of silence and the solace of community, our classroom community and collective healing work becomes a container of solidarity and reciprocity—where we can each take turns holding up the container for each other and still feel held, helped, and heard in its embrace.
- **Witnessing**: Disrupting historical erasure and silencing, students choose to let go of their masks in order to be fully seen and heard. By crafting and sharing narratives of pain and triumph, students recognize the power of memory and storytelling and create space for others to bear witness to their own truths.
- **Affirmation**: Students recognize the assets that come from their whole self, including their contradictions and coping strategies that have helped them survive. They "frame their struggles as brave, understandable, survivable, and worthy of intricate consideration" (Thompson, 2017, p. 91), and see their story as an example of community cultural wealth (Yosso, 2005).
- **Understanding**: Theorizing from their own lived experiences and embodiment, students use critical multi-literacies (Morrell, 2008) to deepen their knowledge of self (Camangian, 2010) and collective struggle. Through intimate inquiry, they unravel

unconscious feelings, memories and perceptions that are intertwined with systems of oppression and desires for liberation. As Lorde (1984) reminds us, understanding comes when students are able to apply this knowledge into action that serves their personal and collective needs.

- **Transformation**: From these understandings, students shift from being objected to false dominant narratives to becoming the subjects of their own life-affirming narratives. Doing so helps students shed the excessive weight of trauma and oppression, so they move in the world—not from habits of fear, shame, or lack, but from intention, conviction, and critical hope (Duncan-Andrade, 2011).

These objectives are nurtured through connection and classroom content, as part of a recursive process towards wholeness. Engaging in intimate inquiry with students for only one semester, I know that our work together—while incredibly fulfilling and rewarding—are but small seeds planted towards what should be a long-term process of healing. It should also be noted that these same healing objectives apply to the intimate inquiry I engage with as I work towards a sustainable teaching practice, which I describe in more detail later in this chapter.

Healing-informed Teaching Methods

Enacting pedagogies of wholeness not only requires re-imagining learning objectives to honor students' full humanity, but also re-shaping the teaching methods we employ. Here, I lay out four kinds of strategies that guide students towards the healing objectives I discussed above.

- **Nepantlera texts:** Throughout every unit of intimate inquiry, I select texts that are rich with emotion and vulnerability, as well as an intersectional analysis. Drawing from Anzaldúa's notion of the nepantlera, which serves as a guide towards healing, I call these pieces nepantlera texts, which serve as literary bridges to help students move from

unexamined pain to integrated wholeness. Anzaldúa's (2002) "path of conocimiento" and Weller's (2015) "five gates of grief," as well as personal stories shared by me, guest speakers, and other students, help the class them name their lived experiences and connect themselves to larger communities seeking empowerment and healing.

- **Checking In**: There are multiple points of entry structured in to lessons for students to check in with their bodies, minds and spirits: centering, journaling, and classroom rituals like our rock ceremony. We have our "class community needs" list, where students and I begin our lessons with sharing needs. I also practice being present, attuning to body language, gently unpacking subtle and overt resistance, so that I can check in with students when they are struggling and needing support. This becomes a reciprocal process, where I can share my own feelings and needs to model self-empathy and self-advocacy. Altogether, these methods model the ways of being that uphold a learning environment built on compassion and wholeness.
- **Mirroring:** Not only do I attune to students' body language, I also mirror back their body language, whether in real time or from a past experience, to help students make meaning from their "body-stories" (Strobel, 2010). With Samar in particular, I use mirroring questions to help her recognize desires underneath feelings of pain and shame, as well as uncover assets that were always there. This mirroring method helps affirm strengths that students often cannot see themselves. When students or I choose to share vulnerable stories of pain and reflection, our words also serve as mirrors to help students unpack their own behavior, feelings, and needs.
- **Joy:** Because of the tendency for our classroom content to be heavy because of our focus on healing, it becomes important to structure in and be open to joy in our classroom.

> Using comedy, simulations, role-playing, video-making, art, photography, and music helps lighten up subject matter and utilizes creativity and imagination as forms of healing. Our wholeness doesn't just emerge from looking closely at pain, but also creating a community that is open to humor, laughter, and playfulness in the present moment.

All of these teaching methods lay the foundation for students to engage in literacy practices that center healing and wholeness, which I now turn to in the following section.

