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What's the Vibe? Curriculum, Atmosphere, and Youth-Adult Partnerships

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What's the Vibe? Curriculum, Atmosphere, and Youth-Adult Partnerships

Jacob Folsom-Fraster

May 2018

A MASTER'S RESEARCH PAPER

Submitted to the faculty of Clark University, Worcester,
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the degree of Master of Arts in the department of Community Development and Planning

And accepted on the recommendation of

Laurie Ross Chief Instructor

ABSTRACT

What's The Vibe: Curriculum, Atmosphere, and Youth-Adult Partnerships

Jacob Folsom-Fraster

This paper explores the concept of the atmosphere of a space, specifically related to educational and goal oriented spaces housed in Youth-Adult Partnerships, and guided by curriculum. Through participatory action research, myself and the peer leaders of Worcester's HOPE Coalition have engaged in a deep reflection on our experiences in these spaces together. Through our dialogue we came to conceptualize the atmosphere or "vibe," and theorized how it is created, how it changes, and how it impacts space and the people in it. We created a vibe identification system, and used it to analyze stories of particular experiences. Out of our analysis, and the themes that we identified, we came to conclusions that shed light on the importance of including an analysis of atmosphere when engaging with the theory and practice of curriculum development, and Youth-Adult Partnerships.

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Introduction

“Alright, so what are your goals for the HOPE chapters?” I asked.

It was my first meeting with the peer leaders from North High, we were beginning to dive into what they wanted to accomplish with our HOPE chapters project.

“I guess to get people to come.” Enrico answered.

“Very true, let’s say you know for sure people will come though, then what do you want to see happen?” I probed.

“I want to have people recognize the name, like get people to know what HOPE is.”

Craig added

“OK, but what will they recognize? What will HOPE be known for doing? What are the big goals you hope to see come out of this project?” I pushed further.

“I hope that people will start to listen to the voice of the youth in Worcester.” Shell said, “Worcester doesn’t know enough about the youth, about what we say and what we know. Craig knows what I’m saying, were both on the Superintendent’s advisory council.”

“That I am.” Craig replied

“You know, it’s just a place for us to come and complain, nothing will happen, she just makes excuses, It’s just for show.” Shell explained.

“Sounds about right.” Craig said. “Student’s mostly just do it to add to their resume.”

“Exactly!” Shell shouted out. “I don’t have power there, I do at HOPE, I have a voice at HOPE, what we need to do with this project is bring that power out to the community. We need to get to those students who don’t know how to share their voice.”

There's so many youth out there doing cool things, and so many youth programs, we should hold a huge event to show what they all stand for. Each group in Worcester gets to present what they do and how people can get involved."

"Yea that sounds cool, there could be food and art and performances and stuff like that." Enrico added.

"Yea and no adults speaking, just youth, except maybe the mayor at the end, he'll just say how proud of us he is anyway." Shell excitedly continued sharing her stream of ideas.

"It could be in the summer, outside with arts, dance, music, speeches, vendors, all by youth! We could all connect, and maybe even start working on the dream mural that we were just talking about. I want it to be as big as the Italian festival or the Latin festival, you know! We could call it something like "Youth Movement."

"That sounds like a pretty good plan." Craig said.

"It's perfect, it connects the point of the chapters and our fundraiser event, and it could be the next steps of this education stuff we've been doing, to work toward with the chapters, the HOPE Youth Movement!"

In a matter of minutes these young people went from hoping that students show up to their meetings, to dreaming up an event to launch a city wide youth lead social movement. In that moment I could feel the energy buzzing in the room from their burst of passion and excitement. They started speaking louder and faster, sitting up in their chairs, and leaning in toward the table. My wrist was racing to jot down all their ideas as they rapidly bounced back and forth. We moved on with our meeting, but these peer leaders continued to use the "youth movement" as a reference point. In the following meetings it became a site in the distance guiding them, something that kept their planning efforts

grounded. In our reflections about the workshops, this conversation stood out to the peer leaders as one that was energizing, productive, and fun.

What allowed them to collectively construct this shared vision? What made this conversation stand out from the rest? Why were these peer leaders pushed into a spontaneous frenzy of imaginative planning? And how can I, as an adult-partner, work to foster atmospheres that will continue to allow the peer leaders to be open, critical, creative, and enact their individual and collective power? What types of atmospheres are helpful, productive, and necessary for this process? What combination of elements made the peer leaders feel free to share their experiences and ideas, and what pushed them to take control of this conversation with passion and excitement? What about the curriculum, my facilitation, and our social context, allowed this moment to happen?

This was the first of three structured workshops I created and facilitated for the HOPE Coalition's Chapter Leader Training curriculum (CLT). I designed the curriculum to prepare peer leaders, youth members of the coalition, for their new leadership roles in our HOPE Chapters project. The HOPE Chapters are after school clubs where peer leaders lead their own extensions of HOPE for students in their respective schools, with the support of a teacher who acts as the club advisor.

In the spring of 2015, HOPE peer leaders identified Worcester's public high schools as places they would like to effect change in. In the first year of our education equity campaign, peer leaders planned and facilitated dialogues with various youth groups across the city, sharing statistics about the schools, and asking students to share their experiences. They collected qualitative data from 200 Worcester Public School (WPS) students representing the different high schools in the city. The peer leaders and HOPE staff worked

together to synthesize this data and pull out the major themes. These findings were shared back to the youth of Worcester at the HOPE Youth Education Success (YES) Summit in the fall of 2016. Peer leaders lead dialogue activities, and worked towards identifying next steps to take in their efforts to address the most pertinent issues they face in their schools. They realized the need to engage the adults. We held our next YES summit in the spring of 2017, with teachers, school administration, school committee members, and youth workers. The peer leaders presented their three major points of change, “resources, student-teacher relationships, and student voice and power,” in order to hear the perspectives of the adults, and find ways to work together to move forward. After weeks of brainstorming, discussion, and following up with teacher allies, the peer leaders came to a concrete action to take; the HOPE Chapters project. The goal of this project is to address the lack of opportunities there are for students to share their voice, opinion, and experiences at school. The peer leaders wanted to discuss issues that are meaningful to students, and take action to create positive change in their school and community. They decided this could be done effectively by extending what we do at HOPE into their schools. They wanted to create youth lead chapters to bring students into dialogue and community organizing. The first HOPE chapter meeting was held on January 25th, 2018, at North High school, with the Doherty chapter starting a few weeks later.

The Healthy Options for Prevention and Education (HOPE) Coalition is a youth-adult partnership coalition created to reduce youth violence, substance abuse, and promote adolescent mental health and voice in the City of Worcester. Born from a grant acquired by community leaders at the Worcester Youth Center in 2000, HOPE has been directed by Dr. Laurie Ross for 16 years, assisted by Walter Jovel, who additionally is a therapeutic

counselor, and wrap-around coordinator at Burncoat Preparatory Elementary School. By January 2001, HOPE had its first group of peer leaders, 15 youth aged 14-19 from the coalition's 18 partner organizations. In the organization's first project the peer leaders, with the support of the staff, conducted a community needs assessment with young people in Worcester. The top issues included concerns about violence, teen sexuality, stress and depression, and concerns about the future. The peer leaders went on to plan and lead workshops on these topics for groups of young people. For the past 17 years HOPE has been active in the community, addressing the concerns of youth through youth led initiatives.

My first experience with HOPE was in March of 2016; I went to one of their dialogues at the Worcester Youth Center. I loved what I saw, youth leading conversations about their experiences, pushing other youth to talk about their schools, what they were proud of, and what challenges they faced. I loved what I felt, it brought me back to when I was a 17 year old participant in a social justice and leadership summer program in Boston. There was plenty of joking around, shade being thrown, and laughing, but as the dialogue progressed, the participants seemed to let their guard down. They shared difficult personal experiences, unpacked them together, and connected over their shared realities. I was left wondering how these peer leaders created such an atmosphere that allowed the dialogue to go down in this way. I started attending HOPE's weekly meetings, eventually taking on more responsibilities, and moving into a leadership role as an adult staff member.

In the fall of 2017, it was my task to create a curriculum to facilitate with the peer leaders, to prepare them to step up into leadership roles for the HOPE chapters project. They needed to more clearly develop their vision and goals, fine tune their leadership and

organizational skills. I hoped to center their voice and ideas, push them to critically think about their role as leaders, and empower them to feel confident and powerful in their abilities through this process. I also hoped that by the end, each group of chapter leaders would produce a curriculum that they would then use in their respective schools.

I wanted to create the type of space I felt at that first dialogue. I hoped the peer leaders would feel the meetings were both fun and productive. I hoped the atmosphere would allow them to be themselves, feel supported to grow, and take ownership of this project. I incorporated a framework of social justice, critical pedagogy, and relational practice, throughout the curriculum, to support this type of atmosphere

Throughout our meetings I noticed the atmosphere of our space change. There were times when the peer leaders were excited, passionate, and motivated, and moments when they were passive, unconcerned, and indifferent. I was left wondering what contributed to the change in atmosphere, and how were these different atmospheres experienced. What components make up an atmosphere, and what are the different kinds of atmospheres that exist? Finally, how do I, as an adult partner, create space with youth that can support the most empowering and transformative atmospheres?

