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EMBRACING CONFLICT AND CONTRADICTION AS A PATH TO AWARENESS

by

JOANN RINTEL ABREU

A dissertation submitted to the Graduate Faculty in Urban Education in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy, The City University of New York

2021

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JOANN RINTEL ABREU

This manuscript has been read and accepted for the Graduate Faculty in Urban Education in satisfaction of the dissertation requirement for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy.

Date:

Konstantinos Alexakos

Chair of Examining Committee

Date:

Wendy Lutrell

Executive Officer

Supervisory Committee:

Dr. Konstantinos Alexakos

David Bloomfield

Dr. Deborah Shanley

THE CITY UNIVERSITY OF NEW YORK

ABSTRACT

EMBRACING CONFLICT AND CONTRADICTION AS A PATH TO AWARENESS

By

JoAnn Rintel Abreu

Advisor: Konstantinos Alexakos

The focus of this autoethnographic dissertation is the exploration of habitus and how it consciously and unconsciously influences our perceptions, emotions, values and actions. I describe this dissertation as an autoethnography to highlight my subjective approach to research and to dispel any claims of objectivity. Through my experiences as a daughter, mother, administrator and teacher-educator, I explore three internal conflicts, highlighted by intense emotional reactions, and deconstruct how my past and present contexts inform my values, beliefs and actions. In each chapter, I describe several events that led to a greater understanding of my emotional responses and how I adapted my practices to better support my family, students and staff.

This work is informed by a bricolage of theoretical frameworks that help structure and illuminate the experiences discussed in each chapter. I include methods and methodologies that support my interpretation and reinterpretation of past and present experiences and utilize event oriented inquiry to analyze specific moments by answering the following questions: *What happened? Why did it happen?* and, *What more is there?* Authentic Inquiry is presented as an overarching framework and guides the emergent and contingent nature of this work. I employ the Authenticity Criteria to ground this research and support analysis.

My research is narrated through five distinct chapters. Each chapter discusses a part of my journey in uncovering *self*. Chapter One introduces how this dissertation emerged, as well as insight into how I view the world (ontology); how I define knowledge (epistemology) and what I value (axiology), with the understanding that these are fluid, and have been mediated by past and present cultural interactions that continuously shape and are shaped by my experiences. Chapter Two explores an internal conflict, signaled by an emotionally charged interaction between me and my youngest son, and how I shifted my actions and expectations by deconstructing Bourdieu's concept of habitus and fields and how they manifest in our social interactions. Chapter Three describes my conflicted experience as a teacher | researcher, and how I unpacked an emotional response to my graduate students' perceived academic performance. Utilizing cogenerative dialogue, I sought student perspectives to explore contradictions, and to enhance my analysis and understanding of my arising emotions. Chapter Four is an account of my emotional response to an anti-bias training, how it illuminated an internal conflict and how I transformed my perception of the event through introspection. Chapter Five summarizes my journey and describes a new approach to curriculum and pedagogy that uses Authentic Inquiry and the Authenticity Criteria to create equitable and agential teaching and learning experiences. Each chapter also explores critical issues, such as classroom power dynamics, the impact of hierarchical education systems and how our identities emerge, reproduce themselves or change through socio-cultural interactions.

It is my hope that each chapter of the dissertation will act as a heuristic to catalyze awareness in its readers, and provide a roadmap for interrogating and transforming their own, emergent and contingent selves.

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CHAPTER 1- THE DYNAMIC NATURE OF BEING: UNCOVERING IDENTITY

“No man ever steps in the same river twice, for it's not the same river and he's not the same man.”

– **Heraclitus**

Introduction

“Tell me a little about yourself.” While at a small gathering, I was presented with this seemingly simple request from a woman I did not know previously. Not usually at a loss for words, I was unsure where to begin. I have been on a search for meaning, for uncovering *who I am* and, more importantly, *why I am*. I learned I am many things, depending on where I am, who I am with, and the context of my environment. Which narrative would I tell? Which culturally mediated symbols would I use to frame the experience? Which protagonist would emerge as I told my story (Bruner, 1996)? Most guests had children the same age as my sons, so I began there. “*I know Katy from Little League. Our sons were on the same team. I have another son, two years younger.*” “My son goes to school with Pat’s sons.” And so, our conversation began. We talked about how the boys responded to remote learning, bemoaned the cancelled youth sports season and discussed local summer activities. We were successfully interacting through the culturally mediated phenomenon of motherhood.

Our narratives, what we tell ourselves, and what we tell others, helps us make meaning of our lives. Although our lives proceed along a singular temporal path, our narratives reflect the multiple cultural contexts that give them their shape. We talk about who we are, what we believe and what we do as a way of organizing experience, but there are different versions of the story depending on the audience. Though we may have a sense of our core, our social interactions and the cultural scripts that mediate them dynamically shape and are shaped by our identity in a discursive dance. Our identities emerge, dependent on past culturally mediated experiences, the

present contextual environment and possible futures. Identity is like a moving river; though it has a predictable path, its core identity, it is constantly interacting with its surroundings. The rocks, fallen trees, flora, fauna, and weather alter its flow and change its appearance, though not its essence, the core nature or most important qualities of a person or thing.

This autoethnographic dissertation reflects my journey in exploring my core identity, as well as the dynamic identities that emerge through sociocultural interactions. Through reflexive analysis (Bourdieu, 1990; Collins, 2004; Sewell, 2005) I explore a series of arising internal conflicts during specific moments punctuated by strong emotion. I use event-oriented inquiry (Tobin & Ritchie, 2012) to break down these emotionally charged moments by asking “what is happening, why is it happening and what more is there?” I employ Bourdieu’s (1977) theory of *habitus and field*, and Sewell’s (2005) *culture-as-theory* to identify both my conscious and unconscious values, and to differentiate among agential, intentional behaviors and ingrained, passive behaviors. This work is a journey of self-awareness, where each step contributes to the whole, including the challenging, often raw, vulnerable process of putting my inner world on paper (Ellis, 2004). While conclusions are drawn, I view them as ephemeral, as I believe our attempts to define our identities are. The value for me in writing this work is in my transformations, and where this wasn’t possible, in the awareness this experience has brought me. The journey, not the destination.

At its heart, this dissertation explores emotions, and my struggle to come to terms with the conflicting identities that emerge as I interact across social fields (Bourdieu, 1977). Throughout this work, I interrogate these emotions, how they were formed, how they evolved/devolved, and how they continue to shape my values and choices (Zembylas, 2003). To those that know me across time, is ironic that I should choose to include emotions in an academic

study. By my twenties, I managed my emotions by either repressing them or rejecting them. “*Did I hurt your feeling?*” is a common refrain when I visibly react to a perceived slight, an insightful take-away from a boyfriend long ago. Marriage and motherhood have expanded my emotional repertoire but not my propensity for avoidance. I continue to be uneasy when thinking about or discussing my emotions. Writing this introduction brings discomfort as I revisit intense self-defining moments, ones that consciously or unconsciously shaped my being’s mythologies and “truths.” I seek distractions, hoping for a reprieve, but needing to move forward I continue writing.

This research explores my journey through three separate inner conflicts, each entering my awareness through a highly charged, emotional event (Sewell, 2005) centering around my identity as an educational practitioner. Chapter Two explores an interaction with my son, Chapter Three investigates a moment catalyzed by my role as Adjunct Lecturer, and Chapter Four highlights my experience at a training for Department of Education administrators. With each event, there was a key moment when I consciously paused before acting. They were moments like hundreds of others before with one major difference; I decided to interrogate what my thoughts and emotions were telling me. Cautiously, I embraced the arising tensions as opportunities to learn about myself.

Contributions

This dissertation contributes to the existing body of knowledge by illustrating that educators are complex, emotional beings with multiple histories, contexts and identities, all of which influence how they approach teaching and learning. While much educational research focuses on systemic *macro* and *meso* levels that influence practice and student achievement, this work positions the micro-level, the internal and personal interactions as a transformative lever. It is the intersection

of the personal and the societal that offers a new vantage point from which to make a unique contribution to social science (Laslett et al., 1999). My own personal narratives highlight significant theoretical debates in contemporary sociology, including how *macro* structures influence *micro* associations; how structures influence conformity and agency, and the dynamics of social reproduction and social change. I seek to transform myself, other educators, and those who seek change, through a critical pedagogy (Kincheloe, 2004) by facing, exploring and analyzing my own roles, identities, and mythologies, to see how they enable consistency or change.

Autoethnography

Social life is messy, uncertain, and emotional. If our desire is to research social life, then we must embrace a research method that, to the best of its/our ability, acknowledges and accommodates mess and chaos, uncertainty and emotion (Adams et al., 2014, p. 9)

I use autoethnography for exploring the “messy, uncertain, and emotional” events that led to transformative epiphanies about myself, my values, my choices and my actions

Autoethnographies provide examples of how individuals make meaning of their worlds in the search for how to live in a world of conflict. Ontologically, it is a postmodernist construct, that combines elements of ethnography and autobiography. It not only acknowledges the researcher’s subjective role, it embraces the subject/participant context to advance knowledge, and moves beyond autobiography in that doesn’t merely present feelings, stories or anecdotes; it seeks to understand them within a nuanced, social context (Reed-Danahay, 1997) It breaks from post-positivist binaries such as objective and subjective, process and product, self and others, art and science, mind and body, and personal and political, (Adams et al., 2014) while challenging dominant, harmful cultural scripts, stories, and stereotypes (Boylorn & Orbe, 2016). When

researchers write autoethnographies, they develop layered, engaging descriptions of personal and interpersonal experience (autobiography) while also analyzing cultural patterns present in data, such as field notes, interviews, and/or artifacts (ethnography).

Through personal narratives, I critique cultural beliefs, practices, and, systems and structures by uncovering how these have informed my identity (Adams et al., 2014). My “insider knowledge” (Ellis, 2007) has allowed me to explore aspects of education about which others “outside” may not know or be aware. Choosing to use autoethnography was a natural outgrowth of my experiences; it is highly personal, as well as valuable for extending sociological understanding as an author/researcher (Sparkes, 2000). Autoethnography also speaks to my conscious ontological and epistemological views, which will be discussed in depth below.

Advantages of Autoethnography

Chang (2016), argues that autoethnography is advantageous as a research method as it is friendly to researchers and readers; because autoethnographic texts are engaging and enable researchers to develop a cultural understanding of self in relation to others, cross-contextual understandings can be built that transform untenable systems and structures. By producing accessible texts, autoethnographers reach wider and more eclectic audiences which traditional research often discounts, thus making personal and social change possible for more people (Bochner, 2001).

Another advantage to autoethnography is the abundance of data that can be mined. As the source is the author | researcher’s lived experience, memories, journals, ephemera, and cultural artifacts are readily available for analysis.

A key advantage of autoethnography is its ability to catalyze reflection in others. In looking at an autoethnographer’s experiences in context, readers may challenge taken-for-

granted structural norms, and consider new ways to act within social structures (Bochner, 2000). For me, writing this autoethnography was a way to make meaning of the experiences about which I wrote (Bruner, 1996); it added an additional layer to my own learning by considering how to express it to others. My subjective experiences and corresponding emotions are valuable in their ability to resonate within readers, so that they are engaged with me in a reflexive, transformative process (Bochner & Ellis, 2016). While I as a researcher/writer used the process as a way of knowing, a method of inquiry, the readers may empathize, become more aware of their own experiences and seek to interrogate them.

Criticisms and Limitations

In the post-modern era, qualitative research methods, such as autoethnography, have gained favor, but they are not without critics (Sparkes, 2000) and there continues to be significant legitimacy and credibility issues of this genre as scholarly work (Holt, 2003). One limitation, which some may also see as a benefit, is the type of data used in an autoethnographic study. Seen as self-indulgent and narcissistic (Walford, 2004), autoethnographers have been criticized for being self-isolated, relying on potentially distorted memories as data, and more concerned with narration than analysis (Chang, 2016).

In a field still mired in post-positivist notions of validity (Kincheloe & Tobin, 2009), autoethnography critics posit that a lack of generalizability limits its credibility. If experiences and emotions are subjectively understood and contextually analyzed, how can social scientists extend this to the larger world? How can a reader's interpretation or potential transformation be predicted? I would argue, as Ellis (2004) does, that as emotions, conflict, self-awareness and reflexivity are human conditions, any experience and its analysis can be used as a tool for anyone to be reflective. The power of autoethnography is its ability to catalyze thought and awareness,

whether or not the included experiences and analyses extend beyond the researcher/author. Validity lies in how the work speaks to others within its narrative “truth,” not whether or not one’s truth is valid. For me, my autoethnography is valid educational research since it both outlines my meaning-making process in figuring out how to live and provides an analysis of what that struggles means to me and can mean to others (Bochner & Ellis, 2016). In doing this, I have not only built meaning into my life, but through these personal narratives have provided a roadmap for educators (Ellis, 2004).

As others read this they can take what they believe applies to them. Ken Tobin refers to this as viability (2015). Post-positivist generalizability assumes a static sameness across time and space, which is not useful in studying how individuals and contexts continually transform. Instead, conclusions drawn from one instance can be transferred to another with the purpose of studying what Lincoln and Guba (1985) refer to as “degrees of congruence (p. 124).” Salient findings from one research study can be evaluated across fields to determine their usability. Rather than being deterministic, conclusions become tools for exploring differences, leaving researchers to determine applicability in their own contexts (Alexakos, 2015).

A final concern regarding autoethnography is the potential for ethical slips (Ellis, 2007). As this methodology involves personal experiences, it is possible that those close the researcher author will be discussed and analyzed. The idea of informed consent becomes a challenge when the researcher/author presents sensitive information or an emotionally charged event that includes others, even though the presentation and analysis is about self. This work represents my unique meaning-making of the events analyzed. Others will read this through their own perspectives and, as the reader/author engages in this textually based dialogue, will make meaning of my utterances through their own world views. Bakhtin (1995) refers to this as the

messy reality of communication, where meaning is always *unfinalized*. There may be places where others might bristle at my interpretations, such as in my discussions about my son. Although not unethical per se, there is guilt in thinking about how he might interpret our interactions through his unique perspective. As there are no definitive parameters or tenets that can guide me, I am, like autoethnographers before me, committed to “do no harm” (Ellis, 2007) and I have taken steps to ensure this is true to the best of my ability.

Finding my Way

As I approach the end of my doctoral studies, I look over my shoulder to the beginning, and see a woman unsure of herself and her place in a post-modernist academia that seems to have left her behind. A woman who held the view that there was no value in what she knew. Two decades of educational experience seemed to mean little, as ideas she had taken for granted were now being challenged in a way that left sparse room for the values she coveted as she began the program. Feeling like a relic from the past, she sat hoping to find some purpose, some space where she was relevant, but the opportunities were slow in coming. Not one to surrender, she persisted, heartened by the thought that she received a fellowship and would not have student loans. It had to get better. (It does not escape me that I write about her in the objective case; I persist in separating myself from the fear and insecurity that colored my first year as a doctoral student.)

It was not until year two of my doctoral studies that I found space where my voice contributed to discussions, but I still had not found my purpose. No longer taking “required” courses, I sought refuge in other departments and enjoyed taking classes where I felt I could contribute while taking a more critical approach to my thinking. I challenged myself to think about education differently, to consider a variety of perspectives and ways of knowing. The more

I read, the more I understood how the educational systems and structures negatively impact both majority and minority students; minority students are impacted by systemic inequity and racial bias, both explicit and implicit, while values and mindsets that perpetuate the status quo are reinforced in majority students, making them unwitting conspirators (Jay, 2003). Uncovering the layers of my own education made me aware of how they influence who I am as an individual. It made me uncomfortable because it challenged my sense of personal efficacy; I enjoyed the benefits that meritocratic systems offered and, though I championed progressive and equitable educational practices for the minority students I served, at my core I embraced these same systems for me and my own children. I saw that diverse communities, families and individuals viewed education differently than I did and I struggled with what that meant for me as a practitioner. Was I engaging honestly or was I promoting one set of values for my students and another for myself and my family?

I still did not consider that there were a variety of perspectives and ways of being *within me* that emerge, depending on the environment-*that I am a diverse community within myself, grappling with contradictory values and viewpoints that reflect my temporal and spatial contexts*. For example, I have practiced constructivist pedagogical models (Vygotsky, 1980) for two decades and I have dedicated my career to advancing these principles. Years ago I eschewed “teaching to the test,” as I believe limiting pedagogy to literacy and computation instruction prevents students from engaging in meaningful learning about themselves and the world. I teach teachers and graduate students how to utilize more “qualitative” sources and resources for data, and always struggled assigning grades to students who don’t meet the artificial standards conceived by educrats. Yet, I revel in my 97% percentile score on the Verbal Reasoning and Analytical Writing sections of the GRE (as I write this I secretly hope for approbation!).

Quantitatively, I excel. I am here today because I was accepted into the Urban Education PhD program based on academic criteria; my transcripts and writing were evaluated to determine my readiness and fit. I applied and enrolled, not because I necessarily wish to teach full time at the college level, but because it is the highest and most prestigious academic title I can achieve. My previous successes in academic fields defined my expectations for myself and the doctoral program, but the Graduate Center's academic field was framed by different values. This contributed to the emotional stress I experienced early on at the Graduate Center. As the contexts changed, other selves emerged and push against it. Selves that believed self-esteem and pride are illusory, that it isn't necessary to always know the answer; selves that regulate emotions by seeking a middle path between extremes and accepting feelings rather than reacting to them; selves that accepted other ways of knowing and being, and felt secure when others cannot offer the same.

As a consequence of this inner conflict, I found it difficult to select a dissertation topic. I had a preconceived notion that valid scholarship requires a rigorous, primarily quantitative research study to add to the knowledge base. I continued to define valid research and legitimate data in a post-positivist frame (Kincheloe & Tobin, 2009) even when introduced to more subjective, qualitative methods (Lincoln & Guba, 1985) How is using my experience research if it lacks an organized direction, logical claims, empirical evidence and generalizable conclusions (Walford, 2004)? A traditional dissertation was familiar to me- clear criteria, concrete data points, formulaic composition. Even though I practiced process-oriented pedagogy and knew how to measure learning qualitatively, I could not come up with anything other than a post-positivist framed, quantitative dissertation. I considered studying the effects of School Improvement Grants (Title 1001.3) on minority student achievement. This spoke to my policy

interests and would lend itself to a mixed-method study with myriad quantitative data points that could be ANOVA-ed, Chi-squared and mixed with interview and/or survey questions. I began the literature review but could not muster even a modicum of excitement. Or interest. I knew I could complete a solid dissertation but became anxious whenever I thought about proceeding. It just didn't resonate within me. Although I tried to persevere, my emotions clouded my mind. I dreaded reading relevant studies and found that their underlying theories not only lacked nuance, they reflected values that I did not share. My anger and frustration signaled I was feeling impotent; my anxiety signaled a fear of failure; my loneliness signaled I felt disconnected from my experience. But what did it all mean?

A Change in Perspective

My thinking had to shift before I could reconcile this major conflict. The ontological battle between unconscious habits of mind, and meanings I had come to consciously, was raging within me during my third year, half-way through my coursework. That's when everything began to change.

That fall semester I studied emotional theory and learned about Authentic Inquiry (Tobin & Ritchie, 2012); I understood the method/methodology in principle, but was unable to see how it would work in a study. I was still mired in the objective and could not envision a study without a foreseeable end. How is research emergent and contingent? But the concept seemed familiar as did many of the ideas to which I was being exposed. I learned about heuristics reflexive tools designed to raise awareness (Powietrzynska, et al., 2015), tools I had used before, but could not name. I learned that studying the moment was as important as studying the larger event, which I knew to be true in my personal life but had not yet extended to academia. I was slowly aligning my personal world views with new notions of scholarship. I challenged my attachment to

concrete studies and opened my mind to alternate forms of research. And though I did not recognize it at the time, the framework for my dissertation was emerging.

At that point, I took a hard look at why I had been so unhappy my first year, I discovered that when emotionally challenged, I frequently retreat to entrenched, post-positivistic behaviors and states of mind, which became more pronounced as my uneasiness grew. For example, I seek security in the concrete, and look for approval and self-worth from others. I become close-minded, looking for the right answer, looking to say the right thing. In hindsight, I know that I unconsciously hold onto these because, in the systems within which I learned it was these attributes that were rewarded? My first semester at the Graduate Center, I struggled with getting back into academia. Although I was well versed in practical research, I had gaps in theoretical knowledge that needed to be addressed. I became insecure and felt ineffectual, unsure if I belonged. Shockingly, the meritocratic policies and practices on which I based my competency and self-worth no longer served me; in fact, they were vilified, making me doubt my intellectual worth. My personal worth.

Reemerging

In my third year, I slowly began untangling the intertwining threads of how and why my identities emerge- individual, mother, teacher, student, administrator. The bound-up ball of emotions began unraveling. Just letting go and allowing my thoughts to flow freely calmed me. I gave myself the space to consider and later embrace the emotions that flooded my awareness. Clarity came in remembering that life unfolds dynamically and imposing my will upon it is futile. I had forgotten that lesson, which I had discovered many years earlier, when emotional struggles overwhelmed me. My post-positivist habits of mind in the academic field became weeds and boulders that cluttered my thinking and I held tightly to the internalized meritocratic

values and behaviors from my youth that nourished me then, but starved me in the present. In this new context, my academic identity's boundaries shifted and I became willing to expose myself to new ways of being a successful student. I began looking at scholarship less objectively, inherently knowing that the universe would unfold and show me the way if I sat back and allowed it. I was frightened and unsure, but I embraced these reactions and moved forward.

That third year my path unfolded before me in two important ways. First, I realized that I did not have to view the world in the way that many of the educational theorists I was presented with did. Each text I read had value in what I agreed with and *what I did not*. I began engaging in an interpersonal discourse with my readings, looking for differences between my experiences and values to learn more about myself. I also discovered an academic space where my emerging views were not only shared, they were applied in research. My eyes opened to research theory and methods that resonated with how I viewed lived experience; nuanced, dynamic, unknowable, polysemic and polyphonic. My research came in stages, unfolding like an insect that bears no resemblance to the beautiful creature it will become. Although I had not yet made the leap to accepting my own emotions as relevant to research, I became aware that I possess contradictory world views, epistemologies and axiologies, that these developed through recursive cultural interactions and that they influence who I am contingent upon time and space.

Identity

As a middle school teacher, I frequently joked with insistent students that they had to wait their turn because, even though I had 17 personalities, they had to share the body.

Much education theory and research, particularly in teacher education, considers the personal and professional qualities and dispositions important. A quick Google search offers multiple lists that include values such as *accepts responsibility*, and *appreciates a variety of perspectives*.

However, even the most comprehensive inventory does not account for where and how these dispositions formed, or how these manifest in a dynamic, culturally mediated classroom. Zirkel (2008) suggests that how teachers identify themselves has an impact on students' interpersonal and intergroup behaviors as well as students' levels of motivation effort and achievement. If educators' perceived identities influence their attitudes, expectations, and actions towards students then it is important they uncover how social interactions, past and present, shape and are shaped by their habits of mind, expectations and behaviors.

Who I am as an educator is not a fixed set of characteristics; this identity emerges contingent upon context, such as who I am with, where I am and what is occurring. As we interact with others, our identities are shaped by cultural practices, social structures, our goals, our agency or passivity, and the similar contexts of those with whom we interact (Tobin, 2012). My identities are constantly in flux, each with its own perspective, a heteroglossia, generated through previous experiences (Bakhtin, 1995). Though I have a relatively stable core self, the one I depict when asked to describe myself, differentiated identities are created, recreated or transformed as I navigate different environments. These interactions influence, and are influenced by, *habitus*, the mostly unconscious behavioral and cognitive habits, the accepted role-specific norms and expectations that bind or catalyze my actions, as I move through different fields. Bourdieu defines habitus as "a structuring structure, which organizes practices and the perception of practices" (Bourdieu, 1984, p. 170). It includes the learned cognitive and behavioral habits, skills and dispositions acquired through socialization and reflects underlying cultural practices, norms, values, predilections, and expectations for acting in a particular environment, or "field." Social fields are arenas where individuals and structures interact, and they possess their own accepted positions and practices considered legitimate for amassing and

utilizing power. Habitus and field are not fixed, and can be transformed through their recursive interactions (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1990). Throughout this work I explore the dynamic interplay among my experiences, my habitus and the identities that emerge across various fields.

Culture- The Interactions between Habitus and Field.

I include William Sewell's ideas about culture as they extend Bourdieu's ideas about structure and practice to include a more agential theory of transformation. While not attempting to define it, which he finds *impossible but imperative*, Sewell (2005) describes culture as a dialectic of system and practice, a category of social life which manifests in shared symbols and meaning, and patterns of behavior bound by time and space. His focus on culture-as-theory, moves beyond the ways in which people generate and preserve distinct social practices by emphasizing culture's tenuous hold across structures. This "thin coherence" leaves cultural systems vulnerable to disruption and change, an idea that diverges from Bourdieu's more stable definition of habitus and field which is more fixed; though he points out that habitus might transform slowly through field interactions, Bourdieu does not pose how changes could occur. Cultural fields then, are more like membranes than boundaries. They are fluid, change shape and allow movement in and out. As identities are formed through interactions mediated by culture, they too are fluid. They are continually changing through praxis, whether consciously or unconsciously.

Defining the World, Defining Myself

My search for meaning connects me those who also seek to understand themselves and the world in which we live. In deconstructing my various selves, where they came from, how they came to be, and how they influence how I view and interact with the world, both Western, objective ontologies and Eastern, subjective ontologies have influenced my development. As with yin-yang, these views are complementary, often highlighting as well as informing the other.

My early enculturation came from my family, whose values and beliefs reflected those inherent in American educational systems (Tyack, 1974). My grandparents, immigrants to America, strongly believed that education and hard work would bring success and happiness. Although three out of four of my grandparents were not formally educated, my parents are college graduates with advanced degrees. I was born into an environment where high grades were the most important contribution I could make to the family. Deviation meant personal failure and I lived and felt that for over 20 years.

Most American educational institutions reflect a western ontological and axiological perspective which has changed little since public education's inception (Sacks, 2001). This post-positivist objectivism influenced me in three ways. Firstly, meritocracy and its related ideologies heavily influence my academic expectations for myself and others. Secondly, I unconsciously maintain Euro-centric, post-positivist ontological and epistemological views regarding education policy and practice. Thirdly, the hierarchical structures inherent in these systems define how I view power distributions across educational settings.

Meritocracy

Meritocracy is the belief that success or failure is a result of an individual's effort, where "everyone gets what they deserve, and deserve what they get" (Lerner, 2013, p. 18). Meritocratic principles are intertwined with ideas about standardized testing; if standardized tests measure student skill level and ability objectively, then these tests reliably sort and rank students independent of social status, ethnicity, gender or other differentiating characteristic (Duru-Bellat & Tenret, 2012). Research shows teachers view standardized tests as "bathed in neutrality" (Moore, 2005) and take for granted that they accurately assess student ability (Bonilla-Silva, 2010).

My elementary and secondary school experiences taught me that academic achievement reflected my hard work and was deserved rather than the result of status or luck. Identified by others as “gifted and talented” and I was treated accordingly and protected in what I call “Gifted and Talented (GNT)” privilege. While struggling personally in high school, I frequently “acted out,” which put me on the deans’ radar. Because I was in a specialized academic program, my teachers consistently intervened and I rarely received the same discipline as my friends. As long as my grades were high, I was untouchable. Poor grades were seen not only as my individual failure, but as the failure of my family (Hartman, 2003) so I dared not cross that line.

Culture and Expectations: Data-driven Decision Making

As a young teacher, my pedagogical encounters reflected my lived experience. My classroom culture was teacher-centered and my interactions reproduced the meritocratic norms, values and symbols I had internalized through my own schooling. I relied on quantitative test results and expected students to perform at similar academic levels to me. The institutional culture within which I worked reinforced my early teacher identity. Data-driving inquiry based on objective data analysis was the primary protocol for making curricular and pedagogical decisions. Standardized state test results determined students’ academic needs and supports for improved student learning. Frequently, these data-driven inquiry strategies became the sole focus of teacher team meetings and the driving force behind curricular and pedagogical decisions. Whether self-aware of the process or not, I was enculturated to believe that standardized tests accurately measured student achievement. The subsequent appraisals and expectations got translated into pedagogical practices that unfairly attributed poor academic achievement to inherent student qualities. I attributed poor grades to a lack of effort, and did not consider academic context or readiness, particularly of minority students (Au, 2010) when assessing

performance. I think back and wonder how my beliefs and actions influenced my students' sense of themselves. Decades ago, Rosenthal and Jacobson (1968) suggested teacher expectations about their students based on ethnic, cultural and economic issues may lead to self-fulfilling prophecies. Did I reject or diminish the efforts of students I believed have little academic ability, thereby marginalizing these students' efforts in the classroom? Did I lower expectations for some students resulting in their achieving lower academic levels than their peers? Did I provide greater levels of individual attention to those students for whom I held high expectations as my teachers had with me? Without the awareness of how I benefited from meritocratic systems, I was not able to see how different my context was from the students I taught. I was one of the 90% of U.S. public school teachers at the time that were white, grew up and attended school in middle-class, English-speaking, predominantly white communities and received their teacher preparation in predominantly white colleges and universities (U.S. Department of Education, 2016).

