UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA

Los Angeles

Literacies of Love:

Trauma, Healing, and Pedagogical Shifts in an English Classroom

A dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction of the

requirements for the degree Doctor of Philosophy

in Education

by

Sharim Hannegan-Martinez

2020

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ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

Literacies of Love: Trauma, Healing, and Pedagogical Shifts in an English Classroom

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Sharim Hannegan-Martinez

Doctor of Philosophy in Education

University of California, Los Angeles, 2020

Professor Daniel G. Solórzano, Chair

Emerging research shows that more than half of all U.S. children have experienced some kind of trauma in the form of abuse, neglect, violence, or challenging household circumstances—and 35 percent of children have experienced more than one type of traumatic event (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2016). In this study— Literacies of Love: Trauma, Healing and Pedagogical Shifts in an English Classroom—I draw from, blend, and synthesize existing research in the fields of public health, social epidemiology, psychiatry, psychotherapy, Ethnic Studies, and education to achieve a more robust understanding of trauma, its effects, and existing interventions. I then draw from these aforementioned fields to highlight a grotesquely under-theorized, but widely agreed upon intervention to child trauma: loving relationships (Ginwright, 2016; Duncan-Andrade, 2009; Perry, 2007; Siegel & Solomon, 2003, Van Der Kolk, 2014).

Drawing on a corpus of data collected throughout my tenure as a teacher-researcher, I integrate student work, interviews, focus groups, reflections, videos, and journal entries to conceptualize love and illustrate how to cultivate loving relationships and literacies within an

English classroom. Through qualitative analysis, including discourse, media, and document analysis, my dissertation highlights the strong corollary between literacy practices and loving relationships to self, classroom, and community. This research is timely, coinciding with significant shifts in the field towards trauma-informed pedagogies and social-emotional learning. Moreover, this study will make a valuable contribution to educational research at the intersection of trauma-informed pedagogies, critical literacy, and urban education.

Keywords: Love, Critical Literacy, Pedagogy of Love, Literacies of Love, Critical Race Theory, Urban Education

The dissertation of Sharim Hannegan-Martinez is approved.

Dolores Delgado Bernal

Tyrone Howard

Hesham Samy Alim

Daniel G. Solórzano, Committee Chair

University of California, Los Angeles

2020

This dissertation is dedicated to:

My students, every young person I have ever met or have yet to meet, to the babies still on their way here, and those who have left us too early: I love you. This work is for you. A reminder that you are loved, have always been loved even when this world would have you believe that it is untrue. May our love inoculate you against this loveless world. May we build a world where you *always* know how unequivocally loved and treasured you are.

&

My abuelita Ernestina Escalante, who prayed for me long before I was born, who taught me what it was to survive and live and love for our children and our children's children.

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Writing a dissertation is no easy feat—writing it in the midst of individual and collective grief and heartbreak felt almost impossible. Were it not for the many people and communities that held me, supported me, protected me, and guided me this dissertation would not exist right now.

I was blessed with a committee that was comprised of some of the most brilliant, gentle, loving people I have been fortunate to come across in academia. I am so grateful for each and every one of them, and for the ways they have guided and mentored me. Samy Alim, your excitement for the work is contagious—I leave every conversation with you feeling inspired and energized. Tyrone Howard, you helped me to navigate every part of the academic process, reminded me that I was never alone, and believed in me in ways that were infectious. Thank you for constantly affirming me and engaging me as I fought endlessly to disentangle care and love. Dolores Delgado Bernal, you are truly the model for the kind of mujer, teacher, mentor, person I hope to become in this work. You are so generous with your time, feedback, and care and model integrity and boundaries in ways that make me feel like this work can be sustainable. It is a blessing to learn from and alongside you. To my advisor, Daniel Solórzano—I struggle often with the words to communicate the magnitude of the impact you've had on my life. From the first day that I met you, you not only allowed be to myself but celebrated the parts of me that academia often asks me to silence, to discard of. The academy threatens to steal our spirit, to turn us into something we are not—and you never let them. On the days I felt those pressures, you gently held up a mirror, reminded me who I wanted to be---you guided me home to myself. You are a lighthouse and have stewarded so many of us. You model every day the type of loving

mentorship I hope to carry forward with all of my students. I will forever be deeply honored by your decision to mentor me. Thank you.

At UCLA I have been able to build many transformative relationships with both faculty and students. I am incredible grateful that I was able to build with and learn from the Ethnic Studies team: Darlene Lee, Emma Hipolito, Lorena Guillén, Josephine Pham, and Eduardo Lopez. Mike Rose, you are one of the best educators I have ever seen. Thank you for tending to both me and my words with precision and care. I could not have written this dissertation without your support. I have also been able to cultivate many meaningful relationships with like-minded scholars whose criticality, insight, and friendship has shaped my being and thinking. I am forever blessed by the people I've built with at UCLA and through Danny's Research Apprenticeship Course (RAC) : Katherine Cho, Michael Moses, Christina Zavala, Christine Vega, Mariana Ramirez, Bryant Partida, JC Lugo, Sara Diaz, Annie Le, Tr'Vel Lyons, Eddie Lopez, Elianny Edwards, Earl Edwards, Mary Senyoga, Cynthia Estrada, Fernando Garcia, Lorena Camargo Gonzalez, Audrey Paredes, Gabriela Corona Valencia, Tanya Gaxiola, Alma Flores, Magali Campos, and Yadira Valencia. Thank you all for your support, critical feedback, shots of corralejo, and check-ins. You all are kind and brilliant and the world will be a better place because of your offerings.

To my first mentors---this path was informed by and possible because of you—thank you Jeff Duncan-Andrade and Patrick Camangian (aka Cam) for seeing the potential in a 17 year old girl with a loud mouth and a fistful of anger and helping me to envision a new way to channel that indignation and that love. Thank you for helping me find my way to teaching and modeling what teaching for liberation looks like. Cam, thank you for teaching alongside me—so much of this dissertation was shaped by your presence. I also continue to be blessed with the guidance

and mentorship of so many others who have paved the way for me, and for us: David Stovall (aka Stov), Allyson Tintiangco -Cubales, Pedro Nava, Tracy Laticia Buenavista, Uma Jayakumar---thank you for helping me get into graduate school and then teaching me to navigate the academy with integrity and authenticity. Jordan Beltran Gonzales, my friend and editor, thank you for always honoring my voice. Stov and Allyson, thank you for reading through different iterations of this dissertation, for always being a thought partner, and for your continued support and counsel.

To my people's both in and outside of the People's Education Movement--- Christina Villareal (aka Ms. V), Carolina Valdez, Stephanie Cariaga, Ed Curammeng, Cati de los Rios, Farima Pour Khorshid, Liza Gesuden – thank you for holding me all these years, for loving me unconditionally and tenderly challenging me to grow. In the last few months of writing this dissertation, some of which were the hardest of my life, you all checked in on me daily, read my work, sent me food and flowers, cried with me, prayed over me, stayed up and wrote with me. You all taught me that vulnerability is not weakness. I am stronger because of you and the many other friendships I have been able to cultivate outside of the academy. These friendships span different lifetimes but have brought so much joy to my life and sustained me endlessly. I hope to be able to reflect back to you all of the magic that you are: Asia Hampton, Leona Kwon, V, Ashley Richards, Mercedes Martin, Karol Martin, Natalie Castro, Cecilia Mclaren, Sabrina Jimenez, Melissa Reyes, Aida Davis, Glenda Macatangay, the Accountability Squad: Allyson, Arlene Daus-Magbual, Jocyl Sacramento, Lauren Daus, and last but not least Mujeres Mansion: Natalia Sanchez-Gonzalez, Darcey Flores. Asia, there are truly no words to capture the decades worth of gratitude I have for your presence in my life. Brandon, I have learned so much by loving you---thank you.

My students, my babies, this dissertation would not exist without you. It has been the greatest honor of my life to know you, to teach you, to hear your stories, to bear witness to your lives. It is because of you all that I believe so deeply in the transformative power of love. Thank you.

Finally, my familia, without whom I would not be where or who I am. To my siblings: Shanae, Laura, Micha, David, and Uziel---thank you for always keeping me humble, reminding me that there is so much brilliance outside of the academy. To my sister and primas: Shanae, Veronica, Jessica, Kassy, and Lizzy--our text thread has kept me afloat. You all are chingonas, the lavender on my backbone--you keep me standing tall. I am also immensely grateful for my parents. Dad, thank you for supporting me. Eduardo, gracias for always being there for whatever I need no matter how far or close I am. Mami, I would not be who I am without your love. Thank you for breaking traditions and traumas so that I could follow my dreams, for always challenging me to do the thing that scares me, and always being there to celebrate and/or cry with me. I am so blessed to be your daughter.

This dissertation is bookended by grief and heartache. I have gained so many ancestors on this journey: my abuelita Ernestina Escalante, my tio Hilton, my dear friend and mentor Antonio Martinez, my students Gabriela Perez, Erik Salgado, and Sergio Martinez. I am grateful that the universe conspired so that I could have the privilege of knowing you in this lifetime. I pray that you, alongside my other ancestors, continue to guide me and that my work and my life does justice to your existence.

VITA

EDUCATION

2012 M.A. **University of San Francisco**
Urban Education and Social Justice
English Language Arts, Single Subject Credential
Bilingual Crosscultural Language in Academic Development (BCLAD) credential

2010 B.A. **San Francisco State University**
Raza Studies, Magna Cum Laude
Raza Studies nomination for the College of Ethnic Studies hood

K-12 TEACHING CERTIFICATIONS

Clear Bilingual Cross-cultural Language and Academic Development (BCLAD) Credential, CA (7-12)

Clear Single Subject Secondary English Language and Literacy Credential, CA (7-12)

PUBLICATIONS

Hannegan-Martinez, S., Mendoza, S., Delgado Bernal, D., & Solorzano, D. (Forthcoming). (Re)imagining Transformational Resistance: Seeds of Resistance and Pedagogical Ruptures. *Urban Education*, special issue.

Hannegan-Martinez, S. (2019). From Punk Love to Compa Love: A Pedagogical Paradigm to Intervene on Trauma. *Urban Review*.

Borrero, N., Camangian, P., Ayers, R., **Hannegan-Martinez, S**., & Flores, E. (2019). Half an Inch from the Edge: Teacher Education, Teaching, and Student Learning for Social Transformation. New York: Rowman & Littlefield.

Martinez-Hannegan, S. (2015). Teaching to Save our Lives. In S. Nieto (Ed.). *Why We Teach Now*. New York: Teachers College Press.

FELLOWSHIPS, HONORS and AWARDS

2020 Ford Foundation Dissertation Year Fellowship (Declined)
2019 NYU Steinhardt Faculty First First-Look Scholar
2019 UCLA Dissertation Year Fellowship
2016 Ford Foundation Predoctoral Fellowship

RESEARCH EXPERIENCE

2019–present **Research Lead**
"Youth Wellness Index"
Community Responsive Education

San Francisco State University
Principal Investigators: Jeff Duncan-Andrade, Allyson Titiangco-Cubales

2016–present **Research Assistant**
"Ethnic Studies Research Team"
Center X
University of California, Los Angeles
Principal Investigator: Emma Hippolito

PROFESSIONAL PRESENTATIONS

Martinez-Hannegan, S. (2019, April). "Literacy, Grieving, and Healing: Weeping as an Act of Literacy." Paper presented at the American Educational Research Association annual meeting, "Leveraging Education Research in a "Post-Truth" Era: Multimodal Narratives to Democratize Evidence," Toronto, ON.

Martinez-Hannegan, S. (2019, April). "(Re)imagining Transformational Resistance: Seeds of Resistance and Pedagogical Ruptures." Paper presented at the American Educational Research Association annual meeting, "Leveraging Education Research in a "Post-Truth" Era: Multimodal Narratives to Democratize Evidence," Toronto, ON.

Martinez-Hannegan, S. (2019, February). "From Punk Love to Compa Love." Presentation in Professor Dolores Delgado Bernal's course, "Chicanos in Education," California State University, Los Angeles, CA.

Martinez-Hannegan, S. (2018, November). "Love as a Pedagogical Paradigm to Intervene on Trauma," in Professor Tyrone Howard's course, "Ethnic Studies Pedagogy," University of California, Los Angeles, CA.

Martinez-Hannegan, S. (2018, October). "Cultivating Love in the Classroom." California State University, Dominguez Hills.

Martinez-Hannegan, S. (2018, March). "Using Chicana Feminist Epistemologies: Las Malas," in Professor Leisy Abrego's course, "Intro to Chicano Studies," University of California, Los Angeles, CA.

Martinez-Hannegan, S. (2018, May). "Rewriting the narratives of Mujeres Malas: Honoring La Malandrina as Maestra." Paper presented at the Ford Conference annual meeting, "The Dreams, Possibilities and Necessities of Public Education," Washington, D.C.

Martinez-Hannegan, S. (2018, April). "Pedagogical Implications of Rewriting the Narratives of Mujeres Malas." Poster presented at the American Educational Research Association annual meeting, "The Dreams, Possibilities and Necessities of Public Education," New York, NY.

CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

> Here you were: to be loved. To be loved, baby, hard, at once, and forever, to strengthen you against the loveless world. Remember that: I know how black it looks today, for you. It looked bad that day, too, yes, we were trembling. We have not stopped trembling yet, but if we had not loved each other none of us would have survived. And now you must survive because we love, and for the sake of your children and your children's children. (Baldwin, 1963, p. 7)

Years ago, I was fearful of starting this dissertation, of putting pen to paper, because I knew that to do so I would have to start at the beginning, and though I hope this dissertation will bring light and love and healing, it did not begin there. This dissertation began decades ago with a not-yet-12-year-old girl in a movie theatre parking lot, choking back tears and vomit and confusion as the pebbles cracked into her gangly and far-from-developed legs. Now that I know more about trauma and healing, I think maybe it began even earlier than that, when my mother—filled with youth and optimism—came to a country without papers, money, and little knowledge of the language. Perhaps it began even earlier, on the day my nana got kicked out of her home at age 14. Or far earlier—the day the Spanish arrived by boat and pillaged our villages, our people, our bodies, our tongues.

As a child, my nana would rest my head on her lap, play with my hair, and tell me that she loved me and prayed for me long before she was pregnant with my mother. I used to lay there incredulous, like how could you love me before you knew I existed? I know now I exist *because* she loved me; she survived because she loved me. Decades later, I am writing this dissertation, and it *is* about me, but it *is not* about me. It is about every student I have ever taught who has been harmed by systems that do not love them, or us, that are at odds with our dignity and humanity. It is for children across this country I haven't met, and for my children's children, for seven generations—may they know we loved them so much we survived, we fought for a world where they would be loved, where they did not have to fight for it. More than ever, I am

sure the grief and trauma of this present moment must be our wakeup call to provide young people the love that is owed to them, the love that is their birthright.

It is my own journey through grief and trauma and healing that brought me to this dissertation, to teaching, to love. As a mixed-raced, working-class Latina who grew up on the highly militarized San Diego-Tijuana *frontera,* I experienced the corrosive impacts of structural and interpersonal oppression daily—in the amount of frijoles we *had* to eat, the varied and multiple assaults I survived, the *migra* we feared, the divorce of my parents, the loss of my friends to both death and the carceral state, the violence we both survived and participated in, and the schools we attended. This type of oppression is sometimes painfully ordinary, chipping away at us at the dinner table while we sit surrounded by our family and drunk *tios*. These moments, both mundane and monumental, are part of how I understand trauma, of why I chose—ran towards teaching.

As a teenager, the conditions that led to these layered and varied assaults seemed normal, and yet, I suffered from the shame and isolation that is endemic to trauma. As a result, I developed a slew of coping mechanisms to navigate the toxic stressors that continued to permeate my day-to-day. Since I was intent on being as far removed from perceived notions of victimhood as possible, instead I became defensive, loud, aggressive, hyper-vigilant, avoidant. My family and teachers could not see past my trauma responses, my survival shape (Haines, 2019), particularly the ones that pushed back on patriarchal notions of how women should be and act, and so to them, I became "*mala*," bad (Hannegan-Martinez, 2018).

These defense mechanisms did little to defend me or my community from the monster that lay at bay and in our beds, so by the time I took ethnic studies courses and decided I wanted to be a teacher at the age of 18, the assaults had multiplied. That same year, I began working as

a teacher apprentice at a high school in East Oakland under the mentorship of Jeff Duncan-Andrade and Patrick Camangian; there, I came head-to-head with the *saliency* of trauma as I saw the *same* coping mechanisms I had used to survive mirrored on the faces of the young people I taught. Every assault I had experienced felt similarly etched and inked on the bodies and desks and paper of our classroom. It was then that I dove head and heart first into the research on trauma. The introductory understanding around the inner and outer workings of trauma and Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) became paramount to my survival as a Woman of Color and foundational to my pedagogy as a teacher in an urban school. Below, I explain the pervasiveness of trauma, the need for love, and my research goals.

Trauma: A National Crisis

In 2016, when I began this project, the research showed that more than half of all U.S. children had experienced some kind of trauma in the form of abuse, neglect, violence, or challenging household circumstances—and 35 percent of children had experienced more than one type of traumatic event (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2016). These statistics correspond with the DSM-IV-TR (2000) definition of trauma:

> An extreme traumatic stressor involving direct personal experience of an event that involves actual or threatened death or serious injury, or another threat to one's physical integrity; witnessing an event that involves death, injury, or threat to the physical integrity of another person or learning about unexpected violent death, serious harm, or threaten of death or injury experienced by a family member or other close associate.

Anzaldúa (1987) refers to these acute events as a *susto,* a trauma, where our relationship to the world is "irrevocably changed." While alarmingly high, this data neglects to account for the ways in which social toxins such as racism, sexism, poverty, other forms of oppression, and subsequent microaggressions constitute forms of trauma (Coates, 2015; Haines, 2019; Leary, 2005; Williams & Mohammed, 2009), nor does it address the ways in which trauma can also be historical and intergenerational (Duran, 2006; Leary, 2005). While those statistics for trauma are

high, it is likely that if we were to expand definitions of trauma to include factors of race, gender, class, sexuality, geography, and so forth, the trauma young people in general, and young People of Color specifically, experience is likely more pervasive than those statistics indicated. Most terrifying, however, is that while these statistics indicated there was *already* an urgency to study trauma, and situated it as one of the most significant socioemotional inequities facing Children of Color, these numbers are dated *before a global pandemic and national uprisings*, which have overnight uprooted the lives of children across the country.

As I am writing this, we are in the middle of a global pandemic. For months, those of us who are privileged enough to have a home have been quarantined inside of it. Over 20 million people have lost their jobs. Schools across the country have closed. As of today, more than 100,000 people in this country alone have passed away—most of whom have been Black and Brown people. The Navajo nation is the most impacted by the virus, and continues to be erased from the data. *Everything* has been on pause. Except death. Except poverty. Except White supremacy. We are still witnessing the sanctioned murder of Black people. The border continues to cage migrant, refugee children. Asian people have been on the receiving end of vitriol and violence. People go to grocery stores wearing their Ku Klux Klan (KKK) masks and cough in the faces of people whom they have long wished death upon. In prisons, COVID runs rampant and nobody bats an eye, or forms a tear. And as people continue to die, as people continue to lose the people that they love—others are fighting to go to restaurants and bars, to not have to wear the masks that could save their life or the life of another.

In the last few weeks alone, we have watched videos and heard stories of Black people being murdered in broad daylight (George Floyd), or in their home (Breonna Taylor). This is six years after Mike Brown was murdered, and 65 years after Emmet Till. The police—despite

damning video evidence—have been met largely with impunity. The grief and indignation is palpable, visible in the uprisings that have begun to take root. Across the country, thousands of Black people and allies have taken to the streets—in the middle of a global pandemic—to demand justice, to demand the right to live, to breathe, to walk down the street, to *exist.* Together, these thousands of people wearing their masks have chanted, cried, danced, spray painted, marched, burned sage, and some have even taken to fire to make their point. These uprisings demand an end to police brutality and yet, they have been largely met with police brutality: with batons, tear gas, tazing, rubber bullets, and cars literally running over protesters. In Los Angeles, we have been placed on curfew and the sound of sirens, fireworks, and gunshots serve as a soundtrack to this dissertation.

This moment is a reckoning. An apocalypse. I hope it is the end of the world as we have known it, and though it is painful, it is also steeped with potential and possibility and hope to build a better world, one that is not predicated on the physical and social death of Black people and other oppressed peoples. However, it is important to note that in the process of that happening, we are individually and collectively experiencing a trauma(s). Understanding the collectivity of trauma does not mean we are all experiencing it as such, or similarly, or that we will all be traumatized after it is "done." Still, in more ways than we can count or conceptualize, this moment is a trauma. A collective one. A historical one. A racialized one. Collective trauma accounts for when a *susto* happens to entire communities at the same time, when our world *and* our relationship to it is irrevocably changed by events like war, colonialism, a natural disaster, or in our current case—a global pandemic, and rampant racism. Saul (2013) understands this as our "shared injuries to a population's social, cultural, and physical ecologies" (p. 2). These traumas, both individual and collective, do not occur in a social vacuum and are

exacerbated by a systemic racialized trauma, which is the "repeated, ongoing violation, exploitation, dismissal of, and/or deprivation of groups of people. State institutions, economic systems, and social norms that systematically deny people access to safety, mobility, resources, food, education, dignity, positive reflections of themselves, and belonging" (Haines, 2019, p. 80). As will be explained in Chapter Two, when unmetabolized, these traumas have both short-term and long-term consequences on mental, physical, emotional, and spiritual health.

Given these understandings of trauma and its effects—coupled with a global pandemic that has been grotesquely mismanaged in this country and the collective uprisings that have no end in sight—it is likely that when the institution of schooling reopens in this country, we will see the above statistics on child trauma catapult exponentially. In classrooms across the country, moreover, teachers will come face-to-face with the impacts of these trauma(s) in new and unprecedented numbers. If schools reopen too soon, as many are asking for, and we force children into classrooms filled with masks and plexiglass, terrified at the sound of sniffling, or we reopen without addressing the racialized trauma of this moment—then we must be ready to grapple with what has been a historical truth for Indigenous, Black, and Brown children: that schools can be, and are, sites of trauma. This requires an urgency to study, understand, and address trauma, to figure out how schools can, in spite of their histories, serve as places to help young people cope and heal from trauma. This is true for all children, but particularly so for those who are most vulnerable: Children of Color. We are at a crossroads, the decisions we make now will live in our bones and bodies and behaviors for generations to come.

Love as an Intervention to Trauma

> The more healthy relationships a child has, the more likely he will be to recover from trauma and thrive. Relationships are the agents of change and the most powerful therapy is human love. (Perry, 2007, p. 30)

Embedded in the research of trauma, are two salient but often glossed-over points which are the foundation of this dissertation. One, trauma is never a personal failing, it is something that happens *to* someone; it is neither a flaw nor weakness (Menakem, 2017). Second, healing from trauma cannot exist outside the container of loving relationships (Perry, 2007; Weller, 2015). In fact, research spanning the fields of public health, medicine, social epidemiology, psychiatry, psychotherapy, ethnic studies, and education are in agreement that one of the major interventions to child trauma is loving relationships (Duncan-Andrade, 2009; Ginwright, 2015; Perry, 2007; Siegel & Solomon, 2003; Van Der Kolk, 2014). Despite this widely agreed-upon intervention, love remains undertheorized, particularly in the field of education.

I have now been on a 10-year journey towards understanding and conceptualizing love. This journey began formally as an early career teacher, when I became consumed with the idea of love and developed a pedagogical framework entitled Compa Love, defined as "the political practice of meeting the tangible (physical), intellectual, and emotional needs of young people in hopes for both self and community actualization" (Hannegan-Martinez, 2019, p. 7). This became the cornerstone of my teaching, the living document I returned to on the days I came home crying and feeling like an utter failure. I taught hundreds, if not thousands of students operationalizing this framework. The success of this pedagogical praxis was evidenced when a cohort of 30 students whom I looped with for four years had a graduation rate of 97 percent at a school where the pushout rate still hovers above 40 percent. I indicted and scoffed at teachers who I believed weren't loving. I did this until the end of my teaching career, when the compounded grief and frustration of working in schools that are at odds with our dignity and humanity became too much to bear.

I have spent the last several years since leaving the classroom sharing this work and collaborating with teachers across the country as a coach, consultant, researcher, and organizer. My research and experiences across the country affirm that there is an imminent need to address trauma in the classroom, and that loving relationships are a promising but under-theorized and under-utilized method of doing so. As an example, in almost every school that I step foot onto, teachers tell me that they believe they have caring and loving relationships with their students. In *every* single one of those schools, I have conducted interviews and focus groups with Students of Color who have shared that they do not feel known or seen. They do not feel cared for, do not feel loved. It was in a hallway of one of those schools that I realized I had spent years asking the wrong question in my work: it isn't a question of whether or not teachers *believe* that they love students, but rather whether teachers *know how to* engage in a practice of having healthy loving relationships with young people. As Thich Nhat Hanh offers us, "To love without knowing how to love wounds the person we love." I also realized that there was no way to learn how and what it means to love without actively engaging young people.

It is these lessons that served as the impetus to return to the students I taught every day for four years, to ask the questions I should have asked long ago. I return to them because research aside, it is because of their presence in my life that "today I believe in the possibility of love; why I endeavor to trace its imperfections, its perversions" (Fanon, 1952, p. 28). In this dissertation, I endeavor to understand *how* we conceptualize love, how we cultivated and practiced love in the day-to-day, how we grew and nurtured it. Because I am an English teacher, committed to all the rigors this discipline entails, I am also interested in unpacking how the curriculum facilitated love, what role our literacy practices and assignments played in shaping

loving relationships. In turn, these commitments inform the research questions for this dissertation:

1) How do we [students and teacher] conceptualize love?
2) How was love embodied and made visible in the context of our English classroom?
3) What role did literacy play in shaping loving relationships to self, to peers, and to community?

Research Goals

By studying love, I attempt to challenge the epistemological racism (Scheurich & Young, 2007) and sexism that have deemed love unworthy of intellectual and pedagogical examination. The current apartheid of knowledge (Delgado Bernal & Villalpando, 2002; Perez Huber, 2009) present in educational literature and schools continues to leave the most disenfranchised youth vulnerable to the abuse of teachers. Building on Chicana Feminist Epistemologies (CFE) (Delgado Bernal, 1998), I situate my cultural intuition, which includes personal and professional experience as a Woman of Color student and educator, within existing research drawing from the fields of public health, psychiatry, psychotherapy, and education, in conversation with literature about love, Critical Race Pedagogy (Lynn, Jennings, & Hughes, 2013), Critical Literacy (Morrell, 2006), and Culturally Sustaining Pedagogies (Paris & Alim, 2017). By doing so, I attempt to expand and honor the work of Freire (1998) who reminds us that "it is impossible to teach without the courage to love, without the courage to try a thousand times before giving in. In short it is impossible to teach without a forged, invented, and well-thought-out capacity to love" (p. 3).

In the legacy of our ancestors who practiced interconnectedness, and Black, Indigenous and Women of Color feminists who have long told us that love is political, I follow in pursuit of existing research on love (Darder, 2002). I offer this dissertation as a humble attempt to

conceptualize a framework for creating classrooms, spaces, literacies, and teachers, who have a well-thought-out capacity to truly engage in a pedagogical praxis of love with young people. This is our task as educators, not because Children of Color are unloved by their families and communities but because we have the responsibility to strengthen their armor with *more* love, more relationships, to inoculate them against a world full of systems and structures that have not loved them. It is my hope that teachers who want to love Children of Color, who believe that they already love them, will listen to the young adults in this dissertation and learn what it means to *practice* love. That they will join students' families and communities and take up the call to love our children in a way that inoculates them against a loveless world, and that they will love them enough to build a new world—a world in which they are completely and entirely loved.

Overview of Chapters

In the following chapter (Chapter Two), I unpack the material realities of trauma and love, drawing from multiple fields to provide a concrete argument for the physiological and psychological need to engage in a loving practice with Students of Color. Specifically, I explain how loving relationships interrupt the physiological impacts of trauma in the brains and bodies of young people. I then unpack the relationship between literacy and healing from trauma, explaining why that relationship makes literacy a ripe location to study the shaping of loving relationships. In Chapter Three, I describe my first study (Compa Love) in depth and how it informs my decision to use Portraiture as my methodology. I then share the anticipatory frameworks that are guiding my research design, and how I envision the three portraits in this dissertation forming a mural. Next, I share the framing for the findings, explaining how literacy artifacts are being used to anchor the portraits shared in Chapters Four, Five, and Six. In Chapter Seven, I theorize a pedagogy of love and offer a literacy framework that centers love. Lastly, in Chapter Eight, I conclude with a love letter to educators, offering practical considerations and

implications for how they might grow their capacity to love young people in their own schools and contexts.

CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

Overview

Young people are experiencing trauma in a myriad of ways we have yet to fully conceptualize or account for, making it one of the most significant socio-emotional needs facing Children of Color. Given the vast number of Students of Color present in our classrooms across the country, teachers must be equipped to understand causes of trauma, manifestations of trauma [in the classroom], and their role as educators in helping young people navigate and heal from traumatic events and stressors. In this chapter, I will draw from, blend, and synthesize existing research in the fields of public health, social epidemiology, psychiatry, psychotherapy, ethnic studies, Women of Color feminisms, and education to achieve a more robust understanding of trauma, its effects, and existing interventions. I will then draw from these aforementioned fields to highlight an under-theorized and under-utilized, but widely agreed-upon intervention to child trauma: loving relationships. Last, I will explore the role of literacy beliefs and practices, and their relationship to trauma-informed healing practices, illustrating how this relationship makes literacy a ripe practice for healing, and love.

As a result of the ways love is feminized and therefore devalued, particularly within the academy, in this chapter I engage in an extensive review of multidisciplinary fields to explain *why* love is worthy of intellectual interrogation and a valid pedagogical and literacy intervention to trauma. In doing so, I lift the validity and viability of love while at the same time critiquing the rigidity of the academy and the ways in which it perpetuates Western ways of knowing and being that are odds with our historical and ancestral practices. For the purposes of explaining how and why I came to the research questions outlined in Chapter One, the chapter is organized into three parts: understanding trauma, loving relationships as an intervention to trauma, and love, literacy, and healing.

Part I: Understanding Trauma

Defining Trauma

Trauma is increasingly understood as "a body's protective response to an event—or a series of events—that it perceives as potentially dangerous" (Menakem, 2017, p. 7). This response and reaction is what Chicana feminist scholars who draw from ethnic studies and women's studies have referred to as a *susto* (Anzaldúa, 1987), which destroys the world as you previously understood and experienced it. In short, trauma is how the *bodymindspirit* (Lara, 2002) responds to potentially *and* actually dangerous events. Varying conceptualizations of trauma from the fields of public health, social epidemiology, and psychiatry, understand trauma to be *acute, complex, developmental, collective,* and *historical/intergenerational.* Drawing on the above fields, I then unpack what I understand to be a *corrosive* trauma. In line with other scholars, I explain how all of these forms of trauma are an extension and manifestation of *structural* trauma, and in the case of People of Color, a *racial* trauma. These understandings, briefly explained below, honor the micro and the macro, the structural and social, recognizing that trauma is always institutional, interpersonal, internal, and never a personal failing. It is important to note that when centering Students of Color, they can be experiencing more than one of these forms of trauma at any given moment.

Acute Trauma is defined within psychology by the DSM-IV-TR (2000):

> An extreme traumatic stressor involving direct personal experience of an event that involves actual or threatened death or serious injury, or another threat to one's physical integrity; witnessing an event that involves death, injury, or threat to the physical integrity of another person or learning about unexpected violent death, serious harm, or threaten of death or injury experienced by a family member or other close associate.

This includes any instance that causes someone to feel "fear, helplessness or horror." Instances of acute trauma can vary from being bitten by a dog to sexual assault to witnessing somebody you love being violently murdered. Where acute often refers to a singular event, *complex* trauma

refers to exposure to varied and multiple events that the body responds to as potentially dangerous (National Child Traumatic Stress Network, n.d.). This can include prolonged abuse or neglect. It is often directly tied to *developmental* trauma (Van Der Kolk, 2014) that accounts for these types of abuse and maltreatment in the earliest years of life and brain development. *Collective* trauma, also understood as a social trauma, refers to traumatic events that are experienced socially, such as a school shooting or slavery. These events, which can be both historical or contemporary, can create what Duran (2006) describes as a soul wound. This soul wound can be passed down, creating an i*ntergenerational* trauma (Duran, 2006; Leary, 2005) or a *historical trauma*.

Corrosive trauma refers to the corroding impact of oppression, including weathering, toxic stress, racial microaggressions, and racial battle fatigue. Weathering (Geronimus, 1992) names the slow erosion of health amongst Black people and other racially oppressed peoples who have to navigate cumulative disadvantages. Toxic stress (Harris, 2018) from navigating racism, poverty, violence, and other stressors can increase young people's allostatic load, which chips away at long-term health outcomes. Similarly, racial microaggressions (Kohli & Solorzano, 2012) and racial battle fatigue (Smith, Yosso, & Solorzano, 2011) address the constant stress impacting People of Color as a result of structural and interpersonal racism. I understand this as a corrosive trauma because weathering, toxic stress, racial microaggressions, and racial battle fatigue all function to corrode one's sense of self, safety, and health. These corrosive traumas are all the byproduct of *structural* trauma which Haines (2019) defines as the "repeated, ongoing violation, exploitation, dismissal of, and/or deprivation of groups of people. State institutions, economic systems, and social norms that systematically deny people access to safety, mobility, resources, food, education, dignity, positive reflections of themselves, and

belonging" (Haines, 2019, p. 80). When these forms of systemic trauma are directed at Black people and other People of Color, scholars argue that it is a *racial* trauma (Leary, 2005; Menakem, 2017; Turner, 2015).

While these understandings of trauma refer to different events and durations of events, there is the potential for significant overlap and relationships between them. For example, take the increase in publicly released recordings of Black people being murdered by the police—while this could be understood as an acute event, its frequent recurrence makes it more complex. Given the widespread posting of these types of video, it is also experienced collectively, and has historical ties to the role of policing and the enslavement of Black people. It is without explanation, a racial and structural trauma. It is all related. Haines (2019) further explores the relationship between individual and systemic traumas:

> While we may have traumatic experiences that are very personal, and may live alone with them for years, traumas such as child sexual abuse, intimate partner violence, harassment, and police violence reveal themselves to be systemic due to their sheer numbers and spread across regions. Violations that occur frequently and across many communities, show us that there is something happening in the social and economic fabric that actually supports, or allows for their occurrence. (p. 84)

Understanding the pervasiveness of trauma as systemic and structural, as a function of oppression, is important for unpacking the layered traumas that Students of Color bring to schools *and* experience at the hands of schooling—*none* of which are their fault.

Trauma, the Brain and the Body

Trauma is experienced primarily in the body (Menakem, 2017), "our bodies tell stories. Our muscles hold memories" (Haines, 2019, p. 26). Menakem and Haines draw from psychobiology and somatics, to explore the role of the body as holder of both trauma and knowledge. They situate an understanding and incorporation of the body—embodiment—as necessary for engaging healing, loving, and grieving. As described by Cariaga (2018), Coates

(2015) illustrates Menakem's argument by describing the material impact of racism, describing the trauma of it as "a visceral experience, [that] it dislodges brains, blocks airways, rips muscle, extracts organs, cracks bones, breaks teeth . . ." This makes the body an important site of understanding traumatic responses.