Through the process of facilitating this curriculum with the peer leaders, I also asked them to join me as partners in my research. As we reflected on our experience, we identified the atmosphere, or vibe, of the space, as a focal point. The purpose of this paper is to explore the lived experience of curriculum. In the following sections of this paper, I will explain the theoretical framework the peer leaders and I developed and used to understand the concepts of curriculum and atmosphere. I will then map out the methods we used for research and data analysis, and how through this process, our framework

became more intricate, leading us to our findings. The findings section will include our theoretical insights into what a vibe is, how a vibe exists, and an analysis of five distinct vibes, followed by a discussion on what theoretical and practical implications this has for curriculum studies, youth-adult partnerships, and social justice youth development.

Theoretical Framework

Atmosphere

Sabine Buchholz and Manfred Jahn's (2005) contributions to the field of narrative theory offer a useful definition of space for thinking about curriculum. "Human... conceptions of space always include a subject who is affected by (and in turn effects) space, a subject who experiences and reacts to space in a bodily way, a subject who 'feels' space through existential living conditions, mood, and atmosphere (p. 553).

The peer leaders and I similarly defined the vibe as how you feel in a room.

Craig: *"The atmosphere is the mood of the room" how comfortable you and others feel in a space or situation* (February 21st, 2018, WPL, Worcester, MA)

The vibe also has the ability to dictate how one feels or acts, it is an invitation to join in on the overall atmosphere. In this way a vibe can be infectious, or have a ripple effect, spreading from person to person.

Shell: *"Sometimes a vibe can just completely take over another one* (February 21st, 2018, WPL, Worcester, MA).

This causes a shift in the mood of a space. People can also experience the same vibe differently; multiple vibes can exist at once. A person's unique perspective, identity, and past experience can affect how they experience a vibe.

Kofi: *"I think people feel different vibes based on how they feel, where they're at affects them"* (February 21st, 2018, WPL, Worcester, MA).

The atmosphere that is created in a space is connected to the structures, expectations, and power dynamics of that space. In order to support atmospheres that will allow young people to feel comfortable to express themselves, and supported to move to action, practitioners have conceptualized Youth-Adult Partnerships as a framework. Youth-Adult Partnerships are intentionally set up in organizational settings, and are often guided by curriculum.

Youth-Adult Partnership (YA-P)

HOPE is organized as a youth-adult partnership (Y-AP) intentionally to promote a shared process of learning, community organizing, and activism, between the youth peer leaders and adult staff. Shepherd Zeldin, Brian D. Christens, and Jane Powers (2013) define a YA-P as "the practice of: (a) multiple youth and multiple adults deliberating and acting together, (b) in a collective [democratic] fashion (c) over a sustained period of time, (d) through shared work, (e) intended to promote social justice, strengthen an organization and/or to affirmatively address a community issue" (p. 388). Y-Aps challenge the typical hierarchical relationship between youth and adults, in an attempt to create space that allows youth to share their voice and experience, and take stake in a collective process of learning and action. The intention of a YA-P is to support an atmosphere that allows young

people to feel supported, valued, and powerful. As a staff member, I see my role at HOPE to be concerned with the atmosphere, in an attempt to support an atmosphere that supports the principles of YA-Ps, and Social Justice Youth Development.

Social Justice Youth Development (SJYD)

Social Justice Youth Development (SJYD), as described by Shawn Ginwright and Julio Cammarota 2002, offers a distinctly different conception young people than positive youth development, and moves away from the typical problem/prevention model, toward one that is oriented toward healing and social justice (p. 85). SJYD posits that the identity and context of a young person's life is directly connected to social structures which cause barriers to their success. Rather than mold a young person to fit societal norms, SJYD offers possibilities for young people to learn about themselves, learn about their situation in the world, and learn how to take action to effect change in their social reality. To engage in this process, young people must take up a “praxis,” an interconnected process of reflection and action, to gain a sense of self awareness, social awareness, and global awareness (Ginwright and Cammarota, 2002, p. 88). Through SJYD, young people understand and heal from the ways society has impacted their lives, they gain critical consciousness and connectedness to others, and they engage in social action in their communities, to effect change and in turn help their communities heal. In this way, personal and social transformation are intrinsically linked (Ginwright and Cammarota, 2002, p. 92). SJYD is based in the idea that our social structures need to change and become more just, and that young people should develop and practice “a set of cognitive skills that promote investigation, analysis, and problem solving” (Ginwright and Cammarota, 2002, p. 89) in

order to be agents of social change, and promote personal and communal “healing—the process of fostering emotional, spiritual, psychological, and physical wellness” (Ginwright and Cammarota, 2002, p. 92).

At HOPE we frame our work with this theory of youth development. This is an intentional decision to ensure that our program objective’s align with the larger goals of SJYD. The atmosphere of our space is important to upholding this framework; that the peer leaders need to experience a vibe that makes them feel comfortable, open, and powerful.

Critical Pedagogy

Paulo Freire (1970), in *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, outlines the framework for “critical pedagogy,” a method of learning that counters the oppressive nature of the “banking” style of education. Critical pedagogy, commonly expressed as popular education, describes a process of learning that intends to achieve “authentic liberation—the process of humanization” (Freire, 1970 p. 79). Freire argues education should be a “practice of freedom” where hierarchy is broken down, and students and teachers take up the process of education together. Through dialogue, and “problem-posing” education, the point of learning becomes to engage in a praxis of reflection and action to re-create knowledge, grow individually, and act collectively to transform the world (Freire, 1970, p. 80-81).

Our method of learning at HOPE is informed by critical pedagogy to make sure that our educational practices and our learning spaces uphold the values of SJYD, and YA-Ps.

Relational Practice

Margo Okazawa-Rey raises the importance of intentionally engaging in deep and meaningful community building during processes related to social justice and education.

She calls for “a radically different *relational practice* alongside our analyses and political actions, a practice that emanates from our souls and energizes us”(Okazawa-Rey, 2009, p. 221). The extent that a group supports its relational practice will greatly impact the vibe that they experience together.

Curriculum

Y-AP's are often housed in organizational and institutional settings that are grounded in a specific mission statement, and a set of values. A curriculum is often used to guide a Y-AP through a certain process or project. Curricula are designed to support larger level goals and outcomes, through the completion of more immediate objectives and outputs. While the short-term objectives are specifically related to the project at hand, the larger goals align with the mission of the organization. While a curriculum provides a map of what should be done to reach certain goals, the values of an organization are often built into a curriculum to outline how it should be organized and implemented. When put into action, a curriculum becomes a part of the space; it's content, the facilitator's pedagogy, the group culture, and the social context, swirl into an experience that can be described or felt as a distinct atmosphere or vibe.

Curriculum Theory

The field of curriculum studies, development, and theory has long been concerned with understanding the the experience of learning. Over the past century, the field of curriculum theory has gone through a few major phases. In the Early nineteen hundreds, John Franklin Bobbit wrote “The Curriculum,” laying out the framework for the “social efficiency movement.” He saw that in a rapidly changing society, curriculum could become

an effective tool for maintaining order through education, if it is theorized and designed with “exactness and particularity” through the scientific method (Bobbitt, 1918, p. 41). Ralph W. Taylor contributed to the “progressive reform movement” in 1949, by calling attention to the importance of experiential learning, and pushing it to be part of the theoretical canon of curriculum. 20 years later, Joseph J. Schwab pushed for the movement to reset its focus away from theory, and toward the the practical and lived aspects of curriculum, bringing up critiques of social power structures into the forefront. In 1995, William F. Pinar, problematized the field, positing that instead of coming up with new practices related to curriculum, scholars and practitioners should be problematizing issues in the field. Through the “reconceptualized curriculum movement,” Pinar pushed for a shift “from development to understanding” (1995, p. 6), arguing that curriculum should be understood “as a symbolic representation,” of our social context. We should be uncovering the ways that curriculum uphold harmful power dynamics, and how critical theory can inform new practices and theories. This movement highlighted the important roles that pedagogy, culture, and context play in the experience of a curriculum. Today, the field is defined by the “post-reconceptualization movement,” the commitment to continuing the dialogue that Pinar started, with the intention of constantly creating new theories and practices related to curriculum, in an attempt to actively disrupt practices of domination, and uphold social justice through the theory and practice of curriculum.

Phenomenology and Curriculum

One lens that has been used to more deeply explore curriculum is phenomenology. Phenomenology is a “form of interpretive inquiry which focuses on human perception and

experience” (Pinar et al., 1995, p. 405). Through this lens curriculum is understood as a “lived-experience,” rather than a plan that facilitators follow. (Pinar et al., 1995, p. 428). Through this conceptualization, the objectification of participants, and of space, afforded by dominant curricular narratives is challenged. “Space can not be thought of as a separate entity; rather the experience of space unfolds as a spatial-temporal event between bodies, which is understood as open and ecstatic” (Springgay and Friedman, 2010, p. 233). Phenomenology is concerned with the “spatial-relations” (Springgay and Friedman, 2010, p. 232) between people’s actions and thoughts, the content of the curriculum, the physical characteristics of the space, and the social context of the situation. The relationships of these components of space are constantly changing; the way space is experienced is in constant flux and flow.

This paper is specifically concerned with the different ways space is experienced through curriculum. In our first reflections of the workshops of the CLT, the atmosphere of our space became a major theme for the peer leaders and I. We began to more deeply unpack what an atmosphere is, what contributes to it, how it affects people, how it changes, and how it is related to curriculum. Through a process of participatory action research, the peer leaders and I conceptualized what an atmosphere is to ground our conversations. I offered a conceptualization of curriculum that I formulated through my literature review to the group to allow us to connect our analysis of the vibe, to an analysis of curriculum.

Three Dimensions of Curriculum

To engage in a critical exploration of the lived experience of curriculum, I conceptualized three dimensions of curriculum that co-exist, interact, and influence each other.

