Rivers of Identity and Cultural Landscapes:

A Journey of Creating Culturally Relevant and Sustainable Pedagogy

Based on Identity Constructions Depicted in Student Written Spoken Word Poetry

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This research was supported in part by a grant from the Coyote Foundation

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Abstract

If culturally relevant and sustainable pedagogy (CRSP) is intended to base education within students' experiences of culture, then a method is required to bring these experiences to the teacher's attention. As a potential method for bringing to light these experiences, the research question is explored: in what ways does student-written spoken word poetry depict identity constructions in a manner that supports the creation of Culturally Relevant and Sustainable Curriculum? Also examined is the question: to what extent and in what ways do spoken word poetry workshops contribute to the development of a classroom culture based on mutual understanding of cultural experiences? Content analysis of 55 student poems, student/teacher interviews and a pre/post questionnaire provide the data for this research. Findings displayed that identity constructions of Northern California urban high school students' spoken word poetry illuminated specific instances of relationships to culture. Poems far surpassed interviews and questionnaires in regards to details of students' cultural identities, which illuminates that an art form facilitating personally intimate spaces for expression is well suited to communicating relationships to culture. Student interview responses affirmed the capacity of spoken word poetry to transform the priorities of the classroom culture to value empathy and a thirst to understand peers' relationships to culture. Limitations arose in that detailed relationships to culture presented in student writing are too specific to construct a curriculum relevant to the entire class. The wealth of information present in poems implies utility of spoken word poetry as a tool for culturally relevant curriculum development. This study points the way to future longitudinal projects that assess the effects of curriculum developed from culturally relevant identity constructions present in student poems.

Key words: Culturally Relevant Pedagogy, Curriculum Development, Spoken Word Poetry, Classroom Culture, Urban Youth

Chapter 1: Beginnings

Imagine identity as a confluence of rivers, and a person's relationship to culture as the varied geography that the rivers pass through. Imagine a curriculum developed from various poetic snapshots of these rivers and the cultural landscapes that both guide and are shaped by the passing water. The student generated writing that informs this study is based out of high velocity narratives forged from the art form of spoken word poetry. This study seeks to respond to the research question of how student-written spoken word poetry depicts identity formations in a manner that sustains the creation of Culturally Relevant and Sustainable Curriculum?

A certain type of classroom culture is necessary in order to develop curriculum that is based in the vast expanses of cultural landscapes in which each student's life is situated. This classroom culture serves the development of this curriculum by providing a supportive environment for the expression of personal relationships to culture. A second research question examines to what extent and in what ways, do spoken word poetry workshops contribute to the development of a classroom culture based on mutual understanding?

A curriculum that arises from the continually evolving and changing rivers of identity requires a method for understanding the current flow and momentum of the various streams that make up the students in the classroom. Just as you can never dip your foot in the same river twice, students' identities are constantly evolving based on river banks of cultural context and significance, oppressive damns, and surges of new energy. The purpose of Culturally Relevant and Sustainable Pedagogy (CRSP) developed through spoken word poetry is to identify river banks, remove dams, supply surges of creativity, and allow students to lead teachers and classmates through the cultural and personal topography of their daily lived experiences. I began

this journey of discovering the countless nodes of geographical formations that make up our pluralistic society the first time I stepped foot in a spoken word poetry workshop.

Growing up in a homogeneous, upper middle class, white (washed) community, culture was something that I learned to not recognize; it was branded as only belonging to exotic minorities. Blind to the pluralistic nature of our society, I proceeded to go about life in blissful ignorance. This came to an abrupt halt when I connected deeply with a ten-year-old student of color whom I was tutoring. He had been homeless for the past three years; he was as forthcoming as the light of the stars and accepted nothing at face value, questioning everything that was presented to him. Because of this relationship I began to realize the massive blind spots I had in regards to systematic oppression. By working with this student, I saw how the curriculum and standards for behavior in the classroom were often irrelevant to young people's lived experiences. In many ways this relationship propelled me to throw myself into the craft of spoken word poetry. People of all cultural backgrounds practice this art form where life is the primary text informed by identity and relationship to culture. Six years ago I facilitated my first spoken word poetry workshop and realized instantly that this method for expression held a substantial capability for bringing to light information that allows everyone present to bear witness to the fundamental aspects that make up each person's identity and relationship to culture.

Culturally relevant and sustainable pedagogy

Culturally relevant pedagogy identifies a pedagogy that values utilizing materials, adapting standards for conduct, creating classroom culture, and fostering personal relationships that are based on students' lived experience and relationships to their background (Gay, 2010).

This study also incorporates the concept of cultural sustainability as put forward initially by

Django Paris (2012),

> It is quite possible to be relevant to something or responsive to it without ensuring its
>
> continuing presence in a student's *repertoires of practice*...The term *culturally sustaining*
>
> requires that our pedagogies be more than responsive of or relevant to the cultural
>
> experiences and practices of young people - it requires that they support young people in
>
> sustaining the cultural and linguistic competence of their communities...the dynamic,
>
> shifting, and ever changing nature of cultural practices...looking at how young people
>
> importantly both rehearse traditional versions of ethnic and linguistic difference and offer
>
> new versions of ethnic and linguistic difference. (Paris, 2012, p. 95)

It is the offering of new versions of ethnic and linguistic practice that promotes cultural

sustainability. Just as a tree grows from its tips, culture survives as it is reformed by the various

rivers of identity that flow through it. As young people offer new versions of ethnic and

linguistic difference, they provide new iterations of culture. Thus cultural landscape is not

stagnant and eroding, but rather is constantly being adapted to fit the cultural times of the

identities winding their way through it both in the classroom and beyond. Just as a river carves

out landscapes, a unique rendition of culture is presented each time an identity reflects culture

(i.e., when a student blends Latino music and heavy metal or identifies as LGBT and athletic,

they provide new versions of difference and serve to shape the cultural landscape of their lived

experience). When pedagogy supports a mutual understanding of personal relationships to

culture, it provides a situation where teachers and students witness and sustain cultural

development.

In Paris's conception, when pedagogy utilizes students' cultures as a bridge to core curriculum it positions their cultures in a subsidiary role to the dominant culture. In order for curriculum to be relevant and sustainable, it must be reshaped by being based in students' various linguistic practices thereby reflecting a pluralistic society and promoting the students' capacity to be cultural innovators. The research and analysis presented in this study employs the term culturally relevant and sustainable pedagogy (CRSP) which places a valuation on supporting culture as ever-changing and curriculum as being planted within students' culture rather than merely reflective of it.

It is important to respect and sustain students' "repertoires of practice" by addressing the current competencies within their communities. It is the purpose of this research to provide evidence of the benefit to English Language classrooms (with implications for others) of a unit designed to build relationships, ascertain the various rivers of identity that flow through a given classroom, and support the cultural landscapes there in. This study aims to illuminate how spoken word poetry is a highly adept tool for this purpose.

Understanding students' cultural identity

and building relationships through spoken word poetry

The spoken word poetry driven unit focuses on providing a platform for students to express their relationship to their culture, their knowledge gained through lived experience, the intersection of their various identities, and a recognition of templates prescribed by society and/or culture to which they feel obligated to conform. The formation of CRSP cannot come to fruition through mapping curriculum onto presumed relationships to culture. Rather, it must arise from a continual understanding of students' identities as formed by their lived experiences which flow through the numerous cultures that a single student interacts with. The unit supported by

this work proposes a methodology that provides students with space to express various intersections of the rivers of their identity, thereby creating an atmosphere of open dialog in the classroom.

Students from marginalized backgrounds who have been under-served by the educational system are the primary beneficiaries of a CRSP. However, this type of curriculum is intended to benefit any student as it proposes a methodology for creating an accessible and provocative learning atmosphere formed by and situated within students' lived experience. The unit supported by this work does not propose a finite comprehension of identity and culture; rather it proposes forging relationships with students based on a continual dialog of mutual understanding. In order to illuminate the need for this dialog it is worthwhile to cite Pedro Noguera at length:

> For many, this [how to effectively provide CRSP] consists largely of the need for educators to know and value the cultural heritage of their students. Yet, while such information may provide teachers with important background information, it rarely provides the insights they will need to actually be successful in the classroom. In contrast, teachers who take time to know their students are compelled to engage in an ongoing process of learning and inquiry, because the children they serve are not static or 'knowable' in an anthropological sense. Educators who acknowledge their inability to ever completely know their students are teaching as an ongoing process of learning. In so doing, they are able to see beyond the stereotypes that frequently malign and limit their ability to work with the children, and to recognize the assets, knowledge, and experiences that their students bring with them. As they search to understand who their students are as individuals and as social beings, they also find ways to make education meaningful to them. (2008, p.143)

The creation of CRSP must include and extend beyond students' cultural heritage by focusing on cultural innovation and personal relationships to background. The spoken word unit though specific in time and scope, does not signify an end point for the process of understanding. Rather, it serves to set a tone within the classroom culture that is based on inter-subjective dialog. Direct and sustained focus on lived experience and personal relationships to background function to penetrate the veneer of cultural stereotypes that "frequently malign and limit (teachers') ability to work with the children" (Noguera 2008, p.143). Cultural innovation and knowledge gleaned from their lived experiences are the basis of students' concentration in the spoken word unit, and constitute a large portion of the assets, knowledge, and experience that Noguera references.

        The spoken word unit provides information that can be immediately utilized in the development of curriculum while also serving as a means for teachers to begin the process of "tak[ing] the time to get to know their students" (Noguera 2008, p.143). A scarcity of time is often cited by teachers as a factor that interferes with relationship building and implementation of non-core programs. The unit supported by this work responds to this limitation as it can be carried out when possible by a teaching artist or other third party.

        This study utilizes student-written spoken word poetry to build relationships between teacher and students, and students to each other, and gathers information about students' lives and cultures. My intent for this research is to respond to the questions: 1) In what ways does student written spoken word poetry depict identity formations in a manner that supports the creation of Culturally Relevant and Sustainable Curriculum?; and 2) To what extent and in what ways do spoken word poetry workshops contribute to the development of a classroom culture based on mutual understanding of lived experiences of culture?

Spoken word poetry is forged from a tradition of courageous vulnerability, precisely empowered communication, confrontation of difference, and direct address of issues hampering social justice. Engaging students through this art form has the potential to build the trust necessary for a process purporting to create an atmosphere where participants are comfortable expressing personal information. An interview with the teacher and 55 student poems which depict their identity formations and personal relationships to culture/background comprise the data sets that provide insight into the first research question. Student and teacher interviews and a pre/post questionnaire function to bring information to light regarding to the second research question. In both of these data sets I have illuminated various generative themes that were either used as lesson plans intended to produce student poetry that aids in the development of curriculum, or arose after rigorous analysis of interviews and questionnaires. In either case, these generative themes serve to structure my analysis of the data as well as provide the theoretical context that underpins the usefulness of the data.

Challenging the deficit model

In Valencia's book, *Dismantling Contemporary Deficit Thinking: Educational Thought and Practice,* one central point of analysis is on the act of victim blaming. He describes the deficit model as a process through which blame for educational performance of minority students is placed squarely on minority students rather than the educational system. Students from marginalized backgrounds and communities have been historically under-served by North American school systems. This work places specific scrutiny on and intends to alleviate certain effects of the deficit model of education, which is both a cause of and created by this institutionalized pattern. CRSP functions in any educational setting, though it has specific impact in situations where the deficit model of education is in place.

The deficit model is fueled by and perpetuates negative perspectives of students who attend schools in low-income neighborhoods. These perspectives frame students as having a diminished capacity for achieving educational success because they are confronted with harsh conditions, experience unhealthy living environments, ascribe to value sets which do not prioritize education, encounter daily circumstances which hamper the possibility of intellectual rigor, and are under constant threat of violence in their communities (Valencia, 2010). Schools affected by the deficit model are often underfunded, staffed with under-trained teachers, and led by administrators who follow a pattern of changing schools every few years. The deficit model functions by "blaming the victim," where many of these perceptions and conditions are considered to be the fault of the students or the cultures they participate in. When these perceptions go unchecked, they often result in a school environment that is counter posed to or looking to remedy students' lived cultural experiences.

CRSP alleviates this disconnect between culture and school by placing students' culture at the center of the curriculum; in this position, students' lived experience and cultural background become validated as worthy of intellectual rigor. This thereby challenges the fallacy that students in low-income neighborhoods experience a lived condition that prohibits vigorous intellectual pursuit. By planting the curriculum within students' lived and cultural experiences, the myths and realities of their particular situations are exposed and expressed.

Youth poetry which explores first hand experiences of a deficit model school often attests to the reality of the harsh conditions and the lack of confidence disseminated by the educational system. It is of paramount importance to recognize the distinction between students who are actively encountering systematic oppression and the erroneous conclusions drawn from the deficit model.

CRSP requires specific personal information about students' lived experiences in order to function in a manner that does not reproduce cultural generalizations. Thus far, the literature does not indicate a presence of specific methods designed to bring such information to light. This research is intended to address this absence. Furthermore, CRSP thrives by putting theory into practice, and as such, this research is designed to be used to create and augment curriculum within the classroom where the study was carried out.

So what do we mean by "culture" any way?

If CRSP endeavors to situate pedagogy within the cultures of students then it must be based in students' actual experiences of these cultures. Therefore, a definition of culture is lacking if it only focuses on the traditional practices of large groups of people (ie: African American, Latino, Asian, etc. or on sub cultures and sub groups such as South East Asian, North western United States, Central American, etc.) as these groups do not necessarily represent the lived experiences of today's students. This is not to say that students from systemically oppressed cultural groups should not be focused on as beneficiaries of CRSP; it is to say that in order to understand the particular way that students relate to these cultures, we must identify precise examples of cultural interaction.

There is a general lack of discussion in the literature around what is meant by "culture" when Culturally Relevant Pedagogy is discussed. As the metaphysical nature of culture is itself without necessary and sufficient conditions, it is by no means clear what phenomenon the term "culture" indicates. A pedagogy that is designed to reflect students' cultural background ought to have clear parameters as to what counts as culture.

 The following analysis of data will view culture as a multidimensional, ever-changing collection of practices, theories, beliefs, literacies, and perspectives. The sociologist John Brown

Child's (2003) book, *Transcommunality: From the Politics of Conversion to the Ethics of Respect*, will be drawn on to provide basis for identifying the usage of the term "culture". Childs's theory of 'emplacements of affiliation' will be utilized to understand the usage of the term "culture" in a physically tangible manner, and will be discussed in depth in the next chapter.

A concrete actualization of culture exists in the landscapes that are carved out by the rivers of students' identities. This study seeks to provide multiple snapshots of these geographical formations as rendered through the lens of student-written spoken word poetry. Students take us on a voyage down intersecting rivers of identity while pointing out, in emotionally vulnerable and intellectually illuminating descriptions, various cultural emplacements of affiliation.

My journey into a career as a professional spoken word poet and teaching artist

I began performing and teaching poetry full-time in 2011 after founding the non profit Digital Storytellers, which provides service to San Francisco Bay Area urban junior and high schools through in-class spoken word poetry and film making workshops. Through this teaching experience and performing internationally on solo and poetry troupe projects, I have come to attain firsthand an understanding of how spoken word poetry facilitates direct address of social justice issues while also promoting courageous vulnerability in writing and performance. Two of my poems, *The Myth of Cool,* and *Wake up Call* (https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EeG7o6IowVo, and https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZAfKREYZHKs, also included in appendix 1), serve to outline my work as a spoken word artist and provide examples of both confrontation of social justice issues and the trust-building faculty of personal vulnerability. I urge the reader to follow the links to the performances of these pieces, as the visceral affective charge of this art form comprises a primary aspect of its ability to address social justice issues and build trust through courageous vulnerability.

My personal experience with spoken word poetry has led me to revel in the deep contemplation that is funneled into highly emotive expressions. Having worked in education for five years prior to embarking on this creative journey, I was left feeling compelled to do what I could to wed the personally and socially evocative nature of spoken word poetry to the process of education. Serving as the founder and executive director of an arts education non-profit and a curator of and performer at spoken word poetry events, provides me with a unique perspective on the work produced by students and how it can serve to inform pedagogy.

Over the past seven years that I have been enmeshed in the spoken word scene, I have witnessed countless moments where individuals of all ages tear the roof off the limitations of how vulnerable and forthcoming a person can become when given the proper training and context. It is these years of experience that have motivated me to conduct this study designed to bring forth student information that pertains to their dynamic personal relationships to their background and culture which are brought to life in the vibrant rivers of identity that flow through these young people every day. Saying that spoken word poetry is the art of surveying cultural landscapes and exploring rivers of identity is not just me trying to compose a metaphor; it is the clearest way that I know how to put it.

My cultural background is of upper middle class European-American descent, and I have buckets of pride in my Irish, French, and Cuban roots, and am learning to love my Swedish, English, and German heritage (as anyone who says they love every aspect of their background is probably not telling you the truth). I have a few famous ancestors, one of whom was from New Orleans by way of Afro-Cuba and served as captain of the first non-white regiment of soldiers during the US Civil War. When he realized that his troops were being treated poorly due to their background as people of color, he left the war and went before Congress to petition for equal

treatment under the law for all citizens, and he was one of the first people of color to do so. This person provides one of my inspirations to work towards social justice. I have always yearned for direct contact and spoken word poetry has been a godsend for me as it has provided a continuous spiritual experience,backed by a chorus of personal truths reverberating through cafes, bars, and any other venue that will have us.

I connected this portion of my history to my present context in order to provide an example of the intersections of identity I mentioned, as well as to frame a large portion of my motivation to do this work. Knowledge of my genealogy is a privilege that people who hail from individuals brought here under chattel slavery do not receive. Even in my case, my grandmother's generation was infused with racism to the point that the reality of this ancestor remained a whispered rumor until prejudice died with the elderly. We can see that the landscape of culture requires us to sing it into view, to trace paths into the various enclaves that we affiliate with every day. Without our active engagement in this uncovering, how could we ever presume to build a curriculum that comes anywhere near being culturally relevant?

Mapping out the study

This study has provided me with a life changing opportunity to draw upon various intersections of my pedagogical, academic, and artistic experiences. As such, these chapters serve to provide the framework, data, and conclusions to the afore mentioned questions. In Chapter 2, I lay out the relevant literature and lead the reader through the theoretical framework that provides the foundation for this study. The theories utilized to underpin the context for the data are crucial in that they also informed my lesson plans for poetry workshops. In this framework, I drew from sociology as well as pedagogic theory in order to address the larger

issue of how to understand culture. Each piece of literature reviewed is referred back to in the study in order to clarify how it pertains to my central questions.

In Chapter 3, before moving to look at the data that informs this study, I take stock of the methods for gathering and analyzing data. Specific focus here is placed on my role as a teaching artist and how that affects my relationships with students. I also provide a detailed look at the school, the interviewed students and teacher in whose class the study took place. Spoken word poetry thrives when it is a reflection of the specific cultural context in which it is written. This chapter serves to map out the cultural terrain that gave rise to these poems. Finally, I lay out who I am, my personal history, and my motivation for doing this work. In a study that drives to illuminate the personal and cultural aspects of students lives in order to develop curriculum, it would be out of place if my own identity were not included. How could I expect to illuminate the rivers of students' identities without also highlighting my own?

Chapter 4 provides analysis of selected excerpts of student poems in order to respond to my first research question: in what ways does student written spoken word poetry depict identity constructions in a manner that supports the creation of Culturally Relevant and Sustainable Curriculum? I have structured this chapter in accordance with with three primary themes that make up my framework. As such, poem excerpts are categorized within one of three sections where I analyze them in regards to the relevant theory, and provide suggestions as to how they could be used in the development of curriculum. I also analyze portions of the teacher interview that respond to the question of curriculum development in this chapter.

In Chapter 5, I delve into student interviews, pre/post questionnaires, and the teacher interview in order to address the second research question: to what extent and in what ways do spoken word poetry workshops contribute to the development of a classroom culture based on

mutual understanding of cultural experiences? These data sets are analyzed through the lens of three generative themes that arose through months of analysis.

I conclude the study in Chapter 6 with an exposition of the generative themes brought forth from poems, interviews, and questionnaires. From these themes I draw two primary findings that respond to the research questions. This chapter serves to wrap up the study where I revisit the limitations and point towards future avenues for extended and short-term study. If this study serves to provide maps of the waterways of identity and the cultural landscapes that surround them, then it is only fitting that I provide a legend for this study, a map for the map as it were.

Chapter 2: Foundations and Blueprints: Literature Review and Theoretical Framework

CRSP places considerable attention on understanding the cultural contexts of students. This understanding provides the backdrop for planting education within lived cultural experiences. In accordance with this valuation on context, this chapter serves to provide the theoretical backdrop for this study. Along with literature on CRSP, I include a discussion of various studies that have employed spoken word poetry as a tool for pedagogic enhancement.

Concepts used in the theoretical framework

In order to explore my two research questions stated in the previous chapter, I draw upon three theories that I describe below: "emplacements of affiliation", "discourse of authenticity" and "third space identity construction." These theories contribute to the creation of CRSP by providing a lens through which lived experiences of cultural emplacements are the primary focus; constraints and demands placed on identity due to affiliations become salient, and the intersections of various aspects of identity come to light. Development of CRSP requires that specific attention is placed on students' lived experiences of culture and how these experiences affect identity.

Not only do these theories frame my data analysis but they also shaped the creation of the lesson plans for the writing workshops where the poems were written and performed. These theories were chosen as the basis for the lesson plans as they provide an entry point into brainstorms and discussions on how identity is shaped by cultural affiliations. I argue that the

theories utilized in this study serve as a direct benefit to teachers in that they provide frames for student experience that are germane to the creation of curriculum.

The solid ground of culture: Emplacements of affiliation

The composition and implementation of Culturally Relevant and Sustainable Curriculum requires a clear understanding of culture and how students' identities reflect a relationship to their culture. Childs describes emplacements of affiliation as, " A site of collective life shared by a group of people that provides them with a rooted and demarcated sense of shared perspective and affiliation" (Childs 2003, p. 25). An emplacement of affiliation can be located geographically as pertaining to a specific space that a group of people spend time in, or can be located ideologically in regards to a philosophy, methodology, or practice that someone is aligned with. Through this theory, Childs puts forth the thoughts that culture is rooted in affiliation with specific places or ideologies and practices, and that an individual likely has multiple affiliations that can be discrete or intersecting. In short, culture exists in specific places (neighborhood, classroom, park, cafe, etc.) that people spend time in.

Emplacements of affiliation will be useful in understanding what is meant by culture in that it focuses not on broad racial terms such as Latino, White, Black, and Asian, but on the specific places and ideologies where these groups interact and share experience. This theory is particularly helpful as it identifies the points of access where people develop specific relationships with culture. A curriculum that seeks to situate education within culture must be aware of how culture is experienced by the students. Defining culture as an emplacement of affiliation provides a framework that maintains perspective on the concrete actualization of

culture. For the purpose of this study, whenever I use the term culture I am referring to the theory of emplacements of affiliation.

In this sense there is a unique culture to every home, classroom, cafe, park, neighborhood, etc. This definition of culture differs from what I term as macro definitions of culture which focus on large scale emplacements identified by race, religion, ethnicity, etc. Incorporating emplacements of affiliation when constructing culturally relevant curriculum requires an understanding of students' lived experiences in regards to places, groups, and ideologies. Macro conceptions of culture rely more on large scale generalizations as they apply to extremely large groups of people. A conception of culture focusing on specific places allows for a multi-valent understanding that is more apt to reflect specific affiliations where students are engaged daily in multiple cultures at various levels of involvement. Culture then becomes a phenomenon created and participated in with each affiliation. Human involvement exists on a tangible and active axis where specific places hold the gates to understanding how belonging is associated with a particular group.

It is important to keep in mind that relationships with groups can be both positive and limiting. Too often, culture is viewed through a value neutral perspective or as something that is categorically beneficial. Through an understanding of culture framed through emplacements of affiliation, it becomes clear that an infinite variety of effects on identity formation can arise from a feeling of belonging with a certain group in a certain space. In specific cases, students attest to cultural templates that limit the scope of their identity. Conversely, situations exist where the intersection of multiple affiliations creates a nuanced and unique picture of an individual. Regardless of the positive or limiting aspect, any perceived identity formation of a student serves as an asset in the creation of CRSP.