The body has an autonomic nervous system, which consists of the sympathetic and parasympathetic systems; the sympathetic nervous system activates the body whereas the parasympathetic is responsible for calming. When a traumatic event occurs, the part of the brain known as the thalamus sends signals in two locations: to the amygdala and the frontal lobe. The frontal lobe and cortex are responsible for higher rationale thinking, while the amygdala is responsible for the release of hormones such as cortisol and adrenaline, which increase heart rate and prepare the body for what we now understand as a fight, flee, freeze, or fawn response prepared by the sympathetic system (Van Der Kolk, 2014). This complex communication of the limbic system that connects the brainstem, pharynx, heart, lungs, stomach, gut, and spine are known as the vagus nerve, which most closely resembles the brain of a reptilian and is otherwise understood as our lizard brain. In the case of a traumatic event, "the limbic systems decides that something is a question of life and death, [and] the pathways between the frontal lobes and the limbic system become extremely tenuous" (p. 64). Essentially, our most natural responses to trauma are the body's way of defending and protecting itself. This form of bodily knowledge is a healthy surviving mechanism in cases of acute trauma, *if* we are able to metabolize and release the trauma once the event has passed. Further, when we are unsuccessful or only partially successful in protecting ourselves against the trauma, "the harm of the violation is left incomplete in our somas . . . they are stored there and shape our experience, interpreting the

world for us" (Haines, 2019, p. 75). This trauma then gets lodged, impacting our body, brain, behaviors, emotions, and spirit.

Effects of Trauma

When trauma is unresolved, un-metabolized, or prolonged, it can have negative and potentially long-lasting impacts on the body and brain (Herman, 1997; Menakem, 2017; Perry, 2007; Van Der Kolk, 2014). Moreover, untreated trauma can stunt emotional and intellectual development—developmental trauma (Van Der Kolk, 2014)—and contribute to factors such as a hyperactive stress drive (Perry, 2007; Van Der Kolk, 2014). Menakem explains these behaviors as an embedded trauma response, explaining that "the trauma gets stuck in the body—and stays stuck there until it is addressed" (p. 7). This is particularly dangerous because the hormones described above—cortisol and adrenaline—when continuously released as a result of toxic stress, have dire implications for long-term health outcomes (Harris, 2018). The physical and psychological reactions to trauma "can result in a whole range of physical symptoms, including fibromyalgia, chronic fatigue, and other autoimmune diseases" (Van Der Kolk, 2014, p. 53).

When an event is too intense to digest, "the psyche splinters off the difficult material and creates an autonomous, semi-contained bundle to hold the highly charged material" (Weller, 2015, p. 6). This splintering is what Carl Jung referred to as a complex, which is a form of a dissociative state, and a prime example of an embedded trauma response. Complexes take people out of the present, and return them to their trauma. In somatics, these complexes can be understood as a survival shape which "impacts identity, interaction, relationship, physiology, emotions, behavior, and thinking or interpretation" (Haines, 2019, p. 76) and organizes these around protecting themselves from the same or similar harm. These become embedded, or embodied, in such a way that they become so familiar that one might think of them as a part of their identity. The language of survival shape is useful framing because (a) it centers the

integration of the mind, body, spirit, social, and relational and (b) accounts for the myriad ways we are shaped by events, people, and structures while also holding space for transformation—shapes can change when provided with the proper attunement, and opportunities for the trauma to be metabolized and mended. Without these, the trauma stays stuck in our bodies, spirits, and shapes. Some of these embedded responses are known as *Post Traumatic Stress Disorder*, *Complex Post Traumatic Stress Disorder*, *Race-Based Traumatic Stress*, *Intergenerational trauma*, and *Post Traumatic Slave Syndrome* (Leary, 2005).

Symptoms of *Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD)* include emotional, physical, cognitive, and behavioral manifestations that can vary in form, including vacant sense of self-esteem, propensity for anger, disassociation, hopelessness, hyperarousal, and more (DSM-IV-TR, 2000). Because some felt that PTSD did not account for the fact that trauma could be ongoing, that unlike soldiers leaving war some people could not leave the trauma they are experiencing, they have begun to conceptualize these types of traumas responses as a *Complex Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (CPTSD).* Some of the symptoms of CPTSD include issues with emotional regulation, self-perception, and distorted perceptions of the perpetrator that can manifest as reliving traumatic events, despair, explosive anger, suicidal ideation, utter hopelessness and more (National Center for PTSD, n.d.).

Some argue that PTSD and CPTSD do not fully capture the way the racism of trauma impacts us and have begun to understand the long-term impacts of racism as a *Race-Based Traumatic Stress (RBTS).* Some of the manifestations of RBTS could include increased vigilance, increased sensitivity to threat, increased psychological and physiological symptoms, increased aggression, increased substance abuse, and a narrowing sense of time (Smith, 2010). Leary (2005) historicizes race-based trauma in the Black community by studying the adaptive

survival behaviors of people who have experienced multi-general institutional oppression dating back to chattel slavery. She argues that these survival behaviors could be known as *Post Traumatic Slave Syndrome (PTSS).* Some of the symptoms of PTSS include racist socialization, learned helplessness, vacant esteem, literacy deprivation, and marked propensity for anger, amongst others. This is similar to what native scholars would refer to as *historical* or *intergenerational* trauma that dates back to the colonization and genocide of native peoples. These traumatic events become embedded in what Eduardo Duran refers to as a "soul wound" or what Love (2019) would contemporarily refer to as "spirit-murder." If unhealed, Duran and other native scholars remind us that trauma stays with us for seven generations—forward and backward. This is reiterated by research that shows trauma has the capacity to change us epigenetically and that it can change the DNA of our children, and their children (Youssef et al., 2018).

The above research serves to give "validity" to what Communities of Color have known for a long time—that systemic trauma is literally killing Black, Indigenous, and Brown people at disproportionate rates. The lack of social structures to support the metabolization of the trauma is leading to health conditions that are killing Black, Indigenous, and Brown people at disproportionate rates. This is not hyperbole, not abstraction. To ignore the traumas inflicted on Children of Color then is to participate in their social and physical death. In the next section, I explore what this means for schools and teachers—where and with whom children spend most of their time.

Trauma and Schools

First and foremost, I cannot talk about schools without naming that both historically and contemporarily they have served as sites of racialized trauma for Indigenous, Black, and Brown

children. *Some* historical examples of how schools have been sites and perpetrators of trauma include boarding schools which were used to continue the colonial project by violently forcing assimilation and cultural erasure, segregation of Black students, and English-only laws. More recently, we have witnessed Black children being physically assaulted by teachers and security guards, Black and Indigenous children being punished or expelled for their hair, suspension and expulsion rates for Students of Color are cataclysmic, and Latinx students have been met with xenophobic attacks and constant fear of deportation. Not to mention the increase in school shootings which have become the center of national discourse, primarily when White schools, communities, and students are harmed. While this is nowhere near an exhaustive list, and could be a dissertation unto itself, I find it important to mention because I adamantly refute the deficit narrative that trauma is solely something that Students of Color bring to schools, as opposed to something that schools actively do to them. Schools serve as sites of trauma, and when they ignore the trauma that students bring, they also serve as sites of re-traumatization.

Despite schools having a long relationship to trauma, it has only fairly recently begun to appear in national educational discourse. Trauma has been described as a "health epidemic that threatens children's academic and social mastery (Craig, 2016; Oehlberg, 2012). It is important to recognize that only now that the research linking trauma to lack of academic mastery has increased, has trauma become important to schooling. It is therefore not the well-being of our children that schools are concerned with, but their ability to perform well on standardized exams— this phenomenon is what critical race theorists would regard as a form of "interest convergence" in which the institution becomes interested in the well-being of children to the degree that it impacts the institution. In response to this "health epidemic," schools have begun to lean on trauma-informed practices and social emotional learning (SEL) which discuss the

importance of relationships, safety, and narrative. They have also begun incorporating programs like Cognitive Behavioral Intervention for Trauma in Schools (CBITS). While programs and approaches like these are important, they tend to lack a critical analysis of systemic trauma, and the cultural relevance necessary to connect with Students of Color, particularly around issues of racialized trauma. Secondly, programs like these tend to over focus on cognition, with little focus on the role of the body. Perry and Szalavitz (2008) caution that "our educational system has focused nearly obsessively on cognitive development and almost completely ignored children's emotional and physical needs" (pp. 236–238). This hyper-focus on cognition and standardized testing as the leading indicator of school success is at odds with the dignity, humanity, and healing of children, particularly Children of Color. Lastly, because many of these programs and approaches are wielded as a way to placate students and protect the institution, they often serve to enact harm on students. Ultimately, rather than help students heal, they serve to silence them.

Furthermore, the various manifestations of unresolved trauma happening in classrooms are behaviors likely misunderstood and disproportionately misdiagnosed by teachers, as seen in instances when embedded trauma responses are misdiagnosed as things such as Attention Deficit Disorder and Oppositional Defiant Disorder (Harris, 2018; Van Der Kolk, 2014). While there have been efforts to build trauma-informed curriculum and schools (Craig, 2008, 2016), which have important considerations, they often lack cultural relevance and specificity for understanding some of the unique racialized and traumatic experiences of Students of Color. When describing the relationship between therapist and patient, Herman (1997) illustrates potential tensions that may arise between teacher and student, by describing that a patient who has experienced trauma will often remain skeptical of the therapist's 'benign' intentions, and that

a therapist may react to these behaviors in ways that "inadvertently reenact aspects of the abusive relationship" (p. 139). This has stark implications for all teachers, who while often well-intentioned may lack the knowledge and skills for addressing trauma. This tension is heightened when considering the overwhelmingly White teaching force which may lack the cultural capital (Yosso, 2005) and training to address the unique socioemotional needs of Students of Color and can lead to their continued silencing and abuse. These responses take the form of silencing, gas lighting, withholding affection, neglect, shaming, and punishment that are often taught as forms of classroom management in mechanical and culturally hostile Teacher Education programs and Professional Developments (Kohli, Picower, Martinez, & Ortiz, 2015) and reflected in the disparately high suspensions and expulsions of Students of Color. Responses such as constitute acts of emotional abuse and serve as a form of (re)traumatization, that can both cause harm and exacerbate the harm students may have already experienced.

Van Der Kolk (2014) argues:

> If the memory of trauma is encoded in the viscera, in the heartbreaking and gut-wrenching emotions, in autoimmune disorders and skeletal/muscular problems, and if mind/brain/visceral communication is the royal road to emotion regulation, this demands a radical shift in our therapeutic assumptions. (p. 88)

If schools are truly committed to addressing trauma and healing *with* Students of Color, this requires a radical shift in our political and pedagogical assumptions. First, we must grapple with the historical role of schools and teachers as perpetrators of trauma and recognize the potential that schools and teachers have to intervene as first responders, as places where children spend the majority of their time. This requires that we also understand trauma as a form of systemic harm and challenge narratives that deem children, families, and communities as the "problem." Last, we must commit vehemently to collective healing, to wellness. In order to do this, I argue that we must commit to love. In the next section, I explore the narratives and literature that inform

my understanding that if we truly want to address and heal trauma, we must make a political and pedagogical shift towards love.

Part II: Love as an Intervention to Trauma, Love as Healing

The Importance of Loving Relationships

Recent trauma-informed scholarship suggests that in order for young people to heal from trauma and develop higher levels of resiliency, they must be around loving adults (Duncan-Andrade, 2009; Ginwright, 2015; Perry, 2007; Siegel & Solomon, 2003, Van Der Kolk, 2014). This builds upon research spanning the fields of psychology, psychiatry and psychotherapy, and medicine (Brackett, 2019; Graham, 2013; Herman, 1992; Lieberman, 2013; Murthy, 2020; Perry, 2007; Weller, 2015) which demonstrate that connection and belonging are precursors for social wellness, as they have profound impact on the way the body and brain manages stress, as well as a person's ability to heal from and develop resiliency to traumatic stressors. Bruce Perry (2007), who leads the field in studying child trauma, argues that "what maltreated and traumatized children most need . . . is anything that increases the number and quality of a child's relationships. What helps is consistent, patient, repetitive, loving care" (p. 232). His research posits that when understanding the experiences of children, healthy and loving relationships serve as an intermediary for healing from trauma and as an intervention to PTSD and other embedded traumas. Perry is echoed by Herman (1992), who argues that "recovery can take place only in the context of relationships, it cannot occur in isolation" (p. 133), and Van Der Kolk (2014), who informs us that "study after study shows that having a good support network constitutes the single most powerful protection against becoming traumatized . . . our attachment bonds are our greatest protection against threat" (p. 212). For Weller (2015), this protection is a form of attunement, "a particular quality of attention, wedded with affection, offered by someone

we love and trust. This deep attention is what enables us to make painful experiences tolerable" (p. 6).

The need for love has been corroborated by Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs (1943), which defined love as a precursor for self-actualization, after the meeting of physiological needs such as food, water, and so forth. Maslow posits that self-actualization refers to individuals who have met their potential and are deeply fulfilled. Lieberman (2013) challenges the sequence of Maslow's hierarchy through examining parent-infant attachment patterns to suggest that connection and love are what leads adults to provide for a baby's physiological needs. Therefore, love and belonging are our most primate needs as human beings. These conceptualizations of human needs and their relationship to love, while distinguishably different, highlight the proximity between the two.

While significant, this research on the importance of relationships and interconnectedness is not new and does not pay (enough) respect to native communities and ancestral practices which situate our needs as interdependent, as cultural and communal (Blackstock, 2011; Cross, 2007). These understandings, which informed Maslow's (1943) work, conceive that actualization is more than an independent feat, and is instead *both* individual *and* communal. Blackstock (2011) and Cross (2007) frame these needs under the quadrants of emotional, spiritual, physical, and cognitive. Maori communities similarly understand emotional, spiritual, and physical needs but add in cultural. Based on his work in the Maori community, Rochford (2004) stipulates that in order for a Maori person to be well they must have:

> a strong sense of identity; self-esteem, confidence and pride, control of his/her own destiny, leadership, intellectual, physical, spiritual, and whanau (extended family) awareness, personal responsibility, respect for others, knowledge of te reo (the Maori language) and tikak, a (custom), economic security, and solid whanau support.

Similarly, in Tello and Acosta's (2012) framework *La Cultura Cura*, they share that cultural identity is the "foundation of well-being for individuals, families, communities and society alike" (p. 5). As they describe, cultural identity includes positive cultural values, practices, rituals, and traditions. Many of the foundations of wellness and healing serve to ensure the survival of people, communities, and culture through a process of developing a deep love for self, and for community. One could argue that the impetus to survive is also rooted in deep love, therefore love is impetus, the process, and the outcome.

These above frameworks also communicate a similar epistemology to *In Lak'ech* which communicates the Mayan philosophy of "tu eres mi otro/you are my other me," *Ubuntu* which communicates the African sensibility of "I am because we are," and *Mitákuye Oyás'iŋ* which is the Lakota saying for "all my relations." Underscoring these understandings is the centrality of relationships, interconnectedness, and empathy—of love—as integral to health and wellness. For teachers and schools, this body of research demonstrates that love is integral to healing and wellness, and if we are to begin to assist in addressing trauma, we can increase the amount of loving relationships and spaces that students have access to. In the next section, I explain how love is more than emotive and affective, but literally alters the physical and physiological mechanisms of our body in ways that sustain health and wellness.

Love, the Body and Brain

As mentioned earlier, Menakem (2017) posits that the body is the site of all intense emotions, the place where fear, hope, and arguably, love all exist. Essentially, if the body is the place where trauma happens, then the body must also be where trauma is healed, the place where love is felt. Honoring the body as an important site of knowledge and healing follows the work of Chicana Feminist Scholars who have argued that addressing *MindBodySpirit* (Lara, 2002) is

an important way to resist the mind/body split (Calderon et al., 2012) present in some of the current trauma practices that have been explored above.

When studying the Autonomic Nervous System—consisting of the sympathetic and parasympathetic systems which are typically understood as balancing acts to one another—Porges (1992) found that their relationship was more dialectical than originally conceived. In his Polyvagal theory, Porges posited that there was a third branch of the system that interwove the other two branches, a branch referred to as the social engagement system. Whereas the vagus nerve as previously understood was responsible for freezing/shutting down (parasympathetic) or fight/flee responses (sympathetic), the social engagement system extends to include regulation of the heart, face, intestines, and stomach. The social engagement system serves to calm, rather than shut down the sympathetic nervous system. Van Der Kolk (2014) explains it as:

> the subtle interplay between the visceral experiences of our own bodies and the voices and faces of the people around us. It explained why a kind face or soothing tone of voice can dramatically alter the way we feel. It clarified why knowing that we are seen and heard by the important people in our lives can make us feel calm and safe. (p. 80)

In short, relationships are the first place our subconscious brain turns to when a traumatic event occurs, and our body is instantly rewarded when those relationships make them feel validated and safe. Similarly, a deep level of empathy leads to a mirroring of neurons between the people in the empathic relationship (Iacoboni, 2009). Healthy and loving relationships quite literally alter the way our brains and body function, and respond.

The positive impact of loving and nurturing relationships on stress response systems is supported by the release of serotonin, oxytocin and dopamine (Perry, 2010, p. 127). Serotonin is a chemical released by the body and serves to reduce depression and manage anxiety. Oxytocin, often colloquially regarded as the "the love hormone," is a neurotransmitter that regulates social interaction and is responsible for feelings of bonding, empathy, and trust which are all important

components of loving relationships. Dopamine also serves as a neurotransmitter and while it largely has a negative reputation for fueling addiction, it serves to reinforce positive behaviors. This is most commonly seen in instances of affection, e.g., a mother breastfeeds and the body releases oxytocin which causes joy, and the dopamine causes the mother to want to do it again. Together, serotonin, oxytocin and dopamine, can both serve to reinforce important facets of healthy loving relationships *and* increase the presence of these healthy hormones in the body as a result of having access to loving relationships.

Looking at Love

The tension with naming loving relationships as an intervention to the traumatic stressors in the lives of Students of Color is that we are largely unclear with what that actually looks like. There is an underlying assumption that we are born knowing how to love, and as a result, there are no schools for love (hooks, 2001). When love is spoken about, it is often regarded in what Cornel West describes as a Peter Pan or Hollywood sensibility (1997) that romanticizes love as effortless and differs from person to person. hooks further asserts that many are ‘‘comfortable with the notion that love can mean anything to anybody precisely because when we define it with precision and clarity it brings us face to face with our lacks” (p. 11). This lack of collective definition further ignites the question of who has the right to say they are acting out of love (Ahmed, 2003; Nash, 2011). These assertions hypostatize that neglecting to define love has made it intangible and inconsequential, with no room to hold one another accountable. This is particularly important when thinking about the role of educators who genuinely believe and/or claim to love the young people they serve. In the next sections, I explore how love has been conceptualized in political and educational spaces.

Love as Political

In 1978, June Jordan wrote a speech entitled "Where is the love?" In writing about this speech, she shares:

> As I think about anyone or anything—whether history or literature or my father or political organizations or a poem or film—as I seek to evaluate the potentiality, the life supportive commitments/possibilities of anyone or anything, the decisive question is, always, *where is the love?* . . . It is always the love whether we look to the spirit of Fannie Lou Hamer, or to the spirit of Aghostino Neto, it is always the love that will carry action into positive new places . . . . I am a feminist and what that means to me is much the same as the meaning of the fact that I am Black: it means that I must undertake to love myself and to respect myself as though my very life depends on self-love. (Jordan, 2002, pp. 269–270)

Jordan centers love as both an intention and an action, as individual and collective, and always political. In describing it this way, she makes clear that love is inherently connected to survival.

Nash (2011) explores the way love has continued to be centered in Black and Women of Color feminist circles and explores the ways waves of "black feminist love-politics" (p. 2) have honored the same tradition as June Jordan, of seeing the choice to love oneself as political. Garcia-Rojas (2016) echoes this argument, drawing on the work of other Women of Color who "theorize that embodied and social emotions hold political import" (p. 6). The embodiment of these emotions is an action *and* leads to action. This is aptly illustrated through the work of the Combahee River Collective (1974), who decades ago described love as central to their political practice, and to our social movements. This has been taken up by the Black Lives Matter Global Network who share that "to love and desire freedom and justice for ourselves is a prerequisite for wanting the same for others."

Love is therefore a central political affect and integral to social movements. In reflecting on her activism and organizing, Grace Lee Boggs (2012) shared, "We urgently need to bring to our communities the limitless capacity to love." Similarly, both Malcolm X (1964) and Martin Luther King Jr. (MLK) (1957) believed that an increased capacity to love could play a pivotal

role in growing the social movements for civil and human rights. MLK argued for a form of love known as agape, that was based not on affection, but on action, a goodwill towards one's neighbor. In 1967, during a speech at the Southern Christian Leadership Conference, he connected love to justice, sharing that "power at its best is love implementing the demands of justice, and justice at its best is power correcting everything that stands against love." Love then is inherently political and rooted in/committed to justice.

As hooks (2001) reminds us, "all the great movements for social justice in our society have strongly emphasized a love ethic" (xix). This legacy on the importance of love in social movements informs my understanding of love as inherently and deeply political, particularly when thinking about Students of Color. In the next section, I turn specifically to the literature in education.

Love and Care in Education

Freire (1970) argues that an ethic of love was imperative to the process of a true education, arguing that true dialogue, praxis, and solidarity could not exist outside of love. He conceived that to love was to commit to others' lives and liberation. Darder (2002) revisits and expands upon the work of Freire by insisting love be central to our pedagogy. Similarly, Duncan-Andrade and Morrell (2008) call for a revolutionary love, defined as "the love that is strong enough to bring radical change in individual students, classrooms, school systems, and the larger society that controls them" (p. 187). Darder, Duncan-Andrade, and Morrell make the argument that people who engage in critical pedagogy but must be committed to and practicing love. In relation, hooks (2003) argues that when teachers center love in their practice, they are "combining care, commitment, knowledge, responsibility, respect, and trust" (p. 134).

Without explicitly naming love, others contend that what we need is more than critical, but culturally relevant or responsive pedagogies (Gay, 2010; Ladson-Billings, 1995) that more

explicitly center discussions of race and culture. Paris and Alim (2017) have expanded cultural relevance by arguing that what is necessary is a culturally sustaining pedagogy (CSP). CSP is about "sustaining what we love," and calls for:

> Sustaining and revitalizing that which has over the centuries sustained *us* as communities of color struggling to "make it"—to resist, revitalize, and reimagine—under enduring colonial conditions that constantly work to diminish our intellectual capacities, cultures, languages, and yes, our very lives. (Paris & Alim, 2017, pp. 12–13)

CSP challenges damage centered notions of Students of Color (Tuck, 2009) and humanizes the lived realities of students, building upon a major tenet of Critical Race Theory (CRT) and Critical Race Pedagogy (CRP) which posit that lived realities are a form of experiential knowledge (Bell, 1987; Carrasco, 1996; Delgado, 1989, 1993, 1995a, 1995b, 1996; Olivas, 1990). Many of these commitments, including the values of seeing and hearing young people and their lived realities, are aligned with understandings of love in that they are rooted in culture, empathy, respect, understanding and other practices associated with love.

Similarly, love is considered to be an important practice and outcome of Ethnic Studies pedagogy and curriculum. In de los Rios' (2013) one-year longitudinal study of the impact a Chicana/o studies course had on students and teachers, she iterates that the values of the course were centered in indigenous concepts of "truth seeking, interconnectedness, respect for others, critical consciousness, and love" (p. 64). For students, the impact of centering a course in these values was that the "classroom community fostered a sense of agency, participation, self-love, and love of one's people" (p. 69). This commitment to love of one's self, community, cultures, and people is centered in the legacy and pedagogies of ethnic studies scholars and practitioners (Acosta, 2019; Beckham & Concordia, 2019; Daus-Magbual, & Tintiangco-Cubales, 2016; Dueńas et al., 2019; Gonzalez, 2019). Some of the ways they describe this type of love are radical (Buenavista et al., 2019) and decolonial (Sacramento, 2014).

More recently, scholars focusing on education in urban schools have begun to engage in a study of love as it pertains to both epistemology and pedagogy (Boveda & Bhattacharya, 2019; Caraballo & Soleimany, 2018). These epistemological and pedagogical practices must be centered in embodiment and have the potential to lead to self-recovery, healing, and wholeness (Brooks, 2017; Cariaga, 2018). Others have stated the urgency for us to engage in loving practices, particularly with Black youth who are the most disenfranchised from schooling, and show that positive relationships have positive academic and socioemotional outcomes (Lyiscott, 2019; McArthur & Lane, 2019; Nasir & Givens, 2019). When studying the relationships between Black and Brown boys in a mentoring program, Jackson, Sealey-Ruiz, and Watson (2014) found that an ethos of care led to a reciprocal love, defined as "a deeply rooted interest in and concern for community that extends personal well-being to communal sustenance" (p. 399). Similarly, Lane (2018) found that when engaging in a politicized caring with young Black girls, they were able to develop what they term "for real love."

The aforementioned literature is useful in that they communicate definitions, aspects, and outcomes of love which are helpful in envisioning the potential of love, yet, they mostly fall short of illustrating what a *practice* of love looks in the day-to-day of classroom teaching. They also highlight the close relationship between love and care, and while some distinguish care as a part of love (hooks, 2001; Jackson et al., 2014; Lane, 2018), many more use the terms interchangeably. The conflation of love and care is significant in that it illuminates the claims made at the beginning of this section—that as a field we have yet to fully conceptualize what love means or looks like. For instance, hooks reminds us that "simply giving care does not mean that we are loving" (p. 8). Given the conflation of these two terms and the fact that the

burgeoning field on love draws heavily on the larger body of work that exists on care, it is important then to understand how people have discussed care.

For the past several decades, many scholars have made significant contributions to the field, contending that care and caring relationships are crucial determinants of effective teaching and lead to positive academic student outcomes (Bartolomé, 2008; Duncan-Andrade, 2006, 2009; Gay, 2010; Howard, 2002, 2017; Noddings, 1984, 1992; Pena & Amrien, 1999; Valenzuela, 1999; Villanueva, 2013). In her seminal work on care, Noddings (1984) advocates for an ethic of care that is relational in which there is a person caring ("one-caring), and a person being cared for ("cared-for"). Given the power relations that exist in schooling institutions, she argues that teachers should be the ones to initiate the caring relations. She also suggests that schools should be reorganized to center an ethic of care, given that often schools and teachers engage in a false care where they pay more attention to objects and ideas, then they do to the students in front of them. Valenzuela (1999) builds on Noddings' work and describes that type of care as aesthetic, and argues that what we need is an authentic care that "emphasizes relations of reciprocity between teachers and students" (p. 61). This type of authentically caring pedagogy, cariño, situated in an understanding of students' cultures and lived realities, would "not only cease subtracting students' cultural identities, it would also reverse its effects" (p. 266).

Building on Valenzuela's work, Gay (2010) offers the concept of culturally responsive caring. Culturally responsive caring is seen in the relationships that teachers have with their students as well as in the curriculum. In terms of relationships, teachers must know and understand their students as whole people, both academically and personally. The curriculum must be one that is rigorous, supportive, addresses issues of race and diversity, and helps students to build their critical consciousness. This culturally responsive care is a form of

politicized care (Lane, 2018; McArthur & Lane, 2019; McKinney de Royston & Vakil, 2019) that, similar to othermothering (Beauboeuf-Lafontant, 2002), is rooted in a deep sense of responsibility for the overall well-being of children. This type of care is critically important for Black children and Children of Color (Duncan-Andrade, 2006, 2009; Howard, 2002) who experience cultural hostility and exclusion in schools.

The wide landscape of this work solidifies the importance of both care and love in the field of education, affirming the impact of relationships through the positive academic and socioemotional outcomes for Students of Color. It is particularly useful in beginning to understand what practices are a part of loving relationships. However, the conflation of love and care in discourse suggests that there is still work left to be done in the conceptualizing of love, particularly in terms of what love *looks* like as a practice. For this reason, my research questions for this study aim to explore how love is conceptualized, practiced, and experienced by both students and their teacher. In doing so, I hope to fill the gap present in the existing literature. In the next section, I explore how the literacy practices used in an English classroom could be used to heal, and to develop a deeper loving relationship to self, peers, and your community.

Part III: Literacy, Healing, and Love

As both a teacher and a scholar, I operate from the belief that "literacy is a social practice" (Street, 1984, 1995). The process of literacy acquisition is not just cognitive but tied to the social, cultural, and historical contexts in which literacy is being taught and learned (Lee, 2007; Nasir & Givens, 2019). In these contexts, they assert that literacy must build on the funds of knowledge (Gonzalez et al., 2006) young people bring into the classroom. Critical Literacy scholars argue that this is an inherently political project, and that literacy allows people to "read the word and the world" (Freire & Macedo, 1987) so that they may engage in the act of transforming oppressive systems and structures (Morrell, 2008). In extending these sociocultural

and sociocritical understandings of literacy, other scholars remind us that we must then look beyond the acquisition of literacy to how literacy is practiced in everyday interactions, both in and outside of school contexts (Gee, 2010; Gonzalez et al., 2006).

Many scholars have also challenged notions of a single monolithic literacy, and instead argue that we should take into account students' multiple literacies (de los Rios & Seltzer, 2017; Kirkland, 2009; New London Group, 1996; Street, 1984). While reading, writing, and speaking are considered the cornerstones of literacy, Muhammad (2019) reminds us that for Black people literacy was not just tied to these acts, skills, and proficiencies but also connected to "acts of self-empowerment, self-determination, and liberation" (p. 22). She shares that one of the major lessons from Black literary societies is that literacy was tied to love (p. 34). More recently, scholars have also begun to center trauma in literacy work (Dutro, 2013, 2017, 2019). While I disagree with the centering of trauma, this work provides insights into how a teacher can design a classroom and literacy assignments in a way that makes space for trauma and healing. Given these understandings of the power and potential of literacy and my role as an English teacher, I am particularly interested in how literacy pedagogies, assignments, and practices might be used to foster healing and develop loving relationships and classrooms. In the next paragraphs, I explain the trauma and healing literature that leads me to understand literacy as a ripe location for healing and love.

An important part of healing from trauma is the act of remembrance, in which a person transforms their often worldless traumatic memory into words, recounting the horrors in as much detail as possible (Herman, 1992). Even more, this act of remembrance in the safety of a loving relationship "can actually produce a change in the abnormal processing of a traumatic memory" (Herman, 1992, p. 183). This is significant because "talking with someone you trust about your

experience can help you complete the metabolic process" (Menakem, 2017, p. 177). This process, when done through the literacy act of writing, allows a person to separate themselves from their complex, from their embedded trauma response (Weller, 2017), helping them make sense of how trauma has impacted their body. In Keating's (2015) edited volume, Anzaldúa (1987) reminds us:

> writing is a gesture of the body . . . 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. The body responds physically, emotionally, and intellectually to external and internal stimuli, and writing records, orders, and theorizes. (p. 5)

In this way, the practices of writing and speaking can not only create the conditions for the reconciliation of the two hemispheres of the brain, the right—the emotional side, in which trauma survivors are often stuck, and the left—the rational side, the side where language and rationale subside—writing also serves to reconcile the *mindbodyspiritemotion.*

Some examples of how writing can be used as a form of remembrance, grieving, and healing can be seen through the practice of narrative therapy, which through writing allows survivors of trauma control of the narrative in which they were once devoid of power and agency. Another form of writing that can hold space for trauma and healing is testimonio writing (Delgado Bernal et al., 2012; Herman, 1992), which allows survivors to act as witnesses to their own trauma with the political intent of speaking back and challenging the conditions which once allowed for their harm to take place. This type of narrative writing creates many possibilities for exploring healing and love (LaMay, 2016), and can also be shared through poetry (Borrero et al., 2019). Similarly, Camangian (2010) and de los Rios and Seltzer (2017) discuss how autoethnographies can be used in the classroom to help young people interrogate and make sense of their own lived experiences.

While Camangian (2010) discusses the importance of writing autoethnography, he also discusses the power of having young people sharing those narratives with one another. This speaking of stories aloud served to not just empower students in (re)claiming their own narratives but served to foster a critically compassionate and caring classroom. Similarly, oral history and dialogue (Freire, 1970) also allows young people to engage in the processes of speaking and listening in order to foster empathy and solidarity. Having your voice, ideas, and stories be heard and recognized (Herman, 1992) combats the shame endemic to trauma and fosters the empathy (Brown, 2012) necessary for being seen and loved. Creating the conditions for young people to be fully seen in the safe container of a loving classroom cannot happen without the space for young people to recognize the trauma, resilience, and love in themselves and one another. These writing and sharing (speaking) opportunities should be ritualistic in our classroom, "a maintenance practice that offers us the meaning of tending wounds and sorrows, for offering gratitude, and for reconciling conflicts, thereby allowing our psyches regular periods of release and renewal" (Weller, 2015, p. 87). These writing and speaking should serve to create, inform, and transform the culture (Mennakem, 2017), and shape (Haines, 2019) of the classroom.

While the few examples mentioned above illustrate *how* literacy assignments and the practices of writing and speaking can be designed in a way that centers the importance of healing, it is important to note that far too often young people are tasked to engage literacy in ways that are apolitical, acultural, and divorced from discourse on trauma, healing, and love. Many of these assignments and literacy practices can also be tied to ancestral practices rooted in storytelling and survival. Also important is that there is rare mention of reading in the literature on trauma, healing, and love and aside from literature on the importance of relevant texts

(Kirkland, 2011), there exists little literature on how reading can help young people to understand themselves, their communities, and the conditions causing them harm in a way that specifically fosters healing and love. In the portraits in Chapters Five and Six, I illustrate how the practice of reading can also be designed towards love. Through these portraits, I also add to a burgeoning understanding of the relationship between embodiment, literacy, and healing (Cariaga, 2018; Kirkland, 2009).

Combined, the literature on trauma, healing, love, and literacy affirm the urgency to address trauma, the viability of love as an intervention, the necessity to interrogate and conceptualize love, and how literacy can serve as part of that intervention. In many ways, these learnings are a *return, a restoration* of ideas and practices that belong(ed) to People of Color prior to the trauma of colonization. Together, they inform my research questions and design, further explored in the next chapter.

CHAPTER THREE: METHODOLOGY

Research and methods have long been critiqued as being steeped in epistemological racism (Scheurich & Young, 2007; Smith, 2013) that disregards the humanity of marginalized peoples, and are used as a weapon against them. Smith (2013) historicizes this truth by reminding us that "the term 'research' is inextricably linked to European imperialism and colonialism" (p. 1). This history continues to be present, particularly as researchers have become interested in studying trauma and Students of Color. Narrow, overly clinical, and ahistorical understandings of trauma, coupled with traditional research methods that are imbued with harm and wielded by people who are not *in* community have led to a plethora of "damage-centered narratives" (Tuck, 2009) which pathologize Students of Color. These limited interpretations have conflated traumatic experiences with being traumatized and led to news articles that call embedded traumas such as Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) the "new hood disease" (Reed, 2016). For years, I have watched as teachers have latched onto this research, proclaiming that *all* of their students, particularly their Students of Color, are traumatized and using it as a rationale for lowering their expectations. With some exceptions (Cariaga, 2018; Duncan-Andrade, 2009; Ginwright, 2015; Kokka, 2019; Pour-Khorshid, 2016), most of the research on trauma in education has served to justify the deficit beliefs about Students of Color that were always *just* beneath the surface—if hidden at all.