The first dimension is the content and plans. It is what is happening on the surface, the most direct and immediate actions and outcomes. This dimension represents the social efficiency movement's concern with the most effective plan for specific learning outcomes, and the progressive reform movement's push to incorporate interactive and experiential processes into curriculum. This dimension is typically found in the specific plans for the

The second dimension is the framework this content is being housed in. It is how the content is to be delivered and the activities are to be structured. It is the way the space is intended to be set up, and experienced; both the cultural and pedagogical intentions, and impacts. This dimension represents the focus of reconceptualization and post-reconceptualization movements in the field, and the concern with power and justice

The third dimension is the context that the first two dimensions are housed in. This includes social, political, and economic factors, historic and structural legacies and practices, personal dynamics, and individual's current situations and past experiences. This dimension is also a concern taken up by the reconceptualization and post-reconceptualization movements in curriculum theory.

Methodology and Methods

Methodology

The dominant narratives and practices of engaging in research with human subjects perpetuate violent and oppressive research practices, a symptom and contributing factor to

the lasting legacies of settler colonialism, and White-Supremacist Capitalist Patriarchy. There is typically a distinct separation between researcher and subject in the social sciences, which hierarchically others and objectifies those who are being researched. The subject becomes a static thing, and the researcher, the gatekeeper of knowledge and action. This pattern of power and oppression is reflected in our institutions, our relationships, and our individual actions. In an attempt to engage in research that aims to disrupt this cycle of violence commonly enacted through academia, my methods of research and data analysis are designed to breakdown the hierarchy between myself and my participants, and center the experience, knowledge, and voice of the youth who I am doing research with. This string of connected methods outlines how I conducted myself as a researcher with the peer leaders; how we communicated, how we collected data, how we analyzed data, and how we came to new ideas and questions. These methods are infused with a mindfulness of the power I hold as a graduate student and a straight, able-bodied, white, man. At HOPE we center the experience of the peer leaders when organizing for social change because they live through and know the issues we are attempting to address. In this same way, the youth I worked with are the experts of their own experience, and hold knowledge key to understanding the interconnected nature of curriculum, atmosphere, and YA-Ps.

Research Methods

To engage in this research I am drawing on Michael Burawoy's (1991) "extended case method." The extended case method enables this ethnography to focus on specific situations within a single case study, but incorporate theory from existing literature and understandings of structural power into the research, in an attempt to complicate and

rebuild existing theories. Important to my use of the extended case method is two methods Burawoy maps out, participatory action research (PAR), and dialogue. PAR is a method of engaging with participants with the intent of restructuring power within the hierarchical relationship between participant and observer, centering participant experience, knowledge, and voice. Dialogue is a method of communication that is at the foundation of this research and the CLT, working to support PAR, as well as the the curriculums framework, methodology, and overarching goals. These methods allowed our workshops to inform our reflections and analysis on atmosphere, with the ability to make connections to other experiences in our lives, all while centering the lived experience of a curriculum.

Extended Case Method

Burawoy's extended case method pushes researchers to connect what they are learning about in their specific case study to larger society. The study is not only relevant to similar situations, but what is learned can be applied across fields and inquiries. The extended case method allowed this research to be concerned with how the CLT workshops were experienced, and connect this reflection to analysis of other spaces and experiences, and to larger social forces and patterns. This method highlights the inseparable nature of human beings and their society, grounding research in the murky tangle of intersecting influences, and watching their interactions and effects. Patterns of social forces are made clear through this process, pushing researchers to move beyond their individual pursuits. "The application of social theory turns to building social movements...it is not a matter of applying the knowledge of the expert but of the observer joining the participants in a joint movement of analysis and action" (Burawoy, 1991 p. 283). The goal of this research is to

engage with participants to collectively explore and conceptualize atmosphere, reconstruct existing curriculum theory, and move to action based on the new insights that are born. Knowledge gained from this research will be a point of reflection that will inform new practices at HOPE, which will in turn lead to new practices of collective action. Finally, through this process, theoretical and practical implications for curriculum theory and YAs will be articulated..

To engage in this research through the extended case method, I am employing two methods described by Burawoy, participatory action research, and dialogue. These methods are intended to promote a shared power and collective construction of knowledge between myself and the peer leaders.

Participatory Action Research (PAR)

Participatory action research (PAR) promotes the experiences, knowledge, and voices of participants. Researchers take the position of participant observer, a position that is neither fully removed from, nor fully meshed in, with the society or population that the ethnography is concerned with. Rather than maintaining expert status, the participant observer attempts to engage participants in dialogue and analysis. PAR pushes researchers to have their power redistributed, to provide “direction without domination, a balance between autonomy and dependence, a shared process of learning.” (Burawoy, 1991, p. 298). The researcher offers their expertise, but must be open to having their ideas, opinions, and assumptions challenged and shifted by the knowledge of the participants. It is incredibly important that the process of this research into the lived experience of a curriculum is able to be guided by those who participated in, and experienced the curriculum. My position as a designer and facilitator of the curriculum is one side of the

story, the peer leaders who participated in it hold valuable and necessary perspectives. Only through partnership and a shared process of reflection and analysis can we make sense of the experience of the workshops, and come to insights about how to move forward together. The peer leaders and I collectively decided how we were going to collect data during our workshops, in order for the data to be representative of all of our perspectives. In follow up meetings, we reflected on our experience, and reflected on our reflections, allowing us to identify atmosphere as a major theme to further analyze. We continued to meet to conceptualize atmosphere, and then reflect again on our experiences, to make sense of our framework. This process was a constant dialogue between us, where I was able to bring in questions and ideas informed by my literature review, and through articulating my intentions with the curriculum, the peer leaders were able to complicate my observations, with their experiential perspectives. This process of PAR was grounded in dialogue, allowing the research to unfold as it occurred, and center the experience of the peer leaders.

Dialogue

Methods of communication among participants and researchers can promote participatory action, or can smother any chance of a shared power. Dialogue as a practice creates space for all stakeholders to share their feelings, experiences, knowledge, and concerns. It allows participants and researchers ideas and assumptions about each other, and about the world, to spill out onto one table. Collectively power is analyzed; reflections inform and transform further research practices taken by the group. Researchers cannot remain on the outside of the community they are studying, no more than they can expect to

become fully absorbed into it. Burawoy “advocates neither distance nor immersion but dialogue. The purpose of field work” he says “is not to strip ourselves of biases, for that is an illusory goal, nor to celebrate those biases as the authorial voice of the ethnographer, but rather to discover and perhaps change our biases through interaction with others” (1991, p. 4). Dialogue was key to our research process. It allowed for our data to center the stories, experiences, and understandings of the peer leaders and I, something that can not be quantifiably understood. It allowed our analysis of our data to continue to center storytelling and reflection, as well as allow our findings and conclusions to be made together, in a non-linear fashion, as new insights and realizations are made through our dialogic analysis.

Burawoy also uses dialogue as a metaphor to represent the process of theory reconstruction bound up in the extended case method. This dialogue is one that creates constant cycles of data collection and analysis, rather than a period of collecting data which begins and ends, prompting a period of data analysis which is separate. This dialogue occurred in our process, when in each of our follow up meetings, we reflected on and analyzed our most recent reflections, which acted as our data. We collected our new reflections and analysis, and used them to then further analyze and reflect on. Each time, I organized questions and my own observations, to bring to the peer leaders attention. As the participant observer, I brought in the theory, and observational analysis that I had done on my own, in order for the peer leaders to then complicate and reconstruct. In the end, our cycles of dialogic analysis and reflection lead us to concrete insights, which informed our findings and conclusions. These insights do not simply prove a particular theory right or

wrong, but complicate existing theories of curriculum, social justice youth development, and YA-Ps.

Participants

Enrico. Enrico Gonzalez first started coming to HOPE during my first summer at HOPE. He was hesitant at first, but as he got warmed up to our conversations, he dove right in, sharing his own experiences and ideas. He is thoughtful and patient, but makes sure his ideas are heard when they need to be. He makes connections quickly, has a critical mind, and a very dry sense of humor. He sometimes blends his thoughtful insights, with corny jokes or puns. Enrico has been a peer leader for a couple years now and has grown into his confidence and his ability to lead a group. Enrico is 16 and is a sophomore at North High. He identifies as a man, and of Hispanic heritage.

Craig. On the surface Craig Snapps seems quite reserved, but when asked to give his opinion on a topic, he will not be afraid to share exactly what is on his mind. Craig brings an almost dark humor to table, but balances this with care for his fellow peer leaders, and with a positive outlook to the future. He has grown into his leadership at HOPE, instilling in him a cool confidence in our meetings. Craig is 16, a junior at North High, and identifies as a male, and as Caribbean.

Shell. Shell Voth is passionate, excited, and loud, and has been since her first day at HOPE. It took her no time to warm up to the group, feel comfortable sharing her ideas, and joining in on the laughing and fun. Shell has a drive to help others when needed, and to fight for what is right. She brings this energy to her leadership roles in her school,

and as a member of the HOPE team. She is 17, a senior at Claremont Academy, and identifies as female, and Asian.

John. John Haverhill will always have something to say if you ask him. He has been a peer leader for sometime now, and because of other programs can not always come as consistently as some of the others. Everytime he comes though he's right back in the family, joking around with people, and down to get serious when it comes time to work. John is 18, a senior at Doherty High, he is white, and identifies as a male.

