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# Stay Woke: Creating a Path Towards Critical Consciousness and Self-Awareness

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Stay Woke: Creating a Path Towards Critical Consciousness and Self-Awareness for  
Young Women of Color

Florcy Romero

MAY 2016

A MASTER'S RESEARCH PAPER

Submitted to the faculty of Clark University, Worcester,  
Massachusetts, in partial fulfillment of the requirements for  
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and Environment

And accepted on the recommendation of

Laurie Ross, Chief Instructor

## ABSTRACT

### Stay Woke: Creating a Path Towards Critical Consciousness and Self-Awareness for Young Women of Color

Florcy Romero

This paper examines a social justice based curriculum that was designed to promote a process towards critical consciousness and self-awareness in youth of color. This was done through a participatory paradigm infused with observational data. The findings indicated that in order to direct youth of color towards a path of critical consciousness and self-awareness, certain elements were required. These elements focused on shifting away from traditional styles of teaching and instead emerging in creating an environment that prides itself in diverse knowledges, engaged pedagogy, and connecting the personal within the political and social context.

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Chief Instructor

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Date: May 2016

Baccalaureate Degree: Bachelors of Arts

Source: Clark University

Date: May 2015

## DEDICATION

To Women of Color,

our backs  
tell stories  
no books have  
the spine to  
carry.  
-Rupi Kaur

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## CHAPTER 1: Introduction

The current state of education is one that requires immediate transformation if we wish to use it as a tool towards the creation of a new world— A world that practices compassion and freedom by confronting colonialism which has made itself the central narrative in our education systems. Unfortunately, our systems of education have not abandoned old style imperialistic and colonial tendencies even after independence.

Curriculum, language, and, in some cases, even the nationality of the teachers themselves are carried over from the colonial period. In many ways, the relationship between ex-colony and ex-colonizer is stronger economically and culturally than during the colonial administration (Jaimes, 374).

The legacy of white supremacy remains intact in the most crucial environment in which our children spend a majority of their time: schools. One cannot separate colonialism and violence. These two concepts are not mutually exclusive, violence functions as a central component of colonialism. Often times we reduce violence to the physical act. As a result, this serves to disregard all the multiple ways in which violence manifests within other structural entities. Coretta Scott King once said:

I must remind you that starving a child is violence. Neglecting school children is violence. Punishing a mother and her family is violence. Discrimination against a working man is violence. Ghetto housing is

violence. Ignoring medical need is violence. Contempt for poverty is violence (Williams, 2004).

I argue that depriving a child from liberatory education due to their status in the social and economic spectrum is a form of violence. Formal Eurocentric schooling prepares its students to become active participants in a capitalistic globe that thrives off the exploitation of many and the success of a few. This style of education is by no means a tool for liberation for which many radical educators have advocated.

My upbringing is crucial to this paper and my overall commitment to using education as practice for freedom. Coming from a city very similar to Worcester, our teachers did not look like us, did not understand us, and did not believe in our ability to prosper beyond our blocks. I am from Chelsea. Chelsea is a small city on the outskirts of Boston. We are teased with the tall corporate buildings and pretty lights of Boston that we can see from Admiral's Hill. The Hill is a residential area with exclusive parks, pools, and apartment condos, mostly inhabited by white upper-middle class folks. It gets closed off after 8 pm by cops but there are ways to sneak in and catch the beautiful views of the Boston skyline. Chelsea is the second most densely populated city in Massachusetts with just 2.5 square miles of land and approximately 36, 828 (documented) people inhabiting this space. We are mostly Latino—mainly immigrants from Central America and the Caribbean. Chelsea has been ranked the most dangerous city in Massachusetts according to the FBI Uniform Crime Report. This was determined by looking at the past three years of FBI reporting in terms of property crimes and violent crimes. Violent crimes being defined

as rapes, murders, robberies and aggravated results. It is important to note that Worcester was also on this list and ranked number 7.

Growing up, the perceptions the outside world had of the residents of Chelsea were as evident as they were negative. Our education system reinforced and condescendingly reminded my classmates and I of our inferior status. This was shown through several outlets; the way we were treated, the resources we were given (but mostly not given), and more importantly the curriculum we were taught in addition to who was teaching it. This curriculum was indicative of a larger problem of systematic oppression and systemic hierarchies that placed the cultures of people of color at the bottom. These curriculums often reflected the ideology of colonial powers and imperialism. Both my school's history curriculum and my teachers misrepresented and devalued my culture, Cuscatlán (formerly known as El Salvador), and first nations/indigenous people from throughout the Americas. This was shown through the lack of truth of the atrocities and accomplishments that occurred throughout the Americas.

In J. Loewen's *Lies My Teacher Told Me*, he states that African American, Native American and Latino students in particular have a particular disdain for history. As a result, they perform worse in both history and English compared to their white counterparts (Loewen, 7). Furthermore, Frances Fitzgerald's 1979 study, *America Revised*, he exposed how "textbooks ignored and distorted the Spanish impact on Latin America and the colonial United States" (Loewen's 10). This is no new knowledge, when taking into consideration that our historical textbooks reflect the social hierarchies that

often leave people of color, specifically Black and Latinos at the bottom of the social spectrum (Loewens, 272).

Growing up, my classmates and I, internalized these curriculums. At times I would hear my own classmates make remarks that glorified European culture the way that our history books did. In turn, this produced comments of inferiority when speaking on Native and Black history- our very own history. In English class, our teacher would always want us to start the first 20 minutes of class with silent reading. Few of us took this time seriously and utilized these 20 minutes to socialize despite consistent rebuttals. However, I vividly remember one of my classmates, an Afro Latino boy who walked into class with *The Autobiography of Malcolm X* in the palm of his hand. As the rest of the class began to socialize and goof off per usual, my classmate asked us to be quiet, as he was trying to read. This worked up another classmate so much that he snatched his book and said, “why you frontin’? You know niggas can’t read.” The whole class let out hollers and laughs at this question that appeared to be more like a universal statement. I too laughed with everyone else. When we are consistently told that our history and our culture is inferior, a part of us begins to believe in this false perception of our roots. We also risk the ability to become critical thinkers about the events that occurred in history because we are only given the dominant culture’s perspective of history.

It is important to note that this process of colonizing the mind of youth of color through Eurocentric curriculums at times can be subliminal. It is the difference between active/covert racism and omissions/passive racism. For example, active racism is deemed

socially unacceptable due to its overt discrimination. Yet, passive racism becomes socially acceptable and to a degree more effective for the process of erasing the history and culture of people of color. Eurocentric curriculums along with their language are part of socially accepted racism. White supremacy has multiple dimensions, not just organized terrorists such as the Klu Klux Klan. White supremacy is also the erasure of Native genocide that becomes labeled as achievements of white men “discovering” Amerika. In turn, the conquests, pillaging and massacre of indigenous peoples becomes filtered. Our children are able to point out the name of the man who “discovered” Amerika but have no knowledge of the specific tribe and people that were colonized. The fact that the creator of the transatlantic slave trade and the father of the genocide American indigenous people is given a holiday is telling. Indigenous people are not given a face, their narratives become silenced to only be told through the colonizers eyes via Eurocentric curriculums.

In addition to curriculum and the language that promotes the erasure of people of color, our teachers also reflected these colonial legacies. All of the teachers throughout middle school and high school were white, with the exception of my two teachers who taught Spanish who identified as Cuban and Honduran. My public school education was Eurocentric from its curriculum to the people in charge of teaching the curriculum. This is problematic, considering 84% of the students at Chelsea High were from Latinx backgrounds. Yet, only 13% of the teachers were “Hispanic”, 2% were African American, and 1% were Asian. This left us with 84% teachers that were white (ESE 2007). Our teachers could not relate to us and were not culturally sensitive to our particular struggles

as first generation Americans. Some scholars believe that students of color achievements suffer as a result of this disparity in the diversity gap within teachers. According, to a study in *Economics of Education Review*, they compared the results of students' yearly test scores based on the ethnicity of the teachers they had for the respected school year. In the first year, the students of color were taught by white teachers. In the second school year, they were assigned teachers who matched their ethnicity (Egalite, 48). After controlling for other variables, the study confirmed that students' test scores improved when taught by teachers who shared their ethnicities. This study could also explain how staffing of predominantly white teachers affected the way in which we engaged, or rather disengaged with our education in Chelsea.

The enrollment rates by race and ethnicity in Worcester similarly reflects the racial disparities prominent in Chelsea. According to the enrollment data from Claremont Academy, in the 2015-2016 school year 72% of the students were from Latin American backgrounds. On the contrary, out of a 52 total teacher count, 43 of the teachers are white. In addition, North High students were 44% Hispanic, 20% Black and 7% Asian, 3% Biracial- equaling to 75% of students of color. Yet, the demographics of teacher staffing did not reflect their students. In fact, out of 121 teachers, an overwhelmingly 98 were white (ESE 2015). This is important considering that our youth are from these two schools. Both Chelsea and Worcester share similar demographics in terms of student population and suffer the lack of diversity in its staffing of teachers.

Conflict theorists would argue that the purpose of education is to maintain social hierarchies based on class. They believe that schools serve the “dominant privileged class by providing for the social reproduction of the economic and political status quo in a way that gives the illusion of objectivity, neutrality, and opportunity” (Feinberg, 41). This idea of using education to reinforce social inequities spoke to our existence in Chelsea.

According to the Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, 83% of students enrolled at Chelsea High in 2015 were low income, while Worcester was 73% low income.

