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Crossing Borders:  
Teacher Pedagogical Discourse Practices in a Non-Profit Community Media Center

By

Richard James Ayers

A dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction of the

requirements for the degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

in

Education

in the

Graduate Division

of the

University of California, Berkeley

Committee in charge:

Professor Jabari Mahiri, Chair

Professor Zeus Leonardo

Professor Susan Stone

Fall 2011

Crossing Borders:  
Teacher Pedagogical Discourse Practices in a Non-Profit Community Media Center

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By

Richard James Ayers

## Abstract

### Crossing Borders: Teacher Pedagogical Discourse Practices in a Non-Profit Community Media Center

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Professor Jabari Mahiri, Chair

The communication skills of teachers, their repertoire of discourses and rhetorical tools, are central to successful educational projects. This dissertation analyzes discourses as complex social practices to determine how they contribute to (or inhibit) things like student engagement, effective student learning, and student initiation into professional practices. Through classroom observations and teacher interviews, this qualitative case study illuminates the discourse practices of two teachers at a non-profit youth development media program. It considers how these teachers negotiate the intersectionality of professional radio discourse with other youth discourses to facilitate student learning of complex content as well as technical and journalistic skills. I propose the term Global Emergent Discourse to capture the mixture of diverse cultures and of global and local identities reflected in the classroom communication of these students and their teachers. This is a hybrid discourse that results from the colliding mixes and collages of their lived experiences. The findings of this study indicated that the deployment of discourse by the teachers in this setting was the enactment of an invented hybrid that was neither formal professional English nor the primary community discourses of the students in the two classes. It was a mixture that marked points of unity as well as steps towards induction to new discourses that reached across different generations and different local experiences within the complex web of Global Emergent Discourse. This hybrid discourse allowed these two teachers to effectively engage students in a complex curriculum of journalism, media literacy, and technical skills. It also marked a validation of the perspective and values of both the teachers and the students and stood in contrast to and critique of the one way transmission of knowledge and framing of educational goals that is often reflective of schooling in the United States.

## Table of Contents

Acknowledgements .....	iii
1) Introduction: Turning toward the Phenomenon.....	1
<i>Deployment of Hybrid Discourse in Effective Teaching Practice</i> .....	1
<i>Research Questions</i> .....	4
<i>Dissertation Overview</i> .....	4
2) Engaging the Conversation on Discourse and Literacy .....	5
<i>Discourse and Schooling</i> .....	5
<i>Race and Schooling</i> .....	6
<i>The Frame of Colonialism</i> .....	8
<i>Community Discourse Practices and School Literacy</i> .....	11
<i>New Digital Media, Youth Development, and Literacy at TeenVoice</i> .....	15
<i>Youth Development Principles and Promise</i> .....	17
3) Methods of Inquiry .....	20
<i>Theoretical Framework</i> .....	20
<i>Design</i> .....	21
<i>Site</i> .....	21
<i>Participants (informants)</i> .....	21
<i>Data Collection</i> .....	22
<i>Data Analysis</i> .....	23
<i>Positionality of Researcher</i> .....	24
4) TeenVoice – The Setting, The Context, The Staff .....	25
<i>San Pietro – From Local to Global</i> .....	25
<i>Inventing a Media Education Center</i> .....	26
<i>Life at TeenVoice</i> .....	27
<i>The Semiotics of Wall Signs</i> .....	30
<i>Roland – Supervisor and Culture Keeper</i> .....	33
<i>Fiona – Discourse and Race</i> .....	35
5) Marcus Harris - Intersectionality of Discourses and Metacognition .....	40
<i>Hip Hop Teacher</i> .....	40
<i>Solid to the Core</i> .....	44
<i>Code Switching and Metacognition</i> .....	50
<i>Real Talk: Culturally Relevant Pedagogy</i> .....	54
<i>Dealing with Conflict and a Cultural Breach</i> .....	58
6) Aida Orovida – Cultural Competence and Social Justice .....	63
<i>The Dance of Instruction</i> .....	63
<i>Global Identity</i> .....	66
<i>Cultural Competence – Using Personal Experience To Connect With Students</i> .....	68
<i>Social Justice</i> .....	72
<i>Global Emergent Discourse, Code Switching and the Secondary Discourse</i> .....	80
7) Findings and Analysis .....	85
<i>The Teaching Discourse of Marcus and Aida</i> .....	86
<i>Implications for Research</i> .....	91

<i>Implications for Practice</i> .....	92
<i>Implications for Policy</i> .....	92
References .....	93

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## 1) Introduction: Turning toward the Phenomenon

### *Deployment of Hybrid Discourse in Effective Teaching Practice*

This research project explores the pedagogical practices and negotiation of meaning of two successful teacher-mentors<sup>1</sup> in a positive youth development organization, TeenVoice in San Pietro<sup>2</sup>. I am using the term “successful” to indicate teachers who lead educational projects that engage students in sustained learning which meets complex standards of skill and critical thinking and which propel students to a continuing learning process after the teaching is over. In addition to case studies of two focal teacher-mentors, I also observed and interviewed the Education Director and the Health Educator in order to further contextualize the perspectives and values that are reflected in teacher-mentor discourse practices at TeenVoice.

The communication skills of teachers, their repertoire of discourses and rhetorical tools, are central to successful educational projects. In this qualitative case study of two teachers and their classes, I used selected ethnographic data collection methods including participant observation, interviews, and field notes to document and explore how classroom discourses reflect complex social as well as pedagogical practices. I have analyzed specific classroom discourses in this setting to determine how they contribute to (or inhibit) student engagement, learning, and initiation into professional practices. After two pilot studies, one in 2007 at the former TeenVoice site and another in 2009 at the current site, I spent six months of 2010 conducting research for this study with two of the classes that students initially take at TeenVoice. I studied teacher-mentor Marcus Harris in TeenVoice’s Core media training classes and Aida Orovida in the MATCH (Media Advocates Transforming Community Health) classes which are particularly targeted to teens who have come into contact with the juvenile justice system or have been identified as at risk by school authorities. Both of these classes represent the first introduction of students to TeenVoice training and production. Those who are interested can take advanced classes and become youth teachers within the organization.

Often the difficulties students have with learning and succeeding in school can be traced to miscommunication (Waxman & Padrón, 1995) and to the failures of teachers to understand and access the vast range of intelligence, wisdom, and funds of knowledge that students possess (Gonzalez, Moll, & Amanti, 2005). Language in school and society is organized within social idioms and in the cultural practices of those who use them (Barnes, 1990). Teachers who seek to initiate students into an engaged school discourse must be able to scaffold academic discourse practices and support students in reconceptualizing meaning (Cazden, 2001). Students must be able not only to acquire new information but to rethink previous conceptual frameworks and to think about subject matter through the lens of new, secondary discourses of professional and academic literacy.

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<sup>1</sup> At TeenVoice the term “teacher-mentor” is used to indicate a relationship that goes beyond the teaching of particular content – to the identity of these staff members as role models, older sibling figures, and critical friends to the students.

<sup>2</sup> TeenVoice and San Pietro are pseudonyms used for this study as are the names of all informants.

Discourse used here in the broad political and cultural analysis of oral and written language, is more than simply a way of expressing thoughts internal to individuals. “Every society has its own regime of truth, its ‘general politics’ of truth, that is, the types of discourse which it accepts and makes function as true” (Foucault, 1980, p. 131). Discourse, as defined by Foucault, refers to: “ways of constituting knowledge, together with the social practices, forms of subjectivity and power relations which inhere in such knowledges and relations between them. Discourses are more than ways of thinking and producing meaning. They constitute the ‘nature’ of the body, unconscious and conscious mind and emotional life of the subjects they seek to govern” (Weedon, 1987, p. 105). It reflects a series of dispositions tied to speaking style, body language, slang, and vernacular codes (Gee, 1990). So we can see inscribed in discourse the subjectivity and the identity of a person and how she is situated within broader social structures. Subjectivity, then, is not merely the internal being of an autonomous individual but rather the complex matrix of identity developed within the competing classes and social forces as reflected in the complex discourse ecology.

Discourse is the mediating mechanism of the social construction of identity (Ivanič, 1998) used to “support the performance of social activities and social identities” and to “support human affiliation within cultures, social groups, and institutions” (Gee, 1990, p. 78). As Leonardo (2003) suggests, language is not just a system of signs but it is a “mode of organizing social life, one filled with ideological dimensions that produce material results . . . a way of acting in the world” (p. 60). In speaking of the different discourses that contend within U.S. schools, Leonardo adds, “Although speakers of these languages may comprehend each other in conversation, the meanings they evoke differ. It is ultimately at the level of meaning that our concern over domination is articulated” (p. 61). My particular lens is on the bridging of students’ acquired, primary discourses with learned, secondary discourses (Gee, 2001).

The students served in the classes of my focal teachers, MATCH and Core, are from 60 to 80% African American, 15 to 20% Chicano Latino, with Asians and Whites representing from 5 to 10% each. The primary discourses of youth served by TeenVoice are neither homogenous nor simple language practices. They reflect their complex worlds. For example, the primary language of African American students in San Pietro cannot be captured by the term African American Vernacular English (AAVE). Twenty-first century youth live in a world conditioned by extensive migration, by the affordances of electronic media, and by a shifting global economy (Appadurai, 1996). Urban youth today occupy worlds of diverse cultures, cultures of language, music, fashion, sport, food, and socio-political identity. The colliding mixes and collages of their lived experiences reflect heterogeneous primary discourses that might better be characterized as a Global Emergent Discourse. The particular variant of these discourses in the U.S. urban context are reflective of African American culture but also Chicano Latino and immigrant communities. I use the term Global Emergent Discourse rather than AAVE to identify the variety of discourse practices that are reflective of the intersecting positionality of young people always in local as well as global contexts. Nevertheless, even as communities and their discourses are more in flux and identities more contingent on particular local practices, the primary discourse of a given community is structured in identifiable ways. The grammar is fluid but still rule-bound, and breaches are still easily identified by practitioners.

It may be most generative to understand the interaction of discourses of oppressed groups, which includes those who express a Global Emergent Discourses, as in a “contentious” relationship with discourses of power (Lave & Holland, 2001). Such groups advance a provisional, subverting response to dominant discourse (Butler & Spivak, 2007). Gee (2001) captures this notion in his formulation of “powerful discourses” which have the ability and intention of critiquing dominant discourses. While this dominant discourse is often called Standard English, here I will follow the example of Hudley and Mallinson (2011) in using the term “standardized English” to make clear that the dominance of this form is not an abstract truth but rather the construction of a class of people. This term was recently adopted by the National Council of Teachers of English (2011). The dominant discourse in society that we call standardized English is itself reflected through many secondary discourses. For example, discourses of physicists or lawyers are different from that of literature scholars. While there are worlds of discourse, we should not reduce it to a simple binary. But in the complex worlds of discourse, we can often identify dominant and the local discourses that do not exist in isolation but instead in conflict and competition with each other. It is a competition for whose version of reality, whose framing of the social space, will in the end define the public space.

Teachers often model learned, secondary discourses as experts in one or more disciplinary fields. The secondary discourses of TeenVoice include professional journalism, media literacy, radio and video technique, and Academic English. For this reason a key to creating an engaged learning environment is for the teacher to recognize a “third space” in discourse (Lefebvre, 1991; Gutiérrez et al, 1999; Moje et al, 2004), which is created when she understands, respects, and deploys aspects of the discourses of her students. Ultimately, instead of students being initiated to a single, standardized dominant discourse, they are exposed to hybrid discourses that correspond to the production of multiliteracies (Cope & Kalantzis, 2000). Teacher-mentors at TeenVoice promote a journalistic and technical discourse but they do not strictly speak in a professional discourse you would find at National Public Radio. Instead they negotiate multiple and conflicting discourses, and they utilize the multiple discourses available to them to teach students effectively.

Many of the non-profit youth development and cultural organizations outside of schools appear to be successful in engaging students and in winning their commitment to sustained work to learn complex skills. In examining the practice of teacher-mentors in out-of-school learning at TeenVoice in San Pietro, I hope to make a contribution to understanding this negotiated meaning and induction of students into professional and technical discourses. Researchers have demonstrated that TeenVoice is a highly engaging environment for the learning of complex technological skills by urban youth, and this success has been linked to the styles of discourse and the pedagogies that mark its approach (Soep & Chávez, 2010). My examination of teacher practice at TeenVoice paid particularly close attention to teacher discourse practices, how they deployed communicative performances, how they thought of their discourse practices, and how they engaged and taught students. I came to know how teacher discourse reflected their identities, their values, and their pedagogical strategies. My study extends scholarship on teacher discourse practices and the negotiation of meaning in pedagogical projects in this context that will also have important implications for teaching and learning in schools.

### ***Research Questions***

In this study, I have sought to answer the questions:

1. How do the two focal teachers at TeenVoice use discourse to facilitate student engagement in learning complex content as well as technical and journalistic skills?
2. How do the focal teachers understand and connect the discourses of their students and the various registers of professional media discourse?
3. What principles and values are reflected in teacher discourse practices at TeenVoice?
4. How might these discourse practices inform teacher education for more effective pedagogy in urban school settings?

### ***Dissertation Overview***

This study examines teacher discourse practices as well as teaching and learning events in this media-based youth development learning environment and documents how teachers deploy language, how they understand and connect student discourse practices, and how they discuss and teach issues concerning discourse with their students. I focus on TeenVoice as an example of engaged teacher discourse in the early 21<sup>st</sup> century. Chapter One introduces the research questions as well as the dissertation purposes and description. After providing an overview of my approach to research and the research questions in this chapter, Chapter Two engages the intellectual conversation on discourse and equity in education. It is an extended discussion of research and theoretical work in this field including the debates, developments, and relevant literature. It situates and contextualizes my framing and implementation of this study. Chapter Three explains the methodological framework I have used. It includes the theoretical framework, design, site, participants, data collection and analysis methods, and the positionality of the researcher. Chapter Four begins to address research questions two and three as it situates the context for the case studies of two focal teachers. It introduces TeenVoice as a media focused youth development organization in downtown San Pietro and examines the practices of staff induction and expectations through discussions with Education Director Roland Ijichi (a Japanese American male) and Health Educator Fiona McLain (a White American female). Chapters Five and Six begin to address research question one as they further address questions two and three. Chapter Five is the case study of Marcus Harris, an African American male teacher in the Core and Bridge media training programs. Chapter Six is a case study of Aida Orovida, a multi-racial (Asian, Latina, White) female teacher in the MATCH program. This class is funded by San Pietro criminal justice funds, targeted at teens in trouble with the law or school authorities. Chapter Seven provides additional analysis to draw together the patterns and meanings of the teaching practices of the focal teachers and to substantiate the key findings of this study. The concluding chapter summarizes the key issues addressed in this study and discusses implications for effective teacher discourse and pedagogical practices to facilitate the learning of urban youth.

## 2) Engaging the Conversation on Discourse and Literacy

### *Discourse and Schooling*

Many of the challenges students face in negotiating the practices of schooling arise from a mismatch of discourses, reflecting an asymmetry in power and legitimacy between their home language and culture and school language and culture. I use both the terms “language” and “culture” here because discourse is not simply reflected oral and written language. It also encompasses cultural practices such as body language, how an argument is made, the use of humor, and more. Extensive studies have revealed that the status of different discourses, including cultural practices and vernaculars, map on to attitudes and teacher expectations. For example, Labov (2011) demonstrated the ways that Southern English and African American Vernacular English have suffered a negative reputation suggesting that the speaker is lazy or ignorant.<sup>3</sup>

Discourse includes the technology of oral and written language in cultural communication and the practice of producing and receiving culturally recognized, ideologically shaped representations of reality (Ivanič, 1998). This includes discourse as the cultural practice of constituting knowledge and the social practices, forms of subjectivity, and the power relations that inhere in such knowledges (Street, 1995; Janks, 2010). Such an approach to discourse takes into consideration the disposition of the body, the conscious and unconscious mind, the social class and cultural practices, and the emotional lives of participants.

Foucault (1982) pioneered theoretical considerations on how the operations of discourse validate official knowledge. He illuminated how discourse is a social practice with material effects. “In every society the production of discourse is at once controlled, selected, organized, and distributed according to a certain number of procedures, whose role is to avert its powers and its dangers, to cope with chance events, to evade its ponderous, awesome materiality” (p. 216). Discourse then is not just the outward projection of internal thoughts but is a social and cultural practice that marks and constructs identity and social relations in society. Those in power in society embody and define the orders of “correct” discourse. “Discourse is constituted by the difference between what one could say correctly at one period . . . and what is actually said. The discursive field is, at a specific moment, the law of this difference” (Foucault, 1991, p. 63). In this sense, then, discourses are ideological and reflect social power (Gee, Hull, & Lankshear, 1996).

Some of the key issues in relation to youth discourse and schooling discourse were defined by Gee (1996). He posited the “small d” discourse as the primary discourse, a community that shares cultural signs that a person acquires through family, neighborhood, and peer interactions. And “large D” Discourse represents the secondary, ratified social discourse which is learned at schools, jobs, etc. Youths develop identity kits that “are ways of being in the world, or forms of life which integrate words, acts, beliefs, attitudes, and social identities, as well as gestures, glances, body positions, and

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<sup>3</sup> A study of new teacher attitudes in 1996 found that many of the 300 participants used descriptors for urban youth such as “lackadaisical, unmotivated, screw-you attitude, rougher, violent, more streetwise, emotionally unstable.” (Shultz, Neyhart, & Reck, 1996).

clothes” (Gee, 1990, p. 42). The primary identity kit represents the discourses of which the youth are part. They mark their identity, their membership in these communities, by appropriate discourse use.

There is a close connection between language and identity. We pick up not only the words but the rhythms and cadences of our primary discourse in the home and family. As Delpit and Dowdy (2002) argued, “Our language embraces us long before we are defined by any other medium of identity .... Our home language is as viscerally tied to our being as existence itself... It is no wonder that our first language becomes intimately connected to our identity” (p. xix). The primary discourse has also been characterized as the internally persuasive discourse, that which is tied to the class, ethnic identity, and community of a person. The common sense, taken for granted assumptions in discourse actually stand as representations of particular ideologies (Fairclough, 1992). This discourse is often in struggle with the authoritative discourse, the ratified master discourse of those in power (Bakhtin, 1981). Consciousness becomes consciousness when filled with semiotic/ideological content and that content is embedded in the cultural experience of a given community (Volosinov, 1929). Bakhtin and Volosinov challenged the Cartesian idealism of linguists such as Saussure who posited an ideal, abstract language separate from social practice. They argued that discourse is a dialogically tension filled environment shaped within social groups and not simply an individual expression.

Nieto (2010) applied this discourse theory to identify the role of language practices in the expression of culture. She asserted that language policy is central to strategies of school pedagogy whether they are assimilationist, dominationist, or multicultural. People acquire their primary discourse in their home environment. Their secondary discourses develop not only in public institutions but also in various community alignments. Schools periodically test the capacity of students to perform in various, dominant secondary discourses, and they attempt to channel people to work assignments that correspond with the needs of those who dominate the economy.

One way to discuss the experience of cultures coming together in education is “contact zones... social spaces where disparate cultures meet, clash, and grapple with each other” (Pratt, 1991p. 34). These considerations of contact zones and discourse mismatches suggest a fruitful direction for further investigation by focusing on the way schooling is constructed and conducted. This work asks us to examine, in addition to overt and just-below-the-surface racism of teachers, the seldom-challenged school language practices and procedures that may be hindering learning.

### ***Race and Schooling***

The social sciences as well as the natural and physical sciences in the West do not have a proud record in examining why some populations of students succeed and some fail. In the 19<sup>th</sup> Century, the most respected scientists proposed phrenology, the measuring of the size and shape of heads, as an explanation of intelligence. Needless to say, the White head was the gold standard and whatever variations could be found from this would be named the lesser shape. In the 20<sup>th</sup> Century, eugenics became the leading theory, again with Whites as the standard (Winfield, 2007). The eugenicists, including many who were identified as progressives, paved the way for a racial pseudo-science that was adopted by the Nazis in Germany. Today we continue to suffer from the

ministrations of scientists who once again use empirical data to valorize particular considerations of achievement and intelligence attributed to the White population (For example, see Herrnstein & Murray, 1996).

In order to examine the ways that discourse is implicated in racial stratification, reproduction, and the achievement gap, we must make a critical framing of race explicit. Woodson (1933) proposed a stinging rebuke of education bound to White discourse eighty years ago. He exposed even then how schools structured inequality:

The same educational process which inspires and stimulates the oppressor with the thought that he is everything and has accomplished everything worthwhile depresses and crushes at the same time the spark or genius of the Negro by making him feel that his race does not amount to much and never will measure up to the standards of other peoples (p. xiii).

In contrast to such a smothering view of education, Woodson (1933) proposed that “real education means to inspire people to live more abundantly, to learn to begin with life as they find it and make it better” (p. 29). More recently, Watkins (2001) traced the history of how education for Black subservience was established by White educators, driven by the same ideological framing of civilizing the savages as seen in the project of Pratt (1892) at the Carlisle Indian School.

Critical Race Theory in education (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995), drawing on developments in legal theory (Bell, 1980), explicates ways that racial privilege operates like property with the rights of disposition, rights of use and enjoyment, and the right to exclude (Harris, 1993). Those with privilege possess networks, contacts, social supports, coded discourse practices, and knowledge of the rules of the academic and business game. Mills (1997) applied this concept to what he called a racial contract, suggesting that institutions such as school and government subordinate people of color.

As Ladson-Billings and Tate pointed out, “Examination of class and gender taken alone or together does not account for the extraordinarily high rates of school dropout, suspension, expulsion, and failure among African American and Latino males” (1995, p. 51). In response to the challenge of Critical Race Theory, academics and practitioners have pursued a number of approaches to strengthening their pedagogy with urban, especially African American and Chicano Latino, youth (Solorzano & Yosso, 2001; Lynn, & Adams, 2002; Dixon, & Rousseau, 2006; Gillborn, 2006). The project of culturally relevant pedagogy critiques teaching practices that undermine and marginalize students of color (Gay, 2000; Howard, 2001; Ladson-Billings, 2006). Some of these attempts at creating culturally relevant curriculum (e.g. Spradlin & Parsons, 2008) have made the mistake of counseling teachers to learn essentialized elements of a number of cultures and to design lessons to appeal to these elements. Others like Gee (1996) have proposed that teachers become attuned to individual identity formation and discourse practices. More recently, Hopson (2003) and Lee (2007) have suggested that teachers can access the cultural funds of knowledge that students bring from their outside literacy practices and leverage them for challenging academic projects.

If we acknowledge that there is a powerful racial component in school failure and marginalization for students of color, we are challenged to examine how reform efforts are positioned in urban schools. Critical Race Theory demands that we develop accessible stories, discursive ways of describing the operation of racial oppression, in a way that situates cultural language practices in historical experience (Delgado, 1995;

Yosso, 2002; Brayboy, 2005). Urban classrooms can be sites for this kind of discursive practice through “exercises in storytelling and in identifying with the ideas, interests, histories, and attitudes of others” (Pratt, 1991, p. 40). Pratt’s notion of the contact zone classroom addresses how divergent voices and viewpoints can be heard and engaged. Do reformers seek to cross the borders in order to co-opt the oppressed into acceptance of their position or do they approach school change as a way to transform education and relations of power? In response to this contact zone reality we can hope to see, at least in some cases, activist “border politics” (Giroux, 1991) in which teachers and students cross the barriers that divide them and struggle together for social justice.

A deeper analysis of the roots of inequity must be developed to better understand discourse and language power if it is to get beyond the stereotypical explanations of ascribing Black school failure to errors in parenting or to a lack of motivation. The codes, of power, of school success, of privilege, are deeply embedded in the discourse of the metropolis and require teachers to bribe or compel the student to find the will to learn (Illich, 1970).

### ***The Frame of Colonialism***

The extensive anti-colonial literature of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century has made the power of ruling class discourses and the struggle of popular discourses a central focus in the decolonizing struggle (Raskin, 1973; Macedo, 1994). Many frames have been advanced to illuminate the mechanism of oppression and marginalization of African American (and other) groups in the US. These have included the Marxist frame of class oppression, and the post-modernist frame of the creation of the “other.” I find it useful to discuss the functioning of this system, upon which school failure is constructed, in terms of colonialism. While colonialism has many elements that are particular to the time and place of its operation, we can find in anti-colonial literature powerful exposures of the role of discourse in oppression that can be applied within the US. Just as Apple and Buras (2006) adapted the notion of the “subaltern” (Spivak, 1985) to marginalized youth in the US, scholars like Dei and Simmons (2010) have applied the frame of colonialism to education struggles in the US. The notion that there is an internal colonial oppression of African Americans in the US, known as domestic colonialism, was put forward by the Pan-Africanists Kwame Nkrumah and W.E.B. Du Bois (Nkrumah, 1965; Allen, 1990). And most theorists of colonialism recognize the functioning of “neo-colonialism,” or colonialist economic and political relationships that persist even when direct, de jure colonialism is abolished (Blauner, 1972; Cabral, 1979; Quijano, 2000; Grosfoguel, 2003). I will examine in this section how the framing of domestic neo-colonialism can be applied to discourse struggles in the US.

The rise of the world economy, international slave trade, and imperialism solidified racial categories as markers of national and colonial oppression. The colonial powers, the countries of accumulation (Cabral, 1979), abrogated to themselves the resources and labor of conquered territories and marked those peoples with racial categories of negativity for black (Fanon, 1963). Critical theorists and intellectuals exposed the many ways that the metropolis, the name anti-colonial activists have generally used for the colonial power, assumed for itself the default construction of rationality and civilization (Retamar, 1989; Spivak, 1985; Prashad, 2007). The colonial model is powerfully appropriate in examining the construction of insiders, U.S. citizens

with social and cultural capital (Bourdieu, 1977), and outsiders in this country, especially African American, Chicano Latino, and Asian American students. Bourdieu (1991) speaks of “linguistic capital” which inscribes difference, bestowing symbolic power on the privileged and not on the marginalized. Discourse and language practices, then, represent a code for demarking this border.

As Pennycook (1998) observed,

English language teaching has been bound up with colonialism and ... the discourses of colonialism still echo through its theories and practices.... Although anti-colonial and post-colonial writing has started to redress the nature of the images of the colonized and the nature of colonial histories, the rather limited stereotype of the colonizer is often left intact (p. 28).

The notion of the educated performance, the appropriate literacy and the standardized expression of English, all reinforce and reward the European and White standard of excellence. Freire (1985) described bourgeois education as having a “domesticating character” that undermines the power and point of view of indigenous communities. But according to Hymes (1983), the issues of language diversity have often been neglected in scholarship and policy:

American scholarship has hardly addressed the facts of the matter. Language has been invisible to us as a problem for critical social science and educational history. Planning and policy about language have been thought of as something found in Belgium and Quebec.... In the U.S., there has been neither a public agency signaled as responsible for a language policy, nor consciousness of policy (p. 207).

Ng’ug’i (1986) examined dilemmas of African writers who are forced into a colonial discourse simply by the language (the colonial tongue) they are forced to use for broad readership. He argued that the depth of meanings was diminished when authors moved out of their own language practices. Morrison (1992) and Gates (1998) explored additional dilemmas of power and identity with respect to American literature by White and Black authors. While African American vernacular and local discourses are not as far from the dominant discourse of English as Ng’ug’i’s Kikuyu language, the problems of identity and power inherent in discourse have relevance here. Morrison demonstrated how the Black presence in all American literature hovers on margins of literary imagination in European American discourse. This approach is often framed as White civilization forging into the raw, half-savage world.

This duality, this exoticizing, demeaning, and dominating narrative was first explored in depth by Said (1979). In this American version of the Orientalist paradigm, the African American represents the other, the savage, even while he/she sometimes demonstrates intuitive healing wisdom or spiritual depth. As Morrison (1992) argues, “Images of blackness can be evil *and* protective, rebellious *and* forgiving, fearful *and* desirable” (p. 59). The African American population is ego-reinforcing for White America as the White male can persuade himself that he is the bastion against the dangers of the unrestrained id, wild nature. Gates (1988) proposed a Black theory of literary interpretation, explicating and honoring the ways that Black texts like those by Hurston, Ellison, Wright, and Reed use signifyin(g) both for deeper meanings and in conjunction with rich interplays among Black literary texts. He explored the coded and culturally

bound expressions in Black Arts, connecting mass culture to the production of novelists and other artists.

The elements of African American Vernacular English and discourse were explored in the 1930's by Woodson (1933) and in the seventies by Dillard (1972) and Smitherman (1977). Woodson and Dillard contributed detailed studies of the grammar, word usage, and culture of various African American communities. In the nineties, Crowley (1991) and Perry and Delpit (1998) entered the debate as the debates over Black language again shook the field of education. While their discourse is not ratified by the school, African American working class students perform extensive literacy practices and communication each day. They use language all the time, with unique ingenuity and style, for pleasure and for learning, and sometimes to make critical choices and to navigate challenging situations (Shor, 1992).