Kofi. Kofi Mensah is always eager to engage. He quickly rose up in informal leadership at HOPE, and has become well practiced in facilitating and public speaking. He gets excited about controversial issues and deep conversations and has an intense drive to become active in his school and community.

Jacob. Jacob Folsom-Fraster designed and facilitated the workshops, and the data analysis dialogues. He began at HOPE as a junior at Clark, and since then has become integrated into the staff. He has been growing his ability to plan and lead HOPE meetings, and has been engaged in research with peer leaders during this process. Jacob is a 5th year Master's student at Clark University, he identifies as white, and male.

Data Collection

To collect data I took field notes at each meeting. Additionally, I audio-recorded and transcribed spoken reflections from peer leaders, and our group meetings during the different stages of the data analysis.

Field Notes

To collect data I followed Michael Burawoy's strategies for collecting field notes. My notes are not fully captured meeting minutes with detailed descriptions and quotations transcribed verbatim. I took down important quotations, general happenings, descriptions of outstanding moments, and the content and ideas we generated relating to our project. After each session, I traced back through my pre-planned agenda, alongside my notes and field notes, to map out and transcribe what happened while it was all still fresh in my mind. This process allowed me to reflect on what I had noticed in the meeting, what was important, what stood out, and what further questions I had. This pushed me to see what I may have expected to happen side by side with what actually occurred. Burawoy mentions that as a professor, he "would not accept any field notes without analysis—a commentary on the significance of what they had experienced and observed" (1991, p. 294). During my process of reflecting on and transcribing the happenings of each meeting, I was able to include my confusion, my judgements, and my connections to theory. With analysis as part of the data collection process, the focus of this research was able to evolve, as patterns arose, and as we discussed them as a group. Housed in my field notes is the evolving process of the extended case method. I collected field notes during the three workshops of the curriculum, as well as during group reflection and data analysis dialogues.

Recorded Reflections

In order to collect data that represented the participants perspective, an activity in our first workshop was to collectively develop a tool for recording reflections. I offered small notebooks, which some peer leaders were drawn too using. Most peer leaders voted for audio recording designated reflection time at the end of each meeting. This data was

able to capture the peer leaders thoughts, feelings, and perceptions of each workshop, a commentary that complemented and complicated my field notes. The transcriptions of my field notes together with the transcribed reflections allowed us to analyze all the data together, that we collected together, and that represented all of our perspectives.

Data Analysis

For Burawoy, data analysis works as a continuous part of data collection, as well as on another level, comparing analysis to literature. “The conjectures of yesterday’s analysis are refuted by today’s observations and then reconstructed in tomorrow’s analysis. But there is a second running exchange, that between analysis and existing theory, in which the latter is reconstructed on the basis of emergent anomalies. Analysis, therefore, is a continual process, mediating between field data and existing theory” (Burawoy, 1991, p. 11). The peer leaders and I upheld the practices of dataanalysis informed by the extended case method. The goal of this research was to unpack my observational analyses, uncover how they lead to new theoretical analyses, and in the end, understand how this can all inform different levels of practice. By identifying themes in our reflections, we began to focus on atmosphere as a specific concept to explore more deeply. This conceptualizing of atmosphere can inform curriculum theory, SJYD, and YA-Ps.

We engaged in four rounds of data collection and analysis in four meetings where we analyzed our most recent reflections and insights. Through dialogue we unpacked our observations, made connections, discussed differences, sorted out confusions, and came to new questions. We were able to look back at our reflections, and through new theoretical

lenses, attempted to make sense of our experiences together, constructed new conceptual understandings, and identified the nuances among our different experiences.

The first round of this was our conversation during the last workshop of the CLT, reflecting on the process, and going over field notes. We analyzed what happened in the workshops, and what stood out to us. I then reflected on this conversation, and on my field notes and transcriptions from the conversation. I noticed that the moments, conversations, or activities that stood out for the peer leaders, as both positive and negative, were described by an overarching mood or feeling. I brought in the concept of atmosphere to the peer leaders and we explored it deeper in our second meeting. In this meeting we conceptualized atmosphere, and analyzed it through a conversation about our experiences in the curriculum, and in other spaces. This conversation was recorded and transcribed, and further analyzed in our next meeting.

In the third session of reflection and analysis, we unpacked and further complicated our understanding of the concept of atmosphere we conceptualized earlier. We identified two spectrums as ways to identify an atmosphere, which we called the matrix of the vibes. We used this to plot specific vibes, identify them, characterize them, and find examples of them in our lives.

In the final meeting, I proposed a reconceptualization of the matrix of the vibes, into a typology of vibes. I had earlier conceptualized this with my research advisor, and explained to the peer leaders how it expanded to matrix, and allowed us to name vibes without labeling them inherently good or bad. The peer leaders agreed this made sense, and we started identifying important vibes to discuss in the findings section, as well as what they show, for the conclusion. In this meeting each peer leader told a story, identified

the vibe of the experience through the typology, and broke down the aspects of the experience that let them identify the vibe in that way.

In these conversations we were unpacking and creating our own understanding of the vibe. Through our dialogues, we used practices of phenomenological inquiry to describe our experiences, and break down these moments to identify various components of the vibe at play.

Phenomenological Inquiry

Phenomenological inquiry distinguishes itself from empirical research by intentionally seeking subjective qualitative data. Important to phenomenological research is the “thoughts and feelings” (Pinar et al. 1995, p. 412) of people understood situationally. (Pinar et al. 1995, p. 412) Methods like the “*curre*” (Pinar et al. 1995, p. 414), conceptualized by Madeline Grumet, inspired by the writing of Edmund Husserl, outline practices used in the social sciences that can engage in this type of exploration of educational settings. This method outlines the importance of the participants engaging in the analysis of their own experiences, through auto-biographical practices. (Pinar et al. 1995, p. 414) Additionally, through the “*curre*,” the aim is to analyze a specific local case, use it to understand the larger world, and then upon new conceptualization, re-analyze the local; “Revised curriculum, revised way of life.” (Pinar et al. 1995, p. 446) Through this process we conceptualized distinct vibes that we have explained through the accounts of our experiences. Our findings are phenomenologically described vibes, that we have identified through a typology of the components we understood to define a vibe. We were then able to analyze these moments, including what contributed to the vibe, how the vibe

contributed to the space, and in what ways it was productive or not. This then let us come to better theoretical understandings of the concept of atmosphere which can inform curriculum, SJYD, and YA-Ps.

Findings

Through our dialogues, the peer leaders and I conceptualized and explored what an atmosphere is, how it is created, and how it affects people and space. We have created a typology to identify distinct vibes. For this findings section, we have identified five significant vibes, from stories that continually surfaced in our conversations throughout our sessions. Each story was audio recorded and transcribed to ensure that each anecdote is told in the voice of the person who experienced the situation. The findings section will begin with an overview of the typology we created to identify the vibe. Each story will be told, and followed by an analysis of how the vibe was created, how it felt, and how it affected the people and the space. In the conclusions I will discuss how the lessons learned from these stories tell a larger story about the concept of the vibe, and how what we learned about atmosphere informed our thinking about curriculum and YA-Ps.

Vibe Typology

Overall, we understand a vibe as the mood, or feeling of a space and how it affects individuals and the group. We conceptualized the identification of a vibe to consist of both how it feels and how it makes people act. A vibe then is a function of the feelings and actions of the people in the space. Through reflection on this with the peer leaders, and with my advisor, we found each part of the equation to include two identifiers, the degree

and the type. I set up this typology similar to the Myers Briggs personality indicator, a identification system used in the field of psychology to used to indicate personality, based on four major characterisitcs in which a person is assigned one of two identifiers for each othe four sections. Most of the peer leaders had recently learned about this and they agreed that it made sense. We then used it to identify vibes from specific stories that we found meaningful. While we found this typology to be useful, we also noted its limitations. The degrees and types of the feelings and actions associated with a vibe are described by two options, when in reality we understood these to represent a spectrum. We stuck with this typology in order to identify distinct vibes and learn from them, with the understanding that we can not include every nuance.

To identify the feelings associated with a vibe, we conceptualized the degree of feeling to be concerned with how free one feels either confined or free in a space, we named these two options “quarantine” or “liberation.” We also understood that these feelings can be felt on an “individual” level, and on a “collective level.” To identify the actions, we understood the degree to be concerned with there being a little, or a lot of action, which we understood as “static” or “kinetic.” We also understand the level of action to happen “individually,” and “collectively.”