The confluence of rivers of identity: Third space identity construction

One theory that places focus on a positive effect that cultural affiliations have on identity is brought forth in the concept of third space identity construction. In this theory, multifaceted representations of identity appear in the intersection of different categories of an individual's identity. As is described by Laur (2009), constructions of multiple aspects of identity,

reveal a gathering together of the dichotomous elements of a person's identity and

a juxtaposing and restructuring of those elements in an attempt to better understand

the relationships between them, and how those relationships, as much as the

elements themselves, contribute to a person's sense of self. (p. 59)

For example, a student who identifies as both Asian and an artist, or as urban and motivated to work towards social justice provides the basis for understanding how intersections paint a picture which reflect nuanced identities. Through observing the confluence of identities, a move is made past basic generalizations associated with identities inherited from cultures. The creation of CRSP requires a personal and unique understanding of who students are and how they relate to the many facets of culture. In order to base education in a student's culture, it is crucial to include as many cultural elements as possible that might contribute to their identity. As Ladson-Billings (2009) states, " The primary aim of culturally relevant teaching is to assist in the development of a "relevant black personality" that allows African Americans to choose academic excellence yet still identify with African American culture" (pg 20). Though framed within her study focusing specifically on African American students, this thought holds true across the board in that it identifies that the aim of the pedagogy is to connect education with the development of a robust cultural identity that is not comprised of generalizations. Ladson-Billings recommends that

teachers draw on the many facets of a student's experience of culture by basing the educational process out of numerous cultural referents.

A single discrete term or list of terms does not provide an accurate description of a culture or an individual's relationship to one. Identities that arise from intersecting affiliations point towards unique personal narratives that are formed from specific lived experiences. New intersections of identity occur nearly daily as students involve themselves with different groups in different places engaging in new activities. These intersections can create both a confluence of identities that the student draws strength from, and a collision of conflicting identities which evoke consternation. The lens of third space opens a dialog where innovation and expression of identity is promoted, and cultural assumptions dissolve in the vast and tumultuous intersecting rivers of identity.

To be _____you need to be _____: Discourse of authenticity

The limiting aspect of cultural influence on identity formations can be understood through the concept of "discourse of authenticity". Authenticity can create a template that individuals feel compelled to map themselves onto in order to be considered a member of a particular group or culture (Low, 2011). Writing from a perspective where identities are performative and dependent on context and purpose, Low is weary of rigid template-based authenticity in that it limits the scope of possible manifestations of identity, " An emphasis on a 'true' or 'real' self or culture therefore seems to reify what are in fact constant and dynamic works in process" (2011, p.31). The discourse of authenticity could be fostered by peer pressure, but it also examines larger systemic ways in which templates of behavior and identity are prescribed/ believed to be prescribed and perpetuated. It is crucial to determine a limiting template only when it is identified by the student. If we as educators make this judgment we run the risk of

perpetuating the deficit model by framing students' cultural affiliations as handicaps. The purpose of the discourse of authenticity is not to remove students from cultural affiliations, but rather to provide a perspective where they can take stock of the effects that these affiliations have on their identity.

When constructing or adapting CRSP, it is important to draw on any relationship a student has with their culture as an asset regardless if the relationship is positive or limiting. Each expression of a personal relationship to culture is a potential cornerstone for furthering dialog based on continuous mutual understanding. When engaging students in regards to affiliations that might levy a demand for authenticity, it is crucial to maintain a perspective based on compassion and inquiry. Discussions and writing exercises undertaken with students who are motivated by this theory have the potential to probe into emotionally sensitive terrain. Within these sensitive moments relationships form that allow teachers to engage in an ongoing process of learning and inquiry on a person-to-person level (Noguera, 2008). When the roles of student and teacher engender a dispassionate neutrality, it drives a wedge between people and hampers empathic and intellectual connection; when this occurs the value of teaching and learning as a fundamental human act becomes lost.

Spoken Word Pedagogy

Bringing spoken word into the classroom is not an innovation of this study. I will examine three prominent researchers in the field: Fischer (2003, 2005, 2007), Low (2006, 2011) and Kelly (2002) to underpin the history of this art form, its benefit for pedagogical use, and how it re-frames what is considered to be academically appropriate knowledge/communication. In each of these studies, researchers worked alongside teaching artists who led daily writing and performance workshops with students in school. In these cases, the teaching artists were well

versed performance poets familiar with the lineage of spoken word. Low provides a succinct

recounting of the history and components of spoken word specifically in its manifestation in

slam poetry, a competition where random audience members score poems immediately after they

are performed,

> Slam poetry emerged in the 1980's, first at the Get Me High bar in Chicago and then in
>
> other major urban centers...Slam poetry is populist, designed to win the hearts and minds
>
> of the audience: it tells stories that blend and move between the personal and
>
> sociopolitcal; it is often urgent, sometimes sexy, and regularly funny and its language
>
> tends to be vernacular and reflect the multilingual context of its emergence. (Low, 2006,
>
> p.14)

Of specific importance to this study are her indications that slam is comprised from a

vernacular that emphasizes personal and sociopolitical urgency. These components have

contributed to an art form that excels in presenting meaningful aspects of the poet's life framed

within a critical and personally or culturally relevant context. Differing from page poetry which

relies on multiple readings in order to be comprehended, spoken word thrives on reaching

directly into the minds and hearts of the audience at the moment that it is performed. The

immediate scintillation prized within spoken word provides multiple benefits in a classroom:

engaging students, supporting a classroom culture comprised of meaningful communications,

and presentation of issues relevant to the audience, to name a few.

The urgency that sits at the core of this art form frequently takes on a revolutionary tone

where poems serve to bring attention to and motivate action towards social justice. This element

of spoken word makes it an apt tool for furthering critical pedagogical frameworks designed to

place the politics of difference and power under a rigorous lens of examination. Kelly (2002)

underscores this critical element,

> In the poetics of struggle and lived experiences, in the utterances of ordinary folks, in the
>
> cultural products of social movements, in the reflections of activists, we discover the
>
> many different cognitive maps of the future, of the world not yet born. (p. 9)

A focus on utterances of ordinary folks returns the power of naming the world in an

academic and artistic context to a populist stand point. This return brings with it a meta message

that anyone's opinion on the world is valuable and worthy of analysis rather than sequestering

this to the ivory tower of academia. Along with ordinary folks, Kelly identifies the reflections of

activists as a primary contribution to the art form. This revolutionary nature both invites students

to sing social critique from a stage up on high as well as to inspire classroom discussion of

current social justice issues.

Focusing communication on social justice draws a parallel to another art form well within

the majority of people's awareness. Depending on the region where the school exists students

may not be familiar with spoken word, though all of them will be acquainted with hip-hop, the

famous cousin of this art form. When students have prior experience with hip-hop, the

communication style of spoken word is immediately relevant to their lived experiences. Low

(2011) examines the pedagogical impact of this overlap,

> Spoken word, rap music, and slam poetry exist in a similar cultural nexus, mutually
>
> informing each other. That said, they are not coterminous, and their differences can be
>
> profoundly pedagogic, as students already invested in rap, either as lyric writers,
>
> performers or listeners, can build on those interests and/or skills or develop competencies
>
> as practitioners or audiences for spoken word. (p. 152)

Bringing hip-hop into the classroom has been a method used by teachers for over two decades now. The critical lens presented in many hip-hop compositions is stylistically and thematically similar to spoken word thereby offering an immediate entry into many students' realms of personal experience. An interesting thought presented here is Low's inclusion of building competency as a spoken word audience member. Perhaps more so than hip-hop, spoken word relies on a vocally engaged audience that is not mired in a passive watching of the performance but rather is participating throughout with vocal and physical response. Audience participation in a classroom setting means that students are prompted to speak up, to vocalize opinion of their peers work, to encourage or critique and most importantly to be lively and boisterous in an out-of-school manner. When undergone in this form, the revolutionary and personal topics presented in student work are not simply academic but are born directly of the classroom culture attested to whenever an audience member calls out during a moving performance.

When students are versed in hip-hop vernacular, inclusion of this art form in the classroom validates this literacy as worthy of academic rigor. Drawing on multiple vernaculars or literacies is a time-honored tradition in spoken word as students are urged to express themselves in all styles at their disposal. In Fisher's (2007) work, she recounts how the teaching artist in residence was able to promote this pluralistic form of communication, "literacy resembled a multi-colored kite anchored by a spool of thread held by many hands…I want you to be literate in as many ways as possible" (p. 5). Valuing the natural vernacular of students is a hallmark element of culturally relevant pedagogy. In a pluralistic society, these speech patterns are apt to take many shapes and colors held by all hands participating in the spoken word workshop.

Restructuring what is considered to be appropriate forms of communication also leads to a revaluation of what we mean by intelligent communication as is made evident in the student interviews conducted by Low (2011) in her study, "A regular theme across the two years in student interviews was surprise about their classmates about how smart they were, or emotionally or politically aware" (p. 25). The valuation of multiple forms of communication allows for intellect expressed in means specific to the students' cultural background to flow into the classroom.

Expression of personally meaningful thoughts and experiences is at the very core of spoken word. The focus of the artist is not just on the writing topic but also on imparting an immediate visceral impact on the audience who is meant to receive an inkling of what the poet feels. Often times students make creative and cognitive leaps when courageously delving into these heated subjects as was the case for one of the students in Fisher's (2007) study, "This was a breakout poem for Kari, who accepted Joe's challenge to confront racism as well as 'classically negative' statements people made about Blacks. Kari took advantage of Joe's encouragement that 'you need to say what you need to say'" (2007, p. 48). Work presented in class takes flight in a pedagogy of relevance and personal truth where students' lives become the primary text for their writings. By enlightening the class with what they are directly experiencing, relevance is not approached through guess work or generalizations, rather it is being taught to the teacher by the students as they take part in guiding the educational experience.

Spoken word pedagogies place focus directly on what students find to be personally moving and on what is relevant to their cultural affiliations. By providing a wide birth for acceptable forms of communication, students are not forced to express themselves in a rigidly

academic style. Rather, they are given encouragement to hone a vehicle customized to fit their personal truth, their ever-changing river of identity.

CRSP: Education planted within the soil of culture

The literature in the field of CRSP describes a methodology for creating a pedagogy that is based on an understanding of students' cultural background and lived experience. This pedagogy is expressed via a curriculum that draws from students' cultures and a teaching strategy that is reflective of students' lived experiences. Teaching strategy and curriculum include such practices as: conducting classroom discussions on race, difference, oppression, racism, and reading assignments that question status-quo perpetuating themes in education.

The most current studies to be cited in this review examine what is meant by "relevant" and how to examine students' relationship to culture. These particular studies are important additions to the literature as they explore questions such as: what is the point of creating curriculum that is relevant to students lives? And, how do we understand students' relationships to their background?

Six general themes in the literature of CRSP

This literature review will explore six general themes in the literature that pertain to this study. Specifically, the intent of this review is to place focus on understanding students' cultural identities by observing their relationships to certain affiliations, providing an educational environment that supports a community of learners who are contributing to a mutual understanding of each other's background, addressing aspects of oppression, and valuing each student's unique methods of communication as assets to building curriculum. The literature reviewed here runs the gamut of hall mark writings that helped to establish the field and recent work that examines new avenues in the evolution of CRSP.

Observing the many facets of culture and what keeps us from doing so

This theme addresses forging an understanding of culture that goes beyond "food and festivals" or equating race or ethnicity with culture. This literature review focuses on aspects of this theme found in the writings of Jackson (2011), Gillborn (2000), Youdell (2003), Leonardo (2002), and Valencia (2010).

CRSP is intended to respond to and be reflective of students' cultures. This can only be done adequately when the focus on culture is broad enough to account for a wide range of possible manifestations. Patrick E. Jackson (2011) identifies multiple shortcomings in regards to the use of CRSP when framed in a limited definition of culture. Specifically Jackson points out that CRSP is being prescribed only for communities that have been negatively affected by

> historical inequities of race, ethnicity and language (which are used) to define the utility of culturally relevant pedagogy. This depicts a limited application of what constitutes culture and who could benefit from making schooling more reflective of their community and home lives. (p. 593)

Though CRSP does place specific focus on historical inequities of race and how these inequities effect education, an important distinction must be made. Focusing only on historical inequities does not allow for a multifaceted understanding of culture to arise. As Youdel (2003) points out, when a definition of culture focuses specifically on inequity, it perpetuates identity stereotypes and reinforces patterns of marginalization. Even if a student has a background with a culture that has been historically oppressed, there is no guarantee that this student identifies with this aspect of their culture. Jackson goes further to point out that, "by delineating culture as being something unique only to historically marginalized groups (by race, ethnicity and language), inadvertently the volume reproduces the assumption that culture/multiculturalism is anything

other than that which is stereotypically White or Americana" (2011, p. 594). With this sentiment, Jackson goes on to equate that defining culture as something unique only to marginalized groups places culture in terms utilized in the deficit model of education (Valencia 2010). In the deficit model of education, students are expected to fail due to internal and cultural deficiencies; defining a culture strictly as marginalized places the students' culture in a weakened position and does not pay attention to the strengths inherent in that culture. This is not to say that patterns of oppression should be ignored; it is to say that focusing only on this is problematic as it can further marginalize and depreciate the strengths within these cultures. Finally Jackson concludes by addressing other possible nuances to define and understand culture; he states:

> CRP need not be limited to at-risk, last-chance, marginalized and disenfranchised students. Future volumes on CRP may consider depicting a broader scope of cultural experiences such as rural communities, the urban elite, sexual orientation, gender, and immigration and nationality to mention a few. (2011, p. 594)

This list is a drop in the bucket in regards to how multiple facets are present in a comprehensive understanding of culture. The point here is not to downplay the adverse effects of cultural marginalization, but rather, to define culture through specific nuances of affiliation. By understanding the specific nuances regarding students' relationships to their cultural background, analysis of the effects of cultural marginalization is apt to be more relevant than a blanket generalization of marginalization and oppression. Understanding students' relationships to culture through their spoken word poetry writings facilitates communication of the strengths within various affiliations as well as students' specific experiences with marginalization.

A multifaceted understanding of culture is not championed by static and marginalizing definitions. This premise is pointed out by Gilborn (2000), who draws a parallel between the

field of multicultural education and superficial representations of culture that further the marginalization of minority cultures by highlighting them as "the other." These superficial representations of culture do not serve the modality of CRSP as they do not indicate specific aspects of culture that are relevant to students. For culture to be understood in a non-superficial manner, attention must be paid to its fluid and continually changing aspects, to view culture more as a verb than a noun. To clarify this point, Gilborn cites Gilory, "Culture, even the culture which defines the groups we know as races, is never fixed, finished or final. It is fluid, it is actively and continually made and remade," (1990, p. 80). In order to witness the fluid remaking of culture, the ways in which it is changing must be highlighted. When a student's identity is effected by their relationship to culture they are actively remaking culture as this synthesis of identity and background creates a new iteration of culture unique to the student. These specific changes point to a multi-faceted understanding of culture that is not simply equated with race and ethnicity. Writing exercises such as spoken word poetry provide a venue for students to present these new iterations and explore the various and fluid affiliations that they interact with everyday.

Developing curriculum based on understanding students' relationships to background

A major crux of this research is the thought that CRSP must be placed within students' cultures rather than using culture as a bridge to acceptable curriculum. This general theme focuses on developing curriculum based within culture by understanding how students' identities reflect their relationship to background. It is present in the writings of (Ladson-Billings, 1995); Ladson-Billings (2009), Kwock Hu (2009), Leonardo (2002), Valencia (2010), Nieto (1999) and Gay (2000).

A specific ordering of priorities allows a pedagogy to form that facilitates this understanding of students' identities. Ladson-Billings (1995) points us towards this order of

priorities as she quotes Bartolome, "don't focus on the right teaching strategy but rather on the reality, history and perspective of students" (1994, p.160). This sentiment echoes the premise of CRSP which places the curriculum within students' culture. It also places attention on the notion of understanding the students before attempting to forge the correct teaching strategy. The next logical question is how best to understand the students? This research drives to highlight the personal and culturally illuminating nature of spoken word poetry as an apt tool for this purpose.

A certain paradigm shift in education is required in order to place an understanding of students' relationship to their culture as a top priority. Rather than seeing the students as vacant vessels to be filled with information (referred to by Freire, 1970 as the "banking method of education") an alternative approach is required that focuses on the wisdom and values that students bring into the classroom. Ladson-Billings (2009) provides further input in regards to this thought with her ideas on values clarification. She presents the notion that,

all students come to school with values, and it is the teacher's role to help the student to understand or clarify these values. Rather than attempt to shape or indoctrinate the students with a particular set of values, the curriculum serves to help students examine what they believe and why they believe it. (p. 79)

By participating in values clarification, the teacher enters into a dialog with students where relationships are built and understanding of their current connection to culture is realized. Students' values provide an entry point into a discussion of their relationship to culture rather than being an indication of their relationship to culture as is pointed out by Valencia (2010).

When the curriculum is based on understandings of students' identities and their relationships to culture, specific elements of that relationship must be focused on. Kwock Hu (2009) remarks on students' culture as a cognitive and linguistic recourse rather than a hindrance.

In this sense, the incorporation of cognitive and linguistic elements are added to the general understanding of students' culture. Kwock Hu makes note that in order to facilitate a community of learners, the teacher must build high levels of personal and cultural knowledge about his or her students. Spoken word poetry serves to provide a venue for students to communicate with the linguistic elements present in their out-of-school speech patterns. This type of communication serves to both create a community of learners as well as to furnish understanding necessary for the development of curriculum.

When building curriculum based on understanding students' relationship to culture, it is crucial to allow for a space for their expression of educational instances where they deem material to be culturally irrelevant. Sonia Nieto (1999) presents one such situation where students report causes for educational burn out. She cites this instance through a student's belief that "what is in this book is not gonna let us know who we really are as people" (p. 187). In CRSP, scripted curriculum is related to and viewed through the lens of the students' cultural background and personal values/lived experience. Understanding students' relationship to their cultural background and lived experience provides the landscape in which the project of education takes place. Spoken word poetry directly addresses this student's statement in that it allows education to be fully focused around personal inquiry where the writer probes their own history, thoughts, and emotions in order to generate material.

Building curriculum from an understanding of students' identities and relationships to culture situates education within culture. Rather than connecting education to culturally relevant material this stance allows teachers and students to respond to the culture in which they exist. Kwock Hu (2009) describes an exercise that bases education within culture where students interpret lyrics of a familiar song as a method to highlight their analytic abilities. This example

shows how the current culture of the students is analyzed and used as an example of higher level thinking. The teacher is not bringing in an example of culture but instead is focusing attention on the culture that is already present for the students. The practice of analyzing familiar lyrics is a mainstay of the spoken word poetry workshop. By bringing material based out of students' lived experiences into the classroom, an invitation is issued to present elements of identity that are reflective of lived experience.

Garnering understanding of students' relationships to culture involves building awareness around how learning and communication styles reflect these relationships. Gay (2000) claims that, "overall characterizations of learning styles suggest that they are not monolithic, situationally idiosyncratic or static traits. Instead they are multidimensional, habituated processes that are the 'central tendencies' of how students from different ethnic groups engage with learning." (p. 151). She goes on to describe the cultural learning and communication styles of African American students as including "movement, performance, dramatic flair, cooperative learning, group context, personalization, rhythm, emotionality and holistic engagement" (156). Incorporation of these aspects of the student's learning style into activities and assignments demonstrates an educational system that is situated within the culture of the students. By responding to the learning styles that are present in the classroom, the educational system is situated within culture rather than bringing culture to the students. An example of the incorporation of these aspects is found in spoken word poetry where students work in groups, are encouraged to be passionately boisterous, and to write/perform with a personalized rhythm. The writing and performance of spoken word poetry is designed to be customized to reflect the author, and is ideal for exhibiting the communication styles of students.

A curriculum composed of multiple literacies

"Multiple literacies" refers to the concept that there is not a singular form of literacy or standard language that determines the ultimate precedence for being literate. Rather the theory of multiple literacies presents the idea that many dialects, vernaculars, cultural speech patterns,and communicative practices including body language, tonal variance, dress, and images all present valid and important forms of literacy each with their specific strengths, contexts, and nuances to be mastered. This theme is present in the writings of Knowles (2012), Ladson-Billings (2009), Kwock-Hu (2009), Valencia (2010) and Gay (2000). The theory of multiple literacies when applied in an educational setting places attention on including in the curriculum linguistic practices relevant to students' lived experiences in the curriculum.

In many respects, language is the ultimate signifier of culture. When a single literacy is considered to be superior to or more appropriate than all others, then the cultures of the excluded literacies become diminished. If the goal of CRSP is to sustain the development of culture, then inclusion of multiple literacies within pedagogy is crucial. Fred Edward Knowles (2012) comments on the destructive effects of excluding certain literacies,

> The problem has historically been that English has been insisted upon as being the only language present, and with it Western European culture as being the only culture validated. However, in the Indian world, language is an integral aspect of culture. Without language, culture dies. (p. 897)

This sentiment reflects the imperative need to affirm the language, dialect, and vernacular used by students and include it as a method for and subject of analysis. CRSP espouses the notion of education being situated within culture. According to Knowles, culture cannot exist without language; by extension CRSP cannot ignore the specific literacies that students employ.

This then begs a recurring question: how are teachers to determine what literacies students employ? If the school in question happens to espouse a rigidly formal standard for behavior, then it is likely that the students are not allowed to speak and write as they do elsewhere. In this situation, a tool such as spoken word poetry fulfills this need through promoting expression of thoughts, experiences, or emotions in what ever language the students choose.

Understanding students' literacies and including them in curriculum does not necessarily establish relationships of trust where a dialog based on mutual understanding as proposed by Noguerra (2008) can flourish. In order to build these relationships, the teacher must be able to connect with students to some degree as a person in their lives rather than just as a teacher they are forced to spend time with. Ladson-Billings (1995) remarks about the advantages of incorporating students' most familiar vernacular, "As they observed teacher-student interactions and participation structures, they found teachers who used language interaction patterns that approximated the students' home cultural patterns were more successful in improving student academic performance" (p. 466). This premise supports the use of multiple literacies as the teacher is providing an example of students' out-of-class linguistic practices as a vestige of knowledge to be valued as worthy of academic rigor. The practice endorsed by Ladson-Billings also serves to create a community of learners where the teacher is a member of the intellectual community rather than presiding over it. When a teacher is unable to acquire these sort of speech patterns, a spoken word poetry facilitator can fulfill this role. In this situation, the classroom as intellectual community is preserved as the students are able to dialog with an instructor as they would with other people from their community.

Utilizing multiple literacies also serves the purpose of heightening levels of participation in the classroom. Gay (2000) notes that the presence of familiar literacies dictate how involved

the student will become in the educational arena. Communication styles that reflect students' lived experience are more apt to promote student inclusion and participation in the classroom. Gay also presents the thought that rejecting students' communication styles can be equated with a rejection of person-hood. The utilization of multiple literacies is essential in facilitating a community of learners where participants' intellectual capability is affirmed.

Creating classroom behavior policy relevant to the students' cultures

This theme is directly focused around teaching strategy: creating positive relationships with students and challenging preexisting educational norms for behavior policy that are often not relevant outside of Eurocentric culture. This line of thought is present in the writings of Knowles (2012), Ladson-Billings (2009), Kwock Hu (2009), Youdell (2003), Leonardo (2002) and Gay (2000). Also addressed here are the basic standards for the ideal student and how these standards reflect educational expectations that are designed to fit with Eurocentric culture. Spoken word poetry workshops allow for a more relaxed standard of behavior where spontaneous contributions are valued. This type of communication allows for students to exhibit their culturally relevant communication styles, thus providing the teacher with an example upon which to base a reflective behavior standard.

CRSP espouses a horizontal power dynamic where the teacher is not fulfilling a totalitarian role but is instead cooperating with students and adapting curriculum to fit collective understanding. In order to achieve this dynamic, Knowles (2012) states, "The communicative model proposed by Habermas, based on discursive exchange with shared and equal power and respect, seems to be particularly well suited for the oral traditions" (p. 887). Counter posed to this model, he identifies two basic tenants of the Eurocentric conception of what it means to be an ideal student: being on task and remaining compliant. To teach in line with the discursive

method requires behavioral policy to be derived from the context in which the students exist.

This is recommended by Ladson-Billings (1995) rather than importing an assumed Eurocentric

standard. Spoken word poetry provides an opportunity for students to display their culturally

relevant communication styles and thereby aid the teacher in developing standards for behavior

that are in line with the discursive method.