Ethnographies, such as Cushman's (1998), explore the way African American working class people must deploy sophisticated strategies in relationship to the dominant discourse. In her study of the literacy practices of welfare mothers, she explored the way those outside of the dominant discourse construe language and use their own skills to bend the institutional power to their needs. She noted, "At the local level of politics, agency includes careful assessment of power situations, conscious and continual crafting of language strategies and a firm, but not naïve, belief in the opportunities and possibilities to be found in institutional structures" (p. 8). These studies of everyday speech and of literary styling are important in exposing the ways that discourses, the production of language, cultural meaning, and community, are distinct in urban, oppressed communities.

Around the world, similar struggles concerning the discourse of schooling have taken place, for instance in Australia concerning the right of Australian English (AE) speaking children to an education in their own language, the preservation of the indigenous Papiamentu language in Curaçao (Romero, 2010), or in Guinea Bissau in the demand for schooling in Creole instead of Portuguese. In this regard Freire and Faundez (1989) argued, "Creole, the medium of expression of those colonized, was always viewed by the colonialists as something inferior, ugly, poverty-stricken, incapable... as if languages did not change historically in step with actual developments of the forces of production" (p. 117). In all these cases we can see instances of power and social capital being contended in the arena of discourse, whether it is within variations of a language (such as Portuguese and English) or in distinct languages spoken by different classes (Freire & Macedo, 1987).

For many public school teachers, especially White teachers, African American Vernacular English is a despised and exoticized cultural expression. It contains both the revulsion at the outsider interwoven with the Orientalism of the other (Fecho, 2004). In contrast to the linguicism<sup>4</sup> of public schools, educators must grapple with the implications of the contention over discourse and power. In order to teach effectively, to

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<sup>4</sup> Linguicism is akin to other negative -isms: racism, classism, sexism, ageism. Linguicism can be defined as ideologies and structures which are used to legitimate, effectuate, and reproduce an unequal division of power and resources (both material and non-material) between groups which are defined on the basis of language (on the basis of their mother tongues). (Skutnabb-Kangas 1988 p. 13)

teach on the side of the child, educators must perceive language diversity, including vernacular diversity, as a resource rather than as a deficit (Gilyard, 1996). In opposing language discrimination, we are obliged to recognize the crucial role of home language development in school achievement. This approach applies to English Language Learners (Nieto, 2010) as well as students from oppressed or colonized groups.

Within the U.S., an understanding of cultural capital and Critical Race Theory posits race and racial oppression as central to social stratification, moving beyond what Leonardo (2009) called a reductionist reading of Marx which relegated race to a sub-category of class, the product of ideological confusion. Just such a connection is made when Ladson-Billings references the work of Du Bois, who dealt with Black oppression as a “national question” (Ladson-Billings and Tate, 1995). Du Bois (1903) explicated the oppression for African Americans in the U.S. and argued that it led to a condition of “double consciousness,” the need to function within the U.S. polity and within a defined, separate, Black space. The corollary to this point is that Whiteness is an unmarked category to which people of color must measure themselves (Cutler, 2009). Such post-colonial theorists as Bhabha (1992), James (1963), and Kaviraj (1994) examine ways that oppressed peoples contest the hegemony of the dominant discourse, an understanding that is reflected in Lave and Holland’s (2001) discussion of contentious discourse. Bhabha has also argued that “minorities” within the metropolis “formulate their critical revisions around issues of cultural difference, social authority, and political discrimination in order to reveal the antagonistic and ambivalent moments within the ‘rationalizations’ of modernity” (p. 437). In other words, such populations have a distinct existential identity and distinct relationship to the dominant culture.

### ***Community Discourse Practices and School Literacy***

Heath (1983) developed a significant sociolinguistic analysis of primary and secondary discourses and the way these discourses were more or less aligned for youths from different class and ethnic communities. Her ethnography challenged traditional notions of literacy and school success that was based on a static notion of language skill and a deficit model of low-income students struggling with official school discourse. Lareau (2003) further elaborated how the language practices disadvantage working class students when it comes to schooling. These works have been misused by policy-makers who suggest that the implication is that working class African American and Chicano Latino students must acquire the practices of the “master narrative” of White, middle-class English. With *No Child Left Behind*, we see this tendency graduate to a form of “whiteness as policy” (Leonardo, 2007; Leonardo, 2009). These studies, however, have simply uncovered the consequences of a cultural mismatch between community and school discourses. Generally, policymakers do not question the supremacy of the homogenous single discourse of school and business as if it were a given. But if we pay closer attention to this nexus of failure, we may decide that changes and fluidity are called for in the discourse practices on both sides, that of students and that of teachers (Hull & Schultz, 2002). What is at issue is the democratic project of education and the question of which students it is for, what the outcomes should be, and who gets to say how it should be.

A powerful examination of this problem is found in the teaching memoir of François Bégaudeau (2006), which was also made into a film in 2008. Bégaudeau was a

middle school teacher in Paris, committed to teaching a group of resistant students the finer points of French literature and grammar. The great majority of his class was made up of immigrants from Mali, Algeria, Senegal, and the West Indies. He found that his constructions, diction, and cultural references did not make sense to the students. While he kept up a vigorous and engaged banter, the students drifted further and further away and began to disrupt and subvert the classroom project. While Bégaudeau tried many approaches from strict to humorous, he continued to fail as a teacher. He could not find a way to alter or modify his own discourse or the dominant discourse of Parisian French and the classical Enlightenment curriculum that is required in French education. Public school teachers in the U.S. find themselves in the same contradiction that Bégaudeau faces. While they may expend tremendous energy in seeking to transmit academic skills and dispositions, the master narrative, the ratified school discourse, itself creates a wide chasm that must be traversed by African American, Latino, and other immigrant students if they are to engage in the challenging curriculum of school. In this context, it is only the students who are expected to cross those discourse borders while the teachers are presumed to hold the authoritative truth.

While language power is obvious in colonial contexts (the predominance of English in schools from India to Nigeria), students who are born and raised within the United States also find themselves marked as linguistic outsiders, unfamiliar with the requisite performance of the vernacular that is marked as powerful and academic. Language has significant symbolic power in the United States as it “is often merely a proxy for race, national origin, or religion” (Salomone, 2010). Derrida (1998) described this linguistic netherland occupied by populations with outsider status, constructed marginal status. He explained that, as a Pied Noir, French colonial raised in Algeria, and a Jew, he was a man who spoke only French but French was not his language. Official, state-endorsed French, the language of power, its inflections and implications, was not his. It was like a second language to him. He wrote, “I have only one language yet it is not mine.... the only language I speak is *not mine*; I did not say it was foreign to me.... The language called maternal is never purely natural, nor proper, nor habitable” (p. 2) A similar outsider status was assigned to students who integrated Yiddish and German in pre-war Germany (Wallowitz, 2008).

Rodriguez (1983) examined the experience of being outside the dominant discourse through his autobiography. He explored the alien and cool world of school discourse, something that attracted him and led him to reject his home discourse and his family culture. And, he asserted, while he was successful in school, a “scholarship boy” in the terms he discovered in Hoggart (1992), he was essentially an imitative student with no point of view of his own.

The scholarship boy is a very bad student. He is a great mimic; a collector of thoughts, not a thinker; the very last person in the class who ever feels obliged to have an opinion of his own. In large part, however, the reason he is such a bad student is because he realizes more often and more acutely than most other students – than Hoggart himself – that education requires a radical self-transformation (p. 67).

While the home language “has the power, efficiency, and complexity of all human languages and should not be viewed as intellectually inferior” (Ortiz et al, 2010), it is not validated in the effort to teach the secondary, academic vernacular. Schooling’s

presumption of decontextualized literacy only has coherence by quietly and indirectly smuggling context and discourses back in by assuming White middle class school based or dominant discourse is the only real one (Gee 1997; Hill 2009).

This is not to say that the dominant discourses are impossible to access. But there is a constant struggle between the ratified academic discourse and the identity and culture of many urban students. Black youth discourse was explored as a site of identification and solidarity in Ibrahim (2003). Discourse and literacy contention, then, represent struggles for democratic access to education for the practitioners of all language practices (Kinloch, 2009a; Smitherman, 1999). The question is not whether or not students from marginalized communities can perform dominant discourse, or code switch when they decide it is necessary or desirable. Indeed, research has shown instances where students do exactly that (Delpit, 1995; Hilliard, 2003). Rather it is a matter of which discourse, which culture, is honored or ratified in educational settings.

To understand how conflict between world-views and power takes place at the level of discourse, we must examine what new literacy scholars (Kist, 2005) say about school and community discourse practices. Street (1993) explored the problem of the hegemonic control of school literacy and the “role of literacy practices in reproducing or challenging the structures of power and domination” (p. 7). Literacy educators often “downplay the creativity and cultural concerns of the people being taught to read and write. As a result, the emphasis has been on the ‘impact’ of literacy on supposedly passive recipients” (p. 12). He argued that African American vernacular discourse represented a danger to school authority: “In the school context, however, such discourses have been treated mainly in moral and disciplinary terms, as rebellious, as inadequate attempts at proper literacy, along with graffiti and other literate forms that differ from the essay text model” (p. 223). But a crucial critique of the transmission of the literacy practices of those in power was seen in Freire’s approach (1970, 1998), well known as the critique of the “banking model” of education. Freire’s project was to center the subject matter and language practices in literacy teaching on the needs and interests of the oppressed community. “From the very first day of class, (teachers) must demonstrate to students the importance of imagination for life. Imagination helps curiosity and inventiveness, just as it enhances adventure, without which we cannot create” (p. 51). In this regard, we can draw from Carby (1982), who described the ongoing struggle for control of the discourse in school: “The ability of Black students to use language as a form of resistance can be seen in the teachers’ fear of being excluded from communication between pupils; this has always been regarded as an unacceptable loss of authority” (p. 187). This power struggle, one that is usually lost by students in terms of academic success, is at the heart of the discursive conflict in education (Purcell-Gates, 2006; Kohl, 1995). Leonardo (2003) argues that “at the heart of ideology is the problem of social relations of domination made intelligible through discourse.” But, he continues, discourse does not only go one way. It is a struggle of both domination and resistance. Teachers and students engage in “new and critical ways of constructing educational discourses” (p. 14).

Other examples of struggles over discourse and the agency of African Americans as outsider actors include Varenne and McDermott (1998), who invoked the indigenous ways of expression in the collective and individual performance in an African American choir, and Knobel (1999), who described a similar “non-standard” way of communicating

and performing in a dance recital. Other works (Postman & Weingartner, 1971; Hoffman, 2007; Ayers & Ayers, 2010) have similarly explored instances of teachers siding with student discourse practices in a critique of institutional power, examples of “subversive” discourse in the classroom. These ways of expressing, ways of knowing, are part of the consciousness of the marginalized communities.

Educators face a contradiction since their role requires them to act as police for the state in this interdiction of the language of the other, of the outsider. Foucault (1982) asserted the role of discourse in school in differentiating ratified knowledge and social power:

Education may well be, as of right, the instrument by which every individual, in a society like our own, can gain access to any kind of discourse. But we well know that in its distribution, in what it permits and in what it prevents, it follows the well-trodden battle-lines of social conflict. Every educational system is a political means of maintaining or of modifying the appropriation of discourse, with the knowledge and the powers it carries with it. (p. 227).

Bourdieu (1991) elaborated further the role of teachers in policing and ratifying discourse performance:

The official language is bound up with the state, both in its genesis and in its social uses ... the linguistic law has a body of jurists – the grammarians – and its agents of regulation and imposition – the teachers – who are empowered universally to subject the linguistic performance of speaking subjects to examination and to the legal sanction of academic qualification (p. 45)

Teachers are expected to act as modern day Pygmalions, civilizing the savages through the gentle language of power (Rosenthal & Jacobson, 1968). Schools then function as colonizing agencies, designed to teach citizens about the current sociolinguistic order of things without challenging that order. “‘Standard English’ is deemed the standard, is elevated to the highest status, with the teachers as the primary conduit of cultural reproduction. Within the current public education system, often teachers are enacting Whiteness and subscribing to an ideology of linguistic supremacy within a system of daily cultural combat” (Alim, 2009, p. 218).

Teachers do not simply accede to this role of enforcing the discourse and values of the broader institutions. They are also patrolled, evaluated, and required to play their assigned role. Bourdieu described this process of control,

Let’s imagine, for example, a populist teacher who refuses this right of correction [correcting students’ language] and says, ‘Anyone who wants to speak should just speak; the most beautiful French is street French....’ When it comes to defining the laws of the specific market of his classroom, the teacher’s freedom is limited, because he will never manage to create ‘an empire within an empire,’ a sub-space in which the laws of the dominant market are suspended (Bourdieu 1993, quoted in Alim 2009, p. 213).

Lankshear (1997) explained:

Dominant social and cultural groups have been able to establish their language, and their knowledge priorities, learning styles, pedagogical preferences, etc., as

the ‘official examinable culture’ of school. Their notions of important and useful knowledge, their ways of representing the truth, their ways of arguing and establishing correctness, and their logics, grammars, and language are established as the institutional norm by which academic and scholastic success is defined and assessed. This is not necessarily a conscious process, much less a conspiracy. It is simply what tends to happen, with the result that the Discourses and discourses of dominant groups become those which dominate education and become established as major legitimate routes to securing social goods (like wealth and status). As a result, educational success is patterned along distinct lines of prior discursive experiences associated with membership of particular social groups (p. 30).

Because TeenVoice teachers are working outside of the constraints of public schooling, they explore a broader range of discourse and pedagogical practices. We shall see, in the course of this study, when and where a project of decolonization, of community empowerment, is attempted in TeenVoice.

Steele (2010) demonstrated the power of dominant discourse with an inverse example. He told the story of Ted McDougal, a White student in an African American political science class at a university. This student found himself uncomfortable because he was not conversant with the cultural assumptions and discourse of the class. He felt he had to prove himself as non-racist, an ally, a good person. In this situation, the normally garrulous McDougal confined his comments to safe, inoffensive, and superficial additions. He was struggling with the issue of group identity, and his own identity and culture, and how he fit in or did not fit in. All of this turmoil was contained within his cultural discourse within the context of the class. The complexity of crossing the boundaries, even by a white person who wanted to forsake the role of colonizer, has been explored by Memmi (1965), demonstrating that the structures of power, the habits of privilege, and the codes that reinforce that privilege do not go away even if one chooses to express solidarity with the oppressed.

Some studies (Gonzalez, Moll, & Amanti, 2005; Lee, 2007) have sought to bridge the distance between primary and secondary discourses by emphasizing the importance of “cultural funds of knowledge” and cultural data sets – the discourse practices, literacy skills, and reasoning experience in primary discourse settings – in producing complex problem-solving in out-of-school settings for African American students. Lee suggested a process of “cultural modeling” for leveraging these out-of-school skills to achieve academic tasks. This takes a particular awareness of culturally relevant pedagogy on the part of the teacher. Such transference of primary literacies to school tasks is done with more privileged students too but is often invisible because of the congruence of everyday discourse practices between the teacher and the privileged student (Wheeler, 2009). This is an area in which researchers have only scratched the surface and it has not benefited from a detailed examination of the negotiation of meaning and learning in out-of-school youth development settings.

### ***New Digital Media, Youth Development, and Literacy at TeenVoice***

While earlier reproduction theorists suggested that mass media would inevitably result in ruling class mind-control and hegemony, in fact new electronic media often

provoke resistance, irony, selectivity, and agency that generate connections between peoples in what Appadurai (1996) called ethnoscaples, mediascaples, technoscaples, financescaples, and ideoscaples. Youth are more and more able to produce their own media expressions (through web pages, podcasting, video production, etc.) and thus transform the media and communicative ecology through what has been called youthsaples. Youth can mobilize multimodal semiotic resources in performing literacies within their primary discourses and, when possible, within academic contexts also. Elaborating this issue of power in reappropriation of media, Lipsitz (2005) evoked the ways that youth “make meaning for themselves under circumstances they do not control.... (they) appropriate the raw materials of globalization – its commodities, mass mediated messages, and displacements – and turn them into tools for building community and critique” (p. xi). Lipsitz argued that there is little utopian optimism in the new youth communities; they draw sustenance and power from radical negativity. But negativity does not mean self-pity. They often position themselves against the “victim narrative” into a new type of identity and affirmation (Rofes, 2005).

We can profitably apply the concept of habitus, the everyday, the common sense of a society or culture (Bourdieu, 1977). We experience the habitus, the ideological framing of a period, as a means deployed by the ruling class for control. But new digital media present a contradiction. On the one hand, new media can be the means of spreading the culture of corporate media and American culture throughout the world. Extensive debate in hip hop studies center on how indigenous media production from communities is coöpted and redirected to support ideological Americanization of the world (Chang, 2005). These truths notwithstanding, in other instances new media have become sites for new cultural creation of group identities, for dialogic encounters, and for imagined worlds. The habitus of the current youth generation is one that is in constant flow and change, built around improvisation, styling, code switching, collage, and appropriation in a continuing project of identity construction. The complex discourse environment within which students reside I have named Global Emergent Discourse, in recognition of these contingent and shifting identities. The proliferation of hip hop cultural expressions across youth communities (Alim, 2006; Hill, 2009; Chang, 2005), and the affordances of new digital media (Mahiri, 2011) have created new contexts for youth appropriation of expressive space and elaboration of a world view. While students style locally, they are engaged in contingent, ever-shifting communities formed by the forces of globalization, living in a world of “aerials rather than roots,” neotribes without intergenerational socialization (Alim, 2009 citing Bauman, 1992, p.10).

The accelerating hybridization of identity, and concurrently of primary discourse, is reflected in new literature that consciously seeks to subvert the dominant discourse, the reflection of colonial structure, which has characterized academic gatekeepers. The 1916 protagonist of Shaw’s *Pygmalion*, himself a professor of linguistics, declared of working class discourse, “You see this creature with her kerbstone English: the English that will keep her in the gutter to the end of her days. Well, sir, in three months I could pass that girl off as a duchess at an ambassador’s garden party” (p. 5). In sharp contrast to the vernacular project of scolding and correction, of civilizing a working class, Cockney-speaking young woman into the high English of the court, authors from Chaucer to Twain to Morrison have championed working class vernaculars. While the novel has always highlighted vernaculars and the tension between classes in society (Bakhtin,

1981) new fictional works demonstrate ways that Global Emergent Discourse today is written against the dominance of standardized English

This is found in Junot Díaz' novel, *The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao* (2007) which is narrated in the multi-voiced vernacular of Dominican immigrants in New Jersey using a mixture of Academic English, Spanglish, Dominican slang, science fiction jargon, and African American Vernacular English. Díaz himself argued that his purpose in writing this way was to subvert the dominant discourse in literature. Other examples include Amitav Ghosh's *Sea of Poppies* (2008) which thrusts the reader into a language stew of a half a dozen different communities mixed together on a ship off of Calcutta in the 1830s. A similar mix is central to the El Dispatcher scene in Danny Hoch's play *Taking Over*. He channels four different vernaculars of Spanish and two of English, demanding that the audience keep up with his multi-leveled riffs. And there is Khemiri's *Montecore* (2011) whose discourse includes letters translated from Arabic to Swedish. Its narrative is in Swedish with hip hop, Arabic, English, and a private language called Khermirish which the author describes as:

a language that is all languages combined... extra everything with changes in meaning and strange words put together, special rules and daily exceptions. A language that is Arabic swearwords, Spanish question words, French declarations of love, English photography quotations, and Swedish puns. It is the family's language; it's a language that is only yours, that no one else owns, and that you will never show anyone (p. 43).

This very difference, the distance between official classroom discourse (which is aligned with the discourse and social capital of White middle class Americans) and the discourse of African American, Latino, immigrant, and working class children, is the barrier that creates space, even demand, for the unofficial, unsanctioned, out of school projects. TeenVoice is an example of such a community-based non-profit that has arisen in the past decade to fill this gap. It is an out-of-school setting which honors the discourse practices of youth from the community while extending their discourse and communicative options.

### ***Youth Development Principles and Promise***

Youth development literature reflects the possibilities and challenges that the out-of-school context offers for youth engagement and expression (Mahiri, 2004). Often these organizations pay more attention to social and emotional development than schools (Eccles & Gootman, 2002), and they engage staff and students in activities that place community building and relationships first. As new literacy studies examines literacy as a social practice, we see the ways that youth literacy development has a particular trajectory within the social institutions of youth development and the power relations within these institutions (Barton, Hamilton, & Ivanič, 2000). Youth learning must be understood within these social fields within the situated identities of students, their peers, and their teachers in what Gee (1996) called "coordinations," the matrices of relationships and artifacts for learning. The particular coordinations in youth development agencies are distinct from those in public school because of the mission, the power relations, and the commitment students bring to the project.

Like many agencies operating outside of public school structures, TeenVoice has been influenced by the perspective of Positive Youth Development (PYD) advocated by

Konopka (1973) and extended by Pittman (2000) who identified critical elements essential to the healthy development of young people. PYD approaches young people as situated in communities, as resources rather than as problems and as having strengths and potential rather than only deficits and challenges. And they have studied more the recent development of Social Justice Youth Development (Ginwright & Cammarota, 2002) that include a critical understanding of oppression and institutional power. We shall see that this “social justice youth development” model guides the youth work approach of TeenVoice staff in their project of helping young people grow into mature and successful adults.

In contrast to the engagement of youth in such institutions, public school has often been guilty of marginalizing, disengaging, and disincentivizing African American and other youth (Lankshear, 1997). As Hill (2009) remarked, “Many of my peers who were active, enthusiastic, and precocious when participating in out-of-school activities were frequently disengaged or disaffected during the regular school day” (p. xvii). Too often, support for non-standard dialects has induced public resistance and, within schools, silence and inaction (Castro, 2010). Language competence of teachers and their attitude toward student speech, however, has been found to be “the most powerful single factor determining a teacher’s expectations for that student” (Scott, Straker, & Katz, 2009, p. 178). If the official curriculum ignores their language, interests, conditions, and participation, it makes their subjectivity invisible. This provokes resistance, active or passive (Shor, 1992).

While extensive research has been done on youth discourse practices and schooling (Delpit, 1995; Gonzalez, Moll, & Amanti, 2005; Lee, 2007) my research will examine discourse interactions between teachers and students in a setting that has its own institutional norms and traditions that are different from those of public school. In addition, this setting includes the practices of new digital media and hip hop culture. TeenVoice provides a site that shares many characteristics of schooling, the responsibility of teaching students complex technical tasks, the assessment of student learning and assignment of students to appropriate classes and projects. It also has unique characteristics that are different from public schools, an out of school setting to which students come voluntarily, a series of teacher-mentors who have developed their own practice without formal or credentialed teacher training.

In my examination of discourse practices of teachers and youth, I find TeenVoice to be a site of great interest because they are explicitly attempting to apprentice young people from their acquired vernacular, their primary discourse, to a secondary discourse in the genres of media and journalistic production. TeenVoice has identified its own educational approach as “collegial pedagogy” based on developing communities of practice, building relationships of mutual humanization, and pursuing positive youth development. This process of teaching and learning is based on the principles of collaborative framing, youth-led inquiry, and public accountability (Soep and Chávez, 2010). This maps on closely with elements of effective pedagogy described by CREDE, The Center for Research on Education, Diversity & Excellence (Stoddart, 2005). They include joint productive activity, language and literacy development across disciplines, contextualization, challenging activities, and instructional conversations. This is the curricular framework present in the TeenVoice project of developing professional and academic discourse in students. Since this process parallels issues of teaching and

learning in school, with students learning to enlarge their discourse repertory and positionality, the study provides rich data for closer evaluation of discourse practices interpretation of pedagogical strategies.

The purpose of this study is to focus particularly on the discourse practices of TeenVoice teacher-mentors in initiating new students to the program. I explore both how they deploy communicative performances and how they think of their discourse practices. These young teachers have evolved practices that may suggest possibilities for more successful communication strategies in school.

### 3) Methods of Inquiry

#### *Theoretical Framework*

The theory undergirding this study might best be described as constructivist-interpretive, and it grows out of my commitment to engaged qualitative research using selected ethnographic methods. The theoretical perspectives that guide this research project on language practices of the teacher-mentors and the students at TeenVoice reflect constructivist-interpretive framework i.e. ontological, epistemological, and methodological interpretive orientations (Denzin & Lincoln, 1998; Leonardo and Allen, 2008).

- **Ontology:** I approach the work with a belief in relativistic ontology, that there are multiple realities and that people construct their understandings of their world through experiences within their own culture and with those they identify as the other.
- **Epistemology:** I am operating from a subjectivist epistemology based on the understanding that the informant and researcher co-create understandings, through the particular local experiences shared during the period of the case study.
- **Methodology:** I employ a sociocultural, naturalistic methodology based on observations of phenomena in everyday settings of the real world (Dyson, & Genishi, 2005). These observations within the complex of social relationships are supplemented by teacher reflections in interviews and my own reflections on the observed phenomena.

I embarked on this project in order to examine teacher-mentor discourse practices in an urban non-school media organization. Discourse, as discussed, includes the practice of producing and receiving culturally recognized, ideologically shaped representations of reality. I seek to examine both the communities of practice and the underlying theories that guide the discourse practices of these teachers. Lave and Wenger's (1991) analysis of apprenticeship and the notion of student movement from the periphery to the center of a practice inform this examination of induction to secondary discourses in the setting and practices of this youth organization. Lave and Holland (2001) have gone further in identifying socially situated discourse as connected to a struggle for power and described the negotiation of discourse between different groups as contentious local practice. This discourse examination is situated in the analysis of how race functions in schools from the tenets of Critical Race Theory to the framing provided by notions of contact zones, border politics, and cultural modeling described in the literature review.

The generative theme driving this study is based on the observation that these teachers are successfully engaging students who are often defined as failing in public schools. They are creating sustained learning, meeting complex standards of skill and critical thinking, and propelling students to a continuing learning process after the teaching is over. The TeenVoice teaching model certainly includes many elements that might explain their success in engaging students including the subject matter (media and youth cultural issues), the voluntary nature of the project, and the fact that some of the students are paid to attend. Yet, it is important to understand specific teacher discourse practices intersecting with the primary discourses of the students that are used to apprentice these youth into a range of secondary, professional discourses.

### ***Design***

This study focused on two selected cases, and I used participant observation, field notes, and interviews (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007) to explore the discourse practices of two teachers at TeenVoice as well as to examine the institution of TeenVoice and its staff induction process. While the study uses selected tools of ethnography, it is not a full ethnography. Rather, it is a study of specific cases of teaching and learning. It will examine both the communities of practice (Lave & Wenger, 1991) and the underlying theories that guide these teachers, particularly as regards discourse.

The two focal teachers are the first to encounter new arrivals at TeenVoice. Consequently, they begin the process of induction to secondary discourses for the students served by this organization. I examine in depth the local particulars of their discourse and teaching practices to construct coherent case analyses. Across the two cases, I looked for common as well as distinctive characteristics of their discourse strategies, and sought a better understanding of the teacher-learner discourse intersections. While the study is bounded by the two cases during the spring cycle of classes, the design of the study has been exploratory and open-ended (Anyon, 2009), allowing me to encounter unexpected or even surprising findings and new theoretical implications. But the observations and discussions were always done with a view to explicating pedagogical strategies with a particular focus on the discourse practices and values of the participants.

### ***Site***

This study took place at TeenVoice, a non-profit youth development program, founded in 1990 on what they describe on their web site as “the deeply held belief that underserved youth, ages 14-24 years old, have the creativity, technical skills and entrepreneurial spirit to become leaders in the multi-media industry and the community and to serve as mentors to other youth.” They continue:

The heart of its pioneering efforts is to train young people from under-resourced public schools, community-based organizations, group homes and juvenile detention centers in broadcast journalism, media production and cutting-edge technology. TeenVoice offers professional development and technical skills training absolutely free of charge with the aim of preparing young people for pathways to meaningful careers. TeenVoice graduates leave with the soft and hard skills necessary to land jobs with employers (from public radio to community agencies).

The site description includes the economic, political, social, and cultural context within which TeenVoice operates. One of the important elements of TeenVoice for purposes of this study is that it is non-school locus of literacy learning.

### ***Participants (informants)***

As Strauss (1987) suggests, doing preliminary fieldwork is crucial before embarking on a qualitative study in order to uncover potential questions and data sources. What started as my broad examination of urban youth discourse practices in pilot studies at TeenVoice in the spring of 2007 and the spring of 2009, soon drew my attention to the teacher-mentors and their approaches to discourse. I queried the TeenVoice staff leadership in order to understand the induction process and sharpened the focus to look at

two case studies of teachers' practices. TeenVoice teacher-mentors have developed guidelines, which are implicit but not written down, concerning appropriate discourse practices for the professional staff in the youth development educational projects.

The following are the foci of data collection in the case studies of the discourse and pedagogical practices of two TeenVoice focal teachers:

1. An overview of TeenVoice situated in Downtown San Pietro – examination of practices of staff induction and expectations through interviews and discussions with Education Director Roland Ijichi, a Japanese American male, and Health Educator Fiona McLain, a White female.
2. Case study of Marcus Harris – an African American male teacher in the Core and Bridge media training programs.
3. Case study of Aida Orovida – a multi-racial (Asian, Latina, White) female teacher in the MATCH program funded by San Pietro criminal justice funds, targeted at teens in trouble with the law or school authorities.