Our schools were run down, we had bars on our windows. We did not have sufficient resources. At times, we had to share textbooks with three to four other students. We could not even bring these textbooks home. These acts of deprivation are not minor, they affected the way in which we saw ourselves, the way in which we performed on tests (mainly poor) because we did not have adequate resources common to many suburban communities, and also the lives we led after graduating high school- poor. Most of my friends dropped out by 10th grade, I was one of the few who attended college. Our education and school systems perpetuated our cycles of poverty because our education system was broken. Our curriculums were not engaging or reflective of our realities. We were treated like criminals, some of our schools had bars on the windows. At times, many of us, including myself would have to be escorted by a school resource officer to navigate the building. This influenced the way we acted out against these systems via dropping out, failing out, acting out, etc. Yet, when you went a city or two over, you reached the suburbs

where the students had more than enough resources to succeed. It was no surprise that they looked different than us. These are the results of education for the purpose of maintaining social hierarchies and reproducing poverty.

It was crucial for myself and a few other Latino and Black students at my school to reimagine and reclaim our narratives and our roots. We became more engaged with subjects such as history through alternative ways of learning for the purpose to unlearn the damage that was taught. For example, we indulged in political/conscious hip hop, art, and documentaries that reflected our own lived experiences. These alternative forms of learning provided us with the process to be able to articulate our truths and the truths of our ancestors in a way that was not offered via traditional education systems.

Hip Hop was the factor that awakened me from the curriculums that continued to remind me that my people and I were incapable of growth and evolution. I was introduced to a rapper by the name of Immortal Technique by my Mexican friend, Oscar Alcazar. He introduced me to “The Poverty of Philosophy.” I remember I had this song on repeat due to the complex concepts in the lyrics which seemed foreign to me. I was hooked by the first line, “Most of my Latino and Black people who are struggling to get food, clothes, and shelter in the hood are so concerned with that, that philosophizing about freedom and socialist democracy is usually and unfortunately beyond their rationale.” Most of Immortal Technique’s songs revolve around politics, immigration, racism, police brutality, and other injustices faced by mainly Latino and Black people.

Soon after I was introduced to this song, I began to explore Immortal Technique's other songs like "Modern Day Slavery", "Industrial Revolution", "Harlem Renaissance", "The Point of No Return", and "Leaving the Past" to name a few. Everything I was hearing was contrary to what I was learning. I began putting pieces together and realized that our mentality of hopelessness as youth in Chelsea stemmed from our environments but were also reinforced through these colonial curriculums that have taught us lies about who we were and who we were supposed to become. I began to attack and reject everything I was learning. When you teach students about slavery, Native American history, the Mexican-American war, our histories, you are consciously breaking any potential of critical consciousness and self-awareness. Our growth becomes stunted by these histories that have taught us that we only exist in destitute states.

With that being said, I created a curriculum alongside my Cape Verdean/Angolan friend Joanna, that reflects some critical components listed above. We saw a need for a social justice based curriculum that pride itself in a pedagogical style of educating for the practice of freedom. The components of the curriculum we created centers on an engaged pedagogy and the power of dialogue that specifically revolves around issues that affect historically marginalized communities. This style of teaching gives voice to groups that have been pushed out to the margins of society by systems of oppression. Furthermore, social justice education is intended to assist students in discovering and wielding their own power as both knowledgeable and critical people in attempt to create a more just society (Chapman, Hobbel, & Alvarado, 2011).

We designed our social justice based curriculum to allow young women of color to critically engage in issues affecting their lives while simultaneously assisting them in the process towards becoming critically conscious of the world they inhabit. This curriculum promotes a critical awareness about the societal structures, institutional policies/practices, and environmental conditions that serve as barriers to students achieving their goals. My growing up in Chelsea and experiencing firsthand a Eurocentric education fueled my development of this curriculum. Many of the educators who have contributed immensely to this field have developed theories and work that also reflects these issues, yet many have not come from the specific reality in which I was raised and educated.

### **Theoretical Framework**

The theoretical framework for the creation of the curriculum is rooted in social justice. A focus on social justice entails that one looks critically at why education is more unjust for some students and not for others. It forces one to analyze curriculum, textbooks, resources and other educational policies that discriminate and devalue students of color. When social justice is the foundation in which we create our new vision of education, we can then begin to create a system that does not exclude students of color. In addition, we can create a group of young leaders that pride themselves in the need to apply social justice into their respected communities. Sonia Nieto (2000) defines social justice as follows:

Social justice is an individual, collective, and institutional journey that involves self-identity awareness, learning with students, developing

meaningful relationships, developing multilingual/multicultural knowledge, challenging racism and other biases, having a critical stance, and working with a community of critical friends (p. 187).

In addition to Nieto, the curriculum reflected the pedagogies presented by bell hooks, Paulo Freire, and critical race pedagogy. From bell hooks (1994), we pulled tremendously from her “engaged pedagogy” which can be described as one that is rooted in love. According to bell hooks, to educate for the practice of freedom is to abandon old ways of learning by transgressing boundaries that confine both students and teachers into a perpetual cycle where the “banking system” is the norm. An engaged pedagogy seeks to “teach in a manner that respects and cares for the souls of our students [and] is essential if we are to provide the necessary conditions where learning can most deeply and intimately begin” (hooks, 13).

In *Teaching to Transgress* (1994) bell hooks transforms the discourse on education into one that is grounded in liberation, which inevitably results in the evolution of an individual. Education should be used as a tool to liberate historically marginalized groups in the United States. It is worth noting the intersectionalities that bell hooks draws on. Race does not exist on its own. In fact, when race is intertwined with gender, class, sexuality, etc. it only serves to intensify the lived experiences of an individual—which is exacerbated by the construct of age. She adds a component that is very relevant to our particular group

of youth- gender. This is crucial considering that all our youth are girls of color- black and Latina to be specific. The way they experience the world requires an intersectional lens that does not separate their identities- this is the basis of feminism for women of color.

### **Critical Pedagogy**

Paulo Freire's critical pedagogy provided a space for our curriculum to further develop. In Paulo Freire's (2000) *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* and (1973) *Education for Critical Consciousness*, he theorizes on the need for critical consciousness in an age of oppression. The concept of critical consciousness is to be able to not only become aware of the social inequities occurring, but to also link this education to action. Freire exposed a "banking system" style of education. The banking system can be described as a style of learning in which a student's purpose in school is to passively consume information from their teacher or professor. We purposefully designed our curriculum to break this banking system.

The more students work at storing the deposits entrusted to them, the less they develop the critical consciousness which would result from their intervention in the world as transformers of that world. The more completely they accept the passive role impressed on them, the more they tend simply to adapt to the world as it is and to the fragmented view of reality deposited in them (Freire, 73).

Freire's framework allowed us as curriculum developers to break away from this "banking system" that has been so deeply engrained in us from its ubiquitous presence formal education.

### **Critical Race Theory and Pedagogy**

In addition, we also sought out the core concepts of critical race theory to guide us through the content of our curriculum. In Daniel G. Solorzano's (1997) essay "Images and Words that Wound: Critical Race Theory, Racial Stereotyping, and Teacher Education", he defines critical race theory as, "a framework or set of basic perspectives, methods, and pedagogy that seeks to identify, analyze, and transform those structural and cultural aspects of society that maintain the subordination and marginalization of People of Color" (Solorzano, 6). It was crucial that we not only identified these structures but that we also envision the potential to transform them as well.

Critical race theory was crucial for the development of our curriculum due to its centrality of race. Critical pedagogy as described by Freire does not explicitly place race at the center of its ideology. On the other hand, critical race theory has five central themes, revolving around race, that became a vital necessity for the curriculum. The first is "The Centrality and Intersectionality of Race and Racism" which can be described as the four dimensions of racism. These four dimensions exists both in the micro and macro level and they take on both institutional and

individual forms. In addition, this concept of race and racism has conscious and unconscious elements that impact both individuals and groups. The second perspective is “The Challenge to Dominant Ideology” which seeks to disrupt, “the traditional claims of the legal system to objectivity, meritocracy, color-blindness, race neutrality, and equal opportunity” (Solorazano, 6). The third aspect is “The Commitment to Social Justice” which initially focused on the elimination of racism but has expanded to be defined by a broader goal to dismantle “forms of subordination such as gender, class, and sexual orientation” (Matsuda, 1991). The fourth component of critical race theory is “The Centrality of Experiential Knowledge.” This component is very important because it places the lived experiences of women and men of color at the center as being legitimate and crucial to understanding the ways in which racial subordination manifests. The final component is “The Interdisciplinary Perspective” can be described as placing race and racism in a way that positions it in a contemporary and historical context. Each tenant was crucial throughout the different workshops and will be explained in detail as the paper develops.

**Summary of concepts: Contributing to youth of color’s self-awareness and critical consciousness**

Our series of workshops display the works of social justice advocates and theorists that ground their work in a pedagogical style of education that is rooted in social justice.

These five themes are equally applicable and crucial to the workshops that we teach. In addition to critical race theory, bell hooks' analysis regarding educational practices has served as guides for the development of this project. More importantly, her ideologies on curriculum and pedagogy reflected the way in which we structured our curriculum and the style of teaching we practiced. Her particular book has guided a lot of the way we not only structured our curriculum but facilitated each class. Mainly because she infuses a lot of Freire's work within her own pedagogy and analysis of the learning experience.