Power and Privilege

As a young teacher, I reproduced the hierarchical power structures I encountered in school. I had to be "right." I couldn't let the students see that I didn't know the answer, that I wasn't "in charge," and that any student could "get to me." I followed the cultural norms and advice of veteran teachers who told me, "don't smile until November," and "don't be nice to these kids or they will go for the throat." Many teachers tried to discipline their students by demeaning them or yelling at them until they were silent. Quiet classrooms were a sign of "good classroom management" whether or not there was actual instruction going on.

My ideas about how students should behave came from the "children should be seen" playbook given to me by my parents. As a student in grades K-12, I rarely spoke back to a teacher and never (yes, never) got a call home for disrespecting an adult. I have never been

involved with the law other than a traffic violation, and have never spoken back to a supervisor disrespectfully, although I have advocated for myself on many occasions. Even today, when I feel powerless, I am usually an institutional “rule-follower,” and frequently limit my agency to my social world, where I am less concerned with perceived boundaries and constraints. When facing hierarchy, hegemony and power, I still revert to passive behavioral patterns I learned interacting within educational structures.

The Need for Change

After only three years as a new teacher I was becoming increasingly dissatisfied with teaching. The days dragged on as did each lesson as students were consistently disengaged. An emotional upheaval in my life spilled into my classroom and I interacted with students through a filter of sadness, frustration and disappointment. Dissatisfied with teaching, I sought the joy that so many educators spoke about, but it continued to elude me. At a weekly faculty conference, I happened to sit near a seasoned teacher, well-liked by her students. *How do you do it? How can you get your students to learn, behave, and like you all at the same time?* Her answer astonished me. *Because I don't think about how they should behave, learn and feel about me. I think about them.*

From this one sentence, my teacher mindset began to shift. I thought about my struggling students and considered how they might perceive being in my classroom. It wasn't their space, or even a shared space; it was mine. If I wanted to be happier, my students needed to be happier and that wasn't going to happen unless I adjusted my practices. Maybe how I approached teaching and learning needed to be revised. Instead of reproducing the deterministic, deficit-based institutional norms to which I had become accustomed, I wanted to create a new classroom culture, where student contexts, interests and abilities could be integrated with policy demands.

Though difficult at first, a shift in my personal world view helped me with the transition and I found meaning and fulfillment as an educator.

When the Student is Ready, the Master Appears

My unhappiness in both my personal and professional lives revealed the tenuous, socially constructed nature of my identity. Professionally, the reified systems and structures I experienced and internalized, dictated my classroom interactions, which were generally unsuccessful. I had adopted the identity of the teachers with whom I interacted rather than letting it emerge through practice. In my personal life, I struggled with living up to who others expected me to be. Though our identities result from the dialectic between self and other, and I cannot define who I am apart from my socio-cultural interactions, I cannot ever be someone else's idea of me. I am a fluid being, whose identities emerge *with* others, not *for* others. Also, as I believe identities are fluid, those who wish to compartmentalize me or expect me to live in their image are subject to the same, dynamic conditions as I am. If they are continuously changing, how can I expect to *be* like they are? Buddhism gave me direction and a new frame to figure it all out.

In the 6th Century BC, Siddhartha Gautama (Buddha) searched among peasants and kings to find meaning in the human condition, to understand among other things who we are, why we experience conflict, its cause, and how it influences our lives in constructive or destructive ways. Buddhist ideas showed me that how we see ourselves and how others see us in any given moment is fleeting. It also presented conflict as an inherent part of life, one that, like physical health, needs attention. The Buddha recognized the inherent contradiction in living; we seek permanence, the concrete, in an impermanent setting. To help us navigate, we label, compartmentalize, predict and hypothesize, but our lives continue to unfold in undefinable, unforeseen, and undesirable ways. If we identify conflict as a process and not something to be

avoided, we can use it as a tool. Buddha's Four Noble Truths illustrate that the capacity to grow or be destroyed by conflict lies within each one of us and provides guidance in how to negotiate the contradictions inherent in our daily lives. The First Noble Truth states that life always involves suffering, in obvious and unrecognizable forms. Even when things seem good, we are anxious and uncertain, because nothing is permanent. The Second Noble Truth posits that the cause of suffering is attachment to worldly possessions and ideas. For example, we suffer because of our mistaken belief that we are a separate, independent, solid "I. The Third Noble Truth teaches that all things, including suffering can end by purifying and awakening our minds. The Fourth Noble Truth provides the path to this awareness. By living ethically, and developing wisdom, we can journey towards enlightenment and freedom from suffering.

A Conscious Ontology

In my mid-twenties, Buddhist ideas helped me through an emotional crisis that left me like a broken-winged bird, unable to fly and unable to find the sustenance necessary to live. I moved like a shadow through the days, longing for home when at work and longing for sleep when home. I read every pop psychology self-help book I could find but chafed at the pat platitudes and suggested affirmations that were supposed to raise my self-esteem. Therapy left me cold as I was asked to dredge up painful experiences and assign responsibility for my pain to others. Since I was only a child, it wasn't my fault if I.... since I was only a child. I had every right to be angry at my parents, history, society.... But none of it healed me. As my anxiety grew, my doctor's prescribed medication to veil the physical symptoms, which I rejected, but offered few strategies for learning how to minimize them through alternate methods. I tried group therapy and wondered whether existing psychological methods made things worse. Discussing my private, emotionally charged thoughts exacerbated the situation. I felt judged, internally weak and out of

control. I continued to search for relief, and found some respite from the dread I felt inside me while reading a book, given to me by an old friend. The first line resonated within me.

Life is difficult.

Ahh. Someone understands. Three words that contained myriad others. They seemed so simple, yet profound. They affirmed my present condition. They allowed me to consider that, although I was in emotional distress, it was a natural state, not a pathological condition that could be ameliorated with medication. In reading further, three ideas stood out as to *why* life is difficult: anxiety and emotional conflict arise when we consciously or unconsciously attach ourselves to things, whether they be physical, philosophical or behavioral attachments; that what we perceive as “self,” and in extension, what others think of us and what we think of others, is contextually constructed and, at its core, illusory; and that life and all it encompasses is ever-changing. It was my introduction to an eastern state of mind.

I thought back on the interventions, strategies, and theories that had informed my previous attempts at emotional healing; not one suggested I accept inner conflict as a state of being or the result of repeating habits that seemed natural but were either unproductive or destructive. The doctors I previously consulted only wanted to extinguish my pain. However, rationalizing, or explaining away my inner conflicts did not help. I sought a different solution by embracing my pain and tried to figure out *why* I felt as I did. With this shift in mindset, I began interacting with my thoughts differently and strove to understand where my opinions, judgements, conclusions came from. Though it took time, I let go of what I thought were others' expectations of me, definitions of what was “right,” and got off the carousel of pleasing others. In accepting the past, I understood that painful memories deserve acknowledgement and helped inform my present context. The world unfolded before me as I avoided worrying about the

future. Sacred eastern texts catalyzed my awareness and directed my choices, which became less dependent on static notions of the way life *should* be. Life did not settle, as it is always moving, but it flowed freely for many years to come.

I also shifted my approach to teaching and learning in several ways. By releasing my reliance on scripted curricula and offering more choices to students, they were more engaged and ready to accept moments that focused on standardized testing. Student ability took on a different meaning as I shifted away from a deficit-based lens. I started with their strengths and leveraged small successes into larger victories. Though it was difficult, I learned to align my expectations with student context, rather than test scores and strove to meet students where they were non-judgmentally. As the year went on, the class culture changed and so did we. We were all happier, more relaxed and communicative. I was becoming the teacher I wanted to be, not the teacher I was expected to be.

Emotions in Decision Making

My personal and professional crises were punctuated by strong, emotional reactions, which highlighted my internal conflicts. Before taking a class on emotions, I rarely thought about how emotions impacted my professional decisions as I interacted with students, colleagues, parents and the community. In my mind, I separated my personal emotions from the classroom environment, though I am now aware that emotions play an indispensable role in my pedagogical decisions (Damasio, 1999). Although I discussed my teaching experiences in emotional terms (Hargreaves, 1998), like many other educators, I felt joy, satisfaction and pleasure from my work (Sutton & Wheatley, 2003), I had never been asked to consider my emotions when making pedagogical decisions in the classroom. There were opportunities for addressing teaching's stressful aspects but they were geared towards ameliorating its effects, not in identifying its

causes and potential solutions. I had never been challenged to connect actions like praising and penalizing to my emotional appraisals instead of objective criteria.

Despite the influence emotions play in our professional identities, as well as the interconnectedness of cognitive decision making and emotion (Day & Leitch, 2001), education research on emotions is relatively new. In earlier education research, emotions were considered unwanted barriers to objectivity that needed to be sublimated and controlled through rational decision making (Lazarus, 1994). Recent academic policies and initiatives, such as social and emotional learning programs, reflect the need to address emotions in schools, but they are directed at students. I believe it would benefit educators if they collected and analyzed their own emotions as they interacted with students, particularly if they are negatively valenced (Frijda, 1986). Extemporaneous teacher decisions tend to be based on emotional responses and the thoughts that are interwoven with them recursively (Keltner & Lerner, 2010). In addition, by understanding that their emotions and the thoughts attached evolve contextually, educators can deconstruct how their emotions and subsequent practices have been defined by their cultural milieu and personal experiences (Zembylas, 2003). Fortunately, emotion research, particularly as it relates to education, has gained prominence in the past two decades and, I believe, will be the impetus for systemic transformation.

Perspectives on Emotion: The “West”

I use the term Western in this discussion as an ontological frame, established during the Enlightenment, that views emotions differently than in many Eastern philosophies. From 1685-1815, the Age of Reason, or, the Enlightenment, raised questions about traditional scientific, political and religious ideas, and embraced rational thought as the way to improve humanity. Scientific exploration in the early Enlightenment led to a fundamental change in how the world

was viewed. These studies, undertaken by people such as Johannes Kepler and Galileo Galilei, challenged both the religious as well as Aristotelian truths about the universe. From Newton's discoveries in physics, catalyzed by Descartes and Bacon's ideas on the scientific method, a system for observing the world emerged, using empirical data to test hypotheses. Though individual Enlightenment thinkers often had very different approaches, men like Voltaire, Rousseau, and Montesquieu advanced the notion that everything in the universe could be rationally explained, categorized and catalogued.

During the Enlightenment, many previously integrated concepts became binaries particularly mind and matter, with matter taking precedence (Descartes, 1641). As emotions were considered mind, they were mostly disregarded by scientists until the 19th century, when Darwin began studying emotions and their evolutionary basis. Emotions are now studied across a variety of disciplines including psychology, endocrinology, neurology, affective neurology, cognitive psychology, history and sociology, reflecting the western tendency to compartmentalize, categorize, label and reduce things to quantifiable, objective principles. Several theories have emerged to define and organize the physiological, cognitive, motivational, and behavioral aspects of emotion in this manner.

Emotions as Objective States

Darwin (1872), argued that emotions developed as an evolutionary function and, as such, are universal across our species. His empirical methods and reductionist conclusions reflected the objective ontology of his era. William James' early work on emotional theory shows a similar ontological lens by taking the Cartesian perspective of body and mind (James, 1884). Borrowing from Darwin, he considered emotions to be evolutionary-based automatic responses to events in

an organism's environment that helped it to survive. When our minds experience these responses, we create an emotion.

Studies in the 1990's supported these theories. For example, Davidson et al., (1994) posited that emotions are discrete, measurable and physiologically distinct from each other and identified anger, disgust, fear, happiness, sadness and surprise as basic emotions. Through neurological and behavioral studies, Jaak Pansepp (2003) concluded that seven basic brain "command systems" were responsible for the basic emotions, identified as seeking rage, fear; panic, play, lust, and care.

I borrow from cognitive theories of emotion, like Magda Arnold's *Appraisal Theory* (Scherer, et al., 2001), as I believe there cannot be emotions without an appraisal. Arnold defines appraisals as "sense judgments," which are "direct, immediate, non-reflective, nonintellectual, [and] automatic" (p. 174) processes that signal whether a stimulus is good or bad for us. Recent research in cognitive theories has moved to a more process oriented approach, e.g. the ways our perceptions are influenced by "habitus." I draw on research that argues emotions are drivers of decision-making as a main reason for raising teachers' emotional awareness, particularly when bias colors perception and degrades their ability to make beneficial decisions for their students (Kelter & Lerner, 2010).

Towards a Comprehensive Theory

Throughout this work, I will employ Jonathan H. Turner's (1999) theory of emotions. , It identifies anger, fear, happiness and sadness as primary emotions. These four emotions, when combined, form more nuanced first order emotions. He situates *expectation states* and *sanctions* as catalyzing emotional arousal. When interacting socially, we have expectations based on norms, and rituals for our environment, ourselves and others. Emotions arise based on how well

these expectations are met. Sanctions, positive or negative, act as both behavioral modifiers and catalysts for additional arousal. For example, when we express kindness to another person, we expect a reciprocal response. If gratitude or a similar response is provided, a positive sanction, perhaps in the form of a smile, will generate a pleasant feeling for both participants. However, if there is no response, or there is a response deemed inappropriate for the situation such as a scowl, the initiator will feel frustrated and may respond with anger.

For Turner, emotions operate as social thermometers and tell us how to respond through regulated action. The regulatory methods one chooses are culturally defined and based on accepted social conventions. Appropriate and inappropriate norms for emotional expression determine how social groups perceive certain emotions. For example, in many cultures, anger is unacceptable for women to express. Similarly, men who express sadness are considered weak. I use Turner's concepts of *expectation states*, *sanctions* and regulatory methods to analyze emotional events in each chapter. Turner argues negative emotions are caused by an incongruity in expectations. When the incongruity lies outside of the individual, anger and frustration arise. When the incongruence is internal, shame and guilt arise. For Turner, individuals seek to protect "self," consciously or unconsciously. As "self" is defined through social exchange, it is important to maintain socially acceptable emotional rituals. We respond to negative emotions by transforming them into more acceptable emotions, eliminating them or actively rejecting them.

Eastern Views of Emotion

The First Noble Truth of Buddhism, *Dukkha*, is often translated as *Life is suffering*. This has led some to a pessimistic, incomplete view of its meaning (Rahula, 1967); it is neither good nor bad, it *is*. It speaks to life's impermanence, and the idea that, no matter what we do, life is always changing. We live and we die. In between, humans are faced with challenges from which

we either learn, become defeated by, or survive somewhere in between these two. The First Noble Truth is not defeatist, cynical or fatalistic; it sets the parameters for how we live our lives. Challenges, conflict, disequilibrium and struggle are to be expected. More importantly, they are to be embraced, analyzed and engaged in, to be overcome. The path to peace is through, not around, pain, and is an essential part of the human condition. The Buddha's world is not divine; truth does not come through belief in an omnipotent being, but through human compassion and intelligence. Humans are agential and not disposed to the whims and arbitrary admonitions of divine puppet masters. It is for each of us to find meaning within, and to choose our own paths to enlightenment.

Buddhist teachings place most emotions into the category of dukkha, and do not define them as good, or bad, wanted or unwanted. While there is valence, Buddhists view emotions as pleasant or unpleasant, creative or destructive and do not subordinate one below another. Emotions are facets of our impermanent existence and have the potential to foment growth or decay. For example, grief and loneliness are unpleasant internal states that, if not addressed, can lead to depression and malaise, destructive conditions. However, satisfaction, love and excitement, pleasant feelings, can also lead to destructive conditions; an inability to accept their transitory nature may lead to the same depression and imbalance as unpleasant emotions.

Valence and Ontology

Early emotion research relied on post-positivist notions of valence, viewing positive (negative) as normative categories with specific, predictable characteristics (Columbetti et al., 2008). Much emotional theory uses polarities to describing valence in objects, conscious experience, action tendencies or conscious appraisal. Objects, events, situations are said to possess positive or

negative intrinsic attractiveness (Frijda, 1986) and affective, internal states are pleasant or unpleasant (Russell, 1980).

In Buddhist traditions, emotional valence is directional as it lies on a spectrum, but not one that delineates between good and bad (Rahula, 1967). Instead, valence moves from creative emotions to destructive emotions. Intensity defines how far from the well-regulated range, a homeostatic “middle path,” a feeling lies; mild annoyance is a less intense emotion than anger. Emotions operate as strategic mechanisms for sustaining equilibrium, which itself falls on a spectrum depending on context. For example, when dealing with a substantial loss like that of a loved one, a period of underlying sadness is expected. This may not create a conflicted conscious state, as it is a “new normal.”

Removing Judgement from Emotional Analysis: Towards an Eastern Approach

Looking at emotions as “positive” and/or “negative” does not allow for a nuanced understanding of how each can catalyze both generative and harmful behavior (Solomon, 1993). Anyone who has been “in love” can speak to the pleasant feelings that arise. We feel complete, satisfied, motivated and often invincible. This emotion can also be destructive if too intense. Similarly, intense anger can be destructive to one’s health and one’s social ties, but measured anger can redirect behavior in constructive ways. Thus, it is more valuable to analyze an emotion’s intensity rather than if it is good or bad.

Another issue with judging emotions is that these judgements are socially and culturally contextual as are the social behaviors that arise from them. For example, in western culture, emotions have a “bad reputation,” especially in education (Zembylas, 2003) and mores dictate that their expressions be limited, especially when these emotions are considered “negative.” This is also true of how an emotion’s intensity manifests. In some societies, it is appropriate for

mourners to wail in pain, while others endure loss more stoically. Emotional judgements also engender harmful consequences. In this work, I explore the consequences of defense mechanisms (Turner, 2002), which arise from social constraints on emotion, later in this dissertation.

Blending Eastern and Western Ideas of Emotion

Here I include Antonio Damasio's ideas which combine Eastern and Western notions of emotions, and can help educators unpack their emotional experiences and use them, as I did, to transform their thinking and their actions. In *Descartes' Error*, Damasio (1994) argues against separating mind and body into distinct components. Instead, he posits that the body and mind are equally significant and their functions dialectically intertwined. He sees emotions as biologically generated and theorizes that, not only do they underlie our motives and decisions, they operate as creators of consciousness and culture. Emotions are communicators, and homeostatic regulators, ensuring that we maintain ourselves within a healthy range, physically and mentally, that keeps us flourishing. Emotions are body states that express fluctuations in well-being, whether they be what are traditionally interpreted as positive or negative.

Damasio's ideas provide a framework for looking at emotions through a blended ontological lens. Once the positive-negative frame is removed, all emotions can be embraced as part of the human condition. Emotional evaluation proceeds through a non-judgmental, mindful analysis with beneficial action as a primary goal. Emotions are a part of human intelligence and creativity and arise as a signal for contemplation; they are to be explored, to be analyzed for what they communicate about our patterns of thought and behavior.

These ideas frame this dissertation and provide a path for helping educators lean into the First Noble Truth; as teaching is a human endeavor, it is fraught with difficulties, but these can

be embraced and overcome. I identify emotions as signaling disequilibrium and posit that by leaning into and analyzing emotions, educators can unravel how and why they are attached to values, ideas and behaviors that create disruption in their lives.

Authentic Inquiry

Ken Tobin and Konstantinos Alexakos introduced me to Authentic Inquiry (Tobin, 2015).

Authentic Inquiry, as originally presented by Lincoln & Guba (1985), and later expanded upon by Tobin (2015), values multiple perspectives (polysemia), multiple voices (polyphonia) and multiple truths, which I have come to value. Authentic Inquiry is not predetermined or static but emergent and contingent; although framed by research questions, ideas unfold organically, leading to new questions and new directions. Each moment of inquiry is different from those that precede it and those that follow. Authentic Inquiry rejects the researcher-subject dichotomy in favor of participants and researchers being dialectically engaged. Authentic Inquiry in practice recognizes four criteria. Ontological Authenticity ensures that multiple, diverse world views are present and that participants are willing to learn from differences. Educative Authenticity provides space for participants to learn from the others. Catalytic Authenticity is present as world views transform and practices change and Tactical Authenticity is present when change is culturally embedded so that all can benefit. Authentic Inquiry is a middle path, with no binary-multiple ontologies are present and valued as a principle. It also speaks to impermanence as it is emergent and contingent. It reflects the dialectic nature of reality, where all things take meaning and are influenced by all things.

Shortly after beginning my work with Authentic Inquiry, its value in advancing my scholarship appeared. I was excited and comfortable with class interactions. Like a fractal, these feelings led to thoughts which led to feelings and then to more thoughts, each emergent and

contingent. Over time I uncovered the inner conflicts between my beliefs, actions, and how I viewed my identity, particularly in my struggle to find a dissertation topic. This awareness transformed my thinking, similarly to when I reimagined my teacher self. My own path to uncovering and deconstructing inner conflicts and contradictions could help other educators as they defined their own beliefs. I quieted my mind and began letting go of internal, static definitions of scholarship and an expanded student identity emerged. I still have moments where I question the value of my experiences, but I also question the value in quantitative conclusions. I am better able to apply my personal ontology to my professional identity, which has changed how I approach this part of my life.

Event Oriented Inquiry

In my work, to deconstruct inter- and intrapersonal interactions I employ Tobin and Ritchie's work on event-oriented inquiry (2012). According to William Sewell Jr. (2005), "Social life may be conceptualized as being composed of countless happenings or encounters in which persons and groups of persons engage in social action... Events may be defined as that relatively rare subclass of happenings that significantly transforms structures" (p. 100). Sewell further theorizes that, although dependent on the structures that define context, temporal events are often responsible for structural transformation. For Sewell, events worthy of analysis are both salient and transformative to participants (Tobin, 2015). Tobin and Ritchie (2012) built on this construct in developing a multilogical research model, which includes a focus on an event's context in relation to the larger episode in which it takes place. The questions *what is happening*, *why is it happening* and *what more is there to learn* ground analysis. The events illustrate how habitus and context influence an event's boundaries as well as how this event can be analyzed in terms of forms of capital, fields of power and behavioral transformation.

In the three events I explore in this thesis, the following questions emerged:

- What emotions were present throughout each conflict?
- What underlying values did these emotions represent? Where did these values come from?
- How did these values compete or clash to create conflict?
- How did my thoughts and responses either reproduce or transform values and systems?
- How was the conflict resolved, if at all?

Teacher | Researcher

Each chapter in this dissertation is written through my lens as a teacher | researcher. Borrowing from Alexakos' (2015) work on being a teacher-researcher, I explore the various roles I play in guiding others, and myself, in obtaining knowledge. I employ the Sheffer stroke (|) to highlight the dialectical relationship among my roles (parent, student, teacher, administrator) as well as the dialectic relationship between these roles and my research. I take a learner's stance throughout, and my related experiences as well as their analysis are influenced by my interaction with others (Vygotsky, 1980) components of being a teacher | researcher. As a teacher | researchers I explore my lived experiences within a sociocultural context; it is participant-centered and seeks to identify multiple lenses. This research is also emergent and contingent, and continues to unfold as I write this (Ellis, 2004). I engaged in each study without predetermined ideas as to where they would lead, focusing on moments of conflict and contradiction to understand how they informed my deeper world (Alexakos, 2015).

Outline for the Remainder of this Dissertation

In this chapter, I have highlighted my purpose, the major theories that will be used throughout this research, an overview of how my personal and professional ontologies have developed and

the path that led me to research and write this autoethnography. Each subsequent chapter will include a deeper look at the theories that informed the particular events studied.

Chapter Two describes and analyzes an emotionally charged interaction between me and my son that challenged my personal notions of academic success and highlighted a contradiction between what I expected for me and my family, and what I expected from my students. I begin to unpack my dueling ontologies, where they came from, and how they influence my decisions as a mother, student, teacher and administrator.

Chapter Three details my continued ontological confusion | enlightenment as an Adjunct Lecturer at Brooklyn College. I explore how ideas about power influenced my thoughts and actions as I interacted with students as a teacher | researcher. This chapter also explores where my academic expectations for myself and others derives, as well as how these expectations are informed by emotions.

Chapter Four explores my highly emotional journey in understanding bias and privilege across my personal and professional life. It describes the often raw and uncomfortable encounters in which I struggled to define my place in these discussions. I employ cogenerative dialogue (Tobin, 2015) with my colleagues to illustrate how my patterns of thinking have evolved, as well as a critique of current anti-bias training content and practices that I believe lack nuance and do more harm than good.

Chapter Five concludes this dissertation by analyzing my findings and highlights how process of the writing of this autoethnography added to the research and nuanced its findings. It also provides a summary of my growth to date, contributions to the field and areas for future research. It is my hope that my emotional journey will inspire others to challenge their ingrained

values and habits of mind, and maintain an awareness of how our past and present inform the future.

Not all who wander are lost.

CHAPTER 2- CONFLICT, CONTRADICTION AND THE ROLE OF HABITUS

He who knows others is wise.

He who knows himself is enlightened.

Tao Te Ching

Becoming an Educator

I have been an educator for 28 years and I am still defining what that means. I never intended to become one, but needed to find work after earning my Master's Degree in English. I took the fewest number of education courses needed to receive a teaching license, and took the first job available, which was in a middle school. I laugh now at my early delusions. Licensed in high school English, I thought of ways to make Shakespeare, Fitzgerald and Ellison accessible. I poured through *Lord of the Flies*, and *Native Son* to identify symbolism, themes and existential connections. Within one week I realized that I was not teaching a *subject*; rather, I was teaching *children*. I became an educator. Almost three decades later, I still struggle with what being an educator means.

When I ask myself the question, "What does it mean to be an educator?" many answers and further questions arise. A deep analysis into what underlies my answers to this question has revealed a spectrum of ontologies and axiologies depending on my identity as student, teacher, administrator and mother, and each identity's corresponding context. I have also realized that my values and my views on how and why we educate are often in conflict *within* these identities. As I enact my roles as teacher, parent student, administrator, I often take on the arch-type persona (Jung, 1969), the expected characteristics and actions of a particular identity, whether or not they reflect my core beliefs. The contradiction between what I believe to be true, and my behaviors, produces inner conflict, intellectually and emotionally. This has led me to question why an

individual would act in a manner that is contrary to their inner beliefs. Are people aware of what underlies their core values? Do a person's actions reflect these values, or are they a consequence of passivity and a conscious or unconscious acceptance of someone else's principles? More importantly, can an awareness of internal and external contradictions between our actions and our views bring about positive changes that minimize conflict and subsequent physical and emotional effects?

Ontological Contradiction

In beginning this research, my thoughts reflected my conflicting ontologies and values. How do I use my experience to develop a study? As an administrator, I use "objective," measurable data such as test scores and demographics to produce reports; more "subjective," qualitative data is considered soft and not an indication of progress or impact. As a teacher, I often measured what students understand through objective tests devoid of context, or how students could apply what they learned to their lives. Consequently, as a first-year doctoral student, I believed my skills and experience were best suited for an objective, formulaic, quantitative dissertation but, not surprisingly, I made little progress in finding a topic. Wanting to study how teachers interacted with students, I could not reconcile my ideas about teaching's contextual, interpersonal nature with the idea that student I teacher interactions could be reduced to quantitative data sets.

Struggling with how to proceed, I became aware of the disconnect between my beliefs about how to best engage students so their individual learning needs were addressed, and how my values had changed as administrator. After my experience with active learning strategies, a constructivist ontology (Guba and Lincoln, 1989) drove my pedagogical practice. Like Jerome Bruner (1996), I saw education as a tool for making meaning of the world, and for developing the agency to change it when deemed necessary. As an administrator, responsible for working

with schools targeted by New York State for poor student outcomes, my thoughts reverted to when I was a young student and I valued data as a means for measuring academic success. Even though I understood the complexity in teaching New York City's diverse, urban youth, I had also bought into the belief that knowledge was objective, that the Common Core Learning Standards accurately reflected what students needed to know, and that prescriptive curricula was integral to raising scores. I began articulating tropes that blamed teachers for their students' low academic outcomes and was certain more professional development was the answer.

After two years at the Graduate Center, I was still unsure of how to proceed with my research. Camps had emerged; quantitative researchers with data-driven theoretical frameworks; social justice warriors who quantified intersectionality in search of violent transformation. Nothing resonated until I finally found the courage to explore what I *actually* believed, and what I *thought* I believed. I became more comfortable deconstructing my own perspectives and realized that I needed to challenge my administrator's beliefs about teaching and learning. I considered how transformative moments in my career arose; an encouraging word, a shared encounter or a momentary event influenced my teaching far more than analyzing data or referring to a rubric to measure effective pedagogy. I untangled where and why contradictions in my thinking arose and how these inconsistencies influenced my behavior. Slowly, my various perspectives appeared, along with their competing values and ontologies. I realized that I had approached my research with the same thought processes I had during high school and college. I was confident that I could develop research questions, generate a hypothesis, define dependent and independent variables and analyze data to reach objective, concrete conclusions that would improve education. The gnawing and frustration arose because I did not truly believe this type of work could help others. Clarity appeared as I embraced the idea that interrogating personal

experience is data and worthy of investigation. Although uncomfortable with the process, I was willing to let ideas unfold and lead me rather than be dependent on a structured study. I was also able to see my struggle's worth and a path to researching human interaction in education appeared.

