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A Man Should Never Eat a Pickle in Public

A Black Man’s Understanding of Enactments of Gender and Sexuality

Pepper Totten

Abstract
According to the World Health Organization, physical and sexual violence against women by domestic partners produces female victims at a rate of more than 70%. Recent reports of high profile Black athlete perpetrators sparked this study. This study explored how Black men make sense of the masculine aspect of their identity and adult development juxtaposed the ideology of sexual socialization. Both athletes and members of Greek-letter fraternities, through their popularity and work with community initiatives, are often recognized as role models, particularly for boys. Because many Black athletes are also members of Black Greek-Letter Fraternities (BGLFs), this study examined how masculinity was enacted within a BGLF. It was discovered social expectations require males to utilize physical strength as the primary tool to triumph over an adversary combined with expectations of multiple sexual conquests. When combined these are powerful concepts that may perhaps lead to impertinence towards women with whom males are romantically involved.

Participants in this study included 7 members of Chi Omega Sigma, Fraternity, Inc. (pseudonym). The men participated in semi-structured interviews and provided life stories following the line of masculinity from birth to present. By
examining masculinity through the lens of Black feminist theory, the researcher was able to understand participants’ stories from a critical perspective. This revealed power structures within the fraternity, inter-group racism, and influences of outside entities such as family dynamics.

Narrative inquiry methodology was used to gather stories from the participants. Following a tenet for social justice of the “oppressed”, Creative Analytic Practice (CAP), also referred to as the Seventh Moment, allowed for the utilization of creative forms of presentations of data (Denzin, 2001). Development of individual masculinity was dependent upon perceptions of others within the group. Individual participants made life decisions based on emotional responses of those within their inner circles. This produced emotional, physical, and behavioral group contagion defined as convergent linkage (Elfenbein, 2014). Through an analysis of participant voices, it was found men in this study looked to their peers for an “at-a-boy” approval rating of acceptable behaviors. The following themes emerged: (1) Learning how to be ‘male,’ means learning how to abide by specific codes; (2) Power was positively correlated to self-identity; and (3) Any perceptions of homosexuality were to be avoided.

**Keywords:** Identity, Black masculinity, Greek-letter fraternity, Creative Analytic Practice, Black Feminist Theory, Poetry, Athlete, Power

The September 2014, publicly displayed violent attack of Ray Rice against his then fiancée, Janay Palmer, was the latest high profile case in what has become an all-too-common tale of violence against women. Rice, a Baltimore Ravens’ running back, was recorded in an elevator of the Revel Hotel and Casino in Atlantic City delivering a single punch to the face of Janay Palmer. This attack rendered Palmer unconscious for several moments before she was able to stumble to her feet with assistance. Since the airing of the video, public outrage prompted the NFL to look at stiffer penalties for players perpetrating domestic violence against women. The tragedy resonates similar confrontations of high profile Black men against women. A particularly bleak historical example is the violent episodes within the previous marriage of heavy weight champion, Mike Tyson and actress Robin Givens in 1988.

Reports of domestic violence by prestigious Black men who are also seen as role models, has provoked intense public reactions (Combating, 2013; Peralta & Tuttle, 2013; Worden, A. P. & Carlson, B. E., 2005). Responses from the public have prompted changes in laws, rules, and regulations (Schopper, 2006). According to the World Health Organization, more than 70% of women experience violence caused by an intimate partner at some point in life (“Prevention,” 2014). Physical as well as sexual violence against women is an international phenomenon that requires changes in statutes, laws, as well as consciousness.
Violence against women, whether it is rape, physical assault, verbal abuse, or psychological manipulation, has been associated with the perpetrator’s perception of real or imagined power (“Prevention,” 2014). Consequently, Wittig (1980) discovered power is associated with an individual’s domination over the weaker “other”. Within the construct of Black masculinity, power and powerlessness prevail as leading factors of self-perception (Henry, 2003; Jones, 2004; Lusher & Robbins, 2010). White men have set the standards for hegemonic masculinity that all others are expected to abide. In their pursuit of hegemonic masculinity, Black men internalize the supposed power of White men and in turn attempt to construct an ideology of an acceptable male existence. Regardless of gender, socioeconomic status, race, ethnicity, sexual orientation, or religious background, basic human needs are safety, food, shelter, clothing, sex, and acceptance as shown by a sense of belonging. Acceptance commences with self-actualization, but is further supported by social orders of hierarchy. Because power is a social-psychological phenomenon expressed from person to person, this article addresses Black men’s expressions of power via negotiations of acceptance through identifications of sexual and interpersonal mannerisms within relationships with their female counterparts. In this article I explain the theoretical, subjective, and contextual underpinnings of how Black men come to understand and respond to their own sense of power and powerlessness in relation to gender and sexuality. Additionally, utilizing Creative Analytic Practice (CAP), I constructed a poetic illustration (Denzin, 2001) of my own subjectivities which also outlines those areas where I am biased at the onset of the study, I provide historical information regarding a segment of Black role models as identified as those within Black Greek Letter Fraternities (BGLF), explain identity development of Black men, address sexual traditions, outline the methods for data collection and data analysis, and also creatively present the voices of men in this study.

When addressing acceptance, it is foreseeable that people gravitate to those whom they have shared thoughts, experiences, or beliefs. Ultimately, commonalities may become the breeding ground in which some or all basic needs are met. Hence mini-cultures are formed. These mini-cultures are often personified within religious organizations, athletics, Greek-letter organizations, and employment cohorts.

Perhaps under conventional orders of leadership, mini-cultures may aid in the productive nature of the larger realm of society. However, when a collective group places stipulations on its’ members regarding acceptable and unacceptable behaviors, the group essentially generates a shared emotional response or group emotional contagion. According to Barsade (2002), group emotional contagion is the transfer of moods or emotions among people in a group, and its influence on
group dynamics. This is an important concept to understand when examining the
dynamics and nuances associated with how Black men view gender and sexuality.

Elfenbein (2014) discovered, although there is freedom of acceptance or de-
nial of group thoughts and beliefs, members often fall into one of three catagories:
convergent, divergent, or complimentary linkage. To identify how people’s affect-
tive states connect, Elfenbein found the following: “Convergent linkage occurs
when individuals share the same vantage point and interpretations of emotionally
evocative stimuli. Divergent linkage occurs with a shared vantage point but dif-
ferent interpretations. Complementary linkage occurs when the other person is
itself the stimulus.” Although it was found that Black men in this qualitative study
gravitated towards the convergent linkage, Elfenbein’s unpacking of divergent and
complementary linkages add dimension to conversations about man code, also
interpreted as man law, and behavioral responses of Black men.

Man code, or man law, stipulates acceptable performances of masculinity.
Specifically, it is unclear how men of color negotiate expectations of masculine
representations of the dominant culture. However, the last two decades have
prompted research interest in the field of Black masculinity which includes dis-
cussions of behavioral enactments and negotiations of manhood (Hill Collins,
Harper, S. R., & Nichols, A. H., 2008; Peralta & Tuttle, 2013). Still, few thick,
rich qualitative studies have emerged.

**Subjectivity**

Mruch & Breuer (2003), reported researchers face a “dilemma” when it comes
to creating a study that is valid and true to the experiences, attitudes, beliefs and
behaviors of participants. There are unconscious as well as conscious decisions
that could pose threat to the validity of the study due to researcher biases (Max-
well, 1996). According to Maxwell, bias and reactivity are the two most notable
threats to the justifiable context of research. Under the construct of bias, it has
been noted “Two important threats to the validity of qualitative conclusions are
the selection of data that fit the researcher’s existing theory or preconceptions and
the selection of data that ‘stand out’ to the researcher” (Maxwell, 1996, p. 90).

All research has limitations (Brown, 2010); although my life experiences may
add to the data, it can also pose a threat to the reliability of the information. As
the researcher, I interpreted the information from my own culture, experiences,
and worldview (Parry & Johnson, 2007). I believe that it is important to investi-
gate my own subjectivities before, during and after the study. The following is a poetic interpretation of my own subjectivities (Denzin, 2001).

BAA BAA BLACK SHEEP

As the train runs back and forth so goes my mind
Intoxicated by the blur of its swiftness until a spiritual revelation
Of a cultural disconnection
Fills my eyes and renders me blind
Another Black man sentenced to spend time in jail
A prison, the embodiment of doom and destruction on earth, a pre-destined hell
Another is lifeless although books filled his head
In an early grave no longer to feel the pangs of societal disenfranchisement, no longer,
Why? Because he is dead
Freedom. Oh sweet freedom.
Youthful mishaps, miss-steps, miss-calculations, miss-educations
All guilty of producing vulgar biles purging high moral standards,
Love of self and community taught by the ancestors.
All hail the words of sister bell hooks.
No longer can you sit idly on the edge of the brook
Be angry, be educated, be free.
Be a man. Be a Black man, a man for the sake of black masculinity
Can a Black man, a grown man, a grown ass Black man return to the womb for an intellectual theoretical rebirth?
What is your worth?
Where is Black manhood; this is a hidden treasure that I am determined to find
Is there such a creature as Black masculinity; how goes my mind?
Is it only a fallacy, wishful thinking something that was born inside of me
Baa Baa Black Sheep have you any wool
Yes sir, yes sir three bags full
The problem is I am not a sir you see
I am a female a woman, will that fact hinder me
Or Black Sheep, does that fact hinder you?
I being a female a Black woman, more than a conqueror boo
My femininity is defined by the acts, the behaviors and the drive within me
What is my problem you inquire as I gaze deeply into the very fibers of your being
All in a search to understand how, where, when, why there was a redefining of your masculinity
I need that bag of wool that you possess
For in the bag is your flesh
It defines who you are
Won’t you please share your inner most self, I believe that I can help you to go far
Baa Baa Black Sheep who is this master which you serve?
How has your wool helped you along the way?
Does your master provide you with the things you deserve?
Is it wool you have in that bag or is it simply hay?
I want to understand you, if I may
Baa Baa Black Sheep Have You Any Wool?
Yes, sir, yes, sir…any bags full?
I understand the world for you is often cruel and difficult for you to discern
To educate as the practice of freedom is a way of teaching that anyone can learn
I aspire to sit at your feet and take in all the words that you speak
All hail the words of Sister bell hooks.
All hail the words of your life are not yet in books
BAA BAA Black Sheep Have You Any Wool??

This poem was written to express my sentiments as I approach literature which is expected to reveal Black men’s struggles to transform into masculine beings despite interlocking structures of oppression. The intersectionality of gender and class represent the struggle for control over their own self-definitions.
In designing this study I had many expectations regarding what I hoped to learn from the participants and from the study. At the onset I expected to learn about motivating factors that have influenced participants’ behaviors over the years; how participants view other men who have had similar, as well as different experiences; how society plays a role in participants’ beliefs; and how I might have fostered or hindered the development of men similar to participants in the study.

One noteworthy area of my own subjectivity is my interaction with participants framed within the disposition of my worldview. I am an African American female from a two-parent, blended home. My half-brother and half-sister were sixteen and fifteen years my senior, respectively. Despite legal battles and my parents’ passionate protests, my half-sister at the age of 15 married a 30-year-old night club owner. Because of his business ventures, her husband was considered a celebrity of sorts within our small, rural community. Consequently, he physically abused her throughout the course of their marriage.

Even after she moved out of our family home, I was repeatedly exposed to the physical and emotional scars of marital violence. As a child, I frequently witnessed contusions and other injuries inflicted upon my half-sister as a result of domestic violence at the hands of her husband. There was an ongoing cycle which entailed violence against my sibling (acute explosion phase), her fleeing her marital home to return to the family home for safety (escape phase), her husband showering her with apologies and gifts to regain her trust (honeymoon phase), and finally arguing (tension building phase).

Because of my age, there was nothing I could do to aide my sister, but I could help my younger siblings. I vowed to never sit idly by and allow this to happen to my other siblings. As the older sister of two African American brothers and a sister, we played together, we fought each other, but ultimately we looked out for the well-being of one another. When I left home to attend college, I became a member of a historically Black sorority and gained thousands of African American/Black fraternity brothers. This new pseudo-family operated in much the same way as my biological family—we fought, played, and loved.

Going into this study I questioned myself on the role that I would play as a researcher. It has been my desire to avoid stereotypical negative constructs—abusive, criminal, associations with drugs and alcohol—assigned to Black men. My concern was that I would uncover information which would confirm and reiterate the stereotypes. I feared the possibility of my adding to the poor outlook of Black men. Would I report the good along with the bad or would I wish to clean it up a bit? My upbringing and cultural norms say to always paint the Black man in a positive light even when the outlook is negative. One might ask why it has been deemed essential to support and celebrate Black men in spite of themselves. The answer my Black culture would give would be based on oppression and the harsh treatment of Black men at the hands of the White, dominant culture both during
and following slavery. Although, women have also suffered substantial oppression, because they are “our” men, we (Black women) are expected to honor and respect them. Hill Collins (1991) conceptualized this ideology as a “struggle for group survival” (p. 140). Essentially, in order to survive oppression and other such disenfranchisements, the group must stick together.

Being familiar with this concept of blind reverence Morgan (1999) reported “There is a widespread perception in the Black community that public criticism of Black men constitutes collaborating with a racist society” (p. 65). Adopting a traditional model of support necessarily leads to the reproduction of social consciousness of the community’s struggles against oppression. Historically, the Black community has taken pride in a tradition of group cohesion; members negotiate and renegotiate their roles in maintaining practices for the good of the collective group (Freire, 1921/1993; Thelin, 2004).

**Black Greek-Letter Fraternities**

Harris, Palmer and Struve’s (2011) qualitative study provides insight on Black masculinity in the particular genre of the college campus. This study highlighted the complexities of male competition in relation to identity development (Harris, Palmer and Struve, 2011). Competition within organized sub-groups such as athletics (football, boxing, etc.) and Greek-letter organizations provide camaraderie and a source of group contagion influencing perceptions of self-worth, as well as views of how educational aspirations are perceived. It is important to note both athletes and members of Greek-letter fraternities through their popularity and work with community initiatives, are often recognized as role models, particularly for boys. Because many Black athletes are also members of Black Greek-Letter Fraternities (BGLFs), this study examined how masculinity was enacted within a BGLF.

The intersectionality of race and discrimination faced by American people of African descent (Crenshaw, 1989; Ross, Jr., 2000; Washington, 1992) prompted the formation of Black Greek-letter organizations (Jones, 2004; Parks, 2008; Ross, Jr., 2000) in American colleges and universities. Black college students fought for their rights to have fulfilling experiences in higher education and for the attainment of college degrees from predominantly White institutions (PWI), as well as from historically Black colleges and universities (HBCUs) (Jones, 2004; Ross, Jr., 2000). The establishment of the Greek-letter fraternity was a way for male students to combat social injustice both on and off college campuses, and to empower self (Jones, 2004; Washington, 1992). Beyond seeing the sociology of college and American politics, we must consider male Black student positioning within fraternal organizations. Jones explained how young, college men exercised their rights to protest the status quo as it related to social and political injustices:
Greek-letter fraternities in the United States were thus clearly born of a spirit of rebellion and agency to create an intellectual and social space for students. They were a response to restrictive societal conditions that were reinforced in colleges and universities. Indeed, both black and white Greeks came out of a tradition of opposition and were founded on similar principles of developing young men. (p. 28)

Transforming boys to men of distinction became the platform for BGLFs. While society practiced oppression and minimized the contributions of Black men, the fraternity taught self-respect, practiced intellectual growth, and emotional healing. Jones’ (2004) account illuminates the effects of oppression on the psychoanalytic identity of Black men:

Hence, most (not all) black men are victims to some extent. They are not victims in the felonious sense, but in the fact that they are akractic identities and bodies immersed in social currents with little ability to build life-worlds for the true ‘I’ outside the whims of the ‘other.’ (p. 110)

The psychological identity of fraternity members is shaped by the highly influential structure and development of individual members (Jones, 2004; Kimbrough, 2003). Given the magnitude of the influences individual members have in shaping the behaviors, convictions, and perceptions of Black fraternities, one might wonder: How does individual identity shape group identity? In this article, I will illustrate how Black men negotiate adult development by examining masculine development juxtaposed identity development. The reader will be introduced to identity formulation within the fraternity, educational systems, culturally accepted racism, and expressions of sexuality in regards to masculinity. Finally, the theoretical basis of the study will be revealed along with rational grounded in literature.

The environment within Black fraternities helps members understand self socially, as well as professionally. Challenging the suggestion that Black men could obtain hegemonic status, Hill Collins (2005b) stated, “Black men, by definition, cannot be real men, because they are Black” (p. 193). Hill Collins argued it unreasonable to expect Black men can be accepted into hegemonic masculinity because they would challenge the Whiteness associated with the accepted definition of masculinity. Literature supports the notion that most people accept heterosexual White men as the epitome of masculinity (Hill Collins, 2005b; Lusher & Robbins, 2010). Therefore, Black men are left to hold a subordinate position.

Identity

The hierarchal order of masculinity is based on power. Lusher and Robbins (2010) reported, “In essence, structural relations to power must be accompanied
by a belief system that sees one group as superior to another” (p. 23). Kolmar and Bartkowski (2005) discovered, “Power is one of the two primary divisions in social and economic life decided on the basis of gender, the division of labor is the other” (p. 52). Another study described power as an egotistical domination (Wittig, 1980). Jones’ (2004) account illustrated how the disproportionate distribution of power explains why oppression continues to have negative effects on identity development of Black men. Power is positively correlated to how Black men define self. Essentially, the more perceived power that one has, the higher value he places on himself as a man and vice versa.

Identity being an abstract phenomenon is difficult to explain. Its very nature is multi-dimensional. Therefore, definitions of identity vary depending on the context and social dynamics. Literature addresses many forms of identity including racial, cultural, and sexual, while taking for granted that the reader has a clear understanding of what identity actually entails (Cohen & Maurino, 2014; Corprew, Matthews, & Mitchell, 2014; Erikson, 1980; McAdams, 1985). This is an unjust assumption, especially when psychological scholars acknowledge the difficulties they have encountered when attempting to define identity in an unambiguous manner (Erikson, 1980; Klimstra, Luyckx, Hale, Frijns, van Lier, & Meeus 2010; McAdams, 1985).

What is identity? According to the Merriam-Webster on-line dictionary identity (n.d.) is defined as “the distinguishing character or personality of an individual;” furthermore, it is “the relation established by psychological identification.” Basically, identity is the very essence of those distinguishing characteristics that create individuality while simultaneously formulating a community identity by those who have the same personality traits, life experiences, and/or worldviews. Sameness then characterizes community identity inclusive of gendered, cultural and racial groups. A critical view of sameness suggests that it is continuously defined and redefined through social interactions framed through power structures.

Identity is neither predictable nor easily measured. However, researchers, in examining identity contexts, have adopted an understanding of how people develop an identity based on sameness (Erikson, 1980; Erikson, 1956; Klimstra, et al., 2010). Erikson (1980) discovered all life experiences follow a life plan that is either in the stage of overcoming the past or experiencing the present while attempting to fulfill a better standard of living in the future. Due to the amount of attention applied to what is hoped for the future, life in the present loses the ability to reach its fullest potential.

Within the context of personal reality, individual identity is formulated. Even within the development of identity, there is definitional obscurity and ambiguity as Mutanen (2010) pointed out:
Identity is the identity of something: there has to be something whose identity that identity is. When something occurs within some environment, it has some (natural and cultural) properties. For example, the identity of a nation can be understood within the framework of nations, or the identity of a profession can be understood within the framework of professions. Sometimes the framework is ambiguous, or it may change from time to time. The identity needs to have some basis which is both factual and ideal or conceptual. (p. 34)

Acquiring a specified framework demonstrates the significance and empowerment of self. Mutanen’s account makes it possible for identity to have meaning across a spectrum of disciplines. The individual or entity is empowered to select an identity from that spectrum based on a structural context (Mutanen, 2010).

Another emerging location for identity formulation is in the works of the intrapersonal relationship. While individuals have relationships with each other, Perry (2010) suggested the connection with one’s self is most critical in identity development. Identity is a relationship with self unlike that which is shared with another (Perry, 2010). Identity, according to Perry, “is a way we think of ourselves. The self is not a special kind of object, but the concept of self is a special kind of concept, one that we each have of ourselves as ourselves” (p. 229).