Over the last 10 years as a classroom teacher and researcher, I have been immersed in this research on trauma, both in books and in my body, studying from a desire-based perspective (Tuck, 2007) for healing, for hope (Duncan-Andrade, 2009), for freedom. It is there that I realized that love can both protect and heal us from trauma, and so I began my quest to understand love—what it looks like, what it feels like, and how it develops over time. This

dissertation is the second study in what has now been a 10-year longitudinal project to explore what love is and what it looks like within the context of the classroom. Guided by Critical Race Theory (CRT), Culturally Sustaining Pedagogies (CSP), and Chicana Feminist Epistemologies (CFE), I employed portraiture to understand how both students and myself conceptualize love. In particular, I used *platicás* with students and additional data from the initial study to construct three portraits, which I envision as part of a larger mural.

Like others I have also made missteps on my decade long journey towards demystifying and unraveling love—below, I describe my first study and conclude with the learnings and lessons I carried with me and how they inform my current research questions. Then, I describe how I arrived at portraiture as a methodology that allows me to talk about trauma, love, healing, and literacy in nuanced and complex ways. Next, I explain how a portraiture methodology is both informed by and aligned with my theoretical, pedagogical, and epistemological commitments. Lastly, I detail the design of the study, including data collection, introduction of the collaborators, and data analysis.

Study 1: Compa Love Application and Reflection

The first study took place over four years from 2012-2016. For this study, I developed a framework for love, entitled Compa Love, defined as "the political practice of meeting the tangible, intellectual, and emotional needs of young people in hopes for both self and community actualization" (Hannegan-Martinez, 2019). To meet the holistic and interrelated needs *was* Compa Love, a compilation of Emotional Love, Tangible Love, and Intellectual Love. Below are excerpts from the 2019 published article which briefly explain the three forms of love:

"Emotional Love—In Lak'ech"

> In Mayan tradition, the principle of In Lak'ech roughly translates to "you are my other me" (Valdez 1973) which is a way of acknowledging common struggles, experiences and

> humanity in one another. This Mayan practice is akin to true solidarity (Freire 1970), the goal being that young people will "[invest] in a common cause based on understanding that they have a collective struggle [and not] let their perceived differences interfere with their compassion for and understanding of one another" (Camangian and Cariaga 2018, p. 8). Although Emotional Love can manifest differently among youth, there are core necessities that are imperative to making it happen: cariño (Valenzuela 1999), honesty, vulnerability (Brown 2013), and the willingness to deal with issues that are painful . . . . Emotional Love is about creating the conditions for young people to be vulnerable as they share their stories and struggles in order to recognize and honor the humanity in one another. In order to do this, teachers must create a healing community.
>
> "Tangible Love—Mi Casa es tu Casa"
>
> Tangible love is the literal providing of material resources to young people which allow youth to deal critically with the complex issues that affect their lives, while simultaneously being materially supported . . . teachers that understand human needs as interdependent must acknowledge the harsh material conditions of urban living and create a space where young people feel like they can "get on their feet" and get ready for the world that awaits them. These spaces should allow students to enter without shame or embarrassment, and be met with some of the material support that they need to be present and academically successful . . . . Similarly, teachers must venture outside the confines of classrooms and schools to seek the resources necessary for young people to thrive. An example of this would be partnering with community organizations or seeking local venues to fundraise. Moreover, teachers should participate in larger movements, organizing for the equitable distribution of resources.
>
> "Intellectual Love"
>
> Intellectually loving young people is about committing to young people's intellectual growth in a way that is culturally sustaining . . . . In short, Intellectual Love is a curricular and pedagogical approach that creates a platform for healing and cultivates love of self and others, by being both culturally sustaining and academically rigorous. Intellectual Love challenges the false dichotomy that exists between rigor and relevance, calling on educators to teach codes of power (Delpit 1995) in a way that is subversive to systems of oppression. Fundamentally, Intellectual Love engages in a process that allows young people to make sense of the systems and structures that are causing them harm. By creating space for young people to understand their traumas in historical context, and teaching the skills young people need to read, write, and speak about these conditions, teachers can alleviate some of the shame mentioned in the previous sections.

While the findings from this first study proved that the Compa Love framework had a significant impact on the socio-emotional and academic outcomes of my students, I later identified a gap in my methodological approach: I conceptualized love without including those who I was in relationship to—my students. The methodological design of this second study,

described below, aims to fill this gap by returning to that same group of students. The research questions guiding the dissertation study include:

1) How do we [students and teacher] conceptualize love?
2) How was love embodied and made visible in the context of our English classroom?
3) What role did literacy play in shaping loving relationships to self, to peers, and to community?

Portraiture and Anticipatory Frameworks

I am always acutely aware that I arrived at love by traveling through trauma, and that in order to answer the aforementioned questions without participating in the production of damage-centered narratives, I must engage in a methodology that honors the humanity of all those involved. It is for this reason that I am drawn to portraiture, as it "resists this tradition-laden effort to document failure. It is an intentionally generous and eclectic process that begins by searching for what is good and healthy and assumes that the expression of goodness will always be laden with imperfections" (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis, 1997, p. 9). Portraiture's principles of searching for goodness and honoring complexity are particularly salient when studying loving relationships given how young people's voices, despite being heavily researched, have been excluded from the literature on relationships, and academic discourses at large.

When describing the role of the researcher, the portraitist, Sara Lawrence-Lightfoot (1994) writes, "For a portraitist to see her subject clearly, she must fall in love . . . . This love allows for both connection and challenge, identification and scrutiny" (xv). This reframing of what other methodologies would perceive as a limitation is at the heart of every page of this dissertation. Ultimately, it is this understanding of the role and power of love that first drove me to teaching, and now to portraiture. As someone who is researching alongside students I taught for four years, and have now known for almost 10 years, I entered this research process already deeply in love with who my students were, who they are, and who they are becoming. Being a

worthy witness (Winn & Ubiles, 2011) and participant in their lives has been the greatest blessing of my life, and it is with great humility and honor that I heed Lawrence-Lightfoot's call to use portraiture as a way fall *deeper* in love, or as Toni Morrison (1994) would say it, *to rise in love.*

Portraiture's Essential Features

Portraiture blends art and science in order to capture the complexity, nuance, and humanity of one's participants and the contexts they exist within. Lawrence-Lightfoot and Davis (1997) describe it as:

> Portraiture is a method framed by the traditions and values of the phenomenological paradigm, sharing many of the techniques, standards, and goals of ethnography. But it pushes against the constraints of those traditions and practices in its explicit effort to combine empirical and aesthetic, in its focus on the convergence of narrative and analysis, in its goal of speaking to broader audiences beyond the academy . . . in its standard of authenticity rather than reliability and validity . . . . and in its explicit recognition of the use of the self as the primary research instrument for documenting and interpreting the perspectives and experiences of the people and the cultures being studied. (p. 13)

In this same text, they offer that in order to meet the lofty goals stated above, portraiture is made up of 5 components: context, voice, relationships, emergent themes, and aesthetic whole. *Context* refers to the setting in which the portrait is taking place and can include the physical, geographic, temporal, historic, cultural, or aesthetic. When thinking about the classroom this is important because "actors are not only shaped by the context, but they also give it shape" (p. 57). *Voice* acknowledges that the portraitist can be seen everywhere in the research process, from design to interpretation to the composing of the narrative. Lawrence-Lightfoot argues that voice takes on many roles in a portrait, voice as: witness, preoccupation, autobiography, voice discerning other voices (listening *for* voice), and in dialogue. As mentioned in the prior sections, *Relationships* are critically important and require vulnerability, intimacy, empathy, trust, reciprocity. *Emergent Themes* are born of an iterative, generative, and "disciplined, empirical

process" in which the portraitists gather and organize the themes emerging from the data and give the data shape and form in the narrative. The *Aesthetic Whole* is the process by which the final portrait is constructed. The portraitists "weaves the tapestry" by attending to four dimensions: (a) conception, which refers to the development of the story, (b) structure, which refers to the sequencing of the story, (c) form, which reflects the movement, and (d), cohesion, which ensures unity and integrity. Below, I describe Lawrence-Lightfoot and Davis's (1997) concept of anticipatory frameworks, the theories that guide my extension and application of portraiture: Cultural Intuition, Critical Race Theory, Culturally Sustaining Pedagogies, and Women of Color Feminist Epistemologies.

Anticipatory Frameworks, Cultural Intuition, and Theoretical Frameworks

Sara Lawrence-Lightfoot and Jessica Hoffmann Davis (1997) share that when writing a portrait "the voice of the researcher is everywhere: in the assumptions, preoccupations, and framework she brings to the inquiry; in the questions she asks; in the data she gathers; in the choice of stories she tells" (p. 85). In short, as portraitists, our voice(s), research design, and analysis are guided by what they refer to as intellectual or anticipatory frameworks which are:

> usually the result of a review of the relevant literature, prior experience in similar settings, and a general knowledge of the field of inquiry. It also resonates with echoes of the researcher's autobiographical journey—those aspects of her own familial, cultural, developmental, and educational background that she can relate to the intellectual themes of the work. (p. 185)

Chicana feminists understand these anticipatory frameworks as part of our cultural intuition. Cultural intuition is the foundation of a Chicana Feminist Epistemology (CFE) and is comprised of four major sources: (a) personal experience, (b) professional experience, (c) existing literature, and (d) analytical research processes (Delgado-Bernal, 1998).

Honoring my cultural intuition is an important methodological and epistemological decision given how I situate myself in my research as an active participant in the classroom, but also how that participation and experience is informed and analyzed by my identity as a working-class Chicana who grew up in similar neighborhoods to the one I taught in. These experiences continue to inform my cultural intuition which has guided me towards my research questions regarding how love can serve as a conduit for navigating and healing from trauma, and what the impact would be for students if teachers were literate *about* and *in* love. These frameworks--this intuition--serve to inform my research design, data collection, data analysis, voice, and shape of the portrait (Lawrence-Lightfoot, 1997, p. 243). Below I explore the theoretical and pedagogical frameworks that in addition to my personal and professional experiences, and literature on trauma, love, and literacy that I reviewed in Chapter Two, also influenced my teaching, my first study (Compa Love), and my current research design and analysis.

Critical Race Theory and Critical Race Pedagogy

Critical Race Theory (CRT) in Education emerged as a framework aimed to center the voices and experiences of Students of Color, providing an analytical lens by which to understand those experiences. CRT is guided by five major principles: (a) centralizes race and racism and other intersecting identities; (b) challenges dominant ideology; (c) represents a commitment to social justice; (d) treats lived experience as knowledge; and (e) utilizes interdisciplinary perspectives (Solorzano & Delgado Bernal, 2001). Together, the tenets guide study designs and analyses to ensure the integrity of theoretical research as it pertains to populations of color and people with other marginalized identities.

Later, this was further developed into a Critical Race Pedagogy (Lynn et al., 2013) that aimed to take the aforementioned theoretical tenets and apply them in practice. This was helpful

in facilitating educators' understandings of how to center race in the classroom, create space for young people's complex and interwoven experiences, while committing to providing a liberatory education. CRT and CRP's commitment to liberatory practices that analyze oppression while centering the humanity of people is crucial when studying love as a conduit for healing the traumas experienced by young People of Color as a result of structural and social toxicity. This will also be particularly important in this study that interrogates the relationship between trauma and love, given that both myself and 100 percent of the students involved are People of Color.

Culturally Sustaining Pedagogies

In 1995, Ladson-Billings argued for a culturally relevant pedagogy, a pedagogy that would "produce students who can achieve academically, produce students who demonstrate cultural competence, and develop students who can both understand and critique the existing social order" (p. 474). More recently, scholars Django Paris and Samy Alim (2017) argue that what we need is a culturally sustaining pedagogy (CSP) that is more than relevant or responsive, but rather one that is *sustaining* of the cultural knowledge and wealth that is *already* present in communities of color. They argue:

> that our pedagogies be more than responsive of or relevant to the cultural experiences and practices of young people—it requires that they support young people in sustaining the cultural and linguistic competence of their communities while simultaneously offering access to dominant cultural competence . . . culturally sustaining pedagogy seeks to perpetuate and foster—to sustain—linguistic, literate, and cultural pluralism as part of the democratic project of schooling. (p. 95)

In studying the impacts of trauma, and literacy as a mechanism for love and healing, this framing of what it means to be culturally sustaining impacted my development and rationale of curricular units and literacy practices which are being utilized to ground this study.

Given that this pedagogical framework was fundamental to my teaching practices, it is an instrumental framework in guiding my research, particularly my research question regarding the

role of literacy in fostering loving relationships. My goal is to understand to what degree using this type of pedagogy creates the conditions for building relationships between and among young people in urban schools, particularly those experiencing the residual impacts of exposure to trauma, social toxicity, and traumatic stressors.

Chicana and Women of Color Feminist Epistemologies

While the aforementioned frameworks (CRT, CRP, CSP) are foundational and fundamental for the work that I have done and intend to do, they still left me with the question of "Where do I fit in this?" Schools and research alike, both contribute to a split of the body/mind/spirit/emotion that feel incongruent with the ways in which I show up to my work. As such, I am interested in a framework that honors my epistemological wholeness as a working class-Woman of Color-educator-organizer. I turn specifically to Chicana Feminist Epistemologies (CFE) because it honors my cultural intuition. Honoring my cultural intuition is an important methodological and epistemological decision given how I situate myself in my research as an active participant in the classroom. This is especially true given that my participation and experience in those spaces is informed by my identity as a working-class Chicana who grew up in similar neighborhoods to the one I taught in. Further, as was explored in Chapter Two, my understanding and conceptualizations of love and healing as a political choice and practice is informed by Women of Color feminists. In what follows, I explain how these understandings and experiences inform my use of portraiture, and my understanding of the portraits as each contributing to a larger mural.

Muralism

Portraiture has been used to capture many different things such as a school (Lawrence-Lightfoot, 1983), human archaeology (Lawrence-Lightfoot, 1994), a concept such as respect (Lawrence-Lightfoot, 1998), and a relationship between loved ones (Lawrence-Lightfoot, 2003).

Many have pushed forward the methodology of portraiture extending it to include: self-portraits of an elementary school teacher (Valdez, 2015), blended portraiture which combines autoethnography and portraiture to highlight a teacher *and* her students' narratives (Cariaga, 2017), Portraits of Praxis which harmonizes multiple teachers' portraits into a collage (Curammeng, 2017, 2020), and portraits of pedagogical promise (Villareal, 2019) which illustrates how teachers' histories are always present in the classroom. Scholars have also used portraiture to explore the convergence between the methodology and theoretical and epistemological frameworks such as Critical Race Theory (Dixson & Chapman, 2005), Black Feminist Theory (Dixson, 2005) and Chicana Feminist Epistemologies (Flores, 2017). All of the aforementioned possibilities for portraiture served to influence my research design.

The portraits in this study resemble human archeology—they are the narratives of three young people as they matriculate through high school, and how they make sense of it years later, as adults in their early twenties. They are also portraits of a concept: *love*. Most accurately, I would describe them as a bridge between these two endeavors, between archaeology and concept; they are an attempt at human archaeology for the purpose of understanding love. The findings from this study will illuminate the architecture of love, what it requires, so that similar to *Respect* (Lawrence-Lightfoot, 1998) the next set of portraits can be of teachers demonstrating what those components look like in practice.

Still, as I set out to write out portraits of these young people in our classroom, I was faced with a glaring tension: in a classroom, I am both witness and participant, storyteller and character, narrator and narrated—I am both the painter and the painted. To illustrate this dilemma, imagine that I am analyzing a particular scenario that occurred in class with one of my collaborators (my former students). We have both identified this moment as significant. As I am

using my impressionistic record to document emergent themes, I am interpreting their actions, and often myself. This interpretation of self is most modeled by Valdez (2015) and Cariaga (2017) who incorporate aspects of auto-ethnography and self-portrait. As is customary in portraiture, in co-constructing these portraits with my collaborators, they are also contributing to this interpretation of the event, their actions, their thoughts. However, because I am their teacher, and part of a dialectical relationship, when they analyze these moments and artifacts they are often analyzing *me* as well, analyzing how my pedagogies, actions, and words shaped that moment. This tension pushed me to consider how portraiture could be used to paint a narrative in which *all* of our voices, stories, artifacts, and analysis are centered and central to understanding our experiences.

In order to reconcile this tension, I was initially drawn to the way that Lawrence-Lightfoot and Davis (1997) discuss group voice, a process whereby researchers had to reconcile multiple stakeholder voices in their creation of a portrait. However, group voice refers to a process where there are multiple researchers and writers trying to give synthesis to a narrative they have constructed together. This didn't quite capture what I was doing, because ultimately I was the primary researcher and writer of these portraits. This tension remained present, a constant flicker in the back of my mind, until I found myself one day reminded of the *Great Wall of Los Angeles.*

The Great Wall is one of the longest murals in the world and is a visual representation of a multiethnic history of California and Los Angeles and was created alongside almost 400 youth and families. The artist behind the mural, Dr. Judy Baca, conceptualizes this kind of community-based public art as being:

> formulated on a dialogical model whereby the artwork arises out of a discussion among people associated with a particular site. These are usually marginalized or

> disenfranchised groups . . . . The underlying objectives of active participation are (a) to counter the group's lack of social visibility and political power by directly involving its members . . . . and (b) to engage participants in the shaping, construction and visual codification of history. Community-based public art projects therefore highlight participation, collectivity, and collaboration as fundamental political strategies. (Indych-López, 2018, pp. 10–11)

Initially concerned with how this collaborative process was unfolding aesthetically, and concerned for what portraitists would refer to as the *aesthetic whole*, Baca shifted her initial plan for the mural. As she shared in 1985, she realized that "one person must have the overall vision [for the work] to become a whole . . . . although the conceptualization takes place in a group" (p. 123). For her, this meant teaching young people to paint and creating a "paint-by-numbers" system which "resolved the thorny problem of aesthetics by allowing Baca to control design while involving the youth in all other aspects of the creation" (p. 121).

Reading Baca's description of the process for conceptualizing and creating *The Great Wall* felt most resonant for the process that I, and we, undertook in the co-construction of these portraits. Undergirding the construction of *The Great Wall* mural and each portrait of this study is an epistemology of Participatory Action Research that holds closely the idea that participants should be included in each part of the research process (Fine, 2008; Tuck, 2009). In our case, students selected the events and artifacts they wanted to analyze, helped outline their love trajectories, and after I "painted-by-numbers" the stories *we* had selected, they analyzed, read, and filled the gaps.

In this way, the portraits actively include the participants in every part of the research process and center me as an active participant (Cariaga, 2017; Valdez, 2015). When the three portraits are blended together, they form the beginning of a mural that tells a larger story, multiple stories, about our classroom and about love. Similarly to Baca, the decision to include young people as collaborators, as co-constructors of knowledge, is a political decision to honor

the voices and dignities of those who have most often been excluded from the academy. In the next section, I introduce my collaborators, and share the data collection methods and how they were selected and utilized to align with these epistemological and political commitments.

Research-Collaborators

This study involves 28 research-collaborators, and following portraiture's emphasis on the portraitist, I consider myself to also be a part of this study. All of the collaborators are former students of mine who were in a cohort that I had the privilege of looping with over the course of four years (2012–2016). Put simply, they were in English class together and with me for the four years that they were in high school. While the cohort consisted of 30 students, two were not available to participate based on scheduling conflicts. The group, which was made up entirely of Students of Color, reflected the larger school population and was purposively selected (Maxwell, 2013, p. 97). First, because of the duration of their time together, they represent an important voice that I think will have valid contributions to the discourse on loving relationships. Second, given that they are adults now, the sphere of privilege and positionality has shifted allowing for more equitable discourse.

From the 28 research-collaborators, three students—Alex, Lay, and Emeliano—were selected for portraits. All three are adults, and opted to not use pseudonyms citing that they were not ashamed of their stories, had nothing to hide, and wanted teachers to better learn how to meet the needs of students like them.

Data Collection Methods and Analysis

To create the portraits, I utilize the following: three different iterations of platicás and previously collected data. Specifically, I use Study 1's: ethnographic field notes, audio and video footage, interviews, curricula, and artifacts, including students' journals, essays, academic records, etc. Many of these forms of data were also used to anchor the platicás, described below.

Pláticas

Pláticas are both a method and methodology rooted in Chicana Feminisms, that call for a way of structuring culturally sustaining dialogue that engages the full humanity of researcher and collaborators. As a method, platicás challenge and extend traditional notions of interviewing which often call for objectivity and distance. For example, while Seidman (2013) would argue that emotional distance is necessary for a productive interview (p. 45), a plática methodology recognizes how much we can learn from people we are in relationship to—our families, our peers, our friends, our students. This belief in the power and validity of relationships is shared by portraitists, who "see relationships as more than data gathering, more than points of access. We see them as central to the empirical, ethical, and humanistic dimension of research design" (p. 138). Given the synchronicity between Portraiture and Chicana Feminist Epistemologies and methods (Flores, 2017) and the fact that I am engaging my former students whom I already have relationships to, I opted to utilize pláticas to aid in the co-construction of their portraits.

According to Fierros and Bernal (2016), a plática methodology is based on five principles: (a) the research draws upon Chicana/Latina feminist theory or other critical theories about race, (b) has a relational principle that honors participants as co-constructors of knowledge, (c) makes connections between everyday lived experiences and the research inquiry, (d) provides a potential space for healing, and (e) relies on relations of reciprocity and vulnerability and researcher reflexivity. The informal nature of pláticas coupled with the rigor of its tenets is a fitting method that "allow us to witness shared memories, experiences, stories, ambiguities, and interpretations that impart us with a knowledge connected to personal, familial, and cultural history" (Fierro & Delgado-Bernal, 2016, p. 99). In our case, pláticas allow us to share memories, experiences, stories, ambiguities, and interpretations, which all aid in the

construction of our portraits and in our conceptualization of love. Below I share the three different ways I structured pláticas.

Group plática. The group plática served as the first method of data collection for this second study and included 20 participants who were a part of our class. The plática, which doubled as our first reunion since graduation in 2016, began with a slideshow using photographs and video—data from the first study. This data were utilized as artifacts to elicit memory of our course, their assignments, and our overall time together. Questions for the plática centered around conceptualizing and defining love as a group, then sharing specific memories in which students did or did not feel loved. This group platicá model allowed for informal conversation in which I as the "researcher" could also share memories and be vulnerable (Freire & Valdez, 2017). One of the organic outcomes of the conversation was a debate regarding the similarities and differences between care and love.

The plática, which felt almost exactly like class, then transitioned to an explanation of peer-pláticas as a data collection method. Following what for us felt like a mini-lecture by their teacher (me), we collectively drafted some potential questions they might use in their protocol with one another. After the peer-pláticas concluded we came back together as a large group and closed out our time together with a return to one of our rituals—an appreciation circle. We shared appreciations for our past time together, for all we learned in community, for our presence in the space now. We also shared apologies for the time we had let lapse between seeing each-other, between reaching out, between the last time we had all been together and now.

Ending our time together with a culturally sustaining and community grounded ritual highlights the glaring differences between a traditional focus group and group plática. While a focus group "works best for topics people could talk about to each other in their everyday lives—

but don't" (Macnaughten & Myers, 2004, p. 65; Merriam, 2009, p. 94), our group plática doesn't make assumptions about the conversations and knowledges that people have in their everyday lives and instead functions similarly to our classroom, as a sacred space in which we "come together and produce knowledge emerging from [our] own experiences, facultad, consejos, spirituality, and testimonios" (Diaz Soto et al., 2009, p. 760).

Peer pláticas. Given the difficulty of coordinating an event that would allow for the majority of my collaborators to attend, the peer pláticas took place on the same evening as the group plática.

Peer pláticas took place immediately after the questions were collaboratively designed by the group, and paid particular attention to defining love and exploring moments they (the collaborators) recollected as loving. Pláticas occurred with one to two people of their choosing and were audio recorded by the participants and sent to me afterwards. Peer pláticas, inspired by peer interviews, were an important method to incorporate in this study because they intentionally honor and engage the participants as researchers (Potts & Brown, 2005). These peer pláticas function similar to a pair-share and would allow participants who might not have felt comfortable sharing in the large group another opportunity to engage. As an important point of departure from others who have facilitated pláticas between their participants (Flores, 2017), these pláticas were facilitated by the participants themselves apart from my own gaze, as their teacher and researcher.

Aside from logistics, the decision to conduct peer pláticas immediately after the focus group had an added benefit in that participants had already begun sharing memories and thinking about love in the focus group, allowing for more in-depth dialogue in their pláticas. This was complemented by the fact that participants had prior relationships to one another. As a result of

this, participants were able to elicit particular memories by sharing their own and/or challenging each others' memories by offering a different perspective of an event. For example, one pair spent several minutes debating who had supported who in getting to class on time. Using the information shared in the peer-pláticas and their analysis of memories, the peer pairs and triads ended the plática by coming up with a rough definition of love, which they hand-wrote and turned in to me. This is an example:

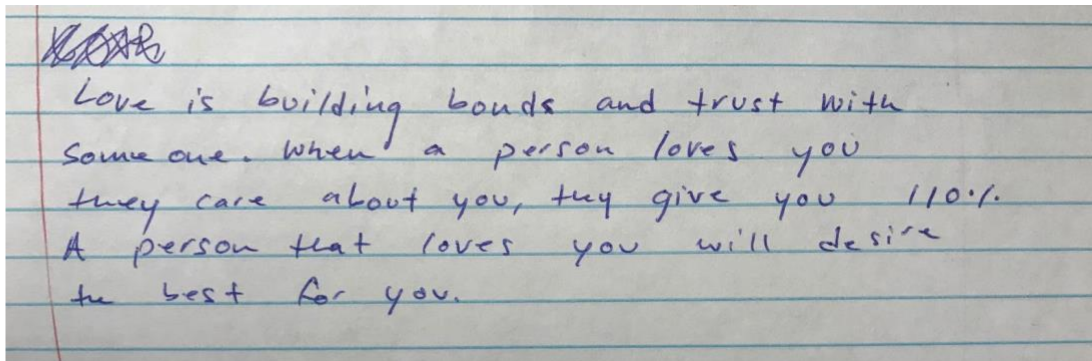

Love is building bonds and trust with
Some one. When a person loves you
they care about you, they give you 110%.
A person that loves you will desire
the best for you.

Figure 1. Example of Students' Definitions of Love.

Individual pláticas. Based on preliminary analysis of the group and peer pláticas, eight participants were purposively selected for two-three individual pláticas. Collaborators were selected based on myriad factors such as comments made during the group and peer pláticas, their absence from those pláticas, and my previous knowledge on either their individual or our collective relationship history. The first plática further explored how the participant defined and conceptualized love as well as how they experienced it, or the absence of it, in our classroom space. This served as an opportunity to ask questions as a follow-up to commends they had made during the group pláticas, or for students who did not attend, to ask the questions that were posed. In some cases, I would share the questions posed by other students such as the difference between care and love and ask them what they thought about what their peers had shared. In this way, the preliminary analysis of the group plática was still present throughout the first individual plática, whether or not the collaborator had been in attendance.

The second plática was extensive and utilized multi-modal data collected during my first study so that we could analyze their literacy trajectory and its relationship to the shaping of loving relationships to themselves, their peers, and community (Research Question 3). Data utilized during this plática included academic records, audio and video footage and written literacy artifacts such as submitted essays collected from 2012 to 2016. The platicá began with them identifying specific assignments and memories that stood out to them from our time together, before beginning with a review of their ninth through twelfth grade assignments. In this way, each literacy assignment served as a marker in time for us to reflect upon and analyze. Assignments were either printed for them to analyze or reviewed virtually via a shared screen. This protocol of reviewing and analyzing this data together was important not only because it elicited memories and allowed our memories to be informed by evidence, but because it allowed them to select the literacy events that were most influential for them, and that they wanted to use to frame their narrative. Included in this plática are their reflections and analysis of my behaviors, practices, and pedagogies as their teacher and how it contributed to the events that transpired, or did not.

The three students selected for portraits were identified based on the prior two pláticas, with considerations for making sure that the racial and gender diversity of our classroom was represented in the three portraits. For those students a third plática was conducted in which we read their portraits together. This served as a form of member-checking, and ensured that there weren't any significant data pieces or reflections missing from their portrait. It is important to note that all of these last pláticas took place virtually and at a time when we were quarantined during a global pandemic. As such, we spent a significant portion of time making sure that we asked about the health of each others' family members and loved ones, as well as asking if there

were any needs such as food delivery. I note this here because it is yet another reminder of the value of pláticas as a methodology while simultaneously serving as an example of the loving relationships we are endeavoring to conceptualize together.

Data Analysis

In this study I generated grounded theory (Charmaz, 2000, 2006; Glaser & Strauss, 1967, Malagon et al., 2009) by focusing on the development of what Lawrence-Lightfoot refers to as "emergent themes." As part of this iterative and generative process, I incorporated thematic coding (Saldaña, 2016) to help me hone in on themes related to different forms of trauma—acute, complex, communal/collective/intergeneration, corrosive—, resilience, relationships, care, accountability, vulnerability, support, literacy, and love. Some of these themes were informed by my first study, while others emerged from the data and my impressionistic record (Lawrence-Lightfoot, 2014).

It is important to note my students, my collaborators, are an integral part of the analytical process. This is particularly salient as we collaboratively analyzed their literacy artifacts. In order to analyze the literacy artifacts, I first studied the artifacts in chronological order, taking note of student's literacy practices and how they shifted over time. Given that artifacts were multimodal, I drew on critical literacy, critical media analysis, and discourse analysis in order to make note of these shifts in literacy practices. Then, in the second platicá conducted, students and I sifted through these artifacts together, also chronologically. In this read, students shared memories associated with these artifacts, identifying which ones felt the most significant for them in their journey. Then, once artifacts were selected to serve as the cornerstones of the portrait, we read them together aloud, analyzing what these artifacts communicated about their love, or lack thereof, for themselves, me, their peers, their families, and their communities. In doing so, we also analyzed the pedagogical practices, curricular assignments, and relationships

that contributed to this event (the context). Me and my practices are very much active participants in the construction of these portraits, and in every part of our analysis. Through this extensive process, the lines and roles of researcher and collaborator are blurred so that our *collective* understandings and analysis could generate new theory.

Artist's Statement

Literacies of Love is a story made up of love stories. It is an attempt at uncovering what love is made of, how it is formed, how it comes to be. To do so, we engage in what Lawrence-Lightfoot (1994) refers to as human archaeology, a process of excavating, tracing, and analyzing the moments when we felt loved, and those when we did not. *What is it that makes us feel loved?* is a question steeped in every page, every part of these portraits. When read together, the portraits that follow blend to create part of a mural that tells the story of three young people's lives, of our classroom, and of a messy journey towards more love—for self, peers, each other, community, the world.

In many ways the process of constructing these portraits felt like going through a box of old photographs and artifacts, some new, and some weathered and wrinkled with time. As we shuffled through these memories, some stood out, bringing us to tears, and laughter as we shared the story tied to that photograph, that snapshot of time. Slowly, we started putting those to the side, deciding that those would serve as the blueprint of our story, of our portraits. Specifically, the portraits are anchored in literacy artifacts with each one serving as a marker in time that we have seen as integral to the portrait, and to the mural. When strung together, this conglomeration of snapshots and artifacts serve to tell our individual stories—so that we can tell our larger collective story.

My jobs over the last 10 years have been that of teacher, mentor, counselor, family, documentarian, historian, and now a portraitist, muralist, and curator. In all of these roles, it has

been my profound belief that in order to do them well, to do them with justice at the center, requires great love. What follows are not just stories and learnings about love, or an analysis of its architecture, but the product(s) of it. These portraits, this mural, are my way of saying thank you to my collaborators, my students, for helping me to know and understand love beyond what I ever imagined was possible.

Framing of the Findings

The following three portraits tell the story of three students in my English classroom over the course of four years. Given the vast amounts of data, as well as my interest in studying the relationship between literacy and love, students' literacy assignments and artifacts serve as the anchors of the portraits. In doing so, the portraits illuminate both their trajectories in literacy, and in love. The artifacts and events shared were marked as significant by the participants themselves. Because they were in the same class together, there is overlap in the assignments they selected to analyze. Together, the three portraits paint a mural of our classroom, illuminating all the ways we fought, and failed, and fought some more in our journey towards *more* love.

A note on the curriculum design. The assignments shared throughout these portraits are not new or unique, some borrowed from my elders and teacher colleagues, and many more are just the practices I was taught to believe were valuable from my family and my community: storytelling, oral history, poetry, music. In more recent years, we call these practices culturally relevant, responsive, sustaining (Gay, 2010; Ladson-Billings, 2005; Paris & Alim, 2017). These practices are also the foundation of Ethnic Studies pedagogy and curriculum, again reiterating that in many ways, they are a return to our cultures, to our roots, and a way sustain them for the future. Increasingly literacy scholars have also begun to recognize the value of these literacy practices in illuminating the full linguistic repertoires of children (de los Rios, 2019). I hold that

all of these are true--these practices and assignments are culturally sustaining, grounded in the literacy practices of our communities and ancestors, and have inherent value.

To note, *all* of the assignments shared in these narratives met and exceeded state standards corresponding to literacy development, and led to all the outcomes schools are seeking—a higher grade, increased scores on reading metrics, and statewide exams. These metrics are not insignificant, particularly in a country that penalizes Students of Color for their lack of "achievement," but I would argue that if we continue with the status quo of using these types of assignments to *only* measure the hard and soft skills of literacy as it is traditionally conceived, then knowing what we know about the impacts of trauma and toxic stress—we are participating in the social and physical death of our children. Moreover, we are missing the opportunity to use literacy assignments to measure what matters most: Is this child loved? Do they know that they are loved? Do they love themselves? Do they love who they come from?

Through the following portraits, I offer that literacy practices and assignments can serve different functions. They can be used to foster healing and love for self, for peers, and community. They can *also* serve as an opportunity to gauge the aforementioned metrics, the ones that are going to help us to survive, to sustain our people and our healing. In doing so, we can create classrooms where we grow our individual and collective capacity to love, where students' have access to *more* loving relationships, and where every child knows that they are unequivocally loved.

CHAPTER FOUR: ALEX

It was the summer after our first year together, August 2013 to be exact, and we'd been assigned a new classroom in a new building. With the help of students, I'd spent the summer preparing for their first day back, painting the walls yellow so that there would be light in this otherwise windowless metal cage they called a classroom. Splattered across the back wall was the word dream in a tapestry of bright pink and blue and yellow—coordination and style after all will *always* matter. In one corner of the room, there was a piece of carpet, a crooked sample from Home Depot I'd managed to find, covered in pillows and bean bags. Adjacent to that lay a nook with a brown couch and coffee table. The walls of the nook contained hundreds of photos we'd taken the previous year. All of this complemented by the photos and posters of the faces and quotes of Gloria Anzaldúa, Toni Morrison, Malcolm X, Octavia Butler, and others whose legacies illuminated our path and guided our words. This room, with a broken tv hanging in the corner and a missing air conditioner, was our new home base.

I taught my new classes of ninth graders and eagerly awaited 6th period, *our* class, our family reunion. The buzz in the room was palpable as everyone walked in hugging and dapping, checking out each others' new Jordans and Cortez's and sizing each other up--some people came back a whole foot taller it felt like while others...clearly did not. We spent the next few weeks alternating between suffocating in the stale heat and stench of sweat, and yelling over the seven rumbling fans we'd managed to acquire for the room. All the while we were growing and reading. Even in these less than optimal conditions we were studying the impacts of historical amnesia, thinking about our own families and histories and how much had been stolen from us, reflecting for the first time on how much we didn't know that we didn't know, and alternatively how much we knew without even having to think about it.