Authentic Inquiry

Ken Tobin and Konstantinos Alexakos introduced me to authentic inquiry. Authentic inquiry, as originally presented by Lincoln & Guba (1985), and later expanded upon by Tobin and Ritchie, (2012), values multiple perspectives (polysemia), multiple voices (polyphonia) (Bakhtin, 1995) and multiple truths, which I too have come to value. Authentic inquiry is not predetermined or static but emergent and contingent. Although framed by research questions, ideas unfold organically, leading to new questions and new directions. Just as one cannot step twice into the same moving river, each moment of inquiry is different from those that precede it. Authentic inquiry also rejects the researcher-subject dichotomy in favor of participants and researchers being dialectically engaged. Authentic inquiry in practice recognizes four criteria; Ontological Authenticity ensures that multiple, diverse world views are present. Educative Authenticity provides space for each ontology to learn from the others. Catalytic Authenticity is present as world views transform and practices change, and Tactical Authenticity is present when change is culturally embedded so that all can benefit.

Shortly after beginning my work with authentic inquiry, its value in advancing scholarship, as well as my topic, emerged through a single moment. It was an epiphany, so powerful that I stopped to reconsider all I believed. And emotion, not concrete data, was the catalyst. Like a fractal, each feeling led to thoughts which led to feelings and then to more thoughts. Over time, these thoughts and feelings uncovered an inner conflict between my beliefs

and actions. I became transformed by this awareness, which led me to consider how uncovering and deconstructing inner conflicts and contradictions could transform other educators as they define their own beliefs.

Theoretical Perspectives: Defining Interactive Spaces

Building on the work of Pierre Bourdieu (1977), I define and explore the educational and personal spaces, boundaries, and social interactions as they relate to conflict and contradiction. I use Bourdieu's concepts of habitus, field and capital to define social spaces, the boundaries that outline them and the parameters that influence individual action. Bourdieu presents the interaction of habitus, field and capital as a way of explaining inequitable social reproduction in education. I will move beyond this and use his framework to analyze habitus, how and why habitus relates to conflict in the education field, how perceptions of capital influence group and individual thoughts and behaviors, and how reflectivity can be used as a tool for transformation.

On Habitus

Pierre Bourdieu's (1986) theory of social and cultural reproduction was developed to explain how formal education systems perpetuate social inequality. He uses the concepts *habitus*, *capital* and *field* to explore how individuals embody social values and move within social spaces.

Bourdieu defines habitus as "a structuring structure, which organizes practices and the perception of practices" (p. 170). It includes individually and collectively learned cognitive and behavioral habits, skills and dispositions acquired through socialization and reflects an individual's underlying beliefs, values, predilections, and expectations for acting in the world.

Habitus informs individual agency by establishing the expectations and possibilities for acting in a particular field. To Bourdieu, habitus is dynamic and has the potential to influence our actions

as we navigate situations through this lens. The boundaries of habitus are persistent but not static. As it is a result of social habituation,

...it is endlessly transformed, either in a direction that reinforces it, when embodied structures of expectation encounter structures of objective chances in harmony with these expectations, or in a direction that transforms it and, for instance, raises or lowers the level of expectations and aspirations. (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1990, p.116)

An individual can adapt habitus and behavior to the context within which they are acting, thereby producing a dialectic relationship between agency | structure (Swartz, 2012). The subjective nature of habitus, and the objectivity found in patterned social fields are no longer dichotomous but are acting on each other.

Fields of Interaction

Social “fields” are arenas of conflict where power structures interact, and individual and group action takes place (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992). Each field possesses its own “rules of the game,” the accepted positions and practices considered legitimate for amassing and utilizing power. Actions within fields consciously or unconsciously reflect individual habitus as well as how individuals perceive their supply of capital as they move within these fields. Importantly, Bourdieu saw habitus as constraining but not determining how individual perform within fields; reflective individuals, aware of their habitus, may be able to perceive social fields objectively and transform them.

Cultural and social capital comprise the social assets a person accumulates that function as either a support or hindrance within social contexts (Bourdieu, 1986). Like economic capital, which consists of financial assets that enhance one’s status and power, cultural and social capital

can be acquired and exchanged for status and power. Bourdieu argues that forms of capital organize behavioral interactions across all fields and are legitimized by dominant class values (Navarro, 2006).

Forms of Capital

For Bourdieu, social capital “is the sum of the resources, actual or virtual, that accrue to an individual or a group by virtue of possessing *a durable network of more or less institutionalized relationships* of mutual acquaintance and recognition” (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992, p. 119).

Social capital consists of the friends, groups and social networks that provide access to other types of capital. While social capital is not available to all members of a group or collective, it empowers those who work to acquire positions of power and status or through acquiring the goodwill of dominant actors (Bourdieu, 1986). Social capital can be used to produce or reproduce inequity, as seen in nepotism and the *quid pro quos* ubiquitous in politics.

Bourdieu (1986) defines three types of cultural capital; embodied cultural capital, objectified cultural capital and institutionalized cultural capital. Embodied cultural capital is internal, and includes both consciously acquired and passively collected cultural and traditional knowledge primarily transmitted through socialization and the family. Embodied capital helps define objectified and institutionalized cultural capital by symbolically determining what is valued in a particular social field. Objectified cultural capital represents the tangible, cultural products that can be used to generate additional forms of capital. For example, a person can wear the “right clothes” or be seen at the “finest restaurants” to enhance their social capital.

Institutionalized culturally capital includes officially accredited and institutionalized cultural practices, such as professional licensing, which formally ascribe the values given to other forms of capital.

Event Oriented Inquiry

In order to deconstruct the chapter's inter I intrapersonal interaction, I employ Tobin and Ritchie's work on event-oriented inquiry (2012). According to William Sewell Jr. (2005), "Social life may be conceptualized as being composed of countless happenings or encounters in which persons and groups of persons engage in social action...Events may be defined as that relatively rare subclass of happenings that significantly transforms structures" (p. 100). Sewell further theorizes that, although dependent on the structures that define context, temporal events are often responsible for structural transformation. For Sewell, events worthy of analysis are both salient and transformative to participants (Tobin, 2015). Tobin and Ritchie (2012) built on this construct in developing a multilogical research model, which includes a focus on an event's context in relation to the larger episode in which it takes place. The questions, *what is happening?*, *why is it happening?* and *what more is there to learn?* ground analysis. What follows is an example of how habitus and context influence an event's boundaries as well as how this event can be analyzed in terms of forms of capital, fields of power and behavioral transformation.

Unpacking Habitus: My Journey

My interest in how habitus affects a person's behavior emerged from a brief moment in time. It was an epiphany, so powerful that I stopped to reconsider all I believed. Emotion, not reason, was the catalyst. Like a fractal, the initial feeling led to thoughts which led to feelings and then to more thoughts. Over time, these thoughts and feelings have helped define my educator-parent's past and present. My transformation has changed how I interact within the various fields I encounter and has provided direction for my research. I explore the micro-sociology of this moment, its interactive space and the subconscious influences that help define it. By analyzing

my habitus, and how I perceive the education field, I can bring clarity and meaning to how these operate as behavioral catalysts, and how they have defined or will define my actions as a parent and educator.

The Power of Habitus

I gave birth to my youngest son at age 43. By that time, I owned my own home, had earned two Master degrees and been working as a teacher for 18 years. I had developed into a fiercely independent, self-determined individual; or so I thought.

From the moment my son entered the world he was tested, measured, assessed and evaluated; first weekly, then monthly, and annually. As a mother, mesmerized by life's capacity and fragility, I dutifully turned to the "experts" for maternal affirmation. Did I follow the appropriate pre-natal protocols? Yes- his APGAR score was 9. Was I feeding him sufficiently? Yes and no. He was growing at a normal pace based on pediatric tables but I didn't breastfeed. Milestone surveys every six months- check. He walked *on time*, developed language *on time*, toilet-trained *on time*, and interacted appropriately in social settings. Each stage brought anxiety and relief, self-doubt and absolution. Never once did I consider the subtle implications inherent in operationalizing development. Nor did I question the measures, the outcomes or the doctors' ability to assess my child's health and welfare. I was just happy my child was *normal*. How does a highly educated, critical and argumentative woman become obsequious and voiceless when it comes to her child? Because that is what my experience within medicine's *field* requires. My previous interactions within my family and larger institutional structures had led me to internalized the passive, archetypal, roles patients and new mothers play (Goffman, 1969) in the hospital setting.

Habitus Enacted

As my passivity when giving birth described above shows, my experience with doctors taught me to defer to the experts. If the doctor says take a test, then you take the test. If the doctor says take this pill because of the test's results, then you take the pill. If the pill doesn't work, then you trust that the medical procedure recommended cures what is considered pathological, or endemic to a healthy body. Our doctors are heroes, life-savers, worthy of accolades and deference, regardless of outcomes. It was into this habitus that I was born and in which my children were born. In this social field, I have limited power, knowledge and ability to act so I go along.

The educational field has similar parameters as the medical field. Policy practices reflect a hierarchical structure where those at the top define how those at the bottom will be educated, and how their success will be judged. Policy makers are members of the ruling class, elected and appointed officials selected for their administrative expertise. In this social field, parents, teachers and students defer to policymakers whose decisions not only define, but significantly impact academic success or failure. However, essential to Bourdieu's theory is the potential for change. While habitus may constrain us, it does not define us. Once aware of how capital influences our environment's many facets, we can reflect upon and reconstruct our social world more critically.

My Student Habitus

I love taking tests, always did. Even today, I take great pleasure in conquering usually meaningless, myriad multiple-choice questions and short essay responses. Successful test scores were an easy pathway to my parents' approval. Their love and acceptance was intricately tied to my academic achievement. A good grade still brings warm fuzzy feelings of self-approbation and a desire to tell my parents. The fear of a low grade still manifests as a knot in my stomach

and I stress about how well my professors think I am doing despite my five years as a doctoral student.

I always “got” school. My reading and writing skills developed at a young age, and by 1st grade I could perform well on standardized assessments. Labeled gifted and talented, I successfully navigated elementary school, receiving high grades in everything but showing self-control- I talked too much. Looking back, I realize that my early teacher’s expectations reflected my parent’s expectations, and academic compliance with a touch of discipline was a natural state of being. My home script seamlessly transitioned into my school script with similar codes, rewards and punishments. I performed my archetypal student role flawlessly; I did all my homework, was respectful, followed directions, raised my hand, and excelled. I learned early on how to interact in this field- *do exactly what they show and tell you and you will get a good grade. Remember exactly what they wrote on the board and you will get a good grade. Get a good grade and you will get positive attention. Get a set of good grades and get a new outfit and a \$10 check from grandma. Keep moving until you hear the bell and then you will get your cheese.* This dance continued for many years as I proceeded through middle school with the same mindset and outcomes.

High school is where I learned about notions of social and cultural capital although I could not define these at the time. Based on my previous academic success, I was placed as a freshman into an accelerated track with the highest academic achievers in the school. As the competition was fierce, I knew much effort was required to keep pace with the other students. All eyes were on my class, 84-09, as we were reminded again, and again, how privileged we were to be in the Science Institute program, how we were expected to succeed and how we needed to behave appropriately and keep our noses clean. I felt stifled and suffocated. Hormones,

teenage angst and emerging wanderlust took over. My habitus began to change as the desire for social acceptance in my peer group took precedence over my need to be academically successful. To my teachers and guidance counselor I became a disappointment. I maintained a solid B average constantly chided that it was below my potential. My Guidance Counselor signed my yearbook with the simple phrase, “You graduated *in spite* of yourself.” I reflected on life as I drove to my first college semester at SUNY Stony Brook and awoke to the family truth; you were loved and supported, as long as you achieved.

As a college student, I had internalized my family’s habitus well enough to succeed on my own. Although their disapproval hurt less, the accolades and attention that came from good grades still nourished my sense of self. As an adult student, I am far more critical of academia’s script but it would be disingenuous to say it does not influence how I think and feel about my performance. I share this to show how habitus is intertwined with our self-image and its accompanying emotions.

The Teacher: Habitus Reenacted

My actions during my first few years as a teacher reflected my childhood habitus, where classroom discipline and high student achievement scores measured success. I looked forward to Fridays. Fridays meant assessment day. Quizzes, short essays, full length multiple choice exams and quiet. On Fridays I could determine who was listening to my lectures. I could see who memorized vocabulary words, spelling and the rules of grammar. I could catch up on paperwork. It also gave me oodles of data that would transform into report card number grades; 25% for quizzes; 25% for writing assignments; 25% for exams; 15% homework; 10% class participation. I learned about Fridays from my 8th grade English teacher who ran his Fridays the same way. At the time, I resented the ritual but celebrated when grades came out because I always did well on

the vocabulary exams. I was happy to have had such an inspired pedagogical role model. As a new teacher, I had to make sure that content was covered, that I could justify why students succeeded or failed and that the class was well behaved. *Check. Check. Check.*

This went on for three years. Then one semester, 23 of 32 students failed in one of my classes. At first, I was angry; *they obviously didn't pay attention; they obviously didn't do their homework well; they obviously didn't study for the test that I gave them 3 days and time during class to study for.* Then I was indignant; *How disrespectful! I spend hours preparing lessons, writing notes on the board and grading their papers.* I then became concerned. But not for my students- for me. *What will the administration think? Will the parents get aggressive at conferences?* I gathered my gradebook, my lesson plans and my behavior book where I noted class interruptions and poor student behavior. *If I can document grades objectively, then I won't get in trouble.*

I was relieved when the veteran Assistant Principal echoed my sentiments; *those kids just don't care about what we teach them. They don't know that they won't go anywhere without a good education.* Neither of us questioned the context that defined those moments. *Those* students were very different from the staff demographically. Many were English Language Learners. Some were African-American students who lived outside the neighborhood. Many had parents who worked twelve hours a day. Few were middle-class children of middle class parents. Rather than adjust my practices to a changing demographic, I conformed to the practices and repeated the tropes veteran teachers who resented the increasing number of poor and minority students; *"These kids don't value education, and their parents aren't helping either. They don't seem to care about their children's future."*

After my meeting with my supervisor, I felt elated, somewhat vindicated. *It isn't my fault they aren't learning. I did my job. They just need to try harder.* When testing season opened, I utilized the test prep playbook. One day practicing cause and effect, one day practicing author's purpose, one day sequencing, one day main idea. Each skill had a corresponding workbook chapter and practice tests. When the standardized test results arrived, my thoughts and feelings were again egocentric. *If they had done what I asked, they would have done better. I get that they have issues but they aren't my responsibility. What are the parents doing?* In looking back, I see that I had little emotional attachment to my students. They were objects, machines- input-output. If they lacked efficiency, had broken parts- that was someone else's job to fix.

Standardized testing kept me mired in my student habitus; I acted from a post-positivist pedagogical mind set where objective data drove my practice. Every year I looked at student scores before I had met the students. When they entered my classroom for the first time, they were already labeled, sorted and judged. Throughout the year, I was rarely surprised when grades aligned with my preconceived notions. I became adept at ignoring the tears, the frustration and pleas for "more time." *You will take tests your entire life. better get used to it now. Those tests don't give you more time. The teachers don't tell you five times what to do.* In retrospect, I do not believe my beliefs at the time stemmed from racial or class bias as there were students who "lived up to" my expectations. I was driven by the expectations my habitus set for me. If you study, you will succeed academically. If you are not succeeding, you are not working hard enough. If you are not working hard enough it is because you lack a work ethic. You don't choose what you learn or how you learn it. I knew of no other way to approach teaching. Then there was a shortage in Social Studies.

Transforming a Teacher Mindset

Although I taught under an English license, I minored in history. As an English major, I developed a strong grasp of the social, political and economic conditions that shaped the world. As an avid reader, I devoured non-fiction, eager to add to my global knowledge as I was drawn to diverse cultures and the histories that defined them. I jumped at the chance. And finally became the educator I wanted to be.

Once untethered by standardized testing I became a different teacher and my classroom environment became a nurturing, creative space. Almost immediately, I reorganized student desks from rows to groups. In planning lessons, I thought of engaging, immersive activities that would address often dry lessons. More importantly, I did not consider how much time needed to be spent on skill based activities that were only relevant to test-taking. No more drill and kill. No more data collection Fridays. We built pyramids. We carved cuneiform into plaster. We painted a ten-foot mural in the hall depicting the Ancient World. And we had fun! I discovered the joy of teaching, of guiding students as they made their own observations and drew their own conclusions. My class buzzed with excitement as students laughed, sometimes argued, and deepened their knowledge. For the first time, I did not look at test scores to define my students. I was amazed at the skills my students exhibited that I did not possess- Some of my students were exceptional artists. Some designed sophisticated models. Some were talented performers who expressed their learning through song and dance. I admired them. I respected them. And they entered my heart.

The shift was fundamentally emotional. It was not that I no longer got frustrated, or that students began to work harder. Nor were they academically different from previous classes. *I was different.* Like the Grinch, whose heart grew when he witnessed joy, I developed

compassion and an awareness of student context that stays with me today. In assessing my students, *I* became the focus. *Did my students learn? If not, what could I have done to clarify? How could I structure activities to promote student voice? Whose voices remain silent? How can I create conditions so that all students engage? Why does Mayra look so sad?* I had stepped out of my previous habitus, one that valued teacher-dominated instruction measured by academic excellence through objective assessment, into a new habitus, which valued constructed knowledge and student wellbeing.

With the passage of No Child Left Behind legislation (2002) all classes had to be taught by content area teachers and I returned to the English department. Fortunately, my pedagogical transformation came with me, with some minor backsliding. I still had to look at test scores as *I* was now being assessed by them. I still grouped my students, but groups did not accompany labels and I maintained high expectations for all. I continued to plan interactive lessons, making sure that each student could access learning in a manner consistent with their strengths. *Did my students learn? If not, what could I have done to clarify?* There was little test prep. I had faith that students would succeed without it and I was right. At this time I also began working with Special Education students in a co-teaching model, always providing encouragement and understanding. It was here that I saw my transformation's effects.

Changing Habitus: The Ripple Effect

In September 2010, my co-teacher and I met our new class and knew that year would be lively. They were a talkative bunch, happy to divert from the lesson to discuss the latest movie, song, sneaker. It didn't take long to learn that they were avoiding work. A majority had difficulty comprehending grade level text and even more struggled with writing. We started slowly, but with patience, modeling and scaffolding that built on student strengths, we raised their

confidence and literacy skills. Our classroom encouraged independent thinking and every lesson contained a critical discussion highlighting student thinking. From these I learned that, regardless of what artificial test scores suggested, my students were high-level thinkers.

This became manifest during a discussion on ethics in Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein*. An enthusiastic debate ensued as students stated claims, provided evidence and rebutted alternative positions. One student, Stephon, took the lead in helping other students articulate and clarify their thoughts. Stephon came to us from foster care; he had been living with his grandfather who could no longer care for him, sick with cancer. He had an IEP which indicated an unspecified learning disability and performed at a level 1, *far below standards*, on both the ELA and math exams. His modified criteria stated he only needed to master 40% of his work in order to pass. His previous teachers gave him no chance. *I tried, but he just doesn't get anything. He talks too much. He has ADD and that's why he can't learn.* No one could provide specifics on why he was labeled Learning Disabled.

At that moment, Stephon threw off the low expectations and limiting labels that had defined his habitus. His face was beaming and the class echoed his excitement. When the discussion ended, my co-teacher and I stood in awe, honored to have participated in what unfolded, though we didn't do much. Upon leaving the class, Stephon turned and said something that brings me to tears years later. *You know Miss Abreu. I'm really not dumb. All I need is something interesting to talk about.* The next day, Stephon asked to exchange his annotated copy of *Frankenstein* for the original. He sat, day after day, looking up vocabulary and asking questions. He finished it and every other challenge. He graduated that year, passing all his classes without the need for modified criteria.

The Administrator- Back to the Beginning

After teaching 21 years, I knew it was time to share what I'd learned. I wanted to “move up the ladder” but I had no interest in a school-based position. I moved to the Department of Education's Central offices to work with struggling schools. As a school improvement manager, I was responsible for working with New York City schools whose academic performance placed them in the bottom 5% statewide. It was a high-profile position where I interacted with superintendents, state education officials and state monitoring agencies as well as principals and other Central support staff. Unfortunately, I reverted to my previous habitus of mind that defined me as a student and during my early teaching career.

Once again, I focused on data, as numbers took precedence over people. I spent hours poring through high school graduation percentages, Regents exam pass rates, attendance numbers and additional student academic markers. Meetings entailed looking for root causes, such as teacher ineffectiveness, poor systems and structures and incoherent curricula to explain poor metrics. Solutions entailed assigning blame and adding prescriptive supports that removed teacher agency in favor of “*research based practices.*” Discussions rarely centered on how to support school staff emotionally or through building on teacher and student strengths.

Regrettably, my ontological lapse spilled over into my identity as parent as I reified the habitus I inherited from my earlier experiences.

The Habitus of Early Parenthood

I became a parent two decades after becoming a teacher. I relished the opportunity to guide my sons as they explored the world, believing that their interests and skill would unfold naturally, as they meandered through experience unhindered by artificial expectations. However, parenting made me afraid and vulnerable so I sought help from the experts; not my mother, the *published*

experts. My behavior mirrored the passive role I enacted at the hospital when giving birth. I did everything the book told me; introduced cereal at 4 months, baby proofed the baby proofing, eagerly awaited every milestone and relied on *What to Expect the First Year* as the definitive guide to parenting. By the time my sons reached school age, they were developing as expected; average height and weight at each visit; age appropriate language and social skills observed, and both transitioned well into school.

As my younger son's physical and behavioral progress was parallel to his older brother, I assumed he would have similar cognitive abilities; John, my oldest, had tested into the district gifted and talented program at age 4. As a child, I had also successfully tested into gifted and talented in elementary school. My mother, a teacher, and father, a lawyer, were also good at taking tests. It was a family expectation. A grade of 97 would invite the refrain, "Where are the other 3 points?" Though tongue in cheek, there was an underlying warning about failure. My youngest son would surely fit the mold as well.

A few weeks before James' Gifted & Talented test, I printed the test prep materials, put on my teacher hat and climbed aboard the assessment express bus?. Except it was a local. And it was slow. And it broke down a lot. And it went in circles, proceeding nowhere. I realized quickly that James was not like my older son, John. While verbal and imaginative, he did not perceive the world critically or logically as defined by Gifted and Talented test questions. He saw patterns, but they were novel and not the obvious choice. He answered questions laterally rather than linearly so that descriptive narratives took on a poetic rather than expository nature. Consistent practice with repeated questions types did little to change James's responses so we stopped preparing. I knew that he had a viable elementary school option so I was not concerned with the results. That was fortunate as James scored in the lowest percentile. Thus began my

internal, deficit-based narrative about my son's academic potential. *He is not smart like John. I hope his teachers are patient with him. I wonder what high school he will be able to get into. I wonder whether he will become a professional like the rest of us.* All of this before he was five.

The Power of Transformation

James is a warm child, easily frustrated. He is utilitarian and sees little use in activities that to him are irrelevant. And to him, much of school is irrelevant. He loves history and he loves science but struggles to write anything not creative. I was surprised by his lack of concern when he received a level 2, approaching standards, in writing months before his first ELA exam. My student voice couldn't understand. *How can he not care? Doesn't he want to do better? This won't get him into a good school later on.* My teacher voice kicked in. *I know what to do. I'll make charts and graphs. I'll use sentence stems. I'll write a model.* My parent voice expressed fear and frustration. *Does he need extra help? How can I fix this? We are going to practice for the test every Saturday. I'll buy test prep books.* As an administrator, I wanted to know how the teacher was helping my son. *Where are the scaffolds? How come I don't see any feedback on his work? What is she doing to meet my son's individual needs?*

The following Saturday I excitedly awoke, ready to engage my own child in the miraculous writing process. I located my chart paper, markers and practice exams. We read the passages together, laughing when one of us made a mistake and then corrected it. Then we got to the written responses and I went into high gear writing on my chart paper. After 20 minutes, I stood back, impressed with what I had accomplished. I had prompts, driving questions and a fully formed written response model. Each part was color coded so James could see how to take the individual parts and put them back together. We talked about the response at length, how it

was constructed and why it would receive full credit. I was sure James could apply what we had done and would finally be a writer! I was proud of myself as an educator and as a parent.

It was James's turn. I watched him slowly read the practice passages and answer the multiple-choice questions. He turned to the written response questions and paused. He read the question then looked away. *Pay attention James.* He begrudgingly returned to work. *You can do this. Just look at the charts and they will help.* He looked up and began playing with his eraser. *Pay attention. You will never get any better if you don't pay attention.* His eyes wandered. *Focus.* He indicated he was done. *How can you be done? Did you see the model? You have one sentence and the model has 5. Should I go over it all again?* James continued, but began to tap his pencil. Then he erased everything he had written. *Why did you do that? Some of that might have been useful. Look at the chart paper for help.* His eyes pleaded for relief. *You have to get better. You want to get into good schools right?*

James's mood turned sour. He was frustrated, angry and confused. He began ripping up his paper with tears rolling down his face. He screamed that he didn't care about the test. He was comfortable with his writing efforts and felt he worked hard. His teacher said that he was doing a great job. I stopped, horrified by the thought that I had caused his distress. *Why are you doing this to him? You know you don't believe in these tests. What kind of parent are you? What kind of educator are you? What kind of hypocrite are you?* But I wasn't a hypocrite. I was an educator with multiple identities, each interacting with and from habitus. *Put everything away James. If you want to work on this let me know. Otherwise, just do your best. I will never make you do anything like this again.* And I haven't since. Becoming aware of my son's anxiety and emotional struggle provided clarity and allowed me to reassess my values and priorities as a

parent. This awareness also compelled me to question the underlying structures and values that framed my thoughts and feelings as the interaction took place.

Event Oriented Inquiry: An Analysis

As the interaction led to an ontological shift and a change in my behavior, I chose to study the event in terms of what took place, why it happened and what layers of meaning emerged that were not apparent at first. At a primary level, my son and I clashed in our approach to studying for the state test; I believed he needed consistent, rote, repetitive response preparation for the ELA exam, and he believed his teacher prepared him well at school. On a deeper level, our responses to each other show how we each view standardized exams as a measure, as well as how we each view our place in school as *students*. Conflict emerged because I placed a greater emphasis on James's state exam performance than he did. I acted as if I believed the state test was a true measure of his abilities. I saw his lack of engagement as reflective of his work ethic and his inability to focus. Maybe he just wasn't academically inclined and needed more support. Slowly, I recognized that my actions were hurting my child and I was jolted into clarity. My ontological transformation occurred as I became aware of the contradiction between my learned values and those I had formed through my own reflection. This awareness allowed me to realign my principles with my behaviors. I began that afternoon believing in the hegemonic systems and structures that defined my education. I ended the afternoon as a compassionate parent, secure in the knowledge that my son's academic life would unfold as he saw it, not how I, or education policy, demanded it.

What Else Is There? How Habitus and Field Influence Behavior

While the interaction between us took only a few minutes, many years went into constructing the context that framed those moments. Our habitus and our actions were informed by the systems

and structures that define our experiences. We each have internalized the core values, dispositions and habits reflected in the *school* field; we both know the rules of the game. However, there is a difference in how we operate within that field, which I attribute to his habitus and perceived sense of social capital. While I was conditioned to unquestioningly submit to authority in school, I am raising my son to be respectfully independent-minded. Strong habitus and a weak sense of social capital led to my passivity; although I had a network of connections, other students, few of us had any ability to amass power. The teacher possessed high levels of social capital institutionalized in education's hierarchy. James believes in his own efficacy, possesses a higher sense of his social capital and sees his teachers as part of his network for amassing resources.

As my narrative above show, my student habitus has been framed by meritocratic values where obedience, structure and high student assessment scores are rewarded. I never questioned how or why these values developed because my forms of capital allowed me to navigate successfully this structure even though I was essentially powerless. As a middle-class student in an educated household, I had supplies, I was neatly dressed and my speech reflected growing up with professional parents. As my mother was a teacher, I was raised with the same behavioral expectations at home as I would encounter in school. I came with high levels of embodied cultural capital; at home, books surrounded me, I visited cultural institutions since a toddler and I had the opportunity to travel outside of New York City. My embodied capital contributed to my objectified capital as I held the *Gifted and Talented* label and high academic grades. My academic success increased my self-esteem so I did little to challenge the constructs and practices that made up the rules of the game.

My school behaviors reflect a strategy Bourdieu refers to as *conservation*, one of three strategies individuals use to navigate fields. These strategies are interest oriented, as actors become “strategic improvisers who respond dispositionally to the opportunities and constraints offered by various situations” (Swartz, 2012, p. 100). How individuals respond depends on the, often unconscious, intersection of habitus and capital. Conservation strategies serve to reproduce the field’s dominant values and are practiced by those whose habitus and capital engender successful outcomes. As my habitus and capital allowed me to succeed in the academic field, I had no reason to challenge its constructs.