As I ponder this material, then, it seems to me that a significant part of adult identity is a reflection of both the individual’s power and powerlessness regarding individual childhood privileges and upbringing. As a child progresses and gains maturity through life stages, he develops his own unique adult identity. However, this adult identity is then challenged based on how much or how little power is possessed.

**Sexual Traditions**

Sexual traditions within the Black fraternity adhere to a culturally accepted stereotype. Essentially, it was the ideology that men should participate in sexual relations with females only (Hill Collins, 2005b; hooks, 2004). There was a consensus with the men in this study that homosexuality was not readily accepted. Regarding why the tradition was being followed, some cited Biblical reasons, but all cited discomfort in being in male spaces with those who may be predisposed towards developing sexual feelings for another male. In contrast to these findings, Hughey and Parks (2011, p. 30) asserted, “[Sex] role theory stresses that people are trapped in stereotypes and expectations that are maintained in the social realm but cannot explain why others engage in treating adherence and deviation from gendered norms with reward and punishment, respectively.”

In Scott Poulson-Bryant’s (2005) book *Hung*, historical as well as current theoretical lynchings were identified as direct results of phallic envy. White men were believed to take extreme measures in order to maintain self-honor:
I don’t want to be Mister Myth, because if I am, then I’m just a dick; the big dick in the locker room; the recipient of the real, live, guy-on-guy penis envy no one talks about; the guy white boys hate yet want to be; the brother other black dudes recognize as representative of their gender; the stone-cold stud with a dick of doom. . . . The sexual beast, the loin-engorged predator, the big-dicked destroyer not just of pure pristine white women but also of white men’s sense of themselves. That’s where black men have found themselves, culturally speaking, hung. (Poulson-Bryant, 2005, p. 7)

Possessing sexual power as indicated by a combination of the size of the penis and the women whom men find themselves in sexual relationships, is a prevalent masculine ideology within hegemonic, as well as Black masculinity. As White men relate to their Black counterparts, the fear of being sexually inferior was paramount.

Culturally, Black men are viewed as possessing physical strength (Harris, Palmer, & Struve, 2011), physical appeal (Henry, 2002), as well as being sexual prowess (Harris, et al., 2011; Henry, 2002). Such sexual stereotypes of Black men may be harmful to their social and psychological development. Psychologically, these men possibly will accept cultural expectations or place significant value on cultural acceptance of supposed sexual behaviors with potential to lead to negative outcomes such as violence against women. Within the Black community, there is widespread group emotional contagion that dictates acceptance of Black men possessing multiple sex partners, as long as the sex is heterosexual (Henry, 2002; Jones, 2004; Mahalik, Good, & Englar-Carlson, 2010; Morgan, 1999; Quarles, 1987; Reich, 2007).

Social expectations that males utilize physical strength as the primary tool to triumph over an adversary combined with expectancies of multiple sexual conquests are powerful concepts that may perhaps lead to impertinence towards women with whom they are sexually involved.

**Response to Homosexuality**

Within Black fraternities and with Black men in general, gay men are often black-balled due to lack of connectedness to heterosexual values and heterosexual men’s lack of understanding of an attraction to another man (hooks, 2004). Social norms suggest any behavior that might be associated with femininity or homosexuality is to be avoided. In view of the significance of personal attitudes toward gay men, permissive personal attitudes of men in this study were examined.

Black fraternity men are recognized leaders and role models in their communities and perspective colleges. In examining masculinity through the lens of Black feminist theory, I was able to understand the stories told by participants from a critical perspective. This allowed me to recognize the power structures within the organization as well as inter-group racism and other self-defeating behaviors.
Methodology

Research that fails to explore the understanding and negations of Black fraternity men, leave their enactments of masculinity to misinformed interpretations leading to racial and gender insensitivities, critiques, and stigmas. Therefore in order to provide a more complex understanding of Black fraternity men’s subjectivities and to provide space for their voices to be heard in light of historical and cultural ideologies, it is important to explore Black fraternity men’s lived experiences through a qualitative lens informed by Black feminist theory.

For this research, I interviewed seven men, all members of the same BGLF. This was to explore how they have experienced their masculinity and the changes they have made to accommodate their lives after graduating from college. I began the interviews with certain expectations of information that might be provided. Often, I received astonishing reports. However, I thought I might find behaviors that are unexpected by society today given the current hegemonic views of masculinity.

Narrative Inquiry

Narrative inquiry is the methodology which was utilized in this study. Literature uses the terms narrative, narrative inquiry, and narrative research interchangeably (Chase 2005; Creswell, 2007; Ellingson, 2011; Fox, 2008). Each description points to the fact that narrative is a story that begins with experiences lived and told by people (Bathmaker; 2010; Chase, 2005; Creswell, 2007).

Narrative is taking the personal stories of an individual for the sake of understanding the lived experiences and how those experiences mesh with the expectations and desires of the greater community (Bathmaker, 2010). Essentially, an examination of narratives tells how private concerns are linked with public issues. Due to the subjective nature of narratives, there is neither a single truth nor one way of interpreting information. Notions of truth are connected with re-storying.

Black Feminist Theory

I chose Black feminism because in this study, it was believed that participants would make meaning of the world based on their own individual experiences. A major tenet of Black feminist theory was embedded in stories being told in the voice of the individual narrator (Thallam, 2013). This theory connects to the methodology of narrative inquiry which also consists of gathered stories represented in the voice of participants (Birchall, 2014).

Other tenets include language of liberation, actual practice of liberation, and unity of the movement (Davis, 1981; Hill Collins, 1991, 2005a, 2011; hooks, 1984/2000). Black feminism addresses oppression that is unique to race relations between Black oppressed and White oppressors (Hill Collins, 2011; Young,
Another major tenet with Black feminists is the fight against injustice based on intersectionalities of race, class and gender.

Each tenet of Black feminism directly relates to how Black fraternity men develop an identity within the construct of masculinity. As a result of the deep-seeded oppression experienced by being Black in America, a solidarity that transcends gender has been established within the community. Black masculinity has been down-trodden by societal constructs, including education, and hegemonic masculinity.

Participants
Participants included 7 members (Sebastian, Joe, Shaun, Thomas, Jonathan, Kevin, and PJ— all pseudonyms) of Chi Omega Sigma, Fraternity, Inc. (pseudonym). Each male partook in semi-structured interviews and provided life stories following the line of masculinity from birth to present. By examining masculinity through the lens of Black feminist theory (Hill Collins, 2011; Young, 2000), the researcher was able to understand participants’ stories from a critical perspective. This interaction revealed power structures within the fraternity, inter-group racism, and influences of outside entities such as family dynamics.

Narrative inquiry methodology was used to gather stories. Following a tenet for social justice of the “oppressed,” Creative Analytic Practice (CAP), also referred to as the Seventh Moment, allowed for the utilization of creative forms of presentations of data (Denzin, 2001). In order to maintain authenticity, participant voices were recorded without grammatical corrections. Italics were utilized as distinguishing tools of participant voices.

Participant Voices
Sebastian was a 26 year old retention counselor who discussed his understanding of man code characterized by man laws:

*Man laws are unwritten rules to say what men should and should not do. So a man law might be like: a man should never eat a pickle in public, or a man should never walk under an umbrella if it’s only sprinkling outside, or a man should never take a bubble bath. A man should never sit in a seat directly next to another man in a movie. Or just a bunch of societal things that men traditionally don’t do. Otherwise, if you are a man you are a gay one. In the eye of heterosexual men who conform to this completely masculine, macho, hyper-masculine identity, think to them if you are gay then you are less than a man. Fraternities are open to everybody and we don’t discriminate on this because that’s illegal. On the other hand, if most chapters could prevent it, they would.*
Shaun, a professional chef, had first-hand experience in negotiating his feelings towards a homosexual man within his personal circle. The following excerpt from Shaun’s interviews highlights his discomfort after learning of his biological brother’s sexual orientation. He spoke about his experience with his biological brother’s sexual identification and how he negotiated his own manhood. Included are my observations/analyses made during transcribing in brackets.

There were always fine women wanting to talk to him but he would never, {chuckle} he would never give them any attention. But he would always like to hang out with the guys. So we knew he was weird. But we didn’t know he was that weird. So that was like a shock, you know. I didn’t talk to him for a while because I couldn’t understand. You know. You know you hear all the stuff about gay people, you know and… like {emphasis} my brother? We did this; you know we took baths together you know. You know when you are little your mom used to bathe y’all in the tub? {chuckle} It’s like wow. Like I don’t even know what to think…. Everybody took baths together. We didn’t know he was gay. {chuckle} I don’t know if he was checking me out or us out or anything. It is weird to say, but I just have to wonder about things like that. Now I know he is that way. I just don’t know if you knew back then.

The prevailing thought was fear—fear of being the object of a gay man’s affection (hooks, 2004). hooks indicated Black parents; more often mothers make decisions to train Black boys to avoid any such association with homosexuality. Mothers result to physical abuse of the son because she “fears that her son will be too soft” (hooks, 2004, p. 87). This apprehension was shared throughout the interviews with each man in this study. In an effort to curb the likelihood of this occurring, men in the fraternity took certain measures believed to be preventative against accepting a gay man as a member of the fraternity.

Technically, we couldn’t ask that question. But that was part of the vetting process. Making sure you talking to somebody. Some female who can vouch for the fact that yeah you ain’t gay. So no, it [promiscuity] was encouraged. Matter of fact to get in. Yeah, You had to mess with somebody. And we had to know it. I mean you used the word dating. Dating is a loose term in college {chuckle}. Hanging out with, sexual partners. I mean dating is cool, but actually, relationships were not encouraged when you first came in. As a matter of fact, generally, the older brothers would pull the one that are coming in and got a level head and in a relationship, and go ahead and tell them, “You know you finna lose that relationship, right? Sorry, it’s part of it.”(Joe)

It was quite apparent that men in this study “linked promiscuity to assumptions of heterosexuality” (Hill Collins, 2005b, p. 105). A confounding issue is
that a sub-set of people and institutions within the Black community support this philosophy further reinforcing the convergent linkage within group contagion. In a recent study, it was discussed that psychologists are now conducting studies to examine how those in authority, such as parents, schools, community institutions and society can be trained to play roles in fostering positive and successful thought patterns in young Black men (DeAngelis, 2014). Recognition of positive socialization has been a focal point for President Obama’s “My Brother’s Keeper.” DeAngelis carries us forward into the purpose of this national initiative in describing how it aims to change negative perceptions fostered by society, the Black community in particular, and self-perception of individual male Blacks.

**Gender and Sexuality**

Understanding enactments of gender and sexuality provides understanding of what it means to be a male sexual being. As the men shared their stories, a narrative about the role of Black men and how both men and women perceive sexuality emerged. The narrative was not wholly congruent with the actual experiences of all men in this study.

In an effort to unravel the complexities underlying their definitions and experiences, the voices of the men in the study were organized into three categories: attraction to the opposite sex, female professions/positions, and gender and sexual customs.

**Attraction to the Opposite Sex**

Through these men’s definitions of beauty it became obvious that physical attraction must be present prior to a pursuit of a sexual or intimate relationship (Hill Collins, 1991, 2005b). However, if the object of the attraction failed to possess substantive evidence of the ability to be intellectually stimulating and to maintain the male’s attention, the result would lead to a demise of the relationship regardless of beauty or sex.

I will tell you about this one. This is actually more funny than anything. A young lady was gorgeous. I mean drop dead gorgeous. We as men often define drop dead gorgeous as, ‘do other men stop and look at her? And do they want her?’ You know kind of makes you feel like you the man. So this was the one everybody was like “I want her.” I was like, okay I’m finna go pick her up. So we did. But this was the dumbest girl I have ever talked to in my life. Would talk for two hours and it might be about Sesame Street and why is Big Bird tall and yellow. I am like are you serious? {breathy chuckle} I mean are we, have you really been talking for two hours about Big Bird and why he tall and yellow? Your favorite color is green; why didn’t they make him green? I mean I dated her for about 3 months thinking that okay we
will get past this. Oh, no! That was the conversations. She would talk for two hours and would sit there with this dumb look on my face. Ok, hopefully the [laughing through words] sex was going to be worth it. [laughing] For three months. Then it was ok, it ain’t worth it. Nothing is [laughing through words] worth it. (Joe)

Each participant favored various physical features of females that captured his attention. However, the consensus was that the female, regardless of attractiveness, must possess the ability to also be mentally stimulating. Take Shaun for example:

Big eyes and big lips… If she got some pretty eyes and some nice lips, that gets my attention. To keep my attention, you have to stimulate my mind. I don’t want you to be talking about Love and Hip Hop. You have to talk about something deep. Something spiritual, the stars or some type of history. Something, because if you don’t have that, sex doesn’t mean anything if you can’t keep my mind. (Shaun)

Another participant outlined how his views of feminine beauty had significant bearings on how other men defined the same female’s beauty.

I mean look nice is… If you are in a room full of guys or if you going somewhere like people look or whatever and be like dang she looks good. (PJ)

Understanding how other men view their masculinity played vital roles in the development of individual masculinity. Meeting the approval of other men was a prevailing viewpoint throughout interviews, especially regarding issues of gender and sexuality. Respondents spoke about receiving affirmation for their own enactments of sexuality from other men. The men followed through with these behaviors to ensure adherence to previously established inter-group emotional interpretations, as defined by Elfenbein’s (2014) convergent linkage.

Female Professions/Positions
The idea of respect for females was linked directly to the work that one has produced, or their merits in their chosen fields. Participants seemed to make no distinctions between culturally acceptable and unacceptable fields as evidenced by discussions of respect for professors, mothers, and groupies.

My algebra teacher, Ms. Allen. She was more than just a teacher. She was very caring to where she cared about personal as well as your education. She would sit down and talk. (Jody)

Joe added:

The ones I respect, the ones that are not classified as the groupie [laugh]. (Joe)
Joe expressed ambiguous sentiments regarding groupies, which was common among the men in this study. Groupies were the women who would “hang out with” the fraternity men, and have “sex, the whole nine.” Essentially, they would perform various acts based on “whatever was requested” or “whatever keeps the brothers entertained.” (Joe) While on one hand they were disdained due to the nature of their very existence, on the other hand they were respected as a result of what they would do for the men in the fraternity.

Although I did have respect for some of our groupies. They were more on time than the brothers were [throaty chuckle]. I could depend on them being at the party or community service event [chuckle through words] on time [chuckle]. They would even be wearing our colors. (Joe)

As a result of their abilities to adequately please the fraternity brothers, groupies won a sense of pseudo-respect. On the surface, the respect that the men in the study speak of appears to be generated through fraudulent acts and a so-called acceptance of these women reduced to simply a mockery. However, a careful analysis of the situation reveals a group of people who have needs and another willingly, and to the best of their abilities, fulfilling those needs regardless of psychological, mental and perhaps physical penalties or abuse.

The women classified as groupies volunteered services. The consensus was that the men understood the reason behind this loyalty. These men believed the women to be motivated by their erroneous fantasies that they would secure the affection of the fraternity brothers, while others had desires to have smooth transitions into sororities. The reactions to female beliefs were based on “an assumption that people choose to maintain existing customs” (Hughey & Parks, 2011, p. 30).

Don’t nobody, nobody wants to marry a woman that’s having relations with everybody. (Shaun)

In actuality the men had no desire for a commitment with these women and neither did the females in sororities. Shaun continued:

Ones that think that if they hang around you they will be able to get into the sorority that they want to get into. They think that it’s easier if they are around all the time that maybe the sororities will be looking at them. But it’s actually the
other way around. Most {chuckle} sororities look at women that hang around fraternity guys as hoes and they don't want them part of their organization.

While most of the men in the study failed to qualify interactions with groupies as being abusive, they readily pointed out similar situations as a form of abuse towards women.

They disrespect themselves when they are disrespected by a lot of the men. They will be going to party in a club, in a bar, whatever. The guys have one thing on their minds, one intention. I think society is trying to make it as far as men are superior to women. And a lot of men fall into women are beneath men. Society makes it seem like women are beneath men. Men are up here. I'm not saying that I fall into that. (Thomas)

Jonathan, however, acknowledging his role in the realm of showing women respect stated:

I would think that a woman that can take control, I can respect that. I can respect that. I think that I have always respected that. And I think just viewing just my history within itself, women who weren't able to take control or women who weren't able to show some level of power, I basically ran over, and probably abused for lack of a better word. (Jonathan)

Overall, the men in the study sited being both attracted to and respectful of women who exercised a level of control both over herself and her environment. However, those who failed to display sufficient self-respect, self-control, and self-love were breeding grounds for abuse.

Gender and Sexual Customs

Gender roles. Gendered enactments of masculinity were clearly illustrated by participants as the male's expression of power and authority. Kevin discussed how he viewed his role as a male in various aspects of his life including work, church and home. During the interviews each participant was asked to define masculinity. The general consensus was that a man is responsible and takes care of his family. Responsible was defined as having a religious affiliation with God, being a leader in the community, working a steady job, and providing money for self and family in order to finance items including food, clothes, rent/mortgage, and gifts. In the final interview, participants brought artifacts that represented their views of masculinity. As each participant told me about his artifact, I came to understand his explanation of what masculinity meant to him.
Invoking creative analytic practice (CAP), as the researcher, I represented collected data creatively (Denzin, 2001). I chose poetic expressions in order to display analytical views of how Kevin, a 37-year-old logistics manager, and Jonathan, a 33-year-old college administrator understood self as positioned within Black masculinity. The following found slam poem presents data utilizing the words of Kevin (italicized) taken directly from the interview transcripts and journal entries of the researcher.

**Foundation Of The Bass**

As a man, I am *the rhythm that keeps everything flowing*

*The bass part of the music that is what keeps things going*

*The man, he has a strong foundation in what he say*

*You know, disciplined in the way*

*Men represent the foundation of the family*

*Just as the bass guitar is like the foundation or the main part musically*

*You’re under the roof in my house, resonates like a cymbal in the ear*

*Set the foundation when they are children, when they’re young, ‘I make the rules here’*

*Not necessarily just the family, it can be on your job, in church, just various places*

*Just like anything that you are dealing with people on a daily basis*

*Although the rules weren’t always received but once they saw these rules follow implementation*

*Step up and take the lead, strong and standing firm, represent that strong, that firm foundation*

*An ideal man has to know how to survive*

*There is a definite responsibility of being the sole one to provide*

*In this economy knowing how to survive and make it today from day to day*
I grew up hearing the White man is not gonna let me break away

A White guy before I came in management would talk to me any type of way

All I had to do was just stand my ground and realize who I was and things turned back around

I learned from the situations that I go through that help me overcome whatever may come down

The church, it teaches me about the Bible; it basically gives the foundation of how we should be

You are a man when you make up your mind that it’s time to take responsibility

Kevin equated his masculinity to the bass guitar (see Figure 1.0) describing the bass as the primary underpinning behind all music. In like manner, he indicated that his position in life allows him to be the foundation at home, work, and church. His wood-grained guitar had 6 strings. This followed the major principals he discussed regarding masculinity: firmly standing on principles, responsibility, respect, religion, discipline, and appearance. According to Kevin, his form of masculinity followed traditional gender-specific roles of possessing and displaying power in all aspects of his life. Additionally, responsibility resonated throughout researcher interactions with Kevin. He defined his own masculinity as his possessing a desire to take

Figure 2. Bible artifact of masculinity

Figure 3. Helmet artifact of masculinity
care of his family and himself. He believed this could be accomplished by his taking responsibility on his job and with his roles within his church.

SEXUAL CUSTOMS. Jonathan chose two seemingly contradictory items to represent his masculinity, one spiritual and the other carnal. The first item was a Bible (see Figure 2.0). He indicated that a man is ultimately defined by characteristics God has identified as masculine within the Holy Bible. Specifically, a man is “I say, a leader, a protector, a provider.” Jonathan’s beliefs were that the Bible prescribes that a man is a leader, especially within his own family. While Jonathan understood himself to be masculine, he indicated there is room for growth. “I think there are still a lot of aspects of my life that are not completely aligned” with the Biblical definition of what a man should be.