In the middle of this unit, the counselors reached out to me and told me that there would be a new student coming to our school and that based on her less than 1.0 GPA, they thought she might benefit from being in our class. I took it back to the group, and together we discussed the pros and cons of accepting someone into the space. Ultimately, it was decided that it was selfish to turn someone away who could benefit from what we were trying to build. She was let in.

On the day Alex first made her appearance, I watched her walk in and immediately find the farthest seat from the front. I walked to the back of the room where Alex had already slunk into a chair. I introduced myself, and asked her a few questions like what school she'd come from and if the counselors had told her about our class and how it was different. She answered monosyllabically without looking up from her phone once. Even so, every one-syllable word felt like a punch to the gut and if I am honest, I worried what having her in the space would mean.

As the school year inched along and we moved through units and assignments, Alex remained stoic, unbothered, and alone. Every day she would walk in and take her seat without talking to a single one of her peers, or completing a single warm up or assignment. Daily, I would try to build with her. I would hunch over her desk or ask her to step into the hallway or I would write her notes. Every day was another failure. In more ways than one, Alex reminded me of myself. Our long hair, Cortez's, gold hoops, sharply winged eyeliner, and seething tones were mirrors of one another. In truth, she could have been my little sister, but instead, as a teacher she was the person holding up the mirror reminding me that I was missing the mark, that I still wasn't reaching the students I wanted to be, and laughably, that my attitude could not just be matched but exceeded.

We spent months at this impasse, assignment after assignment, side-eye after side-eye. To be precise, we spent almost 6 months doing this dance. In her words, I was "annoying" and

she never hesitated to let me know that—sometimes with her words, but more often than not with the other languages we spoke: the hair flip or eye roll. I spent these months racking my mind trying to figure out what the disconnect was between us and what I could do to engage Alex. I oscillated between frustration and a form of arrogance, I mean *look at how much other students love me and this class* I would think to myself on the days I could not take one more failure, one more heartbreak. Now, I reflect back on this moment with a different type of curiosity, one allowed by time and distance. The question I keep returning to was whether in that moment I was more worried about Alex's well-being, or if I was worried about her ability to perform schooling? It is a question I can not answer completely in hindsight, but that it comes to me at all indicates a shift in my thinking around what it is that matters most-- the well-being of our children. In 2013 though, I would have taken any traction though: a hello, a warm-up, a check-in, an essay; it all felt equally rigorous and ambitious. My hope was that wherever Alex chose to begin, that one would lead to the other, especially given the type of assignments we were working through in class.

While every assignment done in the class requires some level of reflection and analysis on how the frameworks being studied can be seen in our everyday lives and communities, each year of our program had what teachers might refer to as a "signature assignment." As freshmen, this assignment was an "absolutely true diary" of themselves, but this year the assignment that was going to close out the school year was a personal legend based on the text *The Alchemist* by Paolo Coehlo. The text is about a young shepherd named Santiago who journeys the world in search of treasure. Along the way he meets an alchemist—a person who is known for creating and transforming things through magic—who teaches Santiago about the soul of the world, and about one's personal legend, one's destiny. This text was selected because the notion of personal

legend is inherently tied to the concept of hope. Given all of the research on hope (Duncan-Andrade, 2009), the premise of the unit was that students would see the value of hope, consider what they hoped and envisioned for themselves and their communities, and then consider what type of practices they would need to engage in the day-to-day in order to sustain that hope. Together, these questions would help them to form what Paulo Coehlo referred to as a "personal legend." The text was paired with poems, such as Tupac Shakur's "The Rose That Grew From Concrete," multimedia interview clips from musicians, athletes, and others whose personal legends they respected, and whose practices they were curious about, and excerpts from texts such as the Tao Te Ching. The assignment was as follows:

WRITING OUR OWN PERSONAL LEGENDS

In the text, when Santiago asks the alchemist what a personal legend is, he replies by saying: *"It's what you have always wanted to accomplish. Everyone, when they are young, knows what their Personal Legend is. At that point in their lives, everything is clear and everything is possible. They are not afraid to dream, and to yearn for everything they would like to see happen to them in their lives. But, as time passes, a mysterious force begins to convince them that it will be impossible for them to realize their Personal Legend" (Coehlo, 1988, p. 23)*

Write a narrative in which you do the following:

1. Analyze a moment or a series of moments that have impacted who you are and that have led you to your personal legend.
2. Share your personal legend, and what obstacles (i.e., oppression) stand in the way of you achieving it. Explain why this is your personal legend, and how it is connected to the "soul of the world"/ your community.
3. A set of 5 principles (may be inspired by the texts we studied) that are going to guide you on your quest towards your personal legend, including why you chose them and how you think they are going to help you.

Figure 2. Writing Our Own Personal Legends Writing Prompt.

In introducing this assignment, I spoke again about the power of writing, of naming our truths, of giving words to the things that have harmed us and the things we dream of. I shared an assignment I had written in college where I talked about being jumped in high school and how

that changed my relationship to schooling, made me hate schools, and ironically ultimately led to my decision to be a teacher--what I believed to be my personal legend. The first day of writing, Alex sat at her desk and did nothing. Again, I tried to talk to her, knelt at the helm of her desk and tried to engage, tried to convince her to see writing as important but was responded to with indifference. Finally, after two days, I offered that she could write and she could just show me the assignment, but I wouldn't read it. The next day I saw her begin to scribble on a piece of paper.

For the two writing weeks that followed, Alex scribbled furiously, still refusing to engage with me or with the class. At the end of the assignment students were expected to share their narrative and personal legends out loud with the rest of the class. Alex refused, but listened attentively as students shared intimate stories about their lives ranging from things they'd witnessed on the street, to delicate family matters. They each ended by sharing how they were going to alchemize these struggles in pursuit of their personal legends, and what kind of actions and beliefs that alchemy would require. At the end of the presentations, Alex shared her personal legend narrative with me. The following are excerpts from the five-page paper she turned in:

> My dad and mom fell off, he always told me he wouldn't leave no matter what, until one night after a week of arguing with my mom he got up and left. My heart literally fell into pieces, my dad was my everything and he just left as if I was nothing. After this, my mom started doing drugs. My dad would give her 400 dollars every week and she would blow it all on drugs. I remember going to sleep hungry every night, with different men in and out of my house. One night after coming home my mom was off her shit, and didn't notice our house was being watched. The next night our house was blazing in flames. My mom owed some money and well . . . you know how that goes . . .
>
> I was always offered alcohol or weed and by the time I was in 6th grade I was smoking a blunt outside with the homies. I had a diary and I would write about how I wanted to get "jumped in." I was stupid and very young I would always be posted up on the block with people much older than me. I was witnessing my homies get shot, my homies getting drunk and seeing how drugs had changed them, seeing myself and how I started to fuck

> up my life. I was out of control drinking, smoking, talking to people older than me by far. I thought to myself that this was the life I wanted, and I could have it because my dad wasn't there and my mom was a druggie. I was satisfied with my life, getting in trouble at school, fights, getting caught with weed all the time . . .
>
> Things remained this way up until now, I am 16 years old. My mom has changed some good and some bad, but we manage to get by. As for my dad, he's still in and out but I try to have a good relationship with him. I still struggle with my attendance. I'm going into my junior year and what started to change my life was going to high school. So far I've been to three high schools. My freshman year I was outgrowing the wanting to be a gang banger and was realizing that wasn't the life I wanted to pursue. I barely passed my classes with D's and F's. My dad then made me go to this academy, a very small charter school. I didn't like it much at first because I was a big outcast;they were into gangs and stuff, And and I was just trying to stay from all of that so I didn't have many friends and just focused on school. I spent some of my sophomore year there, and I'm finishing it here . . .
>
> I feel that my personal legend is to help people and make an impact on their life that will help them for the rest of their lives. To achieve my personal legend I must know my philosophy, my philosophy is what will guide me through my life to reach my purpose. Because of institutional oppression I feel that people of color are mistreated and exploited . . .
>
> I used to be the kid who was always messing up and always high or something, my life wasn't going in the right direction and I thought my life would never change. However now I am working hard in school with this essay, and I have a job. I also stopped smoking and going out with friends and I'm doing a lot better. I can honestly say I see college in my future.

This literacy artifact and the practice of writing marks a pivotal shift in Alex's trajectory both in literacy, and in love. She describes this as the first essay she ever completed, and the first time she was ever asked to think critically and reflectively. In her words "I had to take the bandaid and the blindfold off." What she found when she did was a festering wound, a profound trauma and what she referred to as a lack of love. When analyzing this, she shares:

> I felt that I abused myself. I was living recklessly. I didn't care for myself. I didn't love myself as I should have. I was so smart, I've always been smart. I feel like I should have loved myself way more than how I was treating myself.

Largely attributed to the lack of love she felt like she was receiving at home, she notes that feeling unloved by others made her question the importance of loving herself. In a platicá where

she reflects on this time period, she compares by saying that nowadays as a 22-year-old, “my whole perception of myself has changed. I accept myself a lot more . . . and that’s because, like I feel loved and I love myself a lot more. And I’m not saying that I need other people to love me to love myself, but actually sometimes you do.” Dr. Bruce Perry, a renowned expert in child trauma would agree, arguing that “you cannot love yourself unless you have been loved and are loved. The capacity to love cannot be built in isolation.” He explains that this is increasingly difficult and important for young people who have experienced the type of trauma Alex has. Perry (2007) shares:

> The most traumatic aspects of all disasters involve the shattering of human connections. And this is especially true for children. Being harmed by the people who are supposed to love you, being abandoned by them, being robbed of the one-on-one relationships that allow you to feel safe and valued and to become humane—these are profoundly destructive experiences. Because humans are inescapably social beings, the worst catastrophes that can befall us inevitably involve relational loss. As a result, recovery from trauma and neglect is also all about relationships—rebuilding trust, regaining confidence, returning to a sense of security and reconnecting to love. (p. 231-232)

This belief that people were not loving, grounded in her 16 years of living, also made it hard for Alex to think or care about others. On one hand, she was jealous of those she felt had the love she so deeply desired, and on the other hand she had no desire to think of others at all, not her peers, and definitely not her community. Though she wrote about institutional oppression and a desire to help others, Alex was still trying to imagine a life for herself that was different. Others could wait their turn. This paradoxical engagement to love is similar to what hooks (2001) describes when talking about the yearning for love that often comes out of households where parents are caring, but perhaps not loving. To date this analysis is complicated by Alex who in one moment will say she felt unloved, and in the other, say that her parents loved her and that they were doing the best they could. This tension highlighted by Alex illustrates the urgency for creating a definition, a paradigm, a practice for love—not as a way of

indicting her parents, or our own, but as a way to yield reflexivity and to give name and analysis to our complicated and messy experiences.

As a teacher, what resonated most with me from Alex's writing was the pronounced desire for connection that strung her words and memories together. Whereas the assignment asked for a moment, Alex used the essay similarly to an autobiography, sharing from her childhood until the present moment. At the core of these stories, Alex was longing for relationships to others and yet, was rightfully terrified of it. This is evident particularly in the way her memories are situated in relationship to people—her mom, her dad, homies on the block, her classmates, her community. As a literacy teacher, I was also acutely aware of the language that she chose to operationalize in her observations and narration. She engaged what is regarded as "academic" language in the same sentences with which she used slang and curse words. I was reminded again of the importance of letting young people choose the language to tell *their* own stories. Embedded in my study of her language, was the use of "institutional oppression" in her paper—a shining example that even if she hadn't been outwardly engaging, that she was listening and soaking in and making sense of the things we were learning together. This literacy artifact held up the mirror for me, showing me how I was operating from my ego, and not from what I feel and know is best. I turned instead to the years of research I had done on trauma and its impacts, reminded again that Alex's behaviors were a defense mechanism, a way of protecting herself from getting hurt *again*. This dramatically shifted how I engaged with her and sought to build a relationship. Rather than continuing to pressure her, or to be impatient with her, I opted instead to let time chip away at that armor she had accumulated after so many disappointments, hoping that in that time we as a class would prove that we were not there to

harm her, and that eventually we might be able to provide the type of relationships that she deeply desired, and that were integral to her individual and our collective healing.

As we finished the personal legend unit and the school year rapidly came to an end, we engaged in one of our end of the marking period/semester/year rituals of circling up and sharing our apologies, appreciations, and affirmations for ourselves and for each other. This practice was in part informed by restorative justice practices and organizations and served as a time for reflection, accountability, and continued community building. It was a way of celebrating our growth and each other, and a ritual for grieving the end of something else, or the things we wished we had done differently. According to Weller (2012):

> . . . ritual is any gesture done with emotion and intention by an individual or a group that attempts to connect the individual or the community with transpersonal energies for the purposes of healing and transformation . . . . Ritual is a form of direct knowing, something indigenous to the psyche. It has evolved with us, taking knowing into the bone, into our very marrow. I call ritual an embodied process. (p. 76)

This ritual of ours, carried through the marking periods and semesters and years was a part of our healing, our transforming, our knowing. More than a ritual of celebration or grief, it was a ritual about love, about embodying and embalming our words with love. To stand in front of a group of people and *see* them in the way Brené Brown (2012) calls for, and to let them see you, is an important part of practicing love, of ritualizing it. But to stand there and see yourself, all your jagged edges and the places flowers have begun to sprout, to name all the places you still need to tend to the soil—that is more than self-reflection, more than accountability, more than apology: it is how you learn to say I love you to yourself.

Each circle was different, sometimes more marked with affirmations than apologies and other times vice-versa—the circle would fill with apologies for being late, or for letting their peers down in a group. This year, we had lost someone in the community and the circle was

filled with affirmations of life, with profound gratitude for each other's face and breath, even if it did fog up and stink up our windowless room. Alex, who was slowly coming out of her shell, contributed by appreciating her peers for letting her into the space and apologizing if she came off "like an asshole." Her peers snickered, some affirming her asshole-ness with a "mmm hmmm," but one student Jeremy appreciated her for her vulnerability, acknowledging that it must be hard to come into a place as the new girl, particularly a space like this where everybody else seemed so close. Alex accepted his appreciation, nodding slowly in affirmation—*yes, this was hard.*

The beginning of Junior year Alex's personality was almost unrecognizable as she eagerly greeted the peers she'd missed over the summer. In Junior year, I'd also invited in a part-time co-teacher, a professor from the University of San Francisco—Dr. Patrick Camangian. Much of his work focuses on the value of autoethnography (2010) and having taught a similar unit before, I thought it would be an invaluable assignment for students as we ventured through our third year together, and so we decided to teach it to begin the year (August 2014)—a way of setting the tone for the type of personal, political, analytical work we were going to be doing this school year.

The anchor text and model for this unit was Assata Shakur's autobiography, which we paired with excerpts from Gloria Anzaldúa's *Borderlands* and others. These texts provided the theoretical frames, analysis, and the narrative skills students were expected to illustrate in the assignment, and were specifically chosen to center the unique experiences and voices of Women of Color, particularly as their experiences embodied Kimberlé Crenshaw's conceptualization of intersectionality. While sharing narrative has the potential to profoundly heal as illustrated through the therapeutic practice of narrative therapy, this assignment and corresponding texts

were grounded in the ideology that there is also power in meaning-making, in being able to analyze the interweb of structures that give birth to particular moments, and that impact how we experience them as racialized, gendered, sexualized, beings. This type of assignment is predicated on the idea that analyzing our experiences through these lenses alleviates some of the shame that is endemic to trauma and creates space for healing, hope, and possibility. Ultimately, if we are able to begin seeing and naming the conditions that have shaped and/or harmed us, then we can begin to strategize solutions for transforming them. The following is the assignment description:

Autoethnography: Narratives communicate our values, attitudes, and expectations as well as help us make sense of our own lives. Similarly, autoethnographies serve as cultural narratives that build toward critical social analysis. They help us critically understand our own lived experience and to come to a critical understanding of society as a whole. In contrast to autobiographies, which focus on the unique qualities of individuals, autoethnographies require that you tell your individual story as a member of a larger social group. To qualify as an autoethnography, you must write an essay that:

1) Examines the alienating effects of society;

2) Explores connections within and across cultures; and

3) Strategizes for hope and social change. (Carey-Webb, 2001)

For your autoethnography, share a story of a social group you identify with—Who are you? How does your identity connect you to a larger social group? What experience(s) have you had that made you this person? How is all of this racialized, class-based, and gendered?

Figure 3. Autoethnography Writing Prompt.

For this assignment, Alex began writing on her own, first by hand, and then into one of the few functioning Chromebooks we've managed to secure for the class. Everyday there is the bustle of familiarity in this hot yellow classroom. There is the buzz of a deadline in the energy of the room as some students talk with their peers flushing out ideas, and others type furiously with their headphones on--their music emanating beyond the plastic in and over their ears. The room is a conglomeration of beats and voices and noises--and it is beautiful. Alex works alone

and as she writes, she is steadfast and focused, rummaging frequently through Assata's autobiography, flipping between post-its and tracing the passages she's highlighted. Here are excerpts from the autoethnography she submitted:

> While growing up in an underdeveloped community, you never really know how to identify yourself, due to historical amnesia and the lack of resources in our education system we are mentally blind on our histories and our cultures. We experience oppression from the second we breathe our first breath of air . . .
>
> And it hasn't, however, we have the power to educate and aware our people in my heart I feel as if it is my responsibility to educate my people. And with the help of my peers, Sharim, and a very inspiring woman Assata Shakur I feel that I will be able to live up to my responsibilities. However I didn't always think this way, it took an unbearable struggle to push and motivate myself and give myself a better life.

She continues her paper by detailing the "struggles" she witnessed in her home, first through the gender norms that women were expected to maintain the house via cleaning and cooking. Second, through the abuse she began to witness her mom experience at the hands of her father. And last, and for her most gut wrenching, was the day her father left them and the cataclysmic impacts that had on her family and on her life. She ends the paper by saying:

> Attending this high school has made my vision more clear, clear as who are my oppressors, how I can make a change, and also how I can cope with my feelings. With the help of my peers and Ms. Sharim I have been able to turn my life around for the better and taught me how to face my oppressors.

This paper highlights an important shift in Alex's literacy trajectory, in which she has shifted from being able to narrate a story to being able to do so with analysis that is grounded in theoretical constructs and texts we've been studying together. For example, while in her first year with us she was able to use the language of oppression, she now cites Assata Shakur's autobiography—our anchor text—alongside other constructs and vocabulary such as: historical amnesia, dehumanization, lack of resources. While these are significant leaps that illustrate her burgeoning abilities to analyze oppression in her community as a whole, she neglects to use the same language to narrate and analyze her own experiences. For example, she is able to notice

the impact of the lack of resources in the educational system, but does not connect that to her own schooling experiences. When describing her own family, she narrates the pain poignantly and yet doesn't point to oppression, patriarchy, sexism as the systems that gave birth to those experiences, and that pain. It is as if she does an autobiography and a community ethnography to illustrate her ability to use the rhetorical tools of analysis, but still I am aware that between the words and stories, Alex is making clear that there remains a disconnect between her, her experiences, and her community. This brings to the mind the story of Coyolxauhqui, the moon whose brother butchered her into pieces, and who Anzaldúa (1987) shares:

> [Coyolxauhqui] is my symbol for the necessary process of dismemberment and fragmentation, of seeing that self or the situations you're embroiled in differently. It is also my symbol for reconstruction and reframing, one that allows for putting the pieces together in a new way.

Figure 4. Coyolxauhqui.

Alex described the day that her dad left as "shattering" her world. She, like Coyolxauhqui, and like many of us, is working to rebuild, reconstruct, and re-imagine *herself* and her relationship to the world she loves, but who has hurt her.

Notable in this essay are also the ways in which this essay mirrors the poetic techniques utilized by other authors we've studied, the way she credits her peers in her evolving consciousness, and the way her agency has evolved beyond just thinking about college to thinking about participating in changing a world that her oppressors have caged her in. While the aforementioned analysis of this might suggest it is merely semantics, perhaps even what she thinks I as her teacher want to hear—it is significantly more clear, fleshed out, and purposeful than the year prior. Last, as a person who focuses intently on healing, I would be remiss if I did

not explicitly draw attention to one of Alex's learnings that now "I can cope with my feelings." While these shifts might appear miniscule and still require sharpening and precision, they are a significant departure from the self-hate, self-harm, and self-isolation Alex had shared just a year prior, and share the incorporation of healing praxis language we use in our classroom being incorporated into her personal lexicon and understanding of self.

Perhaps the greatest departure from that previous production of a literacy artifact is that Alex not only writes her paper, but for the first time, presents it to the class. Similarly to the last two years, each student shares a practiced version of what they have written, including both their narrative and an analysis. This year, the group has been together 3 years and it is obvious in the new intimacy of the stories shared. Despite the hours, days, and years we have spent together, this year their narratives are different. Some tell stories of their childhoods they were too afraid to unravel, that maybe they'd forgotten, or that perhaps they didn't understand yet. Others shared new stories, things that had happened in the last year since we had shared with one another--moments they had been holding on to, afraid to utter out loud. These stories were a sobering reminder to all of us that healing is not linear, is not a destination, and that even as we are healing, we can be wounded again.

In the middle of all this sharing, this narrating, this grieving and healing and analyzing, Alex sits on a stool at the front of the room. It is her first time to our "stage" and sits back hunched in a black and white t-shirt, a ponytail, and some slides as she fidgets with her toes and paper. Then she giggles in a way that illustrates not just her nervousness, but in a pitch and fervor that reminds me again that despite her attempts at seeming hardened, she is still just a child. It takes her a while to begin, but once she starts, Alex is magnetic. She is not one paragraph into her narrative before her fingers still and her voice steadies. She speaks with the

kind of confidence that legacies of survival demand of you. Even as tears begin to hang off the long of her lashes, she is steady, passionate: a warrior. When she is done, she smiles a victorious smile and again hides behind her paper, almost as if her words had been her armor, and now she must hide again.

As is our practice, after each presentation students share affirmations, connections, and questions—here, too, we see students growing relationships to one another. One student, Kiki, says to Alex "and I give you my respect because I couldn't do what you just did right there and I done been there done that and I feel like all my life, I'm 16, but I feel like all my life I've never been able to relate to anyone the way I just related to you right now." As she is talking, she pauses often to wipe the tears and snot that have begun to pool around the crevices of her face. As Alex describes it, while she had been building and learning with her peers throughout the last school year, Kiki's comment is the first time she felt publicly seen and validated in our space. It was her first moment feeling a deep sense of connection. This moment was confirmed for when during our class reflection on the unit, another student J shared:

> it took for a lot of my peers to go up there so they could set the example like oh my father is not in my life as well so like for them to have that courage to get up there and tell their story I can feel comfortable like oh i'm not the only in this situation. We learned to relate to each other. We all share a common . . . situation. I really appreciate my peers for going up there and sharing their stories cuz now my father is not in my life, some of your fathers are not in your lives and I can feel more comfortable in how I can tell my story.

At the end of the group reflection Alex shares with the group that before this she didn't know how "deep they got into their stories" and now that she knows, she can work not just on her own coping but help them to cope too.

We decided to bookend the school year with another unit that would gauge students' skill sets in being able to use analytical tools to make sense of their own life and experiences. This time however we decided to do so via a different literary genre: poetry. This poetry unit,

described below, was shared in a book titled *Half an Inch From the Edge: Teacher Education, Teaching, and Student Learning for Social Transformation* which Cam and I wrote alongside other faculty from the University of San Francisco, where I had begun to teach courses after school. The following lesson plans and rationale for the unit are excerpts from that chapter.

ASSIGNMENTS FOR POETRY UNIT:

A. A timed ideological critique on the film "Slam" (Levine, 1999)

B. A literary analysis of two poems

a. Organization:

i. Introduction (Discuss the power and significant of language by drawing on the two foundational texts for the unit)
ii. Analysis of poem #1
iii. Analysis of poem #2
iv. Similarities and differences in poetic theme and techniques
v. Similarities and differences in poetic theme and techniques
vi. Conclusion and implications

C. Two poems

D. A 5-7 minute performance of their poem, with Q&A

Figure 5. Assignments for Poetry Unit.

In order to do this, the unit was organized around two foundational texts to be analyzed by the entire class: Paulo Freire and Macedo's (1987) "Reading the Word and the World" and Marc Levin's (1998) film "Slam." By beginning with Freire and Macedo, students were introduced to a theoretical framing of language and its relationship to power. Embedded in this ideological understanding is the argument that the ability to read and speak on one's material conditions is in fact a form of literacy often disregarded by school settings. By reading this concurrently to analyzing Marc Levin's (1998) film "Slam," students were able to see and analyze Freire and Macedo's argument through the ways in which the protagonist Raymond Joshua (poet/actor Saul Williams) uses poetry and rap to make sense of his experiences living in

Southeast Washington, D.C., and then as someone imprisoned under felony charges for being caught with a minimal amount of marijuana. Lauren Bell (actress/poet Sonja Sohn) who becomes Joshua's romantic interest, encourages him to use his performative and literary talents as a way of coping with, navigating, and healing the harm of being unjustly imprisoned in inhumane conditions.

The major question to be analyzed throughout the film was: how do the main characters use their words to make sense of and change their world? In analyzing the film through an analysis of Freire and Macedo's (1987) conceptualization of literacy, students were able to see the significance of literature, and poetry specifically, as well as begin to identify and analyze literary techniques and purposes. By watching both Ray Joshua and Lauren Bell write and perform their poetry as a way of releasing indignation, critiquing systems, and healing self, students were able to begin understanding their emerging role as poets and performers. To continue growing their literary analysis skills, students were strategically grouped to begin working on their second assignment which entailed an analysis of two poems. The poems covered varying topics ranging from loss of land, struggle with identity, toxic masculinity, exploitation of women, to queer love. Some of the poems students were able to choose included the following:

- "In Response to a Brother's Question About What He Should Do When His Best Friend Beats His Woman" by Asha Bandele
- "Self-Guamination" by Ryan Leon Guerrero and Willa Wai
- "To Live in the Borderlands Means you" by Gloria Anzaldúa
- "Your Revolution" by Sarah Jones
- "10 Things I Want to Say to a Black Woman" by Joshua Bennett
- "Immigrants in Our Own Land" by Jimmy Santiago Baca
- "Kaulana Na Pua" by Jamaica Osorio
- "Ego Trippin" by Nikki Giovanni
- "Motives and Thoughts" by Lauryn Hill
- "Loose Woman" by Sandra Cisneros
- "Duality Duel" by Daniel Beats

- "For Women who are Difficult to Love" by Warsan Shire
- "Dear Ex Lover" by Jasmine Mans

Through this analytical writing process, students were able to explore and understand the function of poetry as a tool for processing thoughts, emotions, and experiences. These poems also served as exemplars for students to begin thinking about what structures and techniques they wanted to use when they wrote their own poems towards the end of the unit. In her essay, Alex analyzed poems by Jimmy Santiago Baca and Jamaica Osorio, grounding her analysis in a quote from bell hooks, which argued "Our words are not without meaning. They are an action—a resistance. Language is also a place of struggle." While Alex's essay is strong and articulated a clear understanding of the power and significance of language and the linguistic choices we make, the literary artifact I am choosing to focus on is the writing and performance of her poem, documented through audio and video footage. Ultimately, Alex chose a different format and organization for her poem than those she'd analyzed for her essay, and borrowed from the performance of Lauren Bell in the film "Slam." She submitted the following poem:

"If I Were to Fall"

If I were half an inch from the edge i wouldn't be afraid to fall
to let go myself let my body be free.
Free like my brother wishes to be
but "chooses" to be locked behind bars,
the bars that apparently define who we are
what they think of us to be

If i were I were half an inch from the edge I wouldn't be afraid to fall
to let myself go let my body be free
free like i want my people to be but instead we are dehumanized
Traumatized by the fear they bring to us
oppressed because that's all we were ever taught to be
But one day my people will be free

They say segregation is a thing of the past but is it really?
Cause all I see in my community are the poor ass Black and Mexicans trying to make ends meet tired from the necks straight down to the feet

see if i were half an inch from the edge i wouldn't be afraid to fall
to let myself go and let my body be free.

I look back on myself and every inch of me depending on education
like my surroundings depending on their crackpipe
thinking that magically it'll open the secret door to a better life
education is my crack you can call me a muthafuckin addict.

And the secret door will soon be open and let my imagination run free,
free like what was once promised to us when our people were colonized,
free like those the color of my paper,
free like i'm supposed to be
but what is free?
One day my people will be free

In this poem, Alex demonstrates a clear understanding of systemic power relations, making clear reference to institutional oppression and interpersonal oppression through the line "Free like my brother wishes to be/ but "chooses" to be locked behind bars/ the bars that apparently define who we are/ what they think of us to be." In making the decision to put quotes around the word chooses, Alex reflects a clear understanding of systemic incarceration and the racist ideologies that inform the mass incarceration of People of Color, vis à vis, "what they think of us to be." She also reflects a clear mastery of rigorous vocabulary taught in the previous years, seen in her use of "dehumanization" and "oppression." Her understanding of oppression is then seen in her incorporation of "Blacks and Mexicans." Despite being Latina, she understands the similar experiences People of Color in her community are subjected to as a result of systematic oppression. The power of this poem and of this event, however significant, is lost if our focus and analyses remain solely on the dimensions of paper and thus, we move to the video footage of the presentations.

The presentations of the poems began with moving to another room, a classroom that had long been abandoned due to low enrollment—a phenomenon resulting from gentrification and the charter school movement—and that would provide us the opportunity to create a "stage" of

sorts. Students scattered into the room slowly, using the new classroom as an excuse for tardiness, as children often do, and finding their seat in a circle that was slowly being formed around the stage. After reviewing the importance of poetry, and of speaking with purpose and power, we began the performances. We planned for three days of performances, with each student having 8 minutes assigned to them in which they would have the opportunity to share a poem and then use the rest of the time to receive affirmations or take questions from their peers.

On the second day of poems, there was a student who began her poem and burst into tears, and felt herself unable to continue. When she performed her poem the next day she shared that it wasn't the crying that had forced her to sit down, but rather the crying so hard that the words wouldn't come out in the way she wanted. As a result of her decision to not perform that poem during her scheduled time, we had an open slot at the end of the second day. While we could have easily used the time to do whole class reflection, Alex volunteered to perform her poem a whole day early. As I announced to the class that we had a volunteer, the class began to clap, to "give it up" for Alex as she approached the stage. Alex slides to the front of her room, holding her papers and begins by saying:

> uhm so I wasn't really prepared to perform today so I might be a little off but I just feel like all of my classmates just gave me inspiration to just want to go already and the reason I wrote this poem is because I feel like not only us, but like I see oppression in my family and in my community. It's called If I were to Fall.

As Alex begins her poem, she instantly becomes alive. Despite not having prepared, she is mesmerizing and within the first stanza she has already let go of her grip on the paper and is using one of her hands emphatically, punctuating her words:

> If i were I were half an inch from the edge I wouldn't be afraid to fall/ to let myself go let my body be free/ free like i want my people to be but instead we are dehumanized/ Traumatized by the fear they bring to us/oppressed because that's all we were ever taught to be/But one day my people will be free

Alex is flowing quickly through her poem, and though the class is actively listening, when she gets to the end of her fourth stanza and says "education is my crack you can call me a muthafuckin addict," the class begins to clap and cheer, yelling "oooooh okaaay." As a reminder, when Alex first joined our class, she had less than a 1.0 Grade Point Average (GPA) and often articulated that she found school both unnecessary and at odds with her experiences. She would often refuse to participate in assignments. It is for this reason (alongside the power of her simile and of her performance) that the class is cheering so loudly. This line demarcated a clear transformation in Alex's thinking about both herself, and her schooling. Alex smiles sheepishly at the camera, flipping her hair, and continues her poem, stumbling but never stopping until she reaches the end. Again, the class claps.

The first comment comes from a young Black woman, Ellie, who begins by saying that she didn't expect anything like that, that it was "touching" because oftentimes "Mexican and Black people don't come up and say things about *each other.*" She ends by highlighting the metaphor between crack and school, and again the class erupts in "riiiight." Up until this point, me and my co-teacher have been facilitating questions, but after this comment Alex demonstrates a new level of confidence and takes the lead, asking her peers if they have any questions for her. Two other students comment on her performance skills, and then another student Selena pipes in, saying "I hella hella loved it. That's the true definition of resistance and owning your space." Alex says she appreciates it, and again, the class claps. Outside of affirmation and appreciation, both of which are important, these comments from the class highlight a unique attunement to Alex's words and message. Moreover, they reflect an understanding of the criticality and curricula of the course through their attention to issues of racial solidarity and framing of what it means to resist, to "own space."

The last question she is asked is what inspired her to write this poem. She takes two minutes and fourteen seconds to respond, a monologue of sorts, and shares:

> Uhm mainly just like all of you guys really, you guys, and my family. Like how I talked about my brother. It's just because not a lot of us have seen like what it feels like to not be under oppression (wipes tear). *Sniffle* sorry. Like how my brother is in jail, I haven't seen him since I was like 15 and I think just like uhm when he gets out I really want him to see like, like there's something...like yea he thinks it's fucked up to be in jail but I want him to see the real reason why I don't want him to be there. Because like, most of the time it's not anybody's fault why they're in jail and in my brothers case it wasn't. And he should know the real thing, not just being locked up for 5 years, like yeah that is fucked up, and that he doesn't like the police, i want him not to like the police for a reason. It's not just the fact that they can strip your dignity away and they can strip your freedom away whenever they want to but there's like more to it, ya know?
>
> And so I feel like, and I still see people in my community like the homeless are turning into our generation you guys. I see a 15 year old when I go to work asking for money on the street. And I feel like, you guys, you guys need to educate everyone else about oppression because not everybody is...I don't want our generation to be the next generation of the homeless, of the crack addicts that we see every day on the streets. And I know you guys can change it, cuz you're all hella smart and we know about this, we know about oppression, and we know how it feels to be dehumanized. You guys need to just...I mean you don't *need* to but you guys should just educate others in the community because they need [y]our help.

By studying these literacy artifacts, both her writing and her speaking, there is a clear window to Alex's healing, consciousness, and love. Alex illustrates a powerful command of literary skills through her written poetry, wielding her words like weapons—with precision. In doing so, she reflects a clear understanding of the literary standards. We see further in her performance of the poem which serves as a window to her growth: where once Alex was withdrawn, she now volunteers, and even facilitates her own presentation. She accepts affirmations graciously, embodying-humility in the way she caves and contours her body as she responds to her peers. However, the magnitude of Alex's growth is embedded in her response to that question: what inspired you?

As Alex responds to the question, she begins similarly to how she began the entirety of the presentation: by naming her peers as her inspiration. Alex's consistent reminder of the impact her peers have had on her is reminiscent of what leading experts have shared: that healing cannot happen in isolation--relationships are the most profound vehicle for healing (Duncan-Andrade, 2009; Ginwright, 2015; Perry, 2007; Van der Kolk, 2014). As she proceeds, Alex makes a clear connection between the content and vocabulary of the course and the experiences of her own family, namely her brother. This serves as a moment of great contrast to the presentation of her autoethnography the year prior, where she was able to talk about her family and her experiences without making explicit connection to social structures. Here however, she is clear in her analysis, indicting the prison industrial complex as a clear reason for her brother's incarceration and subsequently her grief. Her rage and grief are evident in the way she uses her words and body, exercising curse words as a literary device, and letting tears roll when it is necessary. What is most profound for me about her tears is that despite how uncomfortable it is to cry in front of a group of people, she doesn't hide or stop, she just cries as if it is normal--reflecting that in our class, it *is*. In doing so, she highlights the strength of what Weller (2012) describes as our "container," a space that is "strong enough to receive our most painful and sorrowful revelations" (p. 13).