In analyzing my son’s habitus, I noticed that he has very similar levels of capital as I did; his family is middle class and values learning, his mother is an educator, and has had many visits to places outside of New York City. The school system in which he is a student remains meritocratic, bound by objective standards, assessments, and static structures. Yet, his habitus is different from mine when I was his age. While he likes to get high grades, he is satisfied when they reflect average performance as long as he tried his best. He studies, but is more interested in being active or creative. I, on the other hand, spent my time reading and studying to make sure I always succeeded in school. The biggest difference: I was a passive participant in my education, willing to act in any manner that brought me positive attention from those in power, be they my parents or school staff. I didn’t question why I did anything. I just put my head down and got to work as this was the easiest road to travel. James, on the other hand, takes more ownership of his classroom space. If he is bored or confused, he will say so. If he finds an assignment arbitrary, he questions why he has to complete it. Several of his teachers have tried to break him of this habit, but, as his seemingly contrary behavior reflects his values, it hasn’t changed. His *subversion*

emerged from his lack of expectations regarding schooling's usefulness. He is challenging its legitimacy as well as the standards that define the academic field (Swartz, 2012).

Competing Habitus

I continued to unpack what else was happening and focused on how and why I could break the bonds my student habitus had placed on my behavior. As a new parent, my fear and perceived impotency resulted in my relying on the experts and their proscribed parental expectations.

Experience led to confidence and I developed my own expectations for my children. Our family habitus values responsibility but not without compassionate support. We value respect, but not as a sign of submission. My children know they are free to develop their own thoughts and ideas as long as they are not arbitrary and this has provided them with the confidence to explore the world. Similarly, I began teaching with a belief in adult dominance where the educational experts decided what is best for all students. However, when afforded the opportunity to engage with students through active learning, I saw their power and potential, their joy and their pain. I was then able to value student well-being over the systems and structures that previously dominated my actions.

My decision to stop James's test preparation was not easy. I had to choose between following the rules embedded in the education field and broader social structures, and doing what I believed was best for James as a parent. Whether or not I provide my son the space to learn in a manner best for his emotional development, his test scores will still determine where he attends middle school, high school and college. It is my hope that in developing his agency he will be able to succeed by challenging and eventually transforming the systems that may constrain him.

Transformation through Awareness

Many critics argue that Bourdieu's habitus is too deterministic and, although adaptable, habitus can only reflect the types of group and/or individual capital that shape it (Swartz, 2012).

Bourdieu's idea that structures generate habitus, which engender practices that in turn reproduce structures, seems to support this. However, when taken in its entirety, Bourdieu overall theory allows for transformation when there is a significant disconnect between habitus and field, particularly when the expectations of habitus are frustrated (Bourdieu, 1993). Yet, this theory does not go far enough. Bourdieu located change in habitus, and limits transformation to a *gradual* adaptation between opportunities and constraints, expectations and possibilities (Swartz, 2012). I believe that, through critical awareness, individuals can abruptly transform both habitus and how we act within fields. For example, I changed my dispositions toward standardized testing and my subsequent behaviors by becoming aware of how my actions were hurting my child. As a result, I have delegitimized the power that testing structures have over my actions. The education field no longer determines how I interact academically with my son; his needs do.

Interrogating our Roles and Transforming Identities

This experience has helped me understand how we passively adopt and reenact roles based on how we perceive we should act, and how this awareness can reframe role expectations to more align with our core beliefs. In Ervin Goffman's dramaturgical theory (1969), identity is not a stable, objective psychological actor; an individual's identity is enacted through role(s) and agreement between the actor and the audience. It is perpetually recreated as individuals interact with others. We are actors on a stage, influenced by the settings, costumes, scripts and gestures, playing a part for others. Goffman described "performance" as a *presentation of self*, with the goal of forming an impression in others. Roles are the outward patterns of behavior socially and

situationally defined; they are how our habitus manifests across fields. Our past experiences have shaped and been shaped by these culturally mediated roles, beliefs and practices and impact our expectations and appraisals for ourselves. As we enact our varying roles across fields, our selves are either verified or invalidated by others who interpret our performances, producing emotional responses (Turner & Stets, 2006). I adopted the academic and personal roles that were either modeled or rewarded by my parents; the “good student” who passively listens and submissively responds to academic authority; the “good mother” who monitors and stresses academic achievement; and “the good daughter,” whose children perform in a way that makes the extended family proud.

I also recognized that my need for parental approval drove my emotional response. I was stuck in the role of “good daughter,” and feared that my son’s potential academic failure would reflect badly upon me. My anger arose when I attributed the cause of this fear to my son, and continued as I appraised his lack of focus as a lack of effort. I sanctioned his behavior with my words, which caused him distress and pain, and caused me to become conflicted. My primary role is to protect my children and help them navigate unfair social systems and structures. Instead of my parents’ beliefs that academic achievement took precedence over emotional support, I considered how that approach affected my own children and I adjusted my thinking. In a major shift in my perceptions and expectations, I redefined my priorities and my roles. I chose not to define my son’s academic success on my own and made supporting his strengths and emotional well-being a priority; I separated my own sense of efficacy from my children’s actions; and I reevaluated my need for outside approval as a verification of self. In reevaluating and shifting how I perceived and enacted my roles, my identity’s boundaries shifted and I left the interaction different from when I entered.

Raising Awareness in Practicing Teachers

Teachers define and enact their roles based on cultural expectations and their own academic and personal experiences. Our personal and professional identities expand, transform, and overlap each other as we interact across socio-cultural fields (Tobin, 2015). Thus, teacher practices, expectations and appraisals are consciously and unconsciously informed by an educator's past and present contexts. Each student-teacher interaction is influenced by individual habitus as well as the local and macro-structural academic field. During role verification, teachers read student gestures to determine if they have accepted their role-making activities (Turner, 2009). In my experience, the teacher role is verified when students participate and are perceived as academically successful. When students fail to respond successfully, whether by withdrawing in class or performing poorly based on teacher expectations, the role is challenged, a teacher's self is not verified, and emotions such as anger, sadness and fear can potentially arise. Defense mechanisms, which are meant to protect the self, can result in emotional harm to both teachers and students. Many teachers repress their emotions believing that the classroom is not the appropriate place to express them, which takes a psychic and physical toll on them (Zembylas, 2014). Repressed emotions can be transformed into those more acceptably expressed, such as when a teacher's fear turns into anger directed at the students, or to outside actors such as parents and administrators (Turner, 2009). Teachers may also experience shame and guilt for expressing their emotions, which leads to a subsequent cycle of defense mechanisms.

I believe teachers can minimize the emotional consequences that emerge when their expectations for themselves as teachers, their "role," does not align with classroom experiences. (Turner, 2009). My transformative experience has shown me the value in looking at how habitus and field interact with forms of capital to drive behavior. Bourdieu's theory (1986) provided a

lens for looking at how educators operate within education systems. Are teachers or administrators aware of what underlay their judgements, assumptions and school habitus? Do an educator's actions reflect his or her current values, or are they a consequence of passivity and acceptance of the field's parameters, whether consciously or unconsciously? More importantly, can an awareness of internal (habitus) and external (field) contradictions bring about changes in behavior that transform both habitus and field? A critical lens is necessary to uncover the dominant structures, past experiences and present contexts that influence how teachers define and enact their roles.

CHAPTER 3- CRITICALLY APPROACHING PEDAGOGICAL PRACTICES: A CASE STUDY

The Power of Reflection

One important lesson I have learned through my doctoral studies is to mindfully approach what I feel, think, say and do but this did not come easily. It took many years of reflecting on the consequences of my emotional responses that I learned to pause before I react. As my emotions often signal a conflict or contradiction among my perceptions, thoughts, actions and underlying values, I have learned to interrogate their contextual derivation through a reflexive process.

Reflective practice has historical roots dating back thousands of years. Philosophers such as Buddha and Socrates believed reflection was a tool for catalyzing change by clarifying and understanding the world around us. Later philosophers developed theories and others, research practices, that situate reflection as a tool for improving educational outcomes (York-Barr, 2001). John Dewey, (1933; 1938) viewed education as promoting intellectual, social and moral growth through reflective thinking, a systemic process where experiences are described, questions arise, hypotheses form and are then tested through action. Learning is inherently a reflective process where individuals make meaning through experiences over time.

Many researchers have examined the value in using reflective practices to improve education. Donald Schon (1983; 1987) links effective teaching with reflective practice as it helps educators differentiate between genuine pedagogy over the reactive, day-to-day strategies teachers employ to “get by” in the present accountability culture. By engaging in reflective practices, educators develop a better understanding of how their conscious and unconscious values are expressed in their pedagogical decisions. Schon differentiates between *reflection-in-*

action, which occurs in the moment and *reflection-on-action*, which looks back on previous events to affect a specific change. Killion and Todnem (1991) expand this concept to include the more critical *reflection-for-action* where the purpose of reflection is structural change. Max van Manen's theory of reflective practice (1977) organizes reflective theory into three levels: Technical reflection examines skills, strategies and methods used to reach academic goals; practical reflection considers the underlying assumptions of these methods and reexamines the goals themselves; and critical reflection, which focuses on the moral, ethical and equity aspects of practice, with an emphasis on pathic elements (affective, perceptual, contextual, non-cognitive), as a way to influence practice.

Beyond Reflection: Bourdieu's Reflexive Sociology

Pierre Bourdieu's Reflexive Sociology (1992) moves beyond using reflective practice to heighten self-awareness and includes a multi-layered, contextual and critical deconstruction of the systems within which we operate as researchers:

[Reflexivity calls] less for intellectual introspection than for the permanent sociological analysis and control of sociological practice ... It entails ... the systematic exploration of the 'unthought categories of thought which delimit the thinkable and predetermine the thought'. (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992, p. 40)

As researchers, sociologists need to understand the over-arching role context, habitus and field play in their appraisals when researching social interactions. The sociologist's habitus, i.e., entrenched habits, skills and dispositions, is shaped by social norms and a corresponding ontology that guide behavior and thinking within academia (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992).

According to Bourdieu (1992), the academics of his day maintained an elitist, intellectual point of view that was part of, formed in and by, the 'collective unconscious' of their academic field. By presupposing a higher status for their own conclusions, Bourdieu saw these scholars as possessing an arrogant indifference to alternate perspectives that minimized, rather than solidified the validity of their conclusions (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992).

He insisted researchers challenge this “scholastic point of view” and question the intellectual dispositions it produces. Bourdieu also challenged the idea that sociological research could be, in any way, objective; researchers develop socially constructed dispositions within their experiential fields, as the subjects they are studying. Thus, individuals studying social interaction needs to explore their own social origins, particularly the role habitus and capital have played in their ontology, for a clear analytical picture to emerge. This is true of educators as they research their practices. Not only do they need to uncover their own histories, they also need to uncover the historical and cultural elements that define the education field within which they operate.

Reflexivity in Education

Educational research practices have similar characteristics to the sociological practices Bourdieu criticized. Historically, pedagogical theory has resided in academia, far from classrooms of practice (Kincheloe, 2004). Education policy’s reliance on “research based” practices has generated countless programs and initiatives that have done little to address the growing achievement gap. Certain in their “scholastic point of view,” intellectuals and policymakers continue to use the pretense of objectivity to create and maintain a static, hierarchical education system (Tyack, 1974) where standardized exams and quantitative measures reign. Thus, schooling continues to be the primary field for transmitting the mental schemata and social structures that operate as instruments of domination (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992).

Like sociological research, education research should consider the roles that academic context, power and privilege play in reproducing inequitable educational structures (Kincheloe, 2004). For the past few decades, there had been a much-needed shift in educational research practices from the university to the classroom. As Kincheloe expressed, teachers are uniquely situated to best explore the emotional, moral and experiential contexts of their classrooms. Teachers are participants in school-based interactions, making their perceptions valuable in identifying and analyzing classroom events. Yet, their ideas, values and behaviors were internalized through the cultural production of their educational experiences; even teachers with the best intentions navigate within the unconscious structures that influence their behavior. As Foucault argues, the education apparatus is structured so as to maintain power for a chosen few. We are enculturated through physical, temporal and axiological mechanisms and mundane practices that become so common place, they are rarely questioned (Foucault, 1975). Schooling's ideologies, processes and practices are well embedded by the time teachers are in front of their own classes. Therefore, although teachers may be in the best position to research their practice, they need to critically interrogate their own values and ideologies, how they developed, and how their experiences in school influenced their thinking.

In advocating for critical pedagogy, Kincheloe encourages educators to challenge the traditional view of how knowledge is produced and ways in which students understand. He promotes reflection as a tool for uncovering the ideologies and social forces that influence educational power structures and encourages educators to question the dominant ontologies that have shaped present curricular and pedagogical practices. When teachers target their own underlying assumptions, values and unconscious habits or mind, their own capacity to exercise power in their classrooms and how to dismantle intellectual bias, they can collectively redefine

how best to educate all students justly. Reflexivity allows teachers to examine dominant educational ideologies to understand their causes, contexts and consequences on policy, practice, and the day-to-day lives of their students (Shor, 1992). Once teachers emancipate themselves from the hegemonic principles that have driven education practices, they can help students critically examine their own lives as they struggle for agency within social institutions.

Being a Teacher | Researcher

I analyze the interactions throughout this chapter as a teacher | researcher, and employ Alexakos' (2015) work on teacher | research to ensure I acknowledge and explore the different lenses of everyone involved. I employ the Sheffer stroke (|) to highlight the dialectical relationship between my varying roles (professor | doctoral student | researcher) which have been and are mutually dependent upon each other throughout my past and present experiences, as well as my experiences interacting with my Brooklyn College students; my research informs my teaching practice and my practice informs my research. The methods and methodologies included in this chapter reflect how I continuously make meaning of my past and present experiences to learn about and transform my teaching practices. My research is framed by the following elements: 1) Teacher | researchers frame and reframe, their lived experiences through sociocultural enactment 2) Teacher | research is participant-centered and mutually interpretive, and 3) Teacher | research is emergent and contingent, without a predetermined path, hypotheses or conclusions. This research is multi-leveled, as it explores and analyzes the ways macro, meso, and micro-structures culturally interact to frame our thoughts, feelings, actions and perceptions. Thus, it is also important to explore historical, cultural and political influences that informed both the processes and outcomes of the research, which I do through Bourdieu's Reflexive Sociology (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992)

As a teacher | researcher, I am aware of the power dynamics inherent in creating an egalitarian space in my class. My perceptions of student ability are translated into grades, which may underlie many hierarchical interactions. I tried to minimize this by adopting a learner stance, and by illustrating my vulnerability and fallibility during class sessions. In addition, I offered opportunities where participants' commonalities and differences were employed to critically discuss our practices (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 1999).

The Reflexive Process

Teachers shape, and are shaped by previous social encounters in the school field as students (Hawkins et al., 2004), and as part of a school's community of practice (Lave & Wenger, 1998). Pedagogical choices that, on the surface, seem intentional, may merely be embedded responses. How then, can teachers transform their practices if they result from entrenched habits of mind? By questioning how these habits of mind came to be, who they serve, who they harm and how they can be changed. Useful teacher | researcher questions include, *Why did I choose to be a teacher? What values drive my day to day work? How did my student-teacher relationships while going to school influence how I interact with my own students? How did my own academic performance influence my present pedagogical and curricular decisions?* It is important for teachers researching their practice to uncover the symbols and structures that informed their ideas of power- who has it, who does not- as well as the behavioral strategies and habits of mind they internalized as a result.

Researching Emotions

Teacher emotions can be a useful tool for highlighting and interrogating conflicts surrounding their practice. I borrow from emotion research theories that explore the interdependent role of internal and external mediating factors, the emergent and contingent nature of emotions, as well

as their socio-cultural derivation. Emotions play an important role in teaching as a reflective practice (van Manen, 1995), and the dynamics of emotions, and how they have been embedded in teachers' practices, is important in advancing reflexivity.

Emotions, including feelings, sentiments, motivation, expression, and their representations are both negotiated, cultural products (Lyon, 1998) and conscious and unconscious biological states (Damasio, 1999). Turner and Stets, (2006), theorize that the 'hardwired' elements of emotions are the material basis for socio-cultural shaping and processing. Thus, a group of primary emotions can be identified, but how they manifest, including how they combine and become more elaborate are based on *both* neurology and the structural, cultural conditions in which they are produced. Experience occurs within social constructs with our bodies, which do not exist outside of them. Damasio (1999) also views emotions as changes in body in response to environmental stimuli. Emotion and feeling work as homeostatic controls. Somatic markers, physiological signals, emerge and produce emotions, which then influence individual responses. Feelings become associated with particular situations and their outcomes, which individuals carry with them into future encounters both consciously and unconsciously. Importantly, cognitive representations of emotions can be activated in the brain, even without being directly elicited by a physiological response. The brain anticipates what will occur and responds without an actual stimulus. This second path is an anticipation produced in the brain, and constitutes a useful evolutionary resource that helps the preparation of the body to respond faster to external stimuli without waiting for an event to actually occur.

Social-construction of Emotions

Turner and Stets (2006) argue that emotions are psychological and sociological connected; they are the 'glue' binding people together and underlie cultural enactment while simultaneously

pushing them to challenge social structures. Although they are internal states, emotions are perceived through social rules that inform how they are interpreted and acted upon.

Dramaturgical theories emphasize that cultural scripts direct how individuals strategically present themselves to others. Emotional exhibitions are managed by adherence to cultural structures, often resulting in an incongruity between what people express and what they feel (Hochschild, 1983).

Identities emerge as individuals interact within cultural structures. When identities are perceived as salient to a situation, the more conforming emotions and behaviors will match the perceived context. Emotions, such as pride, or embarrassment, occur to the extent that this identity is verified. Negative emotions can induce individuals to take action that brings this identity more in line with cultural standards. Teaching has its own set of display rules, the explicit and implicit boundaries for what is considered appropriate behavior. These rules influence how educators and students interpret and exhibit classroom actions or expressed emotion (Bruner, 1996). Social rules can also influence which emotions are ‘felt’ by students and teachers while in school; for example, both teachers and students are encouraged to regulate or hide anger, which may result in emotional dissonance (Abraham, 1998). Thus, the emergence and enactment of emotions is dependent on perceived hierarchical structures. How certain emotions are defined as accepted or not, or who is allowed to engage in them are important in analyzing their expression (Zembylas, 2014).

Vygotsky (1927) points out the broad influence the inherited experiences of former generations, can have on an individual’s present; human experience is constructed and world mediated by the past, the present and implicit futures. In classrooms, emotions cannot be separated from the in-situ events in which they take place; they mediate and are mediated by

what participants bring into each situation, what occurs during the situation, and potential futures that can be imagined from the interactions. During Interaction Rituals, biological states are defined through emotional arousal which increases or decreases from social interactions. The greater the shared cultural symbols, focus, and goals, the more likely the interaction will result be successful and increase positive emotional energy. These symbols will reproduce themselves and the culture within which their meanings were enacted.

Additional Theories of Emotion

Robert Thamm's (2004) power-status theories are useful for understanding how power dynamics and expectations interact to generate emotions. As individuals interact, they bring with them varying levels of power and status which have been derived by and through cultural interactions. Performative expectations stem from this status and indicate how and when one can and should act with power and authority and when one can and should be submissive. Thus, the structures that define who is in power and those that possess it, create and maintain the expectations for those in deferent positions. This theory is useful in analyzing classroom expectations and deconstructing the power dynamics surrounding student and teacher expectations.

Appraisal theories of emotions focus on an evaluation process that occurs consciously or outside of awareness. Our appraisal of a situation generates an emotional, or affective, response based on the appraisal and its evaluation even in the absence of physiological arousal (Aronson, et al., 2005). *The structural model of appraisal* examines the appraisal process as well as how different emotions arise based on how it is experienced. Two types of appraisal, primary appraisal and secondary appraisal (Lazarus, 1991) influence how an emotion is generated. In a *primary appraisal*, a person evaluates a situation's salience as well as how congruent the situation is to the individual's perceived goals (Smith & Kirby, 2009). *Secondary*

appraisal involves an evaluation of responsibility, that is, who is responsible for the situation at hand. When individuals hold themselves responsible for their situation, guilt, shame, embarrassment, or pride and happiness can occur. When another person, or a group of other people are perceived as accountable for the situation, anger or gratitude may emerge (Lazarus, 1991). Our appraisals and evaluations are discursive connected to cultural enactment. They both define and are defined by social interactions.

Turner's theory of emotion (2009) suggests expectations drive our emotional actions and reactions. It is a dialogic process; we come into situations with emotional expectations for these interactions and use others' reactions to interpret, monitor and mediate these expectations. At the core of each interaction is the desire to confirm self. When our expectations for self and other are met, positive emotions ensue. When expectations are thwarted and self is not verified, negative emotions arise and sanctioning occurs to bring expectations more in line with what was presumed. Defense mechanisms, such as attribution, projection, displacement and repressions operate to reduce threats to self and reestablish verification of self.

Emotional Reflexivity

The teaching profession is fraught with emotion, both positive and negative. When working in a school community, emotions come from myriad sources and help form habitus. All participants bring feelings with them from outside that influence what happens inside. Emotions are internal, external, interdependent and impossible to avoid. An educator's emotions have been constructed through his or her own educational contexts and experiences. When teachers act on these emotions, they contribute to how student emotions are constructed (Shutz & Zembylas, 2009) and influence what educational values and beliefs students internalize. Emotions emerge as unconscious judgements about one's values, ideals and highlight what we value. Teachers

leverage power through their emotional states and reactions in the classroom, whether by smiling in admiration or frowning with disappointment when students meet or do not meet expectations. But how often do teachers critically consider what values emerge from emotional reactions? What are the underlying thoughts behind a teacher's appraisal and how does the teacher's experiences manifest emotionally in interactions with students?

Methodology in Practice

I employ the principles of Authentic Inquiry to explore an emotional event that emerged in response to my perceptions on student performance; I seek multiple perspectives with the goal of expanding and transforming participant knowledge as a catalyst for change. My role as teacher | researcher embeds me into the learning community as the students and I collaboratively make meaning of classroom practices and their impact. By looking at differences in lifeviews, experiences and values, we uncover how macro and meso level social systems, such as federal policy statutes and school level structures, influence micro level teacher and student practices. My doctoral studies have led me to see value in my own experience as a teacher | researcher; by taking a learner's stance, one open to transformation, I continually develop as an educator and a person (Alexakos, 2015).

My Brooklyn College class consisted of 25 diverse students, 22 females, and 3 males. Students identified themselves as Latinx, Jamaican, Pakistani, mixed-race, white, Chinese, and African-American.. The class met weekly in the evening for 2 ½ hours. Students had various levels of teaching experience; five students were teaching, either in a private or charter school, one student was a full-time paraprofessional, four students were student-teaching, one worked part-time in an after-school program, two were substitute teachers and 12 had no teaching experience at all. Prior to writing this chapter, I informed students about how this research

evolved, what emerged from my study, and their roles in advancing my learning. Students participated in both the chapter's analysis and its conclusions.

Data Collection

Both quantitative and qualitative data sources informed this self-study. I kept a digital journal throughout the semester to document my thoughts and feelings during each class. Students provided additional data about their own practice through weekly written reflections, and on-demand exit tickets, where students reflected on class interactions. Students were also encouraged to record their own thoughts and feelings throughout the week, which they later shared through email or written responses. I also analyzed quantitative data points, such as student reflection grades and number of technological devices used in class to analyze the impact of my reflexive practices on student behavior and achievement.

An Event Unfolds

It was my first semester teaching a graduate class at Brooklyn College. Though invigorating and rewarding, it was also becoming stressful. I drove to class one evening about half-way through the semester, filled with frustration and disappointment. The course, Advanced Curriculum and Pedagogy, seemed perfectly matched to my professional skills, knowledge and experience; I had spent 21 years teaching middle school English and social studies, two years as a literacy based instructional specialist, and six years helping low-performing schools reform their pedagogical practices. When I began teaching in the fall, 2019, I had completed all coursework towards my Doctorate

In developing the syllabus, I considered what I believed to be important concepts for aspiring educators. By blending theory and practice, I hoped to provide the *why* of curricular and

pedagogical decisions in addition to the *what*. To that end, I assigned theoretical articles, research studies and practical curriculum development guides. I developed assessments that reflect my teaching philosophy- I wanted to cultivate students' critical thinking skills as a way of promoting equity in their classrooms. Each week, students were required to develop a reflection that provided a connection between at least two readings and their thoughts and/or practices. Students were also responsible for co-teaching one class of their choosing. To support meaning making, I encouraged students to choose their own way of sharing their learning. Students were offered the choice of writing a unit plan, a theoretical research paper, or a paper that discussed their educational philosophy.

A Developing Conflict

Although student presentations were often interactive, I noticed class participation was lacking the first few weeks. Students did not seem to build on information, nor did they seem to challenge conclusions or ask questions. I also observed seemingly pervasive uses of technology, as students either had their heads in laptops or phones. In walking around the room, I frequently saw students reading the texts being presented, or engaging in other work. Class began at 6:05 PM on Thursday. I tried to be mindful of how the time might affect my students; it was late in the day at the end of the week. Many students had additional responsibilities, including family obligations, full time jobs, and other classes. I was hoping that their reflections would highlight their learning and its application to their practice.

By week four, I perceived that students were not putting sufficient effort into their written work. Overall, most reflections lacked text references, insight or critical thought. Although students made connections to their own practice, they were often off topic or not relevant to the assigned readings. To add clarity, I developed a rubric to support student responses. As we

reviewed the rubric, students were invited to respond to, add to, or reduce criteria as they saw fit, but they did not do so. I informed students that I would be using a rubric which measured responses on a 4-point scale, to evaluate, not grade, the next week's responses. I eagerly awaited the next reflections to see how students' ideas were progressing, confident that increased direction would improve response quality. Unfortunately, this was not the case. As with weeks past, I continued to perceive most responses as below standards. Despite being invited to collaborate on criteria for the rubric, student responses showed little improvement. My subjective assessment reflected an average score of 2.68, below the 3.0 standard.

My thoughts were becoming increasingly negative and I noticed I was less concerned with *why* students were not engaged during class or why they weren't improving reflection quality. I began writing these thoughts down as a way of coping with the increased stress. *"What is going on here? I get that they are tired but so am I. I put plenty of time into reading the reflections. You would think they would spend as much time writing them."* The phones and laptops angered me. *"It is so rude! Their fellow students are presenting with me and they have to do the same. Where is the mutual respect?"* I was also surprised by the continued lack of preparation, evident when students were asked questions or asked to discuss a topic. *"Why did I make preparation only 10%?" Now I can't lower grades for not reading."* Certain student comments were also wearing on my better nature: *"Do we really have to write about two articles?" "Can I be excused this week because I have another paper due."* I thought, *"No one has to **do** anything. But the lack of effort will be reflected in their grades."* It was difficult for me to accept what I perceived as a lack of effort in my students. I would never have asked a professor for more time unless it was an emergency, nor would I have submitted sub-par assignments. I believed the only way to remedy the situation was to make the students fully

accountable for their mediocre responses by operationalizing their performance. It was clear my punitive teacher voice was drowning out my compassionate side.

While driving to class week six, I became angry and indignant. *Don't these students understand this is **graduate** school? If this is the level of effort, how can they expect to be teachers in an urban school system? If I am putting in my best effort, why can't they?* It was time for consequences. My primary concern was determining when to hand back the reflections with my feedback- if I did it at the beginning of class it might ruin the mood as many grades were below standard. If I returned the responses at the end of class, they might be quickly shoved into backpacks and my feedback would be worthless. I needed them to know I had done everything possible to support them. Or had I?

Breaking Down an Emotional Reaction

I could feel tightness in my chest and a queasy feeling in my stomach. My heart rate increased and I began to sweat, a physical reaction to the emerging internal conflict (Porges, 2011) All at once, the question washed over me. *"What was my role in this?"* The answer came slowly as I uncovered the thoughts and feelings that recursively informed each other. *Why was I angry?* I put extensive work into designing and teaching the class. I spent hours reviewing the week's readings because I believed it facilitated the best in-class learning experience. *Why was I frustrated?* I spent time every week reviewing learning goals and expectations because I believed they offered clarity. I developed activities with co-presenters and gave students autonomy to make their own meaning out of topics, but these strategies seemed ineffective. *Why was I indignant?* I knew it was difficult to juggle studying, working and raising a family, yet I managed. I also never questioned the length of assignments or asked for extensions. *What was*

really going on? I decided to pause, and reflect, as I investigated the conflict within me. I realized that if I expected my students to evolve, then I had to take the lead.

Reflexivity and Emotion

I began by trying to untangle the emotions I was feeling, how they led to negative thoughts, and how these thoughts were leading me to act contrary to my initial intentions. Critical Emotional Praxis (Zembylas, 2012) provided a platform for my interrogating how systemic educational power structures influenced my own educational views and values reflected in my emotional responses. I needed to explore the role my actions could have in potentially reproducing the negative patterns that influenced my practice. I felt I needed to deconstruct the meaning in my emotionally charged thoughts. How did my academic privilege influence these thoughts? How did I come to value certain academic practices over others? I needed to challenge my academic identity and the mythologies I had constructed about my own abilities and the abilities of others. Why was I so strongly attached to my core beliefs? And how did these beliefs influence the pedagogical choices I have made? Finally, I wished to identify the power dynamics that influenced my emotional development and how this was enacted in my role as teacher.