In addition to the Bible, Jonathan also selected a sexualized item; a motorcycle helmet which depicted a scantily clothed female (see Figure 3.0). The helmet was covered with detailed drawings in shades of black and white. In a straight line down the center, in Mohawk formation, were varying depictions of men’s heads. In contrast to the monotony of the shades of black and white was a boldly colored female on each side of the helmet. The woman had white skin and bright blue, waist-length silky hair. Her eyes were the same bright blue as her hair. On her legs were thigh-high, blood-red boots. She wore a blood-red string bikini bottom that was high on her thighs. She also had a matching bikini top. Bare DD breasts protruded through the bikini top. Red skulls with yellow teeth covered her nipples. Between her blue hair and white skin was a blood-red headband with a grey skull in the center. Her red lips were curved into a closed-mouth smile. In her matching red, gloved, left hand she held three lifeless male heads by the hair.

Jonathan explained, “the name of the actual helmet is ‘Head Hunter.’” The sexual depiction of the design is what Jonathan considered “an aspect of being masculine.” Men have sex. Not just sex, but men have sex with women. Essentially, “from that first experience with your girlfriend” then “I started branching out, seeing multiple girls even in terms of sexual relationships.” According to Jonathan, “Sex, your sexual encounters defined manhood.”

Head Hunter

I think that a woman that can take control, I can respect
Someone who was easily controlled or ran over, I would neglect
A sexual presence of women, as a man I can appreciate
Sexuality is really only one way
A feminine man may view himself as this woman
That in itself was a clear cut indication that this wasn’t a man, in my opinion
It’s upsetting to see someone acting gay

Especially, if you are representing the same organization, putting the fraternity on display

While they are in your fraternity colors or representing your letters or something like that

It’s troubling to see that because I don’t understand a gay man. Damn a gay frat?

They basically talked about us, clowned us, we heard jokes

A lot of brothers just aren’t acceptable or tolerant of that behavior, you know

A man with a woman I can respect

If dude turned out to be gay, I will neglect

Sexual traditions within the Black fraternity adhere to a culturally accepted stereotype. Essentially, it was the ideology that men should participate in sexual relations with females only (Davis, 1981; Hill Collins, 2005b; hooks, 2004; Weedon, 1987). There was a consensus with the men in this study that homosexuality was not readily accepted. Regarding why the tradition was being followed, some cited Biblical reasons, and all cited discomfort in being in male spaces with those who may be predisposed towards developing sexual feelings for another male. In contrast to these findings, Hughey and Parks (2011, p. 30) asserted, “[Sex] role theory stresses that people are trapped in stereotypes and expectations that are maintained in the social realm but cannot explain why others engage in treating adherence and deviation from gendered norms with reward and punishment, respectively.”

Community Initiatives

President Barack Obama’s My Brother’s Keeper, Big Brothers Big Sisters of America, and 100 Black Men of America, Inc., are among a significant number of community initiatives to reverse the challenges faced by boys and young men of color. Without such positive influences, many boys and young men are left to navigate life’s obstacles alone. According to research, Black male role models are inherently nonexistent. According to findings in this research, the men looked to their peers for an “at-a-boy” approval rating of acceptable behaviors.

By epidemic measures, Black young men, adolescents, and boys are left to wrestle with developing a masculine identity without the aid of neither a biological father nor a suitable father figure. Moreover, “the traditionally very close link between marriage and childbearing has weakened, with corresponding increases in the proportion of children born out-of-wedlock, either in non-marital cohabitation or outside of a union altogether” (Tanfer, 2014, Appendix C). In order to
foster productivity and positive sexual socialization, the community must take a stand. The African Proverb, *It takes a village to raise a child*, then resonates true, particularly for those with limited personal resources to Black masculinity. Learning how to be ‘male,’ then, means learning how to abide by specific codes, yet it is an act that must be asserted over and over again to oneself, to one’s peers, and, most importantly, to society.

**Conclusion**

Accountability for one’s actions is a prevailing foundation in how masculinity has been defined. Men of color in this study indicated that as a man, regardless of positive contributions to society or personal failures of performances, they understand individual roles of showing responsibility for family, community, and personal development. Participants’ views indicate masculinity is multifaceted and is a compromise of powers. Power negotiations occur with the dominant culture, peers, supporting agencies, and self. Ervo and Johansson (2003) were in agreement, indicating masculinity is an ever-evolving phenomenon:

> The concept of masculinity is analyzed in a variety of ways—as forms of behavior, as specific ethics, codes and historical traits. Common to most of the authors is the belief that gender is socially constructed and negotiated and that we need to maintain a close relationship between gender theory and case studies in order to understand and demonstrate the dynamic and contradictory nature of gender. (p. 2)

One distinguishing feature of Black masculinity is the insistence that it is constructed juxtaposed self-identity (Corprew, Matthews, & Mitchell, 2014; Jones, 2004). Creating an identity for self in the midst of societal, social, and political unrest poses challenges for Black men. Masculinity is multidimensional especially for Black men who labor to create a self-identity within a society that is often hostile and combative. A changed consciousness of individuals is an ingredient for social change in American society. This is especially true on college campuses, within professional athletics, and community initiatives. Awareness of social, psycho-social, and interpersonal challenges of Black men can be beneficial to institutions, college administrators, and professional boards of directors in developing gender-specific programming and creating inclusive curriculum for sexual socialization purposes.

Although such programming would be beneficial in the attraction and improved interpersonal activities of male Blacks, the institution should first create an honest assessment of its motivation. Essentially, important questions for administration to address are: Do we really want to improve interpersonal activities of male Blacks? If so, what are the goals? What are we willing to give up in ac-
complishing these goals? How much and how long are we willing to support such programming? Finally, what are the measurable outcomes?

There have been advances in understanding masculinity (Reed, 2014; Blanco & Robinett, 2014). However, there continues to be room for future studies in the investigation of Black masculinity and the surrounding political and social implications for Black men in approaching hegemonic masculinity within areas of sexual socialization. Future studies include quantitative and mixed method research through the lens of feminist theory, studies with female victims of domestic violence, and an analysis of domestic violence incidents of high profile Black athletes in comparison to their White counterparts. Due to the complexity of masculinity there are ample opportunities for new social order and international developments.

Dr. Pepper E. Totten received a Bachelor of Arts degree in communications as a Cum Laude honoree, Master of Science in rehabilitation counseling and gained an Educational Doctorate in Higher and Adult Education each from the University of Memphis. In 2013, she became the first graduate to receive the prestigious, Graduate Certificate in Qualitative Research in Education from The University of Memphis. In addition to her educational accolades, she has made significant strides as an entrepreneur, author, and researcher. Her research interests are centered on social justice, gender, race, and life-long learning. She has led symposiums at the Critical Race Studies in Education Association Conference and Memphis in May Student Affairs Conference. Dr. Totten has the remarkable ability to connect with people in diverse settings and is a champion at utilizing her counseling skills in assisting individuals in the navigation of academic, personal, and professional experiences. In this post-modern time when many students are internally fragmented, unaware, and lack subjectivity, Dr. Totten finds it of utmost importance to teach with students, rather than to teach at them. Serving as adjunct instructor at Mid-South Community College, adjunct instructor at the University of Memphis, and as a Christian educator she has assisted learners to recognize their beliefs as choices among numerous viewpoints and be agents of knowledge construction rather than receptacles of tradition. Dr. Totten aspires to continue helping learners meet their educational and career goals through student-centered approaches. She is committed to educational excellence. Her personal philosophy can be summed up in the words of the great Aristotle: “We are what we repeatedly do. Excellence, therefore, is not an act, but a habit.”

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Interactive Notebook
Arts-based Approach to Physics Instruction

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Abstract
In this paper, we present the role of arts-based educational research (ABER) as a paradigm to explore in-depth experiences of a teacher with interactive notebooks to improve physics instruction. We advocate for Interactive notebook as an arts-based technique to teach physics to students of varying interests and abilities. We provide justification for ABER as the analytical tool and the way to represent findings. The first section of the paper explains the theoretical and the substantial frameworks. The following section describes why and how arts-based educational research (poetry and sculpting) was used to analyze and represent data. The final part of the paper focuses on findings and their implications for present day science education.

Keywords: Interactive Notebook, ABER, Physics Instruction, Sculpting, Multiple Intelligences, Interpretivism, Case Study

The purpose of the paper is to present the role of arts-based educational research (ABER) as a paradigm to explore in-depth the experiences of a high school teacher with interactive notebooks to improve physics instruction. Interactive notebooks are designed around the theory of multiple intelligences and the framework of universal design for learning. An interactive notebook is a spiral...
notebook that is divided into right hand side and the left hand side. The right hand side is used for the teacher-directed activities, which include notes, lectures, videos or any other primary or secondary source. The left hand side is for students to capture the teacher-directed information on the right hand side, process it, and express it through student-directed output in creative ways using Venn diagrams, concept maps, graphic organizers, diagrams, poems, or songs (Endacott, 2007; Wist, 2006). The left-side page of the notebook is where the students travel beyond the regular classroom instruction delivered to them and allow the lesson to penetrate for better understanding (Wist, 2006).

The specific questions addressed are:

1. How can arts-based analysis inform deep understanding of the teacher’s experiences with using interactive notebooks?

2. How can arts-based research represent the complexity in the teacher’s negotiation of interactive notebooks to improve physics instruction?

**Theoretical Framework**

This qualitative study is informed by interpretivism as the epistemological framework and Universal Design for Learning (Howard, 2004) along with Gardner’s (1993) theory of multiple intelligences as the substantive frameworks. Interpretivists assume that there are multiple truths that are constructed based on individuals’ understanding of the world (Crotty, 1998/2004). The epistemological belief on which interpretivism rests is that reality is socially constructed, complex and ever changing (Glesne, 2011). This means that a possibility for different interpretations of the same phenomena exists. Interpretivism has its roots in the understanding and explanation of human and social reality developed by Max Weber (1864-1920). During an era where natural sciences completely focused on the causality, social sciences focused on understanding of phenomena (Crotty, 1998/2004). But, for Weber (as cited in Crotty, 1998/2004), when dealing with human affairs, causation comes through an interpretive understanding of the social action. He strongly argued that the social inquiry depends upon the meanings and values of the person acting. Interpretivists assume that the person cannot be separated from the reality because reality is constructed based on individual interpretation and is subjective (Weber, 2004). According to Schwandt (1998), particular people, in particular places, at particular times, interpret and make meaning of various events. These events are distinct and cannot be generalized (Mack, 2010).

Therefore, for interpretivists, knowledge is gained through strategies that reflect the differences between people and the objects of natural sciences and
therefore requires the social scientist to concentrate on the subjective meaning of the social action (Mack, 2010). Mack further asserts that knowledge is gained through personal experience, inductively from a particular situation and therefore cannot be reduced to simplistic interpretation. According to Schwandt (1998), inquirers must reveal the process of meaning making and clarify what and how the meanings are personified in the language and actions of the social actors. Interpretivists subscribe to the notion that the researcher’s subjectivity of a phenomenon conforms to the meaning assigned to the phenomenon through their lived experience of it (Weber, 2004).

Unlike positivists, who believe that objects they study have qualities that exist independent of the researcher, interpretivists suppose that the qualities that researchers ascribe to the objects are socially constructed based on their interactions with the world around them (Weber, 2004). This understanding of meaning making denotes a relationship between conscious subjects and their objects (Crotty, 1998/2004). Husserl (1962) defends this argument by saying that the world cannot exist independently of the mind because humans are beings in the world, they cannot be described apart from their world as their world cannot be described apart from them.

Aligned with interpretivism, the interactive notebook is designed around the theory of multiple intelligences. Gardner (1993) defined intelligence as a set of abilities, talents or mental skills, which all individuals possess to some extent, but differ in the degree of skill and in nature of their combination. He identified eight different intelligences that include linguistic, musical, bodily-kinesthetic, logical-mathematical, spatial, interpersonal, intrapersonal and naturalistic intelligence. This theory provides an understanding of the brain’s complexity explaining why different students learn differently based on their learning styles (Stickel, 2005).

Coupled with multiple intelligences, Universal design for learning (UDL) is used as a supplementary lens for this study. Universal design for learning is a framework that emphasizes on developing flexible curricula that provide multiple pathways to engage students’ interests thereby allowing them to access content in different ways and express their understanding in various forms (Howard, 2004). UDL allows teachers a multidimensional view of their students as learners, thus providing them unique insights into assessing their knowledge, interest, and understanding.

Students come into a learning environment with varying experiences and abilities and therefore construct different meanings of the information delivered by the teacher in the classroom (Redish, 1994). These meanings undergo constant transformation due to the interactions between students, teacher, and the curriculum. Therefore, for the purpose of this study, interpretivism becomes the apt lens to look at how knowledge is co-constructed by the students and the teacher. The theory of multiple intelligences and the framework of UDL help to understand
the different ways in which teachers design instruction and deliver information that is adaptable for students with differing abilities and learning styles.

**Methodology**

Since the study explores in depth the experiences of an individual teacher with interactive notebooks in his physics class, it can be referred to as case study (Glesne, 2011). Creswell (2007) defines case study research as a “study of an issue explored through one or more cases with in a bounded system” (p. 73). In a case study, the emphasis is on understanding the complexity within the case, the uniqueness of it, and its connections to the social context of which it is a part (Yin, 2006). The study focused on the experiences of Bill Jacobs, a physics teacher from an inner city high school in South Texas. In order to gain a better understanding of the interactive notebook, Bill was purposefully selected because Patton (2002) explains that “The logic and power of purposeful sampling derive from the emphasis on in-depth understanding” (p. 46). Bill started working at this school in 2009. He took over the classes from another teacher through the mid-year. Since then, he has been using interactive notebooks to teach physics and had multitude of experiences to share.

Since good case studies benefit from having multiple sources of evidence (Yin, 2006) that can contribute to the trustworthiness and authenticity of the research work (Glesne, 2011), the data collection methods for this case study included five open-ended informal semi-structured interviews, two object-elicitation interviews, document analysis, and participant observations in the form of field notes. The documents included samples of students’ and teacher’s interactive notebooks, assignments designed by the teacher, grading rubrics for the notebooks, and other handouts provided by the teacher to facilitate the set up and use of the notebook. These data collection measures generated approximately 210 pages of raw data.

Initially the evidence was triangulated using inductive analysis during which the data were coded, categorized, and themes were identified. Upon realizing that the participant’s experiences were so complexly interwoven, the isolated themes identified through inductive analysis did not offer an accurate picture of Bill’s challenges in implementing the notebook. I decided to use Arts-based Educational Research (ABER) for further analysis of the data (Barone & Eisner, 2012) because it potentially creates a visual reality of the unnoticed along with the obvious reality through images (Smithbell, 2010). Arts-based Educational Research suggests new ways of viewing educational phenomena by using performing and visual arts to understand and construct meaning of human experiences (Barone

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1. The first author in this study speaks in first person, as being the primary researcher. The second author in this study was the methodological guide and mentor for the first author assisting with design, analysis, and representation of findings.
& Eisner, 2012); Denzin & Lincoln, 2008). While arts-based inquirers construct open hermeneutic texts that can create spaces for multiple interpretations by diverse audience (Finley, 2003), Eisner and Barone (2006) stress the point that the arts-based educational research seeks for the number and quality of questions that the work raises, more so than the conclusions that readers come to believe. Specifically, we employed Cahnmann’s (2006) idea of scholARTistry, a process of combining tools from literacy, visual, and performing arts with the tools used by educators and social scientists to explore human conditions. Cahnmann (2006) discusses scholARTistry as an approach to arts-based research where attention is paid to the scholarly value of the art and the artistic value of the scholarship. This intersected approach can be used in various genres of arts-based research, including poetry and ethnodrama (Bhattacharya, 2013, 2014).

**Noticing the Unnoticed: Poetry Uncovers New Reality**

In this section, we detail our meandering paths in arts-based research that were recursive in knowledge and meaning construction, which provided critical insights into the shared learning experiences of the teacher and the students in a high school physics classroom. First, being unsatisfied with the thematic findings, we decided to use poetry as an analytical tool. Even though poetry is a risky business, we dared to approach data analysis using poetry because it can give language to the unsayable (Cahnmann, 2006). The poem was created using verbatim phrases from interviews with Bill and information in field notes from observation. Some parts were aesthetically modified where necessary for clarity or connection.

*The adventure…just began…*

Sting-chill of winter matt,
With sweat-drenched palms, I stood.
Young faces, probing looks,
Impossible to escape,
Inquiring “Who are you?”
“I am Bill, new physics teacher”.
Erupted the dormant volcano,
Firing questions all over,
“Where are you from?”
“What brought you here?”
“For how long?”
Day never seemed to end.

Lesson plans, hall duties, pep rallies,
New rules, new roles, new traditions.
Days ending after sunset,
Mornings starting before dawn.
Interactive notebooks so called,
“The organized chaos perfected”, they said,
If only I knew how to use.
Blind leading the blind,
Empty spirals lined.
Lost, home escaped me;
Temporarily saved came the weekend.

_The adventure...just began..._

“Take out your Interactive notebooks.”
“What are they?” laughter broke silence.
Standing tall, “Take them out”, authority echoed.
Notebooks emerged in slow motion,
Like frame by frame images,
Taken from a high-speed camera.
No table of contents, no page numbers,
No right side, no left side.
Weeping of misuse and carelessness,
They fell apart, filling the trash.
Sinking into the teacher’s chair,
Are notebooks even worth it?
AVID training I went,
Teased with Interactive Notebooks again,
Discouraged, “Oh no, not again.”
I use them and they work,
Assuring were the experienced.
Ideas, strategies, tips, support,
New plan of attack.
“Perhaps I can do this”.

Next class shaken by change,
“Make them your own”,
Sports, dance, music, art, had their own place,
Bedazzling notebook,
“This is my own”,
“I feel smarter than my dad”.
Right side delegates content,
Left, freedom of thought.
It is no more a notebook.
Customized textbook,
Student authored,
Personal diary of understanding.

Chopping, mixing, building,
Engineers brainstorming.
Eyes glued to notebooks,
Scientists experimenting.
Drawing, coloring, cutting,
Artists creating.
No recalling or recognizing,
Only analyzing and synthesizing,
Learning is not boring.
Curious, like traveling,
To the Bermuda triangle,
Possibility of getting lost,
New questions, new journeys,
New routes to discover.

*The adventure…has begun...*

Reflecting on the poem, it became salient that the poem was not describing just Bill’s journey, but was highlighting students’ journeys, parallel paths with him at all times. The poem was constructed with a primary prompt of, “what is the emotional truth here?” This emotional truth in the participant’s experiences with using interactive notebooks was identified only through this poem. As a high school physics teacher, the first author has been using interactive notebooks for the past four years with an understanding that the notebook was a complete transfer of power from teacher to students. It was pleasantly surprising to notice that the interactive notebook was a *delicate balance of power* between the teacher and the student. After closely connecting with the poem and with deeper reflection through free writing, a new question became transparent. Why was not Bill successful with the notebooks initially? The poem therefore worked as a tool for analytic insight and inquiry, leading to further questions. It was evident to us that what we knew from our thematic narrative was inadequate and what we discovered from our poetic inquiry, was also inadequate, although it allowed us to inquire into the data in ways that we did not while conducting the thematic inquiry. We chose to dig deeper into our process of inquiry.

**In the Pursuit of Hidden Treasure: Sculpting to the Rescue**

We were fortunate to have a professional sculpting artist and an arts educator in our Advanced Data Analysis in Qualitative Research class. He took us to his studio and taught us the fundamentals of sculpting. We were given hands-on training and the opportunity to visit the studio and work with him individually outside the class. Additionally, during class he worked with us as a group and walked around to work with us individually, helping us with our sculpture. And because he was also part of the class, we had access to him during a period of 4 months for assistance with further fine-tuning of our work. This was indeed an unexpected territory for most of us but being able to work with someone with professional knowledge and experience in arts education became a critical turning point in this inquiry, and somewhat of fortunate serendipity.

From the thematic analysis and poetic inquiry, we were faced with new questions. We explored sculpting as a way to find answers to the questions. The first author was the key sculptor with feedback and debriefing from the second author. Next, the first author explains her experience with sculpting.

To find missing answers, I resorted to sculpting in order to give a visual effect to the data to see if it had any other insights to offer because Barry (1996) noticed that, while the words mean what they mean, drawings, paintings, sculptures, and
poems can seldom allow unambiguous interpretation. I decided to make the notebook as a balance on a pedestal of knowledge contributed by both the teacher and the student in various ways.