In looking at the practice of these two teachers, I spent over a year collecting data (see Data Collection, below). Each of these participants works a different amount of time at TeenVoice as well as with a different population of students. These teachers were themselves once students in TeenVoice and they reflect the agency's culture and values. They also share many of the same students. I have examined the commonalities and differences in their approaches to discourse and pedagogy as a key part of my analysis.

### ***Data Collection***

To collect my data, I acted as participant observer in this learning community, and I also made occasional contributions beginning with my pilot studies and then following the two focal teachers through a complete class cycle (spring, 2010) of the classes. I began documenting the nature and role of the physical setting, the new TeenVoice building and its affordances, as well as the broader community setting including downtown San Pietro and the neighborhoods from which the students come. Using a sociocultural frame, I paid attention to how the teaching of TeenVoice content (journalism, media literacy, radio broadcasting and video skills, as well as Academic English) played out in the context of social relationships between students and teachers. I particularly paid attention to interactions in the classroom and studio production sites noting when intersections of discourse practices between students and teachers were directly or indirectly addressed. I noted the developing interactions through the course of the five-month spring cycle, paying attention to changed practices on the part of teachers or students, metacognitive comments on the discourse interactions, and accommodations reached between parties.

The data sources for this research project were observations of the classes of the two focal teachers, field notes taken during these observations, and both formal interviews and open-ended conversations with both informants. In addition, I observed and interviewed the Education Director Roland Ijichi and another teacher, Health Educator Fiona McLain in order to inquire about the values concerning discourse in the

staff induction process at TeenVoice. Building on the insights I received from the pilot studies in 2007 and 2009, I employed my data collection methods in the following ways:

- **Field notes:** I wrote observational and reflective field notes, paying particular attention to transactional communicative periods with teachers and students as well as to dialogical practices. The notes recorded events and observations as well as my own reflections, questions, speculations, and suppositions. I entered observations and reflections in the computer after each observed session. I observed 24 TeenVoice classes (11 of Marcus, 8 of Aida, and 5 of Fiona) in addition to 15 classes that I observed in the two pilot studies at TeenVoice. These captured teacher discourse practices, intersections with youth discourse, negotiated meanings, and instruction methods in the classes.
- **Audio-taped interviews:** Twice during the class cycle I interviewed each of the four informants (the two focal teachers, the Director of Education, and the Health Education teacher). These eight interviews totaled 13 hours. Eight additional interviews had been conducted during the pilot studies. These illuminated the perspectives and interpretations of teaching practices of the key informants.
- **Student focus groups and individual interviews:** This was a series of discussions with students towards the end of the observation cycle. It consisted of three interviews totaling four hours. These helped me to get an understanding of their analysis and interpretation of discursive interactions with their teachers.
- **Informal discussions with staff and students:** Throughout the class cycle, I had informal discussions, conversations and class debriefings with students as well as discussions with other staff members in the organization in order to increase my understandings and interpretations of the events engaged in by all of the participants.

### ***Data Analysis***

My data analysis procedure has been to code the discourse interactions between the TeenVoice teachers and students, seeking instances of accommodation and conflict. I evaluated moments of negotiation and debate, of code switching, and of metacognitive reflections on discourse practices. Reinforcing the direct observations with interviews, I developed a range of insights into the discourse practices and strategies of the teachers. In many cases, I found evidence concerning issues of discourse in unexpected places such as debates about student agency, conflict over teacher practices, and strategizing discussions within the staff. The coding was partially inductive in that I did not only seek evidence of expected interactions, but I also highlighted unanticipated aspects of discourse that I would then trace through the data.

My study has descriptive aims in documenting what was happening in this teaching cycle. And it has interpretive aims based on my analyses of categories of meaning in teacher and student discourse to understand the context of teacher-mentor language practices (Schram, 2006). The main elements of the coding, the categories of meaning are reflected in the sub-headings of the three data analysis chapters (four, five, and six).

The study is bounded by the particular cases of these two teachers during the five month spring, 2010, cycle of teaching and practice at TeenVoice. My analysis examined the nature of the cases in regard to teacher and student discourses and situated them in a

context of language theory. I have assessed the phenomena and themes with respect to my research questions for this study. The narrative is a thick description of teacher and student interactions which is then analyzed to locate the intersections of different discourses, the ways that students and teachers practiced code switching, and the metacognitive reflection by students and teachers on their discourse practices.

### ***Positionality of Researcher***

I came to TeenVoice because I had known their work ran in parallel to mine in exploring the affordances of digital media and issues of equity in education. I have sent many students to TeenVoice from the small school I started in 1997, and their executive director sat on the board of this small school. My own son went through TeenVoice training in 2003 and continues to be in touch with them. In 2007 I helped TeenVoice to align their curriculum with California community college standards in order for more students in the program to gain college credit while taking TeenVoice courses. All of these connections helped me gain access to TeenVoice for my study, and they also marked the complexity of my relationship to this community institution.

I kept reflective notes and journals in order to explore my own relationship to the project, including my own teaching life and work with youth in digital media. In addition, I have reflected on my dual roles as a teacher who has wrestled with issues of discourse and power in the classroom as well as a learner with the staff at TeenVoice. In my high school teaching, I developed a teaching unit on Language and Power that had students exploring linguistic theory concerning vernaculars, code switching, AAVE, as well as alienation, power, and literacy. In the course of this unit, the students created the *Berkeley High School slang dictionary* (Ayers, 2004), a small class project that grew over the years and finally was highlighted in local and national media and finally published.

Through the Language and Power unit I became deeply engaged in issues of discourse, how people wield oral and written language, cultural ways of communicating, body language, artistic expression, new digital media expressions, ways of making an argument, and ways of validating that something is true. My search has taken me to the margins where language and discourse are negotiated between the powerless and the institutions of power. It has taken me to the practices of teachers who are inventing new ways of communicating, new hybrids of vernaculars, perspectives, and values.

My complex connection to TeenVoice is highlighted in the fact that one of the secondary informant teachers in this study, Fiona, was a student of mine when she was in high school. During a high school unit on Language and Power, Fiona helped to develop the Slang Dictionary. This young teacher brought her own values and experiences to her teaching philosophy, including reflections on discourse that she developed in work with me eight years ago.

As I have looked particularly at youth Global Emergent Discourse and standardized English discourse practices, I have reflected on my assumptions, my history as a White male, and my political and social orientation to issues of race, social class, gender, and power. I have examined this positionality explicitly and worked to allow the data to lead my insights rather than seeking to confirm my preconceptions.

#### **4) TeenVoice – The Setting, The Context, The Staff**

I begin this chapter by describing the physical setting and institutional evolution of TeenVoice. Then, to address my third research question, I use observations, interviews, and discussions with the two secondary informants, the Education Director and the Heath Education teacher, to begin an exploration of the principles and values that are reflected in teacher discourse practices at TeenVoice. I also show how various artifacts displayed in the site reinforce some of these considerations. Finally, I use insights from these two secondary informants to describe the process of inducting and orienting staff to the organization's discourse principles and practices. This initial exploration provides a context for my later discussion of the specific ways that discourse practices were enacted by the two focal teachers in chapters 5 and 6.

##### ***San Pietro – From Local to Global***

TeenVoice is an out-of-school non-profit media education and production organization. The TeenVoice building, a former bank, is nestled in the middle of extensive urban revitalization in San Pietro, California, one of the cultural enhancements added by developers to other nearby high-powered building upgrades. Downtown San Pietro had experienced an economic renaissance in the past decades fueled first by the tech bubble then by the real estate bubble in the region, a transformation not unlike other urban areas in the country.

In the mid-twentieth century, the city was a booming industrial center built around its port and extensive trade with countries in the Pacific regions. Since World War II created a labor shortage, tens of thousands of African American families were brought out west from the South, particularly the Texas and Louisiana areas, to work in the shipyards of nearby Fulton. West San Pietro became a thriving working class community with Black homeownership being a common feature. These new Black communities brought southern culture, including a thriving blues club scene, to the region. Filipino and Latino immigration furthered the diversity of the San Pietro area during the war.

The region thrived in the post-war years of industrial boom while it also experienced the upheavals of the Civil Rights and Black Power movements. But the economic stagnation of the 70's and the crack epidemic of the 80's brought the downtown area of San Pietro to economic decline (Ginwright, 2010). Typical downtown vistas featured empty buildings standing near outdated businesses such as Smitty's 24 hour newsstand and the taxi-dancing clubs that used to cater to the sailors. Urban flight meant office building vacancy rates were often over 50%. Earthquakes left formerly thriving theaters and businesses boarded up without the capital for repairs.

Slowly though the downtown area began to make a comeback by the mid-90's. With the export of industry to Third World countries, the American economy moved more and more to service and information enterprises. Consumption of imported products was the norm. Steel mills in Pittsburgh, cargo piers in San Francisco, and cotton mills in Memphis became shopping malls, replacing stevedores with boutiques. In most urban landscapes like San Pietro (population about 400,000), the African American and

Latino communities were marginalized in narrow zones while the downtown areas received makeovers, attracting artists, venture capitalists, entertainers, and hipsters.

A neighborhood known as Uptown north of the city center was slated for upgrade, what some would call gentrification. The city used redevelopment money to repaint and restore the Art Deco splendor of the long abandoned Rialto and Goldwyn theaters. They opened with a decidedly retro flair, recalling the great movie and music palaces of the 40's. The nearby city center became active with new state and federal buildings as well as university and medical office buildings and uptown was providing stylish coffee shops, night clubs, and lunch spots. On the same blocks where cocaine trafficking had devastated the economy, the newly legal and White-identified medical marijuana industry provided another economic boost.

Davis Houie, one of the urban renewal entrepreneurs, rebuilt the Rialto Theater and the Pantheon Building. The latter, with its ornate rococo exterior repainted white like the wedding cake buildings of Brussels, reopened at full capacity in 2005. The Rectory Building a block over rivaled it for architectural daring, again reflecting the refined taste of modern architects in preserving the best of the past. Houie gave TeenVoice an affordable deal on the a property a block away from the Rialto Theater, counting it as a feather in his cap as a community-oriented developer and a way to enhance the credibility of the neighborhood upgrades. While the TeenVoice site is more modest compared to its neighbors, it is a tremendous center for youth media production. With four floors including the basement, the building represents a great victory for the TeenVoice founder and the staff who had built the institution over many years. TeenVoice is one building in the redeveloped area which welcomes, indeed prides itself in serving, the youth who are marginalized in the broader urban ecology.

### ***Inventing a Media Education Center***

The roots of TeenVoice go back to 1979, when Albie Woods, a journalist from South Africa who worked at the *San Pietro Times*, began a Youth Reporter Project. He kept a group of young people involved in gathering and writing news, primarily for print media, acting as teacher, mentor, and advocate. In 1989 the Youth Reporter Project took on Marion McGowan, a journalist from National Public Radio who was determined to expand the diversity of voices in radio broadcasting. McGowan, working with an initial core of teen activists, quickly began assembling recording, editing, and broadcasting equipment in a small storefront on the west side. TeenVoice was officially launched in 1992, using old tape decks and early computers with flickering screens. Egg-cartons stapled to the walls buffered sound for recording studios, folding tables served as work-spaces.

The original vision was to interest young people in broadcasting by creating opportunities for them to be mentored by professionals in the field. High school students came to TeenVoice to get a break from the stifling atmosphere in classrooms. They were interested simply in getting a chance to be on the air, to speak in their own voice, to share and celebrate their music. As new groups of students showed up, TeenVoice created an advanced class for graduates of the initial training. These students were considered interns and would assist in teaching the new arrivals. From a rather formless series of projects and experiences, TeenVoice evolved a clear set of courses and a curriculum based on a peer education model.

When they began to get youth produced programs on broader media outlets and when their news stories burrowed into truths that adult journalists could not find (leading to TeenVoice getting the prestigious Peabody Award in 1999 and many others since), McGowan was able to pursue new grants and to plow the money back into the youth programs. Consequently, they were able to pay not only a stipend to interns but also a salary to a number of youth producers and a professional staff. After 15 years TeenVoice had outgrown the initial storefront location and relocated the site in Uptown through the Houie deal. They immediately launched a major capital campaign for the down payment and funds to completely refurbish the building into a professional media business as well as a teaching institution.

With the new round of grants came a greater interest in the educational mission of TeenVoice. Since the program was so successful at attracting young people and engaging them in a sustained commitment to learning, they were successful in approaching many agencies for grants with educational goals: to keep students in school, to raise their grades, to get them into college, to provide college credit for TeenVoice classes, and to create special programs for health awareness and nutrition as well as for students in legal and academic trouble.

The original class for new participants at TeenVoice is called Core (for anyone interested in media education), and that was followed by the Bridge class (the advanced media course that prepares students to become interns). Special public safety funding gave rise to the class known as Community Action Program (CAP, later called Media Advocates Transforming Community Health or MATCH). This class particularly targeted youth who had been expelled from school, recently released from juvenile hall, or assigned for rehabilitation from arrests resulting from teenage sexual exploitation. In response to community needs and in fulfillment of new grant requirements, TeenVoice soon added health and nutrition classes, an anti-Dating Violence program, as well as other professional projects in journalism and music production. Students gravitated towards one or another area in their journey through TeenVoice, some to journalism, some to engineering (dealing with the hard wiring of the studios as well as the computer aspects), and some to music and beats.

### ***Life at TeenVoice***

The TeenVoice building nestles in the urban renewal section of San Pietro comfortably with students from mostly the poor east and west side neighborhoods, known as “the deep,” taking public transportation to classes. Students are often seen waiting for the bus in front of the building, walking down the block for pizza, or fanning out with digital audio or video recorders to conduct local interviews. A young person is always at the door during open hours, greeting visitors and buzzing in people for class.

The old site of TeenVoice had been mildly chaotic, with hand-made signs on one wall reminding students of SAT prep and tutoring opportunities and other notices, reminders, and hand-made meeting agendas on another wall. In contrast, the new building is a sleek, modern, highly professional studio, with tasteful photographs of youth work on one wall in the reception area and media awards TeenVoice has won on another wall. The building is three stories high with new carpet and office furniture, brightly colored walls, state of the art studios, computer stations, and production areas.

TeenVoice describes their mission as follows:

TeenVoice promotes young people's intellectual, creative, and professional growth through education and access to media. TeenVoice's media education, broadcast journalism, technical training and production activities provide unique opportunities in social, professional and leadership development for youth, ages 14-24. We see TeenVoice's work as cultivating the natural resilience and strength of young people. By connecting youth with their communities through media literacy and professional development, they become active partners in civic engagement. TeenVoice's overarching goal is to instill a long-term commitment and engagement on the part of youth as viable contributors and leaders in the media/arts, journalism and civic life. Eighty percent of TeenVoice participants are low-income and/or youth of color. All of TeenVoice's programs and services—professional development, media education, technical training, academic support and health services—are free. Our programs and services strengthen life skills, motivate high school graduation, support higher education goals and prepare participants for careers in the 21st century (TeenVoice website, 2010).

One glossy foundation report on TeenVoice *Youth Media* put out by the Elliott Foundation is at the front desk. On the cover is the photograph of an African American young man with earphones and a microphone. The headline is, "I Exist, I Am Visible, I Matter." The Elliott Foundation supports a number of projects in youth media work.

The report explains TeenVoice's foundational ideas of media literacy and youth engagement through media. The quotations from young people give a sense of the mission and scope of the program. Here are a few of them:

- Libby (youth editor) helped me find my voice. She always encouraged me. It's helped me so much.
- TeenVoice is a family, like my second home. They have watched me grow and someone is there to help when you fall. There are so many hands to help you back up. There is so much support you can feel it.
- At first it might seem weak to be into writing; but there were enough people who were into it... they made it OK to be passionate about writing.
- I was not too trusting of other people. Group talks help you get to know people. You don't have to censor how you feel and put makeup on.
- I never thought adults could respect us and take seriously what we put on paper and on the air... Adults see us with a camera or a mike and they think, "Wow!" and they respect us for it.
- When I first entered I was really immature. I used to think and act like a kid. Now I am more responsible. I know how to act in certain places.

As the teenagers arrive at the TeenVoice office from all over the Bay Area by bus, BART, or car (usually with a parent driving), they shrug off their backpacks and slouch in chairs and against the wall. Some sport iPod earphones, others cell phones, others packets of CD's. The talk is easy and comfortable, laced with humor and anticipation. In spite of their vastly different racial and class identities, there seems to be a casual warmth among all of the teens.

There are a number of factors that are unique about teaching and learning in this setting as compared to a classroom. The most obvious is its physical location and social function. It is outside of school, so students attend TeenVoic by choice. Because TeenVoice does not have compulsory classes or the kinds of rules associated with public schools, the atmosphere is different. Instead of resistance and discipline conflicts often seen in schools, TeenVoice has a more cooperative interaction among students, teachers, and staff. Issues of power, access, respect, and success are explored through the discourse practices of all the participants. This is directly tied to the stance of the teachers. They are more intimate and informal with the students, in part, because most are graduates of the first stage training (Core classes), second stage training (Bridge classes), and internship programs. Yet the classes are all work with very little wasted time. In addition the attraction of youth to expression through new electronic media is an area in which the schools lag many decades behind.

During radio production at TeenVoice, producers adhere to principles of Positive Youth Development (PYD) articulated Pittman (2000), focused eight critical elements essential to the healthy development of young people:

- youth feel physically and emotionally safe
- youth experience belonging and ownership
- youth develop self-worth
- youth discover self
- youth develop quality relationships with peers and adults
- youth discuss conflicting values and form their own
- youth feel the pride and accountability that comes with mastery
- youth expand their capacity to enjoy life and know that success is possible.

They have also adapted approaches of Social Justice Youth Development (Ginwright & Cammarota, 2002), a youth development model that addressed structures of power and helped youth to understand how their opportunities were circumscribed by larger political, economic, and social forces. This youth development model offered a critique of the traditional approach that focused on individual and psychological work with youth without challenging external power relations.

The students are guided by approaches to learning known as collegial pedagogy, as articulated by Soep and Chávez (2010, p. 54):

- developing communities of practice
- building relationships of mutual humanization
- pursuing positive youth development

This process of teaching and learning is based on the principles of journalistic production with youth:

- collaborative framing
- youth-led inquiry
- public accountability.

But we can see how such principles apply in the teaching and learning process in TeenVoice introductory classes. Meaning is made together, between staff and students; youth are empowered to define projects and the framing of stories; public viewing and group critique are characteristic of all projects. Classes are taught by the teacher-mentors but assisted by interns, students who are a year or more into the program, in a peer-teaching model. Students work on production next to more expert students as apprentice

learners (Lave & Wenger, 1991). While the students cross many borders, between cities, neighborhoods, gang turf, and class differences, to get to class, the teachers also consciously cross borders of identity, power, and discourse in order to be effective with students.

### ***The Semiotics of Wall Signs***

The values of TeenVoice concerning discourse are not encapsulated in handbooks or manuals. Instead, they are reflected through an array of posters on walls throughout the building. Some represent past events of TeenVoice, media stories on the project, or photographs of staff members. Of interest, however, are the hand-made signs which act as footprints of previous classes. These are flip-chart pages that have been created during meetings through a group process and left on the wall as a reminder of principles and values in the project.

A typical sign was posted by the Core class in the meeting room on the third floor of the new TeenVoice offices:

- |  |
|--|
| <p><b>Creating Ground Rules</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Confidentiality</li><li>• Respect</li><li>• “Don’t down it, crown it”</li><li>• One mic</li><li>• Have fun</li><li>• No cell phones</li><li>• Step up, step back</li></ul> |
|--|

And another one for the MATCH class said:

- |  |
|--|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Be punctual</li><li>• Practice self-motivation</li><li>• Take responsibility</li><li>• Be accountable</li><li>• Goals = The results that one puts forth effort to achieve</li><li>• Leave it at the door</li><li>• One mic</li></ul> |
|--|

These signs have been developed in order to establish ground rules and agreements for classes. While similar to other agreements created by many different consultants across the country, these were particularly marked by an adoption of youth discourse. An example is the term “One mic,” which is a reference to a hip hop song released by Nas in 2002, meaning here that only one person should talk at a time. Instead of saying something like “Turn taking,” the meeting has generated a rule that invokes students’ own cultural discourse and experiences. “Don’t down it, crown it” is another

saying which replaced standard rules (which here could have been, “Don’t criticize others, give praise to their ideas”) with a rhyming, engaging phrase.

Other group-generated butcher paper on the wall at the new studio included one on hip hop and one on respect. The first one had been written with multiple different colored markers, the product of a group activity in a meeting.

### **What does hip hop mean to you?**

- Calms you down
- Culture
- Expression
- Changes with eras
- Style
- Intellect
- Best friend
- Respect
- Freedom → free your mind
- Unity
- Soundtrack to your life
- Defiance

60’s space-rock expression  
Rock-indie expression  
The way you want to do it.

### **What is Respect?**

Is able to admit being wrong.

Respect is... listening without interruption.

Respect is... trust and honesty

Respect is... loving yourself

Respect is... direct communication

Enables you to feel safe being with them

Accepts you changing your mind.

Respect is... keeping an open mind

Respects your feelings, your opinions, and your friends.

Respect is... taking your partner's feelings into consideration.

Respect is... non-violence.

Accepts you saying no to things you don't want to do (like sex).

Respect is... building a person up instead of tearing them down.

Lets you feel comfortable being yourself.

Respects your wishes if you want to end the relationship.

Tries to resolve conflict by talking honestly.

Respect is... friendship

Respect is... not pressuring the other person.

Respect is... agreeing to disagree

Respect is... trying to understand your partner's viewpoint.

Respect is... giving each other space.

The latter poster, which was tacked above Fiona's desk, contained different colored hearts cut out and glued to it. In this case the phrases were typed in large font, cut out and glued to the poster.

Most intriguing to me was the sign that hung in the Health Committee room. Fiona and one of her students, Rashonda, regularly used the term "code switching," not only in reflecting on their own teaching practice but in helping students with metacognition, thinking about their own discourse practices.

The poster was as follows:

**Code Switching**

- Limit
- Managing vulnerability
- What is right/wrong
- Laws

- What is acceptable
- Comfort level
- Assert authority
- Prevent uncomfortable situations
- Stay within that space
- Don't give out phone number
- Keeping secrets
- Don't tell people's business
- No gossip/spreading rumors

In this case the term was used to suggest proper, professional behavior. The idea of explicit instruction and encouragement for such moves seems quite reasonable. But I was surprised that the term code switching was used in this way. I learned in the course of my time at TeenVoice that the term code switching was sometimes used to encourage students to use a more professional register but the practice of code switching went both ways: with teachers also demonstrating an ability to understand and communicate in the discourse of the students.

***Roland – Supervisor and Culture Keeper***

In a series of interviews, Education Director Roland Ijichi provided a context for the strategies of engagement and effective discourse that the TeenVoice teacher-mentors and staff employ in relating to the students.

I think there's a certain level of freedom that comes with going to a place by your own choice. We've worked to make TeenVoice a free and open space in that sense. But we've worked on making it a safe space as well by providing certain frames. So while people feel comfortable to express themselves, to be themselves but they also know that in order for them to feel comfortable doing things here they need to make sure that other people feel comfortable here as well, right?

He added that teacher-mentors at TeenVoice all have bachelor's degrees but not teaching credentials. The ones who taught the first wave of students coming into TeenVoice were in their late 20's and themselves graduates of the TeenVoice apprenticeship program in their own teenage years. Not only do teacher-mentors position themselves as understanding and connecting to student discourse practices, they also consciously look for leadership among the students, those who are conversant in youth discourse but who can forward the TeenVoice project. He introduced this concept in talking about difficulties public schools have in creating a place where students can express agency and take ownership of the curriculum. "I don't think, at public schools, especially those that are less resourced or less staffed, I don't think there are enough folks there to keep that culture, to get the students to eventually become those culture-keepers, you know? So a lot of anything-goes happens there and once that takes place it's difficult to make the argument that it's a safe place."

When I pressed him to clarify the term "culture keepers," he clarified that it was something to which he has given a good deal of thought. "I'm looking at the folks that are maintaining the community that they are a part of, and are responsible for, like checking folks that are violating the community, if you want to put it that way." It is the

person who keeps things on track, who points out breaches of agreements. Roland added that this culture keeper is not necessarily the one who gets the best grades or is expected to be a leader. It might be someone who is not well known or acknowledged before starting at TeenVoice.

Yeah that person just kind of emerges. I think there's something to be said about the person that kind of blossoms because they feel comfortable or because they are in a place where they feel they can be themselves and he or she wants to create that environment for other young folks. But certainly it's not like we're honing in on particular folks who we think are going to be the leaders.... And when he's checking folks it has far more value than when any adult is, you know? There's just something to be said about someone who treats this space like a professional space and is trying to ensure that it is a productive space for all the rest of the participants. And young folks respect that.

Roland's framing is important. It is an aspect of honoring the discourse and identity of the students, to honor their practices instead of suggesting that all of their practices represent a deficit. It encourages student agency as part of advancing the project of TeenVoice. It has implications for understanding the underlying pedagogical theory of teacher-mentors at TeenVoice.

Roland explained that making connections, creating trust, are the key elements of effective discipline. "It's because I give respect and I get it back." This is crucial for youth, he told me, "because they've never seen or experienced a classroom that wasn't modeled after a jail." In addition, Roland reflected directly on how the issue of race is discussed and negotiated between teacher-mentors and students. When I asked him if racial difference is discussed explicitly, he responded:

Yeah, there are a couple of examples. When folks feel that they are being complementary, they'll say like, "Roland, you're Black." It raises something in me to like, I have to be like, "I am not Black. And you need to recognize that and it's important to have you understand that." It's not necessarily that I'm taking it as an insult but I don't want to take it as complimentary either, even if you intended it as such.

Another time where it comes up is, there is a certain level of like comfort to make reference to Asian folks. It's almost a knee-jerk reaction to observe me as Chinese or to make some comment like "Oh no offense about these Chinese folks." And I have to say, like, "No, I'm not Chinese." And let's get that distinction clear. It's a teachable moment, who knows.

And then the concept of throwing out certain slurs, you know, it's not an attempt to be like aggressive to me but it's like, "Wow, I don't consider you a bing bing." And I'm like, "Wait, so let's break down where that word comes from." And it's like, "Well, that's how it sounds when you-all are talking." And I'm saying, "Well, that's fine but come on."

Does race come up? Sure. But I'm hoping it's addressed in a way where they're getting something from it and I'm standing clear on who I am and I'm counting on them understanding how important it is to me just like it's important to them to be who they are.

On the one hand, Roland challenges students concerning their own stereotyping, their inability or inattention to the difference between Chinese American and Japanese American, their narrow assumptions about his identity. He demanded that they not misappropriate his identity, that they understand his complexity just as they want to be understood. While honoring their identity, Roland pushed students to think outside of their boxes. By adding awareness of Chinese and Japanese identity to the mix, Roland was complicating the Black-White racial binary.

I suggested to Roland that this conversation on race broaches a number of other important issues. First, it is significant that the students would offer him a compliment by saying he is Black. And of course Roland must challenge and frame that compliment. But that means they already have the view that, “probably Roland is cool enough to think it was cool if I said he was Black.” In other words they interpreted Roland as believing Black culture and Black folks are positive, reminiscent of the “black is beautiful” cultural consensus in San Pietro in the 1960’s. In these students’ experience, some teachers are on a missionary, redemptive, or “civilizing the savages” project. They would hope that the student would change, use a discourse that was more identified with White culture. But the student is saying to Roland, “Roland, you’re Black.” And of course it may be inappropriate, but it revealed the positionality that the student perceives from him. So that’s an example of the teacher occupying a middle space; it’s not a matter of Roland showing that he can speak AAVE but it is clear that the teacher-mentors are there because they are in solidarity, not charity.

### ***Fiona —Discourse and Race***

A typical class of the Health Committee, a group of about 10 students, develops research, outreach, and programming on domestic violence (DV) and particularly on relationship tension and violence. This group is led by 24 year-old White staff member Fiona McLain. Like many programs at TeenVoice, this one is financed by a grant (in this case from Blue Shield). In fulfilling the funder requirements of promoting healthy relationships, the committee has taken charge of a web site that Blue Shield has created in conjunction with an advertising agency. The youth in the TeenVoice Health Committee have worked on making the web site’s language, cultural expressions, and values more in line with youth today and therefore, they hope, more successful in influencing them. The students have gone through a process of critique of the old web site and analyzed the campaign’s assumptions about youth behavior and development. Fiona explained that they then changed the approach to young people so that the discussion of conflict did not stigmatize the youth.

The usual approach to DV stereotypes the male as a criminal and is particularly focused on the woman as victim. However, the students argued that the young men are also in crisis and that they too are not happy with their circumstances or actions. They noted the need to pay attention to mistakes young men make while also building up their self-respect. By having the voice and the confidence to argue their perceptions, these youth worked to challenge and shift from the adult framing of this issues. Instead of setting up both male and female as “others” with outsider, sinful behavior, the health program sought to enter in dialogue with youth where they are through the voices and perspectives of youth who are all dealing with the same issues in order to help both parties make healthy choices. This approach is suggestive of the orientation and ideology

of TeenVoice concerning discourse and power, an endorsement of youth agency that also informs the discourse practices of teachers and the interactions between teachers and students.