Alex continues talking, showing a fearlessness in taking and "owning" space and in doing so transitions from her analysis of the problem in her family to the community, talking about the suffering that she bears witness to daily. In shifting to a focus on the community she also moves from despair to hope, affirming the brilliance in the room and the responsibility that it places on all of them. She makes the connection from content to classroom to community seamlessly saying, "We know about this, we know about oppression, and we know how it feels to be

dehumanized . . . you guys should just educate others in the community because they need [y]our help." In the last thirty seconds of the video she bridges me-we-us quickly and profusely—she understands that we are interconnected, that to love each other is great responsibility, and requires action.

While this moment was profound for me as an educator, so much so that it became a chapter in our aforementioned book *Half an Inch from the Edge,* the longitudinal significance of this moment was revealed as I asked Alex, now 22, when she felt most loved in our classroom and she replied by saying:

> There was one time . . . when we were presenting. Everyone was there, we were already months into the year, I think junior or senior year. There was a time when I shared a poem and I wasn't reciting, and then I went off the top of my head after. And it was so raw, what I was saying, just me. Me, my personality, myself, my story, speaking about my family, and everybody after—whether we were hecka cool or not came up to me and told me how good I did , like that I was fire. They gave me recognition . . . not just recognition but good feedback, like they saw *me*. I don't know but I always remember that day in class. Like we weren't the bestest of friends but there was [a girl] in class who came up to me and said good job, you were so good and that she connected to what I shared and at the end of the day I know damn well I care about and love her and despite the differences we've had, I know damn well she would say the same thing about me . . . . And that's when I knew, like **we got love**.

In this recollection of events Alex highlights two important understandings of love for us. The first is the importance of what Brené Brown (2012) refers to as being "seen," that part of love is being able to show up as your whole self. In another platicá Alex describes this as being able to show up to class "the good, the bad, the ugly, the angry, the sad" and not have to pretend to appease others, or to seem like a "good student." She offers that beyond just not pretending, when she did show up "bad, ugly, angry, sad" the people in our class would *notice*, that they would ask if she was okay, offer support, give space—that whatever she needed in that moment was met without judgement. She felt seen, safe, held—*loved.* Alex also offers a second gem in her above narration, when she shares the story of the girl who wasn't her "bestest of friends." In

sharing this interaction between two girls who didn't and don't like each other, she offers important insight for considering a practice of love, one that many people get stuck on, which is: you don't have to like someone to engage in a *practice* of love with them.

Given the significance of this moment for both me and Alex, in 2019 we decided to re-watch and analyze the video together. I was specifically interested in what it was about this particular moment that felt loving for her. As is predictable when watching old videos of yourself, Alex laughed and cringed. She made jokes and affirmed how cute she thought she was before settling down. Together, we analyze the poem and the comments that come afterwards, Alex lifting up similar ideas as I had--how confident she was, how her peers affirmed her, the power of "owning your space." But it is Alex who in our second time studying this piece asks me to stop 22 seconds into her monologue. "Look" she says, "watch *them.*" The "them" she is referring to are the four people in the camera's view—rather than film head on, we had been filming from the side of the classroom meaning that there were always students in the background of the presentation. Without knowing the language of the academy, Alex was asking us to engage in a form of landscape analysis within our literary analysis. Used by other education scholars who draw on the work of Kris Gutierrez, landscape analysis is a methodological tool that allows for the analysis of incremental interactions that can illuminate social phenomenon (Annamma, 2018; Johnson, 2019). Given my own ideological and epistemological commitments, I see this type of methodological approach not just as a study of landscape, but as an opportunity to study the shapes of people, spaces, and relationships. Somatics expert Stacie K. Haines (2019) refers to shape as:

> . . . one's current embodiment of beliefs, resilience and survival strategies, habits, and actions . . . . In a group this is the embodied and practiced culture, norms, and dynamics, especially those that you see when the group is under pressure . . . . Our embodiment, our

> shape, is developed in interaction with our experiences and environments . . . . Embodied practices are both individual and collective. (p. 20)

So together, we analyzed the four students as Alex spoke—3 young women and one young man, all of different racial and ethnic backgrounds: Black, Latina, Polynesian. In doing so, we studied the shape of Alex, of the students, of their interactions with one another, with consideration for how these shapes were both shaped by and shaping the classroom container. Our findings are illustrated in the graphic below, which tracks her words and movements with that of her peers.

Here are some of our findings: As Alex's voice begins to break 19 seconds into the video, the posture of the other students shifts slightly, but it is when Alex mentions her brother being in jail that Itzel's face contours. Seconds later, she moves her hand to her face and within six seconds she has lifted her other hand and burrowed her face into her palms. The student next to her, Emeliano glances at her and within a second has leaned over placing his head on her shoulder. The other two students seem almost unaware, with their hands partially covering their faces, they appear to be focusing intently on Alex and what she is saying. Then without so much as glancing towards Melissa, Nayeli turns in the other direction and grabs tissue from outside of the camera's sight. As she continues to listen attentively to Alex, she splits the tissue and hands half to Itzel and keeps half for herself. Immediately, they both begin to use the tissue to wipe tears from their eyes. Itzel spends the entirety of the time remaining using the tissue to wipe her steady stream of tears while Emiliano's head remains on her shoulder, with exception of the seconds he takes to readjust to her movements. Nayeli also continues to pat and wipe down her face. The student furthest to the left of the camera wipes a single tear as Alex begins to wrap up, and the video ends. This can also be seen in Figure 6, which illustrates Alex's words, Alex's movements, and student responses at the same time.

Figure 6. Landscape of Alex's poetic performance.

Despite having my own interpretations of what happened, and background knowledge of the students such as knowing that Itzel's father has been in jail for most her life, I ask Alex what she thinks, why she thinks this is important. She replies by saying "look at how they cry for me, how they cry when I cry, they're crying for me and with me." She continues and later notes and "look at how they support each other when they're crying." What Alex is noticing is what therapists would refer to as attunement. Weller (2015) describes attunement:

> . . . a particular quality of attention, wedded with affection, offered by someone we love and trust. This deep attention is what enables us to make painful experiences tolerable. We feel held and comforted, reassured and safe. (p. 6)

This moment is so significant in all of our time together that when interviewing Lay (Chapter Five), she also recalls this moment as one of the moments where love was evident in our classroom. Here is an excerpt from our platicá:

> *Lay*: "Remember one [poem] where the whole class just burst out crying . . . but like that's how I know we had a [loving] relationship because we ALL, you know, had the safe space to cry and you know . . . hug each other.
>
> *Me*: How does that connect to love?
>
> *Lay:* It connects to love because you don't know what people are going through at home--if they get hugs at home. You don't know what people going through so to have someone hug you in a class, in a school where you supposed to learn . . . . it just feels good, it makes you want to come to school. You're excited about learning. You know that there's somebody who cares for you . . . . We were all crying, we were all vulnerable [and] nobody judged us . . . we all was together and we didn't judge each other . . . . It's like we love them enough to feel the way they feel. We're telling them it's okay to cry, cuz ima cry for you.

The literary and landscape analysis of this moment allows us to see the shape of our classroom, the relationships, and the young people brave enough to engage in the story and truth telling that is in their bloodlines and DNA. The shape of the space is both created and held by a culture and norms of vulnerability, empathy, and *love*. This is evident in the way young people embody these values in their second to second interactions with one another, in the providing of tissue, the resting of a head, the knowledge that you are not alone, and that this container, this shape, this space can hold your grief, your pain, your joy. In this embodiment, I am drawn curiously to the presence of tears, and how often they came up for Alex in her analysis of this moment. This leads me to a question posed long ago by the poet Rumi: "is weeping speech?" and if so, how can we reconfigure the boundaries of "literacy" to hold space for embodiment—our shape—and our tears?

After the poetry unit, Alex finished her Junior year and moved through Senior year with the same commitment to self, to healing, and to love—though I would be remiss if I didn't acknowledge how a job and senioritis altered her attendance. Still, she completed every assignment and participated intensively as wrote personal statements, studied gender and sexuality, and conducted research projects. Inspired by her own experiences, Alex ended her high school career studying economic exploitation. The unit culminated with a community exposition where they would present their findings to family, friends, teachers, and community members. There were tacos and music, and after the presentations were over we ended with a private ceremony where we "graduated" students, and they publicly thanked their families and handed them a rose. Alex thanked her family who was unable to be present, and then summoned me to the front of the room, where she presented me with a rose. Most important though, is that she also thanked *herself* for all work to survive, and to heal. When we sat across a table several

months ago, both adults and both still wearing Cortez' and winged liner, I asked her what she thought helped her to get to this point. I end with her words:

> The materials we were reading and writing were things that hit home. like crap, this whole scenario is exactly what i'm going through. and it helped me to love myself—not only love but understand myself to where I was able to love myself . . . it opened my eyes to understanding that we suffer under oppression and to be able to say its ok to be Brown, its ok to be a Mexican woman . . . it helped me to understand who I am, who I came from, and no matter what i'm going through, it's not my fault, and I shouldn't lose myself. I should love myself.

***

I struggled with writing this portrait, primarily because I am acutely aware of the white gaze (Morrison, 1994) and of the way stories such as Alex's can be misinterpreted as a romanticization of trauma, or used to pathologize Students, Families, and Communities of Color. Neither of these is the goal, and it is my hope that people can both see the trauma that often gets ignored and invalidated in schools *and* see beyond the trauma, as Alex does—back to the systems and structures that created it, and forward to the healing and love that is possible. For me, her story is important because it powerfully illustrates the clear relationship between trauma, love, healing, and literacy. Her story gives flesh and face and name to researchers' claims that healing from trauma occurs in the container of loving relationships and that empathy is a cornerstone of love. In this portrait, we bear witness to how she used writing to alchemize her trauma and then used it towards developing a deep love and empathy for herself and her peers, and how in doing so, she changed the shape of a space. It is my profound desire that we do not take the privilege of reading her story lightly, that we honor the gift she has been courageous enough to share, and most importantly that we learn from it.

There are many lessons Alex offers us including the role that literacy *can* play in our healing, and in our developing of loving relationships—with ourselves, and our peers. As Alex

shared, the outcome of the literacy curriculum we design and the practices we ask young people to engage in—reading, writing, and speaking—should be a deep understanding of who they are and who they come from in a way that helps them alleviate some of the shame endemic to trauma, connects them to their own histories, and helps them to understand and love themselves and others. This requires a radical reimagining of the roles and function of literacy assignments, of what we are asking students to read, to write, to discuss, to imagine, to be. Only when we reimagine and reconstruct assignments with these commitments can we begin to answer some of the most important questions about our students: Do they know how loved they are? Do they love themselves? Do they love who they come from?

In this portrait, Alex also teaches us the power of trust, patience, and the importance of understanding love as a political choice and commitment. Alex serves as a reminder that despite our deep seeded psychological and physiological need for love, that trauma causes us to be weary and distrustful as a way to protect ourselves from further harm. As educators, this requires that we be in right relationship to student behaviors, able to empathize without entirely personalizing them. More than anything, Alex reminds me that the choice to love Black and Brown children is a political one, that it requires we be committed and unyielding and unrelenting, understanding that their healing and wellness is deeply interconnected to our own and that of their peers and communities. Alex began to be vulnerable, to write, to speak, to heal, to love, not (just) because of me, but because of her peers, because the classroom served as a loving container that she trusted to hold her, her grief, her dreams. Too often, educators are solely concerned with their individual relationships with students and not enough with the classroom cultures and rituals they are creating, or the relationships that are shaping between students. This individualistic teacher-as-hero trope is dangerous, and leads to burn-out, while

ignoring research that tells us that "the more healthy relationships a child has the more likely they are to recover and thrive" (Perry, 2007, p. 230). The impetus for this work on love, for building loving relationships is not because young people don't have access to them at home or in their communities, but because as teachers we have the privilege and the responsibility of armoring up our young people with *more* relationships, knowing that more love inoculates them against the harm perpetrated by a world that is built on their undoing.

CHAPTER FIVE: LAY

I met LayLay in August 2012. She was one of the first students I met that academic school year, rolling into my first period class and plopping herself on to one of the seats close to the front, next to her classmates from 8th grade. She had short straightened hair, mahogany skin, and a presence that made you forget she stood at 4 feet 9 inches. She was tough, but not hardened or mean, instead the kind of tough that came from her years of wrestling and an unyielding belief in her ability to do more pushups than any of the boys in the class. To her credit, every time she challenged them—she *did* win. Academically, she was engaged, and incredibly analytical, though district mandated scores would say that she both read and wrote below grade level. Still, she always volunteered to read aloud, had an opinion or analysis to share, and worked hard on *every* single assignment. Even now as I scour through data related to her 9th grade year, I both laugh and am impressed at how many times she emailed me in a single week to submit parts of her final assignments or to ask questions.

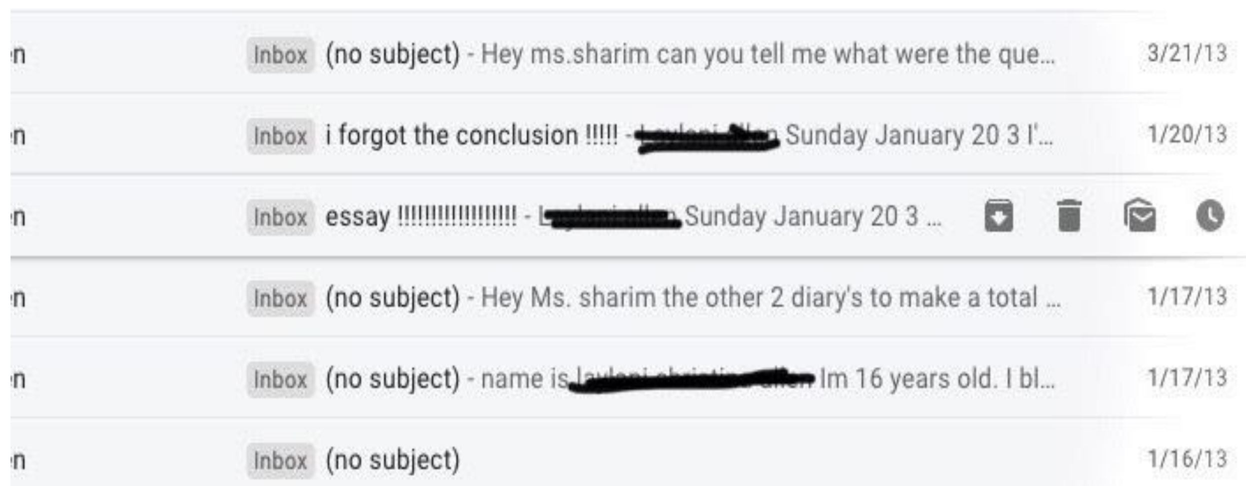


Figure 7. Email Correspondence with Lay.

As seen through our email correspondence, Laylay was actively engaged and participating in the culmination of the final unit of the first semester of her ninth-grade year which was grounded in the text *The Absolutely True Diary of a Part-Time Indian* by Sherman

Alexie. The novel falls under the genre of young adult, and tells a coming of age story of an Indian boy who lives on the reservation but decides to attend high school off of the reservation, and as a result of his decision has to deal with complex issues related to his identity. Cultural relevance notwithstanding, the novel was selected because it clearly illustrated the theoretical framework we were studying: The 3 Is of oppression—institutional, interpersonal, and internalized. Throughout the unit students were practicing the evidence-based analysis we had learned in the first unit of the school year and applying it to these complex concepts. In doing so, students were also making connections to their own community—*How is it that we see these different types of oppression in the community we live in?* We also learned about different ways that oppression manifests such as sexism, racism, classism, ableism, heterosexism, and homophobia to name a few. A critical component of this unit is thinking about what language is used in this oppression, i.e., What language is used to engage in sexism? Students then engage in a class activity around naming this language and it becomes our shared understanding that any language that reinforces oppression is not aligned with the practices of our classroom container. After completing our analysis of the text, students are tasked with creating two assignments, shared below.

The Absolutely True Diary of a Part Time Indian

FINAL ASSIGNMENTS

In an analytical essay answer the following two questions:

- How does the protagonist experience the **3 I's of oppression** (institutional, interpersonal, internalized) as a Native American teenager?
- What **literary devices** does the author employ to illustrate how the author experiences and overcomes oppression?

Create an absolutely true diary of you, which:

- Utilizes the literary devices from the novel to illustrate how you have experienced/witnessed **the 3 I's of oppression** (institutional, interpersonal, internalized)?
- diary should include 15entries and will be presented to class

Figure 8. Final assignment prompts for Absolutely True Diary.

Laylay's essay illustrated a clear understanding of the different types of oppression and her skill in collecting relevant evidence to support her argument. For example, she shares:

> Junior has experienced internalized oppression in several ways. For example on page 173 of Sherman Alexis's novel the absolutely true diary of a part time Indian junior says "well of course man we Indians have lost everything we lost out native land, we lost out languages, we lost our song and dances, we lost each other we only know how to lose and be lost." This is internalized oppression because The Indians are starting to believe that they are nothing because of white people and they are losing hope.

While not "perfect" by traditional English and literary standards, in this short excerpt, it is evident that Laylay has mastered the skills of (a) introducing evidence, (b) citing relevant evidence, and is (c) developing the skill of analyzing evidence. She also reflects an

understanding of internalized oppression and its causation. When interviewing Lay (now 23 years old) and analyzing these documents together, she initially seems to not remember this assignment and pauses before jumping out of her chair with an "oooh yea, the Indian boy!" She then proceeds to share that this was the first moment that she'd considered internalized oppression, especially her own, and continues reflecting by sharing how reading about how the protagonist talked about himself and features such as his nose felt eerily familiar to how she felt and/or talked about certain features of her own at the time. Pointing at her curly hair, she details how averse she was to her natural hair and skin color, and the actions she'd taken to straighten her hair or make sure her skin didn't get darker. She almost laughs as she shares, incredulous that she could have ever felt that way about herself. When asking if she would say she loved herself at this time, she said yes but then staggered backwards, eventually noting that it is quite hard to say out loud that *maybe you only loved parts of yourself.*

For the second part of the final assignment, students were tasked with creating their own "absolutely true diary," inspired by the novel. Some diary entries were mandatory such as an entry related to when you experienced or witnessed institutional oppression. For the rest of the entries students were able to select from other options including a cartoon of self, a map of their neighborhood, poetry, etc. Once they had written them, they were to put them together in a creative book. During this time Laylay had begun to ask if she could braid my hair during lunch. Through our braiding sessions I learned that Laylay was a triplet, though both of her sisters were in the other English class (one of her sisters would join our program the following year). I would also come to know that three sisters did not live together, that only one lived with their mom, and that Laylay lived with her grandparents just around the corner of the school. During this time together, I was under the impression that Laylay and I were on our way to building a trusting and

loving relationship, particularly given the fact that she had initiated this extra time we were spending together. As a result, I found it curious when Laylay's diary submission was filled with entries that shared very little. One of the entries she chose to write was a poem:

> Dear diary #6: The secret
> Im keeping my secret,
> No one will understand,
> Will they judge,
> Will the yell, scream or make a feud,
> Will they understand how I feel,
> Its killing me inside,
> I want to say but I just cannot,
> She understand the pain,
> But im scared inside,
> Sooner or later they will find out,
> Not today, Nor tomrrow
>
> Soon they will find out,
> Not today, Nor tomrrow

At the culmination of this unit, I was left with a complex and yet vague understanding of Laylay. I had many bits of information regarding her, she was: engaged in class, completed all of her assignments, struggled with writing, was cheerful, laughed contagiously, was critical and concerned about issues of social justice, tough, sweet, friendly, looking to build a relationship with me and yet, perhaps because of this poem, I still felt like I was missing something.

Intuitively, I would argue that at this point we had a caring relationship, but perhaps not yet a loving one. When I ask Laylay now about this, she laughs at her poem, saying "I have no idea what I was talking about." When I direct my questions towards our relationship at the time and whether she thinks that is why she wrote the poem so vaguely that even she does not remember it, she shares two important insights. First, she shares that she was a good student and as a result she'd had positive relationships with teachers up until that point, which looked similar to ours, and that she didn't know it could be "more than that." Second, she reminds me that in

the first marking period of that academic year there had been a large fight on campus, which both students and news outlets had termed a "race-riot." While she hadn't been involved, she shares "it was teachers' jobs to break it up...or to prevent it from even happening. These are your students, and you can't even keep them safe." Though I was absent the day that fight happened, she says it is why she put her guard back up. In context, these literacy artifacts and our subsequent analysis highlight the work entailed to develop the profundity of loving relationships with young people, reminding me again that (a) care and love are not the same thing, (b) trust is an integral component of love, and (c) love necessitates safety, it requires a container.

As we continued throughout the remainder of her ninth-grade year—Laylay continued similarly. She was highly engaged, turned in every assignment, helped her peers, participated enthusiastically in group work, continued to hang out during lunch, laughed often, enjoyed school wide "spirit" festivities and overall would be described as happy. When speaking to her now, it is more clear that she was just "going through the motions." She was doing the things she was expected to do, with little investment in them. According to her this shifted towards the end of 9th grade year, when students worked in groups to develop a set of guiding principles for a warrior-scholar. It is important to note here that I was not initially intending to analyze this particular literacy event and unit but am doing so in response to Laylay's insistence that it be included because of its importance in pivoting her engagement to the curriculum and her relationship to herself. The inclusion of this literacy artifact serves to highlight the importance of the methodology employed in this study which centers my former students as research collaborators and co-conspirators in the creation of *our* space.

According to Milne (2013), warrior scholars are "young people who know who they are, with academic and cultural knowledge, that they can change the world." In New Zealand, entire

schools have been structured around ensuring that students become warrior-scholars. This framework and the aforementioned assignment was introduced to me during my time apprenticing under Drs. Jeff Duncan-Andrade and Patrick Camangian. While the language of warrior-scholar had been introduced early in the academic school year, this end of the year assignment asked students to consider what values were important to them in their journey towards becoming a warrior-scholar. In order to do so, students studied different principles such as the Japanese *Hagakure* and Jeff Duncan-Andrade's *Definite Dozen.* Students were allowed to create their own principles or borrow from one of the many examples provided, but had to give their own commentary for each principle.

During our platicá, Laylay mentioned this assignment, specifically recalling one principle that her group worked on. She had borrowed this principle from a set of principles designed and utilized by one of the teachers on our campus:

> **Pimp the system; don't let the system pimp you.** The warrior scholar understands the game and plays it harder and smarter than their opponent.
>
> Laylay's comment: The warrior scholar pimps the system rather than be pimped by the system. They understands the game, meaning they understand that institutional oppression is real and that they have systems that are designed for them to fail so they play the game harder. A warrior scholar knows that people are going to struggle; they see people go hungry, homeless, etc. they have witnessed and experienced unspeakable acts of violence, they use this as motivation to win the game. The weak person does not do this: They blame people for their struggles, they have a naïve consciousness—they do not understand the system. A warrior scholar does not give up; they work hard to learn from the system so they can destroy the system from the inside.

In this commentary, Laylay continues to reflect an understanding of oppression. However, notable is the fact that she moves beyond "understanding the game" to "playing the game harder." This change in language reflects a larger paradigm shift, which Laylay exemplifies when she utilizes language from Freire's levels of consciousness, a framework we learned in class, to mark the transition from a naive consciousness to what Freire would refer to as a

"critical consciousness." In our platicás, Laylay reflects on this assignment and excitedly regards it as the first moment that she realized that she had a choice in how she responded to oppression, that she had agency. Whereas she previously understood schools as an example of institutional oppression, she now realized that she could take control over her own education. For her, it was the first time that she moved beyond performative engagement and began to authentically engage some of the critical ideas we'd been discussing throughout the year. Now, at 23, with a big smile on her face "yep yep, pimp the system. That one stuck with me forever." This shift in Laylay's consciousness, especially as it related to herself, became more clear throughout our time together.

At the beginning of her tenth-grade year, we explored the themes of historical amnesia, historical memory, Freire's 3 levels of consciousness and Solorzano and Delgado Bernal's (2001) framework on different types of resistance. We used these concepts to study *Kindred* by Octavia Butler and the film *Sankofa* directed by Haile Gerima. In both these texts, Black women in present day are transported to the past where they bear witness to and experience the impacts of the institution of slavery. In doing so, they develop a deep knowledge of self that shifts their consciousness and resistance. The unit was grounded in the Ghanaian symbol representing the word and idea of *Sankofa,* which translates to "go back and get it" (Figure 9):

Figure 9. Sankofa.

Essentially, this unit was to serve as a reminder that in order to truly know ourselves we had to know our pasts and that required some level of communion with our ancestors. The essay assignment is reflected on the first page of their essay packet, Figure 10:

Historical Amnesia

DUE:__________________ **at** _____________ **to Sharim.h.Martinez@gmail.com**
OR must be in my hand!

LEARNING TARGETS:

-I can write a complete_______________that guides the rest of my essay.
-I can support my thesis with ________ complete expository paragraphs.
-I can find relevant evidence from the texts Kindred by Octavia Butler and *Sankofa* by Haile Gerima
-I can analyze that evidence in a way that proves my thesis

CALENDAR:

PROMPT:

In what ways does historical amnesia impact the protagonists?

- Why do they have historical amnesia and what are the consequences of it on their lives?
- How does historical amnesia/historical memory impact their consciousness and resistance?

*hint: historical amnesia is deeper than not knowing your mom/dad—it is connected to institutional oppression & how institutions have ensured that we do not remember our ethnic/familial histories

Figure 10. Essay prompt on Historical Amnesia.

Laylay's essay submission met all of the listed learning targets, reflecting a clear understanding of the complex concepts through her skills in identifying relevant evidence and analyzing it accordingly. For example, in her first body paragraph, Laylay writes:

> "Know history, know self. No history, no self." This quote is an example of what historical amnesia is ; it is essentially saying that if you don't know your historical past you don't know yourself and you won't be able to build yourself for the future. Historical amnesia happens as a result of institutional oppression, and lack of knowledge of your own family's roots . . . . In the beginning of the film, Mona shows signs of historical amnesia through her appropriation of African culture, and denying of her own African roots. Seven minutes into the film Mona is shown modeling in Ghana while wearing modern clothing and using African music and people as backdrops. While she is modeling, she is approached by an old African man dressed in traditional African clothing and she gets scared and hides behind her photographer, who is a white man. She hides behind him seeking protection; this is showing the audience that she sees white people as her savior and friend and Africans as an enemy. This is also an example of internalized oppression, She is frightened by her own people. She also has a lack of consciousness of what her people went through and how white people historically tortured her people.

In addition to identifying and analyzing relevant evidence, the above excerpt illustrates a growing understanding of the relationship between complex concepts such as institutional oppression, historical amnesia, internalized oppression, and consciousness. These concepts, often explored in college, are woven intricately in this paragraph written in the beginning of her tenth-grade year.

In platicás Laylay reminds me that immediately after submitting this essay, she and her twin sister made the decision to cut off all of their hair and "go natural." Prior to this, Laylay had "permed, flat-ironed, wore weave" as illustrated below in her before and after photos, Figure 11, which are included at her request.

Figure 11. Before and After Photos of Lay's Haircut.

Using critical media analysis to analyze these photos which were selected and edited by Laylay, it is important to take note of the emojis Laylay has selected to cover her face and how for her they correspond with how she felt about her relationship to her hair and what she felt it represented overall in her relationship to herself. On the left photo—taken before, Laylay chooses to use an emoji that communicates feelings of being distraught, whereas on the right, once she has cut her hair and is natural, she uses an emoji that appears happy. hooks (1989) describes Black women's relationship to hair by sharing:

> The reality is: straightened hair is linked historically and currently to a system of racial domination that impresses upon black people, and especially black women, that we are not acceptable as we are, that we are not beautiful . . . . It is more important that black women resist racism and sexism in every way; that every aspect of our self-representation be a fierce resistance, a radical celebration of our care and respect for ourselves . . . . True liberation of my hair came when I stopped trying to control it in any state and just accepted it as it is. (p. 5)

For Lay, this journey towards liberation, towards communicating care, love, and respect for herself came with the decision to cut her hair.

She reflects now saying that these texts, primarily Sankofa, "educated me on how to look back at my history in order to be happy with myself and love myself all the way. I figured I'd start with the big chop for my hair and going back to my natural roots, kinda like how Sankofa says go back . . ." Laylay's physical manifestations of meaning-making extended beyond the verbal and logocentric definitions of literacy. I argue that for Laylay and her sister, this was a performance of critical literacy (Johnson & Vasudeven, 2012), in which they were embodying—literally using their bodies—as a way to communicate their understanding of the texts we had studied. Cutting her hair served as a literacy act similar to the one Kirkland (2009) argues is occurring when Black men tattoo their flesh. Drawing on Bakhtin (1993) and Kirkland (2009), this act of cutting hair is a performed, actualized deed that serves to help Laylay develop a sense of identity that is connected to a rich cultural past. It is when including her performance and embodiment of critical literacy—vis à vis the act of cutting of her hair—that we are able to truly understand the scope and magnitude of this literacy event and what it reveals about how she is growing in her capacity to love herself, her Blackness, her "roots."

By the end of her first unit in sophomore year, it is clear that Laylay's engagement and embodiment of the critical concepts we are grappling with in class has increased, as evidenced through her cutting of hair. This engagement is in stark contrast to the performance of schooling she had been engaged in early ninth-grade year when she was just "going through the motions." Still, in April 2014, towards the end of her 10th grade year, we came head-to-head again with what it means to truly internalize and embody the ideologies we were studying. The unit we were engaged in was structured around two texts: the novel *Animal Farm* and the film *The*

Matrix. In studying these two texts students were supposed to answer the following question: Who is the most responsible for hegemony—those who coerce or those who consent? While it is important to note that oppression and issues of oppression are not up for debate, this unit and the essential questions were designed to help young people grapple with how oppression becomes normalized, and what role we play in it, if like the sleepwalkers in *The Matrix,* we choose to remain unaware. The final assignments included a persuasive essay and a structured class debate, after which I would share with students that it was my stance that those who coerce are *always* most responsible. Facets of the forthcoming event(s) are shared in a forthcoming article on student resistance (Hannegan-Martinez et al., forthcoming).

Laylay continued to engage critically throughout the unit, actively participating in the analysis of texts and poems we were using to understand hegemony. Though grading is a dreaded act for an English teacher, particularly one who asked students to write 8-paragraph essays for this assignment, I was looking forward to reading Laylay's persuasive essay—I was not disappointed. The following is the introduction paragraph of the essay that Laylay submitted for the written portion of this assignment:

> Take the female and run a series of test see if she will submit to your desires willingly test her in every way because she is the most important factor for good economics if she shows any sign of resistance in submitting completely to your own will do not hesitate to use the bullwhip on her extract the last bit of b____ out of her. Take care not to kill her for in doing so you spoil good economics when in complete submission she will train her offsprings in the early years to submit to the labor when they become of age." This quote from the Willie Lynch letter: The breaking process of the African American Woman illustrates the idea of hegemony which is the system of social control through ideas. Hegemony happens as a result of coercion and consent; coercion is when you force dominant ideology and beliefs unto people.
>
> In the quote coercion is seen where it states: "If she shows any resistance then you whip her." Slave owners were using force to control African American women. Consent is to accept dominant beliefs and ideology as normal. Consent is shown in the quote where it states. "When in complete submission she will train her offspring in the early ages." She is accepting to have her offspring thrown into slavery and to be put to work by their slave

> owners and would not resist out of fear. The concept of hegemony can be studied in many different texts. We studied it in the novel Animal Farm and the film The Matrix. In Animal Farm, the 1950s the Russian revolution story but with animals, a communist farm starts a rebellion against the human. They overthrew the humans and now in this farm the animals are equal to each other. But eventually, the pigs start exploiting the other animals. They let this happen because of the lack of education they have (they couldn't read or write). In the film The Matrix, there are gatekeepers, sleepwalkers, and Neo and his team and they all exist between a real world and a dream world. The sleepwalkers are accepting to be in the dream world, they are consenting and believing that ignorance is bliss. While the group that consents and the group that coerce are both responsible for hegemony, be it resolved that the group that coerces (the pigs on the Animal farm, the agents in the Matrix) are the most responsible because they have more power and abuse the power in order to control the minds and bodies of others.

In the paragraph above, it is evident that Laylay has a grasp on what coercion and consent mean and how they work together to create a system of social control—hegemony. She also has a clear understanding of what characters in the texts studied represent which facets of the hegemonic process. Moreover, she adds a third text to her analysis—the excerpt of the Willie Lynch letter that refers to the "*The breaking process of the African Woman.*" The decision to include this particular text in her analysis is significant in that it demonstrates her commitment to engaging these thoughts critically, particularly as it relates to Black people in this country. This literary decision illustrates how her learnings from the previous unit, analyzed above, are ongoing and relevant. Specifically, Laylay is committed to knowing the history of Black people and how that history manifests in the present moment, both in her community and in her sense of self. I was beaming with pride, and if I am honest, also feeling somewhat arrogant as I thought to myself *damn, I am a really good teacher. Look at this essay that this tenth-grader wrote! This vocabulary . . .*

While Laylay's introduction was strong, it became apparent that she had devoted more time to it than to the rest of the body paragraphs which lacked some of the precise language, formatting, and attention to sentence structure that she had utilized in the introduction. I

prepared some editing notes for her before taking a break from the exhaustive grading of over 150 essays. Like many others, I decided to use my break to hop on social media. Specifically, I hopped on my Facebook which is a platform I use less socially and thus allow students, families, and other teachers to friend me on. As I was scrolling through, I came across a video Laylay posted. It was a video of her fighting a student from one of my other classes. I was furious. I spent most of the night angry, preparing what I was going to say to her the following day. Underneath that anger was a question begging to be heard: had I just taught students to tell me what I want to hear? Had I just been engaging in a different form of what Freire (1970) would refer to as a banking education? I tossed and turned all night.

The following day I asked Laylay to stay after school so that I could speak to her. For close to an hour, I asked questions such as “Why did you fight? Why did you post it? Who wins? Who benefits?” I asked her how she could have written such a powerful understanding of hegemony and still consent to it? Most poignantly, I referenced the excerpt from the Willie Lynch letter asking her why she was continuing the oppressors work, why she was assisting in the “breaking process of the African woman.” Laylay listened to my questions intently. Her facial expressions were hardened and she responded by nodding, with her fists clenched at her sides. I ended the conversation by telling her that I loved her and saw her potential to change the world even if she didn’t.

Later that day, I took yet another Facebook break, and saw the following post and comment thread between 4 different Black girls: Lay, I (her triplet who was not enrolled in our class), M (the other girl who was involved in the fight) and N. Rather than transcribe the entire comment thread, I share the following screenshots (Figures 12 and 13) which highlight these particular girls’ participation in the conversation. In sharing the screenshots, I seek to honor the

locations and platforms where young people *choose* to engage in the literacy practices of text production and meaning-making.

Figure 12. Lay's Facebook Post.