While students had the control of how they learned and utilized their freedom within the boundaries, the teacher regulated what the students learned, the content. The structure of the notebook provided a happy medium for both teacher and student to exercise their autonomy in their own spaces, the right-hand side and the left-hand side. The top part of the sculpture (see Figure 1) reveals an open book with the left-hand side representing the student’s space and the right-hand side of the notebook representing the teacher’s space contributing equally to the pedestal of knowledge at the bottom that supports the entire book. The pedestal of knowledge is built from the rich and varied experiences that students and teacher bring into the classroom. The sculpture represented the shared responsibility of the teacher and the student for the success of the notebook as an instructional tool. The pedestal of knowledge on which the notebook rested was co-constructed by the teachers and the students. The sculpture offered a visual demonstration of the intellectual distance the students and teachers would have to travel to come to a middle ground of understanding while maintaining balance. The visual representation of this distance explained why some students and teachers often give up on using the notebooks because that intellectual distance is not always easy to follow, nor is there a predetermined path, nor is there a way of traveling the path that can yield the same successful result each time for each student and teacher pairings.

However, there was still an issue of balance for the sculptured book to stay in place. It needed to be fixed permanently to the base in order for it to stabilize. Yet, now the balanced, stabilized piece still seemed to call for something more. Perhaps there was more to discover, more to see, more to represent (see Figure 1). Something about the sculpture seemed incomplete, as if there was more to be done, discovered, or understood. What was really needed to fully balance the sculpture, to fully balance the book, to feel that nothing is missing?

We had a thorough conversation and reflected deeply on what arose to the surface. Our first insight was that per-

Figure 1 Co-construction of knowledge
haps building a smaller version of the sculpture might provide some kind of insight that was missing from the larger version. While brainstorming, the first author picked up a note card that was readily available on her desk, folded it in the middle to represent the two sides of the notebook. She realized that it was critically important for the two sides to be equally rich in order to maintain the fine balance, beyond what is physically visible, like the sculpture. In other words, the physical visibility needed to be coupled with other aspects that bring an overall sense of balance that seemed to be missing. This reflection was the catalyst to understanding that the teacher must be able to design activities for the students that are rich and purposeful on the right-hand side. The students then must be able to take that information, process it, and present clarity of understanding of the material on the left-hand side. If any one of the two sides becomes dense or insubstantial, then the balance is lost and the purpose of the notebook is defeated, even though the physical notebook itself might look fine to an outside observer.

The first author walked into the storage area at the back of her classroom and began searching for a base on which she could balance the note card that seemed to reflect the more nuanced understanding of balance, and the intellectual distance between the instructor and the student. She noticed some water cups on a shelf that she was certain would work as a base for the note card. It definitely was a challenge. She could not balance the notebook unless she cut a slit in the pedestal. It was then she found the treasure hidden between the words. The fine balance is not possible if that slit is not present. This slit became a metaphoric representation of the space for negotiation between the student and the teacher. The insights generated from this new sculpture were richer, more powerful and meaningful and nuanced than the first sculpture (see Figure 2).

The notebook created a happy medium for negotiation between the teacher and the student. If the gap in the pedestal is too wide then everything falls in between and one would fail to see the purpose of the interactive notebook. On the same note if there is no slit, then there is no room for negotiation and once again the purpose of

Figure 2. Medium for negotiation
the notebook is defeated. The autonomy and power in Bill’s class was constantly negotiated through the interactive notebook. Thus, the initial frustration reported by Bill and his students could have been because of this lack of balance in how the relationship between the teacher, student, and the notebook was negotiated. In other words, the gap in the pedestal was too wide for the students to see the advantages of using the notebook. For Bill, there were no rules, no guidelines, and no good examples to use to even identify what could work, what is a good strategy for problem solving, or what might lead to problems. Neither Bill nor the students understood the purpose of the notebooks and therefore failed to balance the notebook. The professional development experience on how to use the notebooks provided scope for Bill to fill this space to a point where he was then able to find the right gap to balance and negotiate the power between him and the students. Once he understood the act of balancing and negotiating, he was confident to explore and take up new challenges in trying to make the notebook use more relevant for his students. This enthusiasm was mirrored back by the students when they increased their engagement with the notebook, and started to take ownership of the notebook. Bill constantly reflected on his practices, adjusted instruction, and negotiated expectations with his students to maintain and strengthen the balance between teaching and learning. The ability to balance and negotiate autonomy came with experience and reflection on the part of both the students and the teacher, Bill.

The sculpture presented the interactive notebook as a happy medium for negotiating the power between the teacher and the taught. The act of cutting a slit in the pedestal to balance the notebook opened up a new way of seeing the space that notebooks provided for maintaining a fine balance between teaching and learning by negotiating autonomy in the classroom. This realization of space would not have been possible without the three dimensional representation and continuously reflecting back on the participant’s experiences to use three dimensionality to become a space for physical, emotional, and tacit aspects of understanding data.

**Scholarly Significance**

Since society has been undergoing constant transformation, teaching calls for a significant change in science education to make it effective and relevant for a much larger fraction of the student population (Wieman & Perkins, 2005). The goal of the science community is not just to train a small population to be future scientists but to build a large group of people who can understand science (Redish, 2003). Physics is a key domain of science without which students face reduced access to jobs in today’s technological and scientific world (Sadler & Tai, 2001). However, there is a decline in the number of students who are choosing to take
physics during their college studies. This is because of their low expectations for success in physics and their perceptions of it as less interesting and more difficult in comparison to other sciences (Bramby & Defty, 2006). The troubling question for science educators is: how can we successfully educate all students in science?

Addressing the failure in physics instruction, Redish (1994) suggested that if physics teachers were to make serious progress in reaching a larger fraction of students, then they must focus less on physics content and more on student learning. He further recommended that teachers must ask not only what they want the students to do but pay attention to what the students know when they come to the classroom, how they interact with the learning environment, and how they respond to the content provided. With defined capacities like spatial intelligence, bodily-kinesthetic intelligence, interpersonal intelligence, and musical intelligence, the theory of multiple intelligence establishes a direct correlation of intelligence to visual art, theater, dance, and music, affirming the need to educate young people in these domains in order to fully reach all students (Groff, 2010).

A survey of more than 3,800 individuals conducted by the Group Brain Project at Harvard revealed that more than 80% of participants were nonverbalizers (Chabris et al., 2006) which suggests that there is a significant portion of the population whose dominant cognitive processing system is not language based. Therefore there is a need for alternate instructional and assessment opportunities. This argument establishes the need for interactive notebooks for physics instruction. The notebooks can enable teachers to design rich, engaging, and creative learning experiences for the nonverbalizing population in their physics classes (Moran, Kornhaber, & Gardner, 2006).

The interactive notebook can be a three-dimensional representation of both the students’ accomplishments and a record of what concepts they learned, and how they learned the concepts. It can be used as a diagnostic tool for both students and teachers to assess and communicate their understanding of the concepts without the fear of failure. Notebooks can allow students to take ownership of their learning, thereby boosting their self-efficacy in physics. Improved self-efficacy of the students can encourage them to pursue science related majors in their later years of education. According to Bandura (1993), the aspirations, the level of motivation and the academic success of students depend on their beliefs of self-efficacy to control their own learning and master the academic activities.

Arts based educational research allows educators to appreciate the UDL framework as it is grounded in three main principles: multiple means of representation; multiple means of action and expression; multiple means of engagement by tapping into students’ interests and abilities (U.S. Department of Education, Office of Vocational and Adult Education, 2011) through interactive notebooks. The interactive notebook provides a safe space for students to construct meaning of the material taught in the class by skillfully weaving in their real life experiences
and interests. Educators who fear that the interactive notebook is a complete transfer of power to the students can, through the sculpture, see it as a medium to balance the acts of teaching and learning. The poem could help educators realize that the notebook can not only transform the learning of students, but help inform teachers of their own teaching practices making them better teachers.

Arts based educational research can create many entry points for educators to be able to identify and appreciate the advantages of an interactive notebook and therefore step out of their comfort zones to discover new ways of integrating arts into physics instruction through interactive notebooks. The rich stories described in this study might help educators gain a better understanding of the multiple, non-linear approaches that students take to interact with the concepts of physics. Interactive notebooks can be instrumental for teachers in designing rich and meaningful educational experiences for the students, thus guiding them to engage in an iterative and difficult process of sense making and knowledge-organizing using interactive notebooks.

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References


Parrying the Pathologization of a Strong, Unified Mexican-American Community

Kathy Bussert-Webb

Abstract
This study underlines how a community perceives and aspires for its future, despite the degrading ways that the media and some outsiders characterize it. This community is a colonia, or unincorporated Southwestern settlement, located in South Texas, U.S.A., and lacking basic services. Participants were 32 children, 14 preservice teachers who tutored the children, eight parents of the children, and two staff members, all Latinos/as. Data sources were reflections and logs, surveys, interviews, photos, TV news articles, Census data, a focus group discussion, and participant observation. I analyzed the data using the constant comparative method and poetic inquiry vis-à-vis socio-semiotic and social justice frameworks. Emerging themes were: the colonia’s marginalization, participants’ parrying and their slantwise practices, and children’s career and college aspirations juxtaposed with Census data. This study demonstrates that outsiders’ discrimination is detrimental to colonia residents’ academic achievement over time. Communities must demonstrate their strengths in public forums, and educators and families must recognize negative portrayals and embrace hybrid and slantwise practices to resist normalization.

Key words: Colonia, Media, Poetic Inquiry, Slantwise, Word Clouds
Pathologizing portrayals proliferate about Esperanza (all names are pseudonyms), the most economically disadvantaged U.S. neighborhood for its size (U.S. Census Bureau, 2010). Negative media images and words marginalize this Rio Grande Valley (RGV), Texas, community and may relate to local educators’ negative perceptions and treatment of Esperanza children, as well as Esperanza’s low college graduation rates, which have declined from 2.7% to 1.3% over a 10-year Census period. However, Esperanza children, parents, and tutorial staff members perceived their neighborhood as strong, unified, and beautiful; the children had high college and career goals, which their parents encouraged. Also, participants engaged in hybrid, slantwise practices. Campbell and Heyman (2007) described slantwise as practices that unintentionally “violate dominant norms and power orders” (p. 4).

This article juxtaposes pejorative portrayals and treatment of Esperanza with positive perceptions and slantwise behaviors, and it examines the children’s educational goals vis-à-vis U.S. Census data. The inquiry questions were: How do the media, preservice teachers, city officials, and Esperanza residents and staff signify Esperanza? How do the college and career goals of Esperanza residents contrast with this community’s actual educational attainment? Signifying is a semiotic, sense-making process we employ to navigate our worlds (Hodge & Kress, 1988). When a local news station’s signifying diverges from a community’s signifying, stark contrasts appear. Yet, whose signifying counts?

Frameworks

Socio-semiotics and social justice theories inform this study because messages and signs, or ways to make and share meaning, are socially situated and may include ideology, power, time, space, and social class (Hodge & Kress, 1988). Also, signs can be linguistic and visual and can signify dissimilar definitions to diverse individuals. The statement, “But we treat them like everybody else,” might not be offensive to someone unaware of prejudice, but to a listener or reader who has experienced much prejudice, the statement stings. An arrest mugshot on a television (TV) newscast of a person from a low-income neighborhood might be objective to some, but a barrage of these portrayals can wound a community. Indeed, words are powerful tools in multicultural interactions (Obiakor, Smith, & Sapp, 2007). Also, signs can tell the truth as well as lie (Eco, 1976). They do not represent reality. Instead, we use signs to convey and interpret perceptions. For instance, are low-income minority neighborhoods the crime-ridden places the media portray them to be? No, according to Waymer (2009), who found television news stories cover crime disproportionately in these communities.

Semiotic theory also includes triadic meaning-making processes. A sign is (firstness), an object is (secondness), and an interpretant, or divergent meanings, is (thirdness); Peirce (1955) stated, “The Sign can only represent the Object and
tell about it” (p. 100). Thus, photos and words to re-present Esperanza is firstness. The Esperanza neighborhood is secondness. How people interpret the neighborhood is thirdness. Also, we construct and deconstruct meaning through socio-political filters (Hodge & Kress, 1988).

Social justice was another interpretive framework because of systemic inequalities apparent in Esperanza’s context, and slantwise as a complementing “nuanced view of agency” (Smith & Valenzuela, 2012, p. 339). Activist Freire (1970) contended oppression and structural differences exist, but conscientization can occur when people recognize and take against “social, political, and economic contradictions” (p. 35). Inequalities facing high-poverty immigrant children may include school-related resources and educators’ expectations and prejudices (Gorski, 2008). One way students, families, and teachers can resist hegemonic and normative forces involves seeing through sham, but fighting it (Henry, 1973). Conscientization is difficult for those without official U.S. documentation, and for educators who face banking education pressures (Freire) due to the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) (U.S. Department of Education, 2002). Yet other paths of opposition can intersect the domination and resistance axis (Campbell & Heyman, 2007). People can take on hybrid practices to avoid stereotyping (Fernandez, 2001) and can engage slantwise behaviors, such as code-switching, using neighbors’ Internet for school projects, having 10 or more inhabitants per dwelling, and cutting corners on home building for socially acceptable goals, such as receiving the best education possible and owning a home (Smith & Valenzuela). These behaviors may “affect power orders” (Campbell & Heyman, 2007, p. 4) because authorities might interpret innocuous slantwise practices as resistance.

These interrelated socio-semiotics and social justice theories informed this study because I interpreted signs within social and political contexts. Hodge and Kress (1988) combined socio-semiotics and social justice when they argued, “Social control requires the control of modality systems” (p. 151). Indeed, the media in many countries are powerful and they influence public opinion (Lirola, 2013), especially in the stereotyping of immigrants of color. From an analysis of newspaper portrayals of Czech immigrants, Chovanec (2013) concluded, “The media significantly contribute to the formation of public opinion by tapping into existing negative stereotypes of ethnic and other minorities and engaging in a discourse of intolerance, prejudice, racism and xenophobia” (p. 211). Also, the media may collude by perpetuating a community’s marginalization, especially when residents may not know how to show outsiders their neighborhood’s attributes (Waymer, 2009).

**Context**

This study took place at an after-school tutorial agency in Esperanza, about a 15-minute drive from the Mexican border and a Census-designated place (CDP)
of 0.6 square miles (1.6 km²) and 7,000 residents. A resaca, or a meandering water channel, a gun-barrel road, and a drainage ditch separate this RGV colonia from the city. Esperanza is clearly inside of a U.S. city of over 50,000 residents, but officials refuse to annex Esperanza because they consider it a tax drain. Many Esperanza homes would not fetch much in property taxes because they are not built to code (Texas Secretary of State, 2010). Residents, trying to save money, engage in slantwise building practices (Campbell & Heyman, 2007). They cannot afford to build or buy fancy homes because their yearly income is about $4,000 per capita and less than $17,000 per household (U.S. Census Bureau, 2010).

Esperanza shares challenges with other Southwestern unincorporated settlements, including few basic services, such as garbage pick-up and city police protection (Texas Secretary of State, 2010). Esperanza has existed for many years, but some roads are unpaved and some homes do not have running water. Shirley (2002), who studied schooling in this border region, wrote about the hardships related to road and water conditions affecting colonia students: “Many of the children from the colonias came to school muddy when it rained; others came with their clothes dirty because their homes did not have water” (p. 24). A staff member in the present study corroborated this; she and other colonia children had to clean the mud off of her clothes in the school bathroom when it rained because no Esperanza roads were paved; class members would make fun of the Esperanza children’s muddy clothes. Ward (1999), who studied Texas colonias vis-à-vis policies, discussed the systemic inequalities and capitalism related to the proliferation of these unannexed neighborhoods: “Colonias are a structural problem compounded by developers’ greed, official neglect, ignorance, poor policymaking and weak administrative capacity, inadequate laws, and enfeebled social organization and local leadership” (p. 260). The emergence and continuation of colonias (or neighborhoods in Spanish) and the subjugating coloniality of power (Quijano & Ennis, 2000) are not incidental. Indeed, governments could do more to help. Because they do not, colonia residents engage in slantwise behaviors to survive, and in so doing, they may irritate officials (Campbell & Heyman, 2007).

Despite hardships and official neglect, colonias exude strengths, such as innovative practices (Campbell & Heyman, 2007), unity (Richardson, 1996), and networking (Moll, 1992). Some innovations involve children using neighbors’ Internet, computers, and printers for school related-projects and neighbors sharing electricity by running cords between homes (Bussert-Webb & Díaz, 2012). Because of neighborhood sharing and friendship, even if some have accrued wealth since settling in Esperanza, they do not leave (Bussert-Webb, 2011). According to participating preservice teachers: “This is a very family-based community” where parents care about their children’s education and “work harder than we could ever imagine.” Other Esperanza strengths include shared culture and language; about 99% are Latinos/as and 97% are native Spanish speakers (U.S. Census Bureau,
2010). Also, the Texas Education Agency (n.d.) classified the schools Esperanza children attended as recognized or exemplary, based on attendance and state-mandated test scores.

Methodology

Data Sources

Participant observation, U.S. Census information, tutorial center and news station photos, news articles, interviews, surveys, written reflections, teacher candidates’ and my daily logs, and a focus group discussion were data sources. Regarding observation, I co-supervised the activities during the May 2013 tutoring and gardening program. Regarding the Census, I examined 2000 and 2010 data because I sought to compare the children’s career goals with actual college graduation rates. Next, a tutorial staff member (an Esperanza resident) took photos during the tutoring, snack preparations, college information session for residents, gardening, plant scavenger hunt, and award ceremony. Although I used every photo she emailed me from the May project to demonstrate her perceptions and to analyze as data, I cannot publish the photos because of confidentiality issues.

I compared the staff member’s photos to a news station’s portrayal of Esperanza. I chose a TV station from other media because TV programs are Americans’ main news source (Saad, 2013). From seven local stations I chose one randomly, and then searched for online news articles and photos about Esperanza from February to August 2013. I wanted to capture the station’s depiction as close as possible to the May study, and I needed enough data to determine themes. Next, I typed the colonia’s name in the station’s search box, which yielded six articles and six photos about Esperanza.

Also important were children’s perceptions. The semi-structured child interviews took about 30 minutes. Prompts were: “Tell me about yourself. What do you like to do in your free time? What do you do well? What are your family’s funds of knowledge (FOK)? How do you feel about this neighborhood?” The research assistant used follow-up questions, also. For the FOK question, she added, “What is your family famous for?” If children were confused, she provided examples of my Hungarian mother’s cooking skills, my family’s emphasis on homemade food, or my Midwestern father’s mechanical skills and how, as a machine maintenance man, he mentored his six children in car repairs.

Parents and staff members’ viewpoints were essential, also. Parents completed short-answer responses to an eight-question program survey, a one-page hard copy. This instrument focused on their thoughts about our project and Esperanza. Completing this survey at home could have taken from five to 30 minutes. Additionally, parents responded to a one-page college survey, involving the parents’
goals for their children’s education; it took parents about five minutes to complete this survey immediately after listening to a presentation in Spanish from financial aid and enrollment staff members at my university, whom I invited to speak to Esperanza residents. The two tutorial staff members completed a program evaluation via email; this one-page survey focused on whether the May program helped the children, perceptions of Esperanza and families, and suggestions on how the city could assist the colonia. Based on their detailed responses, survey responses may have taken over 60 minutes.

The pre-and post-structured reflections for teacher candidates took about 30 minutes each. An example pre-question was: “What strengths do you think your tutee and her/his family will have?” Next, candidates and I completed learning logs at 6 p.m. (after the children left) and at 9 p.m. (after each class session). Each log took about five minutes to complete; questions were: “What did you learn? What was said or done that impacted you? How do you feel about this?” I responded to these questions as well, so my logs became field notes, as they included my perceptions of events and my analyses (Burgess, 1991). The audio-recorded and transcribed focus group discussion, lasting about 30 minutes, related to candidates’ views of the children, neighborhood, and project. A sample focus group question was, “Tell me about this neighborhood.”