Unpacking my Social Suitcase

Through incorporating a bricolage of Van Manen's (1995) levels of reflectivity, with concepts from Bourdieu's Reflexive Sociology (1992), Kincheloe's Critical Pedagogy (2003) and Zembylas' Critical Emotional Praxis (2012), I uncovered how my experiences within a variety of fields influenced my habitus and informed my pedagogical and curricular decisions. When critically reflecting on the technical decisions I made in developing the course, I began to see how my habitus influenced syllabus development in ways that contradicted my intentions. My syllabus was developed so students could make their own meaning by choosing from the

readings and activities, in line with my epistemological beliefs. Weekly reflections gave students the opportunity to present their thoughts and apply the readings to their own practice and coteachers were given the autonomy to present what was salient to their lives. However, by week three, I was unhappy with the direction the course was taking, creating a disconnect between what I envisioned and what I felt.

Despite how uncomfortable it made me feel, my negative response reflected the early educational values I internalized and enacted as a student and as a novice teacher; hard work, extensive preparation and attention to detail, will result in successful academic performance. I sought to operationalize student performance by co-creating a rubric that would guide them as they navigated the assignments. Even though that class and I developed the rubric together, the criteria measured what I felt was important; familiarity with the readings, clarity in expressing ideas, and transfer of theory into practice. Thus, though I intended to support students by highlighting what I wanted them to master, the rubric contained criteria that I deemed to be valuable, not what was necessarily meaningful for student practice. Though students were given the opportunity to contribute their own ideas, they may not have known how to develop a rubric. They might also have been uncomfortable challenging my ideas.

The Past is Always the Present

In the moments before class began, I was becoming aware of how my habitus influenced my decisions and actions, and how this influenced the course design. My intention was to develop an open, equitable community of practice (Lave & Wenger, 1991) based on mutual respect and shared perspectives. Understanding that teaching is inherently a political act (Freire, 1970) I wanted students to develop their own critical consciousness through a variety of readings and our interactions. Conscious of classroom power dynamics I believed that I had minimized the

distance between myself as professor and my students by sitting with them to ameliorating the symbolic hierarchy. At the start of the course, we collaboratively defined a standard for reflections and presentations. I avoided didactic instruction, allowing students to lead discussions and determine the class's direction, thus, empowering them to seek their own meanings. Not abdicating my authority, I used it to support my students in becoming "self-directed human beings, capable of producing their own knowledge" (Kincheloe, 2003, p. 17). I also considered how to ethically approach attendance and participation; my students were encouraged to put family first, when navigating the challenges of working, raising a family and going to school. Mindful that not all students were comfortable sharing their ideas, I provided diverse avenues for them to share their thinking.

Practical reflection compelled me to look at whether or not the syllabus supported my goals for the class or were appropriate for the students. Initially, I wanted students to think critically about how they developed curricula and how they engaged students. But were the resources appropriate to that goal? I chose readings that helped *me* think more critically about curriculum and pedagogy without considering much else. My own academic success in reading and writing academic texts led me to assume that the assigned resources were appropriate to the class; I could not get past the idea that it was a graduate level class and thus, needed rigorous coursework that included theory and research in addition to a review of pedagogical practices. I was also navigating my role as a new professor. What was my obligation to the university? In not knowing the answer, I retreated to my learned academic habitus, where I did more than was necessary to guarantee a positive outcome. The consequences of that disposition were falling on my students, as the syllabus better reflected a doctoral seminar than a master's level course. I also began to question if the chosen learning experiences would be relevant to their practice.

Could I, or anyone in the program, decide what knowledge was important or what goals should be set for our students?

Yet, despite my best intentions, my thoughts became authoritative, judgmental and insensitive. *Why is he late every class? Tina missed two classes because she was on vacation? Why aren't reflections being handed in on time? Why are they so short? Maybe some of these students should not become teachers if they cannot come to class having read this week's material.* I did not verbalize these thoughts but I cannot definitively say they were not expressed in my demeanor, tone or facial expressions. I added reflection grades to strengthen my position, as responses were calculated, averaged and leveraged. I became the power broker who meted out capital to the deserving. As the expert in the room, I became too confident that my intervention would lead to improved student achievement. I was still held hostage by expert blindness, convinced that I knew how to get my students to think more abstractly. When I began thinking of consequences for, what I deemed to be, low quality work, I knew I needed to take a step back. Something had to change and I wanted to start with me. It was time to pause, gather information and see what exactly was happening, why it was happening and what could be done about it.

Authentically Inquiring with Cogenerative Dialogue

Embracing the emergent and contingent nature of authentic inquiry was counter-intuitive to the traditional classroom field in which I had formed my basic school sensibilities, but I was open to new ideas that could unravel the tightness within me. I knew it was a risk, opening up to the vulnerability in not knowing, in being unsure, and in relinquishing the power that comes with assessing others. To understand my thoughts and reactions, it was important to analyze how my experiences shaped the decisions I had made to that point. It was also important for my students

to share how they felt about my approach, my choices, and the gap between their expectations and what they experienced. I decided then that a cogenerative dialogue would be an effective way to ensure everyone had the opportunity to learn from each other.

Cogenerative dialogues are reflective conversations that can be the means to identifying surfacing conflicts and contradictions in the classroom (Tobin, 2014). As the *co* implies, it is a community endeavor, as participants share their perspectives, seek to understand others and explore the enacted classroom culture as it unfolds. Culture, in this sense, is the structured set of beliefs and symbols with which social groups identify, define and utilize in practice. It is also the activity, or interactive practices Cultural symbols are provided meaning through practices while practices are defined by the symbols that drive them; they are complementary and dynamic aspects within which social groups can define themselves When there is a contradiction between symbols and practice, conflict can arise. Cogenerative dialogue offers group participants the ability to uncover the symbols on which classroom practices rely (Tobin & Roth, 2005).

I knew I was conflicted by what I perceived in student work. I also knew that my thoughts lacked nuance as they were only from my perspective. If my intentions in designing the class as an open and honest space was genuine, then my thoughts needed to be shared in an open and honest way. I began by asking the students to sit in a circle so we could all see each other. I explained the structure and purpose of cogen, and began presenting my perceptions as neutrally as possible using the terms *noticings* and *wonderings*. *I am noticing that discussions are limited. I am wondering if this is because the readings have not been completed. I am noticing that reflections do not reference the readings. I am wondering if the rubric needs to be reviewed or modified. I am noticing that most of you are using technology during your colleague's*

presentations. I am wondering how they might feel when this is happening? I am also wondering if this is a need or a distraction?

Student Perspectives

Though uncomfortable at first, students expressed their own noticings and wonderings. One noticed that some weeks had over 150 pages assigned. Another noticed that the original syllabus had a 250 word limit for the reflections, shorter than what was now expected. Another student expressed frustration with what they considered to be a lack of direction. She did not know what I was looking for; *You said we can write about what we think but you are not happy with the results.* Others mentioned how difficult the texts were. *Half the time I don't know what I am reading about and then I can't think of what to write about it. I just find a sentence I understand and go from there.* I knew then that one answer was not in what I did do, but in what I did not do. I did not assess my students' readiness for learning, nor did I develop materials based on this initial assessment. It did not matter how clear the instructions were, how engaging the activities or how developed a rubric was; if the students could not enter the material in a meaningful way, they could not learn from it. I was beginning to understand the various perspectives around me and considered how to proceed.

Digging More Deeply

I felt we needed to go further in analyzing the situation. There were still aspects of the class that needed unpacking. I was modeling interim assessment practices by looking at student outcomes and trying to identify areas for modification. I identified assumptions I made that may have influenced student performance; I chose readings that resonated within *me*, particularly those that questioned existing structures or theories that addressed the many factors that make up student context. Students may not have been interested nor prepared for this content. While I provided

practical resources, my focus was on developing critical educators without considering the needed prerequisite knowledge and experience. My expectations for my students mirrored the expectations I had for my student self, without considering that I was a candidate in a highly

Reflexivity and Emotion

I began by trying to untangle the emotions I was feeling, how they led to negative thoughts, and how these thoughts were leading me to act contrary to my initial intentions. Critical Emotional Praxis (Zembylas, 2012) provided a platform for my interrogating how systemic educational power structures influenced my own educational views and values reflected in my emotional responses. I knew I needed to explore the role my actions could have in potentially reproducing the negative patterns that influenced my practice. I needed to deconstruct the meaning in my emotionally charged thoughts. *How did my academic privilege influence these thoughts? How did I come to value certain academic practices over others?* I needed to challenge my academic identity and the mythologies I had constructed about my own abilities and the abilities of others. *Why was I so strongly attached to certain core beliefs? And how did these beliefs influence the pedagogical choices I have made?* Finally, I wished to identify the power dynamics that influenced my emotional development and how this was enacted in my role as teacher.

I uncovered and challenge how my past experiences contributed to and reinforced the unconscious beliefs and core values that engendered my frustration and anger. My teacher identity is dynamically shaped by past and present interactions, as well as perceived futures. Detailed in Chapter 2, my previous academic interactions were framed by my family, which valued high academic achievement and strongly believed in meritocratic systems. I learned that studying, completing extra-credit assignments and getting high grades would lead to praise and poor school performance to punishment. I was relieved by good grades and anxious when

my grades did not live up to my parents' expectations. Thus, my academic achievement was significantly tied to positive emotional states. As my own self-worth relied on my academic success, I internalized this as a positive value when judging others. I looked for ways, though it was unconscious to me at first, to operationalize student performance as a way of judging their personal worth. I realized I viewed students that worked hard to please me in a higher light than those who were apathetic or did the bare minimum. I also used my own strengths as a benchmark for assessing student work; despite believing that students manifest their learning through a variety of methods, my thoughts reflected a higher regard for students who are adept at writing. In addition, while privileged to have strong literacy skills, I did not consider that others may not have the ability or desire to access information from dense, theoretical texts.

I took a step further and analyzed the role of emotion in maintaining my values, and in reproducing these values in my classroom. I noticed that I maintained authority through emotional tones when questioned about class requirements: "*Can I be excused this week because I have another paper due?*" I responded with, "*It is your decision should you choose to forgo a reflection this week. No one has to **do** anything. But the reflection counts for your grade.*" My response asserted my power and lacked compassion. I would never have asked a professor for more time unless it was an emergency, but that was out of my fear of disapproval. In hindsight, I should have furthered the conversation and come up with a compromise that respected both our roles.

I also questioned if I was successfully interpreting my students' emotions. Were they apathetic? Was I accurate in thinking they were disengaged and unprepared because they did not value the course, their colleagues or me, as their professor? Or was I dependent on my own Affective Realism (Barrett, 2016), my gut feeling that told me I was justified in my

disappointment? Perhaps my students were uncomfortable expressing their own frustrations with the coursework and opted to stay quiet, fearing that I would use my power punitively (Foucault, 1975) This awareness changed how I approached future interactions. When I felt an emotional response to an event, I framed its emergence and reacted accordingly. I became more open to student context and no longer compared students to myself.

Reflection on Action

When critically reflecting on the decisions I made in developing the course, I began to see how my academic habitus influenced how I developed the syllabus in ways that contradicted my initial intentions. I wanted students to think critically about how they developed curricula and how they engaged students. However, were the resources appropriate? I chose readings that helped *me* think more critically about curriculum and pedagogy without considering much else. My own academic success in reading and writing academic texts led me to assume that the assigned resources were appropriate to the class; I could not get past the idea that it was a graduate level class and thus, needed rigorous coursework that included theory and research in addition to a review of pedagogical practices. The consequences of that disposition were falling on my students, as the syllabus better reflected a doctoral seminar than a masters level course. I also lacked criticality in developing a rubric for student responses. The criteria measured familiarity with the readings, clarity in expressing ideas, and transfer of theory into practice. Thus, though I intended to support students by highlighting what I wanted them to master, the rubric contained criteria that I deemed to be valuable, not what was necessarily meaningful for their practice. Though students were given the opportunity to contribute their own ideas, they may not have known how to develop a rubric. They might also have been uncomfortable challenging my ideas.

The Illusion of Criticality

I believed I was cultivating student agency, but my emerging thoughts reflected my sense of power which perceived students as passive. I did not allow for my students' own critical development. I expected them to be fully born before the end of the first trimester. Though I espoused student agency, I was unable to minimize the distance between my students and myself, as professor. For example, when we co-created the reflection rubric, I felt I was engendering student voice. However, the students seemed to provide criteria that reflected what they perceived *I* valued. Perhaps they were trying to please me or they provided criteria that reflected their own academic past. Either way, I was judge and jury, weighing their performance against my own expectations, my own academic interests and my own academic performance. I asserted my power by operationalizing student reflections grades as responses were calculated, averaged and leveraged. I was the power broker who meted out capital to whom I deemed deserving.

Educational Reflexivity: Breaking the Systems that Bind Us

Through being reflexive, I identified how my early family and educational experiences formed the habitus with which I engaged in a variety of academic fields. This habitus evolved, as I formed my own ideas about the nature of knowledge, knowledge production, and how knowledge can be expressed. I moved from a passive, often submissive, banking system (Freire, 1970) participant to a more agential, educator who found spaces where critical changes could take place. Even so, I was tethered by the systemic conditions that limited my power and did not have the ability or awareness to break them. What I have learned through this study is, even though I am now in a better position to influence systemic change, and consciously strive to embody a critical lens, the power dynamics that structured my early habitus remain.

Unconsciously, I am still a "fish in water" (Bourdieu, 1992); I do not feel the water's weight because I always live within it. I do not see that my actions perpetuate the system because these actions are familiar, almost comfortable.

I have also learned that my unconscious values, the bottom layers on which my habitus has been built, actively conflict with values I hold consciously. Unconsciously, I value obedience and high expectations. I value deferring to authority. I value others based on their ability to reproduce the behaviors that led to my academic success without considering their own context. Yet, I do not *value* these underlying values; I do not find them beneficial, nor do I hold them in high regard. They were designed to minimize my power, to keep me from questioning what I consciously know to be wrong but cannot help enacting. It is humbling, even frightening to learn that despite my criticality, I am still complicit in social reproduction.

The Problem of Power

As Freire (1970), and Giroux (1983), argue, those in power seek to reproduce the systems and structures that favor them through social transmission. Educators often play a key role in reifying social power structures without realizing that their own autonomy is an illusion; even teachers whose practices place students at the center of learning are unwittingly influenced by the systems in which they operate. Like Bakhtin's (1994) carnival participants, educators become emboldened by situational power without understanding that it is not real; it is a tool for masking their own subordination. There is a certain satisfaction that comes from this false freedom, a moral superiority that arises when power is wielded in the guise of beneficence. It is the opposite side of oppression but cut of the same cloth. I have often wondered why some educators take pride in "classroom control" or in being feared rather than respected. These teachers measure professional success by their ability to dominate students, rather than by how they have

helped their students develop agentially. Perhaps they are addressing their own impotence when in school, somehow regaining the personal power lost through years of educational conditioning. Similarly, I have encountered administrators who, believing themselves part of the power elite, treat teachers as subordinates rather than colleagues. In a reactive spiral, administrators may be responding to their perceived impotence as classroom teachers, or to their required submissiveness as students. In my case, I consistently strive for critical mindfulness, yet still revert to dominant and submissive paradigms when conflicted. In deconstructing these feelings, I see how necessary it is for all educators to uncover and disassemble the *unconscious* value systems that influence how they enact their perceived power.

Change is Difficult

My experience illustrates the difficulty engaging in this work. It requires my understanding the reciprocal roles that power and submission play in this field, and challenges many primary principles on which I formed my identity. A blind acceptance of the educator as “expert” underlies my unconscious axiologies. I revered my teachers as a young student. I freely abnegated my power, secure in their moral and academic supremacy. My obedience stemmed from adulation, not fear. My family highly regarded educators and there were many on my family tree. My school performance defined my self-worth, as it directly correlated to how my parents and teachers treated me, and then defined what I valued in others. Years of educational practice, both as a student and as a teacher, reinforced the positive feelings associated with conforming, whether that was by deferring to authority or reproducing knowledge deemed important by others. Inner change began when my relationships with my students gave me more positive reinforcement than getting them to spell correctly. I learned that all my students were successful in myriad ways. I garnered more respect for making my students feel visible, than I

did in controlling their actions by consciously articulating that all cultures are inherently worthy. As I learned that power defines cultural supremacy, I worked to cultivate a student's cultural expressions as a path to empowerment.

This study has shown me it is not enough. Although on my way to embodying critical pedagogy, I am still susceptible to traditional education's dominance and oppression where my habitus attempts to silence much-needed "language of critique" (Giroux, 1983). Ultimately, I expected my students to work hard to please me just as I acted to please my teachers and administrators and became frustrated when they did not. Perhaps I resented them for not *performing*, for acting according to their own inclinations, as I could never do. I became angry because my students did not respond to my symbolic authority; they did not fear any consequences for not meeting my expectations. Regardless, my negative reactions required I think about the part power dynamics and social conditioning played in my habitus, and the overarching systems that formed it. To move forward, I have to acknowledge my former submission, my illusory power, and how some of my misguided values continue to influence my actions. When criticality becomes an unconscious process, I will be transformed.

Looking for the Ripple- Catalytic Authenticity

It was uncomfortable, but it was productive for me to honestly interrogating my practices with my class; I could see my students' perspective and invite change. I uncovered how my habitus influenced my thoughts and feelings. Would my students be able to do the same? As a way of entering this topic I returned their latest, graded reflection. I wanted them to evaluate my evaluation and reflect on their effort; was the rubric fair? Was the reflection grade an accurate assessment? Did they do their best? Were they reading the assignments or using a line here and there? How were they managing their time? These questions, of course, were not for me, nor did

they require a response. The students were to model what I had done, not for me but for themselves. Conscious of my contextual power, I did not formally capture their thoughts and emotions, as I felt it would allow students to be honest with themselves, and not concerned with what I might want to hear. However, the response was immediate and intense. I received the following emails two days later:

Valerie: Hey Professor, I just wanted to let you know that I really respected the discussion you had with us last week when you self-assessed yourself and had us self-assess ourselves. I liked that you held us accountable, as well as yourself, so it was a good "wake up call" in a sense. I've never experienced that before in any of my classes, so I wanted to say thank you!

Suri: This helped me determine my strengths and growth areas, what is working...and what needs to be improved...Reflecting on my practice has allowed me to grow and learn from my mistakes. It has also allowed me to acknowledge and celebrate the things that work and to be mindful of everything that encompasses being an effective teacher.

It seemed that my students were reflecting on their own performance. Valerie appreciated the difficulty in redefining oneself. Other responses followed. Students were beginning to see how experience and criticality influence their ontologies:

Abe: This was especially helpful because once I was introduced to the different lenses, I (was) able to think critically while reading in order to make connections between things that might not be so easily identifiable upon first glance. I believe depending on what one's own personal experience might be, it's easier to relate (to) particular lenses.

Others reflexively questioned the systems to which they had become accustomed:

Alice: It has always troubled me that, in many ways, public education in the United States is not so different from what it looked like generations ago. What I didn't know, and now just have a tiny glimpse of, is that this "way of doing things" is influenced by complex history, relationships, and power.

Sima: I realize that self-knowledge, is the wisdom to know our own ignorance, patterns of thoughts and prejudice understanding.

Jack: Rather than changing the current system, we buy into it too easily and never question or challenge it. Ranking students, as Beyer mentions, comes all too naturally for us. In my former middle school, students were grouped into classes according to their so-called "intellectual" ability. Everyone in the school knew the classes that ended with a "0" were considered high achievers and the classes that ended with any other number were considered less intelligent. As a result, there was always a hierarchical relationship between not only the teachers and the students, but also between the students and other students. It was clear that such forms of socialization lead to an antagonistic and competitive environment for all.

In their responses, my students showed how powerful criticality can be in shaping ideas. They also illustrated that agential power gained from looking within is stronger than the systems of power that try to bind us.

Conclusions

A doctoral student drawn to critical theory and practice, I have spent the past five years questioning educational policies and practices that benefit some to the detriment of others. Yet, my unconscious habitus continues to influence my thoughts, feelings and actions. Without being

personally reflexive, I would have reproduced the systems that underlie my sense of authority and need for obedience, even though I consciously intended the opposite. This only reinforces my belief that all educators require reflexive practice. My study illustrated that emotions were the key to my uncovering entrenched value systems. Once those were explored, I identified how my emotions and inner values connect to power, and how they reflected my own dominance or submission. Finally, I learned that reflexivity requires *giving up*, but not giving in. I had to relinquish my traditional teacher role and its power by asking my students for feedback. I had to abandon certain mythologies; teachers are to be glorified; good students are obedient; high performing students are valued over others. What I gained was true power; the power to say I can do better, the power to say I need help. And above all, the power to change my habitus.

Recommendations

By interrogating our beliefs and patterns of behavior, we, as educators begin to uncover the power mechanisms that have defined our systems and influenced our thoughts, feelings and actions. Critical discussions, aimed at social justice and emancipation for all participants, including educators themselves, is needed to transform the structures that limit our agency (Giroux, 1983). Only by critically examining how language, experience and cultural symbols serve to oppress individuals, can we disrupt hegemonic school practices.

Emotions are contextual and socially constructed (Barrett, 2017); educators need to consider how their educational experiences and emotions are connected, particularly when they result in emotionally laden, habitual action. For example, teachers understandably feel frustrated when students are late to class and frequently offer a punitive response without seeking to understand their frustration, or the contexts that inform the student behavior. Emotions reflect internal values; in feeling frustration, the teacher is making a judgement (Solomon, 1993), both

about punctuality's value and about students who do not share this assessment. A critical interpretation might consider from where the teacher's ideas on punctuality came, or it might seek to understand why the students are arriving late. There is also a power dynamic involved when students "do not follow the rules." The teacher might also consider how they perceive these minor transgressions in relation to their power. Without criticality, emotional responses can lead to negative short and long-term consequences for all involved (Zembylas, 2014) Though difficult, breaking down the structures and mythologies that comprise our emotions, and the values they reflect, is necessary if we are to act in our student's best interests.

Educators can find value in uncovering their epistemological beliefs so that intellectual bias does not cloud their ability to seek answers within. Teachers, like the intellectuals and academics critiqued by Bourdieu are vulnerable to the expert gaze; an overconfidence in their conclusions, a certainty in what constitutes essential knowledge, and a reliance on the theoretical principles generated in academia over conclusions drawn from everyday practice. These teachers may have difficulty relinquishing power over what they know, and how they believe students can know. Critical thinking becomes a tool for understanding how values, assertions, and behaviors are generated and provides a strong theoretical foundation for transformative practices.

Finally, reflexive practices necessitate teachers consider how power is situated in their classrooms. As Freire (1970) cautioned, "The oppressed, instead of striving for liberation, tend themselves to become oppressors" (p. 1). While teachers may have limited power in changing the policies that drive their work as a whole, they are the arbiters of power within their classrooms. An educator's internalized values, behaviors and perception of hierarchical structures learned from the broader educational field, influence the classroom arena. In my practice, I engage with teachers who have so absorbed the unconscious, subordinating rules of

the game that they are unaware that they enact them with their students. Some teachers actively wield their power through domination. Rather than acting as agents affecting change, teachers who actively wield their power are reproducing the systems that keep them impotent (Foucault, 1975). Teachers should uncover how their practices, assumptions and potential biases relate to their sense of power. Do they transmit knowledge, or do they allow students to uncover meaning for themselves? Are systems arbitrary and intended to assimilate or do they serve as empowering tools for advancing students' critical thinking? Once teachers identify the thoughts and patterns that reproduce dominant structures, they can begin to dismantle them.

Reflexive Practice through the Teacher | Researcher Lens

Educators in the NYCDOE are tasked with reflecting on their practices, systematically and intentionally (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 1999), usually during teacher team meetings. Framed as *inquiry*, quantitative data points, such as standardized test scores, as well as more subjective data, such as qualitative evaluations of performance tasks, are used to evaluate pedagogical practices. However, these data are not used to generate questions about teacher practices, and they are rarely used to evaluate how classroom interactions surrounding pedagogical practices influence student outcomes. In the teacher team meetings I observe, conversations center on student readiness, student ability and student effort; pedagogical practices are presented as static, uniform strategies that either help or hinder student learning. Discussions reflect traditional, objectivist notions of teaching and learning, and seek generalizable conclusions that can be implemented across all classrooms (Tobin, 2014).

Students learn from socio-cultural classroom interactions as well as from curriculum. Teaching and learning is a negotiated practice, where each participant's context is framed by perceptions informed by present moment and past experiences. Focusing on a temporally defined

student outcome ignores the dynamic, emergent and contingent nature of classroom encounters and their effects on teaching and learning. It also dichotomously situates students as passive and agential; discussions are *about* students and pedagogy is practiced *on* them, while the data points are viewed as measures of student effort, motivation and ability. The teachers can determine classroom processes but the students are responsible for the outcome, allowing teachers to avoid interrogating their pedagogical and curricular choices, and the impact of implementation in practice.

When teachers reflectively review student data to improve practice they are engaging in research. Marilyn Cochran-Smith and Susan Lytle (1999) have criticized past education researchers for not including teacher voices in their methods. I believe a similar paradigm exists when teachers evaluate their practice by analyzing student performance: the student voices are missing. A more productive and *reflexive* method would situate classroom educators as teacher researchers as described by Konstantin Alexakos (2015). By framing inquiry work in this way, teachers could explore the impact of pedagogical choices through their own and their students' lived experiences and how they manifest in sociocultural contexts. For example, I frequently used a Socratic Seminar protocol to generate discussion. This requires students to actively question texts and student responses through discourse. Not all students could successfully contribute, and if I evaluated their reading ability based upon this, I might advantage students who are culturally adept at this type of interaction, and disadvantage others who are less comfortable expressing this repertoire. Teacher inquiry should also include students, who have their own perceptions and interpretations about classroom interactions and their academic achievement. Pedagogical practices can be adjusted based on a mutual evaluation of their impact.

As teaching and learning is emergent and contingent, inquiry discussions can take place any time there may be a need for modification at any given moment. Creating a culture of inquiry, where teachers and students observe, evaluate and question on going practices, can be a positive step in developing reflexive practices.

Challenges

My reflexive experience teaching my Brooklyn College class illustrates the challenges in establishing egalitarian classroom environments. Individuals within communities, like schools, produce and enact similar forms of culture, learned consciously and unconsciously through previous interactions. I have incorporated a passive stance towards authority through my own academic experiences and regulate my speech and behavior accordingly. Many Brooklyn College students seemed to do the same by calling me Professor throughout the semester, even though I continuously told them I preferred JoAnn, and used my first name in verbal and written interactions. One student wrote the following in her final reflection on the class:

Amy: This course was my favorite this semester because of the professor. She is a real person who understands. Her empathy and professionalism throughout makes me mindful to be like her in my future endeavors as an educator. I have learned so much in this course. The emphasis on backward design and cultural relevance in the classroom were very good and important things to learn and understand.

Amy's use of formal language suggests the distance she perceives between us, even though we interacted on a personal level; she experienced our interactions as empathetic and calls me a *real* person. Yet, she refers to me in the 3rd person though I am the reflection's audience and identifies me as *the professor*.

Potential Resources

Culturally established hierarchies can be difficult to dismantle even when individuals are given agency, as we do not always know how to change when given the opportunity (Alexakos, 2015).

Cogenerative dialogues can be useful for building more equitable classroom cultures. As students share their own perspectives and listen to the ideas of others, they can practice negotiating their agency and passivity. They can learn how to advocate for themselves, express their ideas and act to achieve their goals, while also recognizing when to step back and allow others to speak and act. As these cultural enactments become ingrained into students' habits, their expectations for equitable interactions will change.

Student-engaged assessment and student-led conferences are two additional strategies that can collaboratively build student agency by leveraging school, family and teacher collaborations. Students are provided with tools to assess their own strengths and challenges as they become leaders of their own learning (Berger et al., 2014). By understanding and planning their own learning targets, tracking their progress, using feedback to revise their work, and presenting their learning publicly, students, in partnership with their teachers, become self-directed and reflective. Research suggests that formative assessments increase student achievement, improve the quality of instruction, and increase motivation (Moss & Brookhart, 2019). Students also thrive when they perceive intelligence as malleable and gain confidence when given ownership over learning and growth (Dweck, 2006).

During student-led conferences, students communicate their progress towards meeting their goals by sharing examples of their growth and discussing their progress with their teachers and families. The students facilitate the meeting as the teacher and parents participate, situating the student as equals in the teaching and learning process.

Limitations

This journey is my story, and other reflexive educators may not have similar experiences or reach the same conclusions. Individual habitus is contextual. Nevertheless, reflexivity is vital to dismantling power structures that define individual thoughts, feelings and underlying values. I end this study wondering where there is space for educators to do this work. Those who operate our hegemonic systems have a stake in keeping them that way. Will policy makers encourage prospective teachers to engage in this work if it means questioning, or worse, dismantling present academic policy? Similarly, will school administrators provide opportunities for teachers to unpack school cultures and critique local decision making? It is my belief that a new, critically minded type of inquiry can support this. Ultimately, teachers hold the power to make decisions in their classrooms but they can do so in a way that pushes the boundaries of existing social structures and empowers students and families. When educators make choices that are beneficent for all, they model equality in action.