   Norms for behavior that are ushered into classrooms regardless of cultural relevance

imply that school is not a place that is relevant to students' culture. Kwock Hu (2009) examines

specific assumed standards that perpetuate this exclusion,

> Studies suggest that participatory structures that are culturally incongruent such as"turn-
>
> taking" are dysfunctional. This is because this participatory structure is Eurocentric, but
>
> often presumed by most teachers to be universally accepted across all classrooms. (p. 30)

When teachers presume a one-size-fits-all behavior standard for participation, they are

not giving room to address what style of participation these students use at home. Along with a

lack of consideration for students' participation style comes a lack of positive valuation for this

communication style. When students attend schools that demand a patient "turn-taking"

participation style that may not be reflected in their homes, there is an extension statement that

the style of participation in their homes is not academically worthy and therefore not an

appropriate way to communicate intellectually. Instead of correcting students' behavior, spoken

word poetry offers an opportunity to draw on students' styles of communication an asset.

Promoting dissent from the dominant world view

CRSP focuses on breaking from the scripted curriculum which is so often created in order

to maintain what has conventionally been termed as true by the dominant power structure. This

break from the dominant world view includes but is not limited to: examining aspects of history,

including cultures outside of the dominant discourse, and generally questioning power structures especially when they uphold economic inequity based on ethnicity. This theme is present in the writings of Knowles (2012), Valencia (2010), Gay (2000), Leonardo (2002), and Nieto (1999).

Promoting critical analysis and discussion of social stratification is a primary focus of CRSP. Sustaining culture requires attention to be placed on what diminishes its vitality. Knowles (2012) makes a clear statement as to how traditional education has failed to do this, "One of the primary objectives of education has been to minimize dissenting ideas, and indeed any that conflict with the dominant world view, through socialization and forced compliance with the dominant ideology" (p. 885). The literature on CRSP cited in this review places prime attention on bringing in new ideas and perspectives to augment or replace scripted curricula. Students who attend schools that are afflicted with the deficit model are usually quite aware that their educational experience is being hampered by a systemic situation and their writing in a spoken word context is quick to reflect this and call into question the inequity. In this regard, spoken word workshops serve to bring out discussion on the effects of the dominant world view. A constant perpetuating factor of the dominant world view lurks in scripted history curriculum that contains varying degrees of inaccuracy that support the current power dynamic. Nieto (1999) conducts a case study in regards to students' explanations for educational burn out, one of which is that students believe that people (*and ideas*) that are repeated over and over (*across grade levels)* must be fakes, ie: Columbus or Pilgrims and 'Indians' being friends. This notion reflects what happens when dissenting ideas are eliminated namely that students realize they are not being presented with a counter perspective and no longer trust the educational system to provide them with a multifaceted and accurate picture of reality.

The above reason for burnout points directly to the trend of focusing curriculum only on figures, events, and ideas that promote the dominant world view. The modality of CRSP functions to call into question historical figures like Columbus and the effect of their uni-dimensional existence in curriculum as well as to provide alternative perspectives of their role in history. Having strong roots in social justice, spoken word poetry provides a venue full of invective ire towards misrepresentations of history that leave out certain groups and perpetuate advantages of others. By conducting spoken word workshops in the classroom, the teacher has the opportunity to gain understanding about students' perspectives on such matters.

The deficit model of education could not exist if dissent of the dominant world view was prevalent within education. If it were, the blatant inequity in funding and resource allocation between schools in wealthy neighborhoods vs. schools in less wealthy neighborhoods would be brought into view. Valencia (2010), presents victim blaming as one central point of analysis as to why responsibility is not brought to bear on the system that allows for these inequities. He describes the deficit model as a process through which blame for educational performance of minority students is placed squarely on minority students, rather than on the educational system. In this perspective, victim blaming is expressed by attempting to change/augment low-performing minority students rather than by conducting complex analysis of the dominant world view and consequent educational situation. Those who are diminished by a system where victim blaming hides within the general MO stand to benefit greatly from an opportunity to speak their truth in an empowered and articulate manner calling out the fallacy of their responsibility for an inequitable situation.

Creating a community of learners based on mutual understanding and respect

CRSP seeks to move past an educational paradigm where the focus is only on filling students with information. Instead a primary purpose is to inspire young people to engage in critical thinking and expression as individuals and as a collective group. CRSP functions through uniting students not in generic similarities, but in a collective sharing of different affiliations and similar experiences. This theme is present in the literature of Knowles (2012), Valencia (2010), Leonardo (2002), Ladson-Billings (1995, 2009); Gay (2000) and Kwock Hu (2009).

An esprit' de corps is instilled by expressing communicative styles reflective of cultural affiliations. Gay cites Porter and Samovar (1991) to bring forth the relationship between how we speak and where we come from as,

> an intricate matrix of interacting social acts that occur in a complex social environment that reflects the way people live and how they come to interact with and get along in their world. This social environment is culture, and if we are to truly understand communication, we must also understand culture. (p. 79)

Students join with facilitators in a spoken word workshop and present lived experiences in the vernacular in which they were experienced. A community of learners arises through this discourse that is bound together by a shared recognition of how cultural affiliation effects communication styles.

The creation of a community of learners arises through the development of interpersonal relationships formed by inquiry into lived experiences. Kwock Hu (2009) sites Collinson (1999) who claims that teachers develop these positive relationships through gathering personal and cultural knowledge about their students. This sentiment points to a strategy for developing a community of learners based on personal and cultural knowledge. The next question is how

ought teachers go about collecting this knowledge? If the end goal of the accrual of this information is to create positive relations between teachers and students as well as to provide information to formulate curriculum, then the method through which personal and cultural knowledge is attained would best serve as an example of creating positive relationships. Students' presentation of courageous and personally evocative pieces of writing bathes the room in collective understanding of lived experiences while also building positive relationships motivated by a shared witnessing of courage.

In this egalitarian community of learners, it is crucial that the teacher relinquishes power as the sole holder of worthy knowledge. Ladson-Billings (1995) proposes that teachers ought to provide space for students to act as teachers,

> Because she acknowledged a wide range of expertise, the individual students were not isolated from their peers as teacher's pets. Instead, all of the students were made aware that they were expected to excel at something and that the teacher would call on them to share that expertise with classmates. (p. 480)

This sentiment has almost become cliché though it is still entirely relevant to the practice of creating a community of learners that is not dominated by hierarchy. Giving students the role of teacher allows them to share lived experience where culturally relevant information can come to light. By generating writing where life serves as the primary text and passionately held beliefs are fodder for the creative process, students engage in the act of teaching the class about an area that they hold singular expertise: the process of their lives.

Expanding culturally responsive pedagogies:

Two recent theories providing new perspectives on CRSP

CRP was founded largely by the landmark writings of Ladson-Billings (1995), and Geneva Gay (2000) which have laid much of the groundwork for development of CRSP. In order to further the discussion of the evolution of this pedagogy, I turn to two theories that provide new insight into the shortcomings and oversights within CRP. Django Paris (2012) calls into question the terms "relevance" and "reflectivity" in regards to the effect they can have on students; Low (2011) takes us into an examination of instances where culture acts as a limiting factor on identity development. These perspectives are necessary for the evolution of this pedagogy in that they point out where this work might not be serving the students in the most sustainable manner (Paris), and where culture is not a be-all-end-all positively valuated term (Low). Consideration of these theories brings a new path for the pedagogy into view.

In order to continue the evolution of CRSP, it is vital that we assess where it might be falling short. Django Paris (2012) calls into question the effect that CRSP has on students due to the terms used to frame the pedagogy,

> I have begun to question if the terms 'relevant' and 'responsive' are really descriptive of much of the teaching and research founded upon them, and more importantly if they go far enough in their orientation to the languages and literacies or other cultural practices of communities marginalized by systemic inequalities to ensure the valuing and maintenance of our multi-ethnic and multilingual society. (p. 93)

Paris begins his critique of the terms "relevant" and "responsive" by citing the work of Gutierrez (2008) on third space theory, where culturally relevant teaching does not succeed if it merely builds bridges between marginalized cultures and the dominant culture. Rather, it

succeeds when it brings together and extends these domains in a forward-thinking third space. Paris then goes on to reference the work of Alim (2007) who makes a distinction between curriculum that is based on the lived cultural and linguistic experience of the students and one that utilizes words like "appropriate", "responsive" or "relevant" to employ the student's language and culture in teaching the "acceptable" curricular cannon. Based on these two thoughts, Paris states, "It is quite possible to be relevant to something or responsive to it without ensuring its continued presence in a student's *repertoires of practice*" (p. 95). With this thought Paris questions if the terms "relevance" and "responsive" indicate a priority of maintaining a connection to heritage.

As an alternative Paris offers the term C*ulturally Sustaining Pedagogy* which includes a requirement for curriculum to be relevant and responsive while adding the criteria of supporting students in sustaining cultural and linguistic competence, and also providing access to dominant cultural competence. This new term is directed at creating a pedagogy suited for a pluralistic society which requires both distinctly diverse cultural practices and common unifying cultural practices.

Paris envisions culturally sustaining pedagogy as having the objective of supporting the practices of young people as cultural innovators. He argues that cultural practices are dynamic, shifting, and ever-changing, as well as not abiding deterministic static linkages to racial and ethnic groups. Young people play a crucial role in offering new manifestations of traditional cultural practices. Paris sites hip-hop culture as one such venue where youth play an active role in how cultures converge, add to, and reshape home culture. He makes the statement that if a curriculum is situated within culture, it must be sensitive to both the traditional and evolving ways culture is experienced and recreated.

  If the growth of culture is sustained through the recreations of young people, then a following question is: how aware are these innovators in regards to the effects of certain aspects of culture? To presuppose that any iteration of culture points towards the healthy development of identity is to ignore the vast effects that arise when culture and identity intersect. Bronwen Low (2011) utilizes hip-hop pedagogy and spoken word poetry to analyze one such intersection specifically focusing on how identity is formed and expressed when in the presence of cultural templates that individuals feel compelled to adhere to. She uses the term "discourse of authenticity" to describe where authenticity is a limiting factor set down as a template within a specific group or culture which an individual identifies with. Low cites one example of this theory in the way hip-hop culture evolves and is limited by the usage of the phrase "keeping it real", "The concept contains an entire hip hop belief system, even an ideology, used in ways generative and restricting, creative and policing" (2011, p. 33). Through this analysis, Low points out how this central aspect of hip-hop culture contains specific guidelines and limitations for expression and identity development.

  Low goes on to state that authenticity of self as a static category does not respond to notions of identity as an ever changing compilation of numerous "available symbolic systems". She describes how a non-contextual perspective on a single authentic concept of self does not allow for "hybrid or blended identities and cultures" (2001, p. 31). The discourse of authenticity places identity construction as a conflicting phenomenon where individuals are confronted with expectations to exhibit certain traits deemed mandatory by the culture they identify with. She analyzes how students respond to, exhibit, and reflect upon these expectations in classroom discussions and slam poetry. Within these discussions it becomes apparent that the effect of these templates are not beyond the scope of students' reflection and consequent informed action.

Through her work we have striking examples of students analyzing the effect that culture has on their lives, and how their identity shifts based on their awareness of the presence of templates. Within her research, spoken word poetry workshops provide a fertile environment for students to reflect on culture in order to identify where it is generative and where it is restrictive.

While not directly addressing culturally relevant pedagogy, the theory of discourse of authenticity illuminates the multi-faceted and multi-valued relationship between identity construction and culture. Her utilization and analysis of student spoken word or slam poetry provides examples of attaining information on specific details in regards to students' lived relationships to their cultural background. Low's observations suggest that identity construction is a constant navigation with numerous forces levying various effects and emphasis.

In the literature on CRSP, situating education within students' culture is viewed as a categorically beneficial act. Through the discourse of authenticity, a limiting dimension is added to identity construction in relation to culture. This limiting dimension brings a sobering perspective to the situation where the examination of the effects of culture is part of the process of situating education within culture. Taking discourse of authenticity into account in an implementation of CRSP evokes the consideration of asking the question of how students are being affected by their culture.

Low's analysis of student poetry as a means to gain insight into this complex nexus of identity and culture provides direction for future studies into CRSP. Precisely because of the various effects that culture can have on identity construction, a personalized student testimony to these specific effects is required. Student-written slam poetry is motivated by sharing of earnest and heartfelt experience without constraint on form, language usage, length, and topic. In this creative act, students are urged to have fun with writing and remove something that has been "on

their chest" in a safe, supportive space. This form of expression provides a venue for students to

reflect on and communicate the effects of culture in a moving and intellectually inspiring

fashion.

Chapter 3: Where the poems are written: Context and methods of research

Spoken word poems do not emerge from the head of the author fully formed. Rather they are a testament to the writer's working through various issues that connect them to their surrounding context. In this chapter I lay out the context in which poems were written, and discuss my methods for analyzing these snapshots of identity. My personal history is presented here as well in order to provide the reader with a perspective of my background and how it might influence my analysis.

The school, classroom, and teacher

In setting out to conduct this study, I weighed the options of three locations where I had been facilitating spoken word poetry workshops for the past three years. I made my choice based on the criteria of an environment that supported artistic expression through open dialog with a diverse student body. The data which informs this study was drawn from an urban charter school in California's San Francisco Bay Area which I will refer to as Open Door Academy (ODA). Students attending ODA are from a diverse demographic that is purposefully chosen to be an exact representation of the ratios of ethnic backgrounds in the city where the school exists. The student body numbers around 500 with youth from middle/lower economic backgrounds and the school does not require payment to attend.

ODA is not hampered by the deficit model, though the majority of students attending it have experienced schools afflicted by that situation. The general philosophy of ODA follows the empowerment model where pedagogy is designed to promote uninhibited personal, social, and intellectual analysis, and contemplation. Course work and materials are designed to provide an opportunity for students to grow both as individuals and as scholars. Most of the course materials are not presented in textbooks or standardized prepackaged worksheet units. Instead, teachers

enjoy free range in employing a creative approach to furnishing their curricula with materials sourced from numerous outlets. A strong focus is placed on global and local ethics and social justice issues, where students choose topics for research that are relevant to their personal and cultural experiences. Teachers generally remain at ODA for long periods of time, though as a charter school it does not offer a tenure track.

The spoken word poetry workshops were carried out in the classroom of a teacher whom I will refer to as Mrs. Shoemaker. Poetry workshops took place once per week for 12 weeks, though the writing examined in this study was derived from 8 workshops. Writing workshops were focused around prompts derived from the concepts in the theoretical framework. Students were given free range to deviate from the prompts in any manner they chose whenever their creative urges led them to range into new terrain. The use of any language, form, vernacular, and culturally specific terminology was promoted. Roughly 50% of students had experienced spoken word poetry in one form or another and 100% were familiar with the art form. Spoken word poetry is a prevalent aspect in the city where ODA is located.

The creative writing class was on the elective track and for some students it constituted a primary interest, for others a means to get credits for graduation. As such, roughly 75% of students in the poetry workshops engaged with highly motivated participation, while 25% demonstrated passive participation. Of the 26 students enrolled in the course, 22 assented to participate in the research and had parental consent.

Mrs. Shoemaker is an avid supporter of spoken word poetry and sets a tone for her students that values open expression and avid exploration of literary possibilities. The classroom culture was a safe space for students to express emotionally and intellectually driven work. In many ways, ODA is the best case scenario for an educational setting. This does not take away

from the daily challenges experienced, and efforts made by teachers to relate to students in meaningful ways.

Due to teacher and administrative support for the spoken word program, a partnership was forged between poets and student researchers who were investigating global and local ethics issues. In conjunction with the workshops, lesson plans were composed where poetry was written in response to the research projects engaged in by the ethics students. In this vein, students in the workshops connected global and local ethics issues to their lived experiences. The data set only includes poems where a direct personal connection is expressed in the writing; as such, the majority of these poems are based on local social justice issues that students had direct experience with.

Mrs. Shoemaker eagerly agreed to modify her curriculum based on the information brought to light by student poems. This information was synthesized into two pages and is included in appendix 2. This was her third year teaching creative writing at ODA, and in these years she had witnessed countless instances of profound expressions of personal truth. She admitted that there was so much that came through these creative works that she felt like she knew more about her students than many of their family and friends did. Mrs. Shoemaker thought that the synthesis of information provided an opportunity to propel curriculum to a new level.

This synthesis functions as the active element through which the study benefits the class where poems were gathered. Mrs. Shoemaker's enthusiasm was a substantial benefit to the research project and a primary factor in choosing to hold workshops in this particular class. ODA's existence as a charter school means it is less constrained by mandated curriculum than public schools in the area. Teachers and students benefit from this lack of mandated curriculum

by enjoying an atmosphere of fulfillment where all can breathe deeply knowing that they are

doing work they feel passionate about. Students are more apt to reciprocate this passion as the

learning environment becomes a place of cooperation for the sake of deeper understanding and

investigation of culturally relevant topics.

My poetic potential for bias

Due to my background as a poet and teaching artist, I have witnessed countless instances

of students displaying profoundly insightful aspects of their identity and relationship to culture

within poems and performances. To purposefully stray from presenting a success narrative would

be to deny what I have learned from five years of experience as a teaching artist. I was quite

aware of this potential bias upon beginning to formulate this study and rather than ignore or

attempt to squelch this lived experience, I choose to funnel it into my analysis of the students'

poems. If the purpose of this research is to highlight the passionate depictions of identity, then

attempting to take a neutral stance would only serve to create cognitive dissonance rather than to

identify the potential that spoken word poetry might hold for curriculum development.

I address this potential bias through triangulating data from poems with data from

pre/post questionnaire, student and teacher interviews. I found that students were less inclined to

interact in a vulnerable manner during interviews and questionnaire as these forums for

communication did not offer the same personally intimate space as the writing workshops.

Nevertheless, there were twelve points of triangulation amongst the data sets. Of particular

relevance were the teacher interviews which are presented in Chapter 5. Admittedly, Mrs.

Shoemaker is a strong proponent of spoken word and using creativity as a method to learn about

students for the purpose of creating curriculum and supporting classroom culture. This thought

points the way for future studies where a teaching artist is paired with a teacher who is not as avidly supportive of this type of project.

How does an upper middle class white teaching artist fit into all of this?

It is crucial to note the potentially problematic nature of being a white teaching artist working with students of color in regards to writing about lived experiences with systematic and direct oppression, stereotypes, prejudice, and racism (please consider my personal history presented in Chapter 1 while envisioning who I am and why I was leading these workshops). This is potentially problematic on two counts: 1) I am a cultural outsider and do not have experience with being oppressed by racism; 2) If the purpose of spoken word poetry is in part to engage in creating personal and social empowerment for oppressed people, and I myself am not an oppressed person, then the meta message being presented to students is that the only path through oppression requires a guide from the white power structure, or that people of color are incapable of liberating themselves from an oppressive situation. At the onset of my career, I panicked and it took years for me to reconcile these two notions. By no means have I learned all there is to know in the process of ferrying myself through these waters. The direct guidance and assistance from friends of color in the poetry community has been a supreme motivating factor. This assistance has never been their responsibility and I am forever grateful for it.

In order to respond to these two counts of the potentially problematic nature of my doing this work, I put to use the following strategies: I explain directly to students that I am aware of my position as a cultural outsider and that by no means do I claim to have experience with much of what they have experience with. I let them know that we are all here to grow through reflecting on and responding to our experiences by way of open creative expression, and that I am not here to save anyone. The only person who can liberate you is yourself and in my

perspective, when one person in our community is oppressed then all our lives are limited by existing within a system of oppression.

        In situations where the school is burdened by the deficit model, I co-teach with another facilitator who is a person of color. I do not ever declaim students experiences as invalid and I keep an eye on my privilege while doing my best to acknowledge it without flaunting it. I communicate with students in their vernacular up to a point where I am not faking it (this is not entirely out of my realm of experience as outside of the classroom in the SF Bay Area spoken word community, similar speech patterns are practiced). I acknowledge my awkwardness as an outsider while not letting it get in the way of comfortable informal behavior.

        Creating a safe space where students are comfortable enough to express issues of personal, cultural, social, and historical relevance requires a direct confrontation with difference, and frank explanation of my personal reason for being there. Trust is also created through sharing emotionally vulnerable and courageous poetry such as, "The Myth of Cool," which can be found in Appendix 1. This particular poem is one of my oldest pieces, and was my first successful creative communication of a personal issue that had implications in regards to social justice. In Appendix 1 I have also included a poem that was created via collaboration in a spoken word duet troupe with which I have toured nationally under the name of Jackhammer Serenade. Consisting of Dre Johnson and myself, the majority of our work is co-written and addresses issues of social justice issues, race relations, and inequities within the school system. Dre and I come from vastly different backgrounds, and through working and touring together, I became and continue to become aware of my privilege as a white person and the systemic social and economic disparity which exists between white people and people of color. My work as a teaching artist would not be possible without my relationship with this colleague and friend.

Central elements of my teaching practice

There was a specific eight week, one meeting per week, time frame set for the study, though flexibility was avidly promoted in students' creation of poems. A maxim I always promote in the poetry workshop is that on this page and stage you are a god or goddess able to bring anything into being and able to take anything away. Moments where we have this degree of application of our will are few and far between. Workshops were structured yet flexible in that students were urged to stray into whatever field their muse led them and to bring anything into existence that they would like to see.

A second maxim I present to students is: there is an ocean of creativity behind each of our eyes and spoken word poetry is an opportunity to open the floodgates. The structure of the workshops and analysis of data that arose from them mirror this maxim in that lesson plans were designed to identify specific cultural identity oriented aspects that come to the surface when this ocean of creativity is let loose. Specific elements of the workshops include: free choice of writing topic is paramount; any sort of language chosen is acceptable; sensitive material does not leave the room; if students do not want to write they don't have to; and respectful active listening is required when someone is sharing their work. I structure workshops in this manner in order to bring to light and compare the vast array of identity formations forged through personal relationships to culture. In order to raise the floodgates that hold back this ocean of creativity, precise and specific levers are required. Students do not necessarily respond well to, "Ok, be creative now!"

Data analysis

The 55 poems that I analyzed were prompted by lesson plans that were designed in accordance with the three generative themes: emplacements of affiliation, third space identity construction and the discourse of authenticity. Therefore these themes served as both the structure for the writing workshops, and as the means through which I have responded to the two research questions: in what ways does student-written spoken word poetry depict identity formations in a manner that supports the creation of Culturally Relevant and Sustainable Curriculum? And, to what extent and in what ways do spoken word workshops contribute to the development of a classroom culture based on mutual understanding of lived experiences of culture?

My dual perspectives of teaching artist and educational researcher allowed me to draw on experience derived from five years of workshop facilitation in order to develop a curriculum that was likely to yield specific and tangible results in the form of clearly recognizable identity formations and personal relationships to culture. I have always viewed the spoken word teaching experience as a co-created journey where we continually remind each other of our abilities to exceed expectations of getting to know ourselves and one another, while encapsulating these realizations in exhilarating, tragic, empowering, humorous, solemn, insightful and sincere presentations of lived experience. Emplacements of affiliation serves to provide a working definition of culture that exists within specific physical spaces. In order to create a curriculum based on culture, it is vital to know precisely what we mean by this term even if there is not a universally agreed upon definition. Third space identity construction provides perspective into the intersections of identity, specifically how certain cultural affiliations combine to create a nuanced picture of an individual. Finally, the discourse of authenticity provides a look at how

expectations are placed on individuals due to their desire to affiliate, or their perceived affiliation with cultural groups. Poetry workshops were designed to create vibrant and moving discussions around students' experiences with these concepts in order to tease out threads of poetic information that can be seamlessly woven into the quilt of a pluralistic culturally relevant curriculum.

I chose the workshop themes because I saw how they might point directly at specific aspects of culture, and the processes through which identity transforms based on specific interactions. In order to transform these theories into writing topics, I relied heavily on the personal experiences of students. These experiences function to enliven theory into something that is directly applicable, while also serving as the basis for communication of poetic devices. Spoken word poetry exists in many ways to pass along the effects of lived experiences. Therefore I continually remind students to utilize the objects and locations of these experiences in order to paint a physical picture that grounds their launch into the emotional and intellectual terrain of the poem.

Connecting the theories to specific experiences during the brainstorm and discussion portion of the workshop is a very molten, spontaneous, and evocative experience. I generally describe the theory and facilitate a discussion before asking students if they have had any experiences that are relevant. This often requires re-framing the theory a few times based on offerings presented by the students which also serve to illuminate new terrain that I had not previously considered. I then refer the theory back to the personal experience presented by the students in order to clarify how the two are related. Before we begin writing, I connect students' experiences to various poetic devices which serves to provide launch pads into the creative process.

How does my relationship to the students affect the poetry they write?

I realize that the relationships shared with students are an integral aspect of the information presented in poems, interviews, and to a lesser extent the questionnaire responses. I will now reflect at length on my context as a teaching artist within the class, and the specific relationships shared with the students and teacher that I interviewed. As qualitative research is based on the often murky aspects of human relations, clarity in regards to my connections with participants is crucial in order to provide context for the following data analysis sections.