Procedures and Participants

Esperanza residents and I have been collaborating in theatrical, gardening, and tutoring projects for over 10 years at this tutorial center, which some Esperanza children attend voluntarily for homework help. Data gathering occurred when I taught a methods course focused on literacy and English as a second language (ESL) at the center. Participants were 32 first through tenth grade children, eight female guardians, two tutorial staff members, and 14 preservice teachers; all were Mexican Americans. One parent had a bachelor’s degree from Mexico; the others had no college. Both tutorial staff members had bachelor’s degrees and were certified teachers. Respondents signed assent and consent and photo release forms before data gathering in this institutional review board (IRB)–approved study. Teacher candidates and parent volunteers tutored, taught, gardened, and ate with the children for over two hours each weekday.

A bilingual Mexican-American research assistant interviewed the children and typed each response into Microsoft Excel as they spoke; most interviews were in English, although the children could choose Spanish or English. I conducted a practice interview before my assistant interviewed the children, and I heard parts of interviews being conducted as I walked around the center co-supervising the tutorials. Many children and their parents did not want audio recorders used; thus, for consistency in methods, my assistant did not tape-record any interview. Instead, she typed quickly, asked the children to repeat often, and she reread aloud
to the children what she had typed at the end of each interview as a member checking device. Also, I shared my findings with tutorial staff and residents to elicit their interpretations.

**Data Analysis**

I analyzed all verbal and visual data with the constant comparative method (Glasser, 1965) and poetic inquiry (Glesne, 1997). Regarding the former, I examined all verbal and visuals data and jotted down insights and possible themes. This step involved reading and rereading the Excel file of the typed children’s interviews, a binder of the preservice teachers’ data, a binder of parent and staff surveys, the staff member’s electronic photos, and the news station’s images and words.

Second, I integrated the themes and drew lines between words and phrases to show relationships. Since the photos were electronic, I was able to physically group photos that represented the same theme. In this stage, I identified and categorized data by looking for similarities and dissimilarities (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007). For example, I printed a local TV station’s internet articles (headlines, captions, stories, and photos) about Esperanza and examined the words and images to determine the station’s most common themes and then I compared the station’s words and images to those generated by Esperanza residents. This recursive process involved revisiting the data to gain more insights.

Third, I delimited the theory. When I saw the same themes appear repeatedly, I realized I had saturated a theory. Last, I drafted this manuscript to explain the theories and their connections to social justice and socio-semiotic literature. Emerging themes became the major headings in the findings section of this article. An initial theme in my first step of analysis was the preservice teachers’ biases against Esperanza, but after rereading the data, I realized in-service teachers, school administrators, and city representatives also marginalized Esperanza. Thus, this theme became officials’ and educators’ marginalization of Esperanza, as my student respondents would be certified teachers soon.

Because of my socio-semiotic interest in making and sharing meaning in alternative formats (Harste, 2013), I used poetic inquiry as an additional analytic method. My goal was to distill key ideas and to portray divergent perceptions at a sensory level (Glesne, 1997) because a dynamic relationship exists between text, reader, and interpretation; meaning does not lie within the text itself (Rosenblatt, 1978). Instead, we evoke poems based on our experiences and dispositions. Rosenblatt (1999), borrowing from Peirce (1955), stated: “There is not simply a sign and a signified, but there has to be some mind, some idea linking them” (para. 23).

Cahnmann-Taylor (2009), in recollecting the work of Barone, Richardson, Eisner, and Lawrence-Lightfoot, defended this poetic inquiry approach: “Alternative, arts-based methods are rigorous, relevant, and insightful” because we use
language to demonstrate claims in our inquiries (p. 16). Poetic inquirers do not create findings devoid of direct links to the data. Instead, we know we cannot separate inquiries from the writing craft (Nielson Glenn, 2014). Thus, to maintain the authenticity of participants’ utterances, yet to be spare poetically (Nielson Glenn), I deleted repeated words without transposing any direct quotes. Like Glesne (1997), I attempted to be “chronologically and linguistically faithful” (p. 207) to participants’ words.

Besides the socio-semiotic and triadic process in a poem’s evocation and the craft of re-presenting phenomena, poetic inquiry should evoke cultural and linguistic resonances (Nielson Glenn, 2014). I have close friendships with Esperanza residents and staff and have taught this methods course in Esperanza for six May sessions. I also am proficient in Spanish, taught local students in Spain and Central America for many years, and have taught in the RGV for 18 years, including three years as a public high school teacher. Although I am White, I have many connections to Esperanza. I cannot speak for this community, yet I can blend my voice as a poet-friend with the utterances of Esperanza residents.

Explaining my positionality is important in this type of interpretivist epistemology, as the inquirer-poet is the filter for all methods, analyses, and published words (Glesne, 1997). For Nielson Glenn (2014) ethnographic poets “are the instrument and medium through which the research is largely organized and facilitated” (p. 138). We begin the inquiry process. We check with participants. We present emerging findings. Although I am not a recent immigrant, unlike some Esperanza residents (U.S. Census Bureau, 2010), I am a second generation American who grew up working class and who was a victim of frequent bullying in elementary school, perhaps because I was working class, perhaps because of my low academic levels, perhaps because of my mother’s foreign accent and the xenophobic milieu of my small Midwestern town. My teachers had a deficit, skills-based approach to teaching and did not value my rich literacies (Greenberg, 1990). Hence, out of three classrooms possible, I inched along in the lowest tracks – IC, 2C, 3C, and 4C – and still received D-‘s and U’s (unsatisfactory) marks on my report cards.

My mother’s immigrant stories course through my blood, also. Her family was desperate for many years in post-World War II Germany. My Hungarian grandmother searched for food in garbage bins and a teacher physically beat my mother who, at the end of a school day, was retrieving leftover milk from peers’ lunchboxes to boil later at home. The educator wanted the milk for his pigs. At 19, my mother left Germany for America – an immigrant twice over – with educational scars. The German educators expelled her when she was in sixth grade because they said she was too dumb to learn, not realizing language, poverty, and immigration issues related to her difficulties. Perhaps this is why she never went to my school to protest the bullying I endured. My mothers’ stories and my experiences filter who I am and how I interpret phenomena. Thus, despite a host
of dissimilarities, *Esperanza* participants and I found ways to connect, and I hope these cultural resonances are apparent.

Besides coming clean with my subjectivity, my poetic inquiry should also involve respect for respondents’ dignity, while acknowledging the power imbalance of re-presenting their words and images (Nielson Glenn, 2014). I was careful to not reveal any information participants told me or photos they shot that would harm their dignity or reveal their identity, and I have been cognizant of my roles and limitations as a university researcher living in a different neighborhood. I am aware *Esperanza* children and parents may have stated things because of this power imbalance. Perhaps they were afraid to say more. Indeed, silence tells much. Mazzei (2007) argued silence “can be meaningful and purposeful” (p. xiii).

Although the constant comparative method and poetic inquiry constituted data analysis, I used www.worditout.com to visually highlight the news station’s and *Esperanza* residents’ most frequent words. I depicted key themes visually based on my socio-semiotic interest in alternative formats (Harste, 2013). I wanted to show how unlimited semiosis or interpretations can occur when at least two sign or communication systems, such as art and language, can operate within divergent social contexts. Also, from a social justice framework, it is important to demonstrate how marginalization is met with resistance (Hodge & Kress, 1988). The news station’s and children’s most frequent words about *Esperanza* demonstrate this disconnect visually. Hodge and Kress stated: “… In the battle for social control through competing definitions of truth and reality, there is not a single inevitable outcome. Resistance is possible, and modality strategies that prevail in some instances may fail in others” (p. 161). Slantwise analysis complements resistance and dominion binaries because it demonstrates several outcomes, often accidental.

My decision to use WordItOut to re-present the data was also practical, as Word Clouds are helpful in summarizing large verbal documents and are ideal ways to compare and contrast frequent words from different data sets. Thus, they can show a disjuncture between realities. Words with the most repetition had a 60 font, while those with less repetition had a 15 font. The news station’s articles about *Esperanza* resulted in 1,025 words in headlines, captions, and stories. For the second Word Cloud, I copied the children’s interview responses, which resulted in 880 words. The third Word Cloud was a hybridity of the station’s and children’s words.

**Findings**

Findings include: 1) educators’ and city officials’ marginalization and mistreatment of *Esperanza* residents, 2) the TV station’s pathologization of *Esperanza* and the community’s parrying in words and images, as well as their hybrid and slantwise resistance, and 3) the children’s career and college aspirations that clashed with U.S. Census 2000 and 2010 data.
Officials’ and Educators’ Marginalization of Esperanza

Officials and educators, including some preservice teachers, stereotyped or discriminated against Esperanza. Regarding official neglect, many preservice teachers mentioned city officials and employees did not police Esperanza or help it. City police do not provide security for Esperanza because the city has never incorporated the colonia. If an Esperanza resident calls to report a crime, county officers, not city ones, respond. Three pre-service teachers believed crime in Esperanza could be reduced with police patrols, and some scholars agree (Ming-Jen, 2009). Police visibility decreases some crime in U.S. cities, especially if officers are on foot because they can develop positive relationships with community members (Novak, 2013). Skogan (2006) found crime in Spanish-speaking Latino/a neighborhoods was higher than in any other ethnic neighborhood in Chicago; conversely, members of the Spanish-speaking communities in Chicago reported less contact with the police and more fear of crime than did their English-speaking counterparts. Thus, the phenomenon of less police contact and more crime are related. In their meta-analysis, Braga, Papachristos, and Hureau (2012) found “small but noteworthy crime reductions” (p. 633) from problem-oriented policing, versus general police presence; residents in their study appreciated focused crime prevention, also.

Other teacher candidates and staff members discussed the lack of trash pick-up, internet access, utilities, and building inspectors, but the multitude of immigration raids in Esperanza. A staff member stated, “Our community suffers on a daily basis from poverty, immigration issues, deportation and separation of families.” Preservice teacher Dee discussed her tutee’s many hardships: “My tutee, he lives in a trailer. No running water. No power. Same shirt every day. The trailer in front was raided by immigration.” The school-related impact of these systemic inequalities, according to Valeria, was “many of these kids have to compete with kids who have internet access and many other resources at home.” Pete, another tutor, noticed how the cramped living conditions of the children could affect learning: “I can see how living in a small household with a lot of people can make it difficult to do your studies.” Pete’s tutee lived with nine immediate and extended family members. Adult family members may have engaged in this slantwise activity to provide for their families and to save valuable resources.

Some teacher candidates did not merely notice others’ biases; these tutors revealed initial biases against Esperanza and mentioned hearing negative stories about Esperanza. Alan stated, “I was under those types of impressions” [that the neighborhood was dangerous]. However, the site-based course helped to change the teacher candidates’ initial perceptions. Noe said Esperanza “wasn’t as bad as I thought or people made it seem.” Ana remarked, “I learned the students that come here and live in those neighborhoods are really great kids. They have so much potential and are very smart, so we should not judge people by where they come from.”
Although the future educators no longer believed the rumors after their site-based course, practicing teachers who may not have visited \textit{Esperanza} may not have had opportunities to eradicate any biases. Indeed, the children, preservice teachers, and staff members believed many local teachers discriminated against \textit{Esperanza} children through low expectations, even though the children were eager learners. Candidates based observations on what their young charges told them and what these college students witnessed while tutoring. Tutors noted most tutees did not have homework and were not challenged academically. Dee wrote, “I learned there are not very high expectations for students in many classrooms … The teacher provided all of the information that my tutee just copied over.” Another tutor said a freshman tutee’s end-of-course exam consisted of knowing countries, which took the 15-year-old only 10 minutes to study. Haycock (2001) found the achievement of minority and poor children depended mainly on teacher expectations and Rubie-Davies (2010) discovered student achievement hinged on teacher expectations and perceptions of students. Also, some children in the present study said their major obstacles in school were teachers. Low expectations are examples of discrimination (a behavior). However, a tutorial staff member who visited the schools often as the children’s advocate said some administrators and teachers conveyed prejudice (a belief) toward \textit{Esperanza} children. Both behaviors (low expectations) and beliefs (attitudes) result in systemic inequalities when they occur among many educators.

Prejudice can be difficult to pinpoint. Sometimes we sense it through a subtle tone of voice or seemingly innocuous three-letter conjunctions. For example, an administrator in a school serving \textit{Esperanza} children told my colleague, “We receive a lot of students from [\textit{Esperanza}], but we treat them like everybody else.” The administrator’s assertion of equal treatment can signify the opposite because of the contrastive conjunction, \textit{but}. Sentences such as, “We know many children, but they have no future” or “She is brown, but beautiful” demonstrate a conjunction’s power to shift meaning, as the second part of the independent clause has more weight after a contrastive conjunction. Also, if the administrator dealt with the \textit{Esperanza} children just like everyone else, then why would she mention neighborhood demarcations?

A poetic analysis of this marginalization reveals the following:

\begin{quote}
Nodding no to a neighborhood
Treating them as One should
We receive them, yet
To fall in hate
Seals One’s fate
Sin seeing eyes – Bright Brown Wrought
If by When and was by Not
\end{quote}
*Sin* in Spanish means *without*, but *sin* in English is a transgression. Thus, *sin* is a double knife, for it is it not a *pecado*, or sin, to ignore and exclude those without? Exclusion is just as much a facet of discrimination as is overtly poor treatment (Nieto & Bode, 2008). Indeed, southwestern colonias and urban ghettos, such as those depicted in Hughes’ (1994) poem, *Harlem*, have much in common – middle class people from the outside may avoid them, which Harvey (2009) called “ghetto avoidance behaviors” (p. 35). Actually, Harvey stated *white* middle class people collude in avoidance, but some *Mexican American* participating tutors were afraid to enter *Esperanza* initially. Similarly, mostly *white*, middle class preservice teachers were petrified of exploring urban areas for a course assignment in Philadelphia (Buck & Sylvester (2005).

The marginalization of *Esperanza* by city representatives and educators, including the preservice teachers, is puzzling, considering all preservice teacher participants were Latinos/as, most city officials are Latinos/as, and 87% of local teachers are Latinos/as. Also, most preservice teachers, teachers, and city politicians have grown up in the RGV. This marginalization demonstrates that people can discriminate against others of their same ethnicity (Bussert-Webb, 2013). Many erroneously believe ethnicity and race are the sole sinews of culture. However, Nieto and Bode (2008) argued culture is a complex human creation involving “ever-changing values, traditions, social and political relationships, and worldview created, shared, and transformed by a group of people bound together by a combination of factors …” (p. 129). When we understand culture is more than ethnicity, it becomes apparent how social class, immigration status, and neighborhood differences can relate to exclusion and mistreatment.

**Media Stereotyping and the Colonia’s Parrying**

The previous theme regarding officials’ and educators’ marginalization relates to the press’s portrayal of *Esperanza*. This is because marginalization does not happen in a vacuum. Peirce (1995) explained, “Unless we make ourselves hermits, we shall necessarily influence each other’s opinions” (p. 13). Also, social justice and semiotics are intertwined, because, according to Hodge and Kress (1988), “Texts as social processes have social effects” (p. 160). Indeed, the media are powerful agents in shaping opinions. The WordItOut visual representation, available at [http://worditout.com/word-cloud/447878](http://worditout.com/word-cloud/447878), shows the most common words from the TV station were: *illegal immigrants, Border Patrol, and arrests*. Poetically, this transforms into:

**Area agents allegedly arrested a border boy immigrant, illegal

*Esperanza?* A no hope home**

However, the children, parents, and tutorial staff members viewed themselves, their families, and *Esperanza* in dramatically different ways. When asked how
she felt about her community, a participating staff member wrote, “Our families are strong in moral values.” Further, this visual representation of the children’s interviews, http://worditout.com/word-cloud/447890, demonstrates a focus on families, friends, food, sports, and being neighborly. These are not just idealized self-perceptions of Esperanza residents. Villarreal (2008) mentioned this sense of community in two RGV colonias. Neighbors, according to Villarreal, borrow and lend without end and live as family. She also stated: “Los niños en la tarde todos juegan”, [the children play together in the afternoons] (p. 58). Put to verse, the children’s responses extol Esperanza strengths:

Dad cooks foods favorite — Friends Family
Hamburgers and tamales at our house
Math and music making
Nice neighbors grant favors
Outside Go
Playing people
Soccer sports
Ties talk while watching Wrestling en español
With love

Essential also was the children’s attention to hybridity and slantwise practices, including translanguaging, or transformative practices bridging two languages (García, 2009). Campbell and Heyman (2007) explained how translanguaging is slantwise: “… It is a language form developed at the grassroots that state bureaucracies and national societies have difficulty coping with” (p. 18). Hybridity and slantwise also relate to food served. Many consider hamburgers a U.S. specialty, but a child mentioned his mother made famous hamburgers. Also, the children’s words challenge stereotypes about Latino fathers, as one father was famous for cooking for the family. Fernandez (2001) remarked that it becomes difficult for those in power to stereotype culturally diverse people when the “other” takes on hybrid practices: “Only those who are not ready to concatenate local knowledges would refuse the combination” (p. 92). As Hong Kingston’s (1976) playful memoir teaches us, it is tricky to categorize someone who defies stereotypes, as a Chinese-heritage girl did in her preference for chocolate chip cookies over rice.

Next, I combined the children’s 880-word interviews with the 1,025-word station’s articles, a 14% difference. My goal in this hybrid re-presentation was to smash the words up against each other for verbal sparring. I wanted the children’s voices to carry weight against the media’s onslaught. In this Word Cloud, http://worditout.com/word-cloud/447867, the most frequent words, besides the colo-
nia’s name, were in this order: play, like, soccer, mom, immigrants, good, all, math, home, Border, Patrol, agents, allegedly, makes, illegal, tamales, friends, and sports. This verse demonstrates the absurdity of pathologizing this community:

Friends, Make sport!
Whist agents arrest alleged
Soccer moms (immigrants) all
In my ill(legal) border home

Besides employing poetic inquiry for linguistic data, I used the constant comparative method (Glaser, 1965) to analyze the station’s six photos of Esperanza, as well as the agency staff members’ photos. After I sorted the electronic photos into groups, a key pattern emerged:

The news photos portrayed Esperanza as a seedy site where criminals surged,
Yet community-based photos depicted a lively neighborhood where families converged.

Three media photos were arrest mug-shots of Esperanza residents, two were the Border Patrol insignia, and one showed a local police badge beside a red siren. In all six images, Esperanza residents appeared as thugs. Emerging sub-themes, based on an analysis of the news station’s images, were: illegal immigrants, criminals, law escapers, drug users, and neglectful parents. The public may perceive media images as objective photo-journalism, but signs are units of complex meanings, never neutral or objective (Hodge & Kress, 1988).

In contrast, themes from the staff member’s photos were: parents’ passion for their children’s college achievement; involved, caring parents; and academically inquisitive, athletic, and hard-working children. Several parents attended a college information session and the staff member took photos during this event. She also shot photos of parent volunteers, children learning alongside their tutors, children gardening enthusiastically, and the youths’ excitement after winning soccer balls. Although the staff member’s photos demonstrated community strengths, these photos are not publicly visible. Fear of breaking confidentiality and the possible deportation of some participants keep me from publishing these endearing photos of Esperanza children and parents. These photos remain out of the public sphere and thus have limited semiotic potential to talk back to the derogatory news images. Hence, the playing field favors those with the resources to objectify and marginalize a high-poverty immigrant community. Hodge and Kress (1988) stated, “Social control rests on control over the representation of reality which is accepted as the basis of judgment and action” (p. 147).

Yet, the issue is not just the media’s depiction of reality. The rub, according to Hodge and Kress (1988), is the media can determine “socially validated truth” (p. 151). Waymer (2009) explained the media provide us with semiotic tools to see where and how people live: “many people’s only experience with inner-city life is
what they learn from mass media” (p. 181). Also, the media can even influence how culturally-diverse people see people of their own race, and these broken looking-glass images (Carroll, 1971) can be troubling. For example, Waymer provided a provocative account of how the media’s portrayal of the 2001 Cincinnati, Ohio, race riots affected him as an African American male. He visited Cincinnati for a faculty job interview and became afraid of his own race in a Cincinnati neighborhood because of the disproportional crime reportage he had learned from the media.