Laylay's post is a radical departure from her previous post which shared the fight. Rather than just delete the fight, she instead opts to use social media as a tool for digital counterstory-telling (Lanskey, forthcoming) in which she seeks to uplift Black women. Moreover, she takes personal accountability for her role in the conflict. As an adult, she reflects back saying she was just sorry and angry that she was doing "the oppressor's work." This post and her reflective commentary serve to illuminate the role of the literary texts and her subsequent meaning-making, so much so that she engages a new platform—social media—as an avenue to perform critical literacy individually and collectively.

Through the following screenshots, you can see how Lay's act of literacy, via the production of digital text, guides her peers through a collective meaning-making process.

Lay
Well Right now , La Will be the bigger person and apologize to everybody . I Apologize M for getting you into something that has nothing at allll to do with you . you should have never fought m yall dont even go to the same school . I Apologize to m for even getting you into this , I should have never pumped up her head and if I disrespected you in any kind of way . we are better than this we was raised better than this . I deleted the video off of my page ,
1 hour ago · Like

Ni
Can you delete this ?
1 hour ago · Like

M
ok cool , and thankyou for being bigger person in my eyes you hella coo i fwy ,and iam sorry for all this shit I STARTED bc at the end of the day this is all my fault bc me and imani fought for no reason i alpoigize !
1 hour ago · Like · 4

Lay
I Can You drop this as my sister I want you to be right by myside as we change the world , I love you sister . I cant change the world by myself I need your help .
1 hour ago · Like · 1

I...
Well like I said laylani I'm not finna

Figure 13. Lay's Facebook Discourse.

The thread between the 4 girls illustrates the profound impact of Laylay's act of text production. In this way, she is able to engage in literacy as it is widely understood—a social practice—by using a tool (social media) that is not as widely recognized or accepted, though feels more culturally accessible to young people than pencil and paper. In choosing to use social media to perform a different function, she is able to engage in an act of literacy that guides the thinking of all 4 girls. As evidence of this, in this thread alone, she (a) gets the girl she engaged in a fight with to also apologize for her involvement, (b) moves N from asking to delete the apology to engaging in the act of apology, and (c) asks her sister to join her in changing the world. The thread ends with the purpose of the counterstory, an affirmation to herself and to the other participants that Black women are beautiful. Drawing on somatics (Haines, 2019), I would argue that through these digital literacy artifacts she was able to use her production of digital text (an act of literacy)—inspired by her meaning-making of written text—to rewrite/reright the shape of the interactions and relationships between these Black girls.

The three outcomes of Lay's post and comment thread work in tandem to present an important growth arc in her trajectory. While as a freshman, she was hesitant to love herself, as evidenced by how she talked about her skin and hair, she is now working to lift up and unite Black women. In saying "we need to be role models to upcoming Black women" and later telling her sister "I want you right by my side as we change the world . . . I want to change the world but I can't do it by myself" she assumes the position of a leader within her friend group and community. These statements reflect a critical consciousness that is growing towards a transformational resistance (Solorzano & Delgado-Bernal, 2001). In assuming that position of leadership and agency, she is also illuminating that how she feels about herself and her community has shifted. I would argue that the shift in her beliefs about herself and her people coupled with how she has enacted and utilized literacy, reflect a shift towards love. Last, I utilize this literacy snapshot as evidence to answer a question Dr. Winn has often written about, a question posed by Mary Rose O'Reilley: "I wonder if it is possible to teach literature in such a way that people stop killing each other?" (O'Reilley, 1984, p. 109; Winn, 2013, p. 128). My answer based on witnessing Lay is unequivocally yes, not only is it possible—it is our responsibility as educators to teach literature in this way.

It is important to note that according to Laylay the latter half of this multi-part event(s) was possible in large part because of the conversation that we had prior to it happening. Aside from using the curriculum from class to ground that conversation, the most important part for Lay is that I hadn't responded by punishing her, a trend we know is all too common for Black girls (Love, 2019; Morris, 2016). Aside from reading the world and the world (Freire, 1970), in that conversation Lay was also reading me and my pedagogical commitments. The pedagogical decision to engage her in a reflective dialogue was grounded in my analysis and organizing with

other critical educators (Martinez et al., 2016; Valdez et al., 2018) where we actively sought to create and practice anti-oppressive pedagogies that worked to disrupt the school to prison nexus and other nexuses of injustice. For Lay, this decision is one of the first things that comes to mind when I ask her as an adult to reflect on when she felt loved. She shares that this moment was loving for her because (a) I didn't do anything to hurt or punish her, (b) "didn't give up" when she was wasn't "perfect," (c) still told her that I loved her, and (d) held her accountable to being better. She continues by sharing that accountability is a part of love because it requires that you see someone's potential, believe in them, and commit to helping them be their best self. She notes that this is different from care which does not always have high expectations or a sense of commitment. Moreover, while love is committed to someone's best self, it isn't conditional, and doesn't quit when the person is not there yet.

The decision to not punish Lay ultimately deepened our relationship and for her, allowed her to feel "safe." As a result of feeling safe, Lay became more comfortable sharing more personal narratives, which was evident in her tenth-grade end-of-the-year personal legend essay (described more in another chapter) which narrated a recent moment in which she'd been in proximity to violence and felt a fear that continued to linger. Similarly, when she began the eleventh grade, Lay used the first unit of the academic year—the autoethnography, also described in another chapter—to talk about the unexpected passing of her grandmother just a few months prior. I had been with Lay the day that her and her sister got the call—she ran into my class shortly after school one day screaming and asking me if I could drive them home. When we arrived, there were fire trucks and ambulances with the sirens on preparing to take her grandmother to the hospital, where she was later placed on life support. I was surprised when Lay decided to put words to such a fresh and tender wound and then share it with both myself,

and the class. Now, she iterates that based on past assignments and having watched her peers share their own autoethnographies, she knew writing it down and sharing "would make me feel better" and that she could, because again—it was "safe."

Lay continued to grow into love and leadership, both in and outside of the class. She was active in cheerleading and wrestling, and in both was working towards captain. Despite having most hours of the day accounted for, she would come to community events that I would organize with the People's Education movement—a collective of Teacher-Organizers of Color. As an organization we were a part of a national collective called Education 4 Liberation Network, and when we decided to organize the biennial Free Minds Free People Conference, she sat and participated in the original planning meetings. In each of those spaces, Lay reflected a love and commitment to centering the experiences of Black girls, and other People of Color. This was further illustrated during our poetry unit late Junior year, outlined in detail in chapter four, when Lay and her sister decided to co-write and co-perform a poem, in addition to their individually assigned poems.

When performances for the poetry unit rolled around, Lay and her sister were so excited to perform that they asked if some of their peers from other classes could join for the first few minutes of class to watch them. It was an ask we had never had, but students unanimously agreed that it was okay. For me, it was another indicator of how Lay was trying to take her learnings outside of this space: these acts of love and literacy could not be confined to these four walls and the people inside of it. The poem she and her sister shared, was published in a chapter of a book I co-wrote entitled *Half an Inch From the Edge: Teacher Education, Teaching and Student Learning for Social Transformation* (Borrero et al., 2019). The poem is:

As black womyn
we are treated less than what we are

We are kidnapped queens
from our wide hips
to our plump lips
excluded from a
patriarchal society that doesn't accept our kinky tresses
we are lost
lost souls that cannot find our way out through the dark
we are black
black women who can't even speak our minds without being called a ratchet bitch.
we are mad
two mad black womyn
who are fed bottles after bottles of
empty promises and sharp lies
cutting throats
blood spilling down bruised bodies covering her beauty.
Tampered beauty
broken down bit by bit forced to be what
"HE"
wants us to be
but we are strong
strong enough to hold the weight of hate on our backs
and still be able to stand tall
nobody ever ask how it feels to be a black womyn!

Although not a part of the written poem, they began their performance by singing Christina Aguilera's lyrics "we are beautiful no matter whey say" before immediately jumping powerfully into the poem, in which they alternate back and forth between speaking individually and together. As they are performing, their practice is evident in the way they stay in rhythm with one another, and as they match their rhythm their tone matches their words—it is indignant, righteously, at a world that has been structured to make them question their own worth. The second they finished, students erupted in cheer, and many of them proceeded to ask for an encore. And so, Lay and her sister performed the poem a second time—again, it was met with the applause of their peers.

While the performance of the poem was powerful, there remains a profound value in analyzing the written poem. The first line of the poem utilizes the word "womyn," spelled with a

y rather than an e. To spell the word this way is a political choice, a statement that wom(e)n don't exist as a result of, or solely in relationship to their male counterparts. It is a literary choice that asserts liberation and challenges patriarchy. The poem then proceeds to state that they are "kidnapped queens" who are "treated less" by a patriarchal society, and illustrates the magnitude of that mistreatment by using the imagery of the body—specifically attributes that are (stereo)typically associated with Black women: wide hips, plump lips, kinky tresses. These first seven lines of the poem are significant in that they analyze many of the issues regarding beauty that Lay had been struggling with/through since her freshman year. What is most critical about these lines however, is that her and her sister name a patriarchal society as the culprit--it is not *their* insecurity, it is a burden that was placed on them. Further, by referring to themselves as "kidnapped queens," they historicize this phenomenon, again asserting their worth and their understanding of when people tried to take it from them. The beginning of this poem serves as a reminder that as marginalized people we cannot talk about love in the absence of talking about systems that have been designed to make us hate ourselves.

The poem continues by sharing how they feel as a result of this alienation and degradation, first describing themselves as "lost" and then transitioning to "mad." It is important to notice that their anger is two-fold. On one hand, they are angry at the system of patriarchy that excludes them and then *further* angered by the fact that they are not allowed to talk about it without them being labeled as "ratchet bitches." They have every reason to be mad, and yet their anger gives a racist patriarchal society another avenue by which to label and oppress them. I find this particular articulation of anger poignant because it reflects a thorough understanding of systems of oppression that have been designed to hurt Black women, and then blame them for being hurt. As Morrison (1994) reminds us through her character of Pecola in *The Bluest Eye,*

"Anger is better. There is a sense of being in anger. A reality and a presence. An awareness of worth" (p. 50).

The poem then continues by sharing how this society has lied to them, silenced them, fed them "sharp lies." The result of this lying, what I would argue is often gaslighting and minimizing the suffering of Black women, is illustrated again through the image of the body which now is "bruised" and has "blood spilling." According to them this society is trying to "tamper," to "break down" the beauty and power of Black women, but they resist, asserting again that they are "strong." The last line of the poem is a call to action, a reminder that we have a responsibility to listen to Black women, to be in solidarity with them.

Several months later, Lay and her sister performed this poem for the Black history month assembly--which they helped organize. Their decision to perform their writing outside of our classroom space served as further evidence of Lay's growing commitment to share and build with others. According to Lay, by performing this poem, engaging in this literacy act at that assembly, she was sharing how much she loved herself, how much she loved her Blackness, and how much she loved Black people. This love continued well into her senior year, when she closed out her high school career by designing a Youth Participatory Action Research (YPAR) project that looked specifically at the impacts of patriarchy and misogyny on Black women. Her last assignment, her graduation, her last rite of passage was presenting those findings to our community, which included her family and friends and those of all her classmates. At face value, sharing her poetry and research publicly are considered acts and performances of literacy, but I would argue that these (literacy) acts were a means of writing and speaking her Black joy, which Love (2019) defines:

> . . . to embrace your full humanity, as the world tells you that you are disposable and that you do not matter. Black joy is a celebration of taking back your identity as a person of

> color and signaling to the world that your darkness is what makes you strong and beautiful. Black joy is finding your homeplace and creating homeplaces for others. Black joy is understanding and recognizing that as a dark person you come with grit and zest because you come from survivors who pushed their bodies and minds to the limits for you to one day thrive . . . . Black joy makes that world manageable for dark people; it is how we cope. It is how we love. (pp. 120–121)

In sharing her Black joy Lay was not just asserting her humanity but she was creating a homeplace for us, writing a world where all Black girls are loved and inviting us to join her there. Lay was not just literate or loving, she teaches us what it means to be literate *in* love. In sharing her joy, she was just not sharing her love of self, her dark skin, her history, or her people—she was showing us how much she loves us, all of us.

***

> In this here place, we flesh; flesh that weeps, laughs; flesh that dances on bare feet in grass. Love it. Love it hard. Yonder they do not love your flesh. They despise it. They don't love your eyes; they'd just as soon pick em out. No more do they love the skin on your back. Yonder they flay it. And O my people they do not love your hands. Those they only use, tie, bind, chop off and leave empty. Love your hands! Love them. Raise them up and kiss them. Touch others with them, pat them together, stroke them on your face 'cause they don't love that either. You got to love it, you! (Morrison, 1994)

I originally chose to share Lay's story to thread together literacy and self-love, absent of trauma. For other students, like Alex, trauma is overt and ever-present, and I wanted to be careful to not perpetuate damage centered notions (Tuck, 2016) or participate in the fetishization of students' trauma. Whereas other literacy scholars argue for centering trauma (Dutro, 2017, 2019) as a powerful pedagogical practice, I wanted to share a narrative which highlighted that while I believe in creating a classroom container that can hold trauma, these assignments are *not* about centering trauma--they are about leaning into and growing our capacity to love. Yet, I would be remiss if I didn't acknowledge that in reading and writing and talking with Lay to co-create this narrative, that I do not also see the way trauma is present. What is trauma if not growing up in a country or going to schools that teach you to hate the color of your skin or your

"kinky tresses?" What is trauma if not the stealing of your land, people, language, and culture (Degruy, 2005; Duran, 2006)?

Baldwin (1963) shared once that "it took many years of vomiting up all the filth I'd been taught about myself, and half-believed, before I was able to walk on the earth as though I had a right to be here." Similarly for Lay, this journey towards (more) love required unlearning so much of what she had been taught. In her case, the early literacy assignments she authentically engaged in were a place to vomit the filth, to purge the illness and to do so knowing that literally or metaphorically, someone would hold her hair or rub her back. This also required using literacy assignments and practices to make-meaning about *why* she had been taught this way, what she was missing, what she was longing for. In this way, literacy became a "vehicle by which the oppressed are equipped with the necessary tools to reappropriate their history, culture, and language practices" (Freire & Macedo, 1987, p. 157). It was in engaging in that type of "emancipatory" literacy that Lay began to use her words and her body to name her world and re-write her present, one connected to a past that was stolen from her (Sankofa). In using her words and her body in tandem, Lay was able to respond to Morrison's call to "love her hands, kiss her hands" and to practice what Moraga (1983) refers to as "theory in the flesh." Her flesh and hair became her text, an extension of the words she put on paper and shared within the four walls of our classroom—it was a literacy in and of the flesh.

Laylay's story serves as a profound reminder that the metrics that schools utilize to assess students do little to capture the inner workings of their world. When Lay came to us as a ninth-grader she was cheerful and engaged in class often. Within the context of A–G requirements, attendance, and test scores, she was a student easily overlooked by teachers who often just found her pleasant to have in class. As a result, nobody looked deeper, nobody noticed the mask or the

performance. Were it not for the poem she wrote as a ninth-grader, I too might have never really known her. So long as schools continue to utilize literacy assignments insofar as they contribute to the aforementioned measurements, we will continue to have students like Lay—students who come through our classrooms, smile, say what we want to hear and then leave unmoved and unloved by us. Instead, Lay shows us that schools and literacy can serve a different function: that they can help us return to love.

CHAPTER SIX: EMELIANO

> Love does not begin and end the way we seem to think it does. Love is a battle, love is a war; love is a growing up. (Baldwin, 1963)

This portrait is different in many ways, and if my intuition is right, will also be shorter than the others. This is true because while I taught Emeliano for four years, there are significantly less written literacy artifacts with which to construct this narrative. Instead, this narrative relies heavily on Freire and Macedo's (1987) notion that a critical and emancipatory literacy consists of reading both the word and the world, and that "reading the world always precedes reading the word" (p. 35). While this 'reading of the world' can occur in written literacy artifacts, it can also occur through the process of dialogue (Freire, 1970; Juzwik et al., 2013). As Giroux reminds us in that same text, "how teachers and students read the world, in this case, is inextricably linked to forms of pedagogy that can function either to silence and marginalize students or to legitimate their voices" (p. 19). Literacy then, exists in relationship to pedagogy. Based on these understandings, this chapter is made up of literacy artifacts, including dialogue, and ruminations on the pedagogical practices that are inextricably tied to the literacy artifacts shared, *and* those not created.

I first met Emeliano in 3rd period, in a class with 40 students, at least 5 of whom were rambunctious and energetic Black and Brown boys who loved to participate, *and* interrupt, and laugh, and play. They were critical and joyous and *everyday* was challenging and unpredictable in new ways. Emeliano was a part of this group, the only Polynesian boy in a group of Black boys. In ninth grade he was the tallest in the group of friends though his face was still boyish, particularly when he laughed. When he laughed, he shook with his whole body, and instantly you caught a glimpse of who he might have been in elementary school. His girlfriend, a Latina girl who'd been dating in middle school was also in the class, and he would go back and forth

between her and his friends—he was both doting and engaged, and then disruptive all in a one hour span. In terms of academics, Emeliano began the school year engaged, participating as we learned the difference between dominant and counter narratives while reading excerpts of Assata's book. He was aptly able to select and analyze evidence, and didn't hesitate to share it with the class, though he refused adamantly to read aloud. In this unit I learned that he had incredibly high critical thinking and analytical skills and yet struggled sometimes with reading comprehension. His reading scores would indicate that he read "several years below grade level."

We spent the first short unit this way oscillating between good days and less good days, both interpersonally and as a whole class. On some days students were highly engaged and our relationships felt burgeoning and on others we struggled, and I felt like relationships with the students in this class were far from imminent. If I am honest, I struggled often with feeling like a good teacher to this class, sometimes losing my patience and becoming overly frustrated with my inability to capture and engage their bountiful energy. This came to a head in September, one month into the school year, when as I was teaching I began to smell smoke. I turned to see that my desk, positioned in the back corner of the room, had sprouted a small fire from a candle I had left lit. The candle was on primarily because I wanted to hide the stench that emanates from a windowless classroom overflowing with students on a hot day—this was further pronounced by the fact that we had a broken heater which would not turn off and remained at a consistent ninety degrees. The classroom was a sauna, and it smelled terrible which made it hard for me to focus, so I couldn't even imagine how much harder that made it for students. The candle was my attempt at making it a little more pleasant—and someone had tried to start a fire with it. I was furious, and in the corner of the room sat the group of boys—staring down at the chipped desks

and trying mightily but failing extraordinarily to hide their laughter. It is worth saying twice: I was furious, and responded as such.

These moments are a blur, reconstructed through our platicás and memories, as well as my journal entries. What we know is that there was *a lot* of yelling and that without being able to know which of the boys had thought it would be funny to use the candle flame to light a paper on fire—I blamed/wanted to hold them all accountable. I recruited the help of our assistant principal Ms. V (who had taught some of them in middle school) and our restorative justice (RJ) coordinator. There was no clear outcome, and it'd be years before I would come to know who had actually started the fire. What I *did* know is that Emeliano resented the accusation--so much so that he began to proclaim to anyone who would listen that I was racist, that I had targeted them because they were Black and Polynesian. In his mind and eyes and words, I favored Latinos. It is embarrassing, shameful even, to write this. Though I understand our conflict intimately and it was resolved later, it is fearful to put on paper that I was called racist. Still, I include this in our narrative because there is no pretending that it did not alter the shape of our relationship or impact his engagement in my class. Second, I hold reflection, honesty, and vulnerability as sacred, and I hope that it models for other teachers the type of reflexivity I think is necessary if we are to teach Black and Brown children. Moreover, the dialogue that ensued allowed me to understand how Emeliano was reading the world, and me.

Our dialogue, facilitated by the RJ coordinator, took place in the staff lounge—a small room with a brown couch and a coffee table that sat right next to our copy machines and right outside our bathrooms. We sat on the couch taking turns explaining why we were frustrated with one another, trying to make sense of how that situation unfolded. We talked about racism and what it meant, and I asked him if he really thought that I was indeed racist. While he proceeded

to say that he didn't, he did explain that he felt like Latino students were favored overall, not just by me, but by all teachers. He continued further, sharing that the curriculum he'd experienced throughout his educational journey centered Black and Latino experiences but never covered Polynesians. He felt unseen and frustrated. And in the much deeper voice he has now as a 22-year-old man, he reflects back on this moment, sharing "I just didn't like you." In the spirit of honesty, there were many moments when I also found him to be unlikeable, but I hold that there are differences between liking and loving--and loving is a *choice*. So we kept discussing. The conversation ended with both of us apologizing and collectively making the decision to switch him to another period—first period—the period that would organically become our cohort, our home.

Once in first period, Emeliano was drawn to Lay and Steph--two of his peers from middle school. Together, they worked to hold him accountable, often staying during lunch or after school to make sure that he completed his homework. Lay would challenge him in pushups, and Steph would literally drag him into class and sit him in a chair. Emeliano says that switching to this class helped him to see me differently, saying "like I saw you with hella Black and Latinos and was like oh ok, maybe it was just our class and she isn't racist cuz they love her. But then like I still didn't believe you. Or like you. I needed to see a little more." This shift in classes and perceptions was accompanied by Emi's decision to join the school football team. In January 2013, at the end of his first semester of the ninth-grade year, he submitted his absolutely true diary book (described in another chapter), and shared:

> The biggest thing that changed my life is playing football. It has changed my life by keeping me out of trouble. The kids/teenagers in my neighborhood I see is either stealing drugs or "having fun." Some kids I see say they want a change in their lives so they play a sport to keep them off the streets. Like me, kids in my neighborhood usually don't do anything good with their lives so I play football for my school. By me doing that it keeps me occupied instead of me on the streets doing drugs, smoking, robbing, drinking, etc.

> The school football team keeps me busy. This keeps up on my work. Coach gives us a progress report sheet teachers have to fill out. We have study halls on Wednesdays and Thursdays so we can finish homework, classwork, or any late work! Our coach really wants the players to do something with their talent instead of having it and putting it to waist. That's the biggest thing that has changed in my life as in society wise.

He also shared that a major change in his own behaviors came as a result of his relationship, sharing that before he met her "I was a different person. I stayed in trouble, always getting sent out of class, always getting suspended, and always getting phone calls home." As he reads what he wrote about her via my shared screen, he shakes his head and laughs the kind of laugh that is reserved for the past, a laugh heavy with a "what was I thinking writing that?" Still, he says to keep it in, because it's "embarrassing but true."

In these excerpts from his entries to his "diary" project, we also see Emeliano's deficit perceptions of himself and his community. For example, he shares "the kids/teenagers in my neighborhood I see is either stealing drugs or "having fun." Aside from his negative generalizations of the young people in his community, in this example we see Emeliano's linguistic practices which are heavily influenced by the neighborhood in which he lives. This is evident through the use of what others refer to as Black/African American Vernacular English, as seen through his use of "is either." It also becomes clear that Emeliano writes exactly as he speaks, which is seen both through the casual tone he utilizes but also later in the excerpt through the misspelling of certain words such as "waist." Overall, these linguistic practices often diminished by school still serve to effectively communicate his analysis of himself and his world: "Like me, kids in my neighborhood usually don't do anything good with their lives."

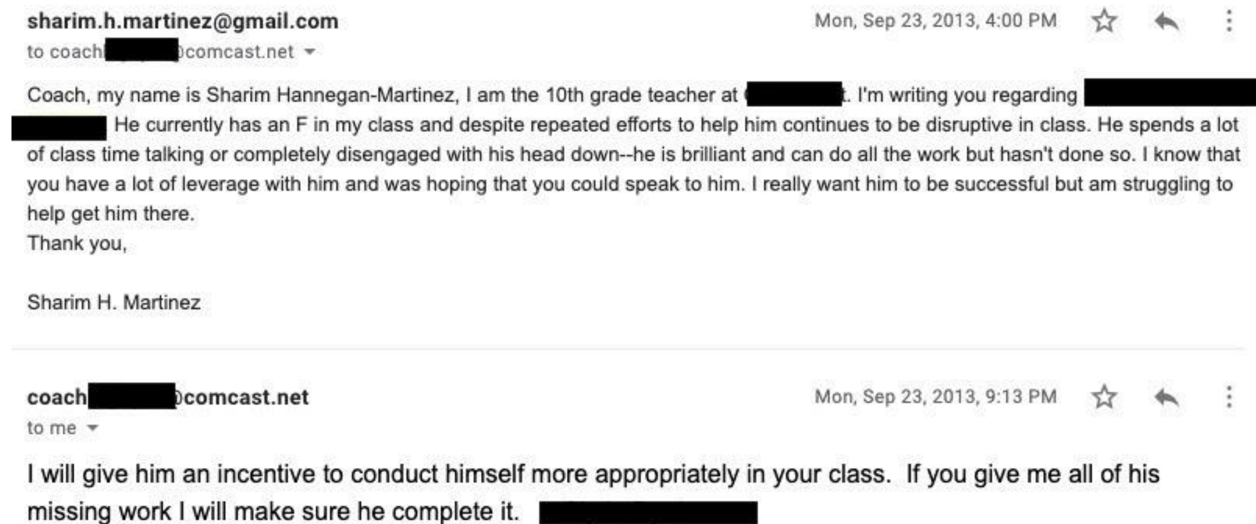
In the above excerpts it also becomes apparent that as a result of both his involvement in football and his relationship with his girlfriend, Emeliano is recognizing a shift in his mentality and behaviors. Where once he was "always getting kicked out of class" or "always getting

suspended," he is now trying to do things differently. This is a struggle I have recognized in him as he seems to go back and forth between who he was, who he thinks he is socially, and who he might want to be. I also notice that these learnings all feel happenstance, as if Emeliano accidentally included them in his attempt to focus on football which for him is both deeply personal and impersonal. This decision to remain as surface level as possible was likely the result of the fact that our relationship remains somewhat tenuous. While we have days where we laugh at silly jokes and get along, I am aware that I don't know Emeliano all that well and that it will likely take significant time and effort given the rocky start to the school year.

There are no other literacy artifacts that I can find for the remainder of his ninth-grade year. While he continued to come to class consistently and participated enough to demonstrate understanding of the critical concepts that we were engaging in—he did not, to the best of my knowledge, submit another complete written assignment. That is to say, that while he read the novels we were reading together and completed some warm-ups, I do not have another essay to analyze for this year. Instead, it is the absence of the essay that I am drawn to: What does the lack of a literacy artifact mean? What does the absence of an assignment reflect about our relationship? My pedagogy? These questions hounded me as we went into the summer, as I knew I would be his teacher the following year.

We began his tenth grade in a new yellow classroom, in a new building, but Emeliano and I were the same as we were in his ninth grade: on a rollercoaster. Some days Emeliano was engaged, actively participating, and our relationship was great. He would stay after school for hours to lay on the new couch we had in the corner of the room, work on an assignment, and joke around with me. Other days he would walk in, sit down in front of one of our many fans and put his head down on the desk, refusing to nudge if I made any effort to check in, or ask how he was

doing, if he wanted to talk, etc. Several weeks into the school year, it was clear that as a result of this inconsistent engagement, he was not on track to get a "good" grade for the first marking period of the school year. I decided to try something new, and reached out to his football coach.



sharim.h.martinez@gmail.com Mon, Sep 23, 2013, 4:00 PM
to coach[redacted]comcast.net

Coach, my name is Sharim Hannegan-Martinez, I am the 10th grade teacher at [redacted]. I'm writing you regarding [redacted] He currently has an F in my class and despite repeated efforts to help him continues to be disruptive in class. He spends a lot of class time talking or completely disengaged with his head down--he is brilliant and can do all the work but hasn't done so. I know that you have a lot of leverage with him and was hoping that you could speak to him. I really want him to be successful but am struggling to help get him there.
Thank you,

Sharim H. Martinez

coach[redacted]comcast.net Mon, Sep 23, 2013, 9:13 PM
to me

I will give him an incentive to conduct himself more appropriately in your class. If you give me all of his missing work I will make sure he complete it. [redacted]

Figure 14. Email Correspondence with Emeliano's Coach.

As is evident in this email correspondence, I was trying and *failing* repeatedly. This artifact also offers a window into my pedagogical practices and ideologies at the time. While I was concerned with Emeliano passing the class and was making concerted efforts to make sure that he didn't, I also appear overly concerned with his grade, rather than *how* he is doing. As I reflect now, I realize that he was telling me something by putting his head down and refusing to work or to write and I just wasn't listening, wasn't taking the time to read or make sense of his behaviors. As someone who understands how trauma and toxic stress manifest in the body, I realize now that I wasn't just focused on the wrong things, I was asking the wrong questions.

In December 2017, when we had our class reunion and focus group, students would describe this type of behavior as caring, but not loving. The distinction for many of them,

Emeliano included, was that teachers cared about students in ways that were self-serving, and tied to the boundaries of school. For example, teachers cared about/for you and would act on it to the degree that it would help you become a good student, but that's where the relationship ended. My students' distinction between care and love is sobering as I re-read my email to his coach, realizing how Emeliano might have interpreted that as my caring about his grade, but not him, and perhaps that is why he wasn't engaging in the curriculum. Maybe he wasn't writing and producing literacy artifacts because he was too busy *reading me.* Maybe the absence of his work *is* the literacy artifact I should have been analyzing at the time.

Perhaps the most important outcome of the email, and point of reflection for me, is that one month later in October 2013, Emeliano turned in a completed essay on historical amnesia (assignment described in another chapter). Here is an excerpt of his essay:

> Historical amnesia happens because of institutional oppression, for example, the white people came and stole the land of Indian people and tried to control them. One of the ways white people oppressed Indians was putting them on a reservation; a reservation is a place of poverty. The whites specifically made that place to keep Native people below them and keep them in control. The whites told the Indians that their culture was wrong and they were not proper. They punished people for speaking their own language, cut their hair off, taught them English, taught them that being white was the thing to be, and made them stop practicing their traditions. Over centuries, this led to Indian people not practicing or knowing a lot of their native traditions, which is an example of historical amnesia. Historical amnesia can impact people by making them feel like they're less than nothing, feel self-hate, not know the real story about their people. In the novel *Flight* by the Native American author Sherman Alexie, the main character experience historical amnesia and negatively affects him by him doing the stupid things he do and have internalized oppression so much all he do is think that his race is nothing. As the novel progresses and the plot thickness, the protagonist Zits travels through time. Time traveling helps him to understand his ethnic background and why his people are so messed up; this helps him to know himself better which makes him feel more human.

This introductory paragraph to his essay reflects a clear understanding of the ideas being studied in class. For example, he directly ties historical amnesia to institutional oppression and then explains how the reservation was a function of that oppression. He also illustrates an

understanding of history explaining how white people sought to destroy native culture and traditions. Further, he is able to name some of the impacts of historical amnesia such as "self-hate." He ends the paragraph by explaining how the protagonist of the novel we are studying feels more "human" as a result of learning his history. These understandings are communicated in a paragraph that in both syntax and grammar are much stronger than the excerpt from his freshman year. While there is a clear reliance on the sentence starters that were provided to the class, illustrated below, he is also able to complete most of the sentences following the "rules" of writing. Only once when he writes "negatively affects him by him doing the stupid things he do" does he revert to writing his literal verbal speech patterns.

INTRO Sentence Starters:

Sentence 1: Attention grabber. Write a comment, question, story, or quote about historical amnesia

____

____

Sentence 2 & 3: Historical amnesia is…

____

____

Historical amnesia happens because….

____

____

Sentence 4 & 5:

Historical amnesia impacts people in many different ways, such as

____

____

Historical amnesia can be seen through…

____

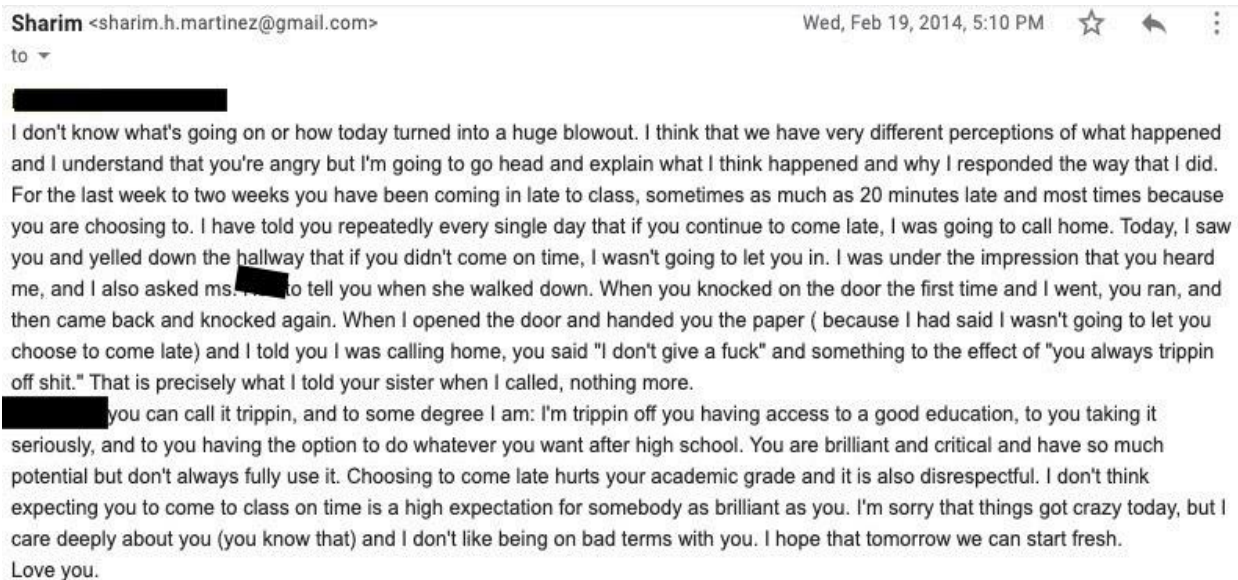
____

Sentence 6: Write your thesis here.

Figure 15. Sentence Starters.

Similarly as I experienced with Alex, the submission of this assignment was another reminder that just because students' are not putting pen to paper doesn't mean they aren't absorbing and retaining the information that we were learning in class. Unlike Alex however, this essay did not mark a pivot or shift in our relationship or Emi's trajectory in the course. Instead our journey together was more like a war, a battle, a rollercoaster, and this paper was just one peak on a ride with lots of twists and turns and drops.

For months we went back and forth between excellent days and days that would send me home crying. In the beginning of second semester, Emeliano picked up a new habit—coming to class late or refusing to come at all. Some days he would come to class only because Steph would pull him in by the ear—literally. Other days, I would see him in the hallway, let him know that I was looking forward to seeing him on time, and still, almost without fail, he would walk in thirty minutes late to a 60-minute class. Again, in my frustration, I began to engage a pedagogy that didn't fully align with my ideological commitments and would tell him that I would send him to the office to get a slip if he continued to intentionally disrespect me, and the class. One day, this came to a head, as can be seen in an email I sent him after that particularly bad day.