My position as teaching artist and researcher led to developing relationships with the students that were at once personal and professional. These relationships were formed in a teaching artist-to-student dynamic more than a researcher-to-participant dynamic. The former is a situation that I have much experience with, and I feel extremely comfortable and happy interacting with young people in this capacity. In order to gain students' trust and motivate their willingness to participate in the courageous act of writing and performing personally sensitive material, I must be immediately forthcoming both as to what my personal stake in this creative act is and who I am as a person.

I generally perform a few poems at our first meeting that expose certain sensitive aspects of my history and identity. These lead to an open floor conversation where they can ask me any questions they like about my life and experience as a professional artist. Through interacting with students as a teaching artist and researcher, I was able to venture into sensitive and personal terrain in the name of creative adventure. This did not provide an ethical conflict in "using creativity to gain access" in that the purpose of the study was to ascertain how useful the creative process can be in providing a tool for the development of CRSP. Before going into the study, I

certainly had a hunch that the creative enthusiasm that often accompanies a spoken word poetry workshop would lead to a more forthcoming data set than many other contexts.

By relating with students as a teaching artist, I embody the role of the "cool uncle" rather than authoritative parent. Students and I are free to talk informally using slang and even the occasional curse word, thus breaking down a behavior standard constrained by "proper conduct" that often creates a barrier between school and the outside world. The goal of spoken word is to communicate meaningful and sensitive topics in a manner that evokes emotion in any person who might bear witness. Therefore, developing relationships is necessary for a creative process that is intended to plumb the depths of personal content.

The type of rapport I need to develop with the students as a teaching artist is personal, intellectual, courageous, comfortable, at times jovial, at times serious, and always looking for what is poetically relevant to the situation at hand. Because this rapport served both roles I was often simultaneously holding, I purposefully did not "put on a researcher hat" when stepping out of the teaching artist role. These relationships develop with each poetry workshop and every time a student performs a meaningful poem for the class or shares a piece with me in order to seek editing advice, hear my opinion, or just because they wanted me to hear their latest creative work. I believe that we all need our various intersecting rivers of identity to be witnessed and traveled along. A crucial aspect of what it is to be human is to know each other and journey in groups. I find taking part in the collective act of sharing spoken word poems to satisfy a large portion of this desire, and I think the students feel this as well and know me to be always present to go on a voyage.

Methods for data collection

The data sets that respond to the first question are student poetry and teacher interview; data sets that respond to the second question are student interview, teacher interview, and anonymous student pre/post questionnaire. It is strange for me to call these collections "data" as I view them as living and breathing entities. These poems are reflections of the creative efforts undergone by brave young writers endeavoring to show us the cultural landscapes that both are carved out by and direct their rivers of identity. If we are to fuse curriculum with the pulse of the students, then oughtn't we employ methods for gathering information that are reflective of the rhythm of their heartbeats as they walk in the world? If we seek to create a learning experience that is relevant to students' unique relationships to background and culture, then oughtn't we reach back to the ancient tool of art: the black mirror reflecting the churning sea of cultural identity that we swim in every day?

How to trace a river in a poem - collecting data in response to the first research question.

The basis of the primary data set of this study arose from the unpredictable creative nature of spoken word. This art form funnels personal experiences and potent emotional charges into pieces of poetry that are intended to be spoken aloud and comprehended by the average person off the street. These poems were analyzed in order to gain insight into the first research question: in what ways does student written spoken word poetry depict identity formations in a manner that supports the creation of Culturally Relevant and Sustainable Curriculum? Spoken word differs from poetry that is intended to be read from the page in many ways. Perhaps the most recognizable is that it often takes a conversational tone drawing on the specific oratorical style of the author. Each student's unique oratorical style is a direct reflection of aspects of their

identity. The conversational tone of the workshops provides a natural vehicle for the communication of personally meaningful experiences.

I collected 55 poems generated over eight writing workshops. In writing workshops, students participated in group and individual brainstorms, open and guided discussions, peer feedback, self-led edits, and individual assistance in the writing process, though only in terms of constructing sound poetic pieces. Focus in feedback was not placed on generating highly usable information for the study. I chose an eight session run of writing workshops in order to be in accordance with the intent of the study which is to attain understanding of how students' identities are affected by their relationship to culture. It is important to gain this understanding at the onset of the semester so as to enable the augmentation of a CRSP.

Students wrote one poem per day in the workshops, and roughly two thirds of the class agreed to take part in the study. One of the constant struggles in a spoken word workshop is responding to students' self-consciousness; and resistance to vulnerable expression while in an environment where the popular mentality often harbors disdain for heartfelt participation. There is no hard and fast strategy for the navigation of this self consciousness; I have quite a few techniques that work in certain situations, though the choice to perform a poem is always in the hands of the artist who wrote it.

I used (what I thought to be) an intuitive process for synthesizing the 55 poems into the two page summary that was given to Mrs. Shoemaker, and that process is present with the synthesis in Appendix 2. This summary is the final product of the poetry workshops and plays a crucial role in determining the potential for spoken word as a curriculum generating tool. Evidence for this use exists in Mrs. Shoemaker's response in the interview, and by my analysis of poems.

Interviewing Mrs. Shoemaker involved touching base with the person who would ultimately decide if the information derived from the poems would be useful as a tool for curriculum development, and if it would support the formation of classroom culture (for the interview protocol see Appendix 3). Information was summarized from the poems as the purpose of the study is to provide teachers with a tool that could be easily used in the development of curriculum. I was advised that a lengthy analysis like the 22 pages present in the next chapter would have likely overloaded a full-time teacher's already packed schedule.

Unlike my relationship with these students, this was my second year working as a teaching artist in Mrs. Shoemaker's class. I have worked with many teachers over the years and my time in her class has been one of the most creatively fruitful endeavors that I have participated in. Her demeanor is entirely personable and approachable, and her teaching style is extremely student-centered. She sets high standards for final products, yet leaves the students plenty of room to reach them utilizing their own style. The effect this has on the quality of information present in the findings does not escape me. The question of how to conduct this type of study with a teacher that is not as creatively inclined as Mrs. Shoemaker is problematic for me to answer, as it would require another study intended to respond to that situation.

When I interviewed Mrs. Shoemaker, I recorded our session with an audio application on my tablet. Interview questions focused specifically on her thoughts as to how information derived from poems could be used to inform Culturally Relevant and Sustainable Curriculum while also focusing on how spoken word workshops altered her relationships with students.

A general summary of the questions that furnished the interview includes what she enjoys about teaching creative writing, and specifically how she decides what she will use in her curriculum. I was interested in how she thought the information from the poems could contribute

to her shaping of curriculum in regards to making it more culturally relevant. I was curious as to how the summary contributed to her understanding of her students specifically in their relationship to background and culture. My interest expanded into curiosity about what sorts of personal aspects of her students she is apt to learn about through listening to their poetry. I inquired as to how participating in the workshops altered her relationship to her students, and how a spoken word program impacts the culture of the classroom.

Cartography of a classroom culture:

Collecting data in response to the second research question

After studying the interview transcripts extensively, through paraphrasing excerpts, and grouping them into sub-themes, I discovered the second set of generative themes that are used in the second findings chapter which responds to the second research question: to what extent and in what ways do spoken word poetry workshops contribute to the development of a classroom culture based on mutual understanding? After determining that this research question was germane due to its presence in the data as well as the literature in the field, I deciphered three generative themes that fill out my analysis of this question. These themes were chosen in order to ascertain what it takes to create a classroom culture based on mutual understanding (opening pathways for communication); what is required for this information to set in on a transformational level (inspiring empathy); and finally what is the result of this sort of learning environment (broadening perspective).

Student interviews

Throughout my seven years as a professional spoken word poet and five years as a teaching artist, I have never ceased to be amazed by the depth of personal closeness and mutual understanding that can occur when people commit themselves to courageous self-expression.

The student interviews provided me an opportunity to explore this level of closeness which is forged through a mutual recognition of creative efforts throughout the workshop cycle. In the "cool uncle" teaching artist role, I have to employ very little censorship in either my or the students' conversation styles. This contributed to candid and personable interviews where we were able to delve into nuanced intellectual worlds with conversational demeanor. When engaging the students with a direct and informal rapport, they were comfortable opening up specifically in regards to their experiences with the creative process.

Around the eighth week, I asked three students if they would like to be interviewed before the end of the program, and they all agreed wholeheartedly. I wanted a range of potential for evocative personal information, so I asked students I had relationships with that spanned from extremely close to distantly comfortable. The first student I interviewed I will refer to as Jose. He and I had bonded in a near mentor/mentee relationship. We had an immediate connection through recognizing a mutual commitment to understanding and connecting with our fellow humans both intellectually and emotionally; our relationship was also motivated by a shared desire to work for social justice. The second interview participant I will refer to as Niki. She was a longtime committed spoken word poet; we had gotten close through featuring in a poetry slam at a nearby junior high together, but our relationship did not have the immediate connection present between Jose and me. The third participant I will refer to as Mina. She was a longtime committed artist whom I had a solid relationship with, though we interacted more on a teacher-to-student level rather than a person-to-person one.

Jose had only recently discovered a deep passion for spoken word poetry and creative writing. Prior to this passion he had very little drive to participate in school. For Jose, this creative re-birth marked a drastic turning point in his general outlook on the world. To quote his

interview, his perspective on life prior to his discovery of this passion was, "Life's a bitch and then nothing happens." His responses in the interview in regards to how spoken word poetry had helped him to understand himself and his classmates was marked by an embrace of his identity as a writer as he painted a scene of ceaseless empathy where each person is a fathomless well of experience. Jose emphasized how sharing struggle and triumph allows people to see their reflection in another person's emotional experience, even if their life situations differ considerably.

It is important that I relate Jose's perspective as I was aware of his recent transformation before the interview began, and it guided my inquiry considerably, specifically focusing on his new perspective on empathy and the ability that sharing creative expressions has to broaden one's ability to connect with people of various backgrounds. To be honest, I considered the possibility of basing an entire study on this single interview. I feel his insights champion the power of this art form in a manner that instills a sober yet unceasing optimism that points the way towards building an empathy based curriculum motivated by each participant's life experiences. In all of my interactions with students, I work to imbue a creative and light hearted approach where expression is a ubiquitous act honed first and foremost in conversation. Jose's responses in this interview are indeed a work of art in their own right.

I approached Niki with the possibility of an interview due to her lengthy participation in spoken word poetry. The questions that informed our interview were framed around her personal experience with spoken word, specifically in regards to how her identity has shifted due to this experience. My extensive experience in relating to other poets gave me a clear idea of how to approach this interview as Niki strongly identifies as a spoken word artist. I knew that if I

focused questions around the personal confidence that she has gained through participation in this art form, her responses would include a wealth of significant information.

Mina is a Renaissance women in regards to her affinity for and experience with various art forms. Prior to the interview, I was aware of this background and her unique high speed communication and socializing style which I discovered are interestingly linked. Her perspective and identity are largely informed by her creative experiences; I therefore sought to focus on the intersections between these and other aspects of her identity. I found Mina to be the most forthcoming in regards to talking about her identity; she was the only interview participant to courageously express specific struggles and difficulties as well as specific aspects of her lived experience of culture.

My initial purpose for this data set was to attempt triangulation of information presented in the poems. Triangulation occurred in that the interviews corroborated with poems in twelve instances. I then realized that a more fruitful manner for analysis of these interview responses would be to focus around how spoken word workshops contribute to the classroom culture. I will discuss my thoughts as to what this indicates in the conclusion section. At this point I began utilizing the generative themes of broadening perspective, opening pathways of communication, and inspiring empathy as I continued to find information relevant to these themes.

Pre and post questionnaire

At the onset of putting together my research plan, the questionnaire seemed to be the least personal method of collecting information in a study that, at its core, is intended to reflect sensitive and precise aspects of identity and relationships to culture and background. Due to this preconceived notion, I did not rely on utilizing the questionnaire to derive information in regards to my inquiries on identity and culture. Rather, it was my intent to utilize the pre/post

questionnaire to triangulate responses to the inquiry as to how spoken word poetry can be used to build curriculum. As such, the majority of the seven questions given to the students before and after the study are focused around the effects of spoken word poetry in school. The questionnaire protocol is presented in Appendix section 3.

I received 17 pre questionnaires and 14 post questionnaires from the 22 students in study. The pre questionnaire was distributed on the first day of the workshop prior to an introductory performance and lecture on spoken word. Student responses to this were based solely on information they knew about the art form prior to my interactions with them. The post questionnaire was distributed on my final day with the students. In both cases I did not prompt my distribution of the questionnaire with any information so as to safeguard against respondent reactivity to pre-framed answers.

I designed the questionnaire to bring to light small nuggets of information that might fall through the cracks of analysis of larger data sets (poems and interviews) and to perceive the distinction in personal depth that students are apt to engage in when the medium allows for a specified quantity of response. One way to understand poetry is as a precise and methodical economy of language, where each word has a specific intent. The questionnaire was intended to show how in-depth students could get in only a few sentences. When in a space where uninhibited expression is a fundamental aspect of the culture, any surface can become a canvas any moment an opportunity to shed the nourishing light of personal perspective.

Chapter 4: This is Where the Rivers Flow

Findings from Student-Written Spoken Word Poetry and an Interview with their Teacher

What can be learned from a poem? What song of ever-changing identity is immortalized within words that fly from the intersection of emotion and intellect? How much molten identity and cultural affiliation can be encapsulated in these catapults of breath and gusto? These thoughts drive my focus as I peer deeply into each of these 55 poems, and the interview with Mrs. Shoemaker based on the two page synthesis of poems given to her two weeks prior to my analysis. I have structured my analysis of the findings from poems and the interview with the three concepts presented in the theoretical framework. These concepts were also used to generate poetry workshop lesson plans: emplacements of affiliation, discourse of authenticity, and third space identity construction. The purpose of the analysis in this chapter is to respond to the first research question: in what ways does student written spoken word poetry depict identity formations in a manner that supports the creation of Culturally Relevant and Sustainable Curriculum?

Identity formations swimming through student spoken word poems

This portion of the findings section is composed of discussion of excerpts of 55 student poems. These poems represent snapshots of students' emotional and intellectual reflection on their identity and personal relationships to culture. I have transcribed excerpts faithfully maintaining the students' grammar and spelling choices, I use (/) to indicate where they have placed a line break. Each excerpt of poetry discussed here represents a subtheme present in a combination of student poems. I have placed each of these subthemes into one of three generative themes that serve to structure my analysis. In order to draw from the wide range of

insight present in the entire set of 55 student poems, I have created each sub theme from two to five poems. Therefore, the poem excerpts presented may only be relevant to a portion of the discussion. I conclude each discussion with my insight into one possible application for the purpose of creating CRSC.

I term these three themes as "generative" due to the ultimate purpose of this research: to provide material that supports the teacher in generating Culturally Relevant and Sustainable Curriculum. Each poem excerpt is an example of personally meaningful and often emotionally vulnerable nuggets of humanity crafted into high velocity performance pieces. By looking carefully inside each beacon of human expression, we avail ourselves of the opportunity to discern information which is relevant to the lived experiences of the students. These lived experiences provide a springboard for the augmentation and generation of a curriculum that arises from the lives of participants, and thereby approaches greater success in the innovation of relevant and sustainable education.

Generative theme #1: Emplacements of affiliation

This generative theme refers to understanding culture as a phenomenon that exists within the aggregate of relationships, behaviors, practices, and experiences that occur within specific locations or movements, ie., the culture of a particular classroom, home, park, cafe, youth center, art form, activism, etc. Students' poems were prompted by discussion of how they define and experience "belonging," what places/groups they feel affiliations with and if they have ever thought that a place where they feel belonging is being threatened. An additional writing prompt was offered where students were given the opportunity to create a fictional place and write as though they were that location. Spoken word poetry is often utilized in order to express issues regarding identity in relation to cultural background. It was not a surprise that this theme

contained the majority of references in the body of student poems. This art form provides an apt vehicle for marginalized groups to hone empowered voices through eloquent proclamation of personal truths. Spoken word authors have a long tradition of claiming their space and speaking out against systematic and direct oppression.

Subtheme 1a: The effects of oppression and violence on students' connection to cultural place. Here we find the poet creating a rally cry response to oppression:

> My people it's time to unite for some time we've let these stigmas ruin our lives / we are worth more than 160 dollars a zip and 3 strikes / Just let em know we are able to fight and lets get our paths to enlightenment in site / my people it's time to unite before these stigmas play tricks with our minds / Just let em know we are alright and looking for a better life.

Connection to place in this poem occurs in the macro as the student has framed his affiliation to America at large. This student and others who wrote with the perspective of America as being motivated by systematic oppression focus on how marginalized groups become strong by standing up to oppression and learning from negative impacts. The call to solidarity in this piece reflects a passionate relationship to this emplacement of affiliation as the student utilizes the poem as a revolutionary anthem for his people. Knowledge of the students' motivation calls for more in-class material that describes a history of responses to oppression, while the teacher now also understands that the students' have leanings towards activism and community organizing.

When violence has been directly experienced it often penetrates into the inner sanctum of students lives. As this poet explains:

> Sometimes I wish my room could shed colors. Black pain feels better when the world has successfully shut me down...Wishing that when I wake the room could be red. Reminding me of all the spilled blood. Mapping my self determination to stay alive.

In this piece the student has drawn an immediate connection between the physical space of his home life and violence in his community. Through forging a direct link between his room and his "determination to stay alive," the poet has outlined his affiliation with this place. Other poems similar to this segment responded to the daily threat of death in home and neighborhood, which evokes and requires courage just to go about daily activities. From this knowledge, the teacher has the opportunity to utilize writings on consistent systemic violence in communities. This manner of poem illuminates a vital understanding: that students possibly have PTS or rapidly evolved psychology due to a constant threat of violence.

Violence associated with place often creates a stark outline of cultural oppression in that it presents evidence of the distinctly different experiences of various groups. The following poem explores this thought:

> No matter how many times / you ignore the phone / apprehensive and alone / but still surrounded by drones/ in a "white" neighborhood but still / scared of the window because there's a chance / a bullet will hit you.

Here we find an important connection to place where the poet is situated at home and is navigating the contradiction of danger in an environment socially defined as "white" and by extension as safe. The poet presents an insight that violence is only a real threat in neighborhoods where people of color live, and when this violence has been experienced it's threat clings to future experience. Through this perspective, the poet is highlighting the systematic oppression which has drawn the lines of property value and violence in most major cities. These considerations point to utilizing material which describes community and political responses to oppression so as to create discussion of students' experiences of the direct effect of systematic place-based oppression.

Poets often take this opportunity for expression to delve into how they see other people responding to oppression in specific places. As is provided here: "Ignorance is bliss / and they say war is peace / but most certainly not in these streets / Bayview has a crime risk of 87% / most people 65% feel unsafe / but they are used to it." In this instance a small snippet of a poem is adequate to reflect the student's' affiliation with the Bayview neighborhood where she has provided statistics on crime to set up the thesis in this section of her poem that the people "are used to it". The poet qualifies affiliation to the neighborhood simply by referring to "these streets" which creates a link to her understanding of the state of "most people" in Bayview. A singular power of poetry is to illuminate striking perspectives with a small amount of words. This piece provides example of that power through bringing to focus the phenomenon of adapting or acquiescing to situations of oppression. The subtheme formed through these poems reflects how violence within a cultural space creates fear, loss, lack of innocence, and general negative impact. Through this knowledge, the teacher would be within the bounds of cultural relevance to ask students to compare and contrast their distinct experiences in the various neighborhoods they live in.

As a cisgendered white man, I must always be wary of my own blind spots in regards to oppression and how when unchecked, these blind spots demean culture and support the deficit model which functions through the belief that communities experiencing systemic violence lack possibilities for success, worthwhile wisdom, and vibrant culture. To be entirely transparent, I rarely feel comfortable commenting on such experiences that I have no first hand dealings with. Nevertheless I cannot ignore the fact that systemic violence within marginalized communities is a reality for many students, and their expression of this reality provides the teacher with recourse to use materials covering the history of cycles of violence.

Through naming the process of oppressive systems, students are able to gain perspective that clarifies their lived experience, as in, for instance, Jose's line: "This cycle is something America seems not to see / and if there's anything they hate more than him being in the streets is watching him succeed." This excerpt arises from a segment of poetry that highlights in no uncertain terms an insight present in other similar poems: dominant cultures are unaware of oppression of minority cultures which causes the dominant culture to perpetuate a systemic stubbornness to ceasing oppression. Furnished with this knowledge, the teacher would be well suited to provide material on critical race theory and whiteness studies, thereby providing background information in regards to students' experiences with the internal mechanics of systemic oppression.

Students take the writing opportunity as a venue for directly expressing subversive systemic oppression that often does not get discussed in day to day conversation. "I say its about time we say enough is enough / we gotta look at the system as corrupt / because these dark colored people seem to be treated like problems before human beings." Here the poet is affiliating with the emplacement of the "the system". Through claiming this space, he is able to highlight corruption and point out the psychological mechanisms that propel it. Initiating this segment of poetry with a call to action reflects his peers' poems which outline how oppression of minority cultures causes groups to be diminished, though all people have the ability to respond to this situation and feel compassion for the oppressed.

Subtheme 1b: Connection to place motivates a sense of belonging and personal growth. Affiliating with a certain location can become a central component to identity where the individual has a bond to a location that other people in their life have not visited. The opportunity for reflection on personally meaningful experiences is a hallmark of spoken word poetry as the

following poem indicates: "The Patagonian glaciers inhabit my icy stare as I gaze upon the city I grew up in but to which I feel no connection now. Now that I have found my artist mind in the colors of the Valparaiso breeze." In this case the poet's affiliation with the city she grew up in has been diminished due to a connection with a foreign place. Her identity has evolved due to her experience of finding her "artist mind". The beauty of life is often found in the details. Appreciation of the nuances of a specific place in this instance have effected the poet's connection to beauty, and in this new appreciation her identity has evolved. Poems like this highlight how emotional and psychological empowerment occurs through relationships to foreign cities. From pieces such as these, the teacher could confidently use writings that deal with the geographical layout and history of foreign cities.

Finding connections between disparate places is an experience afforded by the personal contemplation that is often at the core of the creative writing experience, as the following poem exemplifies:

> Prague / my home away from home / the culture is the same as home's / so is the history / Its red tile roofs / are a world away from us / the stone castles do not exist / in the new world / but they seem oddly familiar...New rules like / "no stepping on the grass" / can be hard to remember / but the cold of a cellar / or taste of a fruit dumpling/ remind me that I belong there, too.

Here we find the poet connecting a foreign place to the feeling of belonging associated with his home. His affiliation with this location is brought to life by his simple interactions with the location. This case, and those like it, evoke this subtheme where belonging is motivated by sensory experiences. With this knowledge, the teacher's conception of what is relevant to the class can expand beyond the neighborhoods in which the students live and reach into far-flung

locations where relatives have set down roots. These locations often make up repositories for affiliation that fill imaginations with possibilities otherwise unforeseen.

Through personally intimate writing experiences, students often find the opportunity to unearth the roots of their passions, as is explored here:

> Now that the well of passion in my chest longs to be free as the clear water that laps onto the shores of Vichuquen. I have discovered a need within me to show myself for what I am, such as the relics of my country's history that are put on display in Santa Cruz.

The poet presents resounding enthusiasm in regards to unveiling her identity as she puts it, "for what I am". Her enthusiasm is driven by her connection to this location. It is as though unknown aspects of identity are hidden within places yet to be discovered and when these places are happened upon, the author uncovers a hidden treasure within herself that has been waiting for just this moment to be discovered. Poems of this ilk spoke to the connection to place as a signal to call forth new cornerstones of identity. From this knowledge, relevant material dealing with personal transformation through travel would be fitting.

Often students utilize the writing experience to find connections between personal philosophies and lived experiences, as is the case in this poet's work:

> This unpredictable little place / No, this never ending space / Its similar to the universe / it's not known to have a start or ending point or walls that bound it / Its freedom... Its a place without a path like a forest that's just being discovered.

In this instance the poet is uncovering a connection to freedom through affiliation with a particular place. A new discovery that has opened perspective of boundless possibilities. Here we find an example of how a certain location informs a major virtue in the poet's identity. Poems within the subtheme that resonated with this sentiment all pointed towards the existence of inexhaustible surprise within the relationship between self and place. Motivated by this

sentiment, the teacher could prompt relevant discussion in regards to the relationship between identity and place.

Subtheme 1c: Relationships to physical home inform relationships to macro culture. The theory of emplacements of affiliation is not intended to replace current understandings of culture. Rather, it is intended to illuminate specific lived relationships to physical spaces which provide a tangible perspective on relationships to culture. By "macro culture," I am referring to more traditional conceptions grounded in ethnicity, religion, and nation-states.