Thus, because of the media’s power to socialize us, their depiction of Esperanza can influence how local educators and community members conceptualize and treat Esperanza children. Hodge and Kress (1988) posited, “Primary targets of modality control are a single uncontestable version of reality” (p. 151). It was obvious no alternative version of reality existed in the station’s portrayal of Esperanza, as all 12 articles and images were negative. According to Hodge and Kress, the media “mount campaigns on behalf of special interests, against sections of the community” (pp. 148-149). Yet, why pick on an unincorporated settlement? Perhaps those in power do not want to integrate Esperanza, fearing annexation would redistribute wealth. Perhaps much relates to these very words – power, integration, and fear.

However, people cannot wield power in western countries at an individual level only, so the media assist in this endeavor (Hodge & Kress, 1988). Also, how officials treat others relates to their contexts. According to the most recent U.S. Census (2010), the city around the “donut hole” (Rev. J. Jackson, personal communication, July 1995), is one of the most economically strapped in the USA; it is also one of the most marginalized U.S. cities because of low voter turnout, high poverty, and proximity to the Mexican border. Thus, it might take pressure off of politicians and others if they can reason, “At least that neighborhood is not part of our city.” Thus, the discrimination against Esperanza and the discrimination against the city appear to be “an onion peel” or a layering of marginalization (Bussert-Webb, 2013, p. 16).

**Children’s Aspirations and Quandaries**

This next finding focuses on the children’s high career goals, juxtaposed with Census data and the role of the police in the lives of marginalized communities, such as Esperanza. If we combine the findings thus far – discrimination against the colonia by educators, city officials, and the media vis-à-vis Esperanza participants’ parrying – what are the outcomes? Is it possible for the children to reach a level of conscientization so they are resistant and resilient over time or do they succumb to outsiders’ perceptions and systemic inequalities? The children’s aspirations provide hope, as 84% desired careers requiring at least an associate’s degree. When asked if they wanted to go to college, only two participants (.06%) said no. One did not want to work and the other planned to join the U.S. Army, which does
not require any college upon entry. Nine (28%) preferred to be educators and four (12.5%) dreamed of being doctors. Most (13 or 41%) were interested in law- and military-related careers. These children wanted to be judges, police officers, Border Patrol agents, and U.S. soldiers.

However, most of these professions require college degrees and U.S. citizenship. Local police under age 21 must have an associate’s degree or 60 semester credit hours from an accredited college, or 24 months of active military experience with an honorable discharge; Border Patrol applicants with college degrees receive hiring preferences. Also, the children’s aspirations regarding police and Border Patrol work may not match the legal status of some children participants, as these occupations accept only U.S. citizens or naturalized U.S. citizens. Rubenstein Avila (2003) lamented about her middle school participant’s immigrant status and the related structural inequalities. Miguel, an adolescent Mexican-heritage male, struggled academically and did not have legal residency, but he wanted to be a U.S. police officer. Although the U.S. Military has accepted people without legal documentation as foot soldiers in the Middle East, it does not give these soldiers citizenship until they die; relatives of the deceased have no such rights (U.S. Department of Homeland Security, 2013).

Thus, the career choices of children in the present study were curious because about 38% of Esperanza residents do not have U.S. residency status (U.S. Census Bureau, 2010). Esperanza’s undocumented population may be under-reported because census enumerators cannot count people in the Census if colonia residents do not talk to the enumerators. Since colonia residents engage in slantwise housing practices, such as creating improvised dwellings, having many dwellings per lot, and moving trailer locations, census workers have difficulty determining accurate colonia statistics (Campbell & Heyman, 2007). Also, 50% of Latino/a adults were born outside of the USA (Pew Research Center, 2014).

Despite the children’s goals involving college-related careers, Esperanza has one of the lowest U.S. college graduation rates. About 1.3% of residents in this Census-designated place (CDP), age 25 and older, received a bachelor’s degree or higher in 2010, a 52% drop from the 2.7% in 2000 (U.S. Census Bureau, 2000, 2010). In contrast, the 2010 college graduation rate of the surrounding city was 16%, even though about the same percentage of Latinos/as live in Esperanza and the city encircling it. This 15% difference in 2010 colonia and city college graduation rates demonstrates systemic factors related to neighborhood location, social class, and immigration may influence Esperanza’s college graduation rates. Also, returning to the notion of discrimination as an onion peel, the State of Texas has a 27% college graduation rate.

However, Esperanza’s high school data are more positive. Among Esperanza residents, 25 years and older, 10% in 2000 and 31% in 2010 completed high school or the equivalent. In 2000, 46% completed less than ninth grade, com-
pared to 34% in 2010. Although these statistics have improved (U.S. Census Bureau, 2000, 2010), about one in three Esperanza children finish high school. Lisa, a pre-service teacher, commented on how some students drop out mentally because they are bored with the curriculum, which tends to focus on test preparation as part of NCLB. McNeil, Coppola, Radigan, and Vasquez-Heilig (2008) found high-stakes testing in Texas related to the State’s dropout crisis. Texas has the highest accountability pressure rating of 25 U.S. states (Nichols, Glass, & Berliner, 2012) and the bulk of instruction time for educators of recent immigrants involves high-stakes test preparation (Palmer & Rangel, 2011). Conversely, most of the tutors in the present study believed the children could be motivated in school with challenging, generative, hands-on activities connected to the children’s interests.

Some may use stale discourse, blaming Esperanza parents and stating families are not involved in their children’s education. My own parents did not read to me. My mother had a sixth grade education and arrived in the USA at age 19. My father had a general education diploma (GED) and labored in a factory. Although I do not remember my parents entering my schools, they showed us love in ways invisible to some. My parents, like the families in the present study, valued education. All mothers who completed the college survey wanted their children to study at a university. When asked the likelihood of their children attending college, they were 100% sure. The reasons, they said, were: “Es mejor para ellos”, [It’s better for them], “para un mejor futuro”, [for a better future]. All parent participants wanted to attend college themselves. Two wrote if they as mothers could attend, this would encourage their children.

Although many Latino/a parents who are economically strapped support their children’s college aspirations, they may not have the knowledge, experience, or information to help (Zalaquett & Lopez, 2006). Also, they may not have the skills to help them at the primary and secondary levels of schools. Coronado (2003) interviewed a young colonia mother, who was proud of her son’s grades in schools. However, the mother lamented, “He is so smart and does so well in school, I wish that I could help him but I can’t because I do not speak English” (p. 196). Dolhinow (2010), also a colonia researcher, said colonia mothers are the children’s primary educators and these mothers care deeply about their children’s education.

So, why does a chasm exist between the children’s and parents’ college aspirations and the colonia’s actual college achievement rates? Researchers have established the media, as socialization agents, shape who we are (Chovanec, 2013; Lirola, 2013; Waymer, 2009). This is especially important for youths’ college and career achievement because younger Americans receive their news mostly from the Internet (Saad, 2013). If the Esperanza children (and their teachers) see and read the disparaging images and reports, how does it affect them? Hodge and Kress (1988) discussed how teachers’ discrimination of children for various rea-
sons leads children to pursue different curricular paths; this is because children construct meaning in context, and schooling is a large part of their context. Also, when children feel they do not belong in school or they have no voice there, they drop out (Fine, 1991). Sam, the only pre-service teacher in my study who lived in Esperanza, stated, “I was impacted by the students [sic] responses as to how and what they wanted to be. I realized that the biggest obstacles are not their social economic necessity, it’s their teachers who have low expectations of them.”

Although the children and mothers expressed beautiful dreams and slantwise practices, they did not mention outsiders’ negative perceptions of their community and they did not discuss overt resistance. However, no interview or survey question explicitly focused on whether the children or parents had heard or seen negative portrayals about *Esperanza* by outsiders or how the children and parents interpreted these portrayals. Also, this conscientization may be difficult for those without official U.S. documentation because they may be afraid of controversy (Coronado, 2003; Shirley, 2002). Thus, it appears structural or systemic inequalities, and perhaps a lack of conscientization, relate to the lower educational attainment of *Esperanza* residents.

Another structural inequality relates to employment. Although most colonia residents who completed U.S. high school are college ready, they must work to support their families (Coronado, 2003; Texas Low Income Housing Information Service, 2005). Construction and service occupations are the most popular jobs, as they do not require advanced degrees. This becomes cyclical because being gainfully employed at a decent salary relates to a person’s educational level (U.S. Department of Labor, 2014). Generally, the more formal education a person has, the higher the salary, and where a child lives has much to do with college graduation. According to Orfield (2014), “… Residence is often destiny for children of color” (p. 273). This destiny is apparent when one compares the 1.3% college graduation rate of *Esperanza* residents, versus the 16% graduation rate of the surrounding city.

Next, 41% of the children desired a curious occupational field – law enforcement. This is perplexing because many *Esperanza* adults might perceive this field to be oppressive. It is common for people of Mexican heritage to not trust U.S. police officers; many immigrants extend their perceptions of corrupt and brutal police from their homeland (Skogan, 2006). As we consider historical and recent incidents of racial violence in the USA, it is no surprise most culturally diverse people do not believe police protect and serve them (McCarthy, 2014). Also, since city officials have not incorporated *Esperanza*, only county police respond to *Esperanza* situations, and these responses may take longer than expected. If people are undocumented they may fear deportation, so they may not report crimes (Skogan).

The children’s affinity for law enforcement careers is counter intuitive – until one considers issues of power. Perhaps the children wanted to be police officers,
judges, and Border Patrol agents because they saw these occupations as powerful and these youths desired that power. After all, power is ubiquitous (Foucault, 1991). Everyone has power, to different degrees. Based on the data and my longstanding friendships with many Esperanza families, I cannot fathom the children wanted to inflict violence on others. Instead, perhaps they romanticized these jobs, based on video games and the media. Maybe they wanted to see the action, like cops and robbers and the U.S. Bad Boys show. Alternatively, the children may view Border Patrol agents and police officers as having enough control to make criminals disappear. Perhaps the youths perceived these occupations as equalizing. The police could thus be a counterbalance to criminals, who could hurt the children and their families.

Another interpretation is the children saw their ethnicity mirrored by school district security guards and local police officers. Each school that participating children attend has at least one uniformed security guard, most of these guards are Latinos/as. Also, this border city is 93% Latino/a; based on my open records request, 89% of local police officers are Latinos/as whose mother tongue is Spanish and the chief is Latino. This is an anomaly, because of the underrepresentation of Spanish-speaking Latinos/as in U.S. police forces (Skogan, 2006). Thus, perhaps the children saw that they, like officers on TV or in their schools, could have these roles. Also, Border Patrol agents must speak Spanish, so it is easier and more cost effective for the U.S. government to hire native Spanish speakers.

In this last poetic analysis, I combine the children’s career goals with media headlines; the headlines portray Esperanza as a dangerous, no-man’s land replete with neglectful parents.

Media headline: Motorcycle chase ends with suspect getting away in Esperanza
Media headline: Esperanza mom jailed for leaving son at playground alone
Could you earn a college diploma in the Esperanza zone?
Yet the children there have dreams of their own, which were:

Vet Actor Zoo keeper
Teacher – Choir, pre-K, second grade, science
To make students smart in math
Coach Boxer Soccer player
Police of er Border Patrol, most of my family is in the Border Patrol or Army
Pilot U.S. Marine
Something to do with medical – Doctor
A judge
To judge
The judged
Limitations

Not taping or recording the interviews is a limitation, but it was important to protect participants’ confidentiality and to help them to feel at ease. Also, my assistant and I honored participants’ wishes and tried to gather trustworthy data. Burgess (1991) stated recorders and other electronic aids are not ideal in every setting, so researchers must consider “the advantages and disadvantages of these instruments in relation to the field context” (p. 193). For this study in a recent immigrant community, the disadvantages and risks to participants’ futures far outweighed any benefit in terms of immigration issues. “Undocumented immigrants certainly continue to avoid attracting attention to themselves” because of deportation fears (Skogan, 2006, p. 48). Also, my assistant did type participants’ words as they spoke and she engaged in member-checking at the end of each interview.

Last, I did not ask the parents or children about any negative words or images they had seen or heard about Esperanza by outsiders or how they perceived these portrayals. Although I added these questions to my new IRB protocol, they are missing 2013 data related to conscientization.

Conclusions

The children, parents, and staff members wove wonderful words to describe Esperanza and most of the youths yearned to go to college. They discussed innovative, hybrid, and slantwise behaviors, which resulted in some resistance. However, the percentage of Esperanza residents earning bachelor’s degrees or higher decreased. Unfortunately, U.S. Congress did not pass any legislation about the Dream Act, a path to citizenship for young adults. Instead, U.S. President Obama’s deferred action program for undocumented youth focuses on prosecutorial discretion and is nothing permanent (Foley, 2012). The lack of higher education attainment in Esperanza relates to the media’s portrayal of Esperanza and the ways in which many educators and officials treat Esperanza residents. Yes, the children dreamed beautifully, but what dreams will they have in 10 years? “What happens to a dream deferred?” Hughes asked, “Does it explode?” (para. 1).

It is no irony today’s Harlem, the title of Hughes’ poem, could very well be Esperanza, through no fault of Esperanza residents. In fact, Chahin (2005), stated: “The term colonia … is analogous to inner-city ghettos” (p. 319). Chahin had children shoot, select, and write about photos of their colonias and Chahin and his colleagues shot films of these colonias to bring to light the living conditions and to affect change. The Public Broadcasting System (PBS) aired Chahin’s documentary and U.S. Congress used the testimonials. Also, according to a staff member in the present study, “[Colonia name] residents have become more outspoken
and present in the Community at large. Many people are getting out the vote and learning how to become involved in raising their own quality of life.”

Colonia residents’ hybrid and slantwise practices, Chahin’s media efforts, and the staff member’s observations demonstrate high-poverty, recent immigrant communities can talk back to derogatory words, images, and treatment. Indeed, this study positions such a neighborhood as poderosa, powerful, and bella, beautiful, full of Esperanza, hope. People in communities depicted as dangerous and calloused must find ways to show their successes in public forums and the media. Waymer (2009) warned that if these residents “cannot get their frames entered into the public dialogue, they risk becoming irrelevant, forgotten, and displaced, as they now are” (p. 181). Last, it is imperative all instructors and community members understand the intersection between social justice and socio-semiotics vis-à-vis media messages, and then help children in marginalized communities throughout the world to develop and sustain conscientization (Freire, 1970) and to embrace hybrid and slantwise practices to resist normalization.

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References


Abstract
Shortly after being informed of his brother’s suicide in 2002, Mic descended into a suicidal crisis of his own. As he had already attempted to take his own life on two separate occasions as a teenager, he began to fear for his safety. His brother’s death acted as a catalyst to begin a process of self-discovery through art. As a sculptor and installation artist, Mic began by creating artworks that incorporated life-affirming qualities within them. This paper explores the doctoral research that developed from Mic’s practice and experience and is supported by the voice of Mic’s supervisor, Lexi, so that the context for the work may be explored. It is a collage of voices, images and text.

Keywords: Suicide, Suicidology, Arts-based Research, Doctoral Dissertation, Lived Experience, Installation

Despite the research in the field regarding suicide there is a dearth of study undertaken by suicide attempt survivors themselves. The doctoral inquiry described in this paper aims to address the void that exists within suicidology and provides an expression of the lived experience of suicide. The voices of Mic, the artist-researcher, of the artworks he created, of his collaborators in these artworks, and of Lexi his supervisor, alternate in the telling of this research and its attendant
issues. In keeping with the arts-based form of the doctoral work, there are many purposeful disruptions and provocations in the reading.

Orientation: Mic
Through my own suicidal crises I have come to more fully appreciate the healing properties of artmaking; the doing, the get-your-hands-dirty stuff of art. An essential and at times frustrating element of my art practice is that seemingly obscure images, forms, thoughts or text often distract me. My immediate reaction is to engage with these distractions, or at least acknowledge them in some way. Then, and only then, am I able to return to my original focus. Some of my best artworks have emerged this way.

Sadly, this trait also applies to my suicidality. I have come to recognise that I have little control over my suicidal thoughts and when they might manifest. They seem to emerge out of the shadows of the darkest recesses of my mind. If I am not watchful, these thoughts can and have spun me into a suicidal crisis. People who have no lived experience of suicide often fail to recognise the depth of pain, or *psychache* (Shneidman, 1993, p. 51) experienced within a suicidal crisis. It is for this reason that those with a history of suicidality have become essential in my life when reaching out for help. However, it is in my art that I have found the most solace.

Orientation: Lexi
In Australian universities, the PhD aspirant has a supervision team, consisting (usually) of two experienced academics who work together with the student to manage the doctoral process and support the research and the candidate. Mic and I met by chance and as the fates would have it, he was in need of another supervisor. Serendipity runs like a quiet river through this work, as in many art-based inquiries, so this didn’t surprise me.

We connected almost immediately, and despite the fact that I knew little about suicide, I knew much about arts-based research. Regardless of our differences, the synergies in our working relationship and the intimate nature of the research focus enabled a dialogue that was productive for us both. In this endeavor, I also had much to learn and thus the processes of supervising and being supervised, making research and being a critical friend, developing rich relationships and talking and marveling and creating was a collaboration; yet another in this process.

On Suicide: Mic
Suicide is a difficult and painful subject to engage with at any time, let alone from a suicide attempt survivor’s perspective. The uncertainty, risk and emotional exposure that I felt in talking about my own suicidality meant that when people shared their own stories with me, our mutual feelings of vulnerability were validated. At
the beginning of my research, I struggled with the various definitions of suicide, seeing no correlation between our experience of being suicidal and what was being written about it. It was David Webb who introduced me to the term ‘original voice of suicidology’ (2002), a term I have embraced to describe the whole person who is experiencing a suicidal crisis; one that encompasses an individual’s body, mind and spirit, framed within the complexities of their social, cultural and historical context (Webb, 2010, p. 16).

Talking about a desire to take one’s own life is not easy. It renders you vulnerable. My original voice of suicide has at times been difficult to articulate, but I see my art as an act of storytelling and like any good read, there are layers of meaning buried within. Through my own reflexive process I expressed my inner emotional turmoil and outer silence by creating artworks about pain, grief and the lived experience of suicide, but just as crucially important I needed to incorporate their opposites for my own survival. The artworks created through this research all have elements of play and innocence about them.

In creatively expressing what being in a suicidal crisis feels like? and how does one move on from suicidal crisis to live an inspired life? the motivation to provide first-hand an alternative awareness of the suicidal mind, is that it has the ability to assist researchers and health care professionals to more fully understand and comprehend the complexities of suicide. The aims of creating artworks that re-present original voice narratives, are to push beyond the taboos and stigma of suicide, beyond the stereotypes, distortions and the malignant silence that pervades societal understanding and reaction to the phenomena. The difficulty for me as an artist, and as someone who has attempted suicide, has been how to express individual narratives in such a way as to present an underlying sense of humanity that is empathic, considered and is above all an honest representation of this trauma.

On Suicide: Lexi

In taking on my role as supervisor, I was wary of the subject matter, yet Mic’s calm and quiet confidence as well as his wise expertise settled my apprehensions. He knew much about suicide and he wasn’t afraid to talk about it; nothing, really, was off limits. This was a revelation and I saw it as courageous, honest and bold. I have learnt from Mic that suicide must be talked about openly.

Understandably, the university ethics committee was quite concerned about the implications of this research for Mic and for his collaborators. It took a while for them to deliberate on Mic’s ethics proposal, but they were satisfied with Mic’s explanations and assurances that support for himself and the others would be accessed and offered as needed. Mic kept his promise.

Although I had faith that the art would act as a catharsis, expression, document, reflective instrument and research method, I wasn’t so sure that Mic understood in
the beginning, the depth of introspection that would be required in order to complete 
the work. Though the research took its toll on many occasions, Mic was stoic. His 
calm and solid presence did not appear to waiver, although I was aware how taxing 
the inquiry was despite his steady authority.