We defined critical consciousness as the process of continuously questioning and challenging dominant hierarchical structures. We refer to this as a process because there is always space to learn more and we are constantly evolving in a way that requires us to reconstruct and modify knowledges. In addition, critical consciousness links this new knowledge to practice as advocated by Paulo Freire. Our students have the power to be active participants in education for the practice of freedom. Their definitions of self-awareness were a conglomeration of "knowing of thyself", "being woke", and "being present." One of my students pieced all these components and defined self-awareness as, "being aware of what's going on around you. Knowing your history, the rights and wrongs that have happened. Knowing what is going on around you today and what can happen in the future as a result of being awake."

## **Research Methods**

### **Methodology**

Throughout the past two years living in Worcester, I formed friendships with predominantly black and Latino community members in hopes that we could collaborate and work towards an environment where marginalized communities can move in a direction where we can breathe. It is very important to connect with those who have lived in the place you wish to do transformative work for the purpose of collective healing and evolution. Real change occurs when community members from all angles work together with the common goal of liberation through social justice work. While speaking to many of Worcester's social justice activists, artists and healers, the conversations always led to youth. Specifically, the need to implement a curriculum that is rooted in social justice. Throughout this time Joanna and I began to flush out necessary topics that were relevant to our respected marginalized communities across the United States- mainly the black and Latino community.

The "research" was conducted through a decolonized methodological lens. This was a very important aspect due to the colonial history and present imperialistic practices embedded in most academic research projects. In Gayatri Spivak's (1985) "Can the Subaltern Speak?" she challenges the dominant narrative that places Western knowledge as the point of reference. Although, we are working in the Western world, we do not wish to reproduce a colonial Western framework that places people of color as subjects to be researched for personal gain. Foucault (1980) added to this when he stated that,

"Perhaps it is no more than to ask that the subtext of the palimpsestic narrative of imperialism be recognized as 'subjugated knowledge,' a 'whole

set of knowledges that have been disqualified as inadequate to their task or insufficiently elaborated: naive knowledges, located low down on the hierarchy, beneath the required level of cognition or scientificity” (Foucault, 82).

Furthermore, Spivak claims that “the oppressed, if given the chance (the problem of representation cannot be bypassed here), and on the way to solidarity through politics (a Marxist thematic is at work here) can speak and know their conditions” (Spivak, 25). Her claims have provided us with assistance to claim or disclaim our reality that we have little or emerging voice and power. For example, due to the principles that serve as the foundation of the banking system in education, students are unable to think critically and freely. Therefore, they are unwilling to vocalize or yet understand the ways in which their knowledges can in fact contribute to a larger intellectual field. Students, despite the background all have knowledge to contribute to in the learning environment if they are given the chance to think freely.

Due to the inherent colonial nature of research, Kagendo Mutua’s (2004) advocates for an approach he terms “research for change”. This includes explicitly acknowledging how power plays out in our research. Furthermore, he advises one to “look at subjugated knowledge and normative narratives” (Mutua, 80). This notion builds on Spivak’s call for abandoning western point of reference and instead claiming our own. It is important that we begin to center our own narratives and knowledges as points of references.

Although these authors have spoken about the process of decolonizing research in terms of the Western world versus those of the overexploited countries (“underdeveloped”), I transfer this framework to those of marginalized backgrounds in the United States, such as women/and young girls of color, who also encounter colonialism in regards to research methodologies which place them as research subjects.

We created a total of 16 separate workshops for the course of two semesters. In the last week of August, Joanna and I found ourselves walking into the YMCA in Main South, Worcester and asking who was in charge of the youth based programs. We were directly put into the presence of the director and pitched our curriculum and our desire to begin the process of critical consciousness and self-awareness. She expressed that she had been waiting for a group of women of color like us to teach her youth.

Our curriculum for the first half consisted of a series of eight workshops/classes that met twice a week. Each individual workshop was intended to be for two hours. However, often times these workshops would extend beyond the allocated two hours due to the intensity level of the conversations. The first eight workshops ran from the beginning of November up until mid-January. They were held at the local YMCA on Main South. We are still running them, but we have not assessed the ones after January for this research. In a nutshell, the titles and learning objectives of our workshops were:

1	Inserting Repressed Stories into the Dominant Narrative	Students will indulge in the importance of community. They will also understand the importance of marginalized communities and individuals (including ourselves) have in disrupting dominant narratives through their art, music, activism, etc.
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2	Historical Revolutionary Movements: Black x Brown Power! Part 1	This workshop is intended to highlight the tactics the Black Panther Party and the Young Lords used in organizing for Black and Puerto Rican liberation.
3	Historical Revolutionary Movements: Part 2	Same as above but to also hone in on the similarities amongst the Black and Latino community.
4	Contemporary Revolutionary Movements	Students will learn how young activists of color from United We Dream, Black Lives Matter, Y.E.A and the LGBTQi communities are resisting oppression.
5	What's the Message Right Now? Analyzing the Media's Portrayal of Black and Brown Bodies	Students will be exposed by the ways in which current events and the media depict people of color. Furthermore, they will understand how these portrayals perpetuate racial stereotypes and inequities.
6	Stay Woke Through Hip Hop	Students will analyze hip hop lyrics from Kendrick Lamar, J. Cole, Capital Steez, Lauryn Hill, etc. in order to highlight the importance of music, specifically using Hip Hop as a tool to advocate for social justice and resistance.
7	Know Your Rights: Flexin' While My Hands Up	Students will draw on the correlations amongst the victims of police brutality and strategize ways in which they can resist systems of oppression while also learning about their rights.
8	Words for Freedom: A Poetic Cypher	Students will hear the ways in which spoken word and poetry are used to heal, resist, and advocate for social justice issues regarding race, class, and gender.

## Data Collection

### The Participants

The youth at the YMCA were all young Black and Latina women of color. The consistent participants identified themselves as: Ghanaian American, Liberian, African American, Dominican/African American, Puerto Rican and Boricua. Their ages ranged between 13 and 18 years old. Due to the “drop in” nature of the YMCA, some days we would host more or less students than a previous workshop. The youth were recruited

through word of mouth amongst themselves. We did not pass out flyers, we showed up one day and the success of the workshop was passed on amongst the youth.

### **Data Type**

It was important for us to reflect throughout the whole process so we made it a requirement for each of our students to write in their journals after every workshop. These journals were collected and analyzed, with permission. After reading each individual journal entry, we typed and transcribed them.

In addition, we realize that a successful learning environment requires that all parties reflect- including those who are deemed “teachers” and those who are labeled as “students.” Mainly due to bell hooks’ advocacy that all of us who participate in a learning environment see ourselves as students capable of receiving and giving knowledge. Therefore, I also draw in on my observations and analysis of the workshops, which I participated in as well.

Our students also participated in oral reflections in which we asked for their opinions on the curriculum. These oral reflections went anywhere between 20 to 30 minutes depending on the student’s conversation. We transcribed all the oral reflections, which helped us indicate to what degree our curriculum assisted in the process towards critical consciousness and self-awareness.

### **Data Analysis**

We began the process of coding by dividing each journal by workshop sessions. For example, we read through each students’ journal entries from workshop 1, followed by workshop 2, and so on. Each student had their responses under each workshop they chose

to reflect on. Through this process of coding, we found that our students reflected immensely on how they felt emotionally and intellectually based on the new knowledge they were receiving. The following themes emerged based on their reflections: intellectual growth/awakening, emotional reflections, and the desire to take action. Interestingly, these themes reflected both bell hooks' concept of emotions as well as Freire's definition of critical consciousness that links education to action.

These themes mentioned above were also prominent in the second method we used to determine the effectiveness of our social justice based curriculum. After transcribing, we placed their quotes in charts and large notepad papers. We grouped responses by interview question number one, two, three, etc. Their responses fit nicely into the themes from their journal entries.

From the interviews and journals, our findings concluded that our students are going through a process of critical consciousness and self-awareness through our curriculum that is based on social justice.

## **The Workshops**

### ***Session One: We Exist: Inserting Repressed Stories in the Dominant Narrative***

This workshop came about through an organization titled "ARTISLove + Action." The organization that was founded in New York City by two women of color has a vision that focuses on the use of art as a vehicle for social justice. Their mission lies in the need to create a movement and collaboration of love that, "will feed each individual field to form

critical connection and consciousness in a fragmented world” (artisloveandaction.org).

This particular workshop set the foundation for building a community with our youth through two exercises. It was very important for us to create a community before we could dive into knowledge that could be painful and simultaneously liberating for us all.

Our first exercise was a gallery walk where we placed two videos and a picture located in different parts of the room. The first video we selected was “A Song for Assata” by the Hip Hop artist Common. This song was dedicated to Assata Shakur, a former member of the Black Panthers who advocated relentlessly for black rights. “Cover your eyes as I describe a scene so violent. Seemed like a bad dream, she laid in a blood puddle. Blood bubbled in her chest, cold air brushed against open flesh. No room to rest, pain consumed each breath. Shot twice wit her hands up.” This song explicitly described the ways in which the U.S. treated her solely based off of her race and her desire for liberation. The second video we selected was Burn Your Village to the Ground by A Tribe Called Red. “You are taking a land which is rightfully ours. Years from now my people will be forced to live in mobile homes on reservations. Your people will wear cardigans and drink high balls. We will sell our bracelets by the roadsides, you will play golf and enjoy...My people will have pain and degradation, your people will have stick shifts.” This graphic video depicts the unfortunate realities of Native Americans living on reservations while simultaneously juxtaposing the ways in which white elite Amerika<sup>1</sup> lives. Our final piece

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<sup>1</sup> Amerika, spelled with a “K” refers to Assata Shakur’s autobiography where she spells it in this manner.

of art was a picture of the Mai Lai Massacre of Vietnam. These pieces of art all represent repressed stories that are not a part of formal education, the dominant (white) narrative.