Sharim <sharim.h.martinez@gmail.com> Wed, Feb 19, 2014, 5:10 PM
to

I don't know what's going on or how today turned into a huge blowout. I think that we have very different perceptions of what happened and I understand that you're angry but I'm going to go head and explain what I think happened and why I responded the way that I did. For the last week to two weeks you have been coming in late to class, sometimes as much as 20 minutes late and most times because you are choosing to. I have told you repeatedly every single day that if you continue to come late, I was going to call home. Today, I saw you and yelled down the hallway that if you didn't come on time, I wasn't going to let you in. I was under the impression that you heard me, and I also asked ms. to tell you when she walked down. When you knocked on the door the first time and I went, you ran, and then came back and knocked again. When I opened the door and handed you the paper (because I had said I wasn't going to let you choose to come late) and I told you I was calling home, you said "I don't give a fuck" and something to the effect of "you always trippin off shit." That is precisely what I told your sister when I called, nothing more.
you can call it trippin, and to some degree I am: I'm trippin off you having access to a good education, to you taking it seriously, and to you having the option to do whatever you want after high school. You are brilliant and critical and have so much potential but don't always fully use it. Choosing to come late hurts your academic grade and it is also disrespectful. I don't think expecting you to come to class on time is a high expectation for somebody as brilliant as you. I'm sorry that things got crazy today, but I care deeply about you (you know that) and I don't like being on bad terms with you. I hope that tomorrow we can start fresh.
Love you.

Figure 16. Email to Emeliano.

Again, I include the above artifact as a way of modeling vulnerability and reflexivity, which I think are central not just to effective teaching but to the development and sustenance of loving relationships. While I communicate both care and love, as well as my belief in his

brilliance, I am again acutely aware of (a) the hyperfocus on academics and (b) the fact that I not once asked him what was going on, if he was okay. It would be months later before I would earn the right to know.

Instead, we would continue trudging along, with days that ranged from excellent to horrible and everything in between. On one of our good days, we were studying hegemony by analyzing the novel *Animal Farm* and film *The Matrix.* On that day, we were using a supplemental song to interrogate what the relationship was between hegemony and sexism. As we brainstormed a sexist hegemonic culture and all the ways that manifests through language, media, advertising, music, etc. Emeliano proceeded to say, with a smirk on his face, “I get what ya’ll are saying but I want my wife to make dinner in her booty shorts . . . and what’s wrong with that?” The class, most of whom are young women, erupted all at once with “hell naws” and “wtf.” Emeliano withheld a giggle as Steph proceeded to tell him all the reasons that comment was “sexist” and “dehumanizing.” His giggles reflected an understanding that he knew that he was saying something that was going to rouse a reaction, but that didn’t make the comment any less true for him. He doubled down. I felt and obliged the urge to jump in and tell him he was wrong, that his desires and beliefs were rooted in a system of patriarchy and sexism that was harmful to us all. As hooks (2003) reminds us, “Today small boys and young men are daily inundated with a poisonous pedagogy that supports male violence and male domination, that teaches boys that unchecked violence is acceptable, that teaches them to disrespect and hate women.” I grappled with how to engage in a pedagogy that could heal the poison of patriarchy while still resisting against what Giroux (1987), when recounting a story of a teacher experiencing sexism, refers to as an authoritative discourse which:

> disallows the possibility for the students to tell their own stories, to present then question the experiences they bring into play. Then, by denying the students the opportunity to

> question and investigate the ideology of sexism as a problematic experience, the teacher not merely undermines the voices of these students, she displays what in their eyes is just another example of institutional, middle-class authority telling them what to think. (Freire & Macedo, 1987, p. 19)

It was the first time that I stopped to consider how gender was impacting our relationship, and how I might have engaged in an authoritative discourse that had continuously disallowed for him to critically and authentically engage.

Our relationship continued to ebb and flow but Emeliano was spending more afternoons in our classroom and I found myself using that time to talk with him, get to know him and how he thought. I was careful and attentive to engage him by asking questions rather than jumping to tell him that what he thought or said was wrong. It seemed that this changed his disposition towards me as he would come more and more in the afternoons--sometimes even on the days he had purposefully come late to class. We continued this way for months, and as we did, he began to engage more in his work. While I had tied his changed behavior towards me to these afternoons, Emeliano tells me now that it was actually the conversations he was having with Steph, his classmate that were helping him to change. He says that out of class they would continue their debates about sexism and though I wouldn't know this until later, at home he was watching his mom experience the brunt impacts of patriarchy and sexism. Seeing his mom experience the things that his classmates and me described gave him pause, "made him want to act different and not do that to women."

In line with his increased engagement, he submitted the final assignment for that unit, a hegemony essay, and participated in the debate (described in another chapter). And as the year began to come to an end, he was continuously and consistently participating more in class. During our final unit, a personal legend, he was engaged but seemed hesitant to write. When I asked him about it after school, he said he didn't like to share "personal stuff." Rather than just

telling him why I thought it was important, we discussed the pros and cons of not keeping stuff inside. He shared how the football field is where he “got his feelings out,” his “aggression.” I asked him if he thought it would be bad if he had another place to “get his feelings out.” Eventually, and begrudgingly, he decided to write a personal legend, long after his peers had begun to work on theirs.

When the school year came to a close, he had not yet completed his essay. I wanted to honor the work that he had already done, so I called him and told him I would be picking him and bringing him back to the school on Monday, the first day of summer, so he could finish his essay. On Monday morning, I showed up to his house bright and early. I called and called, but Emeliano did not answer the phone. So, with great trepidation I opened the screeching metal gate and hoped that his two large pitbulls wouldn’t attack, and then slowly, I knocked on his door. He opened the door, groggy with sleep, but agreed to get ready and come back to the school so he could write while I packed up my classroom. Every year, including when we did our focus group, he tells this story about how I was “crazy enough to show up at his house.” And so, while I packed and cleaned up our yellow windowless classroom, he sat in the corner and typed, until he completed his personal legend. When we were both done, we grabbed burgers at a local neighborhood spot before I dropped him off at home. While eating, we laughed and talked about his friends and girlfriend. In that moment, I was reminded how important laughter and joy are to a relationship.

I sat down to read the essay later that night. While the essay assignment called for a specific event that impacted or changed your life, what I found when I opened his essay was a series of vignettes, a flooding of memories ranging from early childhood until now. He began by writing:

> When I was younger my parents would have to work at night. My pops would work at one a.m. to twelve p.m, but he would leave at twelve a.m. (midnight) to be at work early. My mom would work from ten pm to eight am in the morning so we would have to sleep at home without my parents. We'd go to school and come home to my parents resting for work the next day. So we would have to stay at home with my older sister. My sister would make sure that we ate, brushed our teeth, and made sure we went to school on time. When my sister couldn't pick us up from school, we would have to wait until my grandma came and picked us up. Throughout the day, I hardly saw my parents.

Despite not being a singular event as required by the assignment, Emi's choice to narrate this experience from his childhood is profound. In this short section he uses detailed examples and imagery to highlight how hard working his parents are, how expansive and interdependent his family unit is, and how he is taken care of. Yet, he ends with a reminder that despite all of this community cultural wealth (Yosso, 2005), he "hardly saw his parents." His choice to end the paragraph that way subtly communicates that *perhaps* there is another need that wasn't being met.

He continues by abruptly jumping to a recent event, where he shares:

> In mid-January my pops cheated on my mom with someone at work, and my mother found out. My sisters were old enough and they stayed with my dad while my mom took me and my younger brother. We went and stayed at my grandmother's house on Eighty-Fifth . I spent my birthday that year with my mom and little brother eating at a restaurant and when my mom asked me what I wanted for my birthday I said "I wish we can be a happy family with no fighting or arguing or us moving away."

In four sentences, Emeliano communicates what is a huge fissure in the fabric of his home life. It is to date the most vulnerable he has been, evident not just through his writing of the moment, but through his willingness to share his 'wish' that it wasn't that way. Guttural for me is the realization that this transpired in January--right around the time that he began coming late to and/or missing class. Emeliano, now all grown and bearded, reminds me that it was this event with his mom coupled with his burgeoning understanding of sexism that made him want to start "treating me differently." Again, I am reminded that (a) there is a critical link between literacy

and pedagogy and (b) that we must reconceptualize notions of dialogue and literacy in a way that makes space for *how* Emeliano was choosing to make sense of his world, a world that he felt was falling apart. Further, how do we train teachers in new literacy practices that help them to learn to read student behaviors with compassion, curiosity, and empathy? Emeliano continues his cascade of memories by returning to the past:

> Another moment that changed my life is when I was six years old. At my second game of my pop warner year (football), a guy came up to me and my brother. He asked "what ethnic background" we were and my brother's response was "We pacific islander." He asked "where you from" and I said " we from Oakland." Then he stopped . . . and laughed. Me and my brother were looking at one another thinkin what the fuck is wrong with this guy? and when he noticed we felt awkward he said "no wonder you guys are big and hella aggressive on the field."
>
> The scoreboard rang and it was the end of the second half which meant it was time for us to gear up cause we were next. While me and my brother were gearing up, we were both wondering the same thing but didn't ask each other. What does being from Oakland mean? It took me years to find that answer. I found that answer by hearing my uncle tell us "just because we ain't white, we already behind the game. Being from Oakland, people are going you judge you based on where you from." I told him about the man and he told me I should have kicked him in his nuts. I asked, "Why? "He said what the guy had meant is that we play or act the way we do because of where we are from.
>
> At the time he was drunk, so I was sitting eating chips, thinkin it's another one of his drunk talks, but now that I have learned a lot, I know he was right. People are going to judge me based off of the color of my skin. When you are where I'm from, people say you will be a nobody. Where I'm from, there isn't anything you can have or use to become successful. There's always a distraction. Some people that come from Oakland look at Oakland with a face of disgrace, but one thing they don't know is that we have advantages that other schools don't have: We have people who been there and done that.

He ends his analysis of this memory by sharing that one of the people he has who "been there and done that" is his football coach. He appreciates his coach for sharing his trials and tribulations and for also bringing in other men to share those experiences with them.

The incorporation of this memory is significant in that it shows how early young people are subject to racist people, remarks, and ideologies, and how those experiences imprint in their memories. Emeliano experienced that moment at only 6 years old but held on to it for years,

until he was able to make sense of it. Through his uncle's drunken insights and "learning a lot," Emeliano is able to make sense of this experience within a larger system of oppression and inequity. He begins the last paragraph of this life event with his understanding that "People are going to judge me based off of the color of my skin" and his belief that "Where I'm from, there isn't anything you can have or use to become successful." In stark contrast to this, he proceeds by saying, "Some people that come from Oakland look at Oakland with a face of disgrace, but one thing they don't know is that we have advantages that other schools don't have: We have people who been there and done that." This last line and the story of his coach resist dominant narratives about his people and his hometown, and serve to offer a counterstory built off the wealth that *does* exist in the community and that he now sees. Though only a few sentences, it is a significant departure from the deficit thinking that permeated his absolutely true diary as a 9th grader.

The personal legend continues by narrating another more recent memory in which his family had a party at which "some drama popped off." The retelling of this family party ends with him sharing:

> The next day my dad's hand was broken. That really affected my life because my parents are hard-working people and since that night, my pops can't work because his hand is messed up. All I can think is, who's gonna provide for the family? Yeah, my mother . . . but that means she's going to have to work twice as hard.

Stylistically, the end of this last memory serves to bring the paper full-circle: we both begin and end with the fact that his parents are hard-working, and that he is constantly thinking of them. He then writes that based on all of these experiences, his personal legend is to "become successful and give back to my community." In order to do this he says he needs to live by the following principles: be self-confident, be independent, be reflective, be resilient, and teach little ones the problem. He explains that to teach little ones the problem means:

> You can't go to the little ones and tell them go out there to the world and change it. You got to sit them down and teach them. Teach them why things happen in these areas like Oakland. Tell them stories about back in the days. Teach them these things because most people dont teach young people of color the positives about people who made it. If i want to do this, i need to study things for the little ones to learn that are interesting and teach it to them. I need to work my butt off to look for history from all types of races so everyone can feel welcome and they can relate to it.

While the rest of the paper showed a clear growth in writing, this last section appears to be rushed through with less attention to spelling, grammar, and syntax. Still, the message is powerful and not to be lost. In talking about teaching little ones, Emeliano channels similar understandings learned in the unit on historical amnesia as well as Tupac Shakur's notion of T.H.UG. L.I.F.E that "The Hate U Give Little Infants Fucks Everyone." It is important to note here that while these are things we have covered in class, and shifts in consciousness that other students attribute to our curriculum and classroom, as can be seen in the other two chapters, for Emeliano he is adamant throughout this paper that these learnings are from the men in his life: his uncle, dad, and coach.

At the beginning of Junior year, Emeliano's energy in the space shifted. Whereas for two years we were on a rollercoaster filled with good days and bad days, the first unit of his 11th grade year he was in class, on time, and rarely put his head down. In fact, he now raised his hand often, confidently sharing his opinion. I'd be remiss if I didn't acknowledge that at this same time, we had a new co-teacher in the room, Patrick Camangian, aka Cam. It is hard to say then if his behavior shifted because our relationship had grown, he had changed some over the summer, or because there was now a male adult in the room. My best guess is that all three are true. Emeliano confirms this.

Our first unit, a poetry unit described thoroughly in another chapter and in the book *Half an Inch From The Edge: Teacher Education, Teaching, and Student Learning for Social*

Transformation, was grounded in the Black Arts Movement (BAM) and began with studying the film "Slam." As we studied the film, we paid particular attention to how the main character, played by Saul Williams, uses his words to "name his world," and how in doing so, he disrupted and challenged patriarchy. This is most vividly seen through his relationship in the film with Lauren Bell (portrayed by Sonja Sohn) who uses her poetry, her word, and challenges his internalized sexism. In doing textual and visual analysis of these scenes, we had many class dialogues about sexism, gender, and patriarchy. Emeliano, engaged and curious, would ask Cam questions such as "do you really think patriarchy is bad?" Cam would respond thoughtfully, reflecting on his own internalized sexism and sharing his desire to unlearn something that has also been so limiting to his own humanity. Emeliano would listen, soaking up every word.

The first part of this assignment, described in depth in another chapter as well in the aforementioned book, asked students to engage in a literary analysis of two poems. While there was a select list of poems, paired together by theme, students were allowed to select what poems and themes they wanted to study. Together, in groups they analyzed the poetry before writing their own literary analysis. Emeliano was in a group that analyzed the poems "Beauty part 3" by Carvens Lissaint and "In Response to a Brother's Question about What He Should Do When His Best Friend Beats Up His Woman" by Asha Bandele. Below is his introductory paragraph and excerpts from his literary analysis of these two poems:

> Huey P. Newton, the founder of the Black Panther Party once said that "power is the ability to define phenomenon." What this quote is saying is that when you use the words to tell what's going on in your world, it helps you understand and see what's going on so you can go out and change it. Words are important because they represent something in life, help people view others perspectives, help people discover themselves, and let people realize what's going on in their real world. Poetry helps people to express their experiences, study their experience, learn from them, and heal from them. This is important because in a world where everyone isn't being heard and poetry is a place where you can talk about what you've been through. While there are important similarities between "Beauty part 3" by Carvens Lissaint and "In Response to a Brother's

> Question About What He Should Do When His Best Friend Beats His Women" by Asha Bandele the difference among the two is one talks about a young man growing up getting bullied because of the color of his skin, and the other poem is about how a friend should talk to his male friend on why he shouldn't be beating up, hitting the women of his life. The similarities between the two poems is that they both illustrate that men are taught how not to show their feelings and how that impacts men, and through their relationships, women.

In this introduction, Emeliano clearly illustrates a growing understanding of the power of words, and how they can be used to communicate, learn, and heal. In his thesis statement it becomes clear that by analyzing these two poems, he is able to see the negative impacts of men *not* being able to use their words to name their [internal] worlds. He continues by analyzing the specific content utilized in the two poems:

> In the poem by Asha Bandele, "In response to a brother's question about what he should do when his best friend beats his women," it talks about making a man understand why they hit women, lie in front of their face, and says "take him back to where it all started" and "tell him the white man made him do it." The poet is saying that them seeing the white man hitting his wife or girlfriend during times of enslavement made it seem like it's okay to do it, so the people of color learn mentally to do the same as them. It also shows how men nowadays are mentally taught that when you see something wrong and you have feelings you aren't supposed to show feelings, or when you are angry to take it all out on your women, and that's what's wrong with society nowadays is that we live in a world where men are taught to act a type of way or you are not consider a man . . .
>
> Another Quote by Carvens Lissaint "Beauty Part 3" it says, "My Freshmen year of college I started having sex with women in the hopes to find myself in the museum of their pelvis so gyrate my hips under the bodies of their sweat and of the temples crashing I used to pound bodies . . . screaming at the top of my lungs what's my name just so they could remind me who I was." This is one of them important quotes because it shows how he used to express himself before he started doing poetry. What he used as a pain relief was sex. It sounds like a good idea for men, but when you look at it, it's like you are using women as a recharge. You use them and take your anger out on them. In this quote, the poet is making women inferior to men because he can go to her and take his anger out on her, and that is similar to the first poem I analyzed because it is you taking your anger and frustration on women like they are not human, which is divide and conquer.

In both of the above excerpts, Emeliano is able to identify and analyze relevant evidence related to the themes around gender and masculinity. In each poem and excerpt he is able to explain

how the mistreatment of women is occurring in direct result to men not being able to communicate their feelings. In the first poem by Asha Bandele he is able to historicize this treatment by connecting it to the enslavement of African people. He then is able to connect both poems by saying "and that is similar to the first poem I analyzed because it is you taking your anger and frustration on women like they are not human, which is divide and conquer." He draws the connection between the poems using vocabulary and concepts we have learned in class such as "not human" and "divide and conquer."

While his writing still requires some polishing to be at what they consider "grade level," this essay is the first time he is able to deeply connect evidence from the text to identify a theme and then relate that theme to his own life, as is seen below:

> As a young man right now one thing I know personally is I usually don't express my feelings about things. If it's about feelings I usually just shake my head, and just act like I don't have an answer to it knowing I do, but I know deep inside but if I express my feelings I will be considered a female. One thing I learned is that it isn't just myself that do that. It's a virus for men. Like men don't show a sign of softness because that can be considered a weakness and compared to a female. We can use these words in these two poems to inspire men. Inspire them and let them notice that how we act affects everything around us. It will harm the lower generation...It can also hurt us by men hurting women. The way we treat them is like we are higher than them. When I say them I mean beautiful women. The women who gave birth to you and raised you, but you look up to the wrong parent as a model. It isn't fair the way that women are treated.

This conclusion paragraph illustrates a deep understanding of the insidiousness of sexism and patriarchy—what Emeliano refers to as a "virus." He also is able to explain how this virus impacts everybody negatively, and how he too is infected by it and feels like he can't show "softness" or talk about his feelings. He then is able to connect this understanding explicitly to the poetry he read and analyzed, arguing that we should use these poems to "inspire men" to change things for the next generation. While his usage of the word "female" can be read as

problematic, it is emblematic of the fact that he is at the very beginning of a long journey to unlearning and resisting patriarchy.

The concepts of patriarchy, masculinity, and sexism clearly remain heavy on his mind as he works towards the second part of this unit which requires students to write two poems, and perform one. The first poem, the one that did not get performed, was inspired by the film we studied and is a rumination on hypermasculinity, on gendered expectations and violence.

> If I had a gun to my head
> and it was my final moment on earth
> I would look dead in the person's eyes and think . . .
>
> Think about those times when I catted off during class,
> football practice
> at home when I'm supposed to do my part of cleaning
> and even missing church
>
> Think about my family
> And all the people I let down
> Making sure that I know those things
> that I've done before my time was up
> Crying
> To the fact that I helped people out in my life
> But cry even harder because I seen people fail
> And I know that I could of done something to help them overcome that obstacle
>
> Thinkin' back to the time
> When I got into a fight
> Because I felt like I was being disrespected
> He's looking at me
> And I'm looking at him
> Noticing that he is breathing heavy
> And knowing
> The fact
> That he wants to take my head out
>
> But I'm thinking it's defend myself
> Or let him beat my ass in front of my brothers
> He throws a right jab landing
> Hitting the side of my face
> Then hearing my brothers talking to me
> "he just hit you"

“Fight like he was in your house tryna kill bam, tumtum, and lil deeh.”

Then I get in my mode
Knowing that he wants to take my head off
Just as much as I want to hit him
So i hit him once
Landing it to the chin
Then another
Then another
And then me

Pissed to the point where I just pick him up
Slam him straight on his shoulder
Pop!

I’m looking around
noticing that I threw him on the curb
Seeing him
Grabbing his left arm
Calling his cousins
Asking for help

A lady yelling at us
Telling us
“you boys take that bullshyt somewhere else”

Sitting in the car thinkin
I just won
Brother and cousins saying “you did yo thang lol bruh”
Happy
Enjoying myself
Feeling like I'm the king of the world.

Days later
Thinking back at the time
“What would have happened if I approached Mexican bruh the same way I would have if my blood brother looked at me crazy?”

Thinking to myself . . .
what the fuck did i just do?
I just broke a dude’s arm!

Thinkin to myself…
That's what this government want out of us--
People of color
To kill ourselves

While they watch.

So if I had a gun pointed to myself
I would say
Lord please
Forgive me
For all the negative things
I've left as a representation of who i am
Of my community
My parents

And most of all

Myself

The first stanzas of this poem begin with general reflection—family, football practice, missing church. Quickly and mid stanza, it switches to "crying" because he's seen people fail, and struggle, and didn't help them. This is perhaps his first acknowledgement of agency and power, that he can help himself, and he can also help others *now*, not just in the future once he is "successful."

Then quickly in the next stanza, he becomes focused on a particular moment, the moment that is the purpose of this poem: a fight he had. As the fight is about to begin, he becomes aware of his opponent, helping us to visualize him through his "heavy breathing," a sign he is ready to fight. There is but a brief moment of contemplation for Emeliano because " it's defend myself /Or let him beat my ass in front of my brothers/ He throws a right jab landing/ Hitting the side of my face/ Then hearing my brothers talking to me/ "he just hit you" / "Fight like he was in your house tryna kill." These lines and vivid details serve to support an idea Emeliano began to explore in his essay around how men perpetuate and uphold patriarchy with one another by forcing them to silence their feelings, or in this case, pushing them to fight. This is further reified when the fight is over and he shares "I just won/ Brother and cousins saying "you did yo thang lol bruh"/ Happy/ Enjoying myself/ Feeling like I'm the king of the world." Again, by

using their words to narrate the moment, he paints a picture of how patriarchy is upheld and celebrated, how when he does it right, it makes him feel like "king of the world."

Despite his victory, his next stanza continues that days later he begins to reflect, to consider how he might have responded differently if he could see this person of another ethnic background as family, his family. He continues, realizing the gravity of his violence then thinks to himself "That's what this government wants out of us— /People of color/ To kill ourselves /While they watch." He then ends with an apology to his family, to his community, and to himself. These stanzas reflect a shifting consciousness in Emeliano, an awareness that his actions are inspired by systems of oppression—racism, sexism, patriarchy—but that they are not necessarily in his own interest, or aligned with who he wants to be. In fact, based on his poem, one could argue that his actions serve to maintain oppression as the "king of the world," but that he is growing tired of doing oppression's dirty work.

His second poem, which he had chosen to perform, was worked on with Cam. I mention this because I had not yet read the poem when the night before performances Emeliano texted me asking me if I could call him because he needed help. He asked me if I could pick him up early before school and take him to the store so that he could buy roses for "a surprise." Begrudgingly, I agreed, after he said it was "for the class." The next day, after waking up earlier than usual, I picked up Emeliano and we bought roses for his 5th period performance. When fifth period rolled around, Emeliano was visibly nervous, fidgeting with his hands and pacing around the room, with the roses hidden underneath my desk. Despite his consistent participation, up until this point, he had refused almost every formal presentation over the last several years. I was nervous too, that he would change his mind, but when it was his turn, he went up to the front of the room, stood in front of the semi-circle and performed the following poem:

“The Unknown Queens”

I wanna take this time
To say sorry
Sorry to all the beautiful women
That have been
Beaten
Put down
Single mothers that have been abandoned by their baby’s daddy
Or father

And to all the young women
Who have been played
While they were in a relationship or used

Sorry to my sister for all the shit I’ve done
I know we fight like a like a cat and dog
Because you the only one that would correct me when I’m wrong
And me
Talking back with my smart mouth
Then getting hit
Hit because as a “man” I automatically think I’m right over a woman

When all those times mom wasn’t there
To wake me up for school
You put clothing on my back
Provided breakfast for me and D
Even giving us showers when we were little

I have the right to be disrespectful towards you?
You are a Queen in my heart!

With my mother
You tell me to do something simple
Like take out the trash
I smack my lips
You say “smack your lips ima go over there and give you a real reason to smack them”
I say something under my breath
You say, “What you say Tupouniua?”

And I say nothing . . .

Silence

Thinkin why do I have to do everything
Mom yells at me

“Come here help me cook”
I respond “why can't the girls help you?”
When we at parties
You be drunk
Looking for me and D
But D outside being a problem child
Like always
I’m sitting here making sure that you, bam, and tumtum is all cool

And you come up to me and say come in Pou
Let's go Dance

I say “mom you’re drunk”
“Come on”
“Lets go home now so you can rest”

She’s trying to drag me
Saying
“shut up just have fun”

“I don't want to dance”
Then I walk away

Now that I look at it, it makes me cry
Cry to the fact that you’re my mother
You would do anything to put those fresh shoes on my feet
Make sure my football gear is ready
Fresh to hit the field
Provide a good ass meal
After games or practice
I can't even dance with you while you are enjoying yourself?

Makes me break down inside
Knowing that I can't do a simple thing to make you happy
You’ll give me the world
Even if it’s taking your life away from yourself

You’ll always run that extra mile for me and D
To make sure we’re warm at night
buy extra cereal cause you know we ain’t gonna drink the milk
So it’ll last
Make sure our clothes are washed
So we ain't going to school looking raggedy
I would like to let you know
I LOVE YOU !
I LOVE YOU !

Because I know I don't tell you this all the time
Deep inside
It's trapped on a little island
Locked in a box where nobody can get it
And what's in that box is
Where I keep my precious moments

I have plenty of them with you

You are a Queen in my Heart, Mom!

When he is done performing the poem, the class claps, and as they do, he walks behind my desk and grabs the roses then proceeds to hand one to all the young women in the class as he thanks them for all they do, for all they survive, for all their patience in his learning. This moment is so significant in his own growth that in platicás with Alex, she brings this up as a moment she felt loved, sharing how "it was love that we checked him and wanted him to be better, but it was also love that he listened."

The poem, which details the countless acts of labor his mom and sister do for him and his little brother is filled with a litany of small reflections about how he responds to the small things he is asked to do in return. While the poem at surface is lacking in poetic techniques, his listing serves as a poignant technique that reminds us viscerally just how much women do for the men in their lives. In turn, when he is asked to cook or dance, he refuses, even wondering to himself "[and] I have the right to be disrespectful towards you?" The poem ends with this realization that even after all that women do for him, he can't even "do a simple thing to make you happy." Woven throughout the poem there is a motif strung throughout that because he is a "man" he feels entitled to these feelings and actions, and that all the other feelings, such as love and appreciation are "inside," "Deep inside," "trapped on a little island, or "locked in a box." This

poem is his effort to unlock the box, to resist gendered expectations by verbalizing his feelings, his appreciation, his love.

The literacy artifacts in this unit are evidence of Emeliano's monumental growth in consciousness, reflection, love, literacy. And yet, our journey together still remained a roller coaster. He struggled through the next unit, the autoethnography, and at the end of the semester Emeliano asked to be taken out of the program and placed in a "normal" English class. Despite numerous conversations, he insisted that the workload was too challenging and that he did not want to remain in our class. We allowed him to leave. He would continue to come visit after school although no longer enrolled in the class, though the visits became less frequent and less lengthy as the demands of junior year and the football team continued to grow.

At the beginning of senior year, Emeliano begged to be allowed back into the class. As we talk about this now, he pauses, then pensively shares that "love is like loyalty, right? Like sometimes you gotta do something for people even if it hurts them or they don't like it because you know it's the best thing for them later." He continues by sharing, "That's kinda how I realized you really loved me because you made me do all this hard work and had expectations but when I went to the other class they just let me do whatever I wanted, they didn't even care." According to him, he had gotten used to me and our class and that is why he asked to come back. When he asked, I responded by telling him that it wasn't my decision, it was a collective one. He stood in front of the room, in a new classroom we'd been assigned, and asked if he could join again. As he asked if he could join, he reflected on his decision to leave, and promised to work hard, to honor the space and the people inside of it. They voted him back in, after all he was "family."

During the first weeks that he was back, we had a guest lecture from a good friend, Dr. David Stovall (Stov). His lecture spanned the topics of racism, schooling, Chicago, amongst other topics. The majority of the time was spent with him answering questions. In the onslaught of questions, one came from Emeliano—he asked how Stov was able to unlearn his sexism. He explained that even though I said a lot of the same things as Stov, or Cam, or his coach, that for some reason he just "couldn't hear me the same because I wasn't a man." This question and subsequent reflection is perhaps the most remarkable literacy artifact in Emeliano's four years in high school. Beyond the words "i love you" which I had heard very occasionally from Emeliano, and was commonplace in our classroom, this question, this constellation of words, showed Emeliano's increased capacity for love, his commitment to it. For me, this question was a gift, an act of love made up with so much of what love requires: vulnerability, empathy, reflexivity, and accountability. It was a reminder that "love takes off masks that we fear we cannot live without and know we cannot live within" (Baldwin, 1963).

While there are several more literacy artifacts that I could include and analyze for his senior year—such as his analysis of gender and sexuality in *Drown* and the film *Pariah,* or his senior project which explored racism and anti-Blackness in schools—I instead choose to end this portrait with that question. That question is both an act and outcome of literacy, it is an offering and an invitation for all of us to continue grappling with, just as he does. And so, the question remains unanswered, and is unfinished-- much like our relationship. Emeliano reminds me we can always learn *more* about what it means to be anti-sexist, anti-racist, anti-oppressive. Similarly, we can always learn more about what it means to love; we can *always* grow our capacity to love.

***

In many ways Emeliano remains a constant reminder of what happens when you are not in dialogue with your students, when you are not yet literate in their behaviors and mannerisms, when your literacy and your pedagogy are not yet loving, *and yet you believe they are*. How often did I believe I was loving when my students' behaviors told me that they felt unloved? How often did I grade the literacy documented in essays and parade the hallways ignoring all the ways students were reading and writing their world? I don't know. But it is for this reason that this dissertation exists, why it is built off of a reflection and aims to correct these mistakes by asking what I should have asked a decade ago—*What is love? What do you need to feel loved? When do you feel loved?* It is for these reasons that I also cannot divorce literacy from pedagogy, understanding that what we count as literacy, what literacies students choose to share, and what functions literacy can serve are severely limited *or* limitless depending on what it is we believe and do as teachers.

Emeliano also serves to remind us that we are not just trying to develop loving pedagogies and relationships in the context of acute, complex, or intergenerational traumas—we are developing them within classrooms and larger systems that are responsible for those traumas and have been built in order to divide us, to keep us from loving. Sexism and patriarchy are a part of that system. This requires that we develop loving pedagogies and literacies in a system that has never loved us and has been designed so that we are not loving to ourselves, or to others. As educators, this requires not just that we create a curriculum that engages young people in understanding these systems but that we pay attention to how we develop young people and classrooms that are committed to this kind of consciousness and empathy. What supports, scaffolds, and metrics do we have to honor the kind of reflexivity and vulnerability that it takes a young person to ask the kind of question Emeliano posed? How do we honor the intellectual and

emotional labor of all the other young people in the class, mostly women, who loved him enough to hold him accountable? Who believed that he could be and do better even when he battled them month after month, year after year? These are far from the types of outcomes we are measuring in schools or in literacy, but they are of utmost importance if we are to center a process whereby young people can grow in their capacity to love themselves, their peers, and their communities.

Baldwin (1963) wrote that "Love does not begin and end the way we seem to think it does. Love is a battle, love is a war; love is a growing up." For me, this has never been truer than it was teaching Emeliano. Teaching him was a war of ideologies, internal and external, battle after battle, year after year. He forced me to grow up, to look in the mirror, to realize where my words didn't match my actions, to trace the places my ideologies and pedagogies didn't align, and to learn that literacy could be more than what I had been taught and was teaching. It also didn't begin or end the way I thought or hoped it would—years later, as I am writing this, he has a newborn baby girl and we are *still* arguing about sexism. In the last twenty-four hours his brother, another one of my students, has just survived being shot and I am texting him worried he will retaliate on his behalf—he is still, and will always be navigating patriarchy and hypermasculinity. We are still discussing this, still arguing. We are both still growing up—growing in love.

CHAPTER SEVEN: TOWARDS PEDAGOGIES AND LITERACIES OF LOVE

> Here you were: to be loved. To be loved, baby, hard, at once, and forever, to strengthen you against the loveless world. Remember that: I know how black it looks today, for you. It looked bad that day, too, yes, we were trembling. We have not stopped trembling yet, but if we had not loved each other none of us would have survived. And now you must survive because we love, and for the sake of your children and your children's children.
>
> (Baldwin, 1962, p. 7)

This chapter speaks back to and extends my 2016 *Urban Review* article "From Punk Love to Compa Love: A Pedagogical Paradigm to Intervene on Trauma" by including the contributions of young people as central to the conceptualization of loving pedagogies and literacies. I will begin by briefly explaining the definition and tenets of Compa Love, then explain how I am currently conceptualizing love, and the role of literacy in fostering loving relationships.

Compa Love Revisited

Compa Love is defined as "the political practice of meeting the tangible (physical), intellectual, and emotional needs of young people in hopes for both self and community actualization" (p. 7). As I describe in the article, Tangible love is the literal providing of material resources to young people which allow youth to deal critically with the complex issues that affect their lives, while simultaneously being materially supported. Intellectual love refers to a curricular and pedagogical approach that creates a platform for healing and cultivates love of self and others, by being both culturally sustaining and academically rigorous. Last, Emotional love is about creating the conditions for young people to be vulnerable as they share their stories and struggles in order to recognize and honor the humanity in themselves and one another. I argue that together, these three manifestations of love work together to create the types of loving relationships that research says young people need in order for healing, resilience, and overall wellness.

Towards Pedagogies of Love

I revisited Compa Love after a stark realization that I had, as other scholars have, defined love without those I was attempting to be in loving relationship to—my students. What follows are some major learnings on love born out of platicás with 27 of my former students, and the construction of the three prior portraits (Chapters Four, Five, and Six). These learnings inform the conceptualization of a Pedagogy of Love.

1) *Dropping the "Compa" in "Compa Love."* Many adjectives have been used to describe and define love: radical (Buenavista et al., 2019), decolonial (Sacramento, 2014; Sandoval, 2000; Urena, 2017), abolitionist (Love, 2019), and revolutionary (Kaur, 2020) to name a few. Undergirding all of these adjectives is a demand for equity, for justice, for freedom. Each of these adjectives is significant, poignantly speaking back to a particular type of oppression and demanding that love counter that harm. I, too, have participated in this phenomenon. However, after much deliberation, I am dropping the adjective of compa, and all other adjectives, in an attempt to (re)claim and restore the essence and purpose of love. I offer this instead: if it is not rooted in justice, it isn't love. If it is not abolitionist, it isn't love. If it isn't anti-racist, or anti-colonial—*it isn't love*. If it is rooted in or perpetuates *any* form of oppression—***it isn't love,*** because as hooks (2000) reminds us, "love and abuse cannot co-exist." Given that oppression is abusive, love and oppression cannot co-exist. While the academy tends to engage in gimmicks for which adjectives are useful—there are no adjectives needed for love. Moreover, these adjectives allow, and even enable, people to continue saying they "love" but perhaps it is just not "radical" or "insert adjective here." As Morrison (2004) preaches, "love is or ain't. Thin love ain't love at all." Oppressive, colonial love ain't love at all. It is time

we stop allowing it to be called as such. Below I offer a framework to guide us towards (more) love.