Ways of doing: Mic
The methodologies of dadirri (deep listening) and evocative research have been 
partnered in this research as a platform from which to create a series of installa-
tion based artifacts that respond imaginatively and poetically to original voice 
narratives of the lived experience of suicide. My arts-based approach to research 
relies heavily on the subjectivities of intuition and the imagination. To tease out 
and express what being in a suicidal crisis feels like, requires strategies that are del-
icate and non-threatening. I believe that it can only be achieved with patience, 
sensitivity, honesty and, above all, with compassion. By invoking a heightened 
sense of empathy to enable the humanity contained within the voice of silences, 
of shadows, of pain and of trauma, paradoxically allows for an understanding 
to emerge out of those same shadows and silences that can then be re-expressed 
in artistic form. Employing this approach with others who have a lived experi-
ence of suicide (my collaborator’s accounts) and just as importantly, with myself, 
stories and emotions surface of their own free will. What emerges is a style of 
research that Kanuha refers to as insider research (2000, p. 440) but one that is 
reliant on reflexivity, creativity and inventiveness.

My own reflexive and contemplative approach to meaning-making within 
my studio practice and in combination with the deep listening aspect of dadirri 
has been an essential element in conducting this complex investigation. Judy At-
kinson speaks of dadirri in terms of its ability to help give voice to trauma stories 
that had never before been revealed; the deeper the story the more sense that was 
made of the experience (2002, p. 254). In her explanation of dadirri, Miriam-
Rose Ungunmerr-Baumann speaks of her connection to the land, of finding 
peace in silent awareness and highlights the skill of listening (Wajbala, 2011).

I have also incorporated yarning as an essential aspect of my inquiry to 
provide a broader perspective of suicide other than my own. Although generally 
considered an Indigenous research method for gathering stories, Dawn Bessarab 
and Bridget Ng’andu describe yarning as, ‘the unfolding of information through 
the process of storytelling (narrative) in a relaxed and informal manner that is 
culturally safe’ (2010, p. 38). This approach was crucial within this research to 
allow for the gentle unfolding of the trauma of suicide to be told.

When sharing the lived experience of suicide with my collaborators, my 
sense of vulnerability began to diminish whilst speaking publicly about my 
own suicidality. After some long and quite intimate discussions, a deep level 
of mutual trust was established between us, as was an understanding of each
other’s motivation in expressing and sharing our lived experience of suicide; silences were acknowledged. Blended with these conversations were my reflections, dreams and an eclectic assortment of found objects that helped stimulate my imagination. Consideration was given within the artmaking process to the appropriateness of media, materials, textures and forms whilst constantly being mindful of the symbolism that each might suggest. This creative process of meaning making enabled me to fashion and express authentic representations of the lived experience of suicide as a way to, in Estelle Barrett’s words, ‘generate alternative models of understanding’ (2007, p. 162).

By creating artworks that focus on a range of perspectives relating to the issue of suicide, my aim is to provide a broader, alternative understanding of suicide than that currently being investigated as can be expressed through arts-based research (Barone & Eisner, 2012). Aspects of my research could be viewed as autobiographical in nature; however, much of my lived experience has been re-shaped and transformed into a more conceptual presentation using a combination of text, imagery and form. The biographical approach taken by artist Joseph Beuys suits my sensibilities most in that my artworks are not intended to fit neatly within autobiographical conventions but to mix and stir perception with fact (Kort, 1994, p. 24). Again, much like Beuys, I purposefully engage with and manipulate the materials I use ‘to serve the needs of humanity’ (Klein, 1983) as a device to provide increased opportunities for tacit dialogue to occur between viewer and artwork.

Bridging the two seemingly opposite worlds of suicidology and art has not been an easy endeavour, but the combining of dadirri, yarning and evocative research as methodology has been essential in my approach to underpin both research and creatively expressed responses to individual narratives. Haseman acknowledges that the strength of, ‘practice-led research is its capacity to forge new, hybrid or mutant research methods that are specific to the object of the enquiry’ (2007, p. 155). In setting up a dynamic relationship between research, my studio practice and my quest to present an alternative model of understanding around the issue of suicide, the crucial task of this research is to symbolically and literally, ‘break the muteness of the artifact and give it voice so that it can tell its story’ (Mäkelä, 2007, p. 163).

Ways of doing: Lexi

Mic is an artist. By this I mean this is his ontological and epistemological position. As such the arts-based approach to the research is a pragmatic decision – it is the most authentic way for Mic to explore the deeply personal yet universal phenomena of suicide. The authenticity of this approach with respect to original voice narratives is that Mic acts as a mediator between the known and the unknown through the language
of the visual. This allows for his understandings, but crucially, also allows for the unfolding of understandings by the audience.

It is in this intimate and individual connection between artwork and audience that empathy, dialogue and understanding can occur. The audience is able to come to the information embedded in the works in their own, idiosyncratic ways, enabling interpretations that are peculiar to each individual’s experience and subsequent engagement with the works. This is a powerful way to communicate to the field of suicidology and, importantly, to those of us as yet untouched by suicide, the psychache present in the minds of those who feel suicide is the only option. Yet embedded in the works, because of Mic’s assertion regarding play and innocence as essential elements in his work, there is also hope.

The research: Mic
My studio/art-practice places a heavy emphasis on experimentation through play. Each work is infused with a complexity and blending of symbols, metaphors or analogies. It requires vigorous engagement with the imagination and a belief in occurrences of a serendipitous nature. It is my intuitive response to information and materials alongside a process of continual reflection that helps me create sculptures and installations that I believe will engage the audience in such a way as to facilitate a tacit dialogue between themselves and the artworks.

Each of the installations created for this research began with a conversation; a conversation about suicide. The artworks are narrative portraits relating to suicide, but more importantly however, is that incorporated within each of them are a sense of hope and an embracing of life. This was borne out of a belief that art is a vibrant, living process with an ability to alter perception, which when conceived out of mindful introspection has the capacity and power to help demystify and reduce the stigma and prejudices so endemic in the issue of suicide.

Paradoxical spiral is a collaboration between poet and artist Jessica Raschke and myself and was conceived over a coffee. As we spoke of our shared experience of suicide and our attempts to use art as a means to create debate, Jessica Mic told me that on the way to our coffee meeting, he had an image of a spiral come to his mind’s eye. I was struck by this revelation. I have a tattoo of a spiral on my right shoulder, which I had tattooed as a reminder to myself to always work towards positive transformation. A reminder that, while there might be moments or phases when life feels is it progressing down the spiral, it only takes another moment or phase to find it moving upwards again into a positive future, only this time equipped with a little more wisdom. It seemed like a fated meeting and it made perfect sense for Mic and I to collaborate on an artwork.
discussion and awareness about the issue it seemed only natural that we should combine our talents and experience.

**Mic**

*Paradoxical spiral* consists of thirteen sheets of lead with text cut out of it and beaten into it. The materiality of lead was chosen to represent the toxic thoughts that occur during a suicidal crisis and how easily thoughts can be distorted and manipulated during such episodes. The cut out text lies at the base of each sheet to be re-interpreted to create new words, new meanings. Beaten into the lead sheets is the text from the children’s tale, *The Paper Bag Princess* by Robert Munsch, one of Jessica's favorite books as a child.

*End of statistics* resulted from another café interlude; with Baden Offord. As we chatted Baden spoke of the horrendous prevalence of suicide within the generations of his own family. Numerous coffees have been consumed since and as our friendship has grown so have the insights into the complexities of suicide. *End of statistics* speaks of how suicide has framed and marked one man and his family, past and present, deeply, completely and profoundly.
In creating *End of statistics* our aim has been to capture the complex nature of suicide that can appear to run in families. Making sense of Baden’s story is like piecing together some impossible jigsaw puzzle. Through our conversations

**Baden**

My father rehearsed his death throughout my teenage years until he finally achieved it on my 19th birthday in 1977. My sister and I both attempted suicide preceding him. My younger brother at the age of 42 did end his life in 2007. There were other relatives too, who took their own lives, my family story is one that is indelibly caught up in the complexities and silences, around, of and ensuing from suicide.

**Mic**

In creating *End of statistics* our aim has been to capture the complex nature of suicide that can appear to run in families. Making sense of Baden’s story is like piecing together some impossible jigsaw puzzle. Through our conversations...
Baden and I journeyed into the past via memories, photos and journal entries. These conversations were then reinterpreted and made manifest by printing six distinct images onto acetate which were then cut and folded to form 117 Columbus cubes. The 3-dimensional nature of the cubes means that only one completed image can be seen at any one time without dismantling the entire work. Juxtaposed against the fragility of the cubes is a solid, steel and timber sawmill tram trolley. On one level the trolley represents Baden’s father and his family’s life, on another, the journeys Baden and I took in travelling backwards and forwards into the past. Yet on another level it provides an image of the table
at which we sat drinking coffee, talking and taking the time to listen, with empathy, to each other’s story.

The starting point for *Beyond the 7th month* was hearing about a Chinese tradition in which couples are presented with a lotus pod on its stem when they are married, a symbol of a long and fruitful marriage. In one woman’s case, Fang, that relationship broke down and eventually, for a variety of complex and culturally significant reasons, she took her own life. Unfortunately the situation Fang found herself in was not an isolated one, as women account for over half of all China’s suicides (Meng, 2002).
Associated with death, white is traditionally seen as the color of mourning in China. Red, the symbolic color of happiness is strictly forbidden at funerals. The combination of white porcelain slip cast lotus pods, red thread and black umbrella in the installation of Beyond the 7th month, signifies for me the difficulty researchers face in understanding the complexities of cultural characteristics inherent in the phenomena of suicide. The seventh month refers to the month in which the lotus flower withers.

*Be a right good pal...* came about after a phone call from a young woman, who contacted me the day after her father had attempted to take his own life for the second time. He was a Vietnam Veteran. Weeks later she began to have her own fixation with suicide. The burden and trauma of suicide borne by those left behind is often ignored with dire consequences. Fortunately in this case both father and daughter are now in a much improved state.

*Be a right good pal...* is a line from the Last Post, traditionally played at ANZAC day events or at the funerals of veterans. By recreating the music of the Last Post and installing it with a military bugle, charcoal, lead, bronze and an adjustable pink (girl's) music sheet stand, I hope to reconstruct the account and relationship between a father and daughter who so bravely shared their story with me. It was also important to draw attention to the plight of other veterans in similar circumstances, men and women burnt out by the horrors of war and unable or unwilling to share their pain and seek help.

*Paper shadows* evolved through a series of internal conversations between my brother, his dog Ralf and myself. It was just one of the strategies I used to come to terms with my brother’s suicide and the manner in which he took his own life. Together the three of us relived their last moments, the notes he left and the music he played as we recalled his pain.

Created from the fabric of an old futon that my brother had slept on and the fibre of a plant known as cottonweed, *Paper shadows* suspends two sheets of handmade paper on top of one another. A few pieces of paper are sometimes the only reminders we have of someone’s existence, apart from memories and even those can be extremely melancholic experiences if no one else were witness to them. For
all of our differences in age and in attitude he and I were bound by blood, yet strangely, we led such parallel lives. We have both become free, he in death and me through art.

The numerous conversations that I have had about people’s experience of suicide were the concept behind Yarnings. After meeting an Aboriginal elder working in the field of suicide prevention at a conference, the notion of yarning was discussed as a means to engage with people, to talk in a non-threatening way about their lived experience of suicide.

Apart from being a story, a yarn is also a long continuous length of twisted interlocking threads. And it was the analogy between these interlocking threads and the narrative threads that run through people’s lives that I wanted to highlight within this artwork. Throughout my journey, dozens of people have revealed and shared their experience of suicide, be they bereaved by suicide or having survived an attempt. Yarnings acknowledges those conversations and how our knowledge of suicide can be increased by weaving those yarns together to form a much larger fabric of understanding.
The research: Lexi

Mic’s research is a work of art; the art is the research (Finley & Knowles, 1995). It is also a self-portrait of the artist and a portrait of the enigma of suicide. Like any portrait, the artist captures you in the gaze, looking directly at you through the artwork in silent communion.

It was essential to this dynamic between the real work and the audience, that the examiners view and evaluate the installations in immediate ways rather than as reproductions. It was critical that they travel to see Mic’s work in a direct encounter on-site in a gallery setting. Fortunately, our university was able to accommodate this caveat. The examiners, like the university ethics committee, had concerns about Mic’s wellbeing, given that he admits to several suicidal crises during the process of his doctoral candidature.

I’ve wondered if the concerns raised are in part due to Mic’s candour and brutal honesty in the exegesis. Mic normalizes the dialogue about suicide, and speaks of it openly and without shame. By doing so, he rejects notions of the forbidden.

Discussion: Mic

The lived experience of suicidality is chaotic and confused, full of ambiguity and doubt. Anger, fear and other passions are also tangled with the paralysing hopelessness and helplessness. All of this and more must be spoken of. The dispassionate, scholarly voice has its place, but by itself it cannot adequately capture and articulate these essential elements of the suicidal experience as it is lived (Webb, 2010, p. 6).

The manner in which I have conducted and presented this research is unique in the field of suicidology; it has been my aim to contribute new and personal insight into the lived experience of suicide, something that has been missing from the field. The research has delved into the human story of suicide, not by focusing on the pain, humiliation, guilt or loneliness felt prior to an attempt nor on the method of suicide but by a phenomenological process that, to use Lorri Neilsen Glenn’s words “embraces ambiguity, metaphor, recursiveness, silence [and] sensory immersion” (2008, p. 108). The aim of creating artworks that re-present original voice narratives of suicide is to push beyond the stereotypes, distortions and the malignant silence that pervades societal understanding and reaction to the issue. But more than that, I have tried to express how many individuals have embraced life after a suicide attempt. Primary to my inquiry is the exploration of the intersecting spaces that exist between the opposing elements of the psychache of suicide alongside a passion for embracing life.

The phrase, *suicide is not an option* is often used when discussing suicide prevention and, as desirable as the concept may be, the terminology is flawed. Having experienced several suicidal crises, I know that the extreme complexity of suicide is such that I and others have found enormous comfort in knowing
that suicide actually is an option. To prevent suicide, we must first acknowledge that suicide is a very real and comforting option for many people in crisis. Dismissing this aspect of suicide simply places the issue back in the closet. Thus, we need to concentrate on how an individual can access and be offered better options. It is these better options that I have alluded to within my research.

The difficulty for me, and for others in a suicidal crisis, is with how to engage the will and the desire to reach out for help and seek those better options. The nature of this research and its processes has confirmed for me that the support offered by other suicide attempt survivors is a unique and untapped resource for those in the grips of a debilitating suicidal crisis. My research confirms that if we as a society want to stem the tide of suicide, we need to engage with those who have a lived experience of it.

As I look back on the events that have shaped my life, I visualise the unfurling of an old pianola scroll. Its edges are torn and the perforations represent the markings that fate has bestowed upon me. The metaphor of this musical stencil as a way to represent a person’s life is one of the reasons why I have chosen to print the exegesis onto a series of pianola scrolls and present my research as an artist book. The missing text or imagery caused by the perforations symbolise the complexity, the silence and the sheer impossibility of ever fully understanding the issue of suicide.

Art can act as a vehicle for expressing what words too often fail to do. This research powerfully demonstrates that art, in its many forms, can reach across the void that exists within the field of suicidology to express the lived experience of suicide in all of its complexity. Since many suicide attempt survivors feel uncomfortable in speaking publicly (or privately) about their attempt, using art as an alternative language makes it possible to ‘embrace and explore the complexity and richness of the space between entrenched perspectives’ (Dwyer & Buckle, 2009, p. 60), that fertile ground, the one that exists at the intersecting boundaries of opposites. The potent combination of art and original voice narratives of suicide, working hand-in-hand with suicidology, makes possible new insights and understandings of the suicidal mind and potentially to reduce the incidence of suicide in the long term.

**Discussion: Lexi**

* Mic’s methodology is unique in the field of suicidology, as are his findings. The journey to a place of finished PhD is not, I suspect, as important as Mic’s personal journey. Yet, both are important to our understandings of the phenomena of suicide and what we all can do to support potential victims and their families. The better options of which Mic speaks must be encouraged, and most importantly revealed, not only to those affected, but those of us who are ignorant. Mic has given us something very special; through his art he has given this formidable issue light and air, and thus
the malevolent silence around suicide evaporates in the exposé. This is a powerful outcome for this work, but most importantly for Mic and all of the others touched by suicide.

Michael Eales is a sculptor/mixed media artist and an art-based researcher. He recently completed his PhD, Different Voice, Different Perspective: An arts-based and evocative research response to original voice narratives of suicide at Southern Cross University. He is a suicide survivor in the sense that he has twice attempted to take his own life and having lost his brother to suicide in 2002. It was after his brother’s death that he began creating a series of artworks about the personal, social and cultural ramifications of suicide. He was the 2008 winner of the Windmill Trust Scholarship award for regional artists. He is a founding member of Suicide Prevention Australia’s Lived Experience Committee and has recently become involved with The Survival Project, an international suicide attempt survivor group.

Alexandra Cutcher is currently Senior Lecturer in Arts education at the School of Education at Southern Cross University. She is Research Leader of the Creativity, Arts and Education Research Group [CReArE] and is also Honours Course Coordinator. Alexandra is World Councillor for the International Society of Education through Art [InSEA] and program Chair for the Arts-Based Educational Research Special Interest Group [ABER SIG] for the American Educational Research Association. She is also Editor of Australian Art Education and Co-Editor of the book series Studies in Arts-based Educational Research (Springer). She has been recognised nationally for her teaching and research in Arts education, most recently as a recipient of an OLT (Office for Learning and Teaching, Australian Government) Citation for Outstanding Contribution to Student learning (2014). Alexandra’s book Displacement, Identity and Belonging: An Auto/Biographical, Arts-based Portrayal of Ethnicity and Experience (Sense), is based upon her award winning doctoral work. Alexandra’s current research focuses deeply on collaborative practice, the relationships between surface and materiality as they apply to teaching and teacher education and issues of representation in Arts-based research.

References


Reflections on Teaching and Learning in Undergraduate Education

An Auto-ethnographical Reflection on Storytelling as a Portal to Mindfulness

Kimberley Holmes

Abstract
As a first year instructor in the new B.Ed program at the University of Calgary I required a research mode that would allow for reflection and contemplation on the process explored. Auto–ethnography is, “an autobiographical genre of writing and research that displays multiple layers of consciousness, connecting the personal to the cultural” (Ellis & Bochner, 2000 p. 739). As a researcher, I was seeking a methodology that would merge my personal ontology and epistemology with the broader cultural context of understanding the new program and the needs of the educational system that this program will serve. Through first person narrative, I explore the initial complexities encountered and the learnings discovered as a reflective practitioner.

Keywords: Auto-ethnography, Narrative Inquiry, Poetic Inquiry, Adult Learning, Curriculum and Learning

On the 45th anniversary of the day that I came gasping into this earthly existence I smiled out at my 34 new undergraduate students whom I was challenged to enlighten about professional practice. Did I really know what I was doing? Although I had been teaching for many years, this was a new experience and as butterflies threatened to take flight in my stomach, I turned to my poetry,
for poetry “makes writing conspicuous and pays attention to particulars in opposition to transparent invisible scientific writing that focuses on comparative framework” (Faulkner, 200 p. 25). Poetry was my initial chosen medium used to explore my feelings, calm my thoughts, and allow me to move inward to reflect on the process of reading, writing, and telling stories. It also opened space to reflect on why it is important to open up to the stories of those around us. As Leggo (2012) reflects “we need to compose and tell our stories as creative ways of growing in humanness. We need to question our understanding of who we are in the world” (p.xx). This reflection can be accomplished through the process of poetic musing and narrative inquiry.

Then we reach a turning point
An epiphany of sorts
When nothing is quite what it seems
And the world begins to morph.....

We think we know the answers
But then are there answers at all?
What will be our collective future
Is the writing on the wall?

What were the key learnings required to teach English Language Arts? Husserl (1965) philosophised that the “theoretical interests” of the humanities in an ideal world should be; “directed to human beings as persons, to their personal life and activity and to the concrete results of that activity” (p. 150). The question then becomes, how does one direct the work of human beings and what was it that pre-service teachers really needed to know about themselves and others, to understand, and to make part of their embodied experience? These questions presented a new twist in my pathway which would impact on my own learning and professional practice, a new part of the journey as our “journeys have a way of finding our pathways. Whether sought or circumstantial, each journey shapes how we walk in the world” (Meyer, 2003, p. 11). Each and every experience we have shapes who we are and who we are to become.

Can you share your story?
Can you listen too?
How does the sharing or our stories
Connect to what we want to do?
Can you be the storyteller
Of the human tale?
Can you access all the plot lines
Of the children in your care?
Can you share your story?