Critical Healing Literacies

For my dissertation, I was also interested in seeing how students respond to healing pedagogies in an English classroom. By focusing on the critical healing objectives I discussed above, students produce what I call critical healing literacies. This is work that bridges traditional, critical (Morrell, 2008), and socio-emotional literacy (Berila, 2015; Thompson, 2017; Weller, 2015) practices, to embrace the wholeness that students and I bring to the classroom and make meaning from pain, emotions and desires. Critical healing literacies allow students to transform themselves, their relationships, and the way they see the world. Specifically in an English classroom, critical healing literacies engage in a multi-dimensional analysis: (a) the written word as text, to develop reading, writing, speaking and listening skills; (b) life as text, to unpack dominant perceptions of self and the communities to whom we belong; and (c) emotions as text, to deepen engagement and understanding.

As readers in our classroom, students participate in what Morrell (2008) calls literacy as self-care, where they are given:

> . . . permission to dream through texts, to read in way that allow them to discover and rediscover themselves through the texts that they read. It also allows them to experience legitimately the emotions that accompany the creation of the texts that they read. (p. 172)

For David, Samar, Lili, Jeremiah and their classmates, our classroom texts become windows into new possibilities for seeing themselves in their wholeness and ways they deserve to be treated. As writers, students' "path to conocimiento" essays help them develop alternative narratives that speak back to "social narratives not of [their] own making" (Anzaldúa, 2015, p. 6). In their Healing Grief unit, students use collaborative research to teach their community about the collective wisdom and power that can come from being "in right relationship" (Weller, 2015) to sorrow.

I now present a moving excerpt from Lili's "Path to Conocimiento" essay, where she explains what she gains from telling the story of grieving her father's 10-year absence in her life. Her words exemplify the kind of reflection that embodies critical healing literacies—namely, an ability to affirm her full humanity, bear witness to her pain, and use her words and feelings to transform the way she sees herself:

> My healing has been about speaking back to the voices that said that this hurt too much to get it out of my heart, and that I have the ability to turn that weakness into my strength. I'm a survivor who opened my heart and my most beautiful and painful memories to the public without fear of being judged by others. I'm no longer a fearful person of the world. I know that I have a voice, that expressing myself is good and that my words have power.

I also present anonymous student feedback from a post-class survey, to show how critical healing literacies support students in caring for themselves and their community.

> Student 1: I think it's important to have a class like this because we all need to know that there is a person who cares about our problems and that we can learn how to help others with the same things that we are going through.
>
> Student 2: It was a bit difficult for me to write about hard times, because I don't like people knowing everything about me. But doing my path to conocimiento essay helped me learn to express my feelings. I was able to heal something for myself, which was to open up a bit more to people about what I've been through.
>
> Student 3: I learned that no matter how stressed out or how many problems I have been going through, I can calm down and try to give the best of myself to other people. I

> learned to listen to other people in the best way. I also learned how to give them support they need.

These reflections reveal students' understanding that they can cultivate an inner sense of belonging and bravery, which in turn can be used to help others. Together, these anonymous reflections and Lili's words address the critical healing objectives of our class.

Re-anchoring through my Own Intimate Inquiry

My last dissertation question focuses on understanding ways to maintain a sustainable healing pedagogy practice, given the ways centering wholeness in the classroom can lead to burnout. Although I enter this teacher research with intentions for self/collective care to counteract my tendencies to overextend myself, I still end up experiencing compassion fatigue from teaching about pain while holding space for students' struggles and needs. By the final unit, I also experience compound grief from teaching about loss and containing other students' sorrows while being uprooted by my mother's sudden illness. Much like students' relationships to their own trauma, I vacillate between masking my pain through overworking and being overtaken by sorrow and stress. Despite all of this, returning to my body becomes a significant strategy to help me understand my capacity and underlying needs with much more clarity. Instead of burning out from the weight of carrying multiple worlds alongside my critical work, my re-anchoring strategies become a space of intimate inquiry (see Figure 13), where I am able to move towards the same healing objectives that I strive to teach students in the classroom.

In solitude, my self-care practices of meditation, selfie memos, and journaling help me befriend my own emotions, strengths, and energy. I can move from judging my coping strategies to having compassion for my body's responses, which often help me assert healthier boundaries and re-center my wellness. Giving myself permission to be still allows me to pause from striving and thinking, to just be. Seeing my own reflection while recording selfie memos and reading my

journal entries helps me feel seen, as I let myself unravel and be put back together again by bearing witness to what is present. I can let go of false narratives of incompetence and disconnection, and recognize which pain is mine, and which is coming from students and family. Doing all of this helps me make meaning from my bodymindspirit and gain a better sense of my purpose as a teacher, thereby helping me return to the classroom with much more presence.