Throughout the first exercise our students were asked to simply walk around and view every video and picture that we displayed throughout the room. We then asked students to take a few minutes to choose which video or image they felt closest to and remain in that group. After the students, and facilitators alike chose their groups, we went around and discussed why each of us chose our particular image/video. This led to our discussion in which we asked three basic questions. What do we want to know more about what we saw? What do we know that is not included? Finally, we asked how do we use images, music, and multi-media to bring underrepresented stories to students in our classroom?

Most of my students gravitated towards the video dedicated to Assata Shakur. When asked why they chose this particular video many of the Black students expressed that she sounded familiar or because she was Black. The video of a Tribe Called Red was the second most popular. One of my students expressed that she chose this video because she wanted to know more about Native Americans. Another student stated that, “schools taught us that they didn’t exist. I was curious to find a different perspective.” The image of the Mai Lai massacre had the least students, only two. The students expressed that they chose this image simply because they didn’t know anything about Vietnam or the image that was shown and wanted to learn more. It is important to note the explanations behind

my students' rationales in choosing their groups. Identity and curiosity both over-powered their decisions.

Our second exercise was our community tree. This specific exercise called for the need to build a community amongst us to serve as the foundation of our relationship. We split into three groups and formed three individual trees out of magazine images, our words, drawings, and poems. Each tree was comprised of three parts: the roots, which asked the question of "how did you learn who you are as told by the dominant narrative?" The trunk was a response to "what parts of your story were untold?" Finally, the branches called for our students and us to show "what do we each bring into the community that represents our identity?" We were able to share our trees and what each one of us contributed to our collective creations.

This interactive workshop overall, examined how individuals or groups of people from oppressed communities have tried to counter dominant discourses that silences their stories from history. Through our interactive exercises we were able to move through ways to create a safe space to process topics of race while simultaneously sharing pieces of our own selves to one another. This workshop emphasized the importance of our own narratives and the narratives of other people of color.

This workshop reflected the critical race methodology component of experiential knowledge that draws on the importance and strength that methods of counter story telling, family histories, biographies, and narratives carry. Gloria Anzaldua once said,

“Necesitamos teorías [we need theories] that will rewrite history using race, class, gender, and ethnicity as categories of analysis, theories that cross borders, that blur boundaries—new kinds of theories with new theorizing methods... We are articulating positions in the “in between,” Borderland worlds of ethnic communities and academies... social issues such as race, class, and sexual difference are intertwined with the narrative and poetic elements of a text, elements in which theory is embedded. In our mestizaje theories we create new categories for those of us left out or pushed out of existing ones” (Anzaldúa, 1990).

Along with Anzaldúa’s call to incorporate our own narratives and positions in theories in order to rewrite histories, the critical race methodology also draws this out as a major component. Bernal describes critical race methodology in education as one that disrupts the dominant white narrative that often misrepresents the epistemologies of people of color (Delgado Bernal, 1998). In addition, critical race theory exercises the importance on lived experiences and narratives of people of color as legitimate. Our first workshop put the fourth perspective of critical race theory into motion.

### ***Session Two: Historical (R)evolutionary Movements: Black and Brown Power!***

Our histories have been misrepresented and devalued throughout formal educational settings. There is a need for a decolonized curriculum that is reflective of the population of our students. This was evident for many of us in Chelsea growing up. We

believed we were not built to prosper beyond our environment. Our history classes taught us about slavery but did not teach us about the kings and queens we were before we were ripped away to be sold. We were taught about us as being savages and uncivilized “Indians.” We were not taught how we have influenced the Europeans with our knowledge and systems in the field of science, mathematics, forms of government, and agriculture. We were not taught beyond the last 500 years of our existence and this is very crucial to a person’s self-esteem and the belief or lack of belief in the potential that they may or may not possess. These are our ancestors, they are us, and we began putting pieces together and realized that our mentality of hopelessness as youth in Chelsea stemmed from our environments but were also reinforced through these colonial curriculums that have taught us lies about who we were and who we were supposed to become.

The standard school history curriculum does not adequately reflect our cultures. With that being said, this particular workshop is reflective of our youth and a partial part of the culture that breathes resistance. Our youth all identify as Latino and Black. Most of my Latino students are Puerto Rican with the exception of one who is half Dominican and half Black. This particular workshop “Historical Revolutionary Movements” focused on both Black and Puerto Rican movements in New York City.

This workshop introduced our youth to activists who created organizations dedicated to human liberation and the independence of their respective backgrounds. The two movements that were highlighted in this workshop were the Young Lords and the Black Panther Party. This workshop was designed to showcase community activists who

shared similar racial backgrounds as our youth. Moreover, it was intended to shed light to the ways in which they organized and created change throughout their communities through social justice activism.

The first part of the class was dedicated to showing the Black Power Mixtape, a documentary that broadcasts the Black Power Movement from 1967-1975. This particular style of educating mirrored an engaged pedagogy. The youth were not only able to visualize the inequities that plagued the Black community but also relate to them as well. The film showed interviews from major political activists from the Black Power Movement such as Angela Davis and Stokely Carmichael. What made this film particularly engaging was that it also successfully infused Talib Kweli and Quest Love, two major names in the Hip Hop industry. It shed light to the ways in which these present day hip hop activists were inspired by members of their own communities who initiated change.

In addition to the segment on the Black Power Movement, we passed out the ten-point program of the Black Panther Party. It is also known as “The Black Panther Party for Self-Defense Ten-Point Platform and Program” which is a set of guidelines that showcase the ways in which the party operates in terms of community. The ten-point program exposed the inequities that the black community was facing in terms of their violent government, law enforcement, and white Amerika. This film drew out an intense dialogue that called for all of us to dissect several questions regarding Black liberation, racial inequalities, and structural inequities. We all expressed the importance of community and

creating a foundation to help one another, as the Black Panther Party reflected in their own community in Harlem, New York. We also discussed how the actions and character that members of the Black Panther Party embodied could be applied to their own communities.

One of our main goals for this workshop was to present the ways in which the black and Latino community were connected through common struggles and forms of activism. We also wished to show how our similarities among the Black and Puerto Rican communities in New York differed from those of white America. Chandra Mohanty also alluded to this notion where she explained that the “challenge of race resides in a fundamental reconceptualization of our categories of analysis so that differences can be historically specified and understood as part of larger political processes and systems” (Mohanty, 183). Both the Black and Puerto Rican communities were historically specified in our curriculum and their inequities reflected a larger system that was not favorable to either of us. Moreover, this notion of multiculturalism forces educators to defy the dominant narrative and extend it to those that have been marginalized throughout history. But most importantly extend it to those that reflect our very own present day communities.

After the discussion on the Black Power Mixtape and their 10-point program, we introduced our students to the Young Lords. The Young Lords was an organization comprised of mainly Puerto Rican activists who fought for economic, racial, and social justice. Through their documentary “Palante, Siempre Palante! The Young Lords” our students were able to have an insight on the ways in which these young revolutionaries from the barrios of New York City demanded decent living conditions that had been

previously denied to them by the Amerikan government. This documentary showed their movement through on-camera interviews with former members, archival footage, photographs and music. In addition, we passed out the Young Lord's 13-point program that also displayed their own personal demands for their community.

As stated previously, the highlight of this workshop was to display the similarities in struggle and activism that existed amongst the Young Lords and the Black Panthers. This was displayed through the documentaries and each organization's point program. The students were able to link the commonalities between the two groups across racial differences.

Our final exercise was influenced directly by the Black Panther Party's 10-point program and the Young Lords 13-point program. Together, with our students we created our very own rules that reflected how we wanted to move forward with our community.

How we envisioned our community. How we would reclaim our community. We came up with our own 10-point program:

1. We want the government to stop playing us for our money
2. We want natural food to enjoy
3. Schools should provide school supplies, instead of making us buy it and punishing us when don't have the resources.
4. College should be free. Everyone should have the opportunity to an equal education.
- 5 High schools will teach us things that will prep us for the real world like taxes, applying for a job, college, and budgeting.
6. Peace, Equality, Freedom and Happiness
7. Ban cigarettes and alcohol because they are trying to kill us off.
8. Free Love
9. Good health care systems
10. Affordable housing and decent living conditions

It is worth noting the correlations that exist between the Young Lords, the Black Panthers, and our own 10-point program. The Young Lords advocated in their point 7 for a “true education” that reflected the realities of their culture and race. Point 8 of the Young Lords program alluded to the opposition of capitalism because it produces people that are “paid by the system to lead our people down blind alleys, just like the thousands of poverty pimps who keep our communities peaceful business, or the street workers who keep gangs divided and blowing each other away” (palante.org). Most importantly, in their final point, the Young Lords demanded a socialist society. “We want liberation, clothing, free food, education, health care, transportation, utilities, and employment for all. We want a society where the needs of our people come first, and where we give solidarity and aid to the peoples of the world, not oppression and racism. Hasta La Victoria Siempre!”

Our community point program mirrored upon the Black Panthers’ 10-point program and the Young Lords. Point 2 from the Panthers advocated for the “full employment for our people” where every person in the community would be guaranteed income and if this was not to be fulfilled, “the technology and means of production should be taken from the businessmen and placed in the community so that the people of the community can organize and employ all of its people and give a high standard of living” (collectiveLiberation.org). Similar to the Young Lord’s point 8, the Black Panthers point 3 demanded “an end to the robbery by the capitalist of our Black and oppressed communities.” The other points also demanded for free health care, decent standards of living/shelter, and a useful education that exposes the truth. The last point summed up

most of the points that both the Young Lord's and our community created. "We want land, bread, housing education, clothing, justice peace and people's community control of modern technology." We have all demanded that our government, education system, health care systems and overall living conditions be changed for us to be able to live respectfully.