Fiona also expressed a sophisticated understanding of how a White teacher with a class of mostly students of color must position herself. She explained that it is a classroom skill to “play to your audience a little in order to relate to the students.” But, at the same time, she indicated that you have to be yourself as reflected in the following example:

Now if I came in and tried to be like, “Wassup?!” that would look like I’m trying too hard. . . . Because I have to be mindful, as a White person, to not look to be trying too hard. And then the more that I get to know them I might let down and do that stuff. But otherwise it is too wannabe, it’s not genuine. Even if this is how I really talk, it doesn’t come off that way; it has to be genuine, that’s important.

Body language is another aspect of discourse (Goffman, 1969). Fiona used the example of a lesson in discourse she learned in Brazil where the version of Portuguese is locally colloquial. When she asked what a word meant, people told her that she’d figure it out. She also learned that she had a communication problem while in Bahia, a region of people mostly of African descent, because she had a habit of standing with her arms folded across her chest. She did not know it but this gesture is considered offensive. “If you’re in a space and you have arms folded across your chest, you’re saying, like, ‘Fuck everybody here.’ Literally that’s what they think. And finally someone told me. Before that, I had no idea.” She has paid attention to body language in her teaching at TeenVoice so that she does not communicate disrespect or arrogance.

TeenVoice teachers are explicit in their understanding of the use of body language and personal space. These lessons suggest how teachers should interact with students (giving personal space when appropriate, hugging at other times). In addition, teachers and students discuss proper body language when out in public, how close to stand to people when interviewing, etc. In fact, there is even an aspect of “code switching” in body language, a discussion (in Chapter 5) on how the body positioning and use of voice might intimidate White people in the public during an interview.

A further aspect of discourse as a cultural mode of communication is deploying humor. TeenVoice teachers assert that part of the strength of students they get from San Pietro, part of their resilience, is their ability to use humor. But humor is a very particular part of discourse, laden with deep cultural values and codes. Certain challenging humor, such as “the dozens,” is familiar in an African American context (Kelly, 1998). What teacher can deploy this humor? How will it be taken? Misunderstanding the codes of humor can turn a light moment into a confrontation; but proper use of it can be used to probe the level of trust and closeness that exists between teacher and student.

Fiona explained that a teacher using humor must be able to make fun of herself too, to know when to use self-deprecating humor and when it is permissible to tease students. “You have to know what is and isn’t appropriate,” she added, exploring the notion of clothing and fit as a discourse. “Like Andrew came in wearing some skinny

jeans the other day and he's like a D-boy<sup>5</sup>, he doesn't dress flashy, like some other people do but he wears white T's, jeans and hoodies, you know?"

Fiona said,

So it was really funny to see him because he'd been out because of his work permit and then he was MIA for a bit but then he was back. So it was like two weeks or something and he had on these skinny jeans and like a red t-shirt that was tie dyed and had 'Ed Hardy School' on it, and underneath was a long sleeve thermal and a red hat. And everyone was all like, what happened? And he was like 'Aw,' and Debra was hella making fun of him. And he was like, 'Aw, tryin' to get at the kid. Well I ran out of white tees this morning.' And fellow student Debra (who is White) was like, 'Oh, so you had to wear your little brother's shirt?' And Debra, she hangs out with them every weekend.

So this was a moment that a White teacher and a White student could participate in teasing a student, all as part of building closeness and trust.

That said, the teacher needs the cultural competence to know when to refrain from teasing. "I have kids who I would never tease," Fiona explained, "because they're so sensitive so I do other things to build relationships. Like that girl Annette, she's fragile.... And I would never tease her because I think that it might actually freak her out. And her self-esteem, she's shy to speak; when we're in a group of 10 people she's shy. So like the kids sometimes tease her but they know to tease her gently. But I never would because she needs us to do stuff to make it a safe space for her." Fiona demonstrated with this conversation a constant process of self-monitoring that TeenVoice teacher-mentors are doing. Even in the context of teasing and joking, she is consciously calibrating her discourse in relation to her students.

### ***Staff Induction: Passing on TeenVoice Values***

Before taking a close look at the work of the TeenVoice teachers who introduce new students to TeenVoice culture and its discourse, it is worth examining the discourse practices and routines within the paid staff. In this section, I examine a number of the key elements of discourse, including oral language, body language, humor, and racial identity. Roland said there is not a formal induction process for new teacher-mentors. As he explained, the standards of practice are not based on "certainties," but rather they are based on "these experiences that you go through together." He felt that it might be a mistake to turn their expectations into a manual. While there are common values and practices, he did not want job applicants to simply read the manual to determine what register to take in their language. The common dispositions towards discourse are communicated within staff through an unstated set of principles, a kind of oral tradition, through observations of each others' teaching as well as discussion and feedback.

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<sup>5</sup> A D-boy is a term meaning a dope boy, as in a hustler, a drug dealer. But the general styling of D-boys is to wear big baggy jeans and the white t-shirts. Youth who want to be inconspicuous because of the types of activities that they are engaged in only dress in jeans and t-shirt and they maintain that same style that has been around since the 80s. Other students who are showing off hip hop culture may be wearing "skinny jeans" and polos and bright colors.

On the one hand, a TeenVoice teacher is not supposed to speak like a San Pietro teenager using vernacular in an informal setting. On the other hand, it would be a mistake for the teacher to always speak formally, to remain remote from teen language, only to value standardized English discourse styles. Roland used the term Professional English to stand for, on the one hand, what is known as standardized English; but it also includes professional radio and journalism language. For TeenVoice, even this category has many sub-categories. There is the discourse that engineers use in setting up studios and computer stations, the academic discourse of journalism and media literacy, the radio discourse of the music shows and the radio discourse of National Public Radio type reports. Roland said that teachers at TeenVoice should be able to model Professional English while easily moving back and forth into AAVE, or local teen slang, either in understanding student self-expression or even deploying the youth discourse to get their attention or make a particular point. As we shall see, the borders between these discourses are not clearly drawn and most teachers use a hybrid discourse, some variant of professional English mixed with a certain amount of local teen slang, all mediated by complex local and global discourses.

As far as being conversant, comfortable, and engaged with student discourse practices, Roland asserted, “I think it’s important for the instructor to understand what the hell the kids are talking about. It’s extremely important. I don’t think it’s important for them to respond to the students in kind. If anything I would say it’s not that valuable. And on some level I’m hoping, I’m hoping, I think the youth don’t want to see you talking like that. I would hope they’d look at someone who is twice their age and say, like, damn why does he talk like me, why is he dressing like me? I think they want something different from someone who is my age.”

In probing with Roland and Fiona concerning criteria for staff discourse, I learned that, while there is not an explicit requirement for TeenVoice staff discourse practices, there are implicit rules and even a clear monitoring of potential hires. Fiona explained how students sat in on a sample class from a few potential hires. A woman they were considering came in talking about Allen Iverson, wearing a low-cut blouse, and hugging all the students. She brought up a Tupac song from 1992, suggesting that San Pietro youth must love him. She had extensive professional skills she could have used but it was a stretch for her to try so hard to be “cool.” Students felt they were being patronized. But a second candidate came in and taught them a process and something they could build off of, using professional language while understanding and interacting with the student discourse. The class was built around their learning. He’s the one who got hired.

Fiona added:

Especially these kids who don’t have adults in their lives who act like adults, they don’t need another friend. They already have parents who act like friends and other adults who act inappropriate in their life. They need an adult who acts like an adult, who has clear boundaries and clear expectations that they hold them to, who represent something safe for them. I really believe that Freire stuff where he says that discipline and authority are different. It’s not about power it’s about creating a structure so that people know what it is and isn’t OK to do and they feel safe. And that’s how you build trust is by consistency.

TeenVoice teacher discourse emphasizes relationships, community-building, and a view of a common struggle, a unity between staff and students. The relationship between student and teacher is not supposed to be one of strict, top-down, authoritarian teaching. It is not unusual, for example, for a student to say that her relationship with a teacher-mentor is just like family. So there is this closeness and even permission to be verbally aggressive in the pursuit of either humor or arguments. But as Roland explained, “You don’t expect your parents to speak the same way youth do or smoke marijuana with you. But you do expect something, so there is this something that is in between.”

Race and cultural expression are key aspects of discourse (Smitherman , 1977; Hymes, 1983; Pennycook, 1998; Perry and Delpit, 1998). Roland said that there is a seasoning process that young adults must go through in becoming teachers, especially if they are not the same ethnicity, or do not have the same discourse, as their students. Teachers must examine their own identity and positionality, being comfortable and transparent about where they are coming from.

All of these subtle dimensions of discourse are negotiated in TeenVoice classes every day. A successful teacher at TeenVoice must have the cultural competence, the ability to border cross, that allows her to be aware of her own discourse practices, the multiple experiences of students, and how to successfully connect between the discourse practices of the students, humor and the professional dispositions and skills they mean to teach. I will examine this negotiation and these decision points on how to deploy discourse in more depth with the case studies of Marcus and Aida in the coming chapters.

## 5) Marcus Harris - Intersectionality of Discourses and Metacognition

In this chapter I examine the teaching practice of Marcus Harris with the TeenVoice Core class, paying particular attention to how he facilitated student engagement in learning complex content (Research Question 1). I also explore how he understands the primary discourses the students come to the program with as well as the ways that he interpenetrates and connects his discourse with the primary discourses of students. And I explore his strategy for engaging students and initiating them into the professional discourses of journalism and media (Research Question 2). In addition to describing events in the classroom and student comments, I interject reflections Marcus made about his teaching in a series of interviews.

### *Hip Hop Teacher*

I begin by setting a stage for seeing something of the character and style of Marcus with a description of a moment in his teaching the Core class. Early in the teaching cycle for the Core class, the mood was dragging and students were starting to disengage. Then Marcus uncorked one of his elaborate comic routines and pulled the students back into focus. In preparing students to interview a local hip hop artist, Marcus had them interview him as he acted out the persona of a wild and ambitious small time rapper. He bounced on a large exercise ball and ran a fast and profane monologue as a character he has created named “Spitta.” He clowned for the student trying to do the interview, “It’s your boi in da building: spit, spit, spit! *Hot Lava* is the joint dropping on February 29. Y’all go out and buy it, ya hear?” He was manically talking and promoting, undermining the student’s ability to get a more thoughtful and in-depth interview. Students laughed both at Marcus’ antics and at the ridiculous character that they knew to be so familiar, a hyper, excited self-promoter trying to get over with his new CD.

Throughout the session Marcus breached the barrier between teacher and student discourse, regularly breaking into slang (“The woman on the bus dissed me, but I just chunked up a deuce”), invoking sports trivia and metaphors (from Floyd Mayweather to the basketball trash talk), leading a birthday song with a variation of Stevie Wonder’s Martin Luther King tribute, breaking into a dance in response to a dance step started by a student, and joking about video games.

Like many teachers, Marcus sometimes chose to ignore the student discourse always swirling around him because it was a constant presence of informal talk. But when he felt he could intervene to engage them in reflection on their language usage, he would comment on a side conversation and incorporate it into the lesson of the day. For example, during the second week of this Core session, students started teasing a young short African American student with the nickname Little D, calling out his given name “Earl” from the attendance sheet. Little D wore large horn-rim glasses and tried to concentrate deeply to overcome learning disabilities. A surprised look came on his face as his focus was broken upon hearing his name. He shot back, “Hey, why you tell people my government name?” This was a way of claiming his identity away from the state, understanding the state as only involved in one’s life for certain formal operations, such as attendance sheets and forms.

Marcus picked up on this and led the class to a free flowing discussion of how “we” talk and how the government, or straight society, might not understand. Students came up with phrases like “off the hook,” “off the chain,” “get shoes wet,” and “got a Kiwi” to exemplify contrasts between their talk and “straight society” talk. “Ooooh,” remarked Danzy, a young Black woman who had seen her share of struggles at home and at school, “He said some inappropriate stuff!” But the phrases needed no more unpacking or analysis. Little D was back in the group, the tension was diffused, and the class had reflected on the existence of different discourses.

Sometimes Marcus got his students’ attention while communicating a broadcasting principle such as the day he started class with, “Ooooo, I don’t like dead air. Everybody sit down. How y’all doing?” This was early on and he was calling the class to order, welcoming them, and also pointing out the problem of silence during a live broadcast. Three short sentences in rapid fire order were typical of his way of speaking to class.

Marcus also signaled affiliation with the students, especially African American students who share the background of the “great migration” from the South. He mixed in lore about Southern upbringing as well as mothers who fight for their kids. While speaking to students about proper journalistic writing, he suddenly called out to some African American students who were off task and huddled in a studio. One of them was the outspoken Big Darren who is 6’ 2” and had spotty attendance. The other was Sharita, a fashionable young woman who was an honor roll student at San Pietro High School. When they came out of the studio, Marcus smiled and said, “I’ve got my grandmother’s eyes. She would pinch us in church. She’s gangster. (It’s been) seventeen years since I been in Mississippi but I’m still, you know, so just work with me.” Everyone laughed. He managed to discipline the students, mark a cultural connection, and lighten the harshness of his correction with humor. It’s also worth noting that when Marcus invoked disciplinary admonitions, he usually referred to his mother or grandmother. The gendered nature of child-raising and child-correction in his discourse was a familiar trope that the students responded to.

Marcus referenced markers of hip hop culture throughout the hour, markers much like the ones described by Chang (2005) which include urban iconography, African American slang, Black history, a common cultural legacy from the South, and a bouncing, humorous tone. The powerful presence of hip hop culture throughout youth culture of San Pietro (Mahiri et al, 2007) means that Marcus could invoke the patterns, phrases, and tropes of hip hop to connect not only with African American students but with San Pietro Latino students as well as White students. He navigated between formal (what he called professional) discourse and hip hop discourse on a regular basis. As we shall see he deployed a “teaching discourse,” something between the formal professional discourse he used with staff or funders and his informal, primary discourse for friends.

At another point Marcus was getting the attention of the class in order to calculate broadcast time slots on the white board with a green marker. Responding to comments by all the students that they hated math and didn’t do well in it, Marcus made an exaggerated gesture of smelling the marker tip, remarking, “Doo doo. Just tryna see what flavor this was. Algebra, not my strength. I only passed because I had to tell my professor that an angry Black woman from Fulton (my mom) was coming out to talk to him.” Little D, Big Darren, Sharita and others burst out laughing. Here he positioned

himself as having a problem with math like they did and he noted the way that his family used parent involvement. Sharita remarked in an interview later: “Sometimes teachers try too hard to be cool. But Marcus is just real. Nobody can top Marcus at all.”

Marcus Harris is a teacher who uses his whole life experience, from his roots back in rural Mississippi up to the projects of Fulton and on to Howard University, to construct his teaching identity. While he sought to introduce students to what he described as professional, i.e. standardized English, he easily slid into styles that integrate aspects of various discourses, a Global Emergent Discourse that mixes African American Vernacular English (AAVE), hip hop references, impersonation (revoicing) of well known public figures, and humor in a kind of instructional or teaching discourse. His instructional approach was to keep students engaged with a constant interplay of discourse, calling out students to comment and voice different personae. For each Core class, he developed a clap/cheer, a rhythmic set of claps, followed by a phrase or rap line, which students did together at the end of each day. He explained to the class, “We do the clap to develop community.”

Another way to understand and connect to student discourse was the use of humor. Marcus reflected that an important strength his students come in with is a sense of humor, the ability to “go to dozens, the teasing.” Students also could “take” the dozens, i.e. they could take being teased without losing their cool. His students came in with a thicker skin concerning some themes while they were more sensitive and short-fused on others. The trick was to learn what worked, what jokes could be told, and what areas had to be trod softly. “For a teacher, that’s always the dance, right? The key is if you are able to talk about things that are outside of the work or you allow yourself to be joked about, that helps. It allows me some leeway in being able to joke with them as well.” In class, he played old news tapes of himself looking young and uncertain as a journalism student at Howard. Darren and Sharita laughed at the video, with a mixture of “dozens” (teasing Marcus) and self-reflection. Darren remarked: “That’s just how I looked out there.” Students could laugh at him and he could be awkward in front of them. By exposing his own mistakes and describing his own path to professionalism in broadcasting, Marcus modeled for the students the transition from his primary (home) to this secondary (in this case, media professional) discourse. Humor simply eased the teaching and co-opted student engagement as they were interpreting and judging the teacher’s performance.

### ***Drawing Water from the Well***

Here I examine this focal teacher’s discourse roots and his understanding of his history in order to understand the identity he draws on in connecting with students and their discourse. While Marcus Harris’ teaching style and discourse draws on hip hop idioms, his primary discourse, his home discourse from family, has deep roots in the American South, in the “great migration” to Northern cities, and in the complex fabric of his extended family. Like most of his generation, however, Marcus mixes global and local discourses in constructing his identity. He uses his complex history, and the discourse that comes from that history, in his teacher persona. As we shall see, Marcus not only accesses this discourse but he has reflected extensively about where it comes from and when to deploy different registers and vernaculars.

Marcus is a 30-year-old African American male teacher who wears casually fashionable athletic shirts or sweaters and black horn-rim glasses. He has a laser-like focus while teaching. He often rocks up on his toes while making a point and he is always ready with an observation, a laugh, or a story told in a voice that mimics a variety of characters, his grandmother, hip hop artists, or even students. His repertoire of characters is drawn from his experience in the rural South, the streets of the urban North, his vast knowledge of music and sports, and his time spent studying communications at Howard University in Washington D.C.

His family is a long-standing part of the Black community of West Point in northeastern Mississippi, which is about halfway between Starkville, where Mississippi State University is located, and the Columbus Air Force Base. While a core of the family stayed in the South, even as farming was no longer economically viable, some relatives migrated to Chicago, Kansas City, and the District of Columbia. Many in the Mississippi family made careers in the military, three members of his family are in Iraq right now, and others found factory work. One of his aunts has a PhD in art and teaches at Mississippi State University.

Marcus left this rural environment at age 12 when his mother, Palmyria Harris, moved him and his brother to Fulton, California. While he had loved rural life as a young child, Marcus found the freedom of the city exhilarating with its many possibilities for cultural and social activities. Bypassing Fulton High School, Marcus's mother enrolled him in the charter Middle College High School that is housed at La Costa College in Fulton. His high school and his access to college classes sparked his interest in journalism, and he had the opportunity to be both a sports editor and editorial page editor of the college paper *The Advocate* by the time he was a senior in high school. He was an engaged and ambitious student and during his senior year he traveled to San Pietro to take the Core training class at TeenVoice.

Marcus has always worked a job, helping out on the farm, delivering papers in Fulton, staying with an uncle in Kansas City after high school to work in a Coca Cola bottling plant, and doing door-to-door sales. At Howard University, he held down jobs while doing play-by-play sports reporting and interviewing hip hop artists on the college radio and television stations. The community life of D.C. gave him the chance to be in a stimulating environment with Black students and teachers from all walks of life and from Africa and the Caribbean.

Marcus attributes his language style, his primary discourse identity, to his hybrid background. His mother, he explained in an interview, was a very proper person. His grandmother was a public school teacher for 30 years and she insisted on "proper" diction. Additionally his aunt, who was in the military for 14 years, became a teacher at Mississippi State University. But he and his mother lived in the Fulton Housing Authority projects. He did not even know this housing was urban renewal for his first few years there until another youth told him. Marcus noted, "My mom used to tell me that 'I didn't know I was poor until they told me I was poor.'"

Marcus's mother had a strong commitment to what he calls "proper etiquette," which he found ironic considering they were living in a place where the selling of drugs and commission of drive-by shootings were happening outside. So his indoor language and how he interacted with his mother was very different from when he was outside the door. "I always say if I didn't play ball and I wasn't into rap, I don't know what would

have happened to me as a young Black male,” Marcus stated. “So I was in the narrative of hoop. I was around all these other folks, and I just picked up the language.”

He also learned from African American television shows and 70’s blaxploitation films. He was an avid reader searching for his identity in the mixture of his life, devouring writers like James Baldwin, Iceberg Slim, and Donald Goines. He concluded, “I guess what my native language is I don’t know honestly because how I talk with my boys is pretty similar to how I talk at work except that I curse a lot worse. But it’s all just part of who I am.” When Marcus said “at work,” he was indicating his teaching discourse, something that was more informal than what he calls “professional discourse” but not as informal as his home/friends discourse. When he is not in the presence of students, for instance when in meetings with the managing director of TeenVoice or when he was talking with funders or academics, then his professional discourse was much more devoid of vernacular. Here we see his regular project of code switching, between “small d” discourse and “capital D” Discourse as described by Gee (1996).

Further complicating the picture are Marcus’ uncles in Texas, men who worked with their hands. When there was a family get-together, the accent was southern. But his 80-year-old grandfather can’t read and wants to learn how. So a mixture of discourses, vernaculars, and registers coexist in his family. Since he grew up in this milieu, Marcus comments, “I always feel comfortable. I feel less comfortable when I have to go into formal settings. I’m okay there but I don’t feel as comfortable. In hip hop the dude who makes the music is probably the biggest nerd in the room, talking about bandwidth, 51.20 capacitance, etc. It’s a duality that all of us have to have and it goes back to the invisible man and the Du Bois idea of double consciousness. We all have that.”

After college Marcus was offered a job at ESPN in New York and another at TeenVoice. He commented, “ESPN was asking me to fly out to do the interview. But I cancelled the interview because I could work at this Disney Corporation or I could come to a place like TeenVoice that would give me an opportunity to create things.” While he hoped Howard would lead him to gainful employment, it also gave him a critical lens to apply to his options and working with San Pietro youth seemed to be a better decision. Over his four years at TeenVoice, he has worked as assistant to the Executive Director in development and in youth education.

While Marcus has not had formal training as a teacher, he has gone through the TeenVoice induction process for staff, learning on the job and from mentors who have been teaching over the years. He said, “One big part of my education as a teacher is learning to pull back, to understand where the kids are at and what I can get into, because they may not even care about some things I’d want to discuss. The key to me is not giving them the thought but it is structuring the argument and letting them come to conclusions on their own. Sometimes you feel that need to give them the thought, but you can’t do that.” Marcus expresses his pedagogical philosophy, which emphasizes the students’ own experience and ways of making sense of new information. This is why he extends himself across boundaries of discourse worlds to connect with San Pietro Global Emergent Discourse.

### ***Solid to the Core***

In this section I examine the pedagogy that Marcus applied in teaching content in the Core class. In the following two vignettes from the class, I pay particular attention to

how he deployed multiple discourses and to the facilitating student engagement and commitment to the learning process (Research Question 1). In addition, we see him applying the values of a social justice youth development model in seeking to empower students with an understanding of media power and media manipulation (Research Question 3).

Core class is the entry-level TeenVoice class that is designed to introduce students to broad conceptual issues in media (basic media literacy understandings, journalistic principles and practice) and technical skills (radio broadcasting, video production, online production, and music production). They produce a weekly two-hour radio show that consists of product reviews, commentaries, roundtable discussions, public service announcements and on-air radio hosting. Over 12 weeks, Marcus led students through these experiences in bi-weekly meetings, one for training only and the other for training plus the production and airing of the live radio show. In addition, there was one Saturday intensive, an all-day study of Media Literacy. Students took this free class voluntarily in order to learn radio skills and to get a chance to put their voice out on the digital media radio and on-line.

Entering the open computer area on the first floor of TeenVoice on the day of the first Friday live broadcast Core class, one encountered a flurry of activity. Some students were hunched over computers researching news stories; others were working with music programs mixing beats. Interns (students who had gone through Core and Bridge training over the years) moved between students offering advice and asking about their progress. And students constantly moved chairs back and forth, joining a fellow student at a screen, calling across the room to others with questions, or just pacing around. On this day most students were preparing for their live studio show. There was a diverse group of 16 students and three interns in the room.

All were in high school, mostly from the city of San Pietro, but some from nearby cities and even suburbs. There were four African American males, five African American females, two Latino males, one Latino female, two Asian females, one White male and one White female. Also three interns were present, all African American females. The youngest student was 13-year-old Rhonda from a family of Cambodian refugees who has grown up in mostly Black neighborhoods in San Pietro. Aaron and Claire, the two White students in the class, both high achieving, were from a nearby high school that is better resourced than the San Pietro schools. The one suburban student was Dawn, the other Asian American female, who had perhaps the best writing skills in the group.

The students observed their own dress protocols with a predominance of dark clothing. The young men almost all wore black sometimes with a hoodie. The young women wore jeans and sometimes added some color to their ensemble. Sharita had a green t-shirt, Danzy a hat, and, as Sharita remarked, “Everyone styles with their sneakers.” Kenny, an African American man who attended a nearby arts charter school and was a leading community builder and participant, was wearing orange Nikes which provoked discussion and general approval. For the most part there was no red and no blue, indicating the voluntary avoidance of gang colors that is common among urban youth trying to stay out of the street wars. Since this was early in the session, students did not know each other very well though they made different gestures of connection, a languid smile here, a thumbs up there.

The computer area was bordered by two studios on one side, both of which were used for production processes, recording and editing. One studio had walls lined with vinyl records; another was an interview room with padded walls. On the other side was a large conference room that was used for staff meetings, board meetings, and TeenVoice training classes. At an angle glancing out of the computer area, the front lobby and front door of TeenVoice were visible. Next to the conference room were two live broadcast studios, one with a red “On Air” light turned on and hip hop vibrating through the heavily padded walls. At the corner stood two staff offices, one for education director Roland Ijichi and the other shared between the teachers. Before class starts, Marcus and Aida could be seen huddled at their desks, preparing the day or consulting with each other, sometimes responding to a student who had come in with a question.

The students were comfortable expressing themselves within the TeenVoice space, sometimes breaking into song while in transition between classes. When Big Darren wanted to switch jobs with Danzy in order to have a chance to DJ that week he said, “Ima shout you out and everything.” Just then a student who was not in this class swept into the room from downstairs, real cool, with his sunglasses on and knit hat pulled down. He danced to a song, “slip, slip, slide” with a young woman from the class. Another woman shouted to him, “Light skin! How you doin?” He replied, “I want you to shake something,” and danced out the front door.

Marcus came out to the computer area and called the class together. “All right y’all let’s get started. Gather over here.” He was wearing a truck driver’s hat of patchwork flannel material, a rugby jersey with “US-Norway” on the front and the number 7 on the back and blue jeans and Air Star sneakers. The students settled down and turned towards Marcus, who was standing by the large dry-erase board where production assignments would be written up. As soon as he called the class together, students focused and the division of labor was settled. In this situation, there was very little joking. Marcus emphasized the pressure of the clock, the fact that the live show had to start in about an hour, at 6:00 PM, and spoke in the clear and directive language of a radio producer. Darren did get to go on air that evening and Danzy completed her research and writing project on housing in San Pietro. The transition between casual, joking student talk and the work of getting down to business was quick and required no disciplinary warnings. In the context of the live broadcast, Marcus was much more formal than in the previous, instructional class.

Fifteen days later, in the Media Literacy Saturday intensive, Marcus returned to his more informal instructional voice. But the demands of the class were intense, with a full three hours devoted to detailed study of the issue, with no breaks and no efforts by students to disrupt the class through falling asleep, sneaking out, or carrying on side conversations.

While the atmosphere at TeenVoice was casual, Marcus insisted on maintaining a rigorous pace with complex content. There were 15 students in the class (one Latina from the previous class could not come on this day). The topic for the Saturday class was the ways media are produced and an understanding of media literacy. He led the class through a long exploration of the fundamental principles of media literacy, the content standards of which are as follows:

1. Media is a construction
2. Media constructs reality

3. Audiences negotiate meaning from media
4. Media contains ideological and value messages
5. Media has commercial implications.

Marcus began. “Point number one is that all media is a construction. Can you feel that for a minute? What does it mean that it is a construction?” He proceeded to discuss the movie videos of Hype Williams starting in 1996. Students were familiar with these videos. Marcus here was using his teaching discourse, a blend of standardized English and vernacular, while emphasizing standardized English phrases, particularly when he was enunciating one of the principles of Media Literacy, his lesson plan. But the content was music videos, something familiar in their world. All the Hype Williams videos had the same look, he explained. If you study them carefully, you can find patterns, ways that they were constructed. Again and again he checked for understanding, using a more casual register to invite questions or to invite students to say if they are confused: “Is this making sense? It’s all good so far? I ain’t lost anybody?”

He then brought up another example from hip hop, “NAZ, Nazir Jones, yeah, that’s his government name.” His use of this term represented not only familiar discourse for most of the students but also referenced a moment of teasing and community building that had happened two weeks earlier when Little D was angry that the students used his “government name.”

Through a series of short video clips and discussions, Marcus got the class to deconstruct the pieces, examining how each one was constructed. These included “If I ruled the world” by Biggie Smalls, “One more chance,” by Aaliyah, and “How we do” by Ice Cube. Students began to name elements of the construction of the videos such as fading, moving the camera back and forth, a female voice singing “the hook,” and bodies moving towards and away from the camera. After guided discussion on some videos, students began to do analysis on their own. They analyzed story line, use of color, camera focus, and editing technique in videos by Three Times Crazy and Keak da Sneak.