Feelings	To what degree does the vibe feel free?	Is the feeling experienced indivudally or as a group?
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	<p>Quarentine (Q) Does this vibe make you feel stiff, confined and forced to be in a space, or forced to engage? Do you feel unable or unwilling to participate, speak up, and express yourself. Do you feel undervalued, inadequate, misrepresented, and undable to influence or control the situation.</p>	<p>Liberation (L) Does this vibe make you feel able to fully express yourself; your ideas, personality, and creativity. Do you feel cared for, supported, and able to open up, create, grow, and influence the situation. Do you feel confident and powerful.</p>	<p>Individual (D) Does this vibe make you feel alone in your experience and feelings? Do you feel disconnected from others, or focused on your own individual experience or feelings? Do you feel more introspective in this vibe?</p>	<p>Collective (C) Does this vibe make you feel conencted to others, or focused on the group experience or feeling. Does this vibe make your experience oriented outward.</p>
Actions	To what degree does the vibe afford action?		Is the action occuring internally or externally?	
	<p>Static (S) Does this vibe make you disengaged and inactive? Are you unmotivated or uninterested, complacent or passive, reserved or quiet? Are you bored, spacing out, looking for anything else to place your attention? Are you slouching with your head low, speaking softly and with little description? Is time passing slowly?</p>	<p>Kinetic (K) Does this vibe make you engaged and active? Are you motivated to participate, speak, and contribute? Are you listening, paying attention, and interested? Are you sitting up, leaning in, and speaking enthusiastically, concretley, and spontaneously? Is time passing quickly?</p>	<p>Internal (I) Does this vibe make you introspective and centering your action, or inaction within yourself? Are you keeping to yourself, feeling disconnected from others, or are you reflective, engaging in an internal dialogue with your own thoughts? Is the energy being focused internally for participants?</p>	<p>External (E) Does this vibe make you feel conencted to the group. Is the activity centered on the outward experiecne of the individuals? Is the energy being shared by the group, is there a common experience of the level of activity among the group?</p>

While we originally understood each Q or L, D or C, S or K, and I or E, to each represent a spectrum, for the purpose of this research we have chosen to pick one or the other when identifying a specific vibe. Next I will share the stories as told by the peer leaders who's experience they center, followed by how we made sense of these experiences with relation to our typology, and our overall conceptualization of atmosphere.

Trapped in Physics Class: *"He's just that bad of person"*

The first story told by Craig is about his physics class. When we began brainstorming about atmosphere, and what makes up a good or a bad vibe, school often came up as exemplifying a negative atmosphere. Multiple times, Craig spoke about the ways his physics teacher creates a vibe that sucks the life out of him and his fellow students.

Craig: "I ain't gonna lie I got some bad vibes with teachers at school, like my physics teacher, he's just so bad of a person, you get into his class and your mood immediately just drops for the next 45 minutes waiting for him to end, waiting to just get out. He's just that bad of a person, he's just terrible.

I mean, the physics class, its literally unlike any other class I've been in. In classes you have students they'll be going around, if there not talking to the teacher, they're talking to their friends and misbehaving; no, this class no one talks, whatsoever, not to the teacher, not to each other, they don't even talk to themselves, that's how bad it is. I'm one of the most active people in there, and most of the times when he calls on me I'm not even paying attention, so that's how much it is. Today, there was a girl who was missing from class

yesterday because she had to take the Accuplacer, so she came into class and she was writing notes off the board on one of the papers that he was going through, and he was like,

“Well you didn’t have to write that on there,”

and she was like “Well mister, I just needed to so I could make sure I know what im doing,”

He's like, “Well, we did that yesterday,”

The girls like “...but I wasn’t here yesterday,”

He’s like “You should have come after.”

Well the girls like “That’s why I’m taking it now.”

And he's like, “Just get the study guide from somebody from yesterday,”

And that’s how he usually is, he doesn't care about the students. It's like oh, we need to move on so we can catch up with the rest of the schools because we have this much to do.

The classroom is just general sadness, you know, most of the time the students interact with him it’s when he makes a mistake, and they try and correct him, and then he starts going off on them for trying to fix his mistake, so its like alright, there’s no point.

He should make it more interactive cause he doesn’t usually ask us if we have any questions, it's like alright we're gonna go through this and we're gonna get it done, and then if we don’t get it he’s like “well watch a YouTube video when you get home,” haha. Before we start every chapter he tells us you have to write notes because you have to come prepared for each lesson because I can’t teach you everything. His job is to teach, he doesn’t do that, he does not teach, and so if he made a more interactive class where students could actually participate and learn what was going on then the atmosphere would be much different”

(April 26th, 2018, WPL, Worcester, MA).

Using the vibe typology, Craig quickly identified this vibe as QDSI. Quarantine because it is like being forced in a room for 45 minutes where you have no authority or autonomy. This quarantine is felt individually because the students are kept in such a mental solitary confinement that they are unable to even feel connected to each other. You feel alone, like there is no point for you to try to change your situation. The room is static, the hopelessness of the situation leaves students to suffer through the period. Additionally, the authoritarian nature of the teacher, and his inability to meet students where they are it, with regard to the content, pushes students to passively receive the information, in fear that their questions or concerns will be smothered by the teachers unreasonable frustration. The vibe found in Craig's physics class we associated with the metaphor of being stranded on an island. You feel trapped, forced into a situation where you are unable to express yourself or have any sense of control. This vibe usually affords an active disengagement from participants, and a sense that time is moving extremely slow.

Craig: *"When you're being forced to be there, you just want to leave, like you'll check your watch and think its been 40 minutes but its only been 3 minutes."*

"It's all on the leadership so when you look to the HOPE leaders and they are all people we can talk to and relate to and stuff, but if you were to compare that to school it's like we get into class and we have this amount of time to get this stuff done so its like not that close knit, its just alright we're here to do this so lets get it done (February 21st, 2018, WPL, Worcester, MA).

In our discussions we noted that a leader is a vital component to creating a vibe. A leader sets the tone of the space, and metaphorically invites people in, or pushes them out. This physics teacher is not welcoming, and does not make his students feel comfortable. A

leader also must balance the three dimensions of curriculum to ensure that the content is communicated effectively, and that the pedagogy and classroom culture can support a healthy learning environment. Craig's physics teacher disregards both of these important dimensions. He overstuffs his students with dense content that is difficult to understand, and is more concerned with meeting curricular benchmarks, then with making sure the students understand the material. Moreover, his pedagogy is not interactive, and does not offer students any active engagement to help them take in the information. His authoritarian leadership additionally stifles any attempt made by students to influence the vibe in their own way. He instills a sense of solitary hopelessness, forcing students to feel sad and alone. Finally, this smothers any chance for the students to bond and build community with each other.

Collaboration or Presentation: *"I felt uncomfortable in my own space"*

One Wednesday, during our regular weekly HOPE meeting, members of the Worcester Educational Collaborative (WEC) came in to share with us their strategic plan for Worcester Public Schools. They proposed this idea to us because they wanted to hear feedback, and get input, from the youth peer leaders about the plan. Though their intention was to engage the youth, the atmosphere they created in HOPE that day was not received well.

Enrico: *"Well I kinda went into the meeting just expecting a whole other vibe than what actually was. We went into it expecting to talk to some people who knew how to talk to us cause we're a youth group and we're so used to that. Then we sat down and they started talking to us and they gave us these big packets, haha, that was the first thing, that was like, I*

know your presenting it to us but we're still youth you know. So we see this, and the way that they talked to us, and they just kept talking and talking, it wasn't really interactive. I didn't fall asleep but it felt like that, it just felt like a depressing vibe because of that. It didn't make me excited to talk about it because, I first of all barely even gotta talk, and then even when I did talk, I felt like I didn't even make an impact, like I was just saying things to say things. When I would say something they would either just counter it or be like "hmm ok," and then that's it. I felt like my thoughts weren't being heard by them, same thing with other people who spoke, I felt like we didn't really matter, it was kinda just them telling us, just to tell us.

Everyone was kinda the same way I was. I mean I actually said something when I had the chance to, and same with a couple other people, but everyone was kinda the same. We were all just sitting there just listening to them talk, and talk, and flip to this page and you'll see, talk and talk and talk, and not to sound like an ignorant impatient teenager, but I didn't really feel engaged cause of that, and I'm sure no one else did in the room.

These people weren't HOPE people, you know, and that can really be fine, but it just wasn't right. And because these people, they were in our space, and I felt like I couldn't talk, or I just felt silenced because they just kept talking. They asked for questions but it was more of like we've already said everything, and they didn't stop after each topic they just asked for questions after everything was done. I had a question about this thing that you said mad long ago but then you said 10 other things. They touched on everything briefly when you asked questions, it was depressing.

At HOPE, were usually all the same, we usually all have similar mindsets, especially when it comes to presenters and people who come in to talk to us, and even afterwards after

they left we all kinda felt the same way. We just know that's not how we are, and it helps us reassure ourselves on what HOPE is.

When they left it kinda felt like relief you know, cause then we all started talking, like oh this, this, this, that, and we started talking about how we didn't like it, and our thoughts, and then we started talking about other situations, and that started really feeling like HOPE again. That's just how I knew, as soon as they left, it went right back to normal (April 26th, 2018, WPL, Worcester, MA).

Enrico identified this vibe as a QCSI, similar to Craig's physics class, but with one major difference being that at HOPE, even when feeling trapped, the peer leaders still feel connected to each other. He chose quarantine because of how uncomfortable he felt and how unlike HOPE this meeting was. He felt unable to engage and be heard. He chose collective because although he did not feel free, he could tell that his peers did not either, and that they were sharing this experience of confinement together, sharing a collective struggle. He chose static because the feelings of confinement lead to the peer leaders feeling unimportant, and unable to have any impact, holding them back from engaging deeply and critically. They did not feel valued, and therefore it felt like there was no point in asking questions or sharing how they really felt. Finally, he chose internal, because this kept everyone in their own heads. Peer leaders were eventually disengaged to the point where they were not really even paying attention to the content of the presentation, but were off in their own thoughts.

A major factor that created this vibe was the expectation of what HOPE is like. Craig finds it absurd that his physics teacher acts in such a way, but his story was not an anomaly in our conversation of classroom vibes. Every peer leader could name at least one teacher

who created a similar type of suffocating atmosphere, it is almost expected that a vibe at school is not going to make you feel very free. In this situation though, Enrico was taken aback by this atmosphere infiltrating into HOPE. He tried to engage, and lead the way for other peer leaders to speak up, but the way his comments and questions were received by the facilitators only discouraged them.