In solidarity with others, I intentionally build a container to hold the weight of everything I am carrying as a teacher, mother, wife, graduate student, and woman of color. I seek support from healing practitioners who can help me get in touch with and recharge my bodymindspirit. My renewal and ongoing healing also comes from like-minded sisters and colleagues who understand me personally, pedagogically, and politically. My motivation to keep teaching, in the face of myriad stressors and deep sorrow, is largely shaped by feeling fully seen by folks who understand the interwoven heaviness and beauty of this work. The affirmations I share from the circle at the end of our Healing Grief showcase reflect the kinds of feedback I need throughout the semester—that I am doing good work, that I am not alone, and that I have an abundant community of support to draw from. Overall, these re-anchoring strategies become important to a sustainable healing pedagogy practice, where I can ask for support and be seen not just in crisis, but in my full humanity intentionally throughout the semester.

Significance

This dissertation builds on existing critical scholarship that seeks to meet the holistic needs of young people at the margins. With an emphasis on praxis, as well as an employment of embodied epistemologies, this teacher research meets Morrell's (2008) call for "more thorough, encompassing and theoretically grounded approach [that] should center upon acquisition and demonstrate of critical literacies" (p. 4). Integrating the body, multi-media, emotions, pain,

desire and the written word as text, my discussion of critical healing literacies expands what we understand as critical multi-literacies (Morrell, 2008), narratives of mourning (Kirkland, 2014), critically caring literacies (Camangian, 2010), and restorative English education (Winn, 2013) for high school students in an English classroom. Moreover, my delineation of a critical healing praxis fine-tunes what we understand as culturally sustaining pedagogy (Paris & Alim, 2014), which seeks to address the complex needs of marginalized students as they arise over time. In my blended portraits, I describe the recursive process of identifying students' needs in real time, and outline the processes and challenges of designing units of intimate inquiry to address those needs. By employing embodied frameworks and radical feminist epistemologies, pedagogies of wholeness push against private/public and emotional/rational binaries in schools, and offer concrete ways to engage the full humanity of students *and* the teachers who serve them.

This project also underscores how adverse life experiences inform the ways Students of Color learn in schools, which complicates the existing scholarship on trauma-informed care in education. Beyond defining the basic tenets of trauma-informed care (Ko et al., 2008), this dissertation discusses the contradictions nurturing safety and belonging in schools that are considered unsafe to Students of Color. While the trauma-informed literature advocates for the development of emotional literacy in schools, I discuss the tensions of doing this in an institution that privileges the mind over emotions, and the necessary interventions to ease students towards befriending their bodymindspirits. This dissertation is also one of the first qualitative studies of trauma-informed pedagogy in action at the high school level and of trauma-informed pedagogy that utilizes the subject matter of English language arts, which paves the way for further studies at various levels.

Much literature is dedicated to defining the causes of teacher burnout (Hydon et al., 2008), but this study outlines concrete strategies to prevent it. Notably, this dissertation builds upon the importance of care for students (Howard & Milner, 2014) by advocating for teachers to care for themselves, especially when engaging in healing-centered pedagogies. Lama Rod Owens (2016), in the book *Radical Dharma,* aptly states:

> Healing is not just the courage to love, but to be loved. It is the courage to want to be happy not just for others, but for ourselves as well. It is interrogating our bodies as an artifact of accumulated traumas and doing the work of processing that trauma by developing the capacity to notice and be with our pain.

Thus, this study shows how teacher wellness is not just about staying within the profession, but also about sharpening our political and pedagogical clarity (Martinez, Valdez, & Cariaga, 2016), so that we may "weave our [wounds] into wholeness and release them back into the world as healing medicine" (Strobel, 2010, p. 6) for our classrooms.

Implications and Future Directions

In this dissertation, I have examined ways I have transformed interactions and pedagogies in an English classroom to integrate students and my full humanity as resources for learning and healing. Critical healing praxis and intimate inquiry are not prescriptive processes; rather, they are frameworks and methodologies meant to inspire teachers, schools, teacher educators, and critical researchers to identify authentic needs of communities they serve and re-imagine more humanizing methods to meet those needs. Below, I offer implications for each of these stakeholders to utilize these frameworks and shape their own pedagogies of wholeness in their communities.

Teachers

As I have iterated throughout this study, pedagogies of wholeness are ways of being, learning, knowing, teaching and learning that affirm our bodymindspirits and the wisdom they

carry. While I have laid out what that has meant for me in my own context and the methods that best help me embrace my bodymindspirit, teachers should consider the following: Drawing from your own lived experiences, what wholeness can you bring to your classroom and how might that shift the way students see themselves and drop into their own power? What are ways you enjoy becoming present, embodied, and centered in your full humanity, and how might you integrate those into your curriculum and interactions with students? How can you use your own intimate inquiry to shed limiting beliefs and dominant narratives about yourself and the communities you belong to, so that you can teach students to do the same?