Finally, to sum up this section, Marcus showed a video called “Rap video manual (Instructions for construction)” by The Roots. Itself a piece of media criticism and a lesson in the way media are constructed, this video showed a typical “gangsta” video being made while commenting on the illusions with subtitles. For example when the group arrives in a stretch limo wearing gold jewelry, the subtitles proclaim: “Limo rented for two hours; fake gold.” This was both humorous and instructive, going behind the “hype” of many media productions aimed at urban youth.

Marcus went on to Media Literacy principle #2: “Media constructs reality.” He began with images people have of different cities. “What do you know about Baltimore?” Students brought up examples of the drug trade from the HBO series *The Wire*. “OK, then, so we get our idea of Baltimore from that show. What about San Pietro? Who constructs our reality? Keak da Sneak? Have you ever heard of Felix Mitchell? How was his story portrayed? What does that make of San Pietro? How about the *Hood to hood* videos? You’ve seen them, right? They are important in constructing reality of what the lives of Black folks are like.”

When students started side talk on which *Hood to hood* videos they have seen, Marcus made a hand gesture towards them (as if holding a microphone) and called out “One mic.” And again he checked for understanding, “Are you with me? Have I lost y’all? Good!” He returned to the idea that reality is constructed and that those who

control media want you to live a certain way. He emphasized that one thing they construct is fear, fear of Black communities, fear of cities.

Sharita broke in, countering Marcus' claim that fear in the cities is only media created, affirming her own fear from her experiences in her neighborhood. "The only place I feel safe in San Pietro is Green Lake," she said. Rhonda added, "For me it's the alphabets." By alphabets she meant the streets that are named by letters instead of numbers, basically those near the port. In a matter-of-fact way, they were commenting on their own encounters with violence and the steps needed to find safe spaces.

Marcus did not oppose their perception, did not insist that fear is only media manufactured. He followed Rhonda's comment immediately with, "Ain't nothing wrong with being scared. You know what? I am. Fear is a useful emotion." Danzy, who has had her own challenges with safety, added another bit of advice, "If you be scared, you're gonna look like a victim." Marcus qualified himself again: "I'm not sayin' to show fear, but we all know we have fear." This whole exchange moved from a critique of media power to life lessons and survival skills. But the conversation progressed seamlessly between these themes without putting them at odds with each other.

Marcus next used this interchange to emphasize point three of his Media Literacy lesson, "Audiences negotiate meaning from media." He pointed out that the students were able to criticize the stereotypes the media constructs for their community while also applying their own media interpretations of safety, street awareness, and community values. The students still agreed that the media portrayed their community as thuggish and dangerous, which is a slander on the dignity and value of their lives. But they also had their own challenges with the very dangers that the media glamorize.

For the fourth bullet point of Media Literacy, "Media contains ideological and value messages," Marcus began with a video that depicted sexualized women in an MTV ad. He asked the class, "What about the way media portrays concepts on drama in relationships?" The discussion went into ways that young people in relationships get into arguments and how the media depicts these conflicts. Marcus commented, "Media can set fire to something and walk away. In other words, they can grab your attention by showing a fight but not do the more boring work of showing how conflict is resolved. Conflict itself is not inherently bad." As he often did, Marcus here was validating the perceptions and experiences students had while pushing them to think more deeply, to reflect in a more complex way, on the meanings in these experiences.

He then played a piece by Alicia Keys, "A woman's worth." The song makes an argument of what constitutes a "real" woman, and a "real" man. Marcus asked, "What is a man supposed to be? Fellas, tell me." The young men came up with certain expectations: provider, tough, independent. This lesson, like all of them, integrated academic skills with social critique. When one young man said, "a pimp," Marcus shot back, "hater move," suggesting that this is an image of men that would be used by "haters," people who generate disrespect. With this comment, Marcus also positioned himself as critical, in opposition to, some of the "gangster rap" vernacular that was part of student experience.

After this set-up, he made this critique explicit by showing a ten minute video by African American filmmaker and critic Byron Hurt (creator of *Beyond Beats and Rhymes*) called "Barack and Curtis: Manhood, power, and respect." This short documentary film examines the contrasting styles of manhood exhibited by then

Presidential Candidate Barack Obama and Rapper/Mogul Curtis Jackson, aka 50 Cent. After showing the video, Marcus opened the conversation with, “Let’s be real on men.” The discussion was about how media promote a particular ideology, the ideology of those who construct the media messages. But it also required some deep exploration of sexism, racism, and issues of power and marginalization. Marcus was implicitly challenging the community’s complicity and participation in perpetuating negative images.

When Marcus asked students the difference between Barack Obama and 50 Cent, the first comment, offered by Darren, was that Obama speaks “properly,” while 50 Cent uses, “slur words, I mean slang.” Marcus led the conversation to an exploration of the way media pressure young Black men to act a certain way, the notion that professional speech might be considered inauthentic, “acting White” (Fordham & Ogbu, 1986).

Students pursued an exploration of the notion of acting White, gaining a more nuanced understanding of different discourse practices. In the end, Darren concludes, “You don’t need to do all this or all that. You don’t need to live up to the stereotype. You can talk however you need to, depending on where you are.” This comment, what might be called situational discourse application, revealed Darren’s grappling with the notion of code switching.

Suddenly Rhonda, the young Cambodian female, interjected that she was also subject to stereotypes. She is very low income, living in a housing project, dealing with refugee status. “I always get this jacket that all Asian people are rich,” she said, crying. “It’s not true. My mom has always struggled. My sister died. Life is not easy for us.”

The insights were erupting in different parts of the room, related to the negative effects of media, negative practices that students have internalized, and possibilities they had for taking more control over their identity. Students began to unpack insights of how media is constructed and how they can use it. Marcus brought the conversation back: “Too often, we operate in extremes. We think we have to be either this or that. The media plays to us, pushes us to think in extremes. But we don’t have to believe the hype.”

Though this Saturday class had been going for two and a half hours, it continued without a break. And attention had not waned. When I asked them later, many of the students told me that they never focused so deeply in public school and usually couldn’t sit still for more than 15 or 20 minutes. Marcus introduced the final principle of Media Literacy, number five, “Media has commercial implications.” His point was that commercial media productions are created to make money. “NBC Universal pays both Jay Leno and Li’l Wayne,” he said. “So often, we act against our own interests, our own principles, because of something the media have said we should do.”

Students offered examples: attempts to live a “thug life,” a tendency to act “hard,” and violence against women. Marcus challenged students to reflect on the media and on themselves: “We need to look at what our principles are. These (music) companies dictate to us. People die trying to fulfill things they see. Or they destroy others or their family for this. It is all making money for someone. Someone is selling the hood who has never been to the hood. These are people you don’t know but you put money in their pocket. I don’t want you to be paranoid about the media but to know what is happening. Never ever, ever don’t never take what a rapper does and utilize it in your everyday life.”

In a lesson rich with examples and student involvement, Marcus brought students to insights on how to read, analyze, and repurpose media – with a rigor on par with university and graduate courses on the subject. Soon after the Media Literacy intensive Saturday, Marcus reflected on the goals of the Core curriculum: “A lot of the pressure in Core is to make sure they are exposed to each one of those skills, from critical thinking to production skills... I just want to make sure that everyone’s exposed to it and to make sure that this space is always seen as a safe space and that they really get to interact with different types of people and that they learn different learning styles and the importance of teamwork. I hope that it translates into other areas of their lives.” Most students who complete Core are offered, and accept, a chance to move on to the Bridge class where the skill development in journalism and engineering intensifies.

Marcus complained that outsiders imagine his job to be easy, just hanging out with young people and passing on what he knows. “It might seem to some that anybody could step in to this work, the job of a teacher and mentor, but that’s just not true.” Marcus recognized that he has to be on his toes all the time, drawing from his background skills, testing his own teaching philosophy, and negotiating relationships with the students. “For teaching here you have to be able to manage young people some of the skills are not even tangible, what to do on a particular day.”

In addition he recognized that youth social and emotional development is not simply the affective prerequisite for skill instruction. “In a world where everyone can make beats, what it comes down to is: does someone want to work with you or not.... The question is do they want you in the studio; do they even want you around.” As usual Marcus had a sports metaphor for this concept. Lots of teams have players who are known as great locker room guys. They may be not so good on the court but someone who handles things, who helps the team. That is what he explained that he seeks to build in these students.

Marcus felt the weight of the teaching, the responsibility the TeenVoice staff has taken on to improve the skills as well as the academic standing of these students. “I wish that those students who come in unable to put a sentence together would leave being better able to write a paper. I know they benefit from the program but it discourages me when they have come in and I don’t feel like they’re in a place where they’re going to be alright later. That bothers me a lot.” While students were engaged and gaining life skills and academic training, he worried that TeenVoice is only able to add too little too late. Reflecting the frustrations that all teachers feel, Marcus said, “We’re not miracle workers. And a lot of things happen before they walk in the door and after they walk out that door. That’s something that, for me, I became more comfortable when I could think well if they don’t get it here hopefully they’ll get it somewhere. It’s an understanding that your teaching style isn’t going to work for everybody. My biggest disappointment is that.”

### ***Code Switching and Metacognition***

In the process of inducting students into the complex secondary discourses of radio language at TeenVoice, Marcus engaged in implicit and explicit lessons on code switching. In addition, he drew students into a process of metacognition, thinking about their thinking and learning processes. To do this, Marcus engaged in a process of

reflection on his own experience and his own history in negotiating discourse in order to make explicit the path to successful induction to secondary discourses for his students.

Often the lessons Marcus developed veered from social and technical skill acquisition to critical consciousness, especially about challenges of being Black and Chicano Latino in America. When he was preparing students to go out on the street to do interviews and seek public opinion, he spoke about the awkwardness that any interviewer has to overcome but also about the conflicts students may have over race, either with the interviewee or with themselves in deciding about how to respond. “If someone blows you off,” he admonished, “do not take it personally. I’ve seen people go do an interview and all of a sudden they are getting ready to swing on someone. If they don’t give you time, don’t worry about it. Just get back on the horse and keep on riding.”

And he took it further. “Y’all are some of the loudest people I know in life. I have to tell you this. If I don’t tell you, you’ll find out the hard way. The point of this therefore is people management. Some people in the world are going to be intimidated by you. Maybe you’ll be mad cuz they won’t talk to Black people. But remember: you’re still gonna be a Black dude in 20 minutes. So learn to deal with it; learn to disarm their fear.” This was not simply a discussion about how to get a successful interview. It became an admonition to the students to rise above the immediate moment, to put conflict in a larger analysis so that they don’t react emotionally. It was really a life survival skill. Marcus was trying to arm these teenagers to become agents for positive change in the long run, to avoid burning themselves out or harming themselves by being reactive in the short run.

Sometimes, Marcus provided advice simply in passing. In talking about how new music is promoted, he spoke to the networks of connections Big Boi had when he sent out an announcement of his new CD. He added, “Community is what you fall back on when trouble happens. That’s why Tiger Woods and OJ had no place to go.” Without any further elaboration, he made the point that these two Black celebrities, who had a reputation for turning their back on the Black community, did not get much support from that community when they got in trouble. Not only did he not elaborate but all the students, Black, Latino, White, and Asian, when asked later showed that they understood the references and the point he was making about solidarity.

Marcus had his own operating theory on the strengths that his students brought and consequently the appropriate discourse he could and should utilize with them. He understood that students from low-resourced communities, with lower academic achievement, brought their own skill of survival in order to “exist in their world and not act out those stereotypes which are pushed upon them. And that’s huge, to be able to get up every morning. The resiliency: OK I’m not what everyone thinks I should be but I’m just going to be myself.... And someone like D. What I give him a lot of credit for is showing up. He comes back again and again. He shows up.” Referencing his own experience in urban life, he said to the Core students in passing, “Being from Fulton, I’ve heard ghetto. I know 23<sup>rd</sup> Street.”

Marcus thought deeply about his discourse approach and how he hoped to reach all students in a diverse class. In his view, there was not a baseline way to teach everyone and he was conscious that his discourse and cultural style needed to fit with his own personality and biography. He recognized that it maps on more easily with African American students. As for the few White students, Marcus believed they could follow his

instruction and he could check for understanding occasionally. “I have a theory that I’m not worried about going back to get them (White students) because I can go back and get them any time, sometimes one on one. But as far as the overall class that’s just the language that I’m most comfortable with in some ways. So if you are asking how I calibrate the class, it swings in that direction (towards African American students) because I really want to make sure that student gets across.” But he was confident that White or middle class students have the social and academic resources to operate successfully in this milieu. “I don’t think there’s much that misses them because of like where they’re from. On some levels, they have been exposed to the idea of code switching or existing in this other space.” Towards the end of this Core session that prediction was tested.

Beyond his own performance, however, Marcus regularly signaled to students the importance of discourse awareness, of being able to think about one’s discourse practices as they are being performed. While giving instruction on the construction of radio news stories, he told the students, “We are writing for the ear, the way that you talk ... You need to write like you are explaining things to your folks. There is a natural rhythm in the way that we write. You know you could break down Homer’s *Odyssey* in a way that ‘bro man’ on the fifth floor in Martin sounds like, writing for yo folks.” While admonishing that students can use “no cursing, some slang,” he encouraged students to deploy their own linguistic structures, registers, and patterns in writing news.

But, he added, the test of success is if the audience can understand you. You can pull them to your way of thinking and representing information but, “If they don’t know what you mean, you need to explain it.” His lesson here was a key one: to be aware of audience and adjust the discourse accordingly. More than that, it is key to understand the gatekeepers, those editors and producers who might let you on the air or keep you off. Who were the gatekeepers at TeenVoice? Perhaps the producers, the teachers, or even each other. But in the end, he explained, “You have the advantage; you know your audience and you can communicate with them.”

During this discussion, Marcus used a visual image to invite students to think metacognitively, to think about how language systems work. “It’s like the *Wizard of Oz* when the wizard is revealed behind the curtain. I’m pulling the curtain back, letting you know how some of these things work.” Marcus reflected on this process in an interview later: “If you don’t teach somebody what the game is, you’re not being honest. Once you let them know what the game is, they can decide if they want to engage in it or they can decide their level of engagement in it. The problem is that we don’t teach them what the game is and there is no vested interest in the people at the top to teach them the game.” Marcus recalled his own history, on different mentors who pulled him aside and explained “the game,” how things were done in academics and business, giving him the power to decide how to participate. He recognized this process and also accepted the financial limitations he might encounter if he decided to stay out of the business game. Moreover, at TeenVoice he said that his principles and values included a desire to empower youth in the community so that they could find ways to success within the system or enter into conflict with the power structure in order to develop more equitable social relations that offer more options to their community.

Marcus signaled to students the way standardized English is a particular part of the game of power. In this context he positioned TeenVoice discourse as different from

school by explicitly communicating to students that their discourse was honored here while at school they generally were required to adhere to the dominant discourse. “Please don’t make this be like school,” he admonished when trying to get students to take initiative in getting their projects done. When questioned later, Marcus explained that here he was signaling that school practices are more alienated, more based on an authoritarian model of top-down learning. While Marcus advocated professional discourse within the authentic project of a radio production studio, he rejected the decontextualized formality of school standardized English. In addition, while he advocated for professional discourse (a more formal register), he allowed for a hybrid discourse, a blending of a certain amount of slang and home vernaculars into the studio teaching discussions.

Marcus used his own biography and identity in constructing his approach, this understanding of student discourse and multiple discourses. He regarded his own history as not simple and one-dimensional but as quite complex in itself as he reflected on his teaching and his language heritage. He explained in an interview: “I have had to code switch all my life. What’s home for me? When I think about what is home, I spend a lot more time thinking about my language and communication style and I would say my communication style is based around really five things.” He listed these language influences as: 1) the Baptist preachers, the call and response, 2) comedians, who also utilize a call and response; 3) wrestlers on TV and their bragging styles; 4) rappers, those on the radio and those in the neighborhood; and 5) sports discourse, both athletes and media figures. He felt they all had a certain rhythm in their speaking which had become how he interacted with people.

And he commented on how he can turn on or off his Southern African American accent, what he calls a “twang.”

For me, I know certain words I speak with a twang. It’s interesting because I guess I get very defensive on some levels when I hear people talk about how ignorant and slow people are when they are from the South because it’s the twang, it’s the accent. It doesn’t sound Northern, it doesn’t sound West Coast, so therefore it doesn’t sound as educated. What’s interesting is that I’ve learned that sometimes I can disarm people because I can speak with a twang. Sometimes that has caused problems but sometimes it has helped me because it is disarming because people don’t have a perspective on who I am.

Marcus recognized how he came to use code switching skills, how he could calibrate his discourse style based on audience and on situation. This kind of self-awareness was part of what made possible his social mobility, a knowledge of cultural and language capital that he wanted to pass on to students.

I want to say probably high school, when I started to say, ‘OK this is how I interact with this teacher, this is how I interact with other students.’ What happens in high school, you begin to learn these things. Like I could have interacted with kids in my neighborhood the same way I interacted with my guidance counselor and I would have gotten my ass kicked.

He recalled a breakthrough moment with a high school journalism teacher. He had just written a music review on the hip hop album that came out with the film *Caught Up* and filled his narrative with appropriate cool slang. But the teacher complained that

he did not understand it and challenged Marcus to write something that all the readers could get. He had to admit that he had written in a way that he did not really even talk; it was just a style he had adopted to go with the hip hop CD he was reviewing. He went from that moment to thinking about the ways that different people speak and how they adapt to different audiences. In particular, he thought about how his uncle speaks about sports and decided that this was both accessible and compelling. He had found his sports writing register.

Marcus has applied this experience in working with his TeenVoice students in his commitment to help them build an understanding of audience. They could write and speak for their peers, he explained, but they should also try to broaden their audience. He said, "I'm really honest and I know some of it and I don't know some of it. I tell them I'm 30 years old and I'm not 16. You can play Li'l Wayne on your show; I just don't think he's that great." By marking his difference, he was also inviting students to "meet him half way," to recognize that he met locally constructed standards of authenticity (Hill, 2009) even if he did not have the exact same discourse as the students. Marcus argued that young people don't get enough grown people in their lives. They don't see enough of a difference between themselves and adults because adults are trying to be them. So marking both his differences from them as well as their overlapping interests was part of constructing a powerful discourse matrix between generations. Marcus' project of moving students to a more professional discourse included the recognition of difference between discourses (their primary discourses, the discourse of his generation, and professional discourse) as well as motivating students to want to code switch.

Marcus wanted the students to think about the space at TeenVoice as different from school and even marked the difference explicitly. "How I run the class, for example." He said, "I don't know how people do it in regular school and I don't care. But I think you are here because you want to learn something. I ain't saying we ain't going to have fun. I hope we have fun. But we're not playing here."

### ***Real Talk: Culturally Relevant Pedagogy***

Ladson-Billings (1994) emphasized the ways that teachers who demonstrate cultural competence, an understanding of student discourse and values, are more successful with African American and Latino students. Marcus deployed many strategies to engage his students, strategies that fit Ladson-Billings' definition of cultural relevance. And his own view of the importance of direct instruction contained, in his self-evaluation, an element of challenge, of rejecting the charity or redemptive approach to students from oppressed communities.

While Marcus displayed a caring attitude towards all the students in the Core class, he often cloaked that caring with a gruff discourse, pretending a kind of grudging respect for the students. He favored a direct approach of instruction and correction, which Black psychiatrists Comer and Poussaint (1983) have described as an African American child rearing discourse. Instead of circumlocutions, indirection, and open-ended questions, he tended towards direct instruction. While this may be considered hard or distant to a White liberal, it has been argued that African American students regard their connection with a teacher using this discourse as family-style and close (Delpit, 1995).

Sometimes this direct instruction is carried simply in an abrupt statement such as “Put your food up.” There is no time for, or need for, a long discussion. That’s it. Put your food up. He did not hesitate to call a student out who seemed to not be paying attention: “You want to sit up, Earl? . . . Scoot up.” And one of the interns added: “Or pull your shirt down.” Marcus added, “You grown up enough to take notes.”

In discussing how to give and accept a critique of a radio segment, Marcus said to the class, “A critique is not a battle rap; it is not a diss record. I don’t like y’all music. But a good DJ gets my attention.” Another time he added, “When you go through the editing process, have a thick skin. Accept criticism or reject it but don’t get emotional.” Reflecting on the cultural adaptation required for critique, Marcus observed that many students were more invested in their media studies than in schoolwork. But they have had to learn that there are ways they communicate in their home environment that won’t work in a professional site. He explained, “You can’t out-attitude everybody. Yeah this works in your neighborhood but this wouldn’t be the way of handling this particular issue, to be overly-aggressive, to not be able to take criticism.” Student primary discourse was challenged in the critique segment of a production cycle. Students would sometimes get upset but they had to learn the professional discourse, an approach of openness to criticism, of honest give and take in evaluation. He explained, “Critique is about helping people get better.... that teaches them how to give critique and how to take critique. And then to even sit with, like, some of that anxiety. And it becomes clear what part of that is bravado and what part is actually real.” In Marcus’ view the bravado, the need to act hard to avoid being disrespected or undermined may be a survival discourse on the streets but it can undermine student professionalism in the studio.

As the Core cycle progressed past the halfway mark and he became more familiar and intimate with the class, Marcus more and more mixed threats of difficult assignments with his own dry humor. In challenging students to bring their own play list of “clean” music (without curse words, due to FCC rules), he said, “If I have to start you on a new playlist, it ain’t gonna be no ice cream and cake. I may have you playing Peabo Bryson.” Next he said to the class, “Music should be clean, music should be clean, music should be clean, music should be clean, music should be clean. Please believe me. This is not a threat. Ima have my grandmother talk to you; it is not a threat; it is how it’s gon’ be.”

The suggestion that he did not like the students too much was always taken as a joke because through his commitment to their work he had signaled that indeed he did care. When urging the students to put more work into their radio productions, he said, “You the only ones I like right now. I lightweight like you, lightweight. You can thank my mama for the little bit of nice I have... But sometimes you are flat-out lazy.” By now his personality and his interpenetrating discourse style (using his own and their primary discourse along with professional secondary discourse) flowed easily.

During a lesson on writing commentaries, Marcus jumped between admonitions to work hard and a grammar lesson. “Y’all gotta get fun outa your head. Fun’s all right but not always.” Then as an aside to an intern, “Are you cuttin’ your eyes at me?” Then back to the paper he was reading, “Change this paragraph to active voice.” He then acted out boxing to demonstrate active voice instead of passive voice (“The boxer hits his opponent. Not: the opponent is hit.”); then football. (“The quarterback throws the ball. Not: the ball is passed.”)

Other times he went further, actually giving out a compliment but then with qualifications. “I’m going to tell you something and I hope it don’t come back to bite me, cuz sometimes I tell someone something and then they go and act a fool, but you are a great class... at attendance. I’m impressed by your professionalism.” And he followed that up with, “Do I have to be on you all the time? You should be able to handle yo business. People who act professional know they good; they can handle it.”

He regularly pushed the students to raise their standards, to go further, not to settle for a product that is “just enough.” One day he told Danzy and D, “Get ‘I’m done’ out of your vocabulary. I’ll be real with you. We’re only done because we run out of time.... Don’t half-ass it.”

On another day he continued this line of encouragement with Darren and Rhonda: “Do the work not just to get it done. Actually do something good.” As he went out to talk to one group of students, he mentioned to another teacher, Aida, who is working nearby at a computer, “Can you use your ‘mama eyes’ and watch for any problems?” This, again, was an invocation of the family style and family discipline like that of a mother watching over her kids. When he supervised José and Dawn working on production, he said, “I’m serious about this ‘average’ thing. Get further from ‘aight’ and closer to really, really good.... The key is to do it and to be willing to get better.”

In pushing students from low resourced communities to seek higher standards, Marcus saw himself working against a general expectation of failure, a pathologizing of poverty, which exists in the education system:

Everybody becomes comfortable with failure being the only narrative they have. So even if you’re not involved in the (hustle), you still think that’s the only thing you need to talk about. And that’s what irks me because I know so many people who came from those environments where that was part of our life but it wasn’t all of our lives. Also our life was playing ball or going to school. In a lot of ways it reinforces these racist structures. This is a story, in some ways it’s like entertainment, it’s almost like we go to the zoo and observe.... We have to ask ourselves how are we encouraging young people to continue telling those stories? And it’s not a position of empowerment. You survived some stuff but you’re also these other things. Like I’m trying to live up to that hood narrative. Like I’ll come in and they’ll be on YouTube watching Kimbo Slice fights or like the most hood rap videos ever. And these are students who are not built for what it is they might be trying to live up to. One of the biggest flaws that people have when they do this is, a lot of times they don’t hold the kid accountable. You know, like, the rest of the world is not going to give a damn; they’re not going to care. Either you can do the job or you can’t....

He felt that he must apply a strong stance of accountability to students from inner city schools because he was working against the damage that liberal Whites had often done by not arming students to be successful. Part of his educational project, a project of introducing students to secondary, professional discourses, was to convince students that they had the intelligence and resources to access power.

Marcus believed that Black teachers often expressed caring by being harder on students than White liberal teachers. Coming from an African American Southern culture, attending a Historically Black University, he was committed to the notion of

understanding the game and how to “handle your business.” Echoing the critique of Delpit (1995), he declared:

One of the issues (White teachers) have with this messiah complex is that they still don't want to give them the tools that they need to control the game. They don't want to let them in on the joke .... The issue with the messiah complex is that they're not telling you that they won't hire you; they're not telling that they don't trust you to be the one to count the money. While they are excusing the wrong behavior, when it comes time to what they're invested in, oh no we can't have you. That's why we do a disservice to these young people if we don't insist on professionalism.

Also, if you don't tell them what the game is, these kids have intuition and they know they're being lied to, they know they're being patronized. They know there's something missing. That's social capital. Yes, I have to be hard on them now because if they don't learn things now then they might get fired at age 30 or even go to jail at 18. That's what it comes down to.

This insight connected not just to discourse, the primary and secondary discourse journey, but also to the concept of “double consciousness.” In Marcus' analysis, African American and Latino students were not just victimized, were not just fooled, by the way teachers held them back from the discourse of power. They have read the situation. They knew they were being shortchanged. But without an adult to encourage them, to lift the curtain and invite them behind, they simply withdrew from the school discourse.

In addition, Marcus had a broad idea of the culture of African American and Latino students in the class but it was not a simple, essentialized identity. He understood these students as a product of a complex, mixed culture, millennial youth with diverse identities and discourse practices: “Students now come from a mix of cultures. There is not a unified, mono, kind of stable community. There isn't a ‘singular Black experience’ or Latino experience or any of those identities. And if you go at it in a simplified way, you're already in a flawed state, a flawed mindset. They come with a variety of languages they speak. And particularly when you're a person of color in this country, you're going to have to learn languages that are outside of your own in order to function.... Just to live in San Pietro, it is a mix of cultural experiences.”

While there was more history, trust, and accomplishment to build on with the interns, Marcus was if anything more direct and more harsh with them. This was again an indication that direct challenge was not a sign of disrespect in his view but rather something that came out of deep connection. For example, one day Danzy was researching a story on a pedophile and sex offenders. A few interns and other Core students got involved in the computer search, especially when the student found the Megan's Law site that allows people to identify sex offenders who live in particular neighborhoods. Marcus was angry because the discussion had gotten gossipy and immature. He called the interns into the conference room.

“Why was everybody congregated over there (around the sex offender story)?” he demanded. “Work on your work. You have to be able to work with a delicate subject with some degree of maturity.” He told three who were not involved in the story to leave and continued to critique the other two interns. “What were you-all doing? Y'all boost as much as the students do. I depend on y'all to be the ones to go, ‘Naw, chill, be cool.’ I expect you to be able to help them deal with a hot button issue and be professional about

it.... I expect more and better from you. . . . That is a delicate conversation. It can't be treated in a way that is not mature."

Marcus was explicit about why his approach with the interns is sharper: "My relationship with my interns is very different from my relationship with my students. It's a very different discourse. I'm much more direct, much more blunt. And in some ways I'm much more open with them because they have to be young professionals." So for Marcus greater respect meant that greater challenge and responsibility was laid on the shoulders of the students. He kept the standards of professional discourse high, always challenging students to move to the next level from where they were.

### ***Dealing with Conflict and a Cultural Breach***

Sometimes a breach, a conflict or a situation that disrupts the teaching process, is fraught with insights on the teaching practices. In this instance, a problem that arose in the final two classes of the Core session helped Marcus and the teaching staff think more deeply about their discourse practices and the challenges of border crossing in order to succeed with all students. This example also shines a light on the complex negotiation of meaning and connection between the teacher as authority figure and the students from different cultural and discourse backgrounds.