This story again shows the importance of leaders to create an open atmosphere that can allow people to feel comfortable to engage meaningfully. This story further complicates this theme by raising the importance of the relational component. Enrico connected the fact that these two presenters aren't from HOPE, to the reason why they were not able to reach the group. They don't know how HOPE typically operates, and the peer leaders don't have a foundation of mutual trust and respect with them like they do with the HOPE staff. Enrico noted that this doesn't mean that every guest at HOPE is unable to facilitate in an open and liberatory way, in fact there are guest presenters who the peer leaders ask to come back. But that these facilitators were essentially strangers, further exacerbated the uncomfortable and anti-dialogical nature of their presentation. If someone who the peer leaders felt comfortable with was giving a presentation this boring, they would most likely call them out, and make them change what they are doing, but without a relational foundation of trust and respect, the peer leaders were unable to do this.

The peer leaders often mention the family like vibe that is created at HOPE. They feel connected to each other, through the good and the bad. In this story they shared a collective experience of uncomfort. One way this occurred was through the physical body language of the peer leaders. Every week someone takes pictures of the HOPE meeting to post on our Facebook page. Typically the photos show people speaking, laughing, and

playing games; leaning up in their chairs, moving their arms and hands. The week of the WEC presentation, the photos astonishingly portrayed the unusually disengaging meeting. Each photo showed about three or four peer leaders sitting at a table with their elbows up, and their faces resting in their palms, as if it was a struggle to keep their neck upright.

Another component to the meeting that exemplified this collective experience of confinement was the way in which the vibe flipped once the members of WEC left, and the peer leaders broke free from the chains that were holding them back. I asked one question to the peer leaders, “I want to know how you guys really feel about the strategic plan and everything they presented, it didn’t seem like you all were sharing much and maybe you would feel more comfortable now that it’s just us again?” There was an immediate burst of energy and passion. The peer leaders got to express their feelings of discomfort, invalidation, and boredom, and then were able to be critical of the components of the strategic plan specifically. It was fast and loud, no one was raising their hand, people were interrupting each other, and everyone had something to say. Our base of trust and mutual understanding of what is expected in our space allowed the vibe to immediately change, and allowed the peer leaders to unleash all they had bottled up for the last hour and a half.

Vibe Interrupted: *“There are still gonna be factors out of your control”*

The next story, told by Kofi and John, sheds light on the ways that forces outside the control of a leader, or a of a group, can influence and interrupt a vibe. The meeting this story is about started off high energy. We were eating food, and imagining future goals for the chapters. Kofi and John were passionately discussing how to get a playstation into the school in order to hold an NBA 2k tournament. About halfway into the meeting, we moved

to a larger table, and John communicated to us that he had to focus on his school work; he did not have access to a phone charger, he had no internet at the house he was currently staying at, and this was his only time to get it done amidst finishing his college applications. We had no problems with this, and let John focus on his work while me and Kofi finished up the meeting.

Kofi: I thought it was kind of funny and not just funny, I thought it was interesting because I know how competitive people are, so when you bring 2k into it everyone's gonna be engaged. I think someone had brought it up to me at first, we'll just start an afterschool club and everyone's gonna play against each other. That sparked my suggestion, so my mood during that conversation was more like excitement.

I think one thing was that this idea was innovative in a sense and because it was deviating from the norm, and that generally gets people excited, because when you know you're doing something that if you put it out there, people are gonna be like oh shoot this isn't just your regular everyday boring after school club, this is something people will actually get interested in. I think that aspect of it was very interesting because we might be the ones to actually put that out there.

We were going through it and at a point, the work was still productive, and we understood that John had his work to do and this was like the one place he had an opportunity to do it, so it's not like it was a negativity towards him but like ok we understand this is what you need to do and we'll accept the work you can contribute towards us. We kept moving forward basically and I remember we got good stuff done.

John: I don't know how it popped into my head, that oh I gotta do this, I think it was always there, cause i'm sure whenever you have to get something done you remind yourself all

the time, and then you go off and do other things that are priority and leave it in the back of your mind. And when you do get the opportunity to do that thing you said you were gonna do it's like oh, I gotta do this, I can do this right now, so I think that's really what had happened. It had popped into my head like oh I gotta do this.

That also had to do with my living situation at the time. I get when people have other stuff going in their life and then they come to HOPE and they leave some baggage at the door and then also bring some with them. It's hard to focus.

I got a little bit more room to work so honestly the change in setting and the more space, cause we were sitting on the counter before jus eating, and there wasn't that much room to work or for me to bring out a binder, so the change in setting and the fact the there was more space and less people, and it was easier to do work, I think that just played the biggest factor. It was probably the change in setting that changed my mood, now that I was sitting at the table I was like ok I can do this real quick.

Kofi: I think this kinda connects with qunitens thing, having restrictive factors, these can be environmental, external, or internal, like for example, I'll be at church and I'll just feel really calm and like, wow, for those brief couple minutes when I can't remember all the stresses of life haha and I'm just chilling, and then I remember I have three tests tomorrow and I'm like nope haha I gotta get ready for that. I could have been at maybe complete peace at church, that was restricted by other responsibilities I had. And in John's case as well he could have been fully engaged in our hope meeting, but then he had other factors that were pressing. So if you want to have the ideal condition your environment has to allow it and you have to have internal conditions that aren't restricted. If there's responsibilities, deadlines, or stress in general that's on your mind, then its harder to focus and to reach that peak

productivity and engagement type mode. I haven't been feeling well yesterday and today in fact, and there's been a lot of work, I haven't been getting much time for myself, and that made it harder to focus in school, and in class. I found myself falling asleep while we were reading a book in class and I don't really fall asleep very often in class, its not like there's anything wrong with the book we're reading, its just other factors, internal, outside of that situation that prevented me" (May 3rd, 2018, Goddard Library, Worcester, MA).

This story sheds light on the powerful influence the third dimension of curriculum can have on affecting the atmosphere. Though the meeting started off on a high note, with a vibe resembling LCKE, over the course of the meeting, John's realization that he needed to use this time to take care of work and stresses related to school and other aspects of his life changed his level of engagement drastically. In the conversation about the family game night, Kofi and John were free to imagine and plan something they were excited about, and something that felt innovative. They were able to work collectively, and engage actively with each other, in a kinetic and external manner. A slight change in setting, and in our physical space opened up the possibilities for John to attend to his other needs. For him, the atmosphere shifted to become more individual and internal. Though he was not engaging in our conversation, he was engaged in his own work, and he was free to do so because we understood his situation. The vibe for John became LDKI because of this.

A change in our physical location sparked this change in vibe. Once we moved from a small cramped countertop, to an open table with plenty of room, John had the room to do his homework. This shows the ways that the physical space can influence the vibe of a space, and also shows how people can experience different vibes in the same space. Kofi remained highly engaged with me and our meetings content, while John was able to drift

into his own world. They both had different things going on with them at the time. Their different struggles outside of HOPE gave them a different atmospheric experience.

A Burst of Freedom: “Oh I can just let it rip”

In my first meeting with the peer leaders from North High, Shell brought up an idea for an event she called the “youth movement,” portrayed in the opening scene of this paper. This spark of spontaneous imaginative planning stood out as the most fun and productive conversation from the three workshops for these peer leaders. We made further connections with the vibe created in this situation with an atmosphere that was experienced during the HOPE summer, in an intense conversation about sexism. These two vibes showed two common, yet different ways that a vibe creates an open atmosphere with meaningful action involved.

Shell: That room just felt like inspirational, I’m always feeling inspirational but its like that extra umph to it, the extra oomph is like being super passionate about it to the point where Im planning on the spot. Being someone who’s a leader and always planning stuff it usually takes time, but like right then and there I was able to think of ideas and ways to do it and like having Craig and Enrico being there, I was just fired up about it.

I didn’t have to hold back because I’m comfortable around the peers who were there, or my friends who were there rather, and I know they’re just as passionate about it as me and because i’m really open with my thoughts, I guess it’s just me being me.

Craig: I mean the youth movement when you brought it up it was kinda wild, but it was like a good wild. Everyone was just in the moment trying to figure out what we could do to make it a successful event. We were just planning ahead for the future even though we were not at that point, we’re like looking towards it.

Shell: *I can feel that spruce of confidence I had during this meeting, if one thing didn't lead to another we wouldn't be where we were at in that whole conversation because I know like if I hadn't spoken up about that idea we probably wouldn't be so energized in that whole conversation, the whole conversation in the beginning was I don't wanna say relaxed, we were all engaged but we weren't as spruced up, we were just calmly talking answering your questions but then there was one thing that just sprung up in me and I was like I need to say this, it kept bothering me, I needed to get it out, something I was super passionate about.*

Craig: *Yea it's like it came from this one point and then it just blew up into something big and just got crazy for a couple minutes. It was real fun so you can see how the vibe changed from you (Jacob) pushing to get the answers out of us to like something you (Shell) just got out and just started throwing out ideas.*

Shell: *You have a whole list of questions, and at first I kinda felt intimidated, I was like ok this kinda feels like an interview, but then you reworded them to help us feel more relaxed. You treated us like mature people, you helped us feel comfortable.*

I feel like I kinda brought the whole excitement, because just being super passionate about it everyone else was jumping in definitely Enrico he was just like, I like that idea because we all shared the same ideas and we all wanted to have a voice and say what we wanted and we just wanted adults to appreciate the youth so that definitely played a huge part in this vibe furthering that conversation" (April 26th, 2018, WPL, Worcester MA).