After every class, our students are asked to journal any reflections, feelings, or questions they may have pertaining to the topic of discussion. We do not wish to speak for them through our observations and instead use their own opinions as proof of the necessity to learn the topics we discuss. As stated throughout this whole paper, there is a need to include repressed histories that have been silenced by the dominant narrative. One of our students, a 13-year-old Ghanaian-American girl, alluded to this notion and asked, "Why haven't we learned about the Young Lords in school. I mean I swear schools are keeping us in the dark." Similarly, another student had written that watching the Black Power mixtape was very intense, informative and intellectually driven. She enjoyed it because "it was about African American history and I'm African American." My student's observations and statements reflect the point programs that all demanded an education that is reflected of their cultures. "We believe in an educational system that will give our people a knowledge of self. If you do not have knowledge of yourself and your position in the society and in the world, then you will have little chance to know anything" (Black Panther Party). Another student pointed out that she had noticed the "world not being fair and this helped me really understand the ills of community. But the importance of building one."

All the journals had the common theme that shed light to the importance of community and the need of rejecting what Nigerian novelist Chimamanda Adichie calls the “danger of a single story”, or the dominant narrative.

***Session Three: Contemporary (R)evolutionary Movements:***

The following workshop was created to build on the previous workshop focused on historical revolutionary movements. The aim was to show our students the young activists who currently were creating change through their social justice work. We also wanted to present the correlations between past revolutionary organizations, tactics, and struggles while simultaneously honing in on the issues that each movement addressed in the fight towards ending racial discrimination. We believe that the past should be used to illuminate the present and future. In fact, critical race theory also alludes to this notion that positions race and racism in “both historical and contemporary contexts” (Solorzano, 27). For this workshop, we focused on Black Lives Matter, The United We Dream, and Worcester’s very own Youth Empowerment and Activism (YEA) as the three contemporary revolutionary movements that we would be analyzing and getting to know more intimately.

In the process of creating this workshop, it was very important for us to provide a critical awareness of the oppressive structures that exist within the Black and Latino community simultaneously. However, producing knowledge does not suffice which is why providing the strategies and tactics these organizations and activists used to combat oppressive structures was key to this workshop. We did not want our students to dwell or

become paralyzed by oppression so educating them on the resistance that was a natural response to the inequities occurring in our communities was a major key.

It is 2016, as much as people are fed the illusion that we live in a post-racial society, this is not a reality, especially for the Black community. Amadou Diallo, Oscar Grant, Aiyana Jones, Tamir Rice, Sandra Bland, Rekia Boyd, and the hundreds of black lives that have been killed at the hands of police and white supremacy deserve a space in curriculums if we wish to use education as the practice of freedom. As alluded to in the Black Panther 10 point program, “we want decent education for our people that exposes the true nature of this decadent American society. We want education that teaches us our true history and our role in the present-day society.” How can we not be teaching our children the violence that is being inflicted amongst their very own sisters and brothers?

This workshop began with hip hop artist and activist J.Cole’s video “Be Free.” This particular track opens up with the shootings, lynchings, raidings, and violence that have occurred in past and present Black communities. He states, “All we wanna do is take the chains off, all we wanna do is be free.” He tells people “don’t just stand around” and proceeds to show the ways in which Michael Brown, Oscar Grant, and other Black men and women have died at the hands of police and white supremacy. The last image of the video showed Michael Brown’s body lying on the ground, blood everywhere. My students became very saddened and angry when discussing the familiar faces in the video, particularly Michael Brown. Our generation (because I am only a couple years older than

my students) is really moved by J. Cole. We are resisting through the music that is produced by artists who are calling out social injustices.

We then began with an activity that displayed the 13 guiding principles of the Black Lives Matter movement. We cut up yellow pieces that had the 13 principles of: Diversity, Restorative Justice, Globalism, Unapologetically Black, Collective Value, Black Women, Transgender Affirming, Black Villages, Empathy, Black Families, Queer Affirming, Loving Engagement, and Intergenerational. We also cut up red pieces of paper which had the matching definitions to the above words, as defined by the Black Lives Matter Movement. Our students matched all mission statements and we discussed the role of the Black Lives Matter Movement in depth.

We emphasized the transgender affirming guideline of the Black Lives Matter Movement which stated, “We are committed to embracing and making space for both Trans brothers and sisters to participate and lead. We are committed to being self-reflexive and doing the work required to dismantle cis-gender privilege and uplift Black trans folk, especially Black trans women who continue to be disproportionately impacted by trans-antagonistic violence.” As we discussed this point, we passed around the stories and faces of Black and Latina transwomen who have been killed in 2015. The students went around the circle and read each women’s stories, each one heavier, each one leaving us with dry throats as we vocalized their passing.

Our final exercise required us all to watch a clip of child detainee victims from Central America. As this clip was being shown, we passed around a piece of paper of the

images of children in ICE immigration detention centers in Texas. We had discussed how these children were being held in squalid conditions due to US immigration policies that were based on mass incarceration and detention. The back of each poster comprised of seven youth activists who shut down an ICE detention center along with the mission statements of the United We Dream organization. This is the largest immigrant youth-led organization in the nation who advocate for the dignity and fair treatment of immigrant youth and families, regardless of immigration status. They place a heavy focus on empowering immigrant youth in order to advance their communities and attain justice for all immigrants. Similar to the Black Lives Matter Movement, they advocate heavily for the intersection of queer and immigrant rights and stress the importance of family (stopping deportations and family separation).

We honed in on the relationships that exist between the issues raised by the Black Lives Matter movement and the United We Dream movement. As a group, we found that our connecting point was that as people of color, both marginalized groups were struggling yet resisting similar structural inequities simultaneously. Our discussion revolved around both organizations in terms of what each of them stood for, the major aspects of society that they are trying to change, how they are changing it, who is getting in the way, and who is involved? My students began to share their emotions and feelings with the new information that they had just consumed. These issues were indicative of the realities of our very own communities.

In *Teaching to Transgress*, bell hooks states, “When education is the practice of freedom, students are not the only ones who are asked to share, to confess. Engaged pedagogy does not seek simply to empower students” (hooks, 21). With that being said, in order to break the power dynamics that exist amongst “teachers” and students, I shared my personal story. I opened up with my students my family’s painful experience of crossing the border. My mother, 20 years young, walked for three weeks, violated with each step she took. I told them that it hurt me to know that at 20, I barely had any responsibilities other than to learn and make my own money. It was important for me to also participate in this process of sharing knowledge, sharing experience in order to further break the power structures that serve to limit the intellectual growth of a true learning environment. However, this cannot happen unless we are willing to be vulnerable with our students despite what we have been conditioned to believe is the correct way of teaching. Making myself vulnerable meant that I step into a place where students could know my narrative in a way that called for me to be in their shoes.

Although, this workshop reflected their extended communities in the racial context, the final aspect of our workshop called attention to their own home, Worcester. Often times, despite the fact that we can relate through race, we sometimes tend to feel removed from situations if they are not in front of us. Youth Empowerment & Activism (YEA) is a Worcester based collective of youth workers working in solidarity with youth to creatively and strategically fight racism. This is a youth led group who are committed to “fighting for racial equity, promoting healing in communities of color, and educating & organizing

youth” (yeaworchester.org). It was necessary throughout this whole workshop to not only point out the commonalities in struggles but to also note that resistance amongst youth of color was occurring and in fact transforming their world.

***What’s the Message Right Now? Analyzing the Media’s Portrayal of Black and Brown bodies***

It has become crucial for us as young people of color to be aware of current issues that not only inflict on our liberation but the liberation of other marginalized communities as well. This is critical consciousness, the ability to connect struggles in a social and political context in hopes that it will lead us towards action. We represent the generation in which social media is one of the most important powerhouses for receiving and distributing information. When we are able to understand and deconstruct the biases produced by the media, we can begin to contextualize the motives of a much larger white hegemonic system. This is part of the process towards becoming critically conscious.

We live in a country that was built on the backs of Black people, yet is anti-Black. We live in a country that was stolen from Natives, yet is anti-immigration. We live in a country that prides itself in equality, yet is anti-Muslim. This workshop exposed a plethora of current events and how they have been portrayed by the media. Following the terrorist attacks in Paris, much of the world showed their condolences by changing their Facebook profile pictures to the flag of Paris. Yet, poet Key Ballah writes so eloquently our feelings:

“When the colonizer bleeds

we all go running  
apologies ready  
on the breath.

All the while  
our homes are burning  
but no one comes running for us.”

We then proceeded to show our students a list of incidents that occurred on the same day that the attacks in Paris occurred. On Friday the 13<sup>th</sup> of November, 2015, Japan was hit with an earthquake. On this same day, a funeral was bombed in Baghdad. On this same day, a suicide bombing occurred in Beirut. On this same day, Mexico was also hit with an Earthquake. My students quickly began to become angry at why some lives mattered more than others. We all knew that all these lives deserved prayers, not just Paris. We all knew why Paris was getting all the attention- this is a predominantly white country. Paris was part of the dominant white narrative that needed to be disrupted as advocated by critical race theory.