While teachers like Marcus are highly effective, problems sometimes arose at the TeenVoice Core class and the staff was quick to analyze the problem. In this instance, their analysis of conflicts in the Core session called attention to the complexity of negotiating discourse. The first conflict occurred in the middle of the session when the cell phone of the front desk coordinator Lawrence was stolen. The only people around at the time the phone disappeared were Core students. Since initial inquiries did not turn up the phone, Marcus called a meeting and expressed frustration with the class. After reviewing the rules and agreements of the group, which include respecting the property of others, he argued with the students that they must understand the importance of "investment in this building." He continued, "Maybe y'all don't see us like real people, like actual people who got lives outside this building. I feel bad that I even have to have this conversation ... This space is not like the neighborhood you come from. Here's the thing about it. Don't touch. Don't be chunkin'. I thought it was the best and brightest from the Bay Area we had in here. I was light-weight disappointed. And I don't want to see you slouching. Check all that."

Marcus was expressing strong emotion and a sharp critique of the students but again in a family-style way, the way you might with a relative. He added,

You may decide TeenVoice is not for you. You may decide to leave. Or we may let you go. We may have that nice conversation that usually starts with, "Let me holler at you. Do you want to be here?" When we get to that point, I want you to do it in a professional way. There is a right and wrong way to leave a job. Don't burn bridges. This experience is preparing you for other jobs. You don't want a reputation of not being reliable. You don't want to be ducking me when you see me walking down the street.

Through all of this he was suggesting that there may be some who should not be there. He was also calling on the broader group to make a commitment, to take a decision as to whether they want to be involved in TeenVoice and Core. In the end, this conflict was not resolved, essentially because no one confessed to the theft of the cell phone. It was

unclear if there was one person violating the agreements or if others were also doing so by knowing about the theft and keeping quiet. The atmosphere had been poisoned, as Marcus was never sure who among the students was guilty. And the students, most of whom were innocent, didn't want to carry the blame for something they didn't do. Class proceeded though Marcus occasionally made side comments, expressing his disappointment about the missing cell phone. But the conflict was about to break out more openly at the end of the session.

In the Wednesday Core class before the final Friday class, Marcus opened up a discussion concerning the tasks of the last week. He handed out evaluation forms and asked for student evaluation of the teaching while at the same time the staff was deciding who would be advanced to the next level class, Bridge. Danzy, nervous about the evaluations, called out, "Ima cry." Marcus: "Don't cry."

He then spoke to the class: "Usually, the way the last Friday works is the board is blank and you sign up for what you want to do on the Comedy Show, the traditional final show of the session. But we're not doing a Comedy Show for the last night. I've decided not to do the Comedy Show because it would not be very honest. The behavior has not been productive. That's me being honest with y'all. That's being real. If you are invited to Bridge, it will be on an individual basis. I really wasn't playing on Friday."

With that Marcus withdrew to the conference room, allowing students to work on their evaluations and to develop their projects for the last show. He called two students into the room to discuss Core graduation. Aaron was one of the two White youths, a middle class student from a nearby public school, better resourced than the city schools. Sharita was an African American student who had done well at nearby San Pietro High school. "Since you have been two of the most productive and leading students in this Core class, I'd like to invite you to speak at Core graduation next week."

Sharita smiled, blushed. "I'm honored. Of course. I'd love to."

Aaron looked more doubtful, hesitant. "No, I don't want to. I think I'll decline to speak."

"Why?" asked Marcus.

"Well I guess it's about the final show, the Comedy Show. I know you have a right to cancel it and everything but I just feel disrespected. I resent that there is a group punishment. You yourself said that, when giving a critique, you always have to show the person what they can do to get better not just give a negative critique. But I never felt we were told what to do differently; we were just told it was wrong and even though many of us worked hard we are getting punished." There was a long silence broken only by the loud beats coming through the walls from the nearby on-air studio.

"I hear what you're saying and I will take that into account," Marcus responded. "I honestly think that's fair. I understand how you are doing individually and some have really made great strides. That's why I called the two of you in here. But lots of problems have happened also like things getting stolen, the phone that was stolen. That chips away at trust."

Sharita then joined the complaint: "But that wasn't any of us."

Marcus: "We're not sure." Pause. "All right, I know it may not be fair. I'm listening."

Sharita now took the initiative: "Is there no way we can have the Comedy Show back? Marcus has a heart?" She appealed to his feelings for them.

Marcus concluded: "Let me think about it."

Faced with this issue about the Comedy Show and graduation, Marcus called his supervisor and mentor Roland into the conference room and explained the dilemma. His central question to Roland was, "Was I fair? I wonder if there is a way to make the Core group end on a better note. Is there any way I should think of bringing the Comedy Show back?"

Roland thought for a minute, then said: "Ultimately, of course, it's your decision. I'm not even sure why they are so excited about the Comedy Show. They hadn't even heard of it until last week. Somehow it's become a point of honor. I guess the question is whether they have been able to reach some common unity to be able to work together. They need to understand how to be better as a group; this should be clear."

Marcus was critical of himself and the group: "That's the problem. We have individual problems, discipline issues, theft, but we need folks to check each other, provide leadership. No one is stepping up. This is my feeling about Aaron and Claire [the two White students in the class]." As the student evaluations have been collected and brought in to the conference room by an intern, Marcus read aloud the section "Is there anything else you would like to tell us (please explain)?" in Aaron and Claire's evaluations.

(Claire's evaluation) In order to improve my experience here, it would help for staff members to have a more trusting and respectful outreach to Core students. I felt that I had greater potential than what was expected of me.

(Aaron's evaluation) TeenVoice is a really cool program. I really like my peers and kids in my group. It just sucks that a couple people slipping up has to mess it up for the entire group. I think the Comedy Show would've been a lot of fun and really successful. I am really disappointed in the TeenVoice staff for taking it away from us. That's not how I wanted to go out.

Roland considered, "So they have a complaint but don't lead the way out of it." As a White researcher and activist, I thought I might bring some insight to this moment. While we all agree that there were problems with Aaron's stance, I did not think the solution would necessarily be for him to try to step up and lead the class. I interjected in the meeting, "I think Aaron and Claire, as White kids, while they may have some more writing and journalism skills, they are reluctant to quote unquote take leadership because they don't want to come in and be bossy. It's enough for them to exist in this space, be respectful, not piss anyone off. Actually, I understand that."

Marcus: "Yeah, I can see that."

At this point Aida, who had come into the room halfway through the conversation, made an intervention and comment that incisively explained the conflict between how Marcus saw the class and how Aaron (and Claire) saw it. Aida said:

We could think of it as a kind of a case of cultural competence, but in a reverse sort of way. In a sense, the White kids, who are more entitled, don't understand the corrective directions you were giving. If they come from an asset-based child raising situation, they don't really know what to do if they are told not to do something.

I saw this in my White uncle in church when we kids were acting bad and wiggling around. Instead of my mother's way, which was to shush us and tell us to be good, he would provide another direction, an alternative, like he'd bring coloring books so we would not be disruptive. Bringing his child-rearing into our family, from his place of greater privilege, was a big cultural shift for us.

These students expect to be engaged, to be negotiated with, and to be given suggestions for new directions. The high expectations that we have, how we view professionalism, without negotiation, is not something they are used to.

In that moment, Marcus realized that the expectation he had articulated early in the session (when he said, "I don't think there's much that misses [White, middle class students] because of, like, where they're from") only took into account their cognition and skill acquisition. But on the level of critical communication, on cultural discourse, they actually did not have the level of cultural competence to function within a Black pedagogical style, direct instruction, and critique. That positionality made them feel marginalized.

In seeking to build a space that privileged African American cultural discourse, for once a space different from the White discourse of schooling, Marcus found that some White middle class students were now experiencing what Black students often experience in school: a sense of outsider status, a frustration with the staff, and a desire to withdraw from the project. This is similar to the dilemma Steele (2010) described facing the White student in the majority Black college class (as discussed in chapter 2).

"That makes sense," Marcus said. "So they lead and articulate the complaint but they really don't know how to respond to direction or to lead in getting the work done. So my question is: do I lose anything, do we lose anything, by allowing the Comedy Show?"

Roland: "It depends on how they bring it."

After that, Marcus called a meeting of Core students, announcing that they had five minutes to come up with arguments for why they should be allowed to do the Comedy Show. Students got in a group immediately and started the first intense, engaged peer group meeting of the session. Marcus and I further discussed this conflict and breach on the side.

When class reconvened the students made their arguments but again their methods of persuasion followed the discourse and cultural approach of the different students. Aaron's argument was logical, legalistic: "The Comedy Show is something we have earned. We worked hard. The proof is in the pudding: Our radio show has a very high number of people listening on line." Claire's was similar: "If you respect us as adults, then we'll show you more respect and work harder."

Comments from the African American students were more directed at persuading Marcus that they had heeded his criticism and were trying to improve: "We are getting better .... We are good at comedy."

Many invoked a family-type closeness. Danzy: "We love you. And we know you love us too." Rhonda: "Please trust us. We have a funny side." And Kenny made a speech that turned into a kind of poem, or a cheer: "We have a big family. Yes we're rambunctious but the answer is in the A, B, and the C of it. A: we're all involved; B: we have beauty; and C: we care about the program. We are passionate about Core."

At the end, Aaron took the conversation back to the legalistic: “One last thing. It’s not fair to blame us for the phone getting stolen. It was one person and we should not get collective punishment.” Marcus was at this point reading the difference in the discourses. He needed to repair communication with Aaron and Claire but also wanted to honor the arguments of the other students as persuasive in their own way: “I don’t agree with the phone example. But I enjoy your coming together, how you are working right now. You need to work better at holding each other accountable. . . . What I do like about y’all is that you can be great. You came up with solid arguments. These can stand as a goal as to where you hope to go. In this space I’ve seen more leadership exhibited in the last five minutes than before in this whole session. You need to step up. Check each other. Does that make sense? If you can get it together, with a half hour here and one hour on Friday, y’all can do the Comedy Show.... . But let’s be clear: no racist, homophobic language, no disrespect for women. Skeazers? No, you can’t use that word. It’s racist.”

Again invoking the family-style connection as key, Danzy called out to him at the end of the meeting: “You love us, Marcus.” The incident of the Comedy Show, the breach of communication, acted as a null hypothesis, a demonstration of Marcus’ skillful cultural competence in discourse with African American and Chicano Latino students. And, it became evident that this discourse was more alien and difficult for the White, middle class students. It was not something that couldn’t be resolved and made better. But the generous reflection that Marcus engaged in, and Aida helped to frame, meant that he was able to commit to success for the students who were marginalized in this instance. This kind of attention is hardly what marginalized students experience in typical public school interactions.

At the end of class, Marcus called to the class, “Stand up. It’s time for our closing cheer.” Everyone shouted together: “Let your soooooooooouul out!”

## 6) Aida Orovida – Cultural Competence and Social Justice

Here I add to the Marcus chapter with an examination of the teaching practice of Aida Orovida with the TeenVoice MATCH class, again focusing on how she understood the primary discourses the students come to MATCH with as well as the ways that she mobilized a multiple, hybrid discourse in seeking to engage and empower her students (Research Question 1). I seek here to highlight the aspects of the cultural competence and metacognitive discourse reflections that Aida used. And I explore the principles and values embedded in teacher discourse practiced at TeenVoice (Research Question 3).

### *The Dance of Instruction*

This section introduces Aida and her discourse practice and pedagogy in one TeenVoice MATCH class. As with Marcus, we see Aida emphasizing an empowering understanding of media literacy and also using direct, even critical, discourse to engage students.

It is 4:30 PM on a Monday afternoon in January. Aida rushed out of the teacher office, encountering students of the MATCH class working on computers. She stood at the end of a row of computers, wearing blue jeans, brown boots folded down, a plaid blouse, hoop earrings, and multiple bracelets on each arm. She was short, with a round face and long brown hair, almond-shaped eyes and a powerful stance, with both feet planted on the ground. It was the third session of this teaching cycle. Hands on hips, she commented to one of the interns, “Elise, take us to the front page, please.” Eight students watched their screens as the networked computers synchronized on the TeenVoice website. Elise gave them instructions on how to navigate the website, use the MATCH password to gain access to editing functions, and add and delete content.

In quick succession, Aida then explained to the students how to create content for the web site, how to use “content management” techniques, and which items could be taken from the web under ‘fair use’ doctrine. She helped Elise introduce students to Drupal software for easy publishing. Students were navigating the site, trying to see where their short commentaries could be posted. Aida said, “Venus, you’ve already done this before? OK, so why don’t you let Shinoa go first.”

Two of the young women, Venus and Melody, looked glassy-eyed and sleepy. Aida addressed the class. “You have to get your energy up. Start your day with a good breakfast. What did you have for breakfast today?” Noah responded, “Bacon, eggs.” Aida: “Swine.” This short comment was a humorous one, marking respect for Noah having breakfast, noting her own vegetarianism, and using a term that African American Muslims often use in denigrating the use of pork. Aida turned to Venus. “Are you asleep? Can I talk to you outside for a sec?” As they head out to the reception area, Aida muttered, “My goodness.”

There were thirteen students, one male and one female Chicano Latino, the rest African American, six females and five males. All the young men wore black and grey clothes; one kept his grey backpack on throughout class. The young women mostly wore clothes that similarly hide them except Jennifer and Hannah, who both wore bright plaid shirts, black jeans, and high heel boots. When Aida and Venus returned, Aida went from computer to computer, encouraging students in their web additions. She showed them how to jump between two platforms.

The core curriculum in the MATCH class is about media literacy, which includes helping students understand and deconstruct media messages as well as produce their own media products, from on-line commentaries and news to radio broadcasts. The curriculum varies each cycle depending on what is happening in the world and in the lives of the students but it always includes:

- Historic and current dehumanizing imagery of African Americans in media.
- Analysis of who owns the majority of media we consume and how the ideologies of the ownership affect how stories are told. The students choose an issue they say they are familiar with, such as jails, welfare, or war. In class, they view media messages on this issue and analyze which parts of those stories are shown or hidden depending on one's relationship to/belief about the issue.
- Media myths about Native peoples and how these myths serve to rationalize different aspects of colonization.
- Blood diamonds and the history of how diamonds came into popularity.
- Mortgage crisis role playing game and how the recession has changed the way we talk about poor people and people of color.
- Analyzing the film *Bastards of the party* – a documentary inspired by Mike Davis's book, *City of quartz*, about how the repression of revolutionary youth movements contributed to the rise of gangs.

In the broadcasting section of the curriculum, the class starts with work on strengthening student writing, particularly through the use of expressive tools (such as sensory descriptions and metaphors and similes). They then begin a process of writing commentaries. Next students learn how to formulate interesting questions for interviews and roundtables, including the skills needed to balance inarticulate or unfocused interviewees. Students learn how to write news stories. Finally, they analyze both for-profit and public service announcements and learn how people sell messages/products. They apply some of these same techniques to write public service announcements on topics of the students' choosing.

On this day, about halfway through class time, Aida called a meeting of the students in the TeenVoice conference room downstairs. The basement area was an open room that led on to the kitchen where students in a nutrition program were preparing food for the other TeenVoice students. The room had three cement walls painted light green and three rows of fluorescent lights. The kitchen had bright orange walls and teal cabinets. The white board in the kitchen, visible from the conference room, had a large headline, "TeenVoice Eats." The conference room also had three posters of food labels from old produce market crates: Golden Crown, Honesty Louisiana Oranges, and Liberty Strawberries. And it had four large, brightly colored photographs: a fish market, a table of vegetables, a bustling Asian market, and a fishing Sampan.

She gave the students a lecture. "To be honest, I have to say that I am angry today. This is a non-profit media center. The reason you were chosen for this work is because you had demonstrated that you were mature, you were prepared to write, and you were interested in non-traditional pathways in school." She was referencing the fact that the MATCH students were all there on diversion from other punishments, by the school district or courts, and had demonstrated an interest in doing TeenVoice work as part of their probation. Some had theft or drug arrests, some had school suspensions, and some had a history of prostitution and were referred by MISSSY (Motivating, Inspiring,

Supporting, and Serving Sexually Exploited Youth). But her approach was not one of pity; she did not subscribe to the victim narrative. Instead, she challenged the students. “I can’t be on you all the time. You have to take responsibility. You need to be able to act with autonomy. Who knows what autonomy means?”

Malcolm offered: “On your own?”

“Yes, on your own. With freedom to act, not waiting for someone to tell you what to do.” This was a typical Aida practice, a sidebar to define a word or a mini-lesson on an issue. When she said that students should be optimistic about their hopes for work at TeenVoice, she interjected: “What is optimistic? It’s a good outlook, thinking things will turn out well.” But she made clear that on that day she was disappointed with their work ethic. “In Core class, I can tell you that the teachers are up your asses. Here, I need to be able to say what we are doing and then see it happen. You can’t be just screwing around on the web. I’m saying this not as an insult to the quality of your work but because I know the quality of what you can do.

“I’m upset. And I don’t want to take it out on people. I don’t want an attitude like, ‘Oh, god, I gotta be here.’ I feel like that a lot here too.”

Charles interjected, “Maybe we need a meeting at the beginning of each day, a briefing where we get focused on the task of the day.”

Aida agreed that this might be a good idea. Then she added, “What we are trying to provide here is safety for you. Not just physical safety or like you won’t get shot here. But also safety to learn. We push you to do new things and we try to help you learn the things you need to know to do them. You are not asked to do something that you can’t do.”

She then went over a poster that had been created the previous week. It emphasizes the values of the MATCH class. These include punctuality and practicing self-motivation. She added, “Treat this place as an opportunity to learn. Do not just fart around. Respect each other’s time. And take the opportunity to study. If one of you is like ‘I’m not tryin’ to fuck wit this place,’ then it brings us all down. Kids know what it’s like in a family when one person brings everyone down. Or, if I’m really juiced, then it is all positive.”

Returning to the poster, she reviewed other principles: “Take responsibility. Be accountable. Participate. This means to be accountable and responsible for how your actions affect others around you.” Upon reading one of the bullet points, “Goals = The results that one puts forth effort to achieve,” Jennifer remarked, “That sounds like the Bible.” She found it familiar to index the phrase “put forth” that is also found in the discourse of the King James Version she was used to.

Aida continued, “And finally: Leave it at the door. Charles and Shinoa. That means don’t bring beef, don’t bring attitude into this space from out there. And one more thing. Sometimes we have to edit/critique each other. You need to practice constructive criticism. And you gotta be willing to hear it, consider it.”

The intern Charles added, “Don’t yuck someone.”

Aida: “I don’t want to give you a hard time just for fun. Who would I be to judge you like that? I’m trying to improve your work. And another thing (points at poster), one mic. Don’t all be talking at once.”

Charles: “You need to take the lead in talking, don’t hang back. Stay focused.”

Aida: “We stay in this discussion, we do critique, even if we freak ourselves out. You don’t have to be like (dances), ‘I’m screwing up at TeenVoice!’ but you need to be able to take criticism. Another thing we said though: have fun! Yes, do. This is your space. Fill it up. Remember also: Step up and step back. That means participate but also encourage participation by others.”

### ***Global Identity***

Aida Orovida in many ways embodies Global Emergent Discourse in the way her complex family and its culture were constructed through the social and cultural upheavals of the 60’s through the present. Aida is aware of her complex identity and the hybrid discourse that results, turning that to her advantage in her communication style in order to understand and connect with a diverse group of students.

Aida represents a global, blended, multicultural identity that is unique to the early 21<sup>st</sup> century. Her grandmother is a Russian Jewish and Irish woman from Chicago who fell in love with and married a Japanese American man from Seattle who had been in internment camps. They met when they were both studying at the Art Institute of Chicago. In defiance of both families, they moved out to California, had children, and pursued a bohemian life, focused on artistic and educational interests.

Aida commented about her own mother Sachi who was born in 1963: “So my mom was raised in this very hippy, lefty world. I think that’s something that is helpful in my teaching because there’s a lot of switching back and forth between different cultures. On that side, there are a lot of teachers. My education was really nurtured. I was raised a lot around my grandma and she’d read to me all the time and really emphasize reading and books and education. Not like, ‘You have to go to school,’ but like, ‘School is fun, it’s interesting.” One of her aunts, Sachi’s older sister, was active in political organizing in the Asian community and married an activist from El Salvador. When he returned to that country as part of the FMLN, he was captured, tortured, and murdered.

Sachi got pregnant and dropped out of high school, giving birth to Aida at age 16 in 1979. Reflecting the racial fluidity of the time, Sachi identified as a Chola. “She’s Hapa but she looks really Latina,” explained Aida. Her father, Ernest Orovida, came from a large Tejano-Latino family with six children. He was a laborer, did mostly dry wall work and has been in and out of prison due to drug addiction problems. Aida added, “I’d always been really resentful if I wrote him something and he never wrote me back. He lives in Corpus Christi, Texas with my grandma. It was only in 2005 when one of my father’s sisters died from an overdose and he came out for the funeral that I figured out that he doesn’t know how to read, which I didn’t know. I’d always complain that he didn’t read a piece I sent him and he didn’t seem interested in it.” She only realized recently that he was illiterate. “He goes to great lengths to cover it up.”

Further complicating her identity was her mother’s marriage to a new husband Carl Chau when Aida was 8 years old. Carl is Chinese American and a lawyer for San Pietro. Ernest is the father of one of her younger siblings and Carl is the father of the other. Aida commented, “I switch around because my dad is in a working class position and my mom is kind of middle class. As a secretary for the city of San Pietro, she met my step-dad who was a lawyer. Then we moved in with him and we lived in a suburb for a couple of years, so that was like upper middle class. So I’ve spent a lot of my life switching in between the different levels.”

The name Orovida is Ladino, actually a name from the Sephardic Jews. But they only have a small amount of mestizo European features. “They’re very dark-skinned, short, Indio.” Ernest’s family comes from the Cora tribe<sup>6</sup> who reside right near the Huichol in northwest Mexico. These two tribes, living in a mountainous region, kept off Spanish conquest for centuries and speak a mutually understandable dialect called the Corachol. But Ernest’s family has resided in Corpus Christi, Texas, for over a century.

Even the choice of names reflects Aida’s complex identity. Her middle name on her birth certificate is Yoshida and her last name is Orovida, her biological father’s name. Her mother adapted the step-father’s name Chau and began calling her Aida Yoshida-Chau. But she pointed out that she had to use the name from her birth certificate (Yoshida Orovida) at school, what she called her government name, the same term used by Little D in Marcus’ class. But, as with Little D, this official designation hardly captures the complex reality of her identity.

When Aida described her own primary discourse which reflected her global identity, what I have called “global emergent discourse,” she pointed out that her mother spent a good amount of time with Ernest’s family,

My mom, we actually have very similar voices and ways of speaking in a lot of ways . . . So she sometimes will speak the way that Texas Chicanos talk. One of the idioms at home is not so much the pronunciation although my mom talks a certain way. One of my first languages was Spanish because when I was little we went to Corpus Christi and stayed with my grandma. She only spoke to me in Spanish, even though she speaks English very well. So I speak it, you know Chicanos in LA that have that certain accent, but they don’t speak any Spanish? Kind of like that.

She added that her mix of cultures has given her insight into a working class and middle-class approach to child rearing. Her father was from a Tejano-Chicano family while her mother, who is half-Japanese and half-White, had four sisters who married men from various ethnicities, including a White man, a Salvadoran, and an Iranian. She was able to observe the way each of them raised their children. She pointed out that the White uncle did redirection, a form of child psychology common in middle-class child rearing. On the other side, Ernest’s family was lower income and a lot stricter than Sachi’s. Their view of child-rearing was to tell the children what to do and to threaten a “whoopin” if they misbehaved. She observed, “I think I kind of switch back and forth, depending. Sometimes I’m all asset-based, youth development, more like the nurturey side. And other times it’s just like ‘no.’”

She described her mother and grandmother as using asset-based, nurturing discourse with her. But she said that both sides of her family, regardless of resources, gave her a sense that she was loved and supported.

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<sup>6</sup> Numbering together about 40,000 in the late 20th century, they inhabit a mountainous region that is cool and dry. The Huichol and Cora languages are about as closely related as Spanish and Italian and are next most closely related to Nahuatl, the language of the Nahuatl peoples of central Mexico and the language of the Aztecs. The Huichol and Cora, however, are perhaps culturally closer (as well as linguistically related) to the Uto-Aztecan Indians of northwestern Mexico. Cora is spoken in the state of Nayarit. There is more than one variant. Huichol is spoken in the states of Nayarit and Jalisco. The variants that exist are mutually intelligible.

This is something that me and Marcus have in common, we might be located in different class positions. But when I'd go stay with my dad a lot of times we didn't have any food in the house or we'd stay in these apartments called crack alleys and Marcus too came from an economically under-resourced single-parent family. But neither of us, ever in a day in our lives, has ever doubted that we were loved. And that's a huge privilege that, even if he comes from a tough-ass part of Fulton and if I grew up in Texas, still it never would occur to me that someone in the world didn't love me.

Further enriching Aida's discourse identity was the evolving relationship between African American and Chicano Latino people in east San Pietro. When she was two years old, her father was released from prison and her grandmother moved back to Corpus Christi. But Ernest, who separated from Sachi, lived in East San Pietro. She added,

And I really do feel, in a lot of ways, Chicanos have a relationship with Mexicans from Mexico but they're also closely culturally aligned with Black people, especially San Pietro Chicanos. A neighborhood like Granada in San Pietro isn't an enclave the same way Jackson Heights, New York is or East L.A. is. So I feel that that's part of what it is, is that my dad mostly growing up had some friends who were Chicanos too but he hung out with a lot of Black folks, a lot of Filipinos. He had one friend who was named "White So-and-So." But my dad's family grew up in a very Black neighborhood. So I feel that that's part of the thing. We definitely don't identify in the way like, "Oh, it's the same as being Black," but I do feel like Chicanos and Black folks have a really close cultural connection.

As we shall see, Aida's global identity, her multiple frames of reference, allowed her to move confidently between different communities of youth she worked with as well as to recognize the commonalities between young people who may appear different from each other on the surface.

### ***Cultural Competence – Using Personal Experience To Connect With Students***

Here I describe a number of discourse practices that were negotiated between Aida and students, including the use of humor and body language. The teacher-mentors believe that the life experiences, confidence, and survival strategies of students should facilitate student engagement in the curriculum and projects of TeenVoice. She evaluated her own approach to her San Pietro students, acknowledging their experiences of trauma while also valuing their reserves of resilience.

Aida cut school quite a bit in high school and then transferred to independent studies – though her one consistent commitment in high school was her work at TeenVoice. For six years after high school, she worked and took classes at local community colleges. Eventually she transferred to Hunter College in New York to complete her bachelor's degree. While in New York, she worked with incarcerated youth, teaching creative writing and poetry and with LGBT homeless youth at Sylvia's Place in the Ali Forney Center. Keeping a connection to her high school involvement in TeenVoice, she came back to work as a staff member when she returned to San Pietro.

But this ambiguity towards school made her more attuned to the issues and resistance students bring to the project.

Aida argued that her students at TeenVoice, while often lacking in traditional academic skills, had a natural excitement about learning when they felt it was something that was relevant to them. While students faced an environmental deficit, bad schools and indifferent teaching, they brought their own cultural strengths to the classroom, prompting a pedagogical approach based on the strengths that her students draw upon (Hilliard, 2003). Aida believed that direct instruction, giving unambiguous directions, was an effective pedagogical discourse with TeenVoice students. If she told the students “no,” something is not allowed, they were willing to follow her directions. “It is in some ways easier to teach these kids (compared to more entitled students) ... But still it depends on how you do it because I’ve seen them rebel against being told no if they feel disrespected.” She observed that most of them had a “top-down” relationship with their parents so correction was not considered inappropriate.

Aida also observed a challenge between her own discourse practices and those of her students in the matter of abstract and concrete thinking. “Sometimes they talk in such weird abstract generalizations that I don’t know if they are bullshitting me or if this is how their mind works. It feels like a disconnect when I’m asking a concrete question and they respond in these abstractions, but then sometimes when I’m trying to think more abstractly they have a really hard time doing that.” This observation was similar to Heath’s (1983) that students with low formal literacy often have wide-ranging imaginations and conceptual ideas but have trouble answering factual questions. She has learned from mentors at TeenVoice how to “thematize” lessons. That is, she works at taking a concept that is circulating within an interaction and making a critical analysis of the elements of the interaction in order to best forward the teaching project and communication with students.

Aida appreciated their marvelous sense of humor, a capacity that her students must have, something that has evolved as part of a life of survival in difficult circumstances. She analyzed the constant use of humor as part of student resilience, a coping strategy to deal with challenges to safety, to economic security, and to their dignity. Aida says that she learned to use humor and to take teasing without getting upset because of the atmosphere of teasing that her mother set.

My mom was very loving but she also was a roaster. So one of the things that’s helpful is that, when somebody’s getting at me, I don’t really take it personally. Even if my dad wasn’t around I would see my grandma and my aunts and uncles and we definitely believed that you make fun of somebody as a way to correct them or as a way to express affection. So I kind of tease my kids in some ways, sometimes when they’re out of line, because that’s also family style.