Poetry is in many ways an art form that connects insight, personal experience, and emotion. In doing so, it brings to life specific experiences of personal histories. This student peers into his past in the following piece:

> A year from my Grandpa's death, I was devastated by the memory. My dad left to El Salvador to visit the grave...The point is my home it was comfortable to me when I felt alone. I remember as I wrote that first line the smell of must from the sweat that dripped off my back onto my bed cause I was too lazy to shower...and to this day I still sleep in that bed and write in that room, that room was my savior.

In this recounting, the poet finds solace in his home as a conduit to the memory of his grandfather and heritage culture of El Salvador. The physical location of his home becomes the sanctuary he needs in order to write about this memory. In this act of writing, there is a tangible moment where his personal lived experience is connected to a macro conception of heritage culture. Poems in this subtheme focused on the physical home as a cornerstone of creativity and a place of comfort, refuge, belonging, and culture. A teacher who is looking to provide culturally relevant curriculum is well suited to bring in writing that focuses on how specific relationships to home are connected to larger culture.

Students found the writing opportunity to be an apt moment for reflecting on the dual

elements of joy and frustration, and how they can be connected to cultural markers.

> Sounds of murmurs, / as if it was a newborn, / Beckons to me every time the sunrises / It has become a daily routine / A pleasant curse / that would even make Thoreau smile / for me its worth it / Because how can you not be happy / To know that when you're sitting / in your soft chair, / that a bundle of overgrown love, / would always be there/ to ruin your moment of silence.

By making the connection to Thoreau, the student draws a parallel to the domestic

relationship she has with her cat and an affiliation with a larger transcendental wilderness

culture. This poem and others like it point to the idea that relationships to place are often

comprised by the emotional state of relationships with family, elders, loved ones, and house pets.

Outfitted with this information about students in the class, the teacher has the opportunity to

bring in writings on the effect of personal relationships on the creation and adherence to norms

within specific places.

Subtheme 1d: Rule formation in specific places and how to respond appropriately.

We have arrived at the final subtheme responding to emplacements of affiliation which is flexible

in its ability to account for a wider range of what counts as culture than traditional definitions. In

this case, rules and customs occur not as generalizations but as lived experiences.

Composition of persona poems are a powerful practice in the spoken word tradition. In

this case, the student creates a fictional place and writes as though he is the voice of that

location: "It's been almost a hundred years / since I was born / and I've finally decided to let my

women vote / It was a grudging decision / but foreign relations would look down on me / not

letting them.*"* This piece was the product of a writing exercise where students create a fictitious

place based on their lived experience. In this instance, the poet has taken the theme of oppression

of women and reflected on it as though he were the offending nation. What I find interesting here is that the poet has identified the unstated rule where oppression of those who can be oppressed is a standard until it becomes bad press. Poems within this subtheme indicate that rules enacted in certain places are dictated by the rules present in nearby places. To this effect, a teacher seeking to create relevant curriculum could collect certain rules that students feel are specific to places they affiliate with, and then conduct a genealogy in regards to nearby places.

In creating a fictional location, the student takes the opportunity to remark on how basic values are associated with locations: "Jonesland is a country that is impacted with millions of people who all have one common goal of getting money and being happy. But it can also be a nightmare if you cross the wrong people." In this segment, the poet has created an imaginary place where there is a single goal and requisite action of the people. Through this exercise, an opportunity arises to discern what students find meaningful based on what is included in their fictitious locations. Poems similar to this point to how engaging in ascribed actions within certain places is non negotiable when adequate time is spent in those places. It is relevant to the current discussion to highlight that affiliation with a place brings requirements for certain normative behaviors that, if ignored, are often a direct insult or declaration of ignorance. Any teacher who wishes to conduct relevant discussions would be well suited to focus them around what students believe these requirements to be.

Generative theme #2: Discourse of authenticity

This generative theme explores rigid understandings of "authentic" identities that must correspond to a template of expectations, i.e., an artist must be poor, a black youth must be rebellious, a white student must get good grades, or a woman must go to lengths to be attractive, etc. Discourse of authenticity differs from the common notion of peer pressure in that templates

of expectations often exist as implicitly communicated norms. Writing workshops that were

motivated by this theory were furnished with a free write on any group or movement students

identify with, discussion of their own definitions of authenticity, brainstorming of various groups

they identify with, and the requisite templates of expectations for belonging to these groups.

Included in this discussion was a distinction between generalizations and stereotypes as many of

the expectations presented by students began to point towards subtle forms of oppression.

Students then wrote drawing upon the brainstorm and discussion for inspiration.

**Subtheme 2a: Templates are enforced due to relationships with cultures and groups

of people.** Poets often utilize the writing experience to identify expectations that are directly tied

to cultural stereotypes as this piece examines:

> I have to be ghetto b/c I'm Black / I have to be ratchet b/c I'm a black girl / I have to be
> ignorant b/c I'm black / I have to have a baby b/c I'm a young black girl / ...all these
> accusations are false, / I am not ghetto b/c I'm Black / I am not ratchet b/c I'm a black girl
> / I do not have to be ignorant b/c I'm black / I do not have to have a baby b/c I'm a young
> black girl.

Templates of expectations for "authentic" behavior are often proponents for stereotypes.

Ultimately limiting the vast scope of possibilities for human development, this theme focuses on

patterns of debilitation that garrote groups and individuals. In this instance, the poet is directly

challenging the stereotypical expectations that are placed on her due to her cultural background.

Poems similar to the above segment all point to how templates are often dictated due to

background or places they are affiliated with. There is a desire within groups for members to

have similar identities, and these similar identities dictate the template. The implicit expectations

within groups for members to reflect identities brings the teacher the opportunity to implement

material dealing with social, psychological, in group/out group tendencies.

Students often comment on their surprise as to what comes out of them while writing spoken word poetry. This poet seems to uncover multiple realizations in the following excerpt:

> They want me to change but how can I choose to when success wasn't on the menu?!...people I love saying "make me proud!" / but proud goes to outstound / to impossible turnarounds / make me proud make me proud / well what if I can't?!..they tell me to be myself but myself is / too hard to be.

This piece has a double-pronged indictment of the limiting factors of expectations for behavior. On one hand it presents the impossible expectation of successful behavior, and on the other it correlates an expectation for success with the poet being herself. Poems of this variety had a common trait of expressing how templates of identity are often conflicting, and are reinforced socially by expectations of friends, parents, and loved ones. It is important for me to note here that templates of authenticity are often placed on individuals by people who have no ill intent, and who in many capacities serve as positive influences. This knowledge in the hands of the teacher could lead to the development of exercises that focus inquiry into how students respond to expectations, and which individuals in their lives propagate these expectations. This piece also exemplifies multiple literacies as the student has created the word "outstound".

Students continued to respond to templates as limiting factors that inhibited their freedom of expression and development of identity. When viewed through the scope of poetry, an interesting dichotomy arises as its function is to remove limitations for communication. This poet takes the opportunity to express her thoughts on the expectations that she should live a life based on freedom: "This country was built on freedom / But what freedom do I have / be this or leave / what type of freedom is that?" Directly pointing out the mutual exclusivity of compulsory templates of identity and living life based on a principle of freedom, this short segment of poetry pulls the curtain back on this catch-22 present in American society. Other poems in the data set

responded vigorously to this situation where students felt stuck between a rock and a hard place,

being asked to behave a certain way while also being told that they have the freedom to be who

they want to be. This awareness points the curriculum to other writings and poetry based on this

hypocritical notion of freedom.

Students often use the writing experience as an opportunity to explore what it means to

be revolutionary, as is apparent in this excerpt:

> But I am stuck between / A man's fickle ways, of toying with a whole half a race / saying you are a revolution / Cast away all the stigma/ be Free! be free / The fault in all belief lies in morality / hurting another in the struggle / for equality.

In this case, we find the poet responding to the conflict of resisting patriarchal

expectations without imposing her own moral code on others, as this would be hypocritical to her

own struggle for freedom. "Femenmantra" is the title of this piece, which I assume indicates a

response to critiques on earlier waves of feminism. In these earlier waves, the impetus to "cast

away all the stigma" led to placing more stigmas on other groups. In this sense, she is speaking

to the capacity to develop identity without constraint from templates of expectations, while also

being cognizant of not levying templates of expectations on others. This sample poem shared

traits with other poems in the subtheme, which highlight how resisting a template of identity is a

statement of freedom and personal choice. Templates for behavior and identity are as

omnipresent as the often polluted air we breath. To take a stand against such templates often

requires a nudge from an extraneous presence. This presence functions as a means to bring

attention to the template of behavior which is likely propagated by socialization and

acculturation. From this insight the teacher would be well suited to include relevant material on

purposeful non-conformity, and to inquire into what types of extraneous pressure might lead to

non-conformity.

Subtheme 2b: Templates of expectation and the propagation of racism and sexism.

The revolutionary character of spoken word poetry provides a powerful opportunity for students

to present insight on expectations that maintain oppressive systems. This excerpt provides a

striking example:

> I say this merely to inform, and not to accuse / many white people do not actively
> promote hate crimes as acceptable. but every time a black kid is shot for being black. and
> a murderer is let go. / or a woman is raped and blamed for wearing to short a skirt... we
> reinforce the shitty, white centric patriarchal culture.

In this sample, the student is focusing on the negative effects of inaction as a perpetuating

factor of templates. The template in this case is the macro culture which the poet terms as

"patriarchal" and "white centric," where expectations of negative actions befalling women and

people of color are commonplace. An in-depth look at this poem, alongside others like it, brings

out the thought that templates of identity often promote and are caused by oppression, ignorance,

stereotypes, and racism. This poem is less an example of the author feeling compelled to follow

certain templates as it is a condemnation of the acceptance of oppressive templates of action.

Knowledge that students are aware and interested in such aspects of society connotes a relevant

connection to material dealing with critical race theory. In regards to this poem sample in

particular, the teacher might focus discussion around students' experiences and thoughts

regarding templates that prescribe oppressive actions.

In this instance, the poet utilizes the writing experience to express her emotional response

to templates that perpetuate oppression of women:

I'm a woman / Does this mean anything? Does this mean I deserve to be raped? / Does it mean I'm hella dramatic and crazy?/ Do I have to be oversensitive... they throw shade / 99 times a day / in 1000 ways / every 365 days / it drives me crazy.

Here we have example of a template reinforcing systemic oppression motivated by ignorance, stereotypes, and racism. This sample poem differs from the later in that it focuses on the emotional effect the template has on the poet. This piece presents the teacher with the opportunity to address the students' emotional responses and personal history in regards to actions that beget templates of oppression.

Subtheme 2c: The prescription of templates motivated by macro conceptions of culture. By "macro" I am referring to such entities and constructs as religion, capitalism, economic class distinction, broad racial categories, etc. With this final perspective on discourses of authenticity, we can chart the entirety of motivating factors for levying expectations from personal relationships to cultural affiliations to wider overarching aspects of society.

Delving into her personal experience with religion, this student presents her response to expectations presented by Christianity: "I am a Christian...I am expected to be pure, to pray, to follow god's way / never doubt him just believe and pray...But who am I? / who are they? to tell me who I am? who are you?" *T*he poet expresses affiliation with Christianity and the requisite expectations that follow. She is not without tension in regards to these expectations, and displays awareness that there are individuals within this religion who promote adherence to this template. Similar poems reflected the understanding of templates within macro systems that function through specific person-to-person relationships. This sample of student information has the potential to open up discussion on students' experiences of different templates that are directly prescribed by macro cultural and social systems.

In this final excerpt, the poet is responding to expectations placed both by peers and society, utilizing the writing experience to explore his emotions and thoughts regarding the experience of a friend: "The world turned him into a cold hearted murder tool / and he hasn't even graduated high school / because his partners in crime told him he was too cool." This final segment of student poetry exhibits the macro conception of culture in "the world," while also displaying the personal relationships of "his partners in crime" that motivate adherence to the template. Direct mention of an expectation for action exists in his being thought to be "too cool." This segment of poetry displays with a concise economy of words, the interplay between macro and personal relationships to affiliation and the consequent templates. Poems similar to this identify how templates of identity are often ascribed to unconsciously, due to assumptions, appearances, and friends. Knowledge that this thinking is present among the students motivates a relevant implementation of writings on the effect of appearance and peer pressure on identity.

Generative theme #3: Third space identity construction

This theme refers to understanding identity by focusing on the intersection of two or more otherwise compartmentalized or discrete aspects, traits, interests, affiliations, or cultural/ethnic backgrounds. i.e., Latino and artist, black and feminist, young and motivated, female and athlete, etc. In the writing workshops, students were asked to list all of the various identifier terms that apply to them. They then drew connections between the various terms in order to place attention on specific experiences where these various terms intersect. Discussion was conducted on this theory specifically in regards to how a list of single identifier terms do not provide a nuanced description of a person, but the confluence of various identities does paint a nuanced and specific picture. The writing prompt offered an opportunity to examine specific experiences where this confluence was salient.

Subtheme 3a: Confluences of identity occur due to interactions with other people. In the process of creating CRSP, it is crucial to understand the effect that interactions within cultural contexts have on students' identities. The molten synergy of identity and relationship to others is often played out in person-to-person daily interactions within established cultural spaces. In some instances these interactions can be confusing, pulling the student in different directions as is exhibited in this poem about friendships:

> Hung out with people that were genuine, trustworthy and real / Hung out with people that were disloyal, tongue twisters and confusing / Hung out with people that were not focus, party animals / ...Don't get me wrong / I had fun while it lasted and learned new things / but our friendships fade away / because you judged me or didn't understand my / dilemma / you don't care about me but only yourself / so leave me alone / I don't want to be with you or part of you.

In this example, we see the student reflecting on two aspects or identities which become salient in her interactions with the people she is hanging out with. Ultimately the poet chooses the identity of "trustworthy and real" over "tongue twisters and party animals." We can see the intersection of these identities in the line, "fun while it lasted" and "you don't care about me but only about yourself." This subtheme takes shape through the student providing an example of two distinct identities that are forged through interactions with other people. As other students' work echoed this poem, the teacher has the opportunity to implement material which discusses the effect of social influence on development of identity. Furthermore, these examples of a confluence of identities provide the teacher with an understanding that students have multifaceted and shifting identities, while also utilizing agency in the creation of their identities.

The complexities of the search for identity in relation to others are also shaped by cultural heritage, as is displayed in this piece:

> Came up young Mexican growing up a mess / Uncle with the sesh so I never really stressed / son of two great human beings got me / seeing in between the lines, not yet / black and white, scary nights trying to/ distinguish left and right... became tall and sturdy with this art and with my passion you can't tear me apart / b/c the Aztec blood keeps me brave / and the athlete keeps me sane/ bring the thug home to family hoping they don't get mad at me / cause this young teenager is happy.

Here we see a student taking stock of numerous aspects of his identity: his relationship to his background, his creative capacity, decision making, athleticism, and his family. This window into his life illuminates a nuanced picture where we begin to glimpse the ever complex mosaic of identity. The poet reconciles the numerous aspects of his identity through interaction with his family. It is in this interaction that we have evidence of an intersection where his "brave, sane and thug" identities collide in the culture of his home, where his family awaits with an impending emotional response. This poem reflects other poems in this subtheme in echoing a formation of identity through differing from or responding to family members. Supported by this knowledge, the teacher is informed of the relevance of writings based on the response of the family to a wide array of identities present in a son or daughter. This poem shows how identity construction exists as a constant process, where the cauldron of self is continually brewing and being examined by family who provide immediate emotional feedback.

Subtheme 3b: Challenges to embracing intersecting identities. These instances present situations motivated by factors that arise within a student's thought and emotional processes, and are levied by external societal pressures. Third space identity construction provides an additive understanding of identity. Distinct factors collide to provide a more detailed picture of self, and these poems speak to occasions where this additive process is halted.

Some of the students describe challenges to identity formation due to discrepancies between how they appear physically and how they identify psychologically. For instance: "I am

a woman outside / with the mind of my counterpart / stuck in between / Atlas being forced to hold up/ two worlds at once/ connecting palm to southern pole. / To both / But neither are me." The poet is making a nuanced distinction between her physical identity as a women and "the mind of her counterpart" which is being stifled or "stuck in between," and her identity becomes required to reflect both the physical and mental. This snippet of humanity concludes with the assertion that neither of the poet's internal or external identities reflect who she is. In this piece, we see the conflict between an intersection of identities. No resolution is offered though we must not miss out on the vital information that is presented here: students are aware that identity is determined as much by what they experience in their minds as by what other people reflect back based on their physical appearance. Other poems in this subtheme express the difficulty in embracing a confluence of identity due to a conflict between internal thoughts/beliefs/personal truth and external perception. This morsel of knowledge indicates a relevant inclusion of material that explores curtailing identity construction due to external pressures.

Students also used the writing opportunity to explore challenges to identity construction based on personal response to negative stimulus, as the following indicates:

> Everyone is a margarita or pina colada while / I'm a mixed drink of one part left alone… / and two parts tragedy / a tidal wave of antidepressants and name calls...I tell myself to show my pride but when you break me down / there's only monsters inside.

Spoken word poetry often finds a wheelhouse of muse in the topics of personal and social struggle. These themes provide the highly charged experiences necessary to motivate the writer to compose a piece intended to act as both emotional catharsis, and conduit for a collective witnessing of the human experience. In this instance, the writer is clearly expressing an intersection of identities of "left alone", "tragedy" and "I tell myself to show pride". These

discrete facets of identity exhibit a person who is grappling with two distinct responses to life

one pessimistic and one hopeful. Students who offered personal experiences similar to this in

their poems illuminated a subtheme that shows how the intersection of identities can cause

negative outcomes such as fear, negative self thought, overstimulated emotions, and pain for

others. Outfitted with this knowledge, I can foresee the class responding to material based on the

psychology of emotions, and class discussions which are sensitive to self imposed negative

emotions.

  Often times students utilize the writing experience to delve into moments where

expression has been halted, as in the below excerpt:

> I don't appear as I am / Physically I boast the parts of me / I wish most to conceal / My
> insecurities paint my face / they see my complexion / with no reflection on how little it /
> mirrors me / There's a disconnect / I feel the complexity of Galaxies within me / but
> cannot express / the things others think should define me / cannot transcend, too difficult
> to comprehend.

  Complexity is a necessity and asset when identity is viewed through the lens of third

space identity construction. This complexity also has the potential to confuse as is evident in this

piece. The perspective offered by this poem was a surprise to me, as embarking on this study I

had presumed that the intersection of identities would provide nuanced and positively framed

depictions of identity. This poem and those like it fill out elements in the subtheme that indicate

how complexity of the intersections of identity makes it difficult to express and understand

identity adequately. At its core, this poem articulates the struggle that arises in the conflict

between the vast "Galaxies" within, and the inaccuracy of what "others think should define me".

We find the poet fraught with angst resulting from a seeming impossibility to foster a reciprocal

relationship between the complexity within and her affective response to the assumed simplicity

of appearance. Material relevant to this would explore the premises of non-normative identity

presented in queer theory.

Subtheme 3c: Discrete aspects of identities in conflict due to assumptions based on culture. Students often find motivation for their spoken word pieces in their response to cultural

oppression, as in the poem below:

> Being black ain't easy / and being white don't make it no betta / how do you be both / what is it to be black / or what is it to be white / Does it mean I am ignorant and dumb / or does it mean one day I will be powerful / who am I?...Am I a whore / can I be powerful? / am I powerful? / will I be independent? / or am I depending...I'm in a crossroad / but what I can tell you / is I'm black, I'm white, I can be blue / pink or gray / I'm a Christian and yes I do pray.

A precise depiction of the poet's intersection of identities is presented where being of

mixed cultural descent leads to a confluence of racially profiled stereotypes. One aspect which

marks this poem as unique in its depiction of intersection of identity is the simultaneous

projection into the future, "will I be independent?" and comment on the present, "am I

powerful?" This confluence of future and present tense illuminates that the poet is aware that

these two identities are omnipresent in her existence and aren't going anywhere. Her connection

of ethnic background to stereotypes speaks to other thoughts presented by students in this

subtheme that address how cultural identity ascribes practices which sometimes conflict with and

always dialog with lived identity, and that it is a personal decision to participate in cultural

practices which are sometimes motivated by oppression. A notion presented earlier is echoed

here where students are claiming the helm of their agency as they navigate within the tumultuous

rivers of intersecting identities. The teacher's awareness of this state of her students' perspectives

on racial background points to a relevant utilization of writings on the effect of oppression on

cultural identity.

Students often find spoken word to be an opportunity for enthusiastic proclamation of who they are and how society's interpretation of them is often incorrect, as the following student exclaims:

> 1/2 funny- 2/4 intelligent - 3/4 anger issues- 1/5 crazy - 3/4 cute/ This is a recipe for 'you can't handle this', you see the ingredients above don't make me. Those are just the sprinkles of what you see on the cake. I am the cake itself under all the candles... underneath the picture.

This non-recipe presents a clear case of distinct aspects of identity creating a gestalt that is greater than the sum of its parts. The picture created by ingredients does not constitute the poet's identity. Instead, she is the whole "cake itself" while alluding to her identity as existing somewhere "beneath the picture." Considering this sentiment along with the body of information presented thus far points to how the intersection of discrete aspects of identity do not provide an account for the entire corpus of identity. Observing students navigating this intersection provides the opportunity to understand a unique representation of each student's emotional response to the confusing nuances of identity. Other poems in this subtheme spoke to students' refusal to accept identity imposed by extraneous forces, as these don't take into account mutually contradicting intersections and unstated social rules.

Subtheme 3d: Personal attributes affect the intersection of identities. Here we find that discrete aspects of identity often arise from particular motivations, or are supported by attributes and skills. The takeaway notion I see is that identity is something that is formed by the experiences we want to have and the tools we have to undergo these experiences. The first instance bellow speaks to the "wanted experiences" where the second speaks to the "tools" we have to achieve them.

As poetry is often utilized as a vehicle for emotional expression, students take the opportunity to delve into the murky quagmire of shifting responses to what motivates their desires, as is evident here:

> Something so beautiful yet so ugly / the feeling of completion and emptiness / something I wanted so bad but when I got it / I forgot the meaning of it / Fucked up in a state I shouldn't be / something so easy but we make it hard / I'm here /I'm lost...I stick around around like a puppy waiting for its owner/ only to be alone in the end...something so beautiful yet so ugly / that's love / so familiar but we're holding on to threads / its the pain / its the evil.

The poet tells us of two converging aspects of identity both motivated by desire. The first shows itself through the experience of "completion," where what was sought for was attained. The second immediately precedes with the emotion of "emptiness," where this attainment does not lead to anything. The two identities here do not intersect at the same moment, but rather the first begets the second. An arrow might be fired at me in regards to the thought that this does not signify a confluence of identities. The confluence is seen in the poet's reflection on the entire experience of love. According to this student's perspective, when one aligns with their desire for love they then attain the intersecting identities of "ugly," "evil," "holding on," "familiar," and "complete." Identity is forged through reflecting on the process of a multi-faceted desire. Perspectives on the illusory aspects of love invites the teacher to bring in a wide range of romantic and angst-filled poetry, both contemporary and classic, while also inviting discussion on identities that are constantly being reshaped by experiences with following desires.

This piece shows the poet engaging in the trend of powerful proclamation of skills and their effect on identity: "Now it's the only road I'll ever know the music and a microphone / but only home when I'm alone / with a pen and a pad to take notes / that's how I develop an independent mentality." Here we have evidence of a student describing a confluence of the

discrete identities of "artist" and "independent." A wholehearted commitment to creativity sends this poet down an intimate road where the only thing to be depended on is the creative process. The student uses the tool of creativity to construct his identity which then becomes paired with an "independent mentality." Poems similar to this presented the thought that identities based in confidence and independence are motivated by personal belief in skills and abilities. By understanding that students in the class are focused on developing identities based on various skills, the teacher is presented with the opportunity to determine students' abilities and then bring in material to respond to these skills. With this insight, discussions in the classroom can become motivated to include the various skills of participants, and weave together out-of-class lived experience with the collective educational process.

Mrs. Shoemaker's thoughts as to how spoken word poetry can be used to create CRSP

Construction and augmentation of a CRSP requires a nuanced understanding of how students' identities reflect their relationship to culture. The summary of information (Appendix 2) was given to Mrs. Shoemaker in order to prompt this interview, and determine how spoken word poetry can serve as a tool in the generation of curriculum. Her observations as to how this information might be applied focused around three specific themes that underpin crucial aspects in the construction of relevant curriculum.