CHAPTER 4- IT'S COMPLICATED: THE DIFFICULT, EMOTIONAL WORK OF UNCOVERING SELF

Introduction

As earlier chapters illustrate, I am like many of us, an individual with complicated, often interconnected, contradictory personal identities, each with its own history, world view and axiologies. These identities are situated within larger social identities (Tajfel & Turner, 1979), whose ontologies and values inform how I think and feel on an individual level. I use a multi-level analytical approach to illustrate how micro, meso and macro structures operate and have operated simultaneously to influence how, when, and why, my identities emerge (Roth & Tobin, 2007). Throughout this chapter, I explore how these identities influenced my emotions as I unpacked racial bias, privilege and the fight for social justice. I use event-oriented inquiry (Tobin & Ritchie, 2012) to explore emotionally salient moments and their relationship to my personal and social identities. By paying attention to arising contradictions, I highlight how my agency and passivity within certain fields produces cognitive and affective reactions. I also employ co-generative dialogue with my colleagues (Tobin & Roth, 2005) to center my own thoughts and feelings, and to highlight how emotional entrainment (EE) levels hinder or support identity transformation.

Shifting Lenses

*“41 shots and we'll take that ride
Across this bloody river to the other side...
41 shots my boots caked in mud
We're baptized in these waters and in each other's blood.*

Bruce Springsteen, 2001

An early transformative moment towards my understanding the complexities of racial identity came from listening to a song by Bruce Springsteen, a wealthy white man, now in his seventies, who has never worked in the factories or low-level jobs about which he sings. It saddens me to think that in these days of identity politics, his voice might be minimized by those who would dismiss its privileged origin. Does that make them invalid or is he pandering? I do not know. Can we ever separate the author from the work? In a post-modernist world, we cannot. Like during the French Revolution, people? are being sent to the guillotine for perceived slights and former bad acts. Recent claims that Tajfel, Social Identity Theory developer, sexually harassed women, puts this into perspective (Young & Hegarty, 2019). Is his work on Social Identity Theory no longer valid or can we separate the contribution from the behavior? The need for compassion when struggling with the multi-faceted and densely layered circumstances of racism, privilege and bias in education is a major theme in this chapter. I elucidate these challenges with examples of two introspective moments that expanded my understanding of racialized experiences, and my perceptions of and reactions to an anti-bias training I attended. The first event that I discuss, catalyzed a perceptual shift in my understanding of privilege and the lived reality of black mothers and sons.

On February 4th, 1999, Amadou Diallo was shot at in his apartment vestibule 41 times by four New York City plain clothed officers who mistook him for a rape suspect they had been investigating for a year. Diallo, struck 19 times, was unarmed and his tragic death sparked outrage both inside and outside of New York. In response, Bruce Springsteen, an American rock singer-songwriter, wrote “American Skin (41 Shots)” (2001) above to highlight the contentious, often violent relationship between law enforcement and minority communities.

While driving my sons to school three years ago, I began listening intently to “American Skin’s” lyrics, a song I had heard, but not listened to, dozens of times.

41 shots, Llena gets her son ready for school

She says now on these streets Charles

You got to understand the rules

Promise me if an officer stops you'll always be polite

Never ever run away and promise mama you'll keep your hands in sight

Cause is it a gun?

Is it a knife?

Is it a wallet?

This is your life

It ain't no secret (it ain't no secret)

No secret my friend

You can get killed just for living in your American skin.

Like the mother in the song, I get my sons ready for school every morning and offer them maternal advice; *make sure you focus in school, make sure you eat your lunch, make sure you*

remember to bring your assignments home. For the first time, I reflected on the difference between my own counsel and a black mother's. I have never felt the need to warn my sons about law enforcement. I considered how the mother in the song must have felt, the dread and helplessness, the fear that her child might not come home alive. And though the mother in the song is fictional, the story is reality for many. All at once, *a mother's* fear washed over me. I was not only able to imagine my sons as vulnerable, I *felt* it. I was powerless, unable to protect them. In that moment I glimpsed, because I can never know, how it feels to live as a black person in America. I do know what it is to be a mother, concerned for her child's well-being- up all night worrying about a high fever, or experiencing the heartbreak that comes with having your child bullied and marginalized in school. Though neither compares to existential threats, they are enough to open my heart to another mother's suffering. I also recognized the burden that young, black males carry as they are warned about police interactions. Knowing that the warning is only for them, and anyone that looks like them, creates an early sense of being marginalized and of being *less than*..

I reconsidered highly charged police shootings; Michael Brown, Akai Gurley here in New York City. *What did their mothers tell them when they left the house each morning?* When the shootings occurred, my thoughts reflected my habitus (Bourdieu, 1986). I placed initial culpability on Michael Brown and thought Akai Gurley was the tragic result of mistaken identity, but in that moment, I considered why I did so. I was raised with police officers' children, watched as my friends joined the NYPD, and have met many officers through parenting networks. They have been allies, loyal friends, embraced and not feared. More importantly, except for a few traffic violations, my police interactions have all been positive. I have never been questioned about what is in my shopping bag. I have never been followed because I don't

“fit” the neighborhood demographic. I have never been misidentified as a suspect (McIntosh, 1989). Thus, I am disposed by my habitus, developed through interactions within cultural fields, to support the police, even when their actions might be suspect. But in that moment, as I listened to the song, a maternal connection with mothers who attend their black sons’ funerals resonated within me. The reality that many parents send their children into the world fearing for their “American Skin” from those dedicated to protecting society left me with a knot in my throat and a significant change in perspective. The identity with which I entered the space shifted its boundaries as my maternal values and emotions entered my consciousness and framed the moment. The experience modeled how a small shift in my emotional awareness could reframe a tense situation. I was and still am far from the end of my journey in understanding systemic racism, but that moment was a significant event in my critical awakening.

Interaction Rituals and Shifting Identities

Collins’ (2004) concept of interaction ritual, helps explain how the moment’s emotional energy shifted my identity’s boundaries. Rituals, for Collins, amplify *emotion*. Successful interactions motivate us to act beyond the immediate confines of the moment; we are driven along “chains” of events seeking high levels of EE and avoiding chains where EE is diminished. Primary interaction rituals (IRs) are characterized by mutual focus, physical co-presence, body language entrainment, and a sense of solidarity. Individuals seek successful IRs, which include high levels of participant emotional energy (EE), and an emotional investment in the symbols associated with the interaction. Secondary Interaction Rituals emerge from a private enactment (e.g., praying alone) and includes only the self and an internal dialogue. Though not subject to in-person entrainment effects, secondary rituals focus attention on objects and symbols whose meaning and value are derived from previous primary social rituals.

Individuals enter rituals with “prior identities” (Olitskiy, 2005), structured by previous macro, meso and micro interaction chains, that are themselves reshaped, as part of the interaction. Aspects of identity continually change and transform, sometimes more, sometimes less, sometimes immediate, and sometimes later, contingent upon what occurs in the IR. Successful IRs can have identity-related effects, such as new group connections, or a weaker connection to an in-group. Thus, identity shapes and is shaped by interaction rituals. When symbols are “charged” by rituals, they can shape group member identities and motivate individuals to act in solidarity with the group’s values. Our identities, and the values they reflect, are contingent upon the ritual situations in which we engage; we acquire our beliefs through participation in communities, which themselves reflect the social, cultural and political influences that shape them. The influence is bidirectional; our communities also change as we participate in them.

My interpersonal experience with the song was a secondary interaction as it took place within me. I entered the moment with a prior identity molded by the charged symbols and values from previous interactions. Successful IRs with law enforcement generated strong EE, resulting in my high value for, and lack of fear toward the police. When listening to *American Skin*, my emotional entrainment shifted from the police to the mother, resulting in my redefining the symbolic charge I previously placed on law enforcement. The arising fear and anxiety increased my solidarity with black mothers, and decreased my solidarity with the police. As a result, my identity’s boundaries moved, and I perceived past events with a new lens as my maternal values emerged. My prior beliefs eroded with my emotional connection. This micro-level transformation has motivated me to challenge the meso and macro structures that inform police-minority interactions.

Culturally Responsive Education for Social Change

It's been 21 years since Amadou Diallo's death but it's underlying social roots have not changed and the killings continue: Eric Garner; George Floyd; Breonna Taylor, Ahmaud Arbery.

Movements, such as Black Lives Matter, have catalyzed action to disrupt the inequitable economic, social and educational policies and practices that produce starkly different experiences and outcomes for minority and majority groups in America. Although not as immediate or dramatic as the loss of life, the long-term effects of our racialized school systems on minorities are equally damaging and contribute to our country's continued social unrest.

In response to our nation's great need to equalize educational benefits to all students, school systems across the country, including the New York city Department of Education, are infusing Culturally Responsive Education (CRE), framed by the work of Ladson-Billings (1995) and Geneva Gay (2010), to foster educational equity for all students. CRE uses educational strategies that leverage the multi-faceted characteristics of students' identities, including their rich cultural, racial, historical, and linguistic features, to connect students with their learning. Numerous studies across the country show that CRE increases student participation, attendance, grade point averages, graduation rates, civic engagement, self-image, and critical thinking skills. CRE requires educators to engage students in critical self-reflection and to expose schooling's oppressive systems through the critique of power structures and discourses (Aronson & Laughter, 2016). As an administrator, I believe all stakeholders benefit when educators critically examine their personal attitudes, dispositions and values through a social justice lens (Kincheloe, 2004) and their role in reproducing these systems.

Implementing culturally responsive practices is a work in progress (Aronson & Laughter, 2016). In the 30 years that I have been an educator with the New York City Department of

Education, the term *culturally relevant* has often been used to deflect from authentic conversations about race (Hollie, 2012), and training primarily focused on pedagogical and curricular moves. Rather than participating in discussions about underlying and explicit biases that may impact their approaches, many school administrators and educators I continue to focus on culturally responsive classroom strategies in a “check the box off” manner (Sleeter, 2012) rather than on uncovering systemic inequality’s fundamental causes. I frequently hear teachers complain that cultural competency initiatives are “one more thing” the principal or district wants them to do.

But I also have encounter teachers articulating a personal identification with culturally responsive education’s CRE principles (Miller, 2011) who genuinely *believe* they are practicing it. However, in observing their practice, I wonder whether they have critically considered how their choices, actions and words have been shaped by their own experiences. Through my own critical exploration, I am aware that as a teacher I have acted with implicit bias despite a consistent and conscious effort to provide a culturally responsive environment. Like many teachers I now coach, I made pedagogical and cultural connections within the classroom context, and presented a variety of cultural ideologies. Yet, in looking back, I still needed to rethink deficit models of students and communities, and understand how to address my own personal resistance to structural change (Gay, 2010). Through reflexive practice I explored my unconscious biases, how they were generated by habitus, and how my own educational experiences shaped the implicit biases that led to my pedagogical decisions and actions.

CRE and Implicit Bias

We all have hidden biases that culturally responsive education seeks to uncover and address. In their book, *Blindspot: Hidden Biases of Good People*, Banaji & Greenwald (2013) explore

hidden biases, how they influence our social interactions as well as our professional practice. Reflected in habitus (Bourdieu, 1986), implicit bias is formed through contextual cognitive processes and social interactions outside of conscious awareness (Banaji & Greenwald, 2013). To manage the extensive information it receives, our brains strive to simplify the world through automatic evaluations (Fiske & Neuberg, 1990; Macrae, et al., 1994). Social cognition, the way humans learn to navigate social situations, includes our ability to receive, store, and apply information about our social worlds, including how we form our individual and social group identities (Tajfel & Turner, 1979). Ritual chains that encompass our active experiences (agency) and cultural conditioning (passivity), influence how we categorize social information, which, in turn, contribute to the implicit and explicit associations we make about ourselves and groups, whether they are our own or “other” (Tajfel, 1974). Those perceptions, outside of awareness, shape our attitudes, preferences and judgements about human qualities such as character and ability (Lizardo, 2018). Often developed at an early age, implicit biases become ingrained habits of thought that can lead to errors in perception and faulty decision making (Banaji & Greenwald, 2013). Though often unconscious, teacher implicit biases can affect individual behavior towards others, both positively and negatively. For example, a teacher with struggling black students may perceive extra support as futile, having translated their previous student interactions into low expectations for the student’s success. In contrast, the same teacher may give additional attention to a white or Asian student if their academic interventions were perceived to be more successful.

In-group-Out-group Identification

For the past five years, I have been on a personal journey to research, examine and apprehend my privileges afforded to me for being a white woman, as well as to uncover my conscious and unconscious biases and prejudices. This work emerged from my doctoral studies, but soon

became relevant in my professional life as education policy shifted towards anti-bias initiatives. My emotional struggles with anti-bias initiatives stem from contradictions in how I define my social identities- especially in that I am also Jewish. So, although I do not feel I fully “belong” to white America, my skin color provides me benefits not extended to people of color.

My Jewish Identity

I come to anti-bias work with prior identities that influence how I interact across social fields. Through previous cultural encounters, I am consciously and unconsciously defined by my Jewish experience. I have a complicated relationship with my Jewish identity, replete with the emotional push and pull frequently found in familial relationships where values and symbolic meanings are passively acquired, not chosen. Living in New York City has provided me some comfort and safety, but it has not shielded me from the ubiquitous anti-Semitic interactions that touch my existential core. Powerful, lingering emotions surround this identity. As a social “other” minority group member, I do not feel pride (Abrams & Hogg, 2010). I hide in plain sight, but my emotional connection (hypocrisy?) is illustrated by insisting my sons be raised Jewish although their father is not. I enter social justice spaces with an anger that comes from years of living as a minority, powerless to stop the vitriol, irrespective of my skin color. To have that negated time and time again has left me exhausted, I still though lean in and attempt to be better.

Fear and shame often define my Jewish experience. Fear of being judged, demeaned and rejected. Fear of being unable to support Jewish causes without a backlash of unkind, sometimes hostile, comments. Though perhaps somewhat irrational, I also have an inherited fear that someday I will have to find a new home, as millions of ejected Jews have done before. We laugh to ease the tension, but my cousins and I have not forgotten my grandmother’s admonition:

Always keep a bag packed. She wasn’t preparing us for a natural disaster. She and my maternal

grandfather separately escaped the pogroms. My paternal grandfather was released by the Nazis after two years at Dachau. When I share these thoughts with friends they laugh at the hyperbole, and I laugh with them. But I would be lying if I said I feel existentially safe, especially when national figures can recycle anti-Semitic canards with impunity. It is not even the random violent attacks that fuel my anxiety. It is the constant attention and flow of regular commentary, usually negative, about Jewish lives. These days, it comes from both the left and the right, Democrat and Republican. To survive, to be American, requires aligning with the antagonist and accepting the often-unchecked assaults that too few condemn.

I feel shame for wanting to run, to discard the heavy, tattered, Jewish cloak I did not ask for but which was passed down to me., and that I feel compelled to wear out of respect for my ancestors. My grandparents and the generations before suffered for practicing their Judaism and I cannot completely turn away from it. I feel shame for staying, as the predictable barbs, tropes, verbal and physical attacks affect me and my Jewish community. I also feel the shame any time someone Jewish violates social mores or commits a crime. Again, my grandmother's voice when the news reported a horrible crime- *Oy! I hope he isn't Jewish.* We are vulnerable, exposed, and frequently abandoned. It feels like anti-Semitism is one of the world's oldest spectator sports.

My strong Jewish identity comes from the shared symbols and values provided to me by my family. As my familial interactions, particularly those with my grandmothers, were loving and supportive, I have very strong ties to what they valued. My bond with other Jewish individuals comes from both shared religious symbols and the shared emotional pain of exclusion and derision. Yet, even though I feel solidarity and am mutually focused on dismantling anti-Semitism, the underlying emotions are difficult to bear even though I am not

alone. I make jokes and laugh with my friends and family to increase positive EE and increase my solidarity with others to cope.

On the surface I am white, and my complexion, hair and eye color and my Brooklyn accent frequently lead to my being identified as Italian. As I “pass” for a white gentile, I am privy to how Jewish people are discussed when not around. I cannot count the Jew-lawyer, doctor, accountant, comments I have heard or the way people rationalize their words when I “out” myself. *You guys are Jewish? I thought you were Catholic?* My husband is, but I am Jewish and my boys are being raised with those traditions. *I wouldn't worry about it too much. The other boys don't know they are Jewish. Everyone loves them.* My heart aches when I realize my sons have inherited my legacy. Despite my skin color, I do not completely *feel* white. It is not a safe and reliable group membership. As this example illustrates, although I socially interact as a white person, there is often a point where successful interactions are interrupted by my being “othered” and my boundaries move. The solidarity is broken, and my white identity is called into question, even if many shared values remain.

People adjust their perceptions about me to fit their own narrative. For example, one year I taught a very small group of students who bonded and flourished with me, despite having difficult relationships with their other teachers. The students were frequently in trouble with school security as they cut class, engaged in disrespectful behavior towards school staff, and paid little attention to academic requirements, but I had provided stability and structure through high expectations and non-judgmental understanding. I was teaching a unit on Anne Frank and shared my grandfather's experience in Nazi occupied Austria. One of the few girls in the class looked askance and said, *“Wait...you Jewish?”* She lived in Coney Island and had little interaction with Jewish people other than the Orthodox school staff members who dressed

differently than I did. Her face reflected the cognitive rollercoaster she was on. After a brief pause she looked up, smiled and declared, “*Yeah. But you a ghetto Jew.*” It was her way of reconciling her attachment to me with what she thought Jews should be (Oakes, 1987). “*That’s correct Sam- my grandmother lived in a ghetto in Poland!*” I left it at that. Through our successful ritual interactions, the class and I identified with each other, forming a social group with common goals, symbols and emotional mood. Sam’s perception of Jewish people as *other* contradicted her feelings of solidarity. In response, she adapted her perspective by realigning my characteristics to fit the group.

I am sensitive to perceived anti-Semitic slights in my interactions with friends, but I attribute their behavior to their socially constructed habitus (Bourdieu, 1986). I do not accept any outwardly biased, incendiary comments in my personal life; I educate both those I care enough to want in my circle, and those I no longer care to engage with, hoping they will take the time to consider how their perceptions came to be. I am far more passive in my academic and professional life, which reflects my previous interactions across these fields. I have internalized certain behavioral norms when enacting culture in institutional hierarchies. My successful academic and professional interactions are defined by deference to authority, and a willingness to play by the rules.

Deafening Silence in a “Safe Space”

My passivity is illustrated in an event that occurred during my first semester as an Urban Education student. We were required to participate in a weekly seminar, where students in advanced cohorts share their research and academic advice. These were organized and hosted by first year students who lead thematic discussions after the presentations. One such seminar took place the week following the November 13th Paris attacks, a series of coordinated terrorist

shootings and bombings that left 130 dead and almost 500 injured. This horrible event reminiscent of September 11th, shocked the world, which compassionately came together in support of the French people. That week's student host began by asking for a moment of silence for the victims, which seemed appropriate given the outpouring of support. However, the host took the opportunity to use the attacks as a platform for highlighting perceived oppression around the globe. After requesting silence for France, we were all asked to be silent for other victims who face tyranny and persecution; the Palestinians. I immediately felt ill, but not because I necessarily agree with Israeli policies which I view critically. I felt exposed and violated.

I had been honest in discussing my strong Jewish identity and, though I might have been projecting, I felt it was either ignored, dismissed, or challenged. I also felt trapped. This was not a discussion where I could air my views or clarify how I understand the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. I had been identified in previous campus interactions as a Palestinian oppressor for not supporting the Boycott, Divest, Sanction movement, and I carried this experience with me. The organized BDS protests made me uncomfortable, and I respected the group's right to express its point of view, but this was different. I was in a *mandated* seminar with no way to express my rising emotions. If I stood up and left, which was my inclination, I felt I would be disrespecting the French victims, or jeopardizing my early doctoral career. I stayed, seething at the hypocrisy of our putative "safe space" and platform of racial sensitivity. My anger rose and my body began exhibiting physical signs of fight-flight behavior; my heart rate increased, my face felt flush and I began to tremble (Porges, 2011). With no available outlet to channel my behavior, I shut down and dissociated from the lecture.

Once again, a moment where I felt a strong emotional entrainment with a group with which I identified, my doctoral cohort, was interrupted. In response, my connection withered and

I was affected in two ways; my empathy for those impacted by the terrorist attack became diluted by the anger and isolation I felt; and I was no longer confident in my cohort's alliance. My doctoral student identity was weakened and I felt like an outsider.

I reached out to my advisor to process what had happened and he wisely suggested that perhaps I wasn't the only one offended. He offered to support me if I chose to address the incident. I also spoke to the Department Chair who sympathized with my reaction and was willing to speak with the Cohort and the professor, but I faltered with fear, unable to employ my agency and seek closure. I reproduced the passivity enacted in similar situations, unable to challenge the status quo. I feared causing dissention among the Cohort, and I passively accepted the false identification with it. I proceeded as many minorities do when they feel powerless- I appeased, retreated and said nothing again. I carried this emotional climate (EC) with me for two years, until I had more successful IRs that reaffirmed my solidarity with other students.

My White Identity

The American nation was founded and developed by the Nordic race, but if a few more million members of the Alpine, Mediterranean, and Semitic races are poured among us, the result must inevitably be a hybrid race of people as worthless and futile as the good-for-nothing mongrels of Central America and Southeastern Europe. (Kenneth Roberts, quoted in Carlson & Colburn, 1972, p. 312)

When engaging in anti-bias work I am, by default, viewed as white, even though, as the quote above illustrates, this designation came much later, a mid 20th century conception (Brodin, 1998). Jews who came to America during the great immigration waves of the late 19th and early 20th century were subject to discriminatory practices justified by eugenics, the prevalent social "truth" at the time (Tyack, 1974). After World War II, anti-Semitism was less acceptable, and

this, combined with the elimination of most quotas and the GI bill, provided Jewish males with tremendous educational opportunities and entry into America's middle class. It was not an institutional epiphany; Jews were able to benefit from the nationwide economic boon and assimilate into "white" America, but not necessarily as "equal." In the late 1940's and 1950's, social and political control was exerted through the "red scare," which predominantly targeted educated, liberal Jews in academia and Hollywood. By the time I was born in 1966, my family had assimilated according to the familiar route of many Jewish families. My father was an attorney and my mother was a teacher, one of the few professional paths offered to Jewish women (Markowitz, 1994). But assimilation is a compromise- *I won't be too Jewish (wink, wink) and you let me into the club (wink, wink)*.

My whiteness allows me to freely move among America's social structures successfully, and I acknowledge the privilege it has provided me. I went to predominantly white schools and grew up around predominantly white peers. I lived in a home my parents owned, both were educated professionals, and my path to college was set as the ink dried on my birth certificate. Meritocratic systems served me very well and I am fiercely independent, although I'd like to believe I am collaborative. I obtained a mortgage to buy my house, my family has never been food insecure and I have a retirement plan for my later years. Even though my children are bi-racial, they, and my husband, live in my white world. Through my successful interactions within the middle-class field, I have internalized many of its norms and values. They are inscribed across my identities, though I have yet to untangle which ones are agential, and which ones I have passively accepted.

Contradiction in Identity

My middle class, privileged life is informed by a painful hum, just below the surface. This is the heart of my struggle. I fully accept that I have privileges afforded to me by my skin color in America. But do I feel an equal belonging? Am I free from racial stress (DiAngelo, 2018)? The United States has been a haven for my family and we have thrived, but when anti-Semitism is normalized in the media, government and social interactions, my heart doubts I belong.

Consequently, I am torn between accepting my Jewish identity and rejecting it. My anger rises when I think about having to hide this part of me to fit in; the psychic consequences of being “found out” permeates my days as I remain in a fight or flight state. Yet, I understand that this is a privilege most minorities do not share. I have a choice in how I present myself, which defaults to *white* unless I intentionally display otherwise. Economically, socially and culturally, I move through the world with the ease, unhindered by the systemic racism that underlies the black experience. It has taken me time, but with the help of supportive, trusted friends, I learned that my anger, sadness and sense of injustice often limits my ability to have productive discussions about race. It is not that I don’t understand my reality as a Jewish white woman, with all the benefits that entails. But in highly charged discussions about race, my experiences surrounding my Jewish identity define my emotions, which spark my defense mechanisms and obfuscate my thinking.

A Response to Inequity and Bias

As part of his vision and mission, The present Chancellor of the New York City Department of Education has advanced “culturally responsive-sustaining education (CR-SE).” to addressing the system’s persistent bias and inequality. This two-pronged approach addresses the practical, pedagogical and curricular changes he has targeted for improving minority educational

experiences, while exploring the social and psychological cognitive processes that reinforce inequity in our system. The Chancellor has implemented policies with the goal of dismantling NYCDOE's segregated system. He has aggressively and unabashedly articulated his approach and has been criticized for his outspoken views on meritocracy, particularly as it relates to Specialized High School admissions. To advance this vision, he has mandated all system employees attend anti-bias training to address school-level inequality.

A DEEP Experience

To advance the Chancellor's anti-bias initiative, all Central staff were required to attend an anti-bias seminar through an organization called *Disruptive Equity Education Project*. As the title states, it was an incredibly disruptive, uncomfortable and contentious seminar. I was not prepared for how difficult it would be or how raw and vulnerable I would become, or how my personal and social identities shaped and were shaped by my experience with this anti-bias training.

I entered the sessions prepared to contribute, hoping for a greater understanding of social and institutional injustice, and strategies for taking actions against them. We reviewed norms: Be present; assume good intentions and take responsibility for impact; express as much vulnerability as you are willing to offer; be open to another perspective; be ready to actively listen. Our first activity, discussing *ideological, institutional, interpersonal, and internalized forms of oppression*, resonated with me on two levels; I am aware of institutional oppression, and how it operates to keep minorities in an inferior social and economic position (Anyon, 1972). I witness the emotional reactions my husband has toward the police; a Dominican male, his arrests for jumping a turnstile and driving with a suspended license in his youth, reflect the inequitable outcomes of countless police-minority interactions (Coates, 2014). Listening to his experiences

growing up in East New York, a majority minority neighborhood, has made me appreciate how different our upbringings were. I was learning how to play piano while he was learning how to kill the rats that lived inside his apartment walls.

As part of an activity on understanding institutional oppression, all participants were asked to reflect on institutional racism and how it manifests in government structures. We were then tasked with discussing our thoughts with our table members. In my group, I shared what I had learned from my husband's experiences. I also spoke about the ideological, interpersonal and internalized oppression Jewish people continue to face despite having an institutional advantage over other minorities in places like New York City. A colleague, who is a lesbian, noted how ideological and internalized oppression reflected her lived experience in a mid-western, religious family, and a Russian colleague at my table shared her harrowing experiences as a young girl in the Soviet Union. As a diverse group, we sought out commonalities in our experiences and, though we had different perspectives, our shared emotional experience connected us on a personal level. When asked to "share out" the major themes discussed at our table, I was given the microphone and asked to explain what thoughts emerged. I did not get very far in explaining our ideas before we were told, very politely, that we needed to refocus, and turn away from ourselves.

Some of you are still looking at this through your white lenses. Consider how you are contributing to or are addressing white systems of oppression. How do your actions keep this oppression alive?

I perceived the presenter's tone as benign, but I felt deflated. The room, once bustling with side conversations became quiet. Someone at the next table softly shared their conversation, careful in their words, and I sat there on the edge of tears. I was angry and frustrated, although I

could not identify why. I knew the presenter wanted us to think about black oppression, and she could not have known about my history with discrimination. How could she, as I sat there enveloped in my white skin? In that space, my pain was not the point, nor was it hers to bear, but I could not acknowledge this and it stayed with me, framing the rest of the day.

When we were presented with *whiteness* as an idea, my neck and shoulder tensed, and my heartrate increased, physical reactions to the stress I was beginning to feel (Porges, 2011). A list of dominant traits was presented, which included a few values with which I identified. My emotional climate, informed by the morning's experience, tinted my reaction, and catalyzed my defense mechanisms (Turner, 2009). For example, when *Worship of the Written Word*, was presented as a white dominant characteristic in organizations, my negative reaction contradicted my belief that there are alternate ways of communicating knowledge and information. It was difficult for me to frame my understanding of systemic racism through this activity and I bristled at additional examples of white dominance, even though I have seen how unjust policies and practices have negatively impacted my husband and other minorities I care deeply about. I walked out physically and mentally exhausted, confused by my experience and still emotionally aching inside.

Untangling an Uncomfortable Situation

Event-oriented inquiry asks, what happened? Why did it happen? And, what more is there? Why was behind my emotional reactions to the DEEP training?