2) *Love and care are not synonymous.* As one student Giovanni, shared, "you can care about someone without loving them, but you can't love someone without also caring about them." Although more work needs to be done by scholars to delineate care and love, all 27 students were adamant that they were not the same thing, but that as hooks (2001) shared—caring is a part of loving. While there was recognition that there was clear overlap between the two, students' responded from their cultural intuition (Delgado-Bernal, 1998) sharing that it *felt* viscerally different to hear someone say they care about you versus that they love you. Students also shared that they found that teachers cared more about them being successful students, rather than as whole human beings. For example, many students shared that teachers would show them care to help them get a passing grade, but that care was extended only in that it directly tied to academic outcomes. In some cases students felt that teachers showed acts of care, but felt like these were acts more about making the teacher feel good, rather than truly meeting students' needs. In this way care and love resemble the similarities and differences between sympathy and empathy. Care is like sympathy, something you have *for* someone, whereas love is like empathy, placing you *with* and alongside them. While findings illustrated that care was communicated primarily through singular or disconnected acts, love was described as a consistent practice with connected actions that built on one another. In this way, love was made up of consistency, action, and commitment in ways that care was not.

3) *Spirituality is integral to love.* Anzaldúa (1987) defines spirituality as a "different kind and way of knowing. It aims to expand perception; to become conscious . . . to become aware of the interconnectedness between all things by attaining a grand perspective" (p. 83). Blackstock (2011) and Cross (2007) similarly iterate spirituality as an understanding of interconnectedness, and posit that spirituality is integral to wellness. In understanding our interconnectedness, Tello (2018) offers that every person has a sacred purpose and is integral to the community, to the ecosystem (Yang, 2009). One way spirituality is practiced and maintained is through rituals (Tello, 2018; Weller, 2015). Findings from this study showed how these notions and practices of spirituality served to foster a love of self, peers, and community. For example, many students referred to the ritual we used to begin class each day, where we would chant Assata Shakur's words: "It is our duty to fight for our freedom. It is our duty to win. We must love each other and support each other. We have nothing to lose but our chains." They discussed this ritual of recitation as making them feel connected to their ancestors and to legacies of resistance, while connecting them to their individual—and our collective—sacred purpose. This connectedness also served to foreground love as essential to our purpose, and to honoring our ancestors. In this way, spirituality is not just central to wellness, but deeply connected to the practice of love.

Following others who have studied and utilized the language of Pedagogy of Love (Darder, 2002; Freire, 1998), I utilize these three lessons to inform the following contributions to theorizing a Pedagogy of Love.

Pedagogy of Love

Here we are: to love and be loved, to teach love. Love is a political praxis of cultivating interdependence for the purpose of individual and collective survival, sustainability, well-being,

and joy. Love is the impetus, the process, and the outcome—the what, how, and why of surviving and sustaining. Love requires attunement to the interconnected realms of being: the tangible (physical), emotional, intellectual, and spiritual and is practiced on four spheres—self, peers, community, and world. Love requires consistent intention, action, and reflection. It is not simply a destination, but a praxis of growing built on consistent and connected actions. This framework is not meant to serve as an indictment of whether we are loving or not, but as a way to grow our capacity and ability to love. Elements of love include: *care, trust, empathy, accountability, safety, honesty, vulnerability, support, respect, commitment, consistency, and joy*. These elements exist and are practiced across all four realms. The following graphic illustrates how these ideas all work together to cultivate love, highlighting again that love is the impetus, process and the outcome—hence the graphic beginning and ending with love.

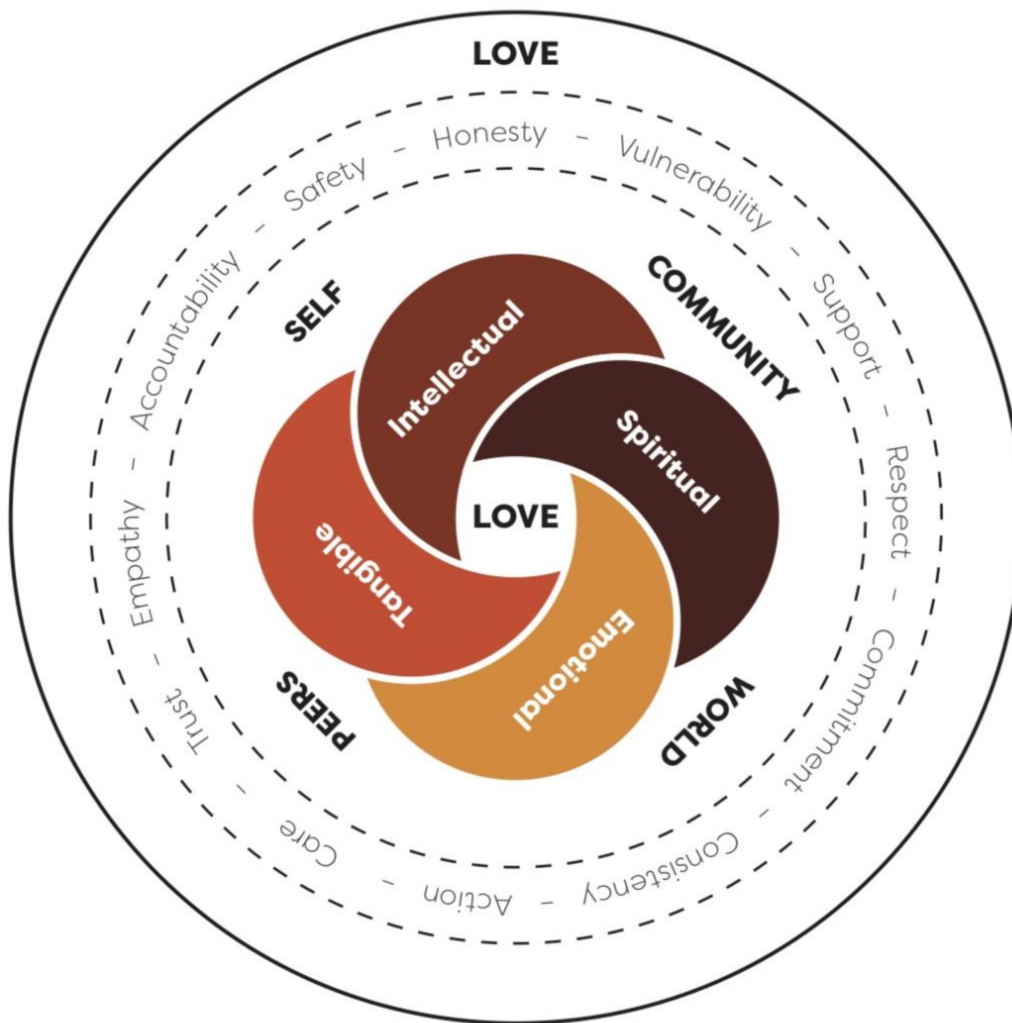


Figure 17. Love.

Within a classroom, a Pedagogy of Love requires that teachers nurture young people's full humanity and well-being--the tangible (physical), emotional, intellectual, and spiritual, and commit to meeting needs across those four realms. Moreover, while the teacher is responsible for creating a loving classroom container and fostering loving relationships with their students, this pedagogy decentralizes the teacher as the holder of love. Instead, the teacher is committed to interdependence and facilitates a process whereby young people grow their love of self, peers, community, and world. The teacher does not make assumptions about whether the child is

already loved, but rather commits to this love knowing it is important for survival and serves to inoculate them against a world filled with loveless institutions. This responds to Perry's (2010) call that the more loving relationships a child has, the more likely they are to recover from trauma and thrive. The teacher must understand that there is a corollary relationship between love and healing, and that both require work and support. Below, I share examples that highlight these themes within the frame of accountability.

To illustrate the ways in which the model on love, seen above, is profoundly interconnected, I offer the following statements from students with regards to the element of accountability. This theme was unexpected but salient throughout all of the platicás, again highlighting the importance of a methodological framework that conceptualizes *alongside* young people rather than just for them. These are some of the responses students shared to how/when they felt loved in our classroom:

- *"Also, you did not mind checking us and did it in love. I have had teachers who would let me fail, didn't care if I came to class late but if you were failing class or late to class then you were gonna find out why, [students] were gonna find out how much Ms. Sharim loved you."*
- *"I'll never forget the moment you told me about plateauing and being willing to do more. That I shouldn't settle with just barely scratching the surface of my intellectual capacities but I should continue to challenge and grow in knowledge and understanding of myself, and others around me."*
- *"It was the small gestures. I remember freshman year in high school, although I kept my distance and didn't really like you, I could tell you had love for me when you would call/text me early morning to make sure I made it to school on time. You even picked me*

up once. Before that, I don't think I ever had a teacher really care about my attendance. Because you demonstrated love consistently, I was able to reciprocate eventually."

- *"It was when you gave me a B and it was the first one that I had ever gotten one and I was so mad that I brought my dad to the school and then in the meeting you said that you gave me a B because you weren't gonna let me just get an A because I thought I was doing better than my peers, that I actually had to do my personal best. That schools had failed me by making me think that being better than my peers made me deserving of an A. And that I owed it to my family and ancestors and peers to be better."*
- *"It was when you told me it wasn't good enough to just get an A and not talk to anyone else, that I actually had to use my brilliance to teach and love others and then made groups so I could teach."*

These are just a *few* of the examples students shared with regard to the theme of accountability, which is heavily present throughout the portraits as well. I utilize this theme as an example both because of how salient it was, but also to disrupt deficit notions about the capabilities of young people who may have experienced trauma. These examples also illustrate the circular interconnectedness of love. For example, while these examples seemingly focus on academics (intellectual), they are only possible because of checking in on students to find out what was happening (emotional), providing support such as calls or rides (tangible), and making sure that they knew they were born from legacies of greatness (spiritual). Across these examples, students also named their peers, community, and world in direct relationship to the work that they were producing, work that was not about grades but about sharpening our minds as a tool against oppression, against a world that has not loved us. This accountability also reflected almost every other element of love such as care, support, and honesty to name a few. I offer this theme

particularly because it disrupts narratives about what is possible for students who have experienced trauma, while also highlighting that you can't focus on one sphere of being without including the others. For example, had I focused on the intellectual, academic work for the sake of grades, that would not in and of itself be loving. If I had given a B just because, without the relationship and analysis, that would not be loving. Rather, this became loving only in that it showed concern for their well-being, connected them to something larger than themselves, and was met with whatever type of support was necessary—phone calls, rides, tutoring, etc. In the next section, I share how I design literacy units in a way that aligns with a Pedagogy of Love, illustrating the role of curriculum in fostering these relationships, and how these units engage all parts of the definition and model shared above.

Literacies of Love

Given the relationship between literacy and healing, for this dissertation I was really interested in the role that literacy assignments and practices could play in growing young people's love for self, peers, community, and world. This intellectual endeavor sits on the shoulders of scholars who ground literacy as a sociocultural and political practice that requires multiliteracies (de los Rios et al., 2015; Gutiérrez, 2008; Morrell, 2008; Street, 1984) and builds on the notions of a restorative English education (Winn, 2013), critically caring literacies (Camangian, 2010), and critical healing literacies (Cariaga, 2018). I also place Literacies of Love in conversation with scholars who have begun to extend notions of literacy to include the body (Kirkland, 2014), while rejecting the notion of centering trauma as a pedagogical approach to literacy (Dutro, 2017). I offer instead that Literacies of Love can both "strengthen you against the loveless world" and support young people in healing some of the effects of trauma such as shame and self-hate. These literacies are loving in that they illustrate the teacher's love for their students, create the conditions for young people to love themselves more, and work alongside a

Pedagogy of Love to turn the classroom into a loving container. Below, I share how I design literacy units to be loving, and some of the literacy understandings that guide both the design, and my assessment of literacy in the classroom.

Curriculum Design

While all literacy units and assignments are designed to meet state and national standards, the primary outcome as Alex shared in her portrait is for students to be able to "love myself, not just love myself, but to understand myself so that I could love myself, and others too." In line with the values of intellectual love, each unit is designed to help young people more deeply understand themselves, their lived experiences, and the world. Specifically each unit should (a) help young people understand the systems and conditions causing them and others harm, *and* (b) center critical consciousness, resistance, love, joy, and agency. In doing so, these units aim to alleviate some of the shame endemic to trauma and build on legacies of resistance in a way that cultivates the agency and power that coloniality, oppression, and trauma try to steal. This serves to foster empathy and interconnectedness, which are integral to love. Important to note however, is that while students may disclose trauma in these assignments, the purpose is not to ask for or center trauma. Second, these literacy assignments cannot be demanded in a classroom devoid of a Pedagogy of Love in that they require safety, trust, and vulnerability.

In addition to these commitments which undergird every assignment and unit, the following essential practices guide my design of loving literacy units.

1. *The essential question(s) guiding inquiry of texts is grounded in rigorous, critical, and liberatory frameworks*; *essential questions always include an analysis of the theoretical frameworks in students' material world.* As illustrated in the portraits, some examples of these frameworks include the 3 Is of oppression (institutional, interpersonal, internalized), intersectionality (Crenshaw, 1991), Sankofa, In Lak'ech, transformational

resistance (Solorzano & Delgado Bernal, 2001), community cultural wealth (Yosso, 2005), and hegemony (Gramsci, 1935). As can be seen in the frameworks utilized, rigorous, critical, and liberatory is not reserved to theories created by the academy, but also those of our own communities. The essential questions and guiding frameworks are a manifestation of the teachers' commitments, illustrating what they value, and what they think is necessary for students to know, particularly with regard to their own world.

2. *Utilizes rigorous and relevant multimodal texts.* This builds on Freire and Macedo's (1987) notion of reading the word and the world. In this case multimodal texts include the written word--novels, autobiographies, poetry, films, spoken word, interviews, music, and students' lived experiences. I also join others that theorize the body as a text worthy of study (Anzaldúa, 1987; Cariaga, 2018; Moraga, 1981). In selecting texts for study, there is a commitment to cultural relevance and sustainability (Ladson-Billings, 1994; Paris & Alim 2017), and an attention paid to representation with regards to the author's race, gender, sexuality, abilities, and other intersecting identity markers. This is an important part of love because it shows who and what the teacher believes is worthy of study. For students, the visible representation of authors was spiritual in that it connects them to ancestors and reminded them of their legacies.

3. *In line with the essential questions, final assignment(s) require analytical writing, as well as a creative component.* Given my role as an English teacher, most assignments conclude with an analytical writing prompt that requires rigorous analysis of the text(s) studied. Given that the essential question requires analysis of theory in multiple texts, including lived experiences, the final assignment requires that young people showcase that analysis. This analysis can be a part of the analytical writing assignment, but most

often takes the form of an "creative" assignment that allows young people to showcase their linguistic dexterity and artistic genius. Some examples of this include: poetry, music, skits, magazine ads, videos, drawings, art, and dance to name a few. This is important in that it not only creates the opportunity for embodiment, creativity, laughter, and joy, but allows for young people to practice and extend literacy in ways that feel authentic.

4. *Every unit culminates with a performance of final assignments.* The presentation of final assignments can take many forms but is principled on creating the conditions for young people to share their analysis, and experiences. These opportunities allow for young people to practice their public speaking skills, amongst other literacy skills of embodiment. When sharing, young people are learning about one another's experiences in ways that alleviate shame and isolation while fostering empathy and interconnectedness. This also serves to facilitate young people's critical consciousness and analysis of systems which can build a sense of collective agency. In order for these performances to occur, the classroom must be a place where young people can trust that they are safe to be vulnerable, that their stories are sacred and protected. These final performances are expected and normalized, part of the ritual of creating a loving classroom container.

While organizing my literacy units with these commitments facilitates young people's literacy development, it also challenges the bifurcation of literacy which has focused almost extensively on the acquisition of literacy skills by focusing on a different function: love. This requires not only that my teaching of literacy and my design of units align with these commitments, but that there is a paradigm shift in how I assess and analyze literacy practices.

My design and assessment of literacy assignments and practices aligns with the values of translanguaging (de los Rios & Seltzer, 2017) and code-meshing (Young, 2009), which challenge racialized notions of code-switching that perpetuate linguistic racism and language hierarchies. Young (2009) argues that by encouraging "speakers and writers to fuse that standard with native speech habit . . . it has the potential to enlarge our national vocabulary, multiply the range of rhetorical styles . . . and make us in the end multidialectical" (pp. 64–65). The residue of these practices are evident in literacy artifacts across the three portraits in which students use their multiliteracies to tell their stories, as they describe "in their own words." For example, in Alex's portrait we see her perform a poem and reflection in which she fuses English, Spanglish, slang, and cursing. This blending of linguistic repertoires allows her to powerfully narrate and analyze her own experiences and then connect with her peers in a meaningful and empathetic way. Moreover students regarded that for the majority of their K-12 experiences the teaching of literacy they experienced was often hateful, traumatic even, in that it positioned their home languages—the languages of their friends and family—as inferior and unworthy. Schools literally teach young people to hate the way they speak. As contrast, the welcoming of translanguaging and code-meshing as valid literacy practices in our classroom made them feel seen and loved, while increasing their capacity to see the value in the linguistic repertoires of their families and communities.

I also argue that the designing of literacy assignments in this manner can allow them to serve a function beyond just the assessment of literacy skills and critical thinking. In creating the conditions for young people to think, read, write, speak, share in this way literacy can serve as a container for growing our individual and collective capacity to love. Moreover, assignments such as the ones illustrated in the portraits can allow us a window into young people's wellness,

specifically literacy assignments can serve as a gauge to allow us to measure one of the most integral components of health: love. Literacy is not apolitical; as illustrated by the young people in this dissertation, the teaching of literacy has the potential to harm or to heal, to cause hate or to grow love. Knowing all that we know about toxic stress and systemic racism—to choose not to design literacy assignments that could serve as another tool to inoculate our children against a loveless world, and to ignore the opportunity to use literacy assignments to gauge a young person's health and wellness, is to in no uncertain terms allow our classrooms to continue existing as sites of suffering and death.

Conclusion

Peck, as cited in hooks (2000) explains love as "an act of will—namely, both an intention and an action . . . . We do not have to love. We choose to love" (p. 5). I argue that love is not just a choice, but a *political* choice--to love somebody is to commit not just to their growth as Peck suggests above, but also to their wellness, their joy, their wholeness, their survival, and sustainability. Therefore, the choice to love is to commit to dismantling systems and structures of harm that threaten those very things. All of the research and data in this dissertation share why this is true for Communities of Color who experience the brunt impacts of systemic oppression and its effects on their bodies, brains, and spirits. However, Freire (1970) reminds us that the oppressor is also dehumanized through the process of oppression. Similarly, Baldwin (1963) shares, "White people in this country will have quite enough to do in learning how to accept and love themselves and each other, and when they have achieved this . . . the Negro problem will no longer exist, for it will no longer be needed" (p. 22). Love then, is not just anemic and affective, nor is it reserved for Communities of Color. Rather, love demands that white people commit to and engage in a practice of anti-oppression, and of freedom, that allows them to begin loving themselves and others in the way this dissertation asks for—as a love that is

rooted in interconnectedness and interdependence. In order to sustain this type of loving practice, requires praxis, requires not just intention and action, but also consistent reflection (Freire, 1970). In the following chapter, I offer suggestions for how teachers, schools, and teacher education programs can create containers for this process.

CHAPTER EIGHT: LESSONS ON LOVE

Days ago, on June 7, 2020 I awoke to text messages and phone calls from my former students that their friend and cousin, my student, Erik Salgado, had died the night before. He was brutally murdered by the police, who dispersed more than 40 gunshots at him and his pregnant girlfriend. She survived, but their unborn baby did not. Erik, who was unarmed, did not. His execution came in the midst of national uprisings that have been demanding justice for the murder of so many Black people at the hands of the police, and that the system of policing as a whole be abolished. The world is in agony. My students are in so much pain, hour after hour they call me sobbing, inaudible behind the wails of loss. I hold them as best as I can from hundreds of miles away, in the middle of a pandemic that has made traveling to them almost impossible. I am an endless pit of individual and collective and ancestral grief and rage. But even as I am struggling to hold it, I know that these feelings are rooted in a profound love for Erik, my students, our communities. Adrienne Maree Brown, shares that "perhaps love can only be as large as grief demands." Perhaps in this moment our grief is insurmountable because of how large our love is, and even so perhaps our capacity to love is being amplified in the monstrosity of this grief. What I know for sure is that even in the heaviness of this heartbreak which feels like it might destroy me, I still believe in the transformative power of love more than I believe in anything else. On the morning after Erik was murdered, I got up, because if for no other reason, I love him and my students enough to fight for the world they deserve, a world where they are loved and protected. This rage is love. This grief is love. These tears are love. This fight is love.

***

Trauma, Love, and the Present Moment

In 2017, Kendi, one of the leading contemporary scholars on race and racism, was interviewed regarding what the roots of racism are, and potential solutions. He shared that the root of racist practices and policies in this country was not hate, but rather self-interest, and that this misinterpretation is what led people to believe education and love were the answer. He adamantly proclaimed that love and education were in fact, *not* the answer. I don't disagree entirely with the sentiment of Kendi's arguments, but would offer that it is his own understanding of love and education that led him to make such statements. He's right that schools as they exist in this moment are not a solution, and I would argue, are actually an overwhelming part of the problem. Similarly, I agree that a feeling of love is not a solution, but love, as I understand it, is not just a feeling but a practice rooted in interdependence and interconnectedness. So, while it may not be THE answer, I argue that love is definitely part of it. Love, interconnectedness, challenges the idea that one person's interest or well-being matters more than another. This week the Minneapolis City Council made the unanimous decision to defund the police department. This came after almost 10 days of protest and uprising from the people of Minneapolis and nationally who argued for justice after the murders of George Floyd, Breonna Taylor, Tony McDade, and so many other Black people. Underscoring these movements is a profound love for Black people, for their existence, and for their continued survival—an understanding that our liberation is intertwined, interdependent. The outcome is the type of policy change that Kendi advocates for—after all, it is *people* who create policy. We can start to shift people, practices, and policy by engaging in the type of love the young people in this dissertation are asking for—a love that is rooted in our collective wellness, our collective survival.

Still, I would be remiss if I did not share that I am concerned about the ways the language around trauma and love are used, particularly in the context of the present moment. In the last several weeks, many have hidden behind "loving all people" as a way to prevent being held accountable for the ways they benefit from and reproduce the racism, xenophobia, and anti-Blackness that permeates our society. Many think pieces have been written about the trauma of the present moment, and while some have focused on the importance of relationships and connection (Teaching Tolerance, 2020) many more have been focusing on how educators can modify their lessons so that students can still be academically successful (McMurtrie, 2020). The focus on trauma in these cases is what Critical Race Theory scholars would refer to as a form of interest convergence (Bell, 1980) in which the schools and educators are focused on trauma only in that impacts the academic outcomes schools and teachers are measured by.

While the above articles focus primarily on how to respond to trauma once schools reopen, other teachers have used their understanding of trauma-informed practices to make sense of the present moment. For example, in a Facebook post that has now gone viral, someone shares:

> Here's my take on the riots in Minneapolis. As a teacher, when a student wrecks a classroom, throws things, breaks things, slams things and completely melts down. That's called trauma. We're supposed to respond by standing with that child, love that child, and working to heal. What is happening in Minneapolis and has happened in other places, to me, is an act of trauma. A kind of trauma that no white person in America can fathom. A kind of trauma that's source is deep, evil, and generational. It stems from slavery, oppression, torture and a long standing hate. George Floyd's murder is a clear martyr of this reality. The reaction is trauma. Why wouldn't we respond by standing with black people, loving black people, and working hand in hand with our black communities in order to heal.

I share the words from this post with great trepidation because I don't want to continue to amplify the message, but think there are important lessons to be gleaned from this post, particularly in terms of how the language of trauma-informed and love is being misused in ways

that perpetuate the trauma of Black people and other People of Color. First, as has been highlighted throughout this dissertation--words matter, language matters. The post begins with using the language of "riots" which already connotes a racialized criminality of events. It then continues by conflating what *might* be trauma responses to trauma, without analyzing what caused the trauma. This is particularly dangerous considering how often white teachers and schools are the perpetrators of trauma for Students of Color. By choosing this metaphor, the author also equates organized uprisings to a *tantrum*, and connotes a profound condescension towards organizers and protestors. The post continues and evokes the language of martyrdom, which communicates a level of deliberate choice and negates that George Floyd was brutally murdered. What follows is the argument that the "reaction is trauma."

Again, this perpetuates an inaccurate, ahistorical, and apolitical understanding of trauma—what happened to George Floyd is an acute, complex, historical, intergenerational trauma—what people are doing in response to that trauma, is organizing to demand that type of trauma no longer be inflicted. The post ends with asking why "we don't just love Black people or stand with them," again ignoring the role that white people have played in the construction of these traumas historically and contemporarily. With regard to the language of love specifically, this post bastardizes the notion of love and empathy and again uses it as a form of interest convergence meant to assuage the "tantrums" people are throwing. This is not love. If you argue as this post does, that we should love people *after* they have experienced a trauma, then let me be clear: you don't love them. If you are complicit in maintaining the systems that cause people harm, and are not reflective about that—you are not "trauma-informed," and it is not love.

Given my concerns around how the language of trauma and love are being used in educational and dominant discourse, in this last chapter I synthesize findings from my

dissertation and offer how they might be used by major educational stakeholders so that they can both respond to trauma and enact love. To do so, I discuss a Pedagogy and Literacies of Love as a culturally rooted way to address some of the tensions narrated above. I share these understandings of love and examine their significance to the fields of trauma-informed pedagogies, culturally sustaining pedagogies, and literacy. I conclude with practical implications for teachers, teacher-educators, and scholars around how they should use the pedagogical and literacy-based frameworks offered in this dissertation.

Significance

This dissertation synthesizes research spanning the fields of public health, medicine, social epidemiology, psychiatry, psychotherapy, ethnic studies, and places them in conversation with literacies, culturally sustaining pedagogies and care in education to theorize an underdeveloped intervention(s) to child trauma: loving relationships. I blend and build on the aforementioned research through what I refer to as a Pedagogy and Literacies of Love. Specifically, I extend trauma-informed, healing-centered, and culturally sustaining pedagogies by considering the role of loving relationships as a central tenet of these pedagogies, and integral to resilience, recovery, healing, surviving, and sustaining. This serves to more pointedly evolve how the aforementioned bodies of research and pedagogies conceptualize loving relationships as political practices. I do so by defining a Pedagogy of Love—political praxis of cultivating interdependence for the purpose of individual and collective survival, sustainability, well-being, and joy—and then naming some of the components essential to that pedagogical practice, and sharing clear student-driven examples. Through the portraits, I relay the complexity of building loving relationships within loveless institutions and against a world that has systematically told some children they are unloveable. These portraits—stitched together to form a mural of our

classroom—refute many of the descriptions of love as affective, highlighting love as an iterative political practice. In witnessing these relationships unfold through a mural, we also see the potential and possibility of love both in the individual lives of students and in the collective classroom, affirming the need for both Pedagogy and Literacies of Love. The methodological conceptualization of a mural is an important contribution to how we think about the potential of portraiture, specifically how portraits can be stitched together to tell a story of different people in one place at one time—allowing us a more nuanced understanding of the phenomenon at hand—in this case, our classroom, literacy, and love.

Throughout the portraits, I also explore and expand the role of an English education (Winn, 2013) and literacy practices and assignments (Morrell, 2008) to consider the relationship they might have in fostering love. Building on critically caring literacies (Camangian, 2010) and critical healing literacies (Cariaga, 2018), I offer that Literacies of Love, or loving literacies, are necessary for classrooms that want to center the healing and wellness of our students and communities. By considering how a literacy curriculum can foster love and serve as a way to gauge love, I reimagine the potential functions of literacy. In incorporating both the body and embodiment in this reimagining, I envision new opportunities for young people to communicate and make sense of their trauma, grief, rage, healing, hope, and love. In order to honor the full humanity of young people, Literacies of Love blends theories often not in conversation with one another to offer different possibilities for what we might consider literacy to be and do.

Offerings

Throughout this dissertation I have described the power of love, loving relationships, and loving literacies not just as a way of healing, but as a way of sustaining our cultures and livelihood. While I painted portraits—a mural—of what this looked like within our English classroom, I offer that these frameworks are not just useful but necessary in other classrooms,

schools, teacher-education programs and the academy. Below, I propose how major stakeholders can utilize these frameworks to grow our collective capacity to love.

Teachers

While I hope the research presented in this dissertation solidifies the impetus for love, and highlighted the ways in which love is fundamentally different than caring or liking, this dissertation is less for teachers who are love averse and focused instead on teachers who desire to be loving, who perhaps believe that they already are. As I have reiterated throughout this study and in the conceptualization and definition of love—love is a choice, a political one. In this section, I offer implications for teachers across three levels: self, students/classroom, teachers/outside of the classroom. Teachers who choose to shift towards love, who are choosing the health and well-being of their students, should begin by considering their underlying beliefs about trauma and love: What do you know about trauma? What do you believe about people who have experienced trauma? What do you believe love is? What do you think love looks and feels like? Who do you believe is deserving of love? How do you show love? How do you know that people are loved? What might you need to unlearn about the way you have been taught to love?

Teachers who commit to the practice of love should refer to the model shared in Chapter Seven and begin thinking about the interconnected realms and elements of love. They should consider how the different components of love: *care, trust, empathy, accountability, safety, honesty, vulnerability, support, respect, commitment, consistency, joy* look like in their particular cultural and physical contexts, understanding that it may look different given the time, place, space, population of students, etc. Given their contexts and students, teachers should then determine the pedagogical and paradigmatic shifts they must make to center love in their classroom and their curricular design. How can you create units across disciplines that foster

young people's love for themselves, their communities, for who they come from? While I describe what Literacies of Love look like in the context of an English classroom, teachers should focus their attention on how they can apply this framework to different content areas such as math and science. Much of the focus regarding relationships in education has thus far focused on teacher relationships to students. As was highlighted in this dissertation, classrooms should serve as loving containers where students also develop loving relationships to themselves, each other, and their communities at large. To do this, teachers should determine what rituals they are utilizing to create and maintain these containers.

Last, love requires critical self-reflection. Teachers must create structures to gauge the effectiveness of their practice, and be willing to shift and adapt to meet the needs of their students. Love is work, and to do this work inside of loveless institutions is oftentimes overwhelming, so it is important that teachers also create containers for themselves where they can continue to both reflect and re-fuel. Given that love is a practice that extends beyond the classroom, teachers should work internally and externally to transform the conditions causing young people harm. One way to do all of this is to create and participate in teacher organizing groups (Pour-Khorshid, 2019) that commit to "understanding the current oppressive school systems in order to avoid imitating them . . . and charting a new course that reimagines ways of relating to and learning from one another" (Martinez et al., 2016, p. 311). These containers, third spaces, are a way to cultivate, receive, and further enact love.

Schools

As iterated throughout this dissertation, schools have historically and contemporarily served as sites of trauma, and therefore, lovelessness. While this dissertation illustrates how a Pedagogy and Literacies of Love could be cultivated in one classroom, I would be remiss if I didn't acknowledge that as they exist right now, I am weary of believing in schools' capacities

and commitments to be loving. As is evident across the three portraits, young people are impacted by trauma in a myriad of ways that schools do not account for, or often notice outside of the realm of academic achievement. To begin moving towards love would require a dismantling and reimagining of the function of schools in a way that centers the wellness, healing, knowledges, cultures, languages, etc. of children and the community. This requires a hard pivot away from the institutional and disciplinary structures and metrics that currently permeate schools and cause harm to children, particularly Children of Color.

Moreover, there is a growing body of research that highlights the way teachers, and Teachers of Color particularly (Pham, 2019; Pour-Khorshid, 2019) experience racially hostile and traumatic experiences in schools. In order for schools to commit to love, they must create spaces where adults (teachers, families, librarians, custodians, cafeteria staff) are also met with a practice of love that engages them tangibly, emotionally, intellectually, and spiritually. In short, schools cannot begin to demand that teachers engage in a pedagogy and culture of love until they have modeled it.

Teacher-Educators

Teacher education programs should utilize the research, frameworks, and suggestions above to support future teachers in unlearning and learning the racialized understandings they have of trauma and Students of Color so that may better assess and address the multi layered needs of students. Specifically, teacher education programs must create a curriculum that facilitates teacher candidates through a process of better understanding themselves and their positionality in a way that helps to foster knowledge of self and self-love. The political ethos and practice of love should be centered in teacher educators' classrooms *and* explicitly taught as a tenet of effective teaching. Curriculum design and literacy courses should have teachers create units that build on the Literacies of Love framework and apply it to their content area and grade

level. Teachers must explicitly be able to name why they think this curriculum design is loving, and what the socioemotional outcomes of this unit are for the students they will be teaching. hooks (2001) argues that there are no schools for love, but I posit that teacher education programs should be just that--schools for love.

Researchers

Lawrence-Lightfoot (1994) shared that "for a portraitist to see her subject clearly, she must fall in love" (xv). This dissertation was conceptually and methodologically designed to center love and unequivocally challenge false notions of objectivity. Instead, I included my participants as active collaborators in every part of the research process, including the construction of the portraits. Together, we challenged damage centered notions (Tuck, 2009) of trauma which perpetuate suffering by pathologizing Students of Color and instead hone in on their trajectories in love and literacy. Moving forward, researchers should consider how they might engage ethos and practices of love in their research and with their participants. Additionally, I urge researchers who study K-12 students, families, and teachers to more actively engage the wisdom of the communities who they are researching for, and with. While this dissertation sought to conceptualize a Pedagogy and Literacies of Love, future research should study what these frameworks look like in practice across both geographic contexts and the K-16 spectrum, and how other teachers and students might expand our current understandings of love.

A Love Note

This dissertation is a labor of love and joins others who are working to reimagine and create schools as places where young people can heal, be loved, be whole (Camangian, 2010; Cariaga, 2018; Duncan-Andrade, 2011; Ginwright, 2016; Johnson, 2020; Pour-Khorshid, 2016). This work stands on the shoulders of generations of Women of Color who have long been saying that love and care matter, that they are integral to our liberation (Boggs, 2012; Cariaga, 2018;

Combahee River Collective, 1974; Darder, 2002; hooks, 2001, 2003; Lane, 2018 ; Jordan, 2002; Valenzuela, 1999). This dissertation is a synthesis of so many of the lessons and principles of many of our ancestors, who have long told us that interdependence, what I argue is love, is necessary for our survival and sustainability. This dissertation is a love letter to them, thanking them for all the ways they fought and survived so that we may be here, so that we may fight for our children, for their survival.

It is also a love letter to our babies—to every student I have ever taught, every young person I have ever met or have yet to meet, to the babies still on their way here, and those who have left us too early: I love you. This work is for you. A reminder that you are loved, have always been loved even when this world would have you believe that it is untrue. It is also a thank you for showing me time and time again what it is to love, what it is to be loved. Today the world is both bleak and hopeful, day after day the world has watched as young people alchemized their pain into organizing, into demanding justice. It is my sincerest hope that the pages of this dissertation mobilize teachers and adults to stand behind and alongside you, that they trust your voice and leadership, and never forget that to love you is to fight for a world where you are unequivocally safe, protected, held, *loved*. In the words of Assata Shakur, "it is our duty to fight for our freedom. It is our duty to win. We must love each other and support each other. We have nothing to lose but our chains." Keep fighting. Keep loving. Never forget that you are loved.

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