This dissertation can pave the path for teachers to engage in their own intimate teacher inquiry that combines contemplative strategies with a critical analysis that seeks to transform themselves while transforming their classrooms. Because my study only captures a semester of critical healing praxis with one 11th-grade class, future studies should examine what impact these methodologies have on students for longer periods of time. They should also explore what this looks like for full-time teachers with full loads of classes and what school structures are necessary to support them in maintaining a sustainable healing pedagogy practice. In addition, future research can explore the implementation of pedagogies of wholeness and critical healing literacies across disciplines, including history and ethnic studies, and in other grade levels, ranging from early to higher education.

Schools

My teacher research demonstrates how pedagogies of wholeness cannot be done alone in one classroom. To do this with integrity, a larger culture of care is necessary to support both students and teachers engaging in rigorous healing work. This study clearly shows the impact of complex and compound trauma on students' personal and academic lives, as well as the teachers

who serve them; it also shows the deep impact it has on students to develop academic and transformative competencies and teachers to deepen their methodologies. School administrators and district officials therefore should consider: How can we institute a culture of wholeness in schools by training every adult to empathize with students' struggles and recognize their assets and underlying needs? How can we integrate critical scholarship with cutting edge trauma-informed studies to provide professional development for teachers to engage in their own critical healing praxis? How can mental health support be provided for students and adults alike?

Throughout this study, student participants describe the impact of trauma on their families, so schools should also consider way to extend this support to parents to heal from their own struggles and develop healthier relationships with their children. With the significant impact of a wellness center and social workers at the school site for this study, future research can also examine the impact systems of healing have on student learning and healing, looking at collaboration between teachers, counselors, social workers, and administrators.

Teacher Educators

Teacher education programs can draw upon the above suggestions to prepare candidates to better address the complex needs of students in schools. Under a pedagogies of wholeness framework, teacher education programs can draw from interdisciplinary and intersectional approaches to train candidates to not just teach academic standards, but widen their scope to include a range of humanizing objectives. Novice teachers should learn how to layer various lenses, including critical pedagogy and literacy, embodied pedagogies, and radical feminist epistemologies, to develop their own problem-posing and needs-centered curriculum. Teacher inquiry should not only reflect on curriculum design, but include strategies for re-anchoring and sustainability. Teacher educators should therefore consider: How are you preparing incoming

teachers to manage the toxicity and stress of schools, including the pain that students bring to the classroom? How can you facilitate spaces for embodied reflection, healing and recharge, for teacher candidates to process the heaviness and beauty of engaging in a critical healing praxis? Overall, teacher candidates "deserve training that lets us know we don't need to run from conflict, confusion, and sadness in the classroom" (Thompson, 2017, p. 40), and that these can actually be resources for learning and renewal.

Critical Researchers

Much of critical teacher research focuses solely on students in the development of humanizing pedagogies, where we often forget "to examine who we are, how we 'know,' and how we teach" (Prieto & Villenas, 2012, p. 412). The blended portraiture approach of this dissertation can help critical teacher/researchers to integrate more nuance in their explorations, and find ways to connect the dots between their own lived experiences, the ways of knowing they bring into the classroom, and their development of more holistic teaching methods. My use of portraiture (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis, 1997) and desire narratives (Tuck & Yang, 2014) can also help researchers envision ways to refine research methods and craft scholarship that honors students' pain, stories, and resilience, instead of further tokenizing and pathologizing young people of color. Whereas this study looked at my sole praxis engaging pedagogies of wholeness, future studies can examine the qualitative differences and similarities between multiple educators employing healing pedagogies in various contexts. Further research should also consider the role of epistemology in upholding or subverting dehumanizing schooling practices.

This dissertation works alongside countless people who are carving spaces for more intimacy, healing, and wholeness in schools: the scholars who have paved the way to utilize

public health sciences and community activism to center radical healing in schools (Camangian, 2010; Duncan-Andrade, 2011; Ginwright, 2016) and the emerging scholars re-envisioning ways to engage in intersectional praxis and love with critical teachers and young people of color (Hannegan-Martinez, 2015; Pour-Khorshid, 2016); the teacher organizers who have created autonomous spaces for personal and collective healing (Martinez et al., 2016); and the students who continue to show up in our classrooms, carrying both pain and desire in their hearts, insisting through subtle and overt resistance that we must do better for them. Financial, material, emotional, and spiritual support should be used to synchronize and leverage these efforts into local and national movements to better comprehend the multifaceted needs of Students of Color and the teachers who serve them, nurture their healing processes, and empower them as learners and agents of social change.

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