Michelle quickly called this vibe LCKE. Liberation because of how free she felt to speak her mind, and be spontaneous in her planning. She did not have to hold back and her stream of consciousness was allowed to spill out onto the table. It was collective because while she brought this vibe to the center, she brought her fellow peer leaders with her, who

she knows share a similar mindset and passion. They were able to build on her explosion of creativity. It was kinetic because it all happened so fast, with a lot of energy and movement. The peer leaders were improvising and bouncing ideas off each other in a rush of excitement. Finally it was external because it all happened collectively. The peer leaders invitation to improvise in this moment let the action occur externally, through a combination of all the peer leaders thoughts at once. They did not hold back their ideas and reactions, but blurted them out as they came.

This moment shows the importance of relationships. Shell felt comfortable to speak her true passion, and share new spontaneous ideas on the spot because she was in a setting surrounded by people she felt supported by, people who she trusts and respects. Our shared vision of the problems facing youth in schools today allowed Michelle to not hold back in sharing her ideas.

This conversation also sheds light on the important balance that a leader must uphold. It was important for me as a leader to facilitate the conversation to outline our goals for the project. The peer leaders noted that my ability to break down, and reword the question allowed them to get into the frenzy of dreaming. The key component to the frenzy was that Shell brought up her own original ideas. Her passion allowed her to take leadership in that moment, which sparked the burst of excitement for the rest of the group. Once she brought up the idea, I did not have to speak, in fact It was hard to get a word in between all the peer leaders ideas. This vibe was such a strong force, and this was because Shell was able to rise up into leadership as a participant, and take control of the vibe.

Physically the growth of this exciting vibe was expressed by the way the peer leaders changed their posture, and the volume and speed of their voice. As the conversation

got more intense, they began leaning in towards the table, towards each other, speaking faster and louder.

This conversation represents the very high energy, fast paced, and creative atmosphere that can be experienced when participants feel free to express themselves, and that their ideas will be valued, and have an impact. Much of our work at HOPE is project oriented, and so we aspire to uphold this atmosphere, so that the peer leaders can meaningfully engage, and grow into leadership and responsibility.

Two Vibes can be True: *“A day of self reflection for you guys”*

Another moment that Shell, Angel, and Craig often recounted was when we focused on the topic of sexism. Our conversations and activities took place in two meetings across two consecutive weeks. The first day we had a more open and fluid dialogue that took turns in many directions. One participant made a comment that recieved strong pushback from a majority of the women in the group. This moment was remembered as one of the tensest conversations of the summer. The next week the staff facilitators guided the peer leaders through affinity groups where we broke out by gender identity. We then came back together and held a speak out, where the men made a statement about the ways they would work to understand how their masculinity impacts the women at HOPE, and the women had time to share experiences that were hurtful to them, and were able to tell their male peers what they need to do to make the space a safer place for the women of HOPE. While these two days were memorable because of their high level of conflict and intensity, they were not remembered as negative experiences.

Shell: *I feel like a memorable moment was the affinity groups. You guys had us separate, all the girls discussed things we felt like are prejudices and the boys had their own discussion, they weren't as serious as us, so when we came together all the boys were like oh shoot the girls are really serious about this.*

So during the sexism thing, when I had something to say I would say it but that day was more of an internal day where I had to think to myself about where do men and women really stand, and do my peers around me support me, and that type of thing, where as like externally during the first meeting, with the youth movement conversation, I was like oh I can just let it rip.

Enrico: *Yea, it was uhh, quiet, haha.*

Shell: *A day of self reflection for you guys.*

Enrico: *Yea I just kinda like just kept my mouth shut, I thought I was gonna get hit if I said anything, and it's not like I had anything bad to say, I felt like If I had anything good to say it would just turn bad, so I don't know. I was just listening to the girls, and I was just like damn, this is crazy, and I don't discriminate myself, I see everyone as people, but I think it's a real problem that this actually does happen, and that's what I was thinking in my head mostly.*

Craig: *I think on that day for me personally it was kinda like alright, it seems like the females were getting a lot off their chest from personal experiences, so this is not a situation that men are supposed to get into, because like it's not like they understand exactly what was going on. While its like something that might happen to everyone, for a female it's a lot more prominent, and a lot more people don't talk about it as often, so it was a situation for them to vent and get it off of their chest.*

Shell: *All the girls were like fired up and they were ready, but the guys, they were scared to talk*" (April 26th, 2018, WPL, Worcester, MA).

Shell, Enrico, and Craig identified that this day was a moment when there were two clearly distinct vibes in the room. They noticed that the men and women felt differently due to their different experiences with and perspectives on sexism. They identified that the vibe for the women was LCKE, while for men it was LCKI. Liberation because the women felt free to speak on their direct and lived experience with sexism, and were able confront the sexism they face at HOPE. For the men, this was liberation because they were forced to reflect on their own masculinity, and gain perspective on something they do not experience. It was a collective vibe because HOPE has a foundational family feel, but more because the women and men both had intentional separate space to unpack their experiences related to sexism. It was kinetic because it was a highly tense experience. The intensity was fueled by passion, pain, confusion, and conflict. While for the women this kinetic energy manifested itself externally, as the workshops were designed to center their voice and experience, for the men it manifested internally, in the form of introspection and reflection.

Kofi further unpacked this experience, shedding light on why two vibes existed in this moment, and why the tension and conflict felt positive.

Kofi: *It depends on how things affect you, for example for the females in the sexism conversation, once they heard Brandon say something, the way he perceived the topic, how it affected him obviously doesn't affect him the same way it did the girls in the room who experience first hand discrimination and prejudice because of there sex, something they can't control.*

Low key if I feel like my foundational base is being shook, like its awesome I'm like damn what, like there's so many things I didn't know, views shattered, I think its awesome when you learn things you just like had no idea what's going on and from there, you want to change and be more aware, be more socially involved and stuff (February 21st, 2018, WPL, Worcester MA).

The sexism conversations and the youth movement story share a window into the important relational component of an atmosphere. Just as the peer leaders burst of energy was sparked by Shell's passion and creativity, the women's ability to express themselves and open up was sparked by other women first being vulnerable themselves. They were able to connect over shared experiences, and find common passion.

It was important and intentional to us as facilitators to make sure that the atmosphere would allow women to open up, and take space and power in these conversations. In a way, we intentionally set up the situation to create two different vibes. In order to grow and learn, men and women needed to have two different experiences. The women needed space to center their truth, and the men needed to feel uncomfortable, and sit in a place of reflection.

Conclusions

Summary of Findings

This exploration into the vibes took the peer leaders and I on a dialogic journey through many stories and themes. Overall, the findings show a range of atmospheric experiences, from the bad vibes to the good vibes. These moments show that there are also a range of possible contributing factors to creating, sustaining, and changing a vibe. The three dimensions of curriculum all contribute something different. The content and

structuring of such content can make participants feel intrigued, invested, and important, or it can cause boredom and passivity. The pedagogy upheld by the leader of the group similarly can make participants feel welcome, comfortable, and valued, or invisible, unworthy, and silenced. The context of the experience holds other important factors, such as the unique identity and experience of each individual, their current needs, and relationship to structural power and oppression, the past experience of the group members and their relationships to each other and to the facilitator, and the more general social, political, and historical context. What we learned in these stories pushed us into a place where we came back to the ideas of curriculum and YA-Ps. We have come to three major points that connect our newly formed understanding of the vibes, to implications for the theory and practice of curriculum development and YA-Ps. The first is a call to action for developers and facilitators of curriculum to bring a framework of atmosphere to the center of their work. The second is a conceptualization of leadership for YA-Ps that highlights atmosphere as a central component to the goals of a YA-P, in terms of creating a space where power is shared. The third is the commitment to exploring the ways that a vibe has power in a space, with respects to abstract structures of power and domination.

Centering the Lived Experience

The field of curriculum studies has raised the importance of atmosphere before, but we need to reconsider how we take-up and analyze this concept. The atmosphere of a space should be a central concern to developers and facilitators of curriculum. The atmosphere that is created in a space is not simply a side effect of what is happening there, it is directly linked to how participants react to the content, how they engage with the activities, and to

what extent the objectives and outcomes are achieved. An understanding of how different atmospheres contribute to the space differently, and an analysis of what types of vibes match up with different curricular plans and goals would allow those who design curriculum to be mindful of how their plans will be received. Rather than hoping that a generally good vibe is created, those in the field should be able to trace through their curriculum to see how their framework will support different vibes when needed for different goals, and how these vibes will change and develop throughout the experience.

Craig: *"I think it could create a new sense of productivity, like if you know what kinda vibe you work best in, then your gonna try to set that vibe anytime your tryna get some work done"* (February 21st, 2018, WPL, Worcester, MA).

Our findings showed that a vibe is not set in stone, but is more fluid and flexible. To reach a place that makes participants feel free and active, the atmosphere must build up to this point. The peer leaders mentioned ways that those who design curriculum should be concerned with the vibe that their curriculum supports. Craig noticed that understanding atmosphere better could push people to design curriculum with an understanding that people are all different, and so they should be able to design the activities in a way that can be open to different kinds of atmospheres, so as to engage a range of people. This being said, there were clearly positive and negative vibes discussed in the findings, and even an awareness of what is generally good or bad could help inform the intentions of a curriculum.

Kofi mentions how a curriculum can be planned out extensively, but without being mindful to the vibe that is being created, the curriculum will not be able to engage

participants. In his explanation, Kofi touches on the three dimensions of curriculum and how they all impact the vibe in different ways.