Aida used an ice-breaker at the beginning of one class: she asked students to say which movie character they think they look like. She had to start with herself in order to show that it can be done in a self-deprecating and humorous way. (After some joking and prompting, they said Aida could be played by the character Cassandra from Wayne’s World because people say that she has a blocky head and Selma Hayek because she’s short and Haile Berry “who’s got that kinda round face thing.”) Since students were reluctant to say who they thought would play them, not wanting to overshoot or brag, Aida offered who she thought should play them. At first some felt that perhaps she was

making fun of them. But, with a careful use of humor and youth discourse, she put them at ease. She said later, “I notice that when I give a little, good-natured talking-shit to them, you can see them light up like, ‘Ay, I just got attention,’ and like, ‘Oh, she’s trying to roast, she’s trying to roast, let me roast her back. So now I get my little moment.’”

Aida reflected on her use of humor later. “(Student) humor makes it possible to connect with them but also to correct them in a way that doesn’t feel abusive. . . . Particularly with the young men, I find that the use of humor to kind of sheep-dog them back into what we are supposed to be doing, in the classroom moment, is very helpful but is also part of their resilience around stuff.” This practice of humor and of building solidarity through testing and teasing, signifying, has been identified as a practice of African American discourse (Gates, 1988). Emphasizing resilience was a way of working with students that did not frame them as tragedies; and it did not frame the work of the teacher as charity.

She identified humor as a cultural discourse practice, one not only tied to ethnicity but even to geography. Aida believed she was a more successful teacher in San Pietro than she had been in New York because youth there had a different sense of humor. One of the ways she made students comfortable at TeenVoice was by “acting stupid,” but in New York students did not understand the subtleties of this kind of self mocking. Students there would say, “Oh, miss, you acting mad weird right now.” She knew that youth in New York use humor but felt that she never managed to deploy the nuances of it successfully.

She added, “We have to be conscious of when not to use humor, you know, because it could get us into trouble. But I think also that I have to recognize in my own self that it’s an asset. This is a way that I can connect with them that will allow me to do my work well. If I don’t do that then we aren’t really having the same conversation.... So it’s not only their asset but it’s a thing that I have to develop in my own self.” She was consciously deploying youth discourse practices (Morrell, 2008), in this case humor, in order to connect to students and teach them more effectively. Instead of insisting that the students come to her, adopt her discourse, she did the border crossing and trained herself to enter theirs. But this was all towards the purpose of making the students more willing to learn at TeenVoice, to make them more adept at using a hybrid version of secondary, professional discourse for radio production.

In addition, Aida identified cultural awareness in using body language and facial expression as part of her teaching repertoire. “Sometimes when they are doing something they shouldn’t do I can kinda go like that (makes a hand gesture) or I can give them that ‘I’m-gonna-fuck-you-up mom-eye,’ you know when the mom just looks like that. My mom always did that to me and she barely ever followed through because she didn’t need to because I just knew.”

Even as Aida struggled to keep the class focused, she found students arriving with an array of challenges. Sometimes it was difficult for students to follow through with their commitments, like Naima, who suddenly disappeared and could not be contacted. TeenVoice staff learned from other students that she was not doing well. Aida observed, “She really wanted to be there and she tried really hard and we know it. That’s not a deficit she has as a human being.”

She cited other examples of when the traumas and the lack of support students have in their outside lives made it difficult for them to focus. Chaz often came to class

high. She observed, “Obviously, there’s a correlative relationship in this. He comes to class high every time after his friends have experienced acts of violence.” Aida had to tell Chaz that she wanted to support him in his life and in his process of grieving but that he simply could not come to class high.

He was obviously high and he was saying, ‘Well, my dad kicked me out of the house last night.’ So he was self-medicating. And we said that we really understand that, but if you go back to work when you are obviously high, it means everybody else in that room thinks that’s OK. Then it starts to undermine what we’re doing. So you have to go home to your mom’s. We didn’t have any case managers on site so we weren’t sure what to do. I asked Roland what to do. And he was like: he has to go. We couldn’t explain it all to the other kids, so that one was rough. That was one of the few times that I wanted to cry after dealing with a student. I usually don’t get like that but this was one of the few times I was really at a loss. I had a really hard time with that one.

Aida pointed out that Chaz was a student who tried hard and pushed himself. He also came early to play on the computer but he did not participate much in class. She pulled him aside and say, “Will you please do me a favor and say at least three things today because I might have a hard time if nobody participates.” Chaz agreed and in fact followed through with three comments or questions. Later he said to Aida, “Is that OK; did that help?” Aida observed, “So he’s got a little kid in him and he also has to be bad.”

Aida observed that students first entering TeenVoice were wary of each other, unsure who to trust and what history other students might have. But she worked to establish trust between them and the staff, then between students themselves. She observed,

If I’m in a regular school the students I have are just assigned to my class and they’re thinking, “I don’t know this bitch from a hole in the wall.” With TeenVoice, we interview everybody before we accept them into the program. We just about always accept them, but that interview is a process where they have to show up and they have to let you know that, “I want to be here,” in some kind of way. We have worked that out individually because the interviews take an hour at least, so we have had that much time together. In the interview, I let them know, I’m going to be your teacher, I’m going to be your supervisor but I’m not in the business of acting like I know everything so you are free to give me feedback if things don’t work. We lay the ground rules individually so when they show up they are already thinking, “Well, she’s kinda nice.” The deal is that you have to be respectful but if there’s something that is boring you can totally tell me and if you have some ideas on how to change it, we can do that. Or if you don’t like how I’m talking to you, you can let me know and I will let you know, I promise, when I don’t like how you’re talking to me.

TeenVoice sought to position all students as belonging in the class discussions, without preconditions as to the discourse they deploy. And this participation was not couched in language of coercion or punishment but, as Aida said, “I let students know, ‘We are going to lose an opportunity to learn if you don’t tell us what you think. Because I’ve never lived your life; I have no idea what it means to be you.’” She pointed out that one interesting thing that happened was for them to hear an adult say, “I don’t know what

your life is and I want to learn about it. But also you don't know what my life has been so we are all trying to make this good." She observes, "You can really see students crack open a little bit."

### ***Social Justice***

In this section, we examine principles and values of TeenVoice teacher-mentors which have to do with struggling for social justice. We see Aida supporting deep insight and metacognition in the students concerning discourses of power and how they can use their own assets to their advantage. Aida's principles and values are examined here in three instances: a media literacy class, a coaching session on interview techniques and on-air radio programs, and a lesson in current economics. She advances a curriculum designed to empower students as well as to deepen their ability to make a social critique and deploy their own understandings to advance themselves and their communities.

TeenVoice teachers pursue a curriculum of social justice, believing that students have a right to examine and critique their own circumstances. In many respects, their hybrid discourse marks an identification with the culture of youth from oppressed communities, even as they seek to give them tools to transcend their circumstances.

For the MATCH class focused on media literacy, Aida gathered eleven students in the conference room, three female, eight male. One female was White; one male was Chicano Latino. The rest were African American. Students were wearing their typical urban gear, the men in mostly black, the women showing some color. This class was joined by the Core class, whose teacher Marcus was wearing jeans, Nikes, and a baseball hat with an orange P. He had a black t-shirt that said "Flamboyant for Life." This in itself was a way of signaling his own commitment to his community discourse because everyone in the class knew that the slogan referred to Big L who died in 1999. His biggest hip hop single was "Ebonics," a tribute to the inventiveness of AAVE and street slang, including the lyric:

The studio is the lab and heated is mad  
I know you like the way I'm freakin' it  
I talk with slang and Ima never stop speakin' it

Aida began with a suggestion that the students would have a chance to see behind the construction of the discourse of power; they would have a metacognitive exploration of how it is produced. She began by admonishing the students to look critically at media, to think about how it is produced. "It's like taking the pill to see behind the matrix. You can enjoy the show but you should also be able to see behind." While not all the students in the class were African American, this discussion today was to be on African American images in the media. Aida said later that such a focus allowed the teaching to go deeply into the issue – and that White and Chicano Latino students would also learn from the discussion and see ways it could apply to them.

She asked students to list the ways Black men were depicted in the media. The answers: saggy, bling, grills, slang, thugs, gangsta, penititutionalized, criminalized, thugged out, pimp. She stopped to comment on the term penititutionalized which one student had offered, a mixture of penitentiary and institutionalized, and remarks that the creation of the term was inventive and clever. She argued with the students that these production companies manipulate them, impact the kind of culture and values they have. They set trends in the community.

After this first round of reflection, she showed a few ads, sports clips, and hip hop videos and asked students to respond, not with personal feelings but by listing the actual images people get in the media from these images. The list: uneducated, poor, materialistic, drug dealers, violent, dominant, aggressive, gun-carrying, criminal, a menace to society, angry, showmanship, inferior, good athletes, hustlers, anti-authority, don't give a fuck, selfish, short attention span. When she asked about the image of Black male sexuality, they added: requiring multiple women; hyper-sexual, over-sexed like a dog in heat; can't be afraid, can't be a punk. Malcolm remarked, "It's a hustle, an act, because at the bottom, we just present a façade. If we had our choice, we would have a good name instead of the bad name we have." Here he was remarking on the social standing, image in media, and status that African Americans have in U.S. society. Malcolm marked an awareness of styling and hierarchy in the presentation of dominant and marginalized communities, the way that the public discourse demeans and exiles Black men.

Next Aida moved the discussion to the media image of Black women. The list included: Objects, only wanting to please a man, ho, single mother, victim of domestic violence, angry, takes no shit, materialistic, strong, seductive, sensitive, emotional caretaker, dramatic, nymphos, hyper-sexual, over-sexed, big body, thick, welfare.

Marcus then gave a mini-lecture, reflecting on these images in constructing the internalized oppression and dominant hegemonic narratives which frame Black people. "With these images, we see not only how White people view us but how we see ourselves." He argued that these images were used as rationalizations that were rooted in the rationalizations for slavery. He asked, "Who was considered to be a real human being? Who had the capacity to speak, teach, think? Who had a soul? Who used technology? Who problem solves, was productive and civilized, organized a government? Who had feelings of love? Who could read and write?" He discussed the way that Europeans drew the line between themselves (the civilized) and the "others" (savages), which corresponds to the European notion of man in conflict with nature. Western culture supposed that nature was only useful, savages were only useful, when they were tamed, domesticated, put at the service of the elites. He defined the term entitlement to explain the sense of superiority. And he brought up current examples, such as the way the media discussed Haiti, again as if the victims of the earthquake there were not quite human. But, he explained, the reason the Europeans dominated Africans and indigenous people was not their superior civilization but simply their possession of guns, their willingness and ability to use violence. Aida added the image of the human community as almost like a club you have to be invited into. "And if you are not in the club, you are closer to being an animal."

Africans held in slavery, Marcus continued, had many of the characteristics of human-owned farm animals. They were bred for strength in labor, given scraps off the table and worked to maximum physical capacity. America kept Pygmies in the zoo; put them on display. He shared a magazine cover<sup>7</sup> with the photo of LeBron James as an animal-like savage showing the basketball as his club. The image of the savage, a Black man with a bone in his nose, is the stereotype of the African American. "We have these roles enforced on us and then start to believe them. Look at Black athletes. The White coach describes this Black male like a slave owner, reviewing his body, not his mind."

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<sup>7</sup> <http://watchingthewatchers.org/news/1378/annie-leibovitz-monkeys-around-lebron>

Aida brought the group back to a conversation on gender. “And the Black woman is set up as the mammy. Here’s the cold shit,” she adds, “We do it to each other. When Black men believe that about Black women, we do the oppressor’s work.” She then began to build a narrative of resistance. She suggests that African Americans did not buy this version of themselves. Examples would be seeking to escape or to work slowly. She described how spirituals served as code. They might be passing a message, a way to say, “We’re going to get away from here.” She argued that slang functioned the same way. It is a language of resistance. Then she brought it up to the present. “We choose how we talk in different situations. I’m not responsible for creating the belief that when you talk like this it is a more educated, valued way of communicating. We have a choice of what to say and how to say it. But we didn’t make it up. We did not make the maze but we can choose where to go in it.” Here she advanced a complicated proposition about how students might position themselves. They could critique the way the system is set up to their disadvantage but they could not make the system go away by just wishing it. They needed to understand how to move, for survival, for social change, within the constrictions of the values and practices of society. She was suggesting that students practice code switching not because the dominant discourse is superior, indeed she insists that community ways of knowing and communicating were crucial to survival. But they should know how to access all the means and methods of effective action in society.

At one point in the media literacy class, Marcus made a comment about women, “We need to protect them.” Aida reflected later that she did not want to undermine him but wanted to intervene. One problem was that most of the young women had left because of having to pick up siblings and make dinner, in other words tasks she describes as “gendered family responsibilities.” She felt these young women would be more likely to agree with her if she objected to the notion of “protecting our women.” Aida did intervene, saying, “Well, I don’t think it’s about that.” Her analysis was that she was saying in front of the class that, “That’s not working for me, as a woman.” What she trusted Marcus to do, and what he did do, was reverse his position and say, “Oh, right, that makes a lot of sense.” She believed that it was a powerful model for young men to see a male teacher they respect simply accept a criticism, recognize his own blind spot, and move on. Later on, as we shall see during the housing crisis economics unit, Aida encouraged young men in the class to similarly express self-awareness and a willingness to move from their first comment when an issue is called to their attention.

Here, again, Aida was marking discourse, language practices as potential instruments of repression and resistance. She indicated that the adoption of or familiarity with the secondary professional discourse need not be a matter of forsaking one’s own identity but rather one of exercising agency in working the system (Lee, 2007). “Here in San Pietro” Marcus said, “Many of the ways power works are invisible. We only make choices within a little corner of the maze.” What young people needed to do is to humanize San Pietro. “I’m considered a problem because I was homeless and dealt dope. I was seeking money because we are poor. What they have is jails for us and they make money off of them. But on some level we don’t think about this stuff. We are filled with distractions, pacifiers, and constant drama. The gold chain. Check out the *Hood to hood* video. People look at the hood as a place we can’t get out of, a war we were born into.”

He added that we internalize the idea that money will make us human. So the question is, “How we can achieve wealth?” For most in the Black community, the options seemed to be: athletics, brute strength, hustler, or criminal. This construction of how to get money was based on old concepts. But even when African Americans get money, like LeBron James, and when this should give us our humanity, he is still seen as a brute. Marcus used the title of a popular hip hop album by Parental Advisory, “My Life Your Entertainment,” to summarize the ways African Americans are only allowed to make money when performing (as entertainers, athletes, or criminals) for White elites. The work of TeenVoice, Marcus and Aida emphasized at the end, was to show them another way – another way to be a man, another way to be a woman, another way to be human, and another way to make a living in the world.

When students were ready to leave, Aida asked each one to utter one word or phrase that is on their minds. The answers:

- respectful
- no n word
- listen
- stay good
- don’t be negative toward women
- girls equal
- don’t judge
- think
- encourage guys to be real
- can’t help no-one but myself

On the first day that students are to go out and attempt interviews on the street, Aida went over instructions on the use of the field recorder with the students. She showed how it recorded digitally. She also admonished students on their discourse, including demeanor and attitude. “I need to be able to trust you guys on your professionalism. Please don’t get socked at Civic Plaza. You gotta come professional. This is when you use that code switch, from slang to professional ... it’s a form of bilingualism.”

MATCH class induction into professional radio practice reflects a set of values and approaches of TeenVoice staff concerning power, agency, and discourse negotiation. In preparing students to practice street interviews, Aida asked them to describe a time in their lives when they had a problem, not necessarily something personal, and how they took steps to address it. As each student described what s/he did, Aida gave feedback on how the student used communication, or analysis, or networking, whatever strategy was used, to solve the problem. The goal in this was to help the student see his or her assets and strengths in dealing with problems and therefore with learning.

Omar remarked, “I’m asking all females.” Aida cut in, “Nope, that would be a no.” Then she continued with instructions. This was an example of what Aida has said is her direct instruction approach, when issues are not discussed at length. Instead, she invoked her authority and moral leadership in simply shutting down a direction she objected to. Omar, in fact, accepted this order and did not bring up the joking suggestion again. “When you first go up to someone, identify yourself, explain you’re from TeenVoice. Remember, when you ask a question, it can’t be a simple yes-no question. You gotta get them to speak their thoughts. Encourage them to answer in complete sentences. Now, lots of people will be uncomfortable. We’re not used to someone

coming up and sticking some big-ass turkey drumstick in our face. And if people leave, just chalk it to the game and move on.”

A few days later, the MATCH class began its first radio production day with Aida leading a warm-up in the basement classroom. “We have a show today and must get ready. Who has something you can read?” Students reached into backpacks and pockets to extract the drafts of introduction pieces, short commentaries that described who they were. Aida had them start reading aloud to partners. In a gesture that allowed her to critique their voicing and also made gentle fun of herself, she said, “You think your voice sounds squeaky? Welcome to my world. My voice sounds squeaky even though I’m damn near 30 years old.” She continued, “I know you might freeze up in front of the mic. Sometimes people with the most mouthpiece get on the air and they’re like, ‘Uh oh.’” She gave students extensive advice on how to sit, how to hold their neck and mouth. “Sit your booty all the way back. Take a deep breath; get that air in your lungs. Don’t swirl in your chair... Sound waves move and this will distort the sound.”

Students were excited about reading their introductions but also anxious. Reinforcing the importance of the day and the need to take it seriously, Aida led them in a series of exercises: shoulder rolls, toe touching, rolling up one vertebra at a time, head roll, and lip blowing (the “raspberry”). She had them practice enunciating certain sounds, the M, the P (“feel the air”), as well as tongue exercises. She explained that the screen on the mic is known as the ‘popper-stopper.’ She showed students how to put the mic two fists away from the mouth.

All of this preparation moved students to the recognition of the radio studio as a performance space, one where they had responsibility to choose their discourse framing. They certainly were not able to mumble or talk in abbreviated phrases as they might have with friends; but they were not admonished to speak standardized English. The construction of a radio persona involves extensive reflection and not a small amount of anxiety. They were expected to be highly self aware of their discourse practices, their language, bearing, breathing, posture, etc. Aida emphasized that they need to have courage to put themselves out there, to be communicators who are more focused on the experience the listener will have than on how they feel about themselves. With these teenagers, who were used to keeping a low profile, not sharing themselves with strangers, limiting responses to short answers, she was coaching them to be bold and extroverted. Aida encouraged the students to drop the resistant, negative tone of voice they were used to using around authority figures. She said, “If you sound like, ‘fuck this shit,’ your audience is going to say like, ‘fuck this shit.’”

She admonished, “You must be willing to look silly in front of others. Allow yourself to get out of the comfort zone. Otherwise you will just be self-conscious and you will shut down. Remember to use variety in your voice. If you make a mistake, don’t freak out, just keep going. And we’re cool with humor. While you think through your delivery, you also want to come back to where it sounds like you are talking, conversational.” She emphasized that it is not necessary that they try to adopt a vernacular sound of standardized English. She assured students that accents are fine. “Many of you have families from the South; many African American families came to San Pietro from Texas or other parts of the South, for jobs. (Imitating BBC radio voice) You don’t have to read like this. You can have swag but we have to hear you. So keep that sound. Just make it bold and clear.” Having “swag” but being clear and

understandable, this was the suggested professional on-air voice for a TeenVoice commentary.

Aida suggested that students could analyze their on-air voices in comparison to a song. It has a beat (how fast or slow it goes, the way it lilts up or down), a melody (which is the tone, flat or varied) and lyrics (with particular emphasis on pronunciation), as well as tempo (speed).

One student, Malcolm, began his practice reading: "I'm 16 years old. I'll be 17 March 27<sup>th</sup> if I get blessed to wake up that day...." Rodrigo read about being born in Mexico, moving to San Pietro, and realizing he had made bad choices when he ended up at Juvenile Hall at the age of 15. "Mexico is my true home. Jalisco is my land of dreams." Shinoa commented while he's reading: "It sounds like a poem."

Omar did his first opinion piece on shoes: "Shoes can be all the way from 99 cent classic flip flops with pictures of Sailor Man or Sponge Bob all the way to a limited edition shoe from Japan." Aida joked about 80's Reeboks that look "hella foamy, with Velcro, that people's moms used to wear when doing jazzercise." But she pushed Omar afterwards to go deeper. What do shoes mean in our lives? What are they representing? What was the importance of Power Ranger shoes when you were a kid?

Shinoa was breathless when she came out of her studio session. "I got hot and my heart started beating!" Aida validated her observation: "I myself get a little sweat mustache." Aida gave feedback to the students after their studio reading. "Your work for this round was very cool; you are beautiful artists. If you feel me behind you, like the devil and angel on your shoulders, that's because I'll be in the studio with you. Remember to slow down. I know it feels hella slow. You're getting better already. All clap." And the class applauded each reader in turn. Aida gave students their physical space as they moved around the room and change places at the large table; but she also easily tapped students on the shoulder or even gave a hug to some for encouragement. The enthusiasm was strong in the room. She had more reminders: "Slang is OK. Curses are not allowed .... Give each word its pronunciation due." She did a little dance. "OK, who's up next?" She returned to coaching on tempo, volume, and projection.

She has moved the class to an anxious self-awareness of their speaking voices and to the lowering of anxiety through humor. She did not try to make one or the other of these moods dominate. It was the tension between informality and serious purpose that she worked to maintain, to keep in constant play. This was an example of the liminal space, the hybrid space, that she sought to balance in her own interactions with the students and in showing them how to move across cultural and language borders into the professional space of TeenVoice broadcasting. "We have fun in here, right? But it's not huggy-huggy, it's not a joke. This is a job."

But she continued to insist on improvement, improvement of skills and improvement of engagement with the work. When students began to look around during sum-up, she remarked, "Are we focused? Because, man, it's like I'm losing you a little bit. Did y'all make your changes? Like legibly?"

As part of professional skill and discourse building, Aida led the class through a consideration of concepts of group goal-setting. The example they worked with was the steps needed to be able to drive a car on a date. With Aida's help, they looked at the steps that were needed, including: getting money for the car or borrowing one, being old enough for a license, studying for the written test, and practicing for and taking the

driving test. She pointed out that a goal that a group sets, just like the goal for getting a car to use on a date, should be specific, measurable, and with a time setting.

During final announcements, Shinoa had to leave early. She was going to the hospital to visit a cousin who had been shot the day before. Aida announced that a TeenVoice intern Darren, of an earlier MATCH class, who some of them knew, was in a coma after being hit by a car that was being chased by the police in East San Pietro. Amid the swirl of violence, tragedy, and institutional neglect, the students had just completed a three-hour project of engaged discourse training.

Besides the media literacy class, another part of inducting the MATCH students into the discourses of power, helping them to make sense of the larger political and economic context of their lives as Ginwright and Cammarota (2002) have advocated, is to give students a special class that examines the current economic crisis. Aida crafted a lesson that did not rely on traditional economics class approaches such as broad overviews of markets, CEO decisions, and government policies. Instead, she sought to give students an interactive experience that illustrates how the economy works. On this day, she was wearing big hoop earrings, a turquoise hat, white hooded sweatshirt, a lanyard with a whistle and keys, jeans and sneakers.

She explained that today students would play a game in order to understand the economy, the recession, and mortgages. The amount of money a student starts with would define their income and identity and whether they can be a home owner or renter. She began by distributing pieces of candy which were to represent money, saying, "All right now, the only rule we have in terms of the money is don't eat the money. I promise you at the end of the game we will all get equal amounts of money. At the end, we will all be communists. Now we're capitalists." Some got more candy and some less.

The candy caused a slight uproar but the students stayed with the game, seeking to learn the rules. She explained that every month students would get paid and they would have to pay their bills. She acted as banker and realtor, asking which students want mortgages from her, claiming that it was a pretty good risk. Those with more money tried to buy their houses and sign mortgage papers. She had another teacher, Roland, stand by and she handed stacks of mortgages to him, explaining that he was an investor buying the mortgages in bundles.

Students began to laugh at the term "bundles" which was street slang for ten grams of heroin. Aida smiled, "Not that kinda bundles; bundles of mortgages." And as they went around the table and students tried to buy houses, make payments, or get their pay, the candy was quickly changing hands. She remarked, "Most people don't have enough money to just come outa pocket for a house so they have to have the bank buy it and they pay the bank back. If you live in a grimy, low income area, it might be tougher to get the bank to give you that loan."

She admonished Rodrigo, who was trying to grab candy from another, "If you steal, you go to jail." Malcolm remarked, "Don't be slippin' in jail."

Jennifer offered: "If you're low income but commit a felony, you'll be fired."

Malcolm teased: "I don't even hear you, broke lady." Already students were getting into their roles, winners and losers, and those on top were quick to ridicule those with low income.

Aida saw that Hannah had a large amount of money. She said, "Looks like you can buy a three-bedroom house. Yay, welcome to the burbs." She kept the action

moving, with payments, collections, and sales, remarking, “You’re good, you’re good, you’re good.”

After play had gone on for a while, Rodrigo who was depleted of funds complained, “This is despicable. I almost feel like my mama.” Aida did a little dance, both to lighten the mood, this was a game after all, and to encourage Rodrigo to stay in. She shouted comments out as play continued:

“Things are starting to happen that are very grimy.”

“I’m not trying to give you guys the life you always wanted.”

“Please be quiet. I’ll ask you nicely because you’re rich.”

(In imitation of *The Jeffersons* theme song) “Movin’ on up...”

Jennifer was doing pretty well until Aida declared that she was getting deported and sends her to jail. Chris bought another mansion. Matt ran out of candy and was evicted for non-payment of rent. Aida asked, “What will you do for money?” His answer: “Sling drugs.” Jennifer offered to have Matt move in with her if he would marry her in order to assure her legal status.

Aida pointed out that she had no one else to give mortgage loans to but she wanted more investments. So she gave mortgages to everyone on the promise of monthly payment. She turned to Roland, who was acting as a banker, and asked him what rating, what value, he would give to the outstanding mortgages. He responded with a smile, “A plus!” Everyone laughed because they knew most of these loans couldn’t be repaid, especially after the banker announced a doubling of the monthly mortgage payments.

And that, Aida explained, is the housing bubble. “Let’s stop and take the temperature around the room. Who’s unemployed? Who lost their house? Who does not have enough to pay for repo houses? Notice that you went up and then down. Those who ended up with money already had money. You don’t have to bust yourself out if it’s you. Now very few people have money. Prices drop. No one shops. People are laid off or take a cut in pay. The rise in unemployment leads to crime.”

Students reflected on the game. One mentioned Charles Darwin and suggested that everyone acting in the economy was fighting to survive; it was the survival of the fittest. Another mentioned two recent robberies at San Pietro Walgreen’s stores. Aida took the discussion to a macro level next, reflecting on the difference between being wealthy and being rich. Drug dealers are rich but not wealthy. She then returned to a media literacy level, examining the language and hegemonic commonsense used to discuss economic issues. She highlighted the way the news regarded poor people: “unlucky, invisible, at fault.” A student added, “Peasants, peons.” She laughed at this and identified the words as coming from the Warcraft video game.

She went on.

If you end up unemployed and homeless, there may have been some bad decisions you made but in the big picture it is the bank’s fault, it is manipulation of the economy, not luck. It is a rigged game with advantages given to some. Poor people go to jail. Although who is most on welfare? Baby mama? Black women? It turns out that the majority of people on welfare are White. In the U.S. we explain people’s poverty by saying it’s their fault. The mortgage crisis was big because in this case White people were hit. It’s the first time I ever heard people who are broke described as super hard-working.

Towards the end of the class, students reflected on the economic crisis and their own binds within it. No longer mystified by the bigger operations of the economy, they went to a discussion of success, asking “Can anybody make it in America?” Some argued that you still can if you are determined. Others felt you have to “have some” to get started. All agreed that only a few could make it out of poor communities unless the rules were changed.

Students made another observation about their own behavior in the candy game. It seemed that in a number of cases women who were broke or had no money sought marriage to get a house to live in; whereas men were more likely to resort to stealing or selling drugs. As Malcolm had said, “I’m just gonna take this motherfucker’s candy.” But they recognized that both responses were adaptations, difficult choices, in a game that was set up against them. Here again the students have had an opportunity to examine their own position in society. They were able to consider how larger forces in society have impacted their lives and choices. And they have gained some power, if not over the economy, then at least over the discourse that can allow them to analyze their conditions and begin to imagine realistic steps to take to change their circumstances.

### ***Global Emergent Discourse, Code Switching and the Secondary Discourse***

In this section, Aida is even more explicit with her students in exploring vernaculars of English and different discourse practices. She reflects on student discourse and displays her own hybrid, complex discourse that is part of her strategy of connecting with and transforming students. This includes a discussion of writing and slang, a word game with students, challenging students on goal setting and conflict, and types of code switching appropriate for radio programs.

An important element of Aida’s cultural understanding of teaching and discourse was her practice of Lucumí, which in the U.S. is known as Santería. She spoke of an intermediary called Eleguá or Eshu who is very young and very old at the same time, a trickster energy, who opens doors and closes doors, allowing things to happen or not happen. Her view was that if someone is being disruptive in class, she must be conscious that that person’s energy has a relationship to her as kind of trickster energy.