Firstly and most directly useful to the construction of CRSP, Mrs. Shoemaker thought that spoken word poetry serves to bring to light aspects about students' lives and relationship to culture that might otherwise go unseen. Secondly, she observed how spoken word poetry could be useful in determining a curriculum that would be relevant to the majority of students in the class. The first theme focuses on specific students' relationships to culture, where this second theme hones in on the class as a whole. Thirdly, she determined that spoken word enables

students to reflect on and learn more about themselves and their relationships to culture, thereby allowing them to communicate these new understandings to the teacher. These instances focus on how spoken word provides students the opportunity to reflect on the social construction of culture, specifically when this construction has an oppressive effect. I will discuss each of these themes through the lens of a selection of her interview responses.

How student poetry displays relationships to culture

Mrs. Shoemaker realized that spoken word provides students an opportunity to reflect on, and craft poems around specific issues that they deal with on a daily basis depending on where they live.

They might say, "I know I want to write about this issue and I feel passionate about it because I see it everyday or it's in my neighborhood," or whatever it is, and they can take this energy that they see all over the place and put it into a piece they feel passionately about.

An important insight in this excerpt focuses on students' passion for these issues. This indicates that students are not just relating what is relevant to them, but also what is specifically meaningful in their lived experience. Spoken word lends itself to honing in on these types of issues as the art form requires the author to highlight a sense of urgency in their writing and performance. This urgency points the way to understanding key aspects of what students deem to be meaningful experiences within their neighborhoods and other cultural affiliations.

The scope of specific instances of students' relationships to culture is presented in this excerpt, "Sometimes they have immigrant parents and they are American born, exploring where those gaps are and how that affects their school performance sometimes and what they bring to the classroom." Here we find Mrs. Shoemaker indicating that spoken word has the potential to

provide students the opportunity to explore how their parents' cultural experiences affects their own cultural experience. This type of understanding often comes about through sensitive communication where students divulge emotionally laden content in their writing. Spoken word poetry thrives on the communication of these types of issues by generating enthusiasm for courageous acts of creativity.

Students often take this writing opportunity to alleviate anxiety through expression of painful experiences.

I think that is something that might come out in this social justice unit that I'm going to do with them where they got to explore these issues of oppression and police brutality where most of them have stories to tell.

Students who have had to face oppression and police brutality are likely to have internalized the systematic racism that propagates these acts. Decrying the acidity of this brutality is a mainstay of spoken word poetry due to the revolutionary nature of the art form. To note that students have experiences with this sort of oppression is one thing. To understand each student's specific relationship to this situation is quite another as it provides relevant contact points for the generation of customized curriculum.

The personally evocative nature of spoken word is present in the below excerpt.

So let's say I have a student who doesn't really say much and are getting straight B's and sort of falling through the radar. I get to see a different side of that student because they might express something in their writing that I wouldn't necessarily get to see in another way.

Mrs. Shoemaker's thought puts forth a direct recommendation for using spoken word to learn things about students that might otherwise go unobserved. This particular excerpt does not specifically highlight the student's relationship to culture, though it does present the message that spoken word brings to light specific elements of a student's identity. Specific information of this sort is crucial in the effort to generate CRSP that is not based on cultural generalizations.

Students often identified their relationship to culture through bringing to light specific aspects of their relationship to family members, "I really liked the idea that identity is forged through finding distinction from other family members, and that identity can then sometimes clash with relationships with the rest of the family." Mrs. Shoemaker is pointing directly to how students' identities are affected by their relationship to culture (if we agree that relationships to culture are often emplaced within relationships to family members). When students reflect on their relationships to family members, they provide the teacher the opportunity to understand specific instances of cultural relevance that are unique to each student.

In this final excerpt Mrs. Shoemaker presents a range of potentially hidden aspects of identity that are often too sensitive for conventional or academic modes of communication.

I wouldn't know if one of their parents had passed away, or if they have had a major loss in their life, or if their parents are divorced, or if they have two dads or two moms, or live with their grandparents, or if a family member has a drug addiction or alcoholism.

This list indicates a small portion of the types of personally evocative topics that are present in student-written spoken word poetry. Though not necessarily reflective of relationships to culture, they do provide a cursory look at the types of meaningful understandings that illuminate the nuanced stories behind each student. If the goal of CRSP is to facilitate a

meaningful learning experience that is based within students' cultures, then sensitive topics such as these are a good place to start gathering the building blocks of curriculum.

Constructing a curriculum that is relevant to a majority of the students

An arrow to be fired at my argument for using spoken word poetry as a curriculum generating tool is that there are too many varying aspects of students' relationships to culture to craft a curriculum that addresses each situation, as well as staying relevant to the class a whole. A response to this critique highlights the idea that specific aspects of students' relationships to culture create clear patterns (presented in the subthemes of the previous section and the summary of information in Appendix 2). These patterns are relevant to a wide range of students, thereby enabling a curriculum that reaches groups within the class. Another response to this critique exists within the excerpts below, where Mrs. Shoemaker indicates how spoken word poetry both serves to aid in the creation of a cohesive classroom culture, and how it illuminates specific terms that indicate students' cultural affiliations. These terms indicate the wide range of affiliations students have, thereby reframing what we mean by "relevant" to include a vast plurality rather than the general ethnocentric identifiers of culture.

In this first instance, Mrs. Shoemaker focuses on how spoken word poetry serves to create a cohesive classroom culture that is not comprised of isolated identities. Instead, it is constituted by diverse members of a larger body brought together through courageous expression, "I think that (spoken word poetry) helps bridge gaps between different ages, or different neighborhoods, or different backgrounds, or different types of upbringing." When the students bridge these gaps by identifying similarities in emotional experiences (as is explained in depth in the student interviews in the next chapter) they begin to coalesce into a unified classroom culture. At this point, the curriculum is relevant to a newly emerging body based on

shared experiences/emotions as well as to students' specific relationships to culture. These shared experiences compose unifying themes that lay the foundation for a curriculum relevant to many students in the class.

Mrs. Shoemaker highlights the many facets of culture in this excerpt, which calls into question the merit of attempting to create a curriculum that focuses on a concept of culture based on ethnicity.

I think there is a lot more than just race and gender, you also bring up religion or capitalism or economic class distinctions that we can look at, and really bringing this into their writing that explores a lot of this.

By bringing to light the various affiliations that students may possess, a curriculum that has a wide breadth of relevance must be able to encompass various identifiers that students ascribe to. If CRSP is based around supporting a pluralistic society, then it is necessary to identify which aspects of the larger whole students correspond to. Poems that highlight these aspects of their lives provide the teacher with information that illuminates identifiable markers of cultures that students connect with. These markers are apt to be shared by many students in the class, and thereby serve as a means to craft curriculum that reaches a majority of the students.

Understanding the interplay between culture, identity and oppression

Spoken word poetry provides more than an opportunity for expression and communication. By placing focus on topics that are personally meaningful to students, it offers a space for reflection and contemplation as well. When attention is placed on conflicts in students' relationship to culture, the work produced fulfills these purposes and brings to light understanding in regards to what is relevant to those in the class. Mrs. Shoemaker attests to her opportunity to observe students as they go through this process of reflection. Undergoing this

process is important for the creation of CRSP as the teacher does not assume to be a mind reader able to divine students' relationships to culture. Instead, the teacher depends on students to illuminate these relationships.

Through careful consideration in the creative process, students have the opportunity to learn more about how their relationship to culture might be affected by larger stratifications. The following excerpts attest to moments when Mrs Shoemaker is aware of students' realizations of social constructions that hinder their relationships with culture. By "social construction," I mean circumstances where the defining characteristics of a culture are determined by media, stereotypes, and other large systems that are not themselves part of the culture that they define.

In this excerpt, Mrs. Shoemaker considers how spoken word poetry allows students to reflect on ways that their identity is constrained by generalizations in regards to affiliations they might have. "Understanding that students might feel, 'OK I have to be in this box, I'm a women or female so I have to be this way, or I'm Asian so I have to get good grades, or I'm black so I have to… .'" The creation of CRSP depends on students presenting cultural emplacements they affiliate with. This excerpt displays that this affiliation is not benign, but rather can bring with it a score of values and effects on identity. Specifically, Mrs. Shoemaker is noting how students feel compelled to adapt their identity to fit a specific affiliation. The templates required to make these affiliations (discussed in the discourse of authenticity theme of the previous section) are often composed of generalizations and stereotypes, and do not contribute to students' agency in developing their cultural identity.

Mrs. Shoemaker notes how the social construction of culture is propagated by assumptions based on appearance, "I have seen students write things like 'I am this, but I'm the opposite of this.'… 'This is what people see but this is what is really inside of me.'" In this

excerpt we see how students utilize spoken word to delve into the contradiction between physical appearance and inner identity. This statement highlights the necessity of revealing testimony in order to understand which cultures a student affiliates with, as their appearance is not sufficient to understand what is culturally relevant to them. Mrs. Shoemaker notes how students are wading through a world that often attributes a culture to them that they do not ascribe to.

Here Mrs. Shoemaker notes another effect that the social construction of culture has on students identities, "A lot of these topics were really interesting to me as far as cultural identity being in conflict with what their lived identity is." This excerpt is distinct from the previous one in that it indicates how even a culture that students affiliate with might be in conflict with how they choose to live. This thought underpins just how murky the waters of affiliation can be. Where students might hail from a specific culture, their lived identity might reflect a different emplacement. In the case that both of these are relevant to the student, how should a teacher decide what to focus curriculum on? The point of CRSP is to base the learning experience within students' cultures and sustain new cultural innovations. Therefore relevance exists within the culture the student is the most actively and passionately involved with. It is within this active involvement that new iterations of culture arise. Fortunately for the curriculum developer, spoken word poetry brings our attention squarely to what the writer deems important and personally meaningful.

Mrs. Shoemaker identifies how the social construction of culture is applied to students whether they will it or not, "So all of these things kind of become titles that become assigned to them even if they don't intend that to happen and fight against it." Previous excerpts have clarified how culture can become synonymous with labels. What stands out about this excerpt is the resistance put forth by students in the face of these label assignments. Through this

declamation, students assert another facet of identity: that which stands up against stereotypes and oppression.

Mrs. Shoemaker is clearly aware that this art form holds a capability for elucidating many interesting aspects of students' identity and cultural relationships. Through her observations, we have instances where specific aspects of rivers of identity leap into view. The question is, can the researcher and teacher understand them? By citing the various identity constructs present in a single class, a recurring question rears its head again: how could we possibly hope to base curriculum in such a diverse set of contexts? I think the answer exists in the effects of the process of becoming aware of what cultures students affiliate with by way of spoken word poetry. The pertinent effects of this process highlight how the culture of the classroom is immediately transformed when students realize that their lives are relevant to their learning experience. The teacher is not guessing what will be relevant, but rather is actively employing methods to gather information in order to base the learning experience within the culture of the students.

**Chapter 5: How spoken word poetry workshops reshape
the cultural landscape of the classroom**

Student interviews, pre/post questionnaires, and the teacher interview generated three themes which focus on supporting classroom culture through inspiring empathetic connections, opening pathways for communication, and broadening perspective. Before students are open to presenting sensitive, culturally relevant information, a level of trust is necessary to ensure that their offerings will not fall on deaf ears. This first generative theme contains examples of how spoken word workshops generate a collective classroom spirit versed in emotional connection. In the second generative theme, responses in the data sets indicate that once a level of connection is established, students begin to explore new vistas of personally meaningful communication. Finally, students and teacher attest to the pertinent effect of spoken word leading to a broadening of perspective resulting from a wealth of courageous writing and performance. I use these generative themes to respond to the second research question: to what extent and in what ways do spoken word workshops contribute to the development of a classroom culture based on mutual understanding of lived experiences of culture?

Generative theme #1: Inspiring empathetic connections

Anyone who has attended a moving spoken word performance can attest to the immediate sense of empathy ignited through the often emotionally visceral poetry. When students become aware of the standard set by professional spoken word artists, and engage in workshops designed to relate this standard, their ability to courageously rise to new levels of compelling expression is often astonishing. Performance through this art form is intended to transmit intended sensations that are met with emotive response thus igniting a wave of empathy.

"Poetry helps me feel what others are going through": Testimonials from student

interviews

In this excerpt, Jose responds to the performance aspect of a spoken word workshop

where students of the class witness their peers' creative expression, and thereby dissolve the

invisible wall between audience and performer.

It makes the audience come in contact with whoever is speaking because it is that

emotion, it's that thing that they hold inside when they do let it out in spoken word, it just

opens a world inside that person, and you get a piece of insight into their world when

they speak to you.

This thought places attention on the impact of performance poetry in regards to the

facilitation of direct "contact," which initiates the process of receiving the emotional content of a

poem. This notion of direct contact is crucial in the effort to create mutual understanding. Jose's

thoughts direct focus to the thing they hold inside. I take this to refer to the glistening and life-

affirming vulnerable presentation of self that occurs in spoken word. Jose is identifying an

understanding where each person carries with them the capacity to open a world inside another

person through sharing emotion and thought. This feeds the classroom culture by prompting

meaningful interactions that forge connections.

Jose saw spoken word as a means to empathize with other people's struggles, "Because

creative writing (and spoken word)... has shown me that everyone has their problems and even

though you don't see it within that person, in the pages it's there, and you can see it in their face

as well when you meet that person." When students call forth the courage to express personally

significant painful issues they enter a space of powerful expression. Though this space begins in

writing and performance, it does not end there. Jose remarks how the emotional transparency that

is evoked carries through to when you meet that person. Moving the empathetic experience past academic and creative exercises is fundamental to the creation of a classroom culture.

Jose was compelled to talk about spoken word in the exact terms that are often used to define the empathetic experience.

> It gives you that feeling that that person wants you to have, and you might never have to go through the same situation...some key words bring out that feeling inside you and you're no longer separate from that person who told you, you're more equal because you're sharing the same emotions, you're trying to put yourself in their footsteps, trying to figure out why, or how, they feel what they feel.

This excerpt expresses the precise emotional intentionality in spoken word, and the effect of fostering empathetic connections. When emotional resonance occurs within the performer and listener, a curiosity often compels the listener to try to "figure out why, or how, they feel what they feel." Jose's words echo with resounding sensitivity and proclaim a gospel of togetherness through creativity, where elements of difference indicated by "never have [ing] to go through the same situation," become no longer irredeemable divides, but instead are challenges in the journey of empathetic connection.

Students who are engaged in spoken word attest to the good will and vast spaces of sensitivity that are opened up when listening actively as peers share personal and eloquent testimony of their life experiences.

> When they get that insight about them, they're thinking about someone else, they're putting someone else before them, they're giving someone else importance that they don't even know, and it's wonderful because that reaching out to someone that they don't

know, lets other people do the same thing because you're not scarred and you're not the

only people doing it, there's allot of people doing it too.

When Jose refers to that insight about "them," I take him to reference the sharing of

emotions mentioned in the previous excerpt. The giving of importance is a major gateway into

empathy and classroom cultures based on mutual understanding. One recurring element I have

noticed in the 5,000 hours of spoken word poetry workshops I have led is the domino effect

alluded to in "let [ting] other people do the same thing." Once students begin to validate each

other with empathetic listening and response, it becomes easy for a majority of the class to join

in.

The ethic of good will driven by empathetic connection is resoundingly championed in

this excerpt from the interview with Jose.

It's for us to write, take it in, reflect on it and try to help them with their situation, see that

we're not different from their situation. We might be in another situation, but the emotions

are still the same, the fear is still there; I feel that when you come together with someone

that shares an emotion, you create a bond, and you can help that person go through what

they're going through.

In this excerpt, Jose mentions the ability to have emotional resonance and empathy across

a divide of difference. He expresses a resoundingly positive experience of bridging this divide

through the bonds created in courageous writing and sharing. In my experience, relating across

difference requires straddling a paradox that is presented in this excerpt as distinct situations with

similar emotions and fears. What strikes me the most here is Jose's realization of his ability to

help the person "go through what they're going through." Empathetic connections are healing as

well as enlightening, and are a means to mutual understanding even when backgrounds and situations might seem to prohibit direct connection.

Poetry builds a classroom culture of caring: Student responses to pre-study questionnaire

These responses in the questionnaire spoke to the capacity of spoken word to forge emotional connections, to aid in the process of gaining awareness of one's own emotions, and to heighten sensitivity to the emotions of classmates. In regards to inspiring empathy, students' responses focused around themes of expression, connection, inner experience, and education.

These responses indicate the facilitation of emotional communication in spoken word:

"Allows you to express who you are by speaking and emphasizing emotions.*"*

"SW is a way to express yourself and write down things you're too afraid to say."

The first response stands out to me in that the student connects expression of self to emphasizing emotions. Spoken word is distinct from other classroom activities in that emotional expression is eloquent, powerful, and passionate rather than awkward. The second response deals with how spoken word eliminates inhibitions, as the student identifies the opportunity to communicate experiences that might involve too much fear to be presented in conversation. I am consistently blown away by how a class will come together in empathetic support of a student who ventures into this terrain in their writing.

Here we find that the students' responses echo terms used to define empathy:

"SW is a shared and appreciated action.*"*

"SW lets other people feel what you feel.*"*

These two insights point directly to the bonds forged through empathetic emotional communication. The students' realization of mutuality is present in both of these responses, where the island of self becomes a contiguous continent of human connection. These comments

indicate how valuing the contributions of classmates leads emotions to become an invisible thread woven through the room. One of the precise goals in spoken word is to evoke emotional response in listeners, often through presenting personally sensitive issues. When this occurs, students recognize that they have been heard and that their emotional experience has been validated.

In these two responses, students direct their focus towards the reflection of personal significance and the effect on the artist:

"SW is emotions, provocative thoughts, pain, love and suffering.*"*

"SW makes you alone with yourself and it feels good.*"*

In the first response, we find the student directly expressing how the content that drives a poem is based on personally meaningful experiences and emotions. This creates empathy as the student is focusing attention on an identifiable and substantive personal reality. In my experience with the empathetic bonds forged through spoken word, the basis for shared connection arises in the willful act to bring personally meaningful thoughts, emotions, and experiences to the table. The second insight presented here speaks predominantly about personal intimacy. From seeds of personal intimacy, vines of empathy sprout and wind their way through a classroom culture based on mutual understanding.

Nuggets of insight: Responses to post-study questionnaire

Responses to the post questionnaire did hold a portion of differing data from that of the pre questionnaire. In order to stave off redundancy, I have not included responses that echo sentiments presented in the earlier data set.

Students responded to feelings of security that develop in a spoken word workshop:

"SW gives students a chance to write what's going on with them and feel safe and not judged.*"*

"Students slowly get comfortable when they write spoken word.*"*

I have spoken at length about the power that this art form holds to provide a space for students to courageously express personal and nuanced aspects of their identity. A realistic temper ought to be added to this claim which is presented in the second response cited here. It takes a certain amount of time (usually around three sessions over the course of three weeks) for students to begin to accept the safety and lack of judgment present in this environment. Once the class has gelled around this belief, levels of comfort rise where emotional expression occurs and students become surprisingly forthcoming with their writing.

"Poetry promotes an empathetic culture in my classroom" : Teacher interview excerpts

In this data set, we have excerpts from Mrs. Shoemaker that provide insight into the capacity for spoken word to positively affect classroom culture, specifically in regards to fostering mutual understanding between classmates and the teacher. The questions that informed this interview were not designed in order to bring forth information in regards to supporting the development of classroom culture. After reviewing thoughts presented in the literature surrounding Culturally Relevant Pedagogy, specifically from Noguera (2008), I realized that the facilitation of mutual understanding is a potent effect of these workshops. This effect has the potential to support CRSP by providing a venue for students and teachers to share specific relationships to their background through direct interactions motivated by the meaningful experiences that inform the majority of poems written in classes. With the sharing of these relationships, students and teachers encounter each other's humanity, and co-create a pedagogy based in a classroom culture of mutual understanding.

I have cited four instances where Mrs. Shoemaker reported that spoken word functions to foster empathetic connections in the classroom. Empathy is crucial for the generation of CRSP, because without establishing an emotional connection there is not a personal and informal standard for communication necessary to impart and receive culturally relevant information.

In this excerpt, Mrs. Shoemaker describes how spoken word has a dual function of transitioning away from what Paulo Freire (1975) identified as the "banking model" of education, while instead creating direct pathways for relating experiences, "I think that breaks down that wall, we are working on sharing the experience and not the authoritarian filling them with information and them reproducing it." Relevance to empathy is present in this excerpt where experiences shared in a lateral manner (teachers and students as co-participants) involve breaking down a wall that blocks sensitive and personally meaningful topics. The wall that Mrs. Shoemaker alludes to consists of the rigid roles often standing between direct informal encounters between teachers and students. Engaging laterally leads students and teachers to share without coercion, and classroom culture develops thanks to the contributions of participants.

Mrs. Shoemaker takes note of how students respond to the work of their peers, "I think that once students see each other taking on such a courageous act, such a courageous act to get up and speak your truth or speak your emotions [then they feel comfortable doing it as well]". One of the standout strengths of a spoken word workshop is that it allows students to teach each other in regards to their life experiences, and show how to take steps towards open communication of difficult topics. By placing each student in a position of power, the classroom culture develops with presentations of personal and emotionally courageous performance. In this case, the classroom culture is established by actions of students, and the teacher cannot impose or control the exact shape it will take. Spoken word is apt under this perspective as it allows the

students to take the driver's seat, and provide the majority of material that furnishes the class by way of expressing personal and emotional truths.

Mrs. Shoemaker also commented on the capacity to generate a space where students feel comfortable with taking the courageous steps mentioned in the previous excerpt, "I think it creates a more understanding and compassionate environment while also creating a safe place." An environment built through the contributions of the participants promotes active listening and self-reflection. When students take it upon themselves to step up and share moving and beautiful testaments of their life experience, they are making a statement to the rest of their peers. Performances exhibit trust that words are being heard while fellow students undergo emotional experiences. Trust and goodwill are necessary conditions for a safe space, and only become a reality of classroom culture when put into practice.

Throughout the twelve week residency, Mrs. Shoemaker kept her ears open for what students had to say about the effect that spoken word was having on their lives*:*

A lot of them say that writing is therapy for them. Where they feel like maybe they aren't necessarily solving something but they are getting to a point where at least they have expressed it, moving forward in a sense.

The sincere and focused self-reflection that informs the writing process often brings on the realization that overcoming a struggle is not simply an item to be checked off a to-do-list. But rather that it involves a commitment to a continued self-dialog that has the potential to transform through the process of sustained focus. The self-expression evident in performance allows students to get a particular issue out into the open. With the issue exposed, they can reflect on it from a place of clarity, as the situation has been encapsulated momentarily in an observable poem rather than a cloudy spectral mass within their psyche. The moving forward that Mrs.

Shoemaker mentions also has traction when we take note of the constantly changing aspect of creative expression. When a topic becomes material for a poem, it is refashioned and becomes a piece of art, thereby taking on multiple roles in the student's life. In my experience, it is the removal of a particular issue from a fixed and immutable state that engenders a therapeutic culture where mutual understanding is supported each time a student moves forward. In regards to the empathy inspired by this act when students witness each other taking on this process, the possibility for numb dismissal begins to evaporate. Members of the class are brought into a collective presence, witnessing their peers process personally potent and meaningful situations.

Generative theme #2: Opening pathways for communication

Fueling the motivation to reach out to people in meaningful ways provides spoken word participants an opportunity to present their thoughts, lives, and emotional experiences in a manner that evokes a sense of camaraderie. Through bearing witness to personal stories, students share faith that what they have to say matters and is worth listening carefully to. Through this belief, an enhanced drive for communication results in classroom spaces that take shape based on the unique contributions of students.

"When you write everything comes out": Student interviews

The following excerpt from an interview with a student by the name of Niki exhibits how spoken word opens the floodgates of expression and the mutual connection that results:

> you listen to other people's' poetry and you say wow I didn't even know that about them. I feel like with the poetry workshops it really opens a door for everybody to start writing and everybody to realize I didn't know that about that person because when you write everything comes out.

What I find to be particularly relevant to the generative theme of fostering heightened communication is Niki's insight that "when you write everything comes out." Through facilitating countless workshops, I have found that students are often surprised by what they have to say in their poems. Where the standard essay form of writing requires them to follow a specific outline, the creative process involves exploring new terrain, veering off course on purpose in order to discover new waterways of identity and new means of expression.