2015 has not been kind to our Muslim sisters and brothers. This particular community faced one of the most intensely anti-Muslim periods in American history. In 2015, there were 63 attacks on mosques (Kumar, 2016). These attacks as mentioned in Kumar’s work “is not just an individual bias but a systematic body of ideas which make certain constructions of Muslims—that they are prone to violence, that they are misogynistic, that they are driven by rage and lack rationality—appear natural.” In light of all the violent attacks committed against the Muslim community via a deeply rooted colonial system, it was important for us to discuss these issues. In recent months,

politicians have “sought to make hay of the opportunities presented by the ISIS attacks in Paris and the Syrian refugee crisis” in order to gain political support.

We presented several clips from different media sources on the Syrian refugee crisis and the terrorist attacks on Paris. The intent of this workshop was to become critically conscious of the ways in which the media depicts people of color. My students were able to point out the rhetoric and islamophobia presented by the various news stations. The term “terrorist” was often mentioned in regards to both the attacks on Paris and the Syrian refugee crisis. I asked my students what was the first thing they thought of when they hear this particular word. All their responses rejected linking terrorism with Muslims. Instead they defined terrorism as people who terrorize others. Their definition of terrorism shed light to their ability to reject the perception of Muslims that the dominant narrative tried to impose on them and society. Despite the consistent negative perceptions that media outlets provided, my students were able to counter these dominant narratives.

One of my students equated terrorists with mass shooters. Thus directing our discussion towards the mass shootings and burnings that occurred this summer. We showed a clip of Dylan Roof, a 21-year-old white male who was responsible for a church shooting in South Carolina that killed nine African Americans. Dylan Roof confessed that he committed the shooting in hopes of igniting a race war. Despite his blatant disdain for black people, the media seemed to have his back. He was labeled as a “troubled loner” who possibly had a “mental illness.” Additionally, he was escorted out of the building shortly after murdering and terrorizing African Americans. We asked where mass shootings are

usually performed. Who are the shooters? Who are the victims? Why is this happening? What does the media want you to think? More importantly, how are the mass shooters framed depending on their race and their religion/cultural background?

We analyzed the words that were used for Black victims and White suspects. We analyzed the way in which CNN had reported the death of Freddie Gray, a 19-year-old Black boy who was killed by police on April 19, 2015. “The April 19 death of Freddie Gray, the son of an illiterate heroin addict...” Other headlines for Black victims read “Police: Warren shooting victim was a gang member” or “Shooting victim had many run-ins with law.” We contrasted these headlines with the headlines white suspects were granted. “Straight- A student plots to bomb high school “or “Bank robbery suspect was outstanding Blue Hills student.” These headlines exposed the ways in which race became the central component that determined how victims and perpetrators would be depicted.

Our discussion and journals reflected our disdain towards the way our people are portrayed by the media, especially considering that 80% of Amerika gets their information from these major media powerhouses. We broke down the power that the media has in influencing the masses towards social justice or further away from it. The media is part of a larger white systemic issue that places white lives as the only lives worth being compassionate towards. Similarly, critical race theory describes this in its first perspective that breaks down the macro level that racism manifests itself through structural entities such as the media.

### **Know Your Rights: Flexin' While My Hands Up**

Our students had previously mentioned their desire to become familiar with their rights. In light of all the violence being inflicted on people of color across the United States, they agreed that it would be beneficial for them to be aware of their rights, if they are to ever be in a situation where they need to “flex them.” We wanted this to be an engaging learning experience that bell hooks advocates for in her engaged pedagogy. Moreover, where we shift away from the banking system Paulo Freire alludes to in which students rehearse laws and facts to with the sole purpose of regurgitation. We opened the class with the video “Chains” by hip hop artist, Nas and R&B artist Usher. This video starts with “while racial injustice keeps killing, society keeps looking away...Facing the facts is the first step towards change.” This video left us with heavy hearts.

As the song played, a collection of pictures of Black women, girls, men, and boys killed by the cops flipped with every lyric. Each picture showed how the violent police officers and white supremacists took each life, along with their age. The hook of the song contained powerful lyrics, “You act like the change (the land of opportunity). Tryna throw me in chains (The land of unity). Don’t act like toy saving us (Brotherhood, trust). It’s still the same (America). Man don’t act like I made it up. You blaming us (You know).” The video itself is a form of activism that calls out the violence inflicted on the black community. Nas expresses that,

We got a problem that needs some acknowledgment. I am no prison commodity, not just a body you throw in a cell for any reason, just to bother

me. Just for your quota, so its rest in peace to Sean Bell. Sleep in peace Eric Garner, Sandra Bland. Every street, every corner...I spoke to Tamir Rice mom and she told me 'be strong'. It won't be long till its Justice. They won't have votes but refuse the discussion. On how certain cops they shoot us for nothing. Revolution is coming (Nas).

Shortly after the video we discussed our reactions towards Chains. Throughout the whole workshop we continuously asked the following necessary questions:

1. What is justice?
2. How can we enforce it?
3. Who should enforce it?
4. What factors stand in the way of justice?
5. Who benefits from these systems and why?
6. Who doesn't benefit from these systems and why?
7. Do we need police? What should their job be?
8. If not, how do we hold people accountable for their wrong doings?
9. What role does/should the media play?
10. What role do/should young people play?
11. Why do some humans hate? How can we confront these prejudices in order to move on?
12. What are some ways to raise these issues and create change?

My students were able to see the power and importance that young people play in creating a socially just environment through the ways in which they chose to lead the discussion of the questions above. All of my youth had questioned the role of police and advocated for a need to create a checks and balance system for cops to ensure that they do not kill anymore. During this discussion one of my girls had suggested that they should be forced to wear cameras. Another student chimed in and said that although they do wear cameras, the evidence is not valued in a judicial system that continuously has proven to be inherently racist. This interactive discussion was the way in which they produced and recreated knowledge amongst themselves. Moreover, their discussion showed the second perspective of critical race theory- “The challenge to dominant ideology.” My students were able to disrupt the white hegemonic narrative that does not allow for one to question authority nor critically think about their society.

While most of white Amerika lives in a world where law enforcement is viewed as a protective entity, this sentiment is not often shared amongst black and brown communities. The history of the police is one that is very aggressive and brutal in nature. The curriculum that the police academy so heavily abides by has not been reviewed or changed since the 1960s. A crucial time in which the U.S. government was strategically murdering black and brown revolutionaries who dared to demand their freedom (COINTELPRO). From the violence inflicted on the Mexican American population in California, to the violence inflicted on the peaceful civil rights movements led by Black folks, the police have always met the bodies of black and brown people with violence. The

police academy was fundamentally structured by racist white supremacist ideals. The symbols have roots that trace back to slavery. The police badge used today has the same design that one would see a plantation police wear in the 1800s.

This discussion of the history of the police force struck a chord in one of my students in regards to the police badge. Symbolism was a very important aspect of our discussion. My student connected the badge that police wear as a symbol of power. She explained that the badge represented a larger system of power structures that exist amongst law enforcement and “the people.” She then became very passionate with her call to action of bringing every case displayed on the Chains video to a court system that would grant them justice. My student was moving the new knowledge she acquired towards a path of desired action as Paulo Freire heavily abides by in his definition of critical consciousness. Another one of students felt saddened by the tender ages of many of the victims. “It hurt because Tamir Rice was only 12. I’m 13...” My students’ opinions and strategies towards police brutality showed the different reactions that come when dialogues allow for the freedom of expression to unravel.

### ***Stay Woke Through Hip Hop***

This interactive workshop was created to showcase the power that Hip Hop has in the realm of social justice. Throughout most of the workshops, we made it a priority to include videos from artists that reflected our times and that we were all familiar with as . In this workshop, we drew from the fourth component of critical race theory that calls for the

centrality of experiential knowledge of people of color. In other words, it focuses on the lived experiences of people of color as legitimate knowledge. Hip Hop is a form of art that people of color use to tell their own narratives. The intent of this workshop was to display the intersectionalities between hip hop and our lived realities. We began this workshop with a game that asked our students if they could name Hip Hop songs from the 70's up until 2015. We presented them with works by Afrika Bambaataa, NWA, Queen Latifah, Lauryn Hill, Tupac, Nas, Kanye West, J.Cole, and Kendrick Lamar to name a few.

Our second activity traced the origins of hip hop and provided our students with the 5 elements of Hip Hop as introduced by one of Hip-Hop's greatest- KRS-One. These 5 elements consisted of MCing, BreakDancing, DJing, Graffiti, and Knowledge. We expressed the importance of each and honed in on the graffiti through artist Banksy. Our students began to analyze Banksy's works. One of the art pieces we showed was a picture that showed a young girl in front of a wall that read "If you repeat a lie often enough, it becomes truth." The twist to the picture came when the little girl crosses out the word "truth" and replaces it with "politics." This generated dialogue. The second image we showed by Banksy was one of 5 pigeons on one end holding signs that read "Migrants Not Welcome", "Go Back to Africa", and "Keep Off Our Worms." On the other end of the picture was a bird of a different species. We asked questions such as "what is the message this artist is trying to display?"

Our next activity was analyzing the videos and lyrics of five songs. The first song was "Institutionalized" by Kendrick Lamar, "Love No Thotties" by Chief Keef, "That

Thing” by Lauryn Hill, “All Falls Down” by Kanye West, and “Free the Robots” by Capital Steez. As a group, we listened and watched each video and then wrote down our thoughts on what we thought the message was on the chalkboard. In addition, my students were asked to write the similarities between what these artists were exposing and what the Black Panther Party and Young Lords were exposing in their respected movements. My students were able to navigate the political context of their present realities and connect it to the historical injustices that plagued their communities.