My Jewish identity is readily activated when I am provided with examples of prejudice, as it strongly matches my reality in both comparative and normative aspects. Thus, when we were discussing oppression, my thoughts were filtered through the unresolved emotions I have regarding my family's history. My group's first interactions generated a high level of emotional

entrainment among us as our experiences, though not the same, had a “family resemblance” (Tobin, 2009). We shared the symbolic notion of *oppression*, and the goal of ameliorating the consequences of our own inequitable experiences through solidarity and mutual empathy. Our successful IRs strengthened my feelings towards the group, as well as my resolve to bridge the chasm that distances racial groups. When the presenter ruptured that entrainment, it drained my positive emotional energy, leaving my pain exposed. Instead of engaging further, I retreated into passivity, my anger lingering. In hindsight, I believe I resented our group’s connection being shattered, not because I was asked to focus on black oppression, but because I was unable to fully process the feelings that emerged. I perceived a rejection of my own painful experiences, even though the presenter did not do this.

Further Analysis

For me, participation was challenging because my emotional state hindered productive engagement. The training changed direction after my table’s successful Interaction Ritual was interrupted (Collins, 2004). Initially, our increase Emotional Energy (EE), boosted my sense of self and our group’s connection to each other, which generated a willingness and courage to access painful experiences. The group was mutually focus, as we shared our emotions through a common understanding of oppression, until the entrainment was interrupted. Once that occurred, my feelings were laid bare and I no longer had the group’s emotional connection or boundary. My vulnerability and fear was transformed into frustration and anger, which I then projected onto the training through an in-group-out group dichotomy. My goals and motivation also adjusted; I disengaged, no longer willing to have the important discussions that could have taken place. The EE dissipated and there were no further IRs that brought it back.

Anger, distress and defensiveness marked my experience, and though it reflected *White Fragility*, defined as “a state in which even a minimum amount of racial stress becomes intolerable, triggering a range of defensive moves” (DiAngelo, 2018, p. 54), I believe more was going on. I recognize and accept that anger and resentment arise when one’s power and status are challenged, particularly when there is the threat that they will be redistributed to others, as DiAngelo argues. It would be disingenuous for me to deny that these motives may have influenced my reactions at an unconscious level. However, I believe there is a more nuanced explanation for why my emotions affected my experience so intensely.

I have a significant amount of generational trauma which is marked by anger for the injustice of my family’s experience, frustration for continued prejudice, and deep sadness that I carry this with me. I became overwhelmed by these feelings at the training, and by not having the ability to diffuse them, they remained. This affective state became conflated with my thoughts during the training, and I redirected this emotional energy towards the presentation rather than recognizing my feelings were ancillary to the present moment. With no outlet, I shut down.

Understanding Why

Jonathan Turner (2002) provides insight about how these processes worked. My anger evolved out of grief, stemming from the violence perpetuated against my family, which was my initial response to thinking about oppression. In being asked to redirect away from this and think about black oppression, a conflict between the emotional “rules” of the space and my feelings developed. Perhaps I felt shamed, or guilty. Either way, as my negative emotional state was highly painful, it catalyzed a series of defense mechanisms. In not being able to further analyze, share or process my intense emotional state, I had few choices; I could seek help, which was

unavailable, leave the situation, which I could not do, or distance myself emotionally by repressing my thoughts and feelings, to which I defaulted. When strong, negative emotions are repressed, particularly shame and guilt, they can evolve into more disruptive emotional states marked by sudden spikes in anger, especially when the perceived cause of the initial emotions are attributed to outside actors. Although the presenter did not intend to invalidate or suppress my emotional experience, I attributed its disruption to her, and in extension, the presentation itself. As the day progressed, a cycle of repressed anger, and shame at not being able to regulate it, ensued and kept me mired in negativity.

A Cogenerative Experience

To layer my experience at the DEEP training more deeply, I sought different perspectives. My team colleagues and I engaged in a cogenerative dialogue (Tobin, 2015) to determine how we each perceived the events, where we agreed and where we disagreed, and how we could use the DEEP activities to raise our own awareness of bias and privilege. My team members were dispersed among different tables at the training. This was our first opportunity to discuss the day together. Cogenerative dialogues (cogens) are framed by Authenticity Criteria and provide a forum for sharing perspectives. Participants take on a learner's stance and are open to change by listening to others (ontological authenticity). Various ideas with different perspectives are presented, and differences highlighted, to stimulate personal transformation (educative authenticity) which results in social change through a ripple effect (catalytic authenticity). The overarching goal is beneficence for all (tactical authenticity). The following is a partial transcript from the conversation. The names used here are pseudonyms.

Ted: I don't mind feeling disturbed, it's how we grow but a lot really bothers me. I don't understand speaking in totalitarian language- all, none. Everyone needs to be open

minded and aware. Not proselytizing at either end. Should I have kept my mouth closed? Now I just feel like an idiot. I accept confusion and unresolved issues. How can we be both an individual and group that falls into stereotypes like all whites are..., black conservatives are..., libertarian. I am American, Jewish, and collective and individual.

Sue: This disturbed a lot of people. Do you think this will be shared openly with senior leadership?

Ted: Look at Robert- parents taught him to be a righteous dude. Make a living. I think about what I said afterwards and I am nervous- anxious. I don't put white man on top as religion. I'm open to understanding that this is privilege but maybe....

Jen: It's a commitment to be part of the conversations. Next time I will commit to do everything I can do to say nothing but nod a lot. Is that enough? (Laughs). It's how I survived in my family.

Ted: They call it a safe space, but is it? That Superintendent sees racism everywhere. Dismissed our work as not doing enough. Dismissed our team. What is the point then??

Juan: What is he coming to the table with? How did you like being asked as the white dude in the room...what do you think? [everyone laughs] I know that I'm brown as a reflex. It comes from both inside and out. The feeling of being predator or prey lives with me. The question is does everyone live like that? Women? White people as other. I get where trainings come from but poor, other marginalized groups- I think it's about social class. Call it what it is.

Sue: I don't know why there is a debate over whether or not we need to be concerned with how people feel. Finish with the bullshit because those in power have the ability to make the decisions that will integrate. Remove zones but that is political suicide.

Ron: They are breaking apart assumptions by assuming. Ha, ha It's distraction. Let's talk about it without making hard decisions.

Sue: Everyone gets bogged down in the story. It irks the shit out of me. When I worked in the Bronx they told me No white teacher lasted by December. By January they were saying *You're not really white Ms..* The reality is different.

Juan: I wasn't looking for someone who represented me in school. Teachers were a whole different class of scary. I don't know. Maybe it would have helped. I definitely had a better connection with my students.

Jo (Me): Was it because you were brown or just a good teacher?

Juan: I don't know. Both?

Ted: Some people just aren't comfortable discussing. Coming out the other side is better for all.

The cogen revealed important points about our experience. Few (Any?) Americans belong to only one single social category, including racial minorities. Ted is a white, Jewish, male. Juan is a middle-class Puerto-Rican male and Jen, a white mid-westerner female, is married to a woman. We all have or are labeled across multiple identity categories and these change our perceptions depending on the environment and the level of successes with previous IR chains., Our multiple selves provide differing vantage points from which to view and

experience the world. There is tremendous diversity within in groups with often only a thin coherence (Sewell, 2005) that culturally binds us together.

All in our group expressed a desire to engage, and to expand our thinking through the training, with Ted, Juan and Jen highlighting their intersectional lenses. Ted and Juan discussed their difficulty in participating because they could not separate their contradictory lenses. Juan's middle class upbringing influenced his perceptions of systemic racism. and attributes oppression to class. He is conscious of his brown skin, but cannot decide if it makes him agential, *predator* or passive, *prey*. He questions whether all people struggle the same as minorities, attributing discrimination to class, not race. He feared his white teachers but it is not clear if it was because they were white, or because all teachers are *scary*. Ted views himself as a collective and an individual, finding it difficult to accept the *white male* label placed on him, although he clearly wants to engage, learn and grow. As a result, he felt self-conscious about his responses, unsure how to express himself clearly, and struggled with the possibility he would be identified as a racist. I too am conflicted when thinking about who takes responsibility for systemic change and the extent of white complicity in American systems and structures. When considering our hierarchical society, not being on the bottom does not mean we are anywhere near the top. Most of us, regardless of our identities or the color of our skin, felt? we have little ability to transform the macro structures that influence all of us.

Issues of agency and passivity also arose. Sue's insistence that *the powers that be* choose to do nothing illustrates her passivity in affecting change. Ron agrees and articulates his belief that systemic racism continues to reproduce itself because the power elite refuses to act. Sue's experience in the Bronx highlights her personal agency and her success in making connections with students, despite their early assumptions about her whiteness. Ted's agency and passivity

flowed in and out. He engaged throughout and spoke honestly, but became passive, questioning his participation, once the training had ended.

Interestingly, the cogen reinforced our group identity even though we may have felt disengaged and emotionally isolated at the training itself. The event's emotional climate, marked by frustration, unexpressed anger and disengagement, did not carry over to our discussion. Our common experience, and our trust in each other as team colleagues for many years, bound us more tightly together as we expressed our thoughts and feelings. We were emotionally entrained, our shared effervescence evident in our laughter and lighthearted conversation despite the serious subject.

A Breakthrough

It took me several weeks, and two major iterations of this chapter for me to process the DEEP training further. My first chapter draft reflected the anger and indignation I felt as a participant, which I attributed to the materials and the facilitator. I shared my work with trusted friends, who provided different perspectives and challenged my conclusions. Through our conversations, I broke apart my emotions and analyzed what they may have been communicating. Through this process, I realized I was mired in my own sense of injustice for the present and past wrongs experienced by me, my family, and my ancestors, and disturbed by my impotence in fighting against it. The training triggered these thoughts and accompanying emotions, even though they had little to do with the goal of the training- to uncover the systemic racism, reproduced by white dominant structures that unjustly impact brown and black minorities. I was stuck in a self-victimization quagmire (Zembylas, 2013) from which I worked to detach myself once I critically examined my feelings. It was hard to accept that the training was not the space to work out my own psychic trauma, or that the trauma might never be reconciled within me, but I was able to

discuss it, make it visible, and my pain began to dissipate. Once it cleared, I saw the presentation's value. I humbly accepted my misplaced anger, committed to being more mindful, and felt grateful for having the opportunity to explore my emotions.

Is Anti-bias work effective? The Research

Research indicates that many of these anti-bias initiatives lack successful outcomes and that anti-bias training alone does not change attitudes or behavior (Dobbin & Kalev, 2018). In their meta-analysis of 985 anti-bias intervention studies, Paluck & Green (2009) found little evidence that training reduces bias. Recent studies used the implicit association test (IAT) before and after anti-bias training to assess whether unconscious bias can be affected. As a meta-analysis of 426 studies found weak immediate effects on unconscious bias and weaker effects on explicit bias (Dobbin & Kalev, 2018). Moreover, Dobbin and Kalev found that anti-bias training activates stereotypes, supporting the idea that challenges to self-identity increase stereotyping and denigration of *others*. Additional field and laboratory studies find that asking people to suppress stereotypes tends to increase their activation. Anti-bias initiatives have been shown to be less effective when they are mandatory. Legault, Green-Demers, Grant, & Chung (2007) in their anti-bias training research, found that people react negatively when they feel controlled. My experience may offer insight as to why these trainings fail, and some solutions for improving their success.

The Fragile Self

Carrie: I think the point... is to acclimate folks to sitting with the discomfort of having to talk about difficult topics and recognizing that while your identity is not ONLY whiteness, it is the part you're dealing with this for this particular training. I think just because we identify with other identities, it doesn't take away from the power or

dominance that white identity has over others—whether you mean for it to or not. I also don't know how you could alleviate these feelings—no matter what if white is part of your identity, there is going to be some dissonance.

There is a great need to explore our biased feelings or actions toward other groups. However, these are highly charged conversations that, in my experience, are far more uncomfortable than anticipated. Norms, such as be present, be vulnerable and expect discomfort were insufficient for engaging in this work. In my experience, many individuals think of themselves and their identity as a stable self, unchanged over time, with a constant core. When this constancy of identity is challenged, as in moments of crisis or when individuals are introduced to a contentious field, the idea of a constant self is threatened. When this occurs, we may instinctively react with a fight-flight reaction (Porges, 2011) which physically and cognitively manifest in anger, defensiveness and or withdrawal. Individuals who are categorized or see themselves as white, may not think about their race as they interact with the world and may feel threatened or not know how to deal with the racial stress that permeates the lives of black and brown Americans.

Identity is fragile, its boundaries ever-moving, shaped by the dialectical relationships among agency | structure, individual | collective and self | other. Our identities are transformed while new ones may emerge from participating in Interaction Rituals across various social fields (Roth & Tobin, 2007). Identities are contingent on what is brought into IRs from previous interactions, what occurs during IRs and what potential actions are considered to reach goals. When faced with the idea of racist complicity, it may be difficult for individuals to accept that their personal values are not being disputed when dominant systems and structures are critically examined. Internal, self-identity is at risk and subject to emotional defense mechanisms. Thus, defensiveness, anger, aggression and hostility can be emotional reactions when anyone's sense of

self is challenged (Turner, 2009). I recognize there are white people only concerned with maintaining hegemonic power who will continue to construct false narratives and erect barriers to true equity (DiAngelo, 2011), but I believe most participants at anti-bias trainings have good intentions as illustrated by myself and my colleagues. Even though the work may be difficult and emotionally challenging, we too hold equity and inclusivity dear. e.

Unconscious and conscious bias, racism, oppression and other forms of marginalization continue to plague our nation and it is important for difficult conversations to take place. This workshop experience taught me how significantly our past can impact the present, especially when we avoid dealing with the past's consequences. The structure of the anti-bias training triggered the reproduction of a past emotional state without my being able to account for it and without a strategy for dealing with the discomfort. The effect was counter-productive to the intent of the training as I was not able to grow from it at the time. I wonder how many other participants had similar experiences, and whether similar dynamics account for anti-bias training's suggested ineffectiveness (Dobbin & Kalev, 2018).

On Vulnerability

At the DEEP training, we were all encouraged to be vulnerable, but I did not feel comfortable in a room with 125 people. Many of the room's participants knew of each other, but we were essentially strangers, and my colleagues and I sat at different tables with mostly pleasant, but unfamiliar colleagues. During the cogenerative dialogue, we noticed how much easier it was to honestly engage, share feelings, and accept missteps than it was during the training. We trusted each other and we were willing to leave ourselves exposed. This speaks to safe spaces and vulnerability. When trauma or highly charged emotional states arise, a safe space and the time to work through difficult issues can help individuals heal (Alexakos, et al, 2016). I have found few

safe spaces, those free from identity threat, stress and potential intimidation (Rom, 1998), but those I have located were central to my emotional development. Weeks after the workshop? Though it was difficult, I productively worked out my DEEP experience with a friend because I trusted her enough to express my vulnerability and I freely expressed my thoughts and feelings. There was stress, and my values and ideas were challenged, but I felt safe to critically examine myself in ways I could not have, at the training. If anti-bias work is done with a large group of strangers or acquaintances, there is value in cultivating a space where participants can be vulnerable. Even if it is not perceived as “safe,” by all participants, which is difficult to achieve given our individual contexts, it can be respectful and framed with kindness and compassion.

Moving Forward

Many anti-bias workshops frame emotional distress, pain and suffering as necessary transformational levers (Butler, 2004). As intense affective reactions may be unavoidable in racially charged discussions, it is important to address participants’ feelings with compassion and kindness, even if these feelings may be difficult for others to accept. Dealing effectively with such situations requires participants be vulnerable and accepting of alternative views, which may be problematic, particularly if participants are mandated to attend. Framing discussions through a *Critical Pedagogy of Compassion* (Zembylas, 2013), where educators actively listen and empathize with divergent points of view, would allow participants who are grappling with their difficult emotions to identify and challenge the *emotional* norms and beliefs that underlie their thinking. Critical compassionate pedagogy stems from an ethic of care and attentiveness to others.

In examining where deficit-perspectives and attributions such as blame originate, participants can address possible negative emotions before they emerge. In unfamiliar spaces, or

in spaces where participants have limited trust, *strategic empathy* (Lindquist, 2004), can help white individuals better accept their vulnerability so they can examine and challenge their ideologies. Strategic empathy is a willingness to critically develop empathy towards those whose positions, values, or knowledge differ, even when this knowledge is disturbing. This may require breaking down defensive responses so that participants understand why they arose. For example, white participants commonly reference their hard work or economic struggles when discussing white privilege. A critical and empathetic response would acknowledge this perceived reality, while guiding participants in critically examining how social and institutional structures operate differently for minorities.

I also believe it is important to assess participants' familiarity with historical racism. Many white people I encounter have little knowledge of systemic policies such as red-lining, the consequences of urban planning policies, such as Robert Moses' isolation of the South Bronx or the impact zero-tolerance drug policies have had on black male incarceration. Our continued geographic segregation in New York City exacerbates this ignorance as we do not witness other's lived experience and their struggle to survive. Providing relevant information on systemically racist institutions and their effects either before or during trainings may provide the background needed to help all participants understand how they operate, how they are reproduced, and how we can take actions to dismantle them.

Strategic empathy raises an important matter concerning responsibility. There is the potential that white participants may still resist questioning long held beliefs and expect others to not contest them. When we cultivate vulnerability, we bind ourselves in the human condition. If we are mindful and attentive to this, empathy grows and the I | you, self | other, dichotomy fades.

Potential Solutions

I believe it is possible to discuss systemic racism and injustice in a way that does not center participant emotion, but does recognize and anticipate it. To that end, I would develop trainings with the following questions in mind:

- What potential feelings might arise?
- How might these feelings connect to or be reflective of participants' past experiences and internalized values?
- How can these emotions be communicated productively, and ethically?
- What protocols can be put in place to acknowledge and process these emotions without projecting them or placing the burden for resolving them on others?

These questions could be used to develop a heuristic, upon which participants could reflect before sessions, or during, and after emotional interactions. Heuristics are reflexive tools that focus participants on a desirable characteristic, feature or concept, as a way to catalyze or raise awareness about a topic (Powietrzynska, et al., 2015). For each characteristic, a 5-point Likert scale (5: Always-Very often; 4: Often; 3: Sometimes; 2: Seldom; 1: Never-rarely and if necessary 0: not applicable or not observed) can be used to measure a participant's response and a space given if participants want to explain or nuance their responses. As participants hold unique world views based on their own perspectives and life experiences, meanings derived through heuristics are personal and different for each user. The answers themselves are not important; it is the awareness they bring that is valuable. Characteristics like, "I become aware of feelings as they arise and try to determine their origin," may prompt an awareness that their present emotional states may not directly relate to what is happening at the moment. Fostering

emotional readiness and providing strategies for processing emotion can improve overall interactions during uncomfortable conversations.

I find Davidson's (2012) six emotional styles, as discussed by Alexakos, (2015) useful in developing a heuristic for anti-bias programs. Firstly, being aware of how others are responding to ideas, narratives and points of view, social intuition, is important in monitoring how and what participants say, especially if they are dominant group members. By being aware of social context, and the appropriate ways to respond to others may prevent harmful speech and behaviors. Focusing on how and why we get stuck in emotional states can increase resilience and aid participants in working through them. Cultivating non-judgmental awareness for self and others while maintaining a positive outlook and a growth mindset may also allow participants to engage more openly and make them more comfortable with their own and others' vulnerability.

Empathy as a Tool

Empathy requires salience, a connection with what another is potentially feeling, and I believe engendering this is a viable way through the brambles of an American history, still overgrown with the strangling vines of bigotry and intolerance. When we empathize, we categorize others as ourselves, expanding the boundaries of the social group. This re-categorization from *out* to *in*, elicits a change in our levels of bias (Gaertner & Dondio, 2000). When we connect with another's feelings, we join in the superordinate group "emotional human" and lose our sub-group boundaries. By leveraging our affective experiences, we can better understand, and respond to our own biases and behaviors in a novel way. We change because, knowing how it feels, we want to end another's distress. Empathy is a place to begin this work. Leveraging our shifting identities allows us to situate ourselves across experiences (Gonzales & Brown, 2006), providing various entry points for discussing race and its consequences. We can find connections between

our own painful narratives and those of others, using the similarities and differences as a means for better understanding others and ourselves.

Coda

Empathy can be a powerful tool. My growth has come from small, internal moments, where I use my own affective states to understand a greater lesson about how others live. These experiences, provide opportunities for new ways of thinking and knowing, a polysemia and polyphonia that enrich my worldview. Through shared vulnerability, we can bridge our axiologies and experiences so that our common values- compassion, empathy, reconciliation- can be leveraged to the benefit of all. I end with an example of how my personal feelings, when viewed through a small shift in perspective, increased my understanding and intolerance of injustice.

Empathy: An Example

As I sit here writing this I feel sick to my stomach and the feeling of a huge boot putting pressure on my chest. I feel both the physical and emotional effects of frustration and helplessness. The city has been completing a large infrastructure project on my street, which is a four-lane road and a major conduit through the area. Right now they are ripping out my sidewalk which will limit my access to my house, as well as my driveway, for up to three weeks. In my neighborhood, there are summer parking restrictions on most streets, in effect from Saturday at 12:00 AM to Monday 12:00 AM. Violations are \$115 and the city had been vigilant in imposing and collecting these fees; residents have also been towed from the front of their houses for forgetting to move their cars. When I asked the project engineers about accommodations their response was *figure it out*. I pressed. *Hadn't others also had the same issue? My husband works and the nearest parking is six blocks away. He needs access to his car.* Their solution? *Call 311*. I can only access my house across a wooden plank that spans the four-foot gap between my property

and the street. For three weeks. And I am worried about how to avoid the potential fines, or walking a quarter-mile to get groceries, visit my parents- just about anything I need to do outside of my house. No one could provide me with specifics about the process or how long it would take. I might not have gas to cook or do laundry from 7AM until 3PM. I feel violated. And impotent as the foreman tells me that the city can access my property, prevent me from accessing my property in an easy manner, take as long as it needs to and I cannot do a thing about it.

I am mindfully aware that this is a problem of privilege. I own a home with a driveway. I own two cars that transport my husband and I to work, and help in easing the daily chores that make up the minutia of my days. I live near the beach which is why there are parking regulations. None of this makes me feel less anxious, or angry, but it gives me a deeper understanding of exploitation, injustice *and my ability to escape this as a natural part of my existence*. My problem is understandably insignificant when compared to systemic injustice, and, unrelated to my race, but the *feelings*, provide an opportunity for empathy. I shift my lens to imagine a life where few of my rights are respected. Worse, they are consistently violated, with no recourse, because of race, economic status, or any number of conditions that make someone vulnerable. A life where this feeling, this helplessness, is a daily part of an *American* life, with its promise of liberty and the pursuit of happiness. I feel angry for the countless numbers of our citizens whose rights, property and dignity have been taken with no recourse. It is the anger I feel, the scorching pain that comes when I think of my grandfather torn from home, torn from his family never to see his mother again. And I better understand.

Conclusion

I find it useful to utilize my own emotional experiences to better understand how systemic injustice manifests itself in the lives of minorities, even though I know my experiences are not

the same. While in an emotional moment such as the one describes above, I have learned to consider how my experiences are similar to, or different from those who do not live in my white skin. These small shifts in perspective have expanded my compassion for others as well as my desire to root out inequity where possible. I use this anecdote to illustrate how our daily experiences can lead to transformation and to show how emotional awareness can be a valuable heuristic for engendering empathy (Powietrzynska, et al., 2015). The process is more a private, than public event, starting without, moving inward, and then without again as the internal I external, individual I social, dialectic plays out. Important here is the extemporaneous arrival of feelings combined with a conscious, critical shift in perspective. I can access my own affective experiences when thinking about unjust government policies and practices, as a way of understanding others' lived experiences. By focusing on my own emotions and connecting them to the feelings of others, I better understand the insidious nature of our inequitable systems and structures, and am driven to change them. Though progress may come in individual steps, eventually, these steps become miles in the journey towards equality.

CHAPTER 5- LEARNING FROM CONFLICT AND CONTRADICTION

Emergent Praxis

Culture emerges in times of crisis (Sewell, 2005), and the Covid-19 pandemic has added an unexpected area of inquiry to my work. As I complete this part of my journey, I have a novel backdrop for assessing the changes and continued challenges surrounding my dynamic identity. The events of the past six months have required us to adapt in many ways we may have thought previously impossible. It has impacted every part of our lives; our work, our recreation time, our family time, and how we have responded says much about who we are.

In March 2020, New York City went into quarantine, which heavily impacted our educational systems. The entire Department of Education, as well as CUNY schools moved to remote learning within a matter of days. With little to no warning, students, teachers, administrators, parents and related community members were forced to adjust their roles and rethink how education looked, felt and sounded. Many people I know struggled to redefine who they were as educators and parents. Some had little experience with remote learning platforms. Others struggled with the sometimes deadly, effects of the virus, as friends, family and colleagues were hospitalized, or fell ill at home. Existential fear tinted our interactions, as we socially distanced, and masks and disinfectants became everyday personal items. Educators with children had a dual task- providing instruction for their students while supporting their own children in adjusting to on-line learning. Administrators worked tirelessly to ensure students had access to technology and high-quality lessons but there was no blueprint for anyone to follow.

A Change in Practice

As a teacher, administrator, student and parent, quarantine affected me in multiple ways. As a federal grant Project Director, I manage magnet programs at four schools by providing fiscal

oversight, professional development and implementation support. The first few weeks of the lockdown were a blur, as I worked tirelessly with schools setting up systems and structures to support students, teachers and families. There was little guidance, but we made decisions that we believed were best for students; we released technology to any student who needed it, we arranged to distribute devices to students in temporary housing, and we developed extensive supports for teachers and families to assist them in navigating remote learning platforms.

My concern for vulnerable students outweighed my concern for compliance, which was a detour from my usual administrative “self.” My goals for staff also changed. I no longer concerned myself with meeting federally mandated Performance Measures, which include implementing 100 hours of professional development and two project-based curricular units. My mindset turned to providing social-emotional supports for my staff, and facilitating professional development so they could provide social-emotional supports to others. We had weekly meetings to check in with each other and to provide a space for sharing our anxieties. It kept us connected and focused on our priority, which was making sure everyone was emotionally supported. My professional response reminded me of how I navigated policy while a teacher. Compliance was always at the back of my mind, but my students’ well-being took precedence.

We shifted our supports to more practical matters a few weeks later. My team and I developed a web site for educators and parents with tutorials, resources, model lessons, scaffolded activities and links to additional supports. In each of my four schools, we consistently reached out to families and students, resulting in an over 90% student engagement rate. I also worked with Central teams to identify specific supports for ELLS and Students with Disabilities, and spent time advocating for guardians to ensure their children were provided with the services

required. The following excerpt from our independent evaluator’s biannual report speaks to the impact:

A majority of teachers indicated that training provided by the magnet staff has well-prepared them for the transition to remote learning. Specifically, on the staff survey when they were asked to what extent the professional development provided through the magnet program had helped prepare them for remote teaching and learning—56% indicated that they felt “very well prepared,” while the remaining 44% felt “somewhat prepared.” This finding suggests that the investment made in technology training was useful for teachers. (Metis Associates, 2020, p. 17)

While we may not have data to evaluate student performance, the teachers were successful in providing high levels of remote instruction with little anxiety.

Changing Direction

I was also teaching a course at Brooklyn College when the pandemic hit NYC, and I had to reconsider what instruction would look like. I already utilized technology platforms for accessing assignments and readings, and for uploading student work. I was disappointed that I would no longer be seeing my students in person, as I was enjoying the semester. I perceived them as critical thinkers, hard workers and personally engaging. I recalled the previous semester, discussed in Chapter 3, and my struggles with student expectations and power enactment. I grappled with similar questions as in the previous semester, but I had very different answers: What was my responsibility to the university? What was my responsibility to students? What was my responsibility to myself? I thought about what would matter when the crisis was over and changed direction.

Choosing Compassion

I chose to be compassionate and to consider the toll Covid-19 was having on my students at a personal level. I decided to forgo synchronous instruction until spring break. I began using a discussion board so that we could communicate how we were feeling and how the readings related to the current crisis. I held voluntary class meetings for the first three weeks which we spent emotionally adjusting to the “new normal.” These meetings were attended by more than 75% of the class, illustrating our need for community. I slowly unrolled new class expectations and pushed all deadlines until the last class. At first, I was concerned that student work would lose its quality but it was unfounded; I perceived the level of work and participation as high throughout the semester when we moved to live instruction four weeks after moving on-line. I was extremely proud of how they rose to the occasion when given the space and agency to do so.

One student had an extremely difficult time adjusting. She disappeared for several weeks until I reached out personally to check in. During a phone discussion, she considered dropping the class, concerned she would not be able to catch up with the work. I assured her my concern was with her emotional well-being and I would work with her in any way necessary to get her through the end of the semester. We developed a plan, and she not only succeeded, she thrived. This is part of her final message:

Tracy: With (your) help after a well needed call, (you) were able to boost my energy, suggest some great books to read that I ordered, and motivate my spirit to realize 1. I'm not alone and 2. so much of this reality is an illusion. I think overall, I've learned that I need to give myself more grace, give others the same grace, and do what I can...know that I am thinking of you.