Kofi: "I can give a presentation but people won't be receptive, even it has all the right points or whatever it doesn't matter if the way it's presented doesn't make people feel like they're more in a conversation than a test. Having the goal in mind that the point of the question is to draw answers out of them but not only answers like relationships or experiences, like if you get people to share their experience they open up and if he talks about how his physics teacher is crazy, it invited me to talk about my thing, and then Shell to talk about her personal experience. I think getting questions like that and not being so oriented on boom, bullet points, done, but focus on if people are actually understanding and if people are engaging" (February 21st, 2018, WPL, Worcester, MA).

Inspired by the way people engage with social media, Kofi began to conceptualize a tool for curriculum developers to use in order to imagine how the atmosphere they are creating will be received.

Kofi: "People post a picture based on what kinda response or feedback they'll get, so having that mindset when it comes to teaching, leading, and organizing; like how will people respond, what can we do to maximize the likes, or maximize the comments, having people engage. How can I do that as much as possible, but to get a point across" (February 21st, 2018, WPL, Worcester, MA)?

Overall, the atmosphere that a curriculum creates should be a central concern to those who are engaged in the development and facilitation of curriculum. This means that they must be mindful of how the three dimensions will contribute in different ways. The content must allow participants to buy in to what is going on, in Instagram terms, the photo

must catch people's attention; it should make them immediately react with “like.” The pedagogy must be able to make participants feel comfortable to engage. To maximize comments, the photo must draw people in, the caption should push those to react based on their perspective. The overall context must also be understood. What is trending at the moment, what meme format is currently being most utilized, who your followers are, and what time of day are all important to ensuring that a post will succeed among the sea of interacting social media forces. The first and second dimensions of curriculum should be informed by a deep understanding of atmospheric conditions and reactions.

To conceptualize a curriculum as a lived experience first, and as a plan second will allow developers in the field to keep atmosphere at the forefront of their planning. This practice will allow people to maintain an intentional orientation to the experience they are creating, and more importantly how it will be received. By uplifting this key idea, current frameworks of curriculum will become more robust and holistic, ensuring that the quality work done to put together the content and outline the pedagogical intentions, will not be stifled by a vibe that keeps people confined and passive. Shell pointed out how she identifies a vibe.

Shell: *“looking at people’s faces, or their tone of voice, and feeling my sixth sense tingling, like yeah ok this is how everyone is rocking right now”* (February 21st, 2018, WPL, Worcester, MA).

Further phenomenological studies into the field of curriculum should be concerned with how to develop this practice among developers and facilitators of curriculum, to understand more fully what this sixth sense is and how to use it for the purposes of curriculum development.

Leadership as Teamwork

A common theme from our stories was the importance of leadership. As we explored this idea, it became clear to us that while a leader is extremely important, to think of leadership in terms of the atmosphere, rather than the technical aspects of a curriculum, opens up the term. We were lead down a path to reconceptualize what leadership means in the context of a YA-P. Overall we found that a leader has a very important role as a person who sets the vibe and has the power to moderate it. The peer leaders notice that Walter does a great job at doing this at HOPE.

Kofi: I think one tangible thing I can point to is Walter. He comes in, if he sees a new person he greets them one on one, he talks to you like your important, “we want to know more about you we want to hear from you” so like on his greetings, it’s a small thing but it makes a big different and impact on how you view the meeting, especially if you’re a new person coming in, or if you had a horrible day and come in and Walter seems genuinely interested in how your doing, and that nature it’s definitely pretty cool vibe” (February 21st, 2018, WPL, Worcester, MA).

While the program leader has an important role to play in setting up the atmosphere, we eventually came to see teamwork as an important component to leadership. There were many ways that participants were able contribute to a vibe, and in these moments, a participants contribution proved to be more powerful than the leaders. I was able to push the peer leaders into a place where they could get into the youth movement conversation, but Shell had to bring up her original ideas to spark that burst of energy. The intention of a YA-P is to share power among youth and adults. If adults are not

sharing the power to also control the atmosphere, then they will remain in a position above the youth, stifling the ability for the partnership to engage in transformational work.

Leadership coming up from within changes the vibes, and allowing this leadership to be fostered among the youth was necessary to getting other participants involved, and to instill excitement and creativity. The original ideas that came out of the peer leaders minds, such as the youth movement and the family game night, became memorable conversations, with outstanding vibes, and productive outcomes. The peer leaders spoke about having this power.

Shell: *“Even if the room is dull, you can still have one or two people who lead the way and say, no we're not gonna be bored, and push ahead, like Jose, you can take him to a boring room and he can have at least a few people smiling and feeling a bit better or a bit more expressive just because he's opened a door, once you see a few people changing the atmosphere and like inviting you to do more things”* (February 21st, 2018, WPL, Worcester, MA).

Craig: *“I think I personally try my best to bring a positive vibe wherever I go because the happier people are makes me feel better so I just go into places and try to be as positive as I can and talk to as many people as I can and smile to make sure it's not all sad and depressing in there”* (February 21st, 2018, WPL, Worcester, MA).

While a leader is important, everyone has a role to play in the leadership of a group.

Enrico: *“I think it's all about working as a whole team like we're doing now, were just putting all our influence, we're using our voices, were not leaving one person excluded, were all adding onto, or subtracting, but being respectful”* (February 21st, 2018, WPL, Worcester, MA).

To conceptualize leadership as being focused on teamwork is to center a conversation on the importance of relationships. If the leader is thought about as a teammate, then the possibilities for the atmosphere to be controlled collectively can open up.

Kofi: *"If your gonna be a leader your able to understand that your leading people, but in that sense your job is not to tell them what to do and not listen to them. Your actions don't dictate them but they come in response to what you get from them"* (February 21st, 2018, WPL, Worcester, MA).

Kofi went on to compare this form of leadership through a basketball analogy.

Kofi: *"Kinda like an alley oop right haha, you lob it up, and then the dunk is awesome, but you gotta lob it up before the dunk can be awesome"* (February 21st, 2018, WPL, Worcester, MA).

Leaders in youth adult partnerships have to be able to balance their role as leader and teammate to ensure that they are supporting a relational practice that creates the family feel that we have at HOPE.

Kofi: *"People always mention hope is that break in the week that just relaxing and brings you back to who you are, you remember you're not just going through the motions but you can actually have fun and feel important or cared about."*

If we can conceptualize leadership as the ability to uphold a family vibe, the concern of a leader will be the atmosphere first, and the content of their curriculum second, allowing them to center the lived experience of curriculum in their practice.

Too often, adult partners in YA-Ps set up activities and programs so that they require youth input, and places where youth voice is guiding the decision making process,

but uphold a vibe that is completely controlled by the adult. How things are done are important to the vibe, and though on a surface level it might look like young people are engaged, without allowing them to be in control of how things are structured, and how the vibe is set, there is no way that the goals of a YA-P will be fulfilled to their full extent. Practically speaking, leaders of YA-P's should develop a shared language and process of analysis with their youth participants to be able to collectively understand the vibe of their space, and engage with it, to ensure that the atmosphere can support the intentions of creating space for youth to be open, critical, creative, and active.

Power of the Vibe

Finally, it is important for the theoretical and practical implications of atmosphere, curriculum, and YA-Ps, to note that embedded in a vibe, is representations of structural social and political power. A vibe produces sociopolitical responses by people, that can be implicit or explicit. An atmosphere can be a powerful tool in upholding dominance and oppression, or in experiencing liberation. Kofi mentioned how implicit bias is associated with how an atmosphere is experienced, and that people's different experiences, perspectives, and identities will produce in them a unique experience of a vibe. To pair a power analysis with a conceptualization of atmosphere will allow people to engage with power, shift power, and take power.

Kofi: "people have certain biases and if you notice you put an activity like that that people are like oh my god wow I didn't realize this about myself then it engaged a conversation or activity people can move on ok like why did you feel this why did you respond"

this way and how can you go on to understand how this topic works in communities, and how can we address it” (February 21st, 2018, WPL, Worcester, MA).

Coupling an analysis of power with a mindfulness of atmosphere might help us paint a clearer image of why a vibe has a certain impact. In the story of Romar’s physics class, we did not give much attention to the ways that public school is set up to support a hierarchy where teachers hold authority of students, and a pedagogy where students are filled with information only to regurgitate it, and that this combination is used to train young people to be subordinate and busy, so that they will fit into the corporate economy of our time. We did not talk about the adultism within WEC that first, lead them to create a strategic plan for Worcester Public Schools without the input from any current student or anyone under the age of 18, and second, pushed them think that they could they could talk at youth for an hour, and then ask for feedback at the end, and that this would count as meaningful community engagement. We did not cover the fact that what led Shell to share her creative idea for the youth movement, was first an examination of her situation as a young person. She was able to name the ways adultism has impacted her, and this power analysis lead her into a frenzy of dreaming. Similarly, because we set up the workshops on sexism to center the voice of women, voices that are typically marginalized, we intentionally shifted the power of the room, so that the women would feel free to speak out their truth.

To engage in the field of curriculum studies, and to support YA-Ps, one must uplift a full and deep analysis of the atmosphere of the space that is being created. The lived experience of a curriculum is directly bound up in its success and its failure. The vibe experienced by a group will determine whether or not goals are met, and objectives are completed in a meaningful way. Leadership must be understood as teamwork, and the

foundation of a team must be based in relationships. Finally, how a vibe perpetuates power and oppression must be held at the forefront, and we must be constantly uplift the atmospheres that allow us a glimpse into what a liberated community can feel like.

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