Our final activity asked for our students to break into two separate groups. Each group was to create a short 2-minute freestyle on the issues that were presented in the previous activities. Both groups exposed the social inequalities endured by Black and Brown communities such as police brutality, white supremacy, inadequate education, etc. This interactive activity allowed us to speak our truths in an engaged manner. More importantly, this activity allowed us to speak back and counter the dominant narrative through our music.

### ***Words for Freedom: A Poetry Cipher***

In *Rhythm and Resistance: Teaching Poetry for Social Justice*, the authors explore the ways in which poetry can be used as a powerful tool to build community, understand literature and history, and talk back to injustice. As June Jordan (1995) wrote in *June Jordan’s Poetry for the People: A Revolutionary Blueprint*:

Poetry is a political action undertaken for the sake of information, the faith, the exorcism, and the lyrical invention, that telling the truth makes possible. Poetry means taking control of the language of your life. Good poems can interdict a suicide, rescue a love affair, and build a revolution in which speaking and listening to somebody becomes the first and last purpose to every social encounter. I would hope that folks throughout the U.S.A. would consider the creation of poems as a foundation for true community: a fearless democratic society (p.142).

We focused on all these aspects in our own poetry workshop. We opened up our workshop with two slam poems. The first piece of art we showed was “A Poem for Syria” on youtube by Amal Kassir (2012). This particular poem opened up with a narrator who stated, “In 1971, Assad’s rule changed Syria’s democracy into a dictatorship. For 41 years over 80,000 people have been murdered. More than 20,000 imprisoned, kidnapped or missing. This poem is for those who have not yet fallen.” She then continues to use her wordplay of the Revolution and the effect that it has had on her as a young Syrian woman. Not only does she convey factual historical evidence of the actual siege; she also lets her audience tap into the power of her emotions despite the differences in location:

I know my people are here even though I cannot see my people, I can hear my people. We are speaking as one, the tyrant inside of me is ravenous. 41-year-old rotting hands bedazzled with rings of oil drums and gems of blood/

grinding at my veins. I tried to keep my mouth shut but my tongue didn't  
have any more room for scars in the shape of my teeth (Amal Kassir).

The climax of her poem hits when she transforms her pain into one that calls for action, for resistance. "March 2011, we have been reborn, a social infant screaming 'let us live'. We will speak until throats are raw. Until all of Syria is in the news!" Amal Kassir incorporates critical consciousness which primarily links education and knowledge towards a path of action.

This particular slam poem generated a lot of emotions from my students from the minute it began. No one spoke. All the attention was drawn to the young woman performing the piece. It is very important for us to consistently ask our students their feelings towards any new knowledge we choose to share with them. Mainly due to the fact that the process of becoming critically aware of social injustices is never one that is always positive. Typically, my students will all have different reactions towards new knowledges, however, their reflections with this particular piece of spoken word were all "I got the chills" or "I'm speechless." They were very drawn in by the amount of emotion this girl displayed through her words. One of my students said "her words were heavy. They carried so much weight and were so powerful." Not only did this allow my students to feel with the poet but it also allowed them a space where they could be educated on the political and historical context that produced that pain.

The next poem I presented to my students was one that spoke volumes to my high school and college career as a woman of color who grew up in the hood. This particular poem titled “Fuck I Look Like” by Kai Davis (2011) sheds light to the realities of the racist perceptions that occur by white people on Black people in school settings. “You also seem to like judging a book by its author. Because apparently Maya Angelou is inferior due to her grammatical errors but white man Mark Twain can write a whole novel with nothing but grammatical errors and that shit is a literary masterpiece.”

This specific point exposed the realities that Hammid Dabashi (2013) alludes to in his essay, “Can Non-Europeans Think?” Dabashi calls attention to the colonial ways in which knowledge is being produced. Kai Davis also questions this notion that Dabshi too proposes, “Why is European philosophy ‘philosophy’, but African philosophy ‘ethnophilosophy’?” (p.5). These two authors force their audiences to dig deep into who is granted the privilege of having their work be considered “knowledge” and who are the ones left in the margins.

The face of racism takes on many forms. All hurtful, yet all masked through different entities and humans. One of the most painful experiences of racism is its ability to forcefully infiltrate itself into the minds of many of our brothers and sisters. It has been one of the primary means by which we have been forced to perpetuate or “agree” to our own oppression. Kai Davis also alludes to this point in her poem when she states the realities that occur in her classroom with her own people.

And niggas can't vibe with me either because as soon as I raise my hand for anything other than a bathroom break I become a weirdo. And God forbid I excel, a 4.0 means I'm four shades lighter. Because apparently intelligence is a white trait. At least that's what I've gathered. This one girl asked me, 'why would I use big words? So I can sound like you?' you know what I sound like? Like I've read a book before. According to my people, I act smart so I act white (Kai Davis).

Kai Davis also breaks it down by incorporating a historical context that mirrors her present day classroom when she asks the question,

So I can't be black and be smart because black people are dumb? All this is self-hate and to them this is acceptable because white people told us niggas not to read 300 years ago and now niggas telling other niggas not to read. What are we afraid of? It's like we think giving 100% means getting 100 lashes. And my people don't even know that we're working with our oppressors, just passing on the torch but we can't pass the bar. Because the bar has been set so low, we're crushing under the weight. And you expect me to cut class and get an F just to perpetuate the stereotype instilled through this bullshit curriculum. Fuck I look like?

However, her words towards the end spoke volumes to us. We discussed the importance all when she demanded that,

I will never. I will never equate stupidity with my melanin. Nor will I ever sacrifice my skin for the white man's standards, so never ask that I speak for anyone but me. Represent anything but what I stand for. And fight for anything but what I believe in. And if anybody ever expects me to do anything but be myself, they got me fucked up!

All my students felt a personal connection with this particular poem in terms of the way we are all treated by our teachers and professors alike. My students shared their painful experiences that they faced by their teachers who did not believe in their potential. Joanna and I also shared our experiences as women of color navigating a predominantly white institution. We discussed the realities of being young girls and women of color in institutions that were not designed for us to prosper in. This process was very important for tapping into our identities and what it meant to walk through the world as Black and Latina women. This was made possible through sharing our experiences via spoken word.

Much of this workshop relied on the importance of centralizing experiential knowledge that places the experiences of people of color as one that is valid. Moreover, in bell hooks (2009) *Teaching Critical Thinking: Practical Wisdom*, she hones in on the importance of sharing and telling our stories. Through these intimate exchanges we are able to begin the process of community building. Sharing our narratives and hearing others people's narratives allows for us to connect with one another, to understand each others struggles. She fleshes the importance by stating,

Story provides the framework for contextual awareness. When we know the story, we see and comprehend the previously hidden or misinterpreted...Stories can excite, inform, expand, and parameter conversation...Stories provide a sense of community, a cohering feeling of shared concerns, values, and investigations (hooks, 52).

Our workshop on spoken word allowed for us to connect collectively with the intent of not only further building community but also exchanging our experiential knowledges. It was evident that through Kai Davis story, my students were able to connect her narrative to their own experiences. Although, this type of immediate connection did not occur with the story Amal Kassir shared, my students were able to share their empathy in a global context. The art of possibility to connect on an emotional level emerged.

## **Findings**

From the interviews and journals, our findings concluded that our students are going through a process of critical consciousness and self-awareness by way of the new knowledge they are acquiring. Our findings also shed light to the necessary factors that contributed to this process. These factors lie on the importance of creating a safe environment that prides itself in the importance of community. In addition, it was necessary for this environment to move away from the constraints imposed by traditional schooling and curriculums. This entails a curriculum that reflects the history and cultural

roots of our students while simultaneously infusing current events. These elements will be discussed in detail below. The sections listed below also mirror the theoretical frameworks and perspectives provided by critical race theory, engaged pedagogy, and critical consciousness.

### **Factors that Contribute to Critical Consciousness**

We found that creating a comfortable environment rooted in love and community was essential to the process of critical consciousness and self-awareness. Although all my students attested to this feeling of comfortability, two of students showed how transformational this concept was to their evolution. “I feel more comfortable now with the conversations we have. I always wanna express myself but I don’t because I fear that I will get shut down quickly. But here I am comfortable.” Another student pointed out specifically why the environment we created was comfortable for her. “I like you guys. And it’s [the workshops] taught by girls who are also of color and aren’t white. I mean it’s not like I have anything against white people but it’s just like its different.” bell hooks also stresses this concept of community in her book *Teaching to Transgress: Education as the Practice of Freedom*. She explains the importance of building a strong community amongst those involved in the exchanges of knowledge in order to break the power relations that exists between teachers and students. This is also mentioned in her style of teaching through her advocacy for an ‘engaged pedagogy.’ This is practiced when one “enters the classroom with the assumption that we must build “community” in order to

create a climate of openness and intellectual rigor” (hooks, 40). A community is established when we are comfortable and vulnerable in an environment that is grounded in love and liberation.