In this excerpt Jose relates the communicative capacity that spoken word has for putting students and teachers in a dialog oriented relationship, "When you find out that perspective and you put it into the classroom it gives the kids a chance to open up to the teachers and not just sit there and be silent the whole time." This perspective is realized from listening to students' poems; just as the creative process differs from standard academic exercises; so too does the communicative space. Rather than responding to prompted questions and waiting to be called on to speak, the brainstorming portion of the workshop thrives when students speak spontaneously, the instant they have something to contribute. This explosive, enthusiastic space is anything other than one where students are silent the whole time. Pathways for communication between teachers and students are blazed in this manner, and culture based on mutual understanding is supported when students have a chance to open up.

In the following excerpt, Niki explains what she believes to be a necessary condition for compelling and meaningful communication:

If you don't express who you really are, if you don't express the person that people can't tell when they just look at you, then they're not gonna get that interested in your poetry. You need to put yourself in your writing.

Niki's thoughts stand out by alerting us that students write in order to have their work be of interest. It is not an academic exercise or chore that must be carried out for credit. Rather, spoken word is driven first and foremost by the raw desire to communicate powerfully. From this notion, the communication engendering aspect of spoken word creates a standard for interacting, and a culture based on mutual understanding begins to take shape.

In this thought Jose explains how spoken word allows him to communicate a precise rendering of his mind:

> I'm just letting that one on feeling, all my frustrations I'm putting it out on paper. All my problems, all my thoughts, I'm just putting it out on paper. Because it's like a map of my brain on paper.

Of particular interest to me in regards to this excerpt is the inclusions of frustrations and feelings along with thoughts to comprise the "map, of my brain." In this rich insight, Jose identifies that the cathartic nature of many spoken word pieces brings an understanding that his mind is not just a compilation of thoughts, but is instead a vast and differentiated terrain composed in part of the struggle to respond to frustrating experiences. The "map" is drawn in stories rather than lines, composed of a legend of emotions rather than various measurements, and corresponds to the demarcations of identity rather than nation-states. When this form of communication occurs, participants work to co-create a classroom culture based on mutual understanding of the ever evolving landscapes of cultural identity.

This final excerpt on opening pathways for communication comes from Mina, who clarifies that students and teachers often do not know how to initiate open communication with one another:

The times when the teachers say, "Hey guys, how was your weekend?" And we're like,

"Oh it's great," [and the teacher says], "I'm just gonna move on with the lecture." They're

not really trying to put in what you learned or what you find interesting in the classroom,

outside the classroom. I feel like there is a borderline kids feel like they don't want to step

out of.

Mina's thoughts point to the student/teacher dynamic that is often fraught with formalities

and expectant behaviors. The borderline Mina speaks of is testament to the standard of behavior

that often occurs where students and teachers fall back into customary roles. These roles inhibit

engaging with each other as people who have particular experiences outside of school that are

relevant within the classroom. Mina's comments are relevant to the body of insight presented in

the students' interviews, which indicate the capacity for this art form to establish a culture of

communication that is not confined to traditional behavior patterns.

Poetry places us in dialog with each other: Responses to pre-study questionnaire

The capacity for establishing and inspiring meaningful communication is a critical strong

point of spoken word. If this is not drawn on by the facilitator, a valuable element of the culture-

supporting aspect of the art form is lost. In these nine responses, students take note of the power

of communicating through numerous senses, how communication is based from the writer's

identity, the ways spoken word develops capabilities that enhance academic performance, and

the overarching objective in spoken word of compelling the audience towards specific emotions

and considerations.

Spoken word requires a valuation on certain modes of communication that are not

confined to the strict definitions of words. As it is a performance art, communication takes place

through tonal, volume, and pitch variance, body movement, eye contact, and emotional sincerity.

"I can connect with people visually, mentally and emotionally."

"SW shows, tells and shares emotions and experiences through words of all types."

Students are quick to realize that the communication of their message is carried out through more than just words on a page. When looking at the audience, it is clear that every aspect of body language becomes a legible text, and the specific emotive intent of the poet comes into question in regards to the content of the piece. By trisecting the visual, mental, and emotional communicative aspects, students open a nuanced capacity for relating with each other. This trisection leads the way into possibilities for understanding that surpass literal meaning, and move into the varied and elusive body language and tonal communication that occur in our daily experiences.

Students noted the personal nature of spoken word.

"SW is a collaboration of words that apply to the writer."

"SW is a way to powerfully express your innermost thoughts."

These responses underpin how the poet's life becomes the raw material out of which moving works are crafted. The communicative terrain covered in spoken word is extremely likely to illuminate specific elements of participants' personal lives, which contribute to the collective understanding present in the classroom milieu. I am intrigued by the second insight here in that the student places focus on how powerful communication is an apt vehicle for expressing inner most thoughts. It is the compelling nature of the work that draws students in, and gives them a motivation to express personally sensitive aspects of their lives.

The next two insights focus on how spoken word contributes to students' academic performance.

"People might focus more in SW."

"Depending on student and teacher, SW allows for a higher level of expression."

Using a student-centered, informal, and scintillation-based pedagogy often catches students' attention, and provides an intrinsic motivation to focus. Students take joy in hearing empowered and moving opinions and experiences of their classmates, and find that the point of the poetry is the experience of listening and performing, rather than the external approval presented in grades. The second insight identifies a varied effect depending on the students and teachers. When the teacher is unable to step back and allow the class to move out of the standard culture of control, and when the students are not interested in taking part in the creative process, then higher levels of expression are difficult to achieve. Spoken word is based on a commitment to allow for the natural communication style of participants to flow into the classroom, which challenges the pattern of young people being told that in school they have to communicate in school according to culturally irrelevant standards.

The last bits of insight focus specifically on the priority in spoken word to craft compelling pieces wrought from the opinions and experiences of the writer.

"SW is poetry spoken to a crowd often about social justice."

"SW is the art of putting words together to seduce the human mind into a state of tranquility or anger."

When social justice topics are taken up in spoken word, they are not done so from a removed, objective perspective, but rather are directly connected to students' lived experiences. Through the gateway of expressing personal experiences, students are able to bring the audience into an intimate space, and thereby engage emotions. The second insight here guides back to the thought that each spoken word poem has a projected goal of eliciting a specific emotional response. Distinct from other art forms, the ideal audience response is audibly emotive and

occurs during the performance of the poem. In either of these instances, the classroom expression focuses on engaging the audience in meaningful topics, and thereby supporting an inclusive culture of participation.

Throwing open the gates to communication: Responses to post-study questionnaire

Composed of multi-modal communication spoken word has the ability to go beyond communication via the written word.

"Allows emotion that may be lost on paper to be conveyed.*"*

"SW is a way for people to express themselves in an informal and unique way.*"*

When seeking to express meaningful aspects of identity, it is crucial to utilize a fully-embodied approach. We do not go about our daily experiences as brains isolated from bodies; if the goal is to understand emotionally and personally meaningful information, then an art form that reflects and even exaggerates natural expressive tendencies is called for. Often cerebral linear mind dominance takes precedence in reading whereas, when performing, the author is able to communicate through the emotional resonance booming from the echo chamber of their body.

A major allure for students is the unabashed expressive quality of spoken word.

"SW allows me to show the world who I am without holding back."

"SW is a way for you to let go of insecurities and yell all your feelings out to people."

So often, the actions of youth are curtailed while they are trained for adulthood. Especially in their role as students, young people are told that there is a muted standard for behavior they are expected to adhere to. Spoken word allows rigid constraints on behavior to be lifted, as students are encouraged to speak emphatically in any manner they choose without concern for being reprimanded. In this liberated space of expression, students discover new avenues for communication. Due to this discovery, the classroom culture becomes an

environment rich with morsels of personal information that are readily accessible for the entire class.

Spoken word is all about communicating isn't it?: Teacher interview

Mrs. Shoemaker's comments spoke to the powerful capacity of spoken word to remove blocks to communication, heighten students focus through promoting an intrinsic valuation of the work being done, and to promote the sharing of personal knowledge. Her perspective on the effect of opening pathways for communication has the vantage of witnessing the full transformation of students from the beginning of the school year. By observing the class prior to the residency, Mrs. Shoemaker was able to account for new levels of communication in both herself and the students:

> If they spend multiple weeks going through different drafts of their stories or their poems or whatever they are working on, that improves their writing skill and makes them care about what they are doing. It's not just "Mrs. Sho wants me to do this poem, so I'm just going to dash something out the night before and turn it in."

Students are urged to refine their message with a precise economy of words, utilizing poetic devices to highlight key moments throughout their piece. By taking the time to hone their poems, students boil down emotive expressions to their essential elements and realize the key components to meaningful communication. Outfitted with this skill, they become increasingly confident in their ability to express sensitive topics with grace and beauty. There is a proportional relationship between confidence in their ability to write powerfully, and the level of personal topics that are taken on. Through the multiple revision process mentioned in this excerpt, students are able to take risks experimenting with new avenues of expression. By focusing over a lengthy period on a

personally significant experience, students assert that their classroom culture is appropriate for candid communication.

Mrs. Shoemaker is already a proponent of culturally relevant pedagogy; this excerpt describes her thoughts as to how spoken word serves to communicate about lived experiences:

I let them share it with the class, so kind of using their knowledge about things outside of the class, they are bringing it in...They might think, "Ok, I'm going to bring that, I can bring that in here and write about it."

Through the process of inward reflection on what is currently present in the mind and heart, students are able to craft pieces that are not only reflections of their "knowledge outside of the class," but are also expressions of experiences that have been omnipresent in their lives. The gap between school and the rest of life dissolves when the writing workshop space becomes a venue for expression and discussion of what students want to bring in. Dissolution of the ivory tower divide is a crucial first step in the effort to foster a collective understanding of students' relationships to their background.

Moments in the interview exhibit Mrs. Shoemaker making observations of how the workshop functions to promote a space conducive to meaningful communication:

I think that's the most important thing, having the knowledge that everything is safe in that classroom, no one is going to get hurt or feel ostracized or have their voice be silenced, that it is a freeing place for them.

*S*tudents' courageous expressions about personally meaningful, relevant, and sensitive matters are the primary producers of the workshop space as a "freeing place for them." It is crucial for the facilitator to demonstrate how she or he intends on promoting a space free of malicious and silencing comments, though ultimately it is up to students to venture into this

terrain in order to produce the collective understanding of safety in the creative environment. I have noted a definite progression when students probe into these types of communications; they create a momentum that pulls their peers along, convincing students who often do not contribute to test out the safety of the classroom for themselves. Teachers who employ either harsh or relaxed disciplinary styles do not promote this type of freedom but teachers who participate as a member of the classroom culture, rather than as a rigid overseer or negligent babysitter are more apt to promote this safe space in order to facilitate their own expression as well as the students'.

Generative theme #3: Broadening perspectives

Rather than leading students down a narrow and predetermined path, spoken word promotes a journey of learning and expression where no one knows exactly where we will end up, or what knowledge we will gain along the way. In this way, the creative process mirrors the unpredictability associated with learning from lived experiences. Participants in spoken word workshops gradually learn to embrace the lack of rigid boundaries where each person is given ample room to display who they are, while also being given tools, insight, and guidance in crafting passionate pieces of art. In this visceral act, perspectives are broadened in more than just an analytic sense as students engage each other in regards to what they deem to be personally meaningful on emotional, intellectual and cultural levels. Through this type of interface, students craft a classroom culture on their terms and claim the space as a reflection of their contributions.

I see you!: Student interviews

Empathetic bonds forged through new channels of communication often result in enhanced perspectives. As this communication occurs, the light bulb of awareness is illuminated in regards to the students' own identity, their understanding of their classmates, and the world in general. The following five excerpts express how spoken word enables participants to understand

people from different backgrounds, while also broadening the teacher's perspective of the writer's identity. A classroom culture based on mutual understanding of identity and background represents a place where perspectives are constantly expanding.

The following excerpt from Jose's interview depicts a student who is committed to funneling his perspective into the minds of his listeners: "Its 'I want you to think about it,' I want you to go home and run that spoken word through your head because it gives you an idea, it gives you an emotion, it makes you feel a certain way." Jose's drive to present himself in a manner that motivates the listener to go home and run that spoken word through your head illuminates his faith that this art form is one that can have impact past the classroom space where it is presented and received. Once his message is taken home, it becomes something that merges with the lived relevance of his peers. This bringing home of information also speaks to the mission of CRSP in that the educational experience is no longer a separate entity from the cultural experience.

In the next thought, Niki presents the premise that spoken word functions in precise ways to transmit inspiration: "I feel like that one line in my poems that always hits people the most is what inspires people. It's what changes people so their eyes light up like when mine did when I wrote it." Niki directly acknowledges transformational power in her thought that the art form changes people so their eyes light up. She does not indicate what effect this has on broadening their perspectives; she does make a direct correlation between her inspiration and what is communicated to the audience. This transmission of motivation is a fundamental aspect of broadening perspectives where the author is marinating their writing in meaningful experiences, and offering it to classmates as food for thought. The fact that Niki knows which lines in her

work contain this impacting potential indicates that there is a traceable and predictable method

for broadening perspective and supporting classroom culture based on what moves the writer.

In this excerpt, Jose gives testimony as to how spoken word has specifically enhanced his

perspective on the world:

When I did find that aspect of writing, it like opened up a whole new world to me. Since

then, I've been more open to a lot of things, like LGBTQ community, I've been open to

people who are going through problems with their family, with their friends.

The power to evoke a "whole new world" is a primary focus of education in general.

From this insight, we see that spoken word is certainly appropriate for purposes that extend past

creative exercise. Jose explains that spoken word has given him the ability to recognize the

problems that other people are going through, and within this recognition of the problems of

others comes an enhanced perspective on the world. His openness to the LGBTQ community

displays the capacity of this art form to provide a window into different cultures. When the

classroom is viewed as a microcosm for the cultural environment of society, it becomes an

embodiment of the power dynamics present in our world. From this perspective, the urgency for

bringing awareness and an ability to communicate across cultures and power differentials

becomes crucial, not only for the purpose of building CRSP but as a fountainhead for political

and social evolution.

Here we find Nikki reflecting on how spoken word functions as a vehicle that enables her

to communicate her perspective and passion to teachers:

I feel like poetry is definitely a much more effective way to get your point across

to teachers because they can actually realize "Oh, she is serious about this, she

actually took the time to figure this all out and write it down and put it down on

paper and like tell me it and show me it. This shows that she's committed and she

wants other people to learn what she's talking about."

Niki's ability to communicate what "she is serious about" is a necessary condition for

supporting a classroom culture based on mutual understanding. She identifies that a key facet of

this communication is the fact that the teacher becomes aware that she took the time to figure

this all out. This stands out due to the free will aspect of writing spoken word. Students might be

given a prompt, though ultimately there is little constraint on choice of writing topic. Therefore,

the time they choose to spend on a piece is a reflection of how much importance they imbue the

topic with. This stands counter posed to the assignment-oriented work ethic that furnishes the

majority of material that teachers see from students. From Niki's insight, we see that spoken

word functions as a vehicle to bring teachers enhanced perspectives of what the student wants

other people to learn. Focusing on what the writer wants other people to learn creates a

classroom culture informed by students who are empowered to teach the class about various

aspects of life that they are passionate about.

This final excerpt from Mina displays the capacity that spoken word has for bringing on

new perspectives through self reflection:

I used poetry as a way to kind of like imagine if I were able to get out of loneliness and

find a way to travel and explore and meet new people. People that would understand me,

that was a way for me to realize that I cannot let whatever was happening to me to get in

front of me.

Here Mina presents how spoken word has served her as a venue for contemplating new

possibilities for a fulfilled life. By putting her problems of loneliness on paper, she is able to see

them from a slightly removed angle, and thereby gain perspective on possible explorations into

new terrains of relationship. This enables her claiming agency of her experience of reality, where loneliness becomes mutable rather than fixed. With this perspective, Mina is able to present herself to the world in a manner where she can expect to be understood, and therefore contribute to a classroom culture that is enhanced by the diversity of its pluralistic members.

"Go in poet!" : Pre-questionnaire indications of broadening perspective

Students were compelled to comment on how spoken word broadens perspectives by promoting an atmosphere of sharing, providing teachers an understanding of how to connect curriculum to students, of fostering teacher's understanding of students, providing students with a venue to hone perspective of their identities, and by connecting students' lived experience to their academic experience.

This first set of responses to the questionnaire focuses on the capacity of spoken word to foster an open space of sharing.

"Teens feel more open to sharing fears/ problems/ background when it is written beautifully."

"SW allows people to say what they feel is important and be recognized in the world around them.**"**

The comment here that strikes me focuses on how beautiful writing promotes willingness to share personal matters. Here we find that when students are led through a process of developing numerous capacities for expression, they gain confidence that their meaningful communication will be received with open ears and willing hearts. Through fashioning fears, problems, and backgrounds into glowing stars of expression, students are able to transmute their lives into creativity and thereby broaden perspectives.

These three responses focus on how spoken word allows students to focus attention inwards, and how they can have a specific effect on the outside world:

"SW can be used to tell people how to look at the world differently."

"Lets you open up with yourself and with your hidden self."

"SW is a tool to venture into the head of the writer."

In the first instance, the student mentions that this art form has the potential to instruct others in how to see the world. If we view knowledge and perspective as light and people as mirrors, then these performances can be seen as a fun house mirrored room lit by the enunciation of the author, where beams of illumination bounce from person to person, creating a watershed of glowing understanding and a culture informed by the contributions of each participant. It is perhaps the shining of personal light that allows students to open up and discover corners of identity that have been hidden from sight. In this second insight, we see that the students are aware of the self-discovery that occurs when they direct their attention inward in the creative process. Finally, we have a clear assertion that spoken word has the potential to not only provide perspective of someone's head, but also as a tool to venture into it. This thought alludes to the drive to engage the audience through vulnerable presentation. In turn, the audience is implored to join in the poetic adventure through audible responses that indicate perspective is being altered, people are "going in" and a culture of mutual understanding is being discovered.

"I become more real to them": Teacher interview

Mrs. Shoemaker takes note of what motivates students to use the workshop space as a venue for bringing lived experiences into the learning environment: "I think sometimes naturally students just write about those things because of what they live and breath everyday." In this case, the motivation for broadening the classroom perspective in regards to lived

experiences is right in front of our noses: it is a natural act. People love to tell you about their day and take the position of first hand knowledge of their personal lives. It is these elements of communication that spoken word places a high valuation on, thereby becoming a seamless conduit for connecting the learning environment to what students live and breath everyday. Through focus on natural communication, the classroom culture is not a forced entity but instead one that arises as a composite of the willful communications of the participants.

When the classroom is focused on a collective broadening of perspective, Mrs. Shoemaker has a front row seat due to her vantage of witnessing each student's' writing:

I love getting to see that side of students because you don't normally on a daily basis get to see that deep into their emotions...there seems to be this knowledge that 'OK this teacher gets me on this different level or she understands where I'm coming from'.

Mrs. Shoemaker actively expresses the joy she feels through participating in the perspective broadening aspect of learning about her students' emotions. When she expresses this to her students, the climate of the classroom promotes an intrinsic personal motivation for the learning experience. If each person is a well of emotional, psychological, and intellectual nuance, then spoken word acts as the bucket plunged into the depths to bring up life-sustaining elixir of sincere and heartfelt expression. As active listening is promoted throughout this process, students begin to realize that they are being seen as equal human beings understood on a different level, rather than simply being told what to do as subservient subjects. Through this realization, the classroom culture becomes a shared reflection that magnifies the realities that students bring into the classroom.

Mrs. Shoemaker comments on the mutuality that is at the core of the spoken word experience:

I think it makes me understand them more as human beings and individuals therefore I

become more real to them....I let them discover who they are in their voice and I think

that helps inform me as a person, as a human being.

The mutuality echoed in the above excerpt displays Mrs. Shoemaker's realization that

when she understands the students on a human level, she in turn becomes more real to them. Her

stake in the learning experience does not end with the passing on of information, but rather has

an ultimate goal in creating a collective encounter informed by people finding their voices. As

she takes part in students' discovery of who they are, she becomes a member of the classroom

culture, another chair in the symphony of personal passion where each participant takes a turn as

the lead every time they share their work.

In this final excerpt Mrs. Shoemaker comments on the potential for students to gain focus

by directing their attention towards personally relevant issues that arise in their daily lived

experience: "Different things are going to come to light so students who normally would be all

over the place and not really know where they wanted to direct their energy [would now know

exactly where to direct it]." Students have often told me that they find tasks presented to them by

teachers to be irrelevant to their lived experience. In fact, a sure-fire way to know what is going

to resonate with students' lived and cultural experience is by providing a venue for them to

display it. These relevant experiences are at the center of students' realities. This cornerstone

location provides a personal motivation to present what is meaningful in their lives. When the

learning space is opened up to this type of expression, perspectives become broadened due to the

inclusion of personally and culturally relevant contributions.

Students' offerings of personally meaningful information furnish the journey of the

learning experience as we course over the tumultuous and shifting rivers of identity. Mrs.

Shoemaker's responses point to what happens when students are given the opportunity and training to gracefully guide us down the waterways of their lives. A learning environment informed by this guidance cannot be anything but evocative of the meaningful experiences of students. Each person in the class is provided the opportunity to inform the collective journey of the learning experience. On this voyage, each of us is endowed with the potential to be simultaneously ship and lighthouse, illuminating our experiences of life and thereby making visible patches of the vastly oceanic human experience that each of our many intersecting rivers of identity flow into.

Chapter 6: Conclusion and a View of the River

Rivers of identity that both shape and are shaped by the contours of culture are not knowable at first glance. The interplay of cultural landscape and river of identity is an often nuanced and shifting situation, and a curriculum designed to be based within this synergy requires a method for teachers to gain a view of the river. Through an art form that prizes personally evocative expression based within students' lived experiences, teachers have the opportunity to understand where their students are coming from and how this has affected their identity. Ultimately this understanding occurs when the classroom culture has been affirmed as a journey undertaken by student and teacher alike, where the process and goal are to broaden perspective in regards to our lived experiences.

Creating maps and navigating waterways: Two central findings

This journey along the rivers of students' identity has been made possible through rafts built from six generative themes that provide perspective into various elements of two central findings. I maintain that the poems, interviews, and questionnaire responses affirm that spoken word poetry holds a potent ability for illuminating detailed aspects of students' relationships to culture. I also suggest that it is specifically through the personally intimate nature of student writing that this data responds to the first research question: in what ways does student-written spoken word poetry depict identity constructions in a manner that supports the creation of Culturally Relevant and Sustainable Curriculum? In other words, student-written spoken word poetry depicts identity constructions useful for the generation of curricula because it provides a a personally intimate space for students to express frank and revealing commentary on their lived experience of culture.

This study proposes an Eisner-esque generation of curriculum where the students' context is paramount for the generation of CRSC (Eisner, 1979). This context becomes salient throughout the school year, and such tools as spoken word poetry provide a means for teachers to understand specific elements of students' cultural context in an accelerated manner. The understanding of how cultural context effects identity could be an indecipherable tangle of infinite points of interaction. To provide clarity, I propose three generative themes that serve to support the creation of CRSC. Firstly, if we are to focus on how students' relationship to culture affects their construction of identity, then we must have a clear definition of culture that places focus on tangible points of contact. To this effect, I employ the theory of emplacements of affiliation (Childs, 2003), where culture is understood as a phenomenon that exists in specific places where people spend a recurring amount of time. We must be careful to not place culture in a values vacuum or on a pedestal of infinite positivity; in order to focus on these situations, the theory of discourse of authenticity (Low, 2011) illuminates situations where templates of expected behavior are placed on individuals if they seek to (or are presumed to) belong to a certain group. Finally, I propose a multifaceted perspective of culture where affiliations with different emplacements provide a nuanced picture of an individual composed of various intersections. These various intersections become salient when viewed through the lens of third space identity construction (Laur, 2009), a theory that proposes we view identity as a nexus of various cultural affiliations that intersect at various points, at which time specific narratives appear that paint more precise pictures of identity. By utilizing these three theories, teachers who seek to create CRSC have a clear and concrete conception of culture, and two specific lenses to view how students relate to various affiliations.

These themes relate to and support this first central finding in the following ways: In order for students to probe into the personally intimate terrain that often exists when they explore how templates of authenticity limit the scope of identity construction, an intimate and safe creative space is necessary. When personal information is required for the construction of CRSC, the discourse of authenticity illuminates how important it is to facilitate a space where students are comfortable communicating about limitations and expectations that have hampered their lives. Without a clear definition of culture, the information gathered for the purpose of creating CRSP has the potential to focus on broad impersonal and hence non-intimate cultural generalizations, rather than specific contact points of meaningful cultural interaction. The theory of emplacements of affiliation places focus on personal experiences of culture within specific places. An intimate creative space reflects these personal place based experiences of culture that provide the information upon which CRSP can be built. Drawing on spoken word poetry's strength of providing a personally intimate creative space allows students to explore numerous cultures that they might be affiliated with. The theme of third space identity construction provides a perspective on the the various intersections of these affiliations. If students find the poetry space to be conducive to letting loose and courageously voyaging into new considerations of how their experience of culture affects their identity, then a fluid framework that provides perspective on the various intersections of cultural manifestations is required.