Looking at them in that way, I don’t feel the pressure to either smash on them or be overwhelmed by them. It’s more like how you work with that energy to make it into a learning opportunity for you and for everyone else in the class. It’s a matter of seeing how that can work for you and for the rest of the people in the class. Their presence is really valuable, even though they are being a pain in the ass. In our tradition, there are definitely energies that destroy and energies that produce, but there is not, in my view, good and evil. But nobody says we’re trying to eradicate Eshu. It’s more how do you work with Eshu, how do you work with that energy, to be in balance.

Part of that balance for Aida was to recognize that a good teacher did not have to have mastery of all discourses. The important thing was to be open, to be able to learn from students, to improvise and follow the flow, and to change one’s discourse to match the students. In this way the class was not just changing the students but was also changing the teacher. In discourse, this meant moving towards a professional code while elevating and honoring the hybrid code that students bring to class. When discourse exchange

went both ways, students were offered an opportunity to buy in to a learning process that was changing them.

In the course of student writing and broadcast scripts, inevitably the issue came up of what kind of vernacular to use, leading to discussion about the issue of code switching. Aida explained that sometimes students would criticize each other for not being able to speak “proper English,” leading to a discussion of what is proper, not only about code switching but about how a language develops. She explained to the students that if someone said, “I’m finna go to the sto,” that comment could stand on its own as grammatically correct within African American vernacular. “If it’s mutually intelligible and there are rules, so you would know if someone was faking it, you would know if someone was trying to be hood in their language. So it means there’s a correct way of pronouncing words and rhythm. That makes it fulfill the functions of language.”

Students were enthusiastic about this exploration, examining next the grammatical consistency of Chicano English, or Spanglish, too. In this situation, African American and Latino students were examining and appreciating each others’ vernaculars as well as finding the confluences, where terms and constructions were shared. While there were more African American students in the class, Aida always took time to include all students in the reflection on language.

TeenVoice teachers were committed to finding what was best in students, nurturing their curiosity, celebrating their accomplishments. Aida pointed out that sometimes they had a student who was frustrating or simply problematic. The staff tried to find a way to help the student out, to help her move forward, to support her in her life. But she did not hesitate to correct a student who was not adhering to the professional atmosphere in the studio. In passing a bank of computers, she said loudly, “The headphones have to come off. I know you’re not listening to them. Let’s keep it looking professional.” As she welcomed two new students, she reminded them of the Academic Advising program adding, “Remember, when you are trying to get your work done and you don’t know how something works in school or at TeenVoice, use me as a tool.” This was a down-to-earth and clear way of explaining her commitment to being a coach, to apprenticing the students.

Aida was not only closely engaged with the discourse of African American San Pietro students, but she deftly invoked cultural shorthand to connect with other students. One day she referenced “Emo Mexicans” when talking to Rodrigo. When I asked her later about this, she had a long, complicated explanation:

We don’t have Emo Mexicans out here very much, maybe a little bit in the Mission, but there’s a whole sub-set of Latinos in LA who listen to Morrissey and dress rockabilly and all that. So if you go to a Morrissey concert, like in Bakersfield or around there, it’s all Mexicans. My secret theory is that that kind of music is very much aligned, in the content and the mindset, with Mexican rancheras, like get drunk and cry about how fucked-up your life is. He’s from the Central Valley so he would have been exposed to that more. If he was from up here, like Eddy, I doubt that he would have been exposed to that as much. But Rodrigo knew it. And then there was this controversy in Mexico about the “emo-sexuales.” Many Mexicans insisted that emos are gay because they are acting like this so they called them, instead of homosexuales, emo-sexuales.

This complicated read on one sub-genre of cultural expression in Mexico and in rural California is an example of the way Aida paid close attention to various discourses, cultural struggles, and group positioning. Her interest in such detail derived from her belief that all these cultures intermingle, talk to each other, and share new expressions.

Aida referenced her own father's multiple identities growing up in East San Pietro to understand the complex identities and discourses of her students. Students live in proximity to others from many different races and ethnicities. She commented, "Someone might identify as hella Black but he can tell about going to a Laotian house and he's telling me, 'I ate this duck egg with the fetus in it,' and so on." While the outsider view of East San Pietro emphasizes instances of conflict and contention between communities, she saw evidence of more cooperation and interpenetration.

Aida initiated a parlor game called Taboo, in order to explore self-awareness and secondary discourse. She described it as "a fun game but it's also a way to learn to express ourselves without using crutches." The game consisted of cards with key words at the top. The person who drew the card had to get others to say that word without using any of the six banned, or taboo, words that were listed below the key word. The player had to figure out some other way to get people in the room to say it.

She described the situation: "So we were playing it and for some reason, because God likes to make fun of me, I got all these crime words. And I didn't want to do this and have them think that I think that they only know about crime or whatever." The average player would get four cards done each minute but Aida was finishing eight cards. "When it would be 'robbery' I'd be 211 and they'd be 'armed robbery!' So you could just say a police code or a slang word and they would get it right away. They had that because I used all the things I know they know because they'd got arrested for that, so I felt really bad about it but we won." She reflected on the discourse implications of Taboo, "It's a fun game because you really see how people's minds work and you get to talk about language, usage, and audience."

Aida was interested in the discourse and stories of the youths themselves but she resists the way media often parade "ghetto tragedies" of Black and Latino students to further a cliché version of their lives. Much as Lipsitz (2005) spoke of youth resisting the victim narrative, she explained that she did not want to "tokenize" the writing of these young people or make every story about tragic life markers. While some student commentaries and stories from the MATCH class went on air, often students had to invest a much longer process of involvement in TeenVoice before they could produce broadcast ready material. The priority in the class was to get students engaged, interested in media literacy, and beginning to produce their own stories.

But such stories often extracted a cost. She explained, "There's this one student who's a graduate of MATCH and she's a health intern. Most of the young women who are in the MATCH program have been commercially sexually exploited so they were referrals; most of the young women were referred through for MISSSY, which is for commercially sexually exploited youth. The newsroom wanted her to do a story about that so she was reporting it. But I think it's not an accident that she did one interview and then we didn't see her for three weeks. Although she texted that she was alive and OK, she had disengaged and I think it was very difficult for her to do."

One aspect of inducting students into a professional secondary discourse was discussing and modeling how to negotiate conflict. While an aggressive approach to

conflict might have worked at home or in the community, it could backfire in a professional site. Aida conducted a workshop on discourse and conflict with a particularly charged example. She talked about different codes and registers, how people carry themselves. She sought to demonstrate how inappropriate a White middle-class person might come off in Excelsior Park, a Black San Pietro neighborhood. So she began an exaggerated imitation of a White middle class young woman. She reflected later, “I was kinda acting hella White but it doesn’t have to be White because if I were from Rancho Cucamonga I could be any race and acting like that. So I was going, ‘Oh my gosh so this is like East San P, gasp, I’ve heard a lot about it in the rap songs.’” Students were disturbed by this act. They said things like, “Oh my god, you would get, like murdered (murdered), like really fast.” Students were challenged to modify Aida’s behavior. Slowly they showed her how to walk, to adjust her body language, and to speak in particular ways. She slowly changed her discourse based only on what they told her to do. She reflected: “I love these moments when they are hella experts on something.”

Then the same awareness, the idea of code switching based on the neighborhood, the context, the audience, was transferred to how they should deploy their discourse skills. Aida had the class explore ways to argue, debate, and even disagree that were acceptable in a professional site. An important skill of the secondary discourse is to be able to balance force and strategy, to know when to press for what one wants and when to hold back. The key is to be self aware, not only of language but of the whole range of discourse, from body language to words to how to make an argument.

Aida taught the concept of code switching as a metacognitive lesson, the creation of student self-awareness of different discourses and how to adjust one’s discourse depending on the audience and situation. It was not only about teaching San Pietro youth to adjust to a professional discourse in a professional situation. It also had to do with legitimizing and honoring the code students were coming from (Wallowitz, 2008; Scott, Straker, & Katz, 2009).

After exploring “how to act” in Excelsior Park, the benefits of that discourse, how it can make one safe, the class discussed how to balance force and strategy in seeking to get something done. They realized that in their own communities they rely more on force but in work situations you can’t just use force.

The class set up a scenario in which Malcolm owed Robert money and Robert had to get paid. They performed a very active scenario. Aida later said it made her uncomfortable because it was so real; the feeling of incipient violence was unsettling. Then they set up another scenario. In this one, Malcolm was the boss at a job and Robert had to get him to agree to a raise. In this situation, students could not use any of the techniques that they had used in the neighborhood. In this scenario, the students struggled to get what they needed and find themselves, even in small ways, falling back on force to get the raises from their bosses. The whole scene was played out in a humorous way, but students got a chance to see the work that had to be done to develop strategy for the workplace, for the different, professional, discourse that was required. And they explored more subtle shadings of the issue. Force did not always have to take the form of brutal aggression; it could also be assertiveness.

Aida argued that African American young men often felt called upon to keep up a hyper-masculine exterior, to exhibit an attitude that they don’t care. “For those people who have the investment to project that way of being in the world, it totally makes sense,

but it's not really helpful for their life processes on a larger scale." Most of these young men had a hard time displaying that they care about the classes and the work of TeenVoice even though they came back every day, eager to learn. Over time, some of them felt safe to express that they love to participate and be open.

Sometimes students went the other way, moving from reluctant participants to microphone monopolizers. She observed, "There's also an aspect of peacocking ... They learn to be the person that all the energy in the room is going towards." They wanted to be invited to speak about TeenVoice. As she described it, they said, "Oh, my god, captive audience." But she felt that would also work to the student's detriment because he comes to think that that might be all he had to do. She said to one student, "I appreciate that you know how to have a mouthpiece because I also have a mouthpiece and it also helped me to get through high school. I know what that looks like and it's not going to take you much farther than where you are right now. I had to learn to do things other than just that." She was telling students that they had to get more sophisticated in their discourse. It was not enough to be charming and outgoing. You had to learn how to apply complex technical and communicative skills. She added, "You don't have to bullshit me. I know what that looks like and I totally think that that's a skill that you have. If you don't learn how to do something else in addition to that, it's not going to work."

But, she added, "I can't lie and say that we were always successful." She knew there were some that "we weren't able to hold on to," youths who left the program and went on to crime and incarceration. Some had drug offenses and some were, as she described, young men "who have taken that investment in the idea of force as a way to get what they want to the point that they have been really violent." She looked pensive and worried. "We do have a lot of people who are at risk of going that direction." Her concern here was that TeenVoice not be romanticized, not be oversold. It had been successful with many youths in San Pietro. But everyone on staff knew there was much more work to be done.

## 7) Findings and Analysis

By examining how TeenVoice youth teacher-mentors interacted with the discourses of the San Pietro youth, I sought to consider the ways that communication, engagement, and inspiration of students could be improved. Having examined the teaching practices of Marcus and Aida, we can locate their “teaching discourse” which is neither congruent with the student primary discourses nor with standardized “professional” discourses. I have used the term Global Emergent Discourse to try to capture the new communicative ecology, mediated by global and local forces, within which students and teachers function. Because they do not exist in a world of stable and homogenous culture and discourse, they are used to communicating across platforms, improvising and inventing new expressions and new hybrids, finding their way in contingent communities.

In this study, I have sought to answer the questions: (1) How do the two focal teachers at TeenVoice use discourse to facilitate student engagement in learning complex content as well as technical and journalistic skills? (2) How do the focal teachers understand and connect the discourses of their students and the various registers of professional media discourse? (3) What principles and values are reflected in teacher discourse practices at TeenVoice? (4) How might these discourse practices inform teacher education for more effective pedagogy in urban school settings?

I found that the focal teachers demonstrated an active awareness of issues of discourse – exploring discourse practices of their students and the broader environment of discourse in school and professional settings. They sustained a creative and improvised discourse interaction with the students which they consciously applied in order to engage and challenge students. I found that the focal teachers understood and connected with student discourse through a self-awareness of their own identity and discourse as well as the secondary discourses they had acquired through their education and professional training. These teachers viewed their task as more than the transmission of knowledge. They sought to develop critical consciousness in their students as part of a process of social justice youth development. They were explicit about drawing students into metacognitive awareness – concerning language practices, social capital, and how to successfully negotiate school and professional challenges. I shall speak to the ways this might inform other teaching projects in implications section, below.

Teachers at TeenVoice deploy a kind of hip hop collaging and free style inventiveness, not simply by understanding and respecting the discourse of youth but by being able to perform and improvise within this sensibility. They are able to think and to act in a way that Hill (2009) calls representin’, a practice of sustaining allegiances to community and meeting locally constructed standards of authenticity. Representin’ means honoring the values, experiences, and truths of students’ homes regardless of geographic location or economic position. In this approach to discourse, similarly to DJ’ing, creativity rests in how one recontextualizes the previous expression of others, in the accretion of new hybrid forms of expression that develop over the course of a class. The teacher who accesses and honors the discourse of students attempts to hand a greater part of the locus of meaning over to the student (Willinsky, 1990). It represents the teacher challenging the meaning of literacy in the classroom as well as the nature of a

teacher's work with the students. Since the "culture" is constantly changing, this practice pushes further the meaning of culturally relevant pedagogy as proposed in Critical Race Theory, as it suggests a decentering of the traditional borderlines of power in discourse.

While the school setting enacts discourses of power and resistance, the TeenVoice setting is a locus of peer discourse communities, even when the teenagers are negotiating the code switching necessary to cross racial, class, and geographic boundaries. In this respect, the framing of colonialism, or domestic colonialism, has been useful in suggesting the imposition of power and the modes of cultural resistance that contend within educational contexts. In normal public school, as Edmund Gordon explains: "Students are regularly confronted with the paradox of negotiating between the mastery of the data of schooling, which tends to be other peoples' information that students are expected to learn, and the understanding of the data of their own experiences" (Kinloch, 2009b). But TeenVoice discourse creates a kind of decolonized space in classroom. As Dei explains, "The decolonized space is where learners from disadvantaged backgrounds are able to construct and privilege their own intellectual, cultural, and political knowledge and agency. The decolonized space allows learners to be organically connected with their communities so as to make their learning meaningful in terms of its impact on the daily lives of communities" (Dei & Simmons, 2010). The hope is that these teachers might be able to develop what Kinloch calls a "pedagogy of possibility" (2009b).

### ***The Teaching Discourse of Marcus and Aida***

A most salient point about the discourse practices of Marcus and Aida is that they did not fit a simple binary between student and teacher discourse or between community and official discourse. Both of these teachers had their own history of complex discourse, the result of local and global factors. And the students too came from a heteroglossic complex of communities. The teaching project at TeenVoice involved an improvised set of discourse practices which constantly shifted. Students were not just passive recipients of the teacher discourse. Indeed, they played an active role in ratifying the legitimacy of the teachers and their discourse. Meaning, commitment, and project goals were all negotiated between the teachers and students in MATCH and Core classes within the complex ecology of Global Emergent Discourse. The principles of collegial pedagogy led these teachers to create communities of practice, to build relationships of mutual humanization, and to pursue positive youth development

I have traced the teaching discourse of Marcus and Aida, noting their awareness of the elements of discourse, including language registers and slang, body language, humor, and cultural values. Teachers noted the ways students dressed and changed their appearance as ways of signaling membership in communities as well as values. But they had a deeper read too and calculated their own communicative interactions based on an understanding of the intersectionality of discourse between themselves and the communities of their students. They understood the humor of San Pietro youth, for instance, as a part of their resilience and their coping with challenges in their lives and developing persistence in survival. And they worked closely with students who suffered the traumas and challenges associated with urban life in the U.S., high unemployment, underground economy, and violence.

While they acknowledged the challenging circumstances their students had to negotiate, having open discussions about fear, safety, and healthy decision-making, they

also resisted what they called the “ghetto tragedy” narrative about their students’ lives. They respected the struggles San Pietro youth made to survive and move their lives ahead but they were critical of the framing of these lives as deficits, they resisted the pathologizing of poverty, as seen in the work of teacher trainers like Ruby Payne (Bomer, Dworkin, May, & Semingson, 2008). Indeed, they regarded such evaluative approaches by some teachers as liberal charity, a self-serving redemptive project. These teachers, on the contrary, responded to difficult life circumstances by challenging the students with higher standards, demanding more, for as Marcus said, “the rest of the world is not going to give a damn; they’re not going to care.” And Aida asserted that she did not want to tokenize the writing of these young people or make every story they wrote be about tragic life markers. This was a challenge to the projection of a concept of “real” urban life which imposed stereotypical representations and narrowed choices (Fleetwood, 2005).

While Marcus and Aida revealed values that favored youth empowerment rather than charity, they also expended extensive energy in working with the young people to more effectively deal with conflict. Through examples and role playing, they walked through different situations with different constituencies, working on how to negotiate differences and reach agreements. This kind of training was its own induction into new discourses, as students learned how to sell their ideas rather than intimidate others. Many of the classes Marcus and Aida conducted had the goal of strengthening the capacity of students to make a social critique in order to struggle for the interest of their communities. They did explicit training for students to balance force and strategy, to know when to press for what one wants and when to hold back. Students explored acceptable and effective ways to argue, debate, and disagree in a professional site. The key was to be self aware, not only of language but of the whole range of discourse, from body language to words to how to make an argument. Such negotiations could apply in relationships, community encounters, and professional situations.

This was the way Marcus and Aida deployed culturally relevant discourse (Ladson-Billings, 1994). It was not only a matter of the teachers demonstrating cultural competence, but also in understanding student assets and strengths (Hilliard, 2003) in dealing with problems and therefore with learning. They mixed a close relationship-based connection with the students, akin to the *cariño* approach articulated by Valenzuela (1999), with culturally-ratified discourse of direct instruction as Delpit (1995) advocates in connecting with students.

They also approached discourse as a transparent project shared by teachers and students, a metacognitive lesson, frequently stopping to comment on discourse issues and to help students unpack the codes of power – a reflection of their own social-political principals and values. Marcus used the metaphor of “looking behind the curtain” from *The Wizard of Oz* while Aida invoked the concept from *The Matrix* of taking the pill in order to examine the working of the system. As Marcus said to the students, “Many of the ways power works are invisible. We only make choices within a little corner of the maze.” In both cases, though, they spoke to the students about “understanding the game” (or sometimes called “the rigged game”), the codes and practices of power that were stacked against them as well as how they could enter the discourse of power and be successful. Aida and Marcus both pointed out the intuitive knowledge the students had about codes of power (“these kids have intuition and they know they’re being lied to”) and what Du Bois (1903) called double consciousness, the awareness of their own being

and their oppressed positionality in society. They discussed how the dominant culture, historically and in current iterations, positioned Black and Brown and immigrant youth as savages, even as animals. But this exploration was not directed at making the students feel like outsiders. Rather it was a social justice resistance project of naming the system in order to overcome it. They emphasized the importance of helping students make this knowledge explicit so they could act on it in their own interests.

As for how they positioned their own communicative strategies, their own ways of understanding and connecting to student discourse practices, Marcus and Aida had a practice that was a bit different from how they talked about it. While they saw themselves modeling “professional” discourse, in all my experience at TeenVoice it seemed that they used a hybrid, mixed discourse. And while they sometimes urged students to be more formal in their communicative practices in the space of TeenVoice, they also encouraged them to use a casual, community-based language (minus any cursing or slang words that few would understand) even when doing radio shows. This again was an example of their commitment to crossing borders, positioning the ratified discourse in a zone that was neither the dominant discourses nor the home discourse of students.

The task of TeenVoice teachers was not to achieve a discourse that mapped on exactly to the youth discourse nor was it to bring students to their own personal discourse or the professional radio discourses. The key was to engage in a co-construction of meaning and trust in a discourse exchange, to be able to learn from students, to improvise and follow the flow, much as is done in hip hop styling. In this way, the class was not just changing the students but is also changing the teachers. In discourse, this meant moving towards a professional code while elevating and honoring the hybrid code that students brought to class. When discourse exchange went both ways, students were offered an opportunity to buy in to a learning process that was changing them.

Aida and Marcus exhibited constant awareness of the contingent, shifting nature of communities that their students resided in. They both commented on the mixture of influences that were found in San Pietro communities, including religious practices, food culture, and language forms. These complex and shifting cultures, as distinct from more stable cultural communities of even 50 years ago, resulted from what Appadurai (1996) called the flows of migration and electronic communication across the global landscape. Thus youth identity and youth discourse was constructed from global and local influences in a phenomenon I am calling Global Emergent Discourse. Both Marcus and Aida were also a mixture of complicated ethnic and migratory mixes. While outsiders often spoke of conflict and contention between communities in San Pietro, TeenVoice teachers called attention to extensive evidence of more cooperation and interpenetration. They referenced the multiple cultural and discourse influences of their students and engaged in an always-shifting banter about discourse, sharing and joking about references to hip hop, sports, community practices, foods, etc. In addition, they were explicit with the students about the generation gap (between 30 year olds and 16 year olds) and the fact that their taste in music, slang, and reading was some distance from the students. But it was clear that they also exhibited enough cultural awareness, enough good-natured engagement, that they were seen as trusted interlocutors by the students, recognized as meeting locally constructed standards authenticity (Hill, 2009).

Through a curriculum built on the principles of social justice, Marcus and Aida helped students to examine and critique their own circumstances. Their hybrid discourse marked an identification with the culture of youth from oppressed communities, even as they sought to give them tools to transcend their circumstances. Instead of simply trying to position students to succeed within the system, they sought to arm students to rethink, transform, and rebuild a system that would be more in the interest of their community. Marcus argued that the problems in the community, even crimes committed by the youth, had to be understood within a systemic critique, an understanding of the game stacked against the youth, a war they were born into. These TeenVoice teachers struggled to get these young people to see that there were other ways for the game to end up, there were solutions they could work towards.

## 8) Conclusion and Implications

Key to the success of the TeenVoice mission is the way students and teacher-mentors negotiate meaning and build relationships for successful educational projects. These focal teachers were self-aware of their discourse identity and discourse use with students, negotiating a hybrid and improvised discourse practice in their teaching. They challenged students to be self-aware of their own discourse practices and of the ways to deploy their skills in society to meet their goals. Often pedagogical initiatives meant to be revolutionary and transformative – in that they support power from below, validate indigenous knowledge, and challenge assumptions of power – are coöpted and undermined in their application by establishment education policymakers. For example, social capital has been extracted from a metaphorical concept denoting the codes used by people in power to become something that can be taught to working class students; the concept of situated learning has recently been adapted for corporate training sessions; the idea of “Freirian projects” has been reduced to student choice in research papers; and “code switching” has become a term prompting marginalized youth to clean up for a job interview.

In all these applications, the one thing that schools have not challenged, that is holds its hegemonic place as unassailable, is the discourse and body of knowledge of power. The prime and singular focus of the educational process is the “civilizing of the savages,” the inscribing of dominant values, practices, and habits of mind on the marginalized student. In his State of the Union speech in January, 2011, President Obama praised his “Race to the Top” initiative and in the process managed to sound more like a foundation officer dispensing grants to a fortunate few than a president of all the people. Still, he urged young people to consider a career in teaching: “If you want to make a difference in the life of a child – become a teacher.” He noted that it was essential “to reward good teachers” but not just any effective or engaging teachers: “We want to prepare 100,000 new teachers in the fields of science, technology, engineering and math” for “it’s not just the winner of the Super Bowl who deserves to be celebrated, but the winner of the science fair.” In this speech, he illuminated clearly the narrowing agenda of education in the U.S.: education is to be tied tightly to an increasingly fierce fight with China and India, seen as competitors for economic dominance and global control. This study demonstrates how youth development projects in out of school settings fill a gap that is left by such instrumental uses of schooling. TeenVoice engages students precisely because it is focused on their community, their needs, in their discourse rather than the demands of the dominant class.

In reflecting on my third research question, I found that my case study teachers demonstrated principles and values that resisted narrow goals of inducting students into the current social order. Marcus and Aida did not simply apply more engaging discourse practices to traditional content nor did they see the students through a deficit lens. Instead, they demonstrated an understanding of the assets and strengths the students brought to the enterprise and they adjusted the purposes and pathways of their teaching to correspond to the community practices of their students. Moreover, they constantly sought to strengthen critical consciousness, awareness of “the game,” and a determination to struggle for different social relationships and political power relations in their lives. Large and powerful institutions, such as scholarship foundations, pay young people well

to recount that story which is comforting to those in power. Scholarships are awarded to urban youth who offer a narrative that validates the virtue of their own lives and casts the lives of the great masses of our urban centers as others, at best a cautionary tale of the consequences of bad choices and at worst a dangerous predator which must be repressed and imprisoned. Key to the educational framework which Marcus and Aida used was the rejection of a redemptive project, a rescue mission to take young people out of the pathological world of their poverty and its crime, bad values, and bad choices. Instead, they viewed their responsibility as empowering these students to struggle within their communities for critical insights and the ability to transform their circumstances.

### ***Implications for Research***

**Theoretical challenges of new discourse environments.** Extensive work has been done on mismatches and conflict concerning discourse awareness in teacher practice (Heath, 1983; Barnes et al, 1990; Delpit & Dowdy, 2002; Ibrahim, 2003). As often as it has been demonstrated that home or primary discourse acts as a disadvantage for marginalized students, most educators have left the school discourse in place, unchallenged. The project, then, has become to change, transform, and “raise up” marginalized students to achieve what is loosely referred to as Academic English. But the dominant discourses are not an abstraction, are not made by God. It is a particular register of vernacular, cultural values, and ways of communicating that is identified with White middle-class America. The result is a process of alienation as described by Rodriguez (1983) or a project of deficit reduction such as practiced by Ruby Payne (Bomer et al, 2008).

The problem of the achievement gap in education, particularly between White students and African American and Chicano Latino students, is widely regarded as intractable. Countless research studies have examined the problem, thousands of policy and research professionals work on it, but the gap persists. But a key matter that receives little attention in regards to the gap is the way that school discourse remains incongruent with student discourse practices. Discourse stands, in a way, as the secret code of the achievement gap. This study suggests new areas of theoretical focus in education research. Particularly, it challenges researchers to decenter the authority of the dominant discourse, and singular curriculum content, in educational projects. In place of such traditional approaches, I suggest that educators should reexamine and reevaluate the given discourse of schooling – turning it toward a meaning-making hybrid discourse that is aware of the Global Emergent Discourse ecology of urban communities today.

**Teachers in youth development sites.** Little attention has been paid to those in teaching positions outside of school who have not been certified and who are not bound by the accountability systems of public schools. Because there is not a formal induction process for new staff, there exists an informal, oral tradition of what kind of discourse practice is most effective in teaching. This allows for more innovation, experimentation, and creativity in finding ways to effectively work with students.

Much more work could be done at non-school sites like TeenVoice to unpack the complex teaching practices, in curriculum, community-building, discourse practices, and assessment of efficacy. This TeenVoice study suggests that teachers entering into a discourse ecology that is closer to the student discourse also question the legitimacy and goals of the dominant discourse. Whether they have adjusted their discourse because of

their values concerning power relationships or whether they have changed their view of power relationships based on the discourse experience they have had is a matter for future studies.

### ***Implications for Practice***

Teaching is always a complex negotiation between communities, classes, and discourses. Some powerful work has been done on teachers working to be culturally responsive and engaged (Lee, 2007). Too often, however, advice to teachers has transformed culturally relevant teaching approaches into performances of multiculturalism which essentialize and objectify cultures (Spradlin and Parsons, 2008).

**Teacher discourse.** A deep understanding of the TeenVoice teaching practices offers teachers more insight, and indeed more courage, to pursue honest and engaged communicative relationships with their students. Teachers examining the practice of teachers at TeenVoice need not feel that they must have the same cultural experience or competence as these teachers. For if they demonstrate anything, it is that their discourse repertoire is a matter of improvisation and creativity. Teachers must recognize the fluid and shifting nature of discourse today, what I have called Global Emergent Discourse, and avoid essentializing or stereotyping any students in an effort to be culturally relevant. Students are welcoming of teachers who make even small efforts to cross discourse borders. In improvising and connecting to student culture, teachers become allies rather than critics of students. Teachers who do make the effort discover knowledge and literacy strengths that they had not realized students have.

**Educational outcomes.** While the project of teaching is generally regarded as a transmission of knowledge from the knower to the not-knower, the experience of TeenVoice teachers demonstrates that it is possible to set more challenging, rigorous goals for student learning when the content is a matter of adding to student knowledge and building on student experience. Instead of following a narrow curriculum of test preparation, teachers can be more effective in developing programs that allow youth to take responsibility for their own learning.

### ***Implications for Policy***

Finally, this study suggests new directions in the development of skilled, effective teachers for tomorrow's schools. Instead of merely modeling the dominant discourse, effective teachers will be those who can dwell in the liminal space, who are comfortable within Global Emergent Discourse practices. One of the greatest crises in teacher recruitment and teacher education today is the limited number of African American, Chicano Latino, and immigrant college graduates who become teachers. Besides the barrier of weak financial rewards, teaching is often seen as an unattractive option because of the narrow, stilted discourse we associate with "proper" communicative skills. By validating and broadening the educative discourse as exemplified by TeenVoice, we would be able to recruit a broader range of teachers, teachers with strong community ties and local cultural capital. In a period when educational priorities and needs are changed, not by those in power at the top of the economy but by communities seeking new ways to live and thrive, these teaching practices promise to be inspiring and generative.

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