I received similar comments from many students, reinforcing my belief in making beneficent choices:

Farook: It was a dramatic change in my lifestyle and routine. I am not a technologically advanced student when it comes to current generation laptops. In the past I was good but now it was a learning curve. As a student the understanding from you as my professor relieved a huge burden off my shoulder. Your understanding and shift of asynchronous learning approach allowed me to complete assignments overnight. I really appreciate that. On the contrary the other class I took was a complete utter nightmare for me because of the disconnect of our current situation. The complexity of this is unreal and unimaginable to go into details it would take more than 100 pages of what went wrong versus what was done correctly. You have done a perfect job cutting down on the number of reflections and cutting back on mandating a specific time to log in on zoom in which if we couldn't we didn't lose an insane amount of points. Your understanding and empathy to the situation is to be saluted. A perfect role model.

I am proud of the outcome. I provided both emotional and academic support, and my students responded with what I assessed as high-quality work that would more than satisfy course requirements. In this instance, taking a compassionate approach worked best for all involved.

Shifting Priorities

The shift to remote learning required I change my approach when dealing with my own children's academic needs. Their teachers did not provide synchronous instruction, opting instead for assigning work on Google Classroom. My oldest child is independent and adapted quickly to self-directed learning. However, my younger son has very different needs that remote

platforms could not meet. During the first week of quarantine, my focus was on supporting schools and assumed my son, James, was faring well. On Friday afternoon, I had time to review his work and saw it was incomplete. We spent the following day developing protocols to assist James in organizing his work and engaging in the day's activities. When the following week began, he had strategies for working independently, but he needed consistent redirection and focus prompts. My stress grew as I tried to balance my responsibilities at work, at Brooklyn College and at home, but we were getting used to new routines. Within a few weeks, James could complete ELA and math lessons with minimal support but he still needed to be refocused throughout the day.

Science generated the most anxiety. Instructions and assignments were posted weekly, but there were no supports for understanding the material. Basic scaffolds, such as vocabulary lists, or visual aids were absent, as was any student-teacher interaction. I reached out to the teacher, through email, and expressed my concerns, but I heard nothing back. Though I have a strong curricular, pedagogical and leadership background, I have respected my sons' teachers and the school administration by not interfering in their practice and hesitated to call the principal. I felt it was inappropriate for me to make suggestions, even when underwhelmed by educational experiences.

James and I worked together on completing his assignments and he scored well on assessments for the next few weeks. I continued to email the teacher, this time with suggestions that would ease my son's stress, but again, there was no response. The following week, the science assignment was so dense and complicated, James broke down before he even had a chance to begin. I emailed the principal who immediately got back to me, reviewed the assignment, and later worked with the teacher on scaffolding her lessons. When the next week's

work followed previous patterns, I again reached out and was finally contacted by his teacher. She explained why she could not provide additional materials and stressed she was not obligated to provide live instruction. Even though my son has an IEP, science class did not follow the collaborative team teaching model and she had no time to develop individual scaffolds.

From Conflict to Clarity

I hung up the phone conflicted. As an educator, I knew how hard it was to adjust to remote learning, especially with school-aged children at home. Many teachers lacked sufficient training in using synchronous platforms though they were doing the best they could. However, as a parent, I witnessed my child's struggles. He wanted to do well, but did not have the independence or skill set to succeed without help. He became increasingly anxious, and could not talk about or engage in science activities without crying. I paused, and made a decision that contradicted my values, but was best for my son; I informed the principal that James would no longer be completing assignments if he had difficulty understanding them. By that point, and I cannot believe I am writing this, *I no longer cared about his grade*. James completed what he could, and even though he was uncomfortable not handing everything in, his anxiety significantly subsided.

James' experience shaped my thoughts throughout the pandemic. Who is helping our most vulnerable students? Systemic gaps between the *haves* and *have nots* became glaring. My schools were lucky to have devices for each student. Most schools did not, and it took upwards of six weeks for the DOE to distribute devices to our neediest students. Even with technology, not all students had available internet service. When this was provided, the bandwidth often proved insufficient. Where did our students living in densely populated communities find a quiet space to work? How were our English Language Learners being supported? I know how limited

special education supports were for my son; I could help him but many students do not have that privilege. I was also concerned with how students were being fed, and afraid for the safety of others; as front line reporters, school staff are a primary defense in addressing child abuse. If my sons and I succumbed to arguing as a response to our anxiety, what was happening in homes where violence might be present? Again, my own emotional response allowed me to consider the contexts of the vulnerable and disenfranchised.

And in the end...

I have learned much through writing this dissertation, the last part of this academic journey. My knowledge and perspectives have expanded and changed from engaging in this work. In Chapter 1, I discussed autoethnography as a method for studying myself. The process itself acted as a heuristic, as I transformed my thinking, perspective and emotions throughout (Moustakas, 1990). As with any epic, my story begins in the middle, its end still to be determined. I entered Ken Tobin's classroom half-way through my doctoral coursework where I envisioned the map I would follow while completing my studies. I reached back to past endeavors and interrogated where my ideas about education, myself and the world developed. As I learned more about emotions in education, I became aware of internal conflicts. Questions arose about how my experiences influenced my values consciously and unconsciously. I immersed myself in learning new methodologies, such as Authentic Inquiry, and theories that supported introspective analysis. Learning to explore events through hermeneutic phenomenology provided me with a method for unpacking my emotions, and I probed how my habitus influenced my thoughts, perceptions and actions.

Writing this dissertation has contributed to my exploration, and has provided an additional layer of awareness. Each chapter evolved as I revised them; new ideas emerged from

writing other chapters in a spiraling process of explication, percolation and reevaluation. Early versions reflected my discomfort with subjectively situated scholarship, as they seemed more theoretical than personal, and more formally written. As I became more comfortable with my voice and its value, I weaved my experiences with theoretical explanations that illustrated its power. Different meanings became illuminated as I synthesized my learning, and I continued to grow and change. Though this work will have an end, it is open and undefined; as others read this, their own thoughts and feelings will emerge, contingent on the connections or differences they perceive.

Inquiring through Autoethnography

Autoethnography is both a method and a methodology; as I uncovered and analyzed the data from my experiences and the prior identities that shaped them, I moved the boundaries that define who I am. Now that I am approaching the end, I see how I have changed from when I began. My self-study was emergent and contingent, each event unfolding in the present, but informed by the past and influencing the future. In deconstructing my habitus across various fields, I uncovered the various world view, values and beliefs that shaped my interactions. These values reflect the many cultural spaces that mediate my perceptions, and are often in conflict with one another. In some fields, such as academia, my goals and values for myself reflect my parent's expectations but I also take pride in my academic success. Without awareness, my values and expectations were transferred to my students and my children. However, when I mindfully considered what is of value *to* and *for* them, my priorities shifted.

Through this process, I have learned about and from my fluid identities, how they have shaped and been shaped by my experiences, and how they influence agency | passivity during cultural enactments (Tobin & Roth, 2005). As I became more comfortable deconstructing my

own perspectives, I realized that I needed to challenge some of my taken-for-granted beliefs. I considered how these beliefs arose and the contexts that generated them. I untangled where and why cognitive and affective contradictions arose and how these inconsistencies influenced my behavior. I discuss my roles as mother, teacher, student, and administrator, but I have learned that even these designations are fluid and dependent on both the past and the present. (Goffman, 1969). I discovered that these identities can overlap, and, at times, they can conflict with one another. Ultimately, I have uncovered why some contexts make me passive, while others engender agency, and I can use that knowledge to define myself in future spaces.

I came to the Graduate Center shaped by habitus (Bourdieu, 1977) and the past interactions that took place across various fields. In Chapter Two I explored how my academic habitus shaped many of these behaviors. The daughter of professionals, I was taught to value education and to defer to adult authority. The consistent positive attention I received by complying with rules and achieving high grades, shaped how I act within academic fields. As a student, I enact both active and passive behaviors, learned from previous positive and negative interactions; my passivity is evident in how I interact within hierarchical systems. I am deferent to authority, I rarely challenge directions and I seek positive approval. My agency is visible in my motivation to succeed, as well as in my desire to grow as a human being. Shaped by my previous interactions, I passively generated expectations for others- my graduate students, my children, the teachers I support- based on how I identified as a student. I expected my graduate students to possess the same work ethic and submit high quality work. I expected them to be engaged in class, to submit their work on time, and to fluently read high level academic texts. I expected the same from my son, despite his struggles. It took agency, my deliberate and critical

examination of both my actions and principles, to realign my priorities, and attend to what was best for others rather than maintaining my authority.

I also learned that some identities, like relationships, need attention if they are to flourish. Although my early middle school teaching career reflected my student habitus, I believe it was because of inexperience; I pulled from my existing student paradigm when faced with the discomfort and limited repertoire of a new teacher. As my pedagogy improved, so did my interactions with students. After only a few years I reframed my ideas of who I wanted to be as a teacher. I became kinder, more adaptive, and more informed about effective strategies for reaching my diverse students. I stopped “teaching to the test,” opting for engaging instructional strategies that addressed my students’ lived experiences. Most of my students succeeded personally, socially, and academically and I am proud to still be in contact with many of them today. However, when I stopped teaching, the positive emotional interactions stopped as well. I missed my students but after a few short years, I no longer felt the instantaneous joy that came from thinking about my years in the classroom. When I began teaching again, I reverted to an earlier, more authoritarian, disposition, until I mindfully cultivated the positive, more compassionate practices that informed previously successful student-teacher interactions.

On Validity

While I have expanded my notion of “scholarship,” I still struggle with accepting the validity in my autoethnographic narrative. This speaks to the powerful hold our past experiences, and their cultural frames, have on our beliefs. And though my worldview reflects the illusory nature of reality, I still believe there are relative truths available to all and I cannot completely abnegate my need for structure. I have searched for criteria to validate my work, but there are no specific or concrete guidelines to follow. I understand that this reflects the method itself; as an emergent

and contingent process, autoethnography reflects the dynamic, polysemic nature of identity and our views of the world.

Carolyn Ellis (2004) provides characteristics for evaluating the strength of an autoethnography, which I apply to my dissertation. She suggests that their value lies in the answers to the following:

- Does the author use vivid pictures and intense feelings to convey experiences?
- Do these experiences illuminate social issues?
- Does the author use theory to frame experiences?
- Can the author legitimately make the claims put forth in their experiences and evaluations?
- Will it help others understand their own worlds?
- Did it evoke thoughts and feelings in others?
- Was valid data used?

In evaluating my work based on these criteria, I believe it is valid. I have used qualitative sources that were generated in a systematic and rigorous manner, including student reflections, journals, cogenerative dialogue transcripts, and ephemeral artifacts such as emails. Theory grounds each chapter, and supports both claims and analyses about social issues relevant to education. Post-structural hermeneutic phenomenology underlies my chosen methodologies and frames analyses and conclusions (Tobin & Ritchie, 2012). I employ Sewell's (2005) Event-oriented Inquiry to identify salient moments that illuminate an internal conflict or contradiction. By considering how these "events" and my perceptions of them shape and are shaped by past and

present socio-cultural interactions, I uncovered the many layers that influence my ever-changing identity.

Authenticity Criteria in Practice

Authenticity Criteria (Tobin, 2015) guided my process and helped structure my thinking. As a lifelong learner, I seek new experiences and embrace change, both in my circumstances and my thinking. Entering a doctoral program at the age of 49 attests to this. As a student at the Graduate Center, I was exposed to new knowledge, theories and manners of thinking and being. By intentionally seeking out multiple perspectives, polysemia and polyphonia nuanced my experiences. Many other voices informed my ideas; my sons; my graduate students; my colleagues; my teachers and my friends. Each one layered my own thinking and helped me develop a new, heteroglossic voice (Bakhtin, 1995). Through my class interactions, I learned from others and they learned from me, as we shared perspectives, ideas and experiences. We also generated new knowledge together through methods such as cogenerative dialogues (Tobin & Roth, 2005).

Though I cannot know if my dissertation will spark reader's thoughts and feelings, my intense emotions are illustrated throughout the narratives. I do know that my experiences have catalyzed change within me, as I believe it has in others who participated with me in this research. Overall, I have a greater understanding of how my past unconsciously informs my present, especially when I feel threatened, vulnerable or unsure of myself. I am also more mindful when making decisions as a mother, an employee, a teacher and a student, particularly when they elicit emotional reactions; I listen to find out what my emotions may be saying about my present and past contexts and potential contradictions. One of the more important lessons I have learned is to interrogate my anger and how it manifests. I have learned that I frequently

employ defense mechanisms that unconsciously thwart progress towards a goal, especially when my confidence and self-esteem are diminished. Change is difficult as it requires individuals to surrender what was. Even if transformation is towards growth, there can be the sense that what was before, the unchanged self, was not good enough.

I write this hopeful that readers will see a familiarity, a thin coherence (Sewell, 2005), with which they can identify. Perhaps they will remember similar experiences and apply what I have learned to their own lives as educators, parents, and/or students. Potentially relevant suggestions can be tested in comparable situations to see if there is a family resemblance between my evolution and their own (Tobin, 2015). Beneficence, and the possibility of helping others, has surrounded each step I have taken on this journey. My compassion has grown through this process and I approach my children, students and colleagues with a softer, gentler air. A crisis in representation (Greene, 1994), Bakhtin's (1994), *unfinalized* understanding in communicating ideas limits my ability to protect potentially disadvantaged voices, like my son's, because I can never know how he or others will interpret this work. However, I believe that my own growth has benefited, and will continue to benefit, those with whom I interact.

Emotion in the Classroom

In each chapter, I explored the emotions that signaled internal conflict. As educators, it is difficult to evade them; teaching is an emotional activity, and educators express feeling a range of emotions, such as joy, satisfaction, frustration and sadness, depending on the context (Hargreaves, 1998). Our emotions are culturally constructed through interpersonal interactions and are framed by micro, meso, and macro levels structures. In classroom interactions, an educator's emotions can be stimulated by internalized expectations formed through individual past experiences, the norms and values of the local school community, and the norms and values

of overarching educational systems and structures. Appraisals determine the extent to which expectations align with what happens, and when expectations are not met, negative emotions arise. (Turner, 2009).

My experience illustrates how this operates. I developed academic and personal expectations for myself based on previous positive interactions in which I engaged, both at home and at school. These expectations were carried into my home and my classroom. I experienced an emotional reaction, usually anger when my expectations did not align with my appraisals; I expected my son and my Brooklyn College graduate students to be compliant and passively accepting of my curricular and pedagogical decisions. Subsequent interactions changed my perceptions and values, and altered my expectations.

Emotional reactions to unmet expectations frequently have targets, such as the self, proximal others, distal others, or meso and macro systems. When a failure to meet expectations is attributed to external factors, anger arises and is directed outward. If the failure is perceived as a personal fault, sadness and fear can arise; however, as individuals are motivated to protect self, these emotions tend to be repressed. Emotions, once repressed, can be transformed into different emotional responses, dependent upon the power status of those involved; those with power tend to attribute personal failures to external factors, and express anger toward less powerful others. My anger at my son in Chapter 2 was transmuted sadness and fear; sadness that I was ineffective in supporting him and fear of his not being able to compete academically. In Chapter 3, my anger towards my class obfuscated my own responsibility in not properly assessing student readiness and knowledge base early in the semester.

It is important that teachers understand why their anger arises in classroom settings, as it can impede student learning and reinforce inequity. There are a variety of reasons why teachers

get angry in the classroom. At times, it is because teachers perceive students as not meeting expectations. At others, teachers are feeling frustrated by external actors, like parents or school administrators, and they cannot appropriately channel their emotions due to logistical or hierarchical constraints. Teachers may also feel impotent if they are not included in school decisions. Without analyzing how and why anger is manifested, educators can unfairly target students, develop biased perceptions of student behaviors and abilities, or create a hostile, unsupportive classroom culture.

Becker, Goetz, Morger, & Rallenucci (2014) found that teacher emotions, especially anger and anxiety, were contagious to the student and subsequently affected conduct. Similarly, Sutton and Wheatley (2003) have found evidence of the deleterious effects emotions, such as anger, can have on students; teacher yelling can produce harmful emotions such as guilt, and shame, as well as submissive behaviors in students. In addition, negative emotions can affect how teachers categorize students, which subsequently influences how students are treated. Finally, there are significant positive correlations between student misbehavior, and levels of teacher hostility. Consistent experiences with hostile or angry teachers can reinforce passivity in students, especially minority students who are far more likely to be subordinated in meso and macro systems. Turner (2010) suggests that these encounters can lead to alienation, feelings of shame, and anger towards institutional domains including school. Rather than repressing emotions, teachers can interrogate their origin, or share them openly in a manner appropriate to the context, in a critical, productive process. By interrogating my anger, I learned why it manifested and how it reflected other emotions, such as fear and sadness. In deconstructing the experiences, values and thoughts that contributed to my anger, I understood that it was misdirected and adjusted my behaviors.

Turning the Inside Out: Moving to Systemic Change

As an autoethnography, this dissertation is primarily introspective. However, as we are all shaped by culturally mediated interactions, we are always navigating micro, meso and macro structures together; even the meanings of my chosen words have been socially negotiated, collectively defined and understood (Bakhtin, 1995). Underlying each chapter's conflict was the clash between the static, hierarchical, reductive nature of our education systems and a more egalitarian, equitable and growth-based approach to teaching and learning. Current education policy reinforces the first to the detriment of the latter. I believe we can create educational experiences that cultivate academic skills, student agency, and emotional well-being, but not until we address standardized testing's narrowing of curricular and pedagogical practices.

On December 10, 2015, *Every Student Succeeds Act* (ESSA) was signed into law. It is the federal legislation that reauthorized the *Elementary and Secondary Education Act* and replaced *No Child Left Behind* (2001). ESSA is a major shift from the extensive federal authority of NCLB and provides increased flexibility to states and school districts. Nonetheless, its focus is still on standardized testing. States must still test all students yearly in grades 3-8 and once in high school for reading and math proficiency; report results for student subgroups, such as English Language Learners, Students with Disabilities and students living in poverty; continue to have 95 percent state test participation; identify the lowest-performing schools; and report data on the distribution of effective teachers.

I have both experienced, and been witness to the negative consequences of standardized testing. The focus on data-driven practices often leads educators to interpret student state test scores as the sole indicator of student ability, even though many factors influence how a student performs on a standardized test; different cultural funds of knowledge, unfamiliarity with testing

methods, test anxiety, and the need for additional accommodations can all cause students to struggle on state exams. As standardized exams became more important to school ratings, teachers started “teaching to the test” and stopped experimenting with new techniques and teaching methods in their classrooms. Teachers became afraid to take risks, which limited their creativity and student engagement. Testing drives curricular and pedagogical decisions, and social studies, science and the arts have been sacrificed for additional math and ELA instruction. Yet, the achievement gap between minority students and their white counterparts persists and American students perform below their international peers (Barshay, 2019).

Towards an Authentic Pedagogy

We cannot solve our problems with the same thinking we used when we created them.

Albert Einstein

A pedagogical | curricular framework, using the principles of Authentic Inquiry and the application of the Authenticity Criteria (Tobin & Ritchie, 2012), could transform present educational practices. I use the Sheffer stroke (|) to indicate the dialectic nature of curriculum and pedagogy as they dialectically interact in this teaching and learning model. Though it draws from multiple pedagogies it is not limited to any one approach; it is a bricolage, emergent and contingent, polysemic and polyphonic.

On the macro- and meso-level, policy would reflect an egalitarian approach to standards and assessment. This would mean parents, students, teachers and other relevant stakeholders would be part of its development. When New York State’s ESSA (2015) plan was being drafted in 2017, I worked for the NYCDOE’s Office of State and Federal Policy and had a first-hand look at how our state’s policy was created. An initial proposal was drafted and a series of public

hearings were held to gather feedback and further suggestions. I organized speakers and summarized information for the DOE at three of the five borough hearings. Though many parents, students and teachers spoke against standardized testing, their comments were not addressed in the finalized New York State assessment policy, which was modified, but not substantially changed from its No Child Left Behind (2001) accountability structures. The main difference was the addition of non-academic measures and qualitative data sources to assess overall school and district performance. All students in grades 3-8 continue to be tested yearly. Schools continue to be evaluated on student reading and math proficiency scores, including those of subgroups, such as English Language Learners, Students with Disabilities, and economically disadvantaged students, who are required to meet the same standards with limited exceptions. Parent, teacher and student feedback did not seem to be considered, and the opportunity to change practices and policies was lost.

I believe standards should frame student learning, as students may not have the knowledge or skills to determine their own learning trajectories, especially in the lower grades. Rather than dictating content, standards should be skills based and aligned to cognitive development theories, but they should be constructed by educators, students, parents, business leaders, community partners and other relevant stakeholders. They should not dictate what materials are used, in which direction learning should go, or how lessons should be taught. Collaborative reviews can be ongoing, and standards adjusted when new needs arise, or previous decisions are no longer applicable.

Our state's Next Generation Learning Standards (NGLS) were developed this way and I believe they are well structured and practical. As a New York City Common Core Fellow, I participated in early curriculum development initiatives and found the standards concise, flexible,

and skill based. I think the NGLS have been maligned because they were poorly implemented, not because they were poorly designed. The new state assessments were rolled out with the Common Core moniker even though they had little resemblance to the standards-based formative assessments that naturally evolve from the NGLS. Students and parents, unhappy with testing outcomes, attributed poor student performance to the standards and not the exams, and directed their anger at the school's curriculum rather than at the state assessments.

Shared Decision Making through Cogenerative Dialogue

School Leadership Teams (SLTs) have a role in the DOE's decision making process and meetings could provide a space that engenders polysemia and polyphonia. Team members represent school stakeholders, such as teachers, parents, community partners and support staff. Decisions are made by consensus and responsibility for their implementation is shared. However, as a former SLT member, I felt that team outcomes did not always impact school culture or practice. Central and school building leaders continued to make major decisions, isolating teachers and students whose actions were constrained by persistent hierarchical structures. If faithfully implemented, cogen could be an effective tool for addressing how this factor limit shared decision making. By including multiple perspectives and cultivating an active adult learning stance, schools can create climates where staff embrace a collaborative sense of responsibility and commitment to action. As stakeholders become synchronous in their desire to change the culture, solidarity, not isolation will become the norm. By removing the "expert," cogen distributes power across all participants equally. This is what makes positive cogenerative dialogues important; changes at the micro and meso levels can ameliorate the negative effects of macro level structures and policies.

Authenticity Criteria for Teaching and Learning

Researchers and historians who study education reform have increasingly recognized that long-term improvement is less likely to occur from the halls of government and more likely to come from collaborative efforts at the school level (Lattimer, 2012). School communities can collectively be agents of change. As Cochran-Smith & Fries (2001) claim, teachers have a social responsibility to challenge the hierarchical systems and structures that hinder equitable access and opportunity for marginalized groups, by speaking out against cultural hegemony, and education policies that harm, not help vulnerable students.

At the classroom level, learning experiences developed with Authenticity Criteria (Tobin & Ritchie, 2012) in mind would reflect equitable practices, multiple perspectives, differentiated instruction and a variety of pathways to knowledge. Blending transformative and progressive models, and participatory action research, topics of study are emergent and contingent on student interests and community needs, and lessons and practices reinforce and inform each other. For example, in 8th grade, standards indicate students should develop arguments, using a variety of sources that address multiple perspectives. This standard reflects ontological authenticity. A unit could begin by discussing the community to find relevant topics students find value in studying. Valuing student and community context, language and culture allows children to navigate meaning, without marginalizing who they are even as they think critically about their own lives. This type of pedagogy has emancipatory properties as children develop a contextual sense of power structures and their place in transforming society so that it inclusive of all.

Once topics are identified, student perspectives could be explored, particularly where differences arise. Students benefit from seeking alternative viewpoints that clarify, challenge or

change their thinking. By learning from others, either students or sources, students engage in educative authenticity. Arguments presented through debate, or cogenerative dialogues illuminate student thinking, and allow students to practice expressing their voices. Performance-based tasks that evolve out of student studies and reflective of their strengths might involve community activism or volunteer opportunities, catalyzing positive change outside of the classroom. Creating an open, dynamic classroom culture, where individual needs, interests and learning styles are addressed is beneficent for all participants and reflects tactical authenticity. Schools would become arenas for active participation, as students construct both social and academic knowledge with volition and voice. Classroom educators assess students through a teacher | researcher paradigm, by including student voice in determining criteria and analyzing performance (Alexakos, 2015). As discussed in Chapter 3, student-engaged assessments and student-led conferences encourage students to evaluate their own growth, and reframes testing's primary role into one that motivates them to learn instead of one that ranks their ability. In taking responsibility for their own learning, students build independence, reflexivity, criticality and agency. The following statements can be used to evaluate successful implementation, or they can be converted into a heuristic for teachers to reflect upon:

Authentic Pedagogy Heuristic

1. Multiple perspectives and types of knowledge are included in resources and evident in student discussions
2. Students have opportunities to learn from multiple perspectives and funds of knowledge
3. Students have opportunities to share their own perspectives
4. Students show evidence of learning from different perspectives

5. Learning opportunities are emergent and contingent, based on student interest, and strengths, while addressing key standards
6. Students are involved in determining activities and assessment criteria
7. Students collaboratively define expectations and academic success
8. Students are actively involved in the assessment process
9. Feedback is collectively developed
10. Decision-making power is shared
11. Students utilize community resources
12. Learning extend outside of the immediate classroom
13. Student learning catalyze action at the classroom or school level
14. Student learning catalyze action in the community
15. Community stakeholders are included in the learning process

Classroom management can also be approached through Authentic Inquiry's principles. Teachers would address behavioral issues in a manner that maintains student dignity and provides positive strategies for dealing with anger and frustration. The first goal is to build classroom communities in which students develop agency through agreed upon protocols, authentic communication, and specific tools that allow students to bring issues and conflicts forward in a helpful way. Students determine the criteria for what is and is not acceptable in their class community. These practices provide opportunities for bringing together those who are affected by misbehavior as a way of giving all sides voice. Students who violate agreed upon norms are presented with their behavior and the effects it had on the community. Participants come to consensus about how to ameliorate any harm done. It is a process of acceptance, not abandonment, of advocacy, not invisibility.

On Mindfulness

I end this part of my journey with a few comments about mindfulness. As I shared in the introduction, I embraced mindfulness as a way to make meaning out of pain. Rather than rejecting my anxiety, fear and sadness, I sought their origin in my experiences. I learned to bracket my thoughts and feelings, to approach them without judgement or evaluation. Being mindful was more than a practice; it allowed me to pause, rethink and reframe how I approached the world. Reality's ephemeral nature, its constant flux, illuminated the futility of attachment, especially to the static, unrealistic expectations and valuations of others. But it is work, difficult work, that cannot be accomplished through daily five minute rituals that only seek to quiet the mind without discovering what made the noise.

At a recent NYCDOE conference, mindfulness was introduced as a strategy for minimizing workplace stress. We were given tips on the proper seating pose, provided with a mantra, and instructed on how to appreciate life through the "purposeful pause." I remember thinking, *now that the DOE got a hold of it, mindfulness will lose all meaning*. Mindfulness is now ubiquitous across the system. Some schools have meditation rooms and students and teachers engage in mindfulness seminars to reduce stress and anxiety. I applaud the effort, but I laugh and worry of its shallow character. No one discusses why teachers have so much stress and anxiety, how these conditions developed or how micro, meso and macro system interactions frame our values, beliefs and behaviors.

To me, it is not sufficient to pause and reflect if the purpose is temporary reprieve. I could have meditated to reduce my anger towards my class, my son, or the DEEP presentation. But that would not have uncovered the tangled and gnarled roots that grew out of my experiences. I present a final heuristic, based on Buddhism's Eightfold Path, for contemplating

our world, our place within in, and our connection to other living beings. Similar to other mindfulness heuristics (Powieskatrzyn, et al., 2015), this is built on compassion, wisdom and ethical conduct, and are a practical set of principles for classroom interaction (Rahula, 1967):

Eightfold Path Heuristic

1. I am mindful of how I speak to others, both in tone and content.
2. I am truthful in what I say to and about others.
3. I avoid gossip and seek productive solutions to conflict.
4. I model appropriate behaviors for those around me.
5. I actively avoid behaviors that can potentially cause harm to others and promote peaceful, compassionate conduct.
6. I actively interrogate emotions and regulate their expression so that reactions are compassionate to myself and others
7. I address the needs of all students, and myself so we are not harmed by inattention.
8. I embrace the effort required in ensuring equity for all students.
9. I provide opportunities for student decision making.
10. I am mindful of student context and take efforts to ameliorate any disadvantages
11. I am aware that I possess unconscious biases which can influence expectations and appraisals.
12. I am aware that these unconscious biases have been shaped by past experiences and can potentially impact present and future interactions.
13. I seek to uncover unconscious biases to minimize their impact on classroom interactions.
14. I am aware of classroom power dynamics and make decisions out of beneficence and not authority.

15. I am aware that those in authority often exercise their power unilaterally, but I respond with compassion and flexibility.

Fortunately, we can change our minds, literally and figuratively (Davidson, 2012), and cultivate new gardens. Weeds will grow, but with attention and the right tools, they can be controlled, allowing beautiful flowers and sheltering trees to fill our lives.

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