The second central finding is that student and teacher interviews contain evidence that spoken word poetry facilitates a classroom culture that places a priority on a collective interest in each person's relationship to background. This thereby responds to the second research question: to what extent and in what ways do spoken word poetry workshops contribute to the development of a classroom culture based on mutual understanding of cultural experiences?

Spoken word workshops provide a learning climate where students voices inform the educational experience. This places a high valuation on what students have to offer which thereby leads to a collective interest and investment in each other's lives.

Classroom culture is at once a molten, chaotic, unpredictable phenomenon; an ever-shifting sea that is a gestalt of innumerable factors of identity, relationships to culture, inter personal dynamics, etc. On the other hand, classroom culture is decipherable in that there are certain clearly visible characteristics that greatly determine the shape it takes. I have uncovered three generative themes through analysis of interviews and questionnaires that focus on creating a vibrant and pluralistic classroom culture. These elements include: the basis for positive interactions through inspiring empathetic connections, the means by which these empathetic connections are realized by opening new pathways for communication, and finally the effect of a healthy pluralistic classroom culture which appears in the result of broadened perspectives.

I maintain that these three elements of classroom culture support this second central finding of spoken word poetry as a tool to generate a classroom culture based on students' interest in each others identities. Inspiring empathetic connections is both fostered by and contributes to interest in classmates identities and their relationship to background, the culture of a classroom is forged when students voyage into new means of communication that actualize their interest in each other, and finally that the understanding of identities leads to broadened perspectives. I will now discuss in detail these two central findings through analysis of excerpts from student poems and interviews.

Finding #1: Spoken word, personally intimate communication, and curriculum development

The fact that the poetry contained specific and personal details about students' relationship to background more so than interviews and questionnaires is a unique finding of this study. I maintain that this occurred due to the intimate nature of creativity where the student is communicating with her/himself through a medium where the blank page serves as a talking mirror, both reflecting and responding to the words placed on it. Through a creative act that is predicated upon sincere and heartfelt expression, students are urged to speak on painful, joyous, and generally meaningful topics as the below excerpt exemplifies,

> Sometimes I wish my room could shed colors/ Black pain feels better when the
> world has successfully shut me down...Wishing that when I wake the room could
> be red. Reminding me of all the spilled blood. Mapping my self determination to
> stay alive.

Here we have an example of a student expressing how their lived experience affects their identity by way of communicating about a recurrent experience of being "shut down." A direct correlation is made between identity and life experience in the student's reference of "spilled blood" and a consequent "determination to stay alive." If the student did not feel comfortable addressing their experience of feeling shut down, then the correlation between identity and lived experience would not have a backdrop for expression.

CRSP thrives when the teacher is aware of personally intimate aspects of the students' lived experiences. Mrs. Shoemaker remarks about the intimate communications made by students in regards to poignant aspects of their personal context.

I wouldn't know if one of their parents had passed away, or if they have had a major loss

in their life, or if their parents are divorced, or if they have two dads or two moms, or live

with their grandparents, or if a family member has a drug addiction or alcoholism.

These aspects of a student's life, though not directly cultural, are pertinent to developing

a personal rapport. If cultural information is the only thing the teacher is interested in, then

students are less apt to be forthcoming. Spoken word serves to provide a space for cultural

understanding to be achieved, precisely because it promotes meaningful and personal expression.

Finding #2: Classroom culture based on students' interest in their classmates' identities

Crafting a supportive environment for the expression of these intimate topics requires a

specific classroom culture where empathy and curiosity about each other's lived experience are

salient. CRSP drives towards embrace of the pluralistic reality of urban North America, where

students' specific cultural affiliations provide the foundation for their educational experience.

One student interview excerpt summarizes how spoken word opens a door to understanding and

empathizing with various cultural experiences, and the consequent curiosity in classmates'

identity.

It gives you that feeling that that person wants you to have, and you might never have to

go through the same situation...you're no longer separate from that person who told you,

you're more equal because you're sharing the same emotions you're trying to put

yourself in their footsteps, trying to figure out why, or how, they feel what they feel.

In this rich and moving excerpt the student highlights an effect spoken word has in

providing "the feeling that that person wants you to have." This art form serves to reach into the

listener's reality, bringing them into a present shared experience with the performer. This excerpt

then moves to draw the connection between this shared experience and the consequent drive to

"figure out why, or how, they feel what they feel." CRSP does not occur in a vacuum, rather it is a testament to the various nuances of identity and the connections that can be drawn between individuals and curriculum. When students become fascinated with understanding each other, they produce a momentum where presenting culturally relevant aspects of life become a norm of the classroom culture.

Student poetry identifies the need for a classroom culture motivated by a desire to know what is beneath the surface, as so much of what is assumed about identity is done so based on appearance. Through a common desire to know what makes classmates tick, there is the potential to resolve generalizations placed on students based on what others assume. The intersection of identity and background is often murky and fraught with the issue of identity being determined by extraneous forces either in large social systems or other individual's perceptions. I do not claim that spoken word poetry can resolve this issue, but I do claim that it allows this issue to be raised, and thereby to inform the collective dialogue of the class. The following student's poem illustrates this gap between appearance and identity.

> I don't appear as I am/Physically I boast the parts of me/ I wish most to conceal/ My insecurities paint my face/ they see my complexion/ with no reflection on how little it/ mirrors me/ There's a disconnect/ I feel the complexity of Galaxies within me/ but cannot express/ the things others think should define me/ cannot transcend, too difficult to comprehend.

This excerpt underpins the need for students to express specific instances of the relationships and conflicts of how background is perceived, "they see my complexion," and how this affects identity "with no reflection on how little it mirrors me...cannot transcend." Here we find the student remarking on how her appearance stifles the identity she would like to affirm. This poem excerpt strikes at the core of why spoken word is necessary to understand how

students relate to their background. Physical appearance in this case is the primary cause for this poet's consternation, though when classmates inquire into her identity they will find what is bellow the surface. Spoken word serves to provide an opportunity for students to voice what is going on with them beneath what can be observed through appearance or grades, and thereby begins a dialog based in curiosity of the cultural landscapes that make up our background and the rivers of identity that flow through them.

Limitations: There is no way for a curriculum to be relevant to each student

My primary concern for the applicability of this research is that each student's relationship to background is so unique and nuanced that there is no way to craft a curriculum that takes all of what is presented in poems into consideration. Though this concern is well founded, there is a response that partially ameliorates this limitation. The identity formations present in poems can be synthesized into subthemes that were presented to the teacher and are attached here in Appendix 2. Through these, the teacher is able to build a curriculum based on commonalities rather than a single student's experience.

Another limitation of the applicability of this research arises in the constraint of the scholastic time frame. Due to testing and graduation requirements, a school year progresses along a somewhat predetermined pathway, where curriculum is generally devised prior to meeting students in order to ensure that they will be presented with all information necessary to meet their responsibilities as students. Therefore, creating curriculum after a month long spoken word poetry unit does not allow the time required for necessary planning. Similar to the first limitation, this constraint does identify the unmistakable truth of the time crunch present in education. In order to respond to this limitation, the understandings generated from spoken word poetry ought to be used to augment curriculum rather than compose it from scratch. Also

of note here is the capacity for spoken word poetry to build a classroom culture germane to the creation and augmentation of CRSC. The seeds of this culture are planted when the first student takes the courageous leap of sharing personal aspects of their identity with the class.

Implications for further study

This research has shown that spoken word poetry holds a substantial capability for illuminating specific aspects of students' relationship to culture in a manner that can be used for the purpose of creating and augmenting curriculum. After holding these workshops, the students and teacher noted how the classroom culture was motivated towards a high valuation of mutual understanding of participants' identities and backgrounds. I have also argued that a primary condition for this is the personal intimacy involved in spoken word poetry, where students are motivated to share forthcoming aspects of their lives.

This effect of spoken word workshops points the way to possible future study where a teacher takes the place of the teaching artist in the delivery of the spoken word curriculum in order to determine how much of a role the facilitator plays in creating a safe and enthusiastic space for expression. An addendum to this potential future study would be to place a teaching artist with a regular teacher who is not as enthusiastic about creativity and CRSP as Mrs. Shoemaker was. In this study, the effect of the classroom culture prior to the workshops could be assessed in order to determine if spoken word requires a teacher such as Mrs. Shoemaker in order to illuminate specific aspects of students' identities and their relationships to culture.

If the point of this research is to support curriculum development, then a longitudinal study is required where a spoken word poetry unit is carried out in the first month followed by a synthesis of poems given to the teacher for the purpose of curriculum development and augmentation. The researcher/teaching artist would then return at the end of the school year in

order to determine how effective the spoken word unit was in supporting curriculum development.

Final thoughts

This study has been a new step for me in combining artistic experience, years of work as a teacher and conducting educational research. This confluence has been a natural evolution as I have been navigating the rivers of identity in a spoken word classroom for the past five years. It was my happening upon critical pedagogy that provided the context to see how important were the countless poems I have read where students declaim the impersonal and irrelevant aspects of much of their education. Through this realization grew the hunch that spoken word poetry could be used to provide students a venue to infuse their educational experience with the personal and culturally relevant aspects that it was missing. What is left is a testament to the vast array of manifestations that relationships between background and identity can take, and the journey awaiting us if we only commit to listen and respond, and to be active participants in the reshaping of education into a force that supports the pluralistic strength of North American culture.

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Appendix 1

<u>The Myth of Cool</u>

By Patrick Ohslund

You can never be cool enough…….Oh high school!

Somehow I existed in that over eager culture as someone who didn't think himself good enough.

But there was chance for me yet, A friend who sure was 'cool',

being seen with him might boost my popularity in this Vastly important teenage ranking system.

Some how he had mastered all the carefully planted nuance

in this elusive game of "I'm the bomb"!

What was his secret? Drunken shit talk at all the right parties

while being sure to be seen flirting with all the hoties?

But the secret runs deeper, to be cool in a whitewashed high school you've got to be a dick,

Got to be able to create demons out of people hanging on the bottom rung.

In a world where popularity is determined by who's boning the most bitches,

the demons are those who make you want to play for the "other" team.

In my high school the basement of popularity was inhabited by homosexual's.

And this cool friend of mine would call out with acidic spittle,

faggot, homo, queer, They do that?!

His venom sent my stomach churning, and in the back of my mind I knew

that his disgust for homosexuals arose from a brooding confusion of his own frustrated urges.

But I didn't want to acknowledge his torment, I didn't want to see the side of him

that was so starved for affection It could only act out of desperation.

I didn't want to see that his words, "we are going to get fucked up tonight!"

would lead us into a booze soaked haze giving him the courage to show

Me the part of himself that he had exiled to his own Private basement, his queer underneath.

I didn't expect to drink so much I'd pass out on the floor and wake up to

him masturbating in the corner of the room,

Facing the walls with back turned to his own homosexuality

Caught up in a con swapping his authenticity for illusions of coolness.

Laying on the floor I still didn't want to see

I had bought in to a similar hustle:

The thought that I wasn't cool enough had carved out a hole in my chest

And since there is not enough cool in the world to fill it with, I filled it with fear,

Which began to multiply and overflow when the next time I woke up,

my best friend's mouth was on my dick.

When we have diminished who we are we can only act out of desperation.

When I felt him on me I didn't know who he was And I did not want to know,

I just wanted to look to a place where I would not choke back

cringes that there might be rumors spreading through high school hallways.

To keep it on the DL I severed the tendons of emotion

wouldn't call it molestation until a week before writing this.

I haven't ever hated him, I saw how so many of us live inside of a mirage

distorting our faces with persona's of who we think other people want us to be,

I felt ashamed of both of us For going along with everyone who buys into this myth of coolness.

A myth that shreds personalities over cheese graters to make us consumable enough

to fit into the popular conception of what a person should be.

And that's what keeps fucking with me, We are all born perfectly righteous,

him, me and every one, Far more real than cool could ever be.

Wake Up Call

by Patrick Ohslund and D'andre Johnson

When the student is asked for his home work he laughs like I must be joking.
This school is in East Palo Alto but this substitute teacher has seen these walls
before in Oakland, Detroit, any where else forgotten about by real estate booms.

The student laughs because he sees desperation leaking out of walls
built in the seventies lit by dim blinking fluorescence.
He laughs because his eyes are open, this young boy is no fool, He knows that this desperation is
a learned behavior

And his spine cheers with a shiver that causes a sun to rise that only he can see,
His personal path of illumination rises from his rib cage like a hot air balloon.
Fueled by words a teacher told him
your mind is a tool

Sharpen it on books like they were whetstones,
To Cut chords and hover above desperate patterns to think for yourself.'
This student is awake, wont sit down, shut up, or listen blankly anymore.

But we are seeding our youth with vines designed to choke out life.
Cafeterias in prison and school train gut as mind to shut up and swallow the blandness
Provided By the conglomerate Sysco Systems

Blue prints for school buildings fall from the same architects that churn out prisons.
Both structures clenched around the necks of their inhabitants
Strangling enthusiasm that would grow outside the bricks

Stacked, lining student prisoners in cell or desk

accustomed to jumping at the sound of a bell
Off to the next detention center,
It is time for a wake up call
But we are seeding our youth with vines designed to choke out life
And are surprised that babies drop out of teenagers as teenagers drop out of high school
surprised at students with numb noses and Punctured veins
To punctuate the I don't give a fuck attitude that drains into class rooms from Governator's
budget cuts trimming a little future out of our lives.

Education being cut down to the cold efficiency of a mechanized factory
has been an American theme since the days of Francis Bellamy
winding up a sales pitch in the form of the flag salute, a wholesale
conditioning of government school kids.

(Dre and Patrick switch off doing pledge of allegiance while history lesson is given)
In 1888 Francis Bellamy worked both as a producer and salesman of American flags, he was
obsessed with the cold efficiency of military and wanted school along with everything else to
mirror this cold precision. His mission was to use the flag salute to ingrain blind obedience into
students. In 1888 there was one slight difference in the flag salute, students arms were raised to
honor the republic, straight from the shoulder.

Francis Bellamy the programmed pirate infamous flag dealer left his mark like the lynch letter,
slangin the image of the red white and confused.
Francis Bellamy sold nationalism to government schools to create armies
of industrial militant minded Pavlov's lap dogs instead of what should be students.
who are force fed falsified information while they sit entranced,
It is time for a wake up call!

Instead of a pledge to empire how about a pledge to what moves us
Freedom from history books bound by chapters that speak only of Eurocentric beginnings.
I pledge Allegiance to the light of knowledge
so that it may bounce off people like they were mirrors
transforming any classroom
into this one.

Appendix 2

My process for synthesizing the 55 poems into the summary given to Mrs. Shoemaker is as follows: Each poem was paraphrased with numerous one sentence codes; these codes were grouped in accordance to similarity; I then created composite themes based on these groups; composite themes were then placed in the relevant section of generative themes. Each composite theme is therefore derived from numerous poems and serves to provide a compact time-efficient summary of identity formations and culturally relevant information present in student poems.

Generative themes derived from poems

Third space identity construction - 17 instances
This theme refers to understanding identity through focusing on the intersection of two or more aspects or traits, i.e., Latino and artist, black and feminist, young and motivated, white and athlete.

-Multiple friend groups create multiple forms of identity which can conflict with friend groups leading to asserting a change of identity through changing friend groups.
-Identity forged through finding distinction from other family members; this distinct identity can clash with relationship to the rest of the family.
-Difficulty in learning/developing identity from intersection of identities and beliefs.
-Lack of coherence of physical appearance with inner self and complexity/conflict of intersections of identity makes it difficult to express identity adequately.
-Refusal to accept identity imposed by extraneous forces as it doesn't take into account mutually contradicting intersections and unstated social rules.
-Cultural identity ascribes practices which sometimes conflict with and always dialog with lived identity; it is a personal decision to participate in cultural practices which are sometimes motivated by oppression.
-Intersection of identities can cause negative outcomes such as fear, negative self-thought, overstimulated emotions, and pain for others.
-Changing desires and emotions create new identities which are unclear when desire/emotion is unclear or framed with a negative social stigma.

-Identity is informed by skills and abilities; strong skills and abilities lead to confident identities.

Emplacements of affiliation - 26 instances
This theme refers to understanding culture existing within personal relationships to specific locations. i.e., the culture of a particular classroom, home, park, cafe, youth center, etc.

-Emotionally and psychologically empowering connections to foreign cities
-Affiliation with mutually exclusive groups and cultures forms complex and empowered identities.
-Daily threat of death in home and neighborhood evokes and requires courage.
-Belonging motivated by sensory connection to places, often through architecture.
-Home and neighborhood are limited by oppression causing feelings of sadness and being shut down.
-Culture is created by the individual because belonging is located in the self,
-When individuals connect to a place it uncovers and calls forth a cornerstone of their identity.
- Inexhaustible surprise in relationship between self and place.
- Home as cornerstone of culture and place of comfort, refuge, belonging, and creativity.
-Violence within culture evokes fear, loss, lack of innocence, and general negative impact.
-Marginalized groups become strong through standing up to oppression and learning from negative impacts.
-Dominant culture is unaware of oppression of minority culture which causes dominant culture to perpetuate systemic stubbornness in ameliorating oppression and fear of minority cultures.
-Cultural norms are often comprised by emotionally reciprocal relationships with family, elders, loved ones, and house pets.
-Copacetic responses to stigmas which negatively effect cultures.
-Participation in norms within a place is nonnegotiable when adequate time is spent there.
-Oppression within culture at large causes minority groups to be diminished, though all people have ability to respond to this situation and feel compassion for the oppressed.
-Rules enacted and labels used in certain places are dictated by the rules and labels present in nearby places.

Discourse of authenticity - 16 instances
This theme refers to understanding identity through ascertaining when there are specific templates of expectations that an individual feels compelled to attain in order to be considered part of a particular group, i.e., an artist must be poor, a black youth must be rebellious, a white student must get good grades, a woman must go to lengths to be attractive.

-It is mutually contradictory to fulfill a template of identity and to conduct life based on a valuation of freedom, and success must be defined by the individual.
-Templates are often dictated due to background or places that are affiliated with; there is a desire within groups for members to have similar identities and these similar identities dictate what the template is.
-To not adopt a template of identity is a statement of freedom and personal choice for identity which often requires extraneous pressure.

-Templates of identity promote and are caused by oppression, ignorance, stereotypes, and racism.
-Templates of identity inhibit comprehension of self.
-Templates of identity are reinforced by macro systems and the people within them; examples of these systems are: religion, capitalism, economic class distinction and racial distinction.
-Templates of identity are often conflicting and are reinforced socially by expectations of friends, parents, and loved ones.
-Emotional expression is prescribed by templates, especially when these templates are reinforced due to affiliations with certain places and groups.
-Templates of identity are often ascribed to unconsciously due to assumptions and appearances.

Appendix 3

Student interview protocol, teacher interview protocol and pre/post questionnaire

Student Interview Questions

Warm up questions:
- Ho do you like the workshops?
- What would you like to change about the workshops?
- What, if anything, do you like about writing poetry?

Third space identity construction questions:
- What are the labels that you would use to describe yourself? For example, my labels would be White, young adult, upper middle class up bringing, artist, teacher, student , athlete, Irish/French/Scandinavian descent, Californian.
- How do you feel about your labels/description of yourself?
- Are there any stories in the relationships between these labels that paint a picture of you?
- How has the way you think of yourself today changed from how you thought about your self last year? 2 years ago? 3 years ago?
- How does the way you thought about yourself in the past relate to how you think about yourself today?
- When was a time you felt you were being creative in describing who you are?

Emplacements of affiliation questions:
-What are some groups of people that you spend time with in a specific place? For example, a peer group, your family, athletic group, school class, etc.
- How do you feel about being a part of these groups?
- What are some of the things about this group that you like?
- Are there any groups you would like to feel like you are part of that you are not?
- Are there any groups you feel like you are part of that you would not like to be part of?

-Do you think there is a specific culture in each of your classes in school; if so could you describe a few of them?

-Do you identify with a specific movement? For example, an artistic movement like hip-hop or a political movement like feminism.

- What are some of the beliefs or actions of this movement that you like?

- What was the first time when you felt like you belonged to a group?

Discourse of authenticity questions:

- How have you felt pressured to be a certain way?

- What do you feel pressured to be?

- Where do you think this pressure comes from?

- For any of the groups that you feel like you are part of, are there any ways you are pressured to be in order to be part of that group?

- What ways have you been told you aren't supposed to be, or are supposed to be?

- What was the way you weren't or were supposed to be?

- How did it make you feel to be told to be or not to be a certain way?

- How do the groups you feel part of relate to each other?

Culturally Relevant and Sustainable Curriculum questions:

- In what ways to you think what you learn in school has to do with who you are?

- When school does not have to do with who you are, how does that feel?

- How do you think your cultural history is something you could learn about in school?

- How do you think school would be different if you learned more about where you came from?

- How do you think school succeeds or fails to include things you know from outside of school?

- How could what you learn in school better match up with your life outside of school?

- How could the stories that describe who you are be used to set up what you learn in school?

- How do you think the things you write in the poetry workshops show who you are?

- How do things you write in poetry workshops show where you come from or groups that you feel like you are a part of?

Concluding questions:

- How do you think students would act in school if they thought that what they learned had to do with their lives out side of school?

- Do you have any idea about how school could have more to do with peoples' lives outside of school?

- Do you have any idea of how school could teach people about where they come from?

Teacher Interview Questions

Warm up questions:

- What is it about teaching creative writing that you enjoy the most/least?

- What is something that you have learned from your students?
- How do you decide what to put into your curriculum?

Culturally Relevant and Sustainable Curriculum questions:
- What is it that you think makes curriculum effective?
- How do you fit your curriculum to your students?
- How do you feel in a class where there are students from a diverse range of backgrounds?
- How do you think school does in regards to implementing curriculum that is relevant to students of color?
- What do you think are the leading causes for the achievement gap between white students and student of color?
- What is your experience in teaching students who come from as background that is different from yours?
- How is the class affected when you know specific things about your students background?

Spoken word poetry questions:
- What is something you have learned about your students through listening to their spoken word poetry pieces?
- What do you think the effects of spoken word poetry are?
- What purpose do you think creativity serves in education?
- What do you think is beneficial about having spoken word poetry in the classroom?
- How do you think spoken word poetry functions as a vehicle for students to express identity, emotion, opinion, struggle, and/or triumph?
- How does spoken word poetry affect students from marginalized and or low income backgrounds?

Student identity construction questions:
- How does your understanding of student identity change over the course of the year?
- What is the effect of changing student identities over the course of a school year?
- How do you think student participation in creative-oriented classes affects their identity in regards to school?
- How do you think curriculum structured around students' individual identities affects students?
- How does understanding students' individual identities alter your understanding of their background?
- How do you think students from low-income or marginalized backgrounds identify with school as compared to students who are not from low-income or marginalized backgrounds?

Questions in regards to Culturally Relevant and Sustainable Curriculum informed by identity formations generated through spoken word poetry:
- What does the summary of information from student poetry tell you about your students?

- To what extent do you think this information can be used to develop Culturally Relevant and Sustainable Curriculum?
- What are the ways you can envision shaping curriculum in order to utilize this summary of information?
- Do you think this information would be more effective if it were about specific students, rather than being a summary of themes presented from the whole class?
- How does this summary of information contribute to your understanding of your students' relationship to their backgrounds?
- How do you think this class experience would have been different if you had had this information at the beginning of the school year?
- What themes in the spoken word poetry workshops could be added in order to generate student writing that would make this summary of information more effective?
- How do you think this summary of information will aid in your curriculum development for future classes?
- How does this summary of information and participation in the spoken word poetry classes alter your understanding of your students on a personal level?
- In what ways does an augmented personal understanding of your students alter your teaching experience?

Concluding questions:
- What aspects of this project would you recommend for other classes?
- In what ways does this project motivate you to look for other ways to gather information about your students' relationship to their backgrounds?
- In what ways does this project motivate you to look for other ways to understand your students' personal identities?

Pre/Post Questionnaire

1. What do you think spoken word poetry is?
2. What effect do you think arts education has in school?
3. How do you think spoken word poetry lets you express who you are?
4. How do you think spoken word poetry could be used as a tool for teachers?
5. How do you think spoken word poetry could be used for teachers to understand where their students come from?
6. What do you enjoy or not enjoy about telling people about yourself?
7. What pressures do you feel about how you are supposed to be?