This part of my journey involved exploring stories, mine and my students, and the discussion around how our personal stories connected to the teaching of English Language Arts in an attempt to bring us to a holistic understanding of the discipline. I have noted through years of teacher training that the study of the humanities has become increasingly fragmented. The deeper understanding of the essential questions of the humanities has been scattered into spelling lists, grammar tests and disconnected bits, all requiring quantitative evaluation and measurement, all lacking relevancy and significance. As Seidel (2006) reflects, “education has been increasingly described around goals of preparing children for work—and the word democracy slips away, to be replaced by the language of competition, measurement and bottom lines.” We break things down into measurable pieces that take away the study of the deeper essential questions, the heart of the humanities, which require our exploration and engages the minds of learners. An understanding of the essential questions, those large questions that address the essence of our humanity, requires a type of education that allows all learners to live as a unique and individual person within a social framework, living together in a community. How would I create such a community which would then be brought forth into the schools? What is required to hear each individual voice, and explore each individual story? How will I listen to the “ever growing chorus of voices calling for a comprehensive vision of some kind?” (Stock, 2006 p. 1761). In addition to taking the time to listen to the voices, I need to also be mindful to the demands of the system and the wellness of the teacher and students. I needed to breathe.

First day of school
Take a deep breath
Each day a new chapter
Not written yet

Each day a new chance
To engage and inspire
Savour each moment
As we are here for awhile

This was the first class in the University of Calgary’s Bachelor of Education program, the first class of what was soon to evolve into secondary English teach-
ers, my colleagues and fellow storytellers of the human tale. How could I teach them what they needed to know so they could go forth and support the diverse needs of the complex system? What was important?

We ask ourselves and others: Why is it important that we write and tell our stories to others? Why is it important that others read, view and listen to our stories? Why is it important that others write and tell their own stories? Why is it important that we open up to the stories of others? (Hasbe-Ludt, Chambers, & Leggo, 2009, p. 3)

Why do we write, read and communicate if not to share our stories of humanity? Narrative work “is connected to the understanding of how stories present possibilities for understanding the complex, mysterious and even ineffable experiences that compromise human living” (Leggo, 2012, p. xix). Certainly there are other pragmatic purposes but the essence of effective communication is to facilitate harmony in our world. For years I had pondered what path I would take if such an opportunity to teach pre-service teachers arose. How would I guide the novice teachers through the complexities of teaching, specifically the complexities of teaching the human story and all its passion and power, the discipline we call English Language Arts, the heart of the humanities. Somehow I needed to find the balance between the ontology and the epistemology of teaching and learning, to revisit past learnings and be open to new possibilities for “only when venturing into the unknown do we enable new ideas to take shape, and those shapes differ for each voyager” (Wheatley, 1992, p. x.). I took a deep breath and prepared to bring forth what I knew and inspire new learning for “so long as you breathe the free air of earth you are under obligation to render grateful service” (Yogananda, 1946, p. 105).

The breath is a reappearing motif in my life for so many reasons and is such an important one for “with each inhale, our lungs stretch open, our rib cages swell and our hearts expand. Each inhale is a new beginning, a clean slate” (Herring, 2007 p. 13). I needed to remember to breathe and to show my pre-service teachers how to bring this concept forth into their own professional practice. What does it mean to breathe? The trinity of breathing, slowing down and being present are all part of being a reflective practitioner.

I smiled out at my learners, welcoming them to the tribe and, with my eyes, offering an invitation to slow down and reflect inward. Slowing down was not something they were used to in the rapid fire world of coursework and assignments that was their current reality. It would not be easy as, “entering this mindful space-time in educational places is difficult because of our constant busyness and overwhelming amount of work, but also because a critique is often expressed by critical voices towards the use of contemplative practices in education” (Siedel 2006, p. 1903). Yet without careful contemplation of the philosophy of our own
being we are lacking a critical component of the wisdom of the teaching practice required to discover professional praxis. My invitation was for my learners to join me on a slow journey, a quest for an understanding of self to then be expanded to an understanding of others. What is the significance of this journey?

It is a journey that is common through our human experience. According to Smith (1999):

> If setting out on a journey is a central aspect of human experience, what are the motivations? Classical examples indicate the following:
> 1. To answer a basic concern about existence, such as the meaning of suffering
> 2. To respond to an inner call
> 3. To escape oppression
> 4. To discover a divine purpose

This idea of a journey was the key to our explorations. Slowly and mindfully, no longer concerned about what I had spent my entire summer planning to “teach” pre-service teachers, I asked them the question, How came you to be here, at this time and at this place? It was an invitation to share their personal legend as a starting point to making sense of the process of teaching the humanities for storytelling is a meaning making process through which we transmit thoughts, emotion and culture. As Connelly and Clandinin (1990) stated, “education is the construction and reconstruction of personal and social stories; teachers and learners are storytellers and the characters in their own and other’s stories” (p. 2).

To take the time to construct and reconstruction our personal and social stories required us to slow down.

*Can you slow your mind down?*
*Listen to your slow and steady breath?*
*Can you take a moment?*

*To pause, to dream, to be*
*To practice mindfully*
*And understand your own ontology?*

My goal was to set a tone of mindfulness to my teaching that would allow for an environment of trust conducive to bringing forth authentic voice for; “to bring mindfulness to the moment of teaching is to be able to respond to what is really going on, to life as it presents itself, with all its surprises from moment to moment” (Seidel, 2006, p. 1907). The key was to connect with my learners at a deeper, more personal level which would then be transferred over to their own interactions with future student as, “I have never once been disenchanted with
teaching and learning when the environment is engaging and inspiring” (Meyers, 2003, p. 21).

A silence fell over the room. Where they really thinking about this or had I lost them already? They all looked down at their notebooks or immersed themselves in their technology. I fought the urge to jump in with my own verbal commentary and bit down on my lip to stop the constant chatter in my own mind. The monkey in my own mind was in a rage, screaming for me to get going and teach them something but this was not a theory or strategy that they could memorize to be added to the teacher toolkit. It was an authentic question about why they have chosen this path, this journey, this particular specialization to focus upon. There was no right answer only essential, authentic questions that would be the holy grail of the explorations they were about to undertake and this process would take time so I needed to learn to wait and tell my inner monkey to shut up! We needed to stop, reflect and breathe, together.

Hence began the exploration of our personal stories, our interconnected legends and the significance of these stories, in their various forms, to our greater learning community and the systems within which we coexist. It was an exploration within our storied lives and research into the process of teaching and learning as the study of narrative is the study of the way that humans experience the world and “teachers and learners are storytellers and characters in their own and other’s stories” (Connelly & Clandinin, 1990, p 2).

This was an exploration that took me far beyond my expectations and inspired my heart and my academic mind to seek deeper into this process and it’s implications for teaching and learning in the Academy, as well as in the field, for “the inward path of the journey with inspiring landscapes and the outward path with political territories have both lead to a place where we imagine pedagogy again and again” (Meyer, 2003, p. 21). What alchemy would we discover through the interpretation of our collective voice? Together, we were seeking the inward path to discover our ontology that would guide not only our epistemology but our teaching philosophy.

Alchemy
A type of magic
That opens our world to the various
Possibilities

Created through the merging
Of the elements
And the collaborative vibration
Of our voices
Our world is filled with stories and these stories are never truly finished. It is a spiral process that folds back onto itself, expressed and sometimes concealed, through the power of our language. Our stories are our journeys, our quests, and are a central aspect of our human experience for “the most basic purpose of going on a journey, then, is the very ordinary one of learning to be at home in a more creative way, in a good way, a healthy way, a way to be tuned to the deepest truth of things” (Smith, 1999 p. 2). Our role, as English teachers, is to take our students on that journey to understand the alchemy that surrounds us to allow us to understand ourselves as “the most sophisticated definition of ‘magic’ that now circulates through the American counterculture is the ability or power to alter one’s consciousness at will” (Abram, 1996, p. 9). We were building higher levels of consciousness, expanding pathways in our pre-frontal cortex, increasing our ability for empathy and compassion and, “in doing so we intend to set the stage for synergistic collaboration between scientific research on contemplative practice and educational programs designed to foster the cognitive, emotional and social development of 21st century youth” (MLERN, 2012, p. 148).

It is this development of a higher level of consciousness in ourselves and in those we teach, which guides our journey. The sharing or our stories “is a way for educators to see more clearly themselves in relation to their circumstances, past and present, and to understand those relationships and their implications more deeply” (Hasbe-Ludt, Chambers & Leggo, 2009, p. 31). This sharing allowed for the authentic development of our collaborative learning community, as “I want to surrender my care of the universe and become a participating member, with everyone I work with, in an organization that moves gracefully with its environment, trusting in the unfolding dance of order” (Wheatley, 1992, p. 23).

Together we can shape it
If we join the dance
Remembering our histories
Willing to take a chance

Something remarkable happens when we are asked to share our stories and others in our community listen. Something happens deep within our bodies that results in taking pause and reflecting: “Philosophy and science could each stand on mountains and speak clearly and eloquently about humankind as an abstraction, yet say little of relevance for the deep caves of a person’s life” (Griffin & Griffin, 1994 p. 30). What is it that resides deep within us that shapes our personalities and our state of being? How do we answer the question, “who am I as a person? Am I the author of my life, or do others author my life?” (p. 30). What does it mean to author one’s own story and what are the implications for teacher training.
programs? Understanding our personal ontology begins with an understanding of our own story, which allows us to transform and evolve as beings.

*Listen children to a story  
That began when you were born  
When your purpose and your passion  
And your dreams began to form*

The premise is that the central purpose of education is a “transformation of the self” (Dall’Alba, 2009, p. 37). If teachers do not understand this process of transformation it will be impossible for them to bring this understanding forth in their students. It is this understanding of the complex transformative nature of self that is at the heart of the study of ontology for “while knowledge and skills are necessary, they are insufficient for skilful practice and for the transformation of the self that is integral for achieving practice” (Dall’Alba, p. 1). Somehow I needed to combine the ontology of being with the practical epistemology that they would need to be in the classroom. I was drawn back to the thoughts of Palmer (1998) in *The Courage to Teach*, in that, “remembering ourselves and our power can lead to revolution but it requires more than recalling a few facts. Re-membering involves putting ourselves back together, recovering identity and integrity, reclaiming the wholeness of our lives.” (p. 20) How could reclamation of wholeness occur in the classroom and how can this wholeness be brought forth into the system? How could I help my pre-service teachers grow and thrive?

I needed to facilitate an understanding of self and an understanding of process and a base of knowledge that would work together to help pre-service teachers understand the complexity of the system. Programs of studies, learning outcomes, recommended resources, universal design for learning, and personalization of student learning all combined together as an “organic system”(Robinson, 2013). Education is always evolving, changing and becoming yet always tied to our common humanity. My learners were in the midst of an epiphany about their personal practice, poised on the starting blocks yet unsure where to start and afraid to jump the gun and make a mistake. They needed confidence, inspiration, and a practical toolkit as well as an understanding of mindful practice and the connection to the current cognitive learning science. We all needed to stop being distracted by the fragmented pieces and consider the whole, recognizing the heart of this whole as our interconnected stories. Habito (1997) speaks of this as living in the present moment and “with such an understanding of living the present moment, one lives life and makes decisions in the present in a way that is open to the future and is thereby responsible for it” (p. 71). Jardine (2012) calls for an “opening up free spaces for thinking, for knowledge, for coming to know the world, around the real events of our lives and the possibilities (p. 7). It is an opening of space to
allow creativity, free thought and an exploration of the deeper questions as Smith (1990) eloquently states,

for teachers in the “West”, the deepest challenge may be to learn how to reclaim the senses of the Self that are not dependent on manufactured images or commercial summoning. Instead, in the face of shrill prescriptions, let deep down reverberations of the soul now emerge pedagogically from a new kind of meditatively centred self-assured autonomy, and let young and old join hands in hymn of joy that celebrates a space of common interest and free intelligence. (p. 60)

The challenge is to reclaim the self, to experience what Chogyam Trungpa (1991) expressed as “the real feeling of the present moment” (p. 151). For me as the instructor this meant that I would be present, I would be in the moment, and I would allow the process to develop organically and authentically. I focused on the sound of my own breath, the deep inhale and exhale that symbolized the root of life and waited patiently for my students to find their own breath. How came you to be here, at this time and this place? How did I as the instructor come to be here?

I don’t know how it began or when. In fact, I don’t even know if it had a beginning or it was a cycle amidst it’s spiraling synthesis long before my own biology became reality.

Perhaps the kaleidoscope of colors began blending when the chromosomes of parents collided or maybe that was just purely physical and the real journey began much later. The quest for being, the cycle of life, the perpetual seeking for the solutions in a world filled with one way streets and do not enter signs. A world filled with confusion and broken dreams yet…..

It was all part of the jumbled jigsaw. All part of it…
(Holmes, 1990 pg. vi)

I was back to the exploration of my own story, my own voice in this complex process. But somehow this was different as I was facilitating the exploration of not only my own story, but the story of the teaching aspirants in the room and we were exploring together. It was a type of collaborative auto ethnography which would allow for not only deeper learning about the self but the other as “collaborative work has potential to engender a deeper understanding of self and others in the social and cultural context than is possible from a solo analysis” (Chang, Ngunjiri & Hernandez, 2013, p. 28). It was a process that would allow us, the English Language Arts tribe, to build an authentic and sustainable learning community that would thrive in the classroom setting and have the ability to remain
organic and growing in an on-line platform as the students all went individually into their field experiences. The ability of this group to remain connected on-line was a direct outcome of the deep level of personal story sharing that occurred in the classroom setting as, “this level of sharing that ensues from a collaborative auto ethnographic research process inherently promotes community among research participants” (p. 29).

This was not about teaching them how to be teachers at all, but joining them in a research process exploring the ontology and the epistemology of the process involved in the professional practice. A process is defined in my old high school dictionary as:

1. A course or methods of operations in the production of something
2. A forward movement (Funk and Wagner Dictionary, 1983)

It appears we need to change the lens again and rethink the possibilities for teacher training. Yes it is a course of possible methods or operations but not a set method at all. There are multiple forms and possibilities to be considered. It may be a movement forward, but it could also be a movement backwards, or even sideways as well. It would be a process of a spiral movement, bringing us in and out of a circle of understanding for exploring teaching and learning. It is a type of contemplative practice, a type of journey for “the true aim of contemplative practice is called Upacara, referring to the fact that once inner peace has been found, one must embark on the difficult new journey of investigating one’s “outer activity’ piercing its illusions and repudiating its claims when necessary” (Smith, 1999 p. 4).

Hence, we needed to begin with our own stories of the journey and then we needed to braid those stories together. This poetic, lyrical, autobiographical, visual, musical or digital writing is the catalyst to changing our personal lives and the lives of those we interact with and care about. As Hasbe-Ludt, Chambers and Leggo (2009) explore through Life Writing, “through literary and literary engagement with words, stories and poems, we hope that they can remember their own stories, gain the courage to tell them and to address the complicated issues of living ethically and with empathy among all our relations.” (p. 12) This life writing process, which was used to inform the process explored in the methodology course, was a hybrid of duo ethnography (Norris, Sawyer & Lund; 2012), collaborative auto ethnography (Chang et al, 2013) and poetic inquiry (Faulkner, 2009; Leggo 2010). It was a collaborative journey we would continue to explore in the future as colleagues face- to- face and in an on-line community, and it would begin in this methodology class as, “each year I ask my students to trust me, to journey with me as we think about possible connections between their subject discipline and teaching creatively” (Leggo, 2010, p. 13) I began to think about
the “content” of our English Language arts program; literature consisting of plays, novels, short stories, and poetry all presented in a multiple means of engagement, representation and expression. I began specifically to think about the role of prose and poetry in connecting our worlds, connecting our hearts.

I began to understand poetry in new ways.
what does it mean to live poetically, to live
with the spirit of creativity, to call to the Muses
into our daily experiences of living and learning?
(Leggo, 2010 p. 14)

And I realized that the Muses were again calling to me, as their voices have called so many times before, bringing me back to the creativity, the poetry and the phenomenal beauty of the human story with all its tragedy and all it’s power. The Muses were reminding me of the essence of who we are and how we came to be, a solo journey and yet a collaborative one at the same moment. Whether I was teaching grade 7 or post-secondary, the root of exploration of the humanities remains the same. We are all interconnected parts of the whole of humanity trying to find our way.

The lover, the lunatic and the poet
Are of imagination all compact.
(Shakespeare – A Midsummer Nights’ Dream)

All parts of the whole, struggling to come together and find one stronger, common story for “when immersed in the act of writing and braiding we are distinctly aware how juxtaposing and mixing our narratives create a new text that is stronger and more complex than our individual stories” (Hasbe-Ludt et al; 2009, p. 7) Together, we needed to create something stronger than all of us alone and we needed to start with the voices of my students, start with their personal stories and then build that understanding to something deeper, something that would allow them to understand the epistemology through the lens of their own ontology. Before we can understand the theories of knowledge, we need to understand our own theory of being in the world. Who we are, our being, shapes how we understanding knowing and what we know. The ontology and the epistemology are critically intertwined. An understanding of our personal journey, and how that journey shapes who we are and who we may become is a critical self-reflective process that beginning teachers need to understand, and then be able to facilitate that reflective process in others. When we understand our own being, we then can understand the being of others and the greater interconnected role of our humanity. Just as Holmes(1990) asserts, there is a wholeness and a universality about this endeavour;
I am one human being, in a world filled with many different stories about the journey of life. My journey began long ago, and I am not alone in this quest. We are all searching for meaning, a reason for existence and the words to our stories. (p. 114)

I took another deep breath for, “writing begins with the breath” (Herring, 2007) and waited for learning to happen authentically and organically. Then when it was time, together, we journeyed through each of our stories and “some write poetry and narrative. Others paint, sing and dance” (Leggo, 2010, p. 13). And in our various modes and representations, each unique and individual, we began to explore the essential questions of the human story and our hopes and dreams for the future. Van Manen (1991) describes the essence of teaching and of parenting as hope. He writes, “what hope can give us is the simple avowal; ‘I will not give up on you. I know you can make a life for yourself.’ Thus hope refers to that which gives us patience and tolerance, belief and trust in the possibility of our children.” (p. 68) I have two biological children and hundreds of others I have met in various classrooms and contexts. Most teachers do, that is a significant part of our story. Each child or person we share a chapter with becomes a part of our lives, a part of the interconnected web of human stories, a part of our personal ontology and way of being in the world. As Lymburner (2004) reflects on the evolving process of becoming a teacher:

Who am I? How have I evolved as a teacher? What matters to me the most? How can I make a difference to others? To unravel the snarl of questions that surround my practice,..... and to negotiate a path of meaningful inquiry that shifts inward and outward is no easy task. (p. 75)

Negotiating a path inward and outward is difficult work and the journey of the reflective practitioner. It begins with a solitary story and then becomes a task that is best negotiated within a caring learning community spinning a web or interconnected stories of humanity. Learning communities, working together towards a common vision create a powerful force. As Wheatley (2002) reflects, “there is no power greater than a community discovering what it cares about” (p. 45). My students and I shared stories about what it means to be entrusted with the care of the children, in essence the guardians of our future. We realized that all the seemingly separate pieces of a complex system came back to the same whole, to prepare our students, using each individual learners’ unique gifts and talents for life and “as the students explore language and creative arts, they develop an understanding of the fundamental importance of integrated, holistic, process oriented and collaborative approaches to leaning and knowing” (Leggo, 2010 p. 13). We laughed, cried, and learned together about the complex process of exploring the teaching and learning of English Language Arts as “they were intended to
develop the intellect, and through this to transform a life” (Stock, 2006, p. 1761). Through the process of reflective process of storytelling “we perform our commitment to living with careful intent, critical interrogation, and thoughtful awareness” (Chambers, Hasebe-Ludt, Leggo & Sinner, p. xxvii).

Once upon a time
Or so some stories start
We began a new existence
A journey to the heart

Reading, writing, arithmetic
The basics of the world
Perhaps the essence of the human story
Is really what should be heard

Will you share your story?
Join me on this quest
Are you ready to be the teacher?
The dream keeper

Once upon a time
In a land far far away
There were children
Waiting for their story to be told.

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**References**