Being taught by women of color laid the foundation for an environment where they felt they could learn. My students noted that our workshops were structured in a way that called for breaking down paradigms that exist between white teachers and students of color. They compared it to other programs held at the YMCA in which white people “just come and we have to answer questions for them. Here we have the freedom to just talk.” Our interview questions did not ask for the comparisons we knew existed between being taught by white people versus being taught by women of color. This dialogue came organically and revealed that the intersectionalities that exist amongst race, gender, and class is crucial to the process of learning and unlearning. “I like that you teach me your culture. I rather have the culture of minorities to be taught by those who are a part of it. If that makes sense.” There is an urgent need for white people working with youth of color to begin to reflect on the impacts their presence has on people of color. Additionally, if white presence is to be in said spaces, we need to begin a process where decolonization is happening from all angles: both mind and body. If we are to create a community of critical consciousness and self awareness, we must be able to acknowledge when our privileges are serving to perpetuate the alienation of students of color. This component is needed to create an environment that allows for evolution to occur. Each person in the learning environment is valuable thus “we must be conscious that educators and students both

“produce, reinforce, recreate, resist, and transform ideas about race, gender, and difference in the classroom” (hooks, 183). Moreover, this “compels educators to recognize the narrow boundaries that have shaped the way knowledge is shared in the classroom. It forces us all to recognize our complicity in accepting and perpetuating biases of any kind” (hooks, 44).

The interviews revealed my student’s critical reflections on formal schooling. Moreover, the differentiations between our curriculum versus school curriculums reflected many of Paulo Freire’s ideologies. From its drafting stages, the curriculum was intended to reflect education for the practice of freedom, critical consciousness or as others have called it, critical pedagogy. This required for us to break away from the ways we have been fed knowledge via formal schooling. Or what “radical educators have long argued that the academy and the classroom itself are not mere sites of instruction. They are also political and cultural sites that represent accommodations and contestations and contestations over knowledge by differently empowered social constituencies” (Mohanty, 183). My students expressed that we created an environment that was unlike school which was a major component in designing our workshops. These spaces of comfort can transform into places of resistance and intellectual growth when they do not mirror traditional schooling environments.

### **Unlike School**

“Unlike school.” This component was one in which they deemed as one of the main reasons they continued to come every week, twice a week. “It’s different from school. Not

to be offensive all you learn about is white history. For example, in World History, I learned more about white culture and what's going on in Europe." My students' critical reflections between traditional schooling and our curriculum called attention to the second perspective in Critical Race Theory. It is "The Challenge to Dominant Ideology" which seeks to disrupt, "the traditional claims of the legal system to objectivity, meritocracy, colorblindness, race neutrality, and equal opportunity" (Solorazano, 6).

Their reflections of our workshops being "unlike school" was linked to the content of the curriculum. When asked on their reflections regarding the curriculum we created, all of my students were drawn by the diversity of topics. Critical pedagogy did not really hone in on the importance of a multicultural/diverse style of learning. However, bell hooks brings this issue to light in which she calls a knowledge that is multicultural. "When we, as educators, allow our pedagogy to be radically changed by our recognition of a multicultural world, we can give students the education they desire and deserve." We concluded that students become engaged when topics were diverse.

I enjoy these workshops because they teach me. You guys just don't teach about African Americans but you guys also teach us about Latinos and Native Americans and even Vietnamese history which was interesting. I get a variety of different cultures and everything. It's not just white and black. It is important to note that critical pedagogy does not touch on the importance of exposing students to an education that is relatable to them. Both hooks and critical race theory components touch upon the importance of teaching in a manner that

embraces “multicultural.” However, more can be said about the positive effects that come when a student is exposed to these various cultures, including their own.

Often times when they described this, they reflected on how this new knowledge was different from their schools. In addition, they claimed that if they learned this in school, it was taught not “one sided like in school.” My students were able to see the value in countering the hegemony or what they continuously labeled the “one sided” perspective their schools offered. Educating through this lens allows for us to “teach in ways that transform consciousness, creating a climate of free expression that is the essence of a truly liberatory arts education” (hooks, 44). I could see my students begin to express their feelings towards the narrow education they had been receiving throughout their formal schooling years. They were working towards the process of becoming critically conscious of the information they had been receiving previously and comparing it to the new knowledge we were exposing them to.

### **Current Issues**

We found that history on its own was not sufficient for developing an environment where students were continuously engaged in education. In fact, when we presented current events and movements, my students became more eager to learn. When asked about favorite workshops, more than half of my students expressed the ones that resonated most with them were the workshops on Contemporary Revolutionary Movements and Current Event/Media Portrayals of Black and Brown People. Paulo Freire states that

critical consciousness represents “things and facts as they exist empirically, in their causal and circumstantial correlations...” (Freire, 44) therefore integrated with reality. His notion of freedom calls for disengaging the slave consciousness which oppressors “introjected into the deepest recesses of their being” (1). These two workshops positioned my students to not only question their role in present day society as youth of color but to also recognize the value and importance in being aware of the present.

This is important knowledge to know. Especially nowadays considering the world we live in that’s mostly going bad. We don’t notice these things. We need to be aware of our surroundings...of the crises’ in different parts of the world that we don’t notice because the media hides it from us. I’m happy we can learn and talk about these issues in order to open up people’s eyes and for all of us to realize that while we are young, we need to help each other out and speak against things that are not just.

All of my students stressed the importance of being woke about current issues. They were very moved by this particular workshop and were able to understand the power that the media holds regardless of the intention. They were able to recognize the media’s role in the creation of cultural paradigms. This is specifically the case for corporate media. As a result, my students attested to the media’s very tangible impacts on places all over the world which perpetuated racial stereotypes and biases. One 13-year-old student was able to point these inequities out in her journal. “Media is heavily biased. Like, if a person of color was killed, they’d go on and on about how that person had a previous conviction for

stealing a piece of candy, but if a white guy killed people, he was just “troubled.” She then proceeded to question and answer the motives of corporate media, “why aren’t people who shoot up schools called terrorists? Why aren’t they called thugs? It’s really irritating how the media only feeds off of hate and bias. They tell lies and exaggerations just so people can get angry. What’s the point? What’s the point of making all Black Lives Matter activists look like rioters?”

As stated previously, it is important that as people of color, we begin to make these connections within our own lives. One student compared this issue of media biases to Africa in the global context. She states that often times, her people, Liberians are often compared to Nigerians negatively. My other students were genuinely content and moved by the plethora of current events we presented. Others seemed very upset at the fact that “they lie about us. They lie about black people and don’t put out the true story. They only put the true story white people so they’ll look good.” Through my own observations I could see my students’ body language and interactions begin to shift. They became more engaged with the different types of media sources we presented them, whether it was a negative or positive reaction. My students were beginning to critically think about the social and political oppressive elements of society that made them question their very own historical and social situation.

One of my students wrote in her journal the necessity of compassion and empathy. She notes how society as a whole is very judgmental and quick to assume things about other people. She states, “The only way we can change this is to understand the importance

of empathy and putting yourself in other people's shoes or shut down social media" because we are very "brainwashed." Similarly, in bell hooks (2000) *Feminism is for Everybody*, she discusses the power of love and its ability to transform us. She states, "for me forgiveness and compassion are always linked: how do we hold people accountable for wrongdoing and yet at the same time remain in touch with their humanity enough to believe in their capacity to be transformed?" (p.17) My student not only called for society to start acting compassionate towards one another but also demanded that we check the ways in which we receive and produce media. We found that the process of becoming woke demanded actions.

When asked about her favorite workshop, my student responded with the workshop on "police, Black Lives Matter, and the workshop on Latino immigration issues. I liked being able to see the connection between all of them and because they are happening right now." Another one of my students explained how she saw the connection between the "Black Lives Matter Movement to transgender issues, to the immigration movement. I learned to look at the bigger picture." We cannot expect our youth to change inequities that they have yet been exposed to. In fact, once my students were exposed to different struggles they then were able to move towards connecting these social issues with one another. I was particularly moved by the compassion and desire to act that followed this exposure to new knowledge.

### **Learning about and Exchanging Diverse Knowledges**

It is crucial that curriculums reflect the demographic of students that are receiving and exchanging knowledges. All of our students identify as either Black and/or Latino. We found that a curriculum that reflects these two races was important for the process of critical consciousness and self-awareness. It is important for our students to see themselves and their histories reflected in curriculums. “If our children are clear about where they came from, they’ll have hope about where they can go” (Harris, Khalilah). Through participatory observations, we concluded that it was not enough to just incorporate Black history and struggles. It was crucial for us to implement Latino history and struggles for students who identified as Latino. While speaking on Black Lives Matter, one of my students who identifies as Colombian was not really engaged, yet, as the workshops began to incorporate her own culture she became more engaged. She reflected in her journal how pleased she was to learn about the struggles and history of people who shared the same backgrounds as her. Another of my students who identifies as Black and Dominican alluded to this notion as well. She stated in her interview that she was excited to be taught on Latino history because “schools in a way already speak on my [her] history from my other half [her African American side].” We concluded that when our students demonstrated a personal connection to the subject, their engagement level became more prevalent. The curriculum we created not only provided new knowledge for students regarding their histories but this also assisted them to make sense of their individual identities.

The new knowledge presented through our curriculum brought forth many emotions. While structuring this entire curriculum, we knew there would be a degree of pain that would come with developing critical consciousness. Our student's journals reflected that pain that came with "giving up old ways of thinking and knowing and learning new approaches" (hooks, 43). Many of my students expressed their anger and swollen hearts towards the violence that continues to be inflicted on our people. When people of color reach an age where they are able to deeply realize and internalize how intensely and directly racism affects them and their communities, it is truly traumatizing. It is draining and depressing. It is painful and scarring. It can very easily make you lose the will to do anything or dream anything. And that is something that white people will never understand how deep this feeling truly goes. Although, some of my students have not yet realized how intensely racism affects their lives, they are beginning to grasp it slowly. "I'm so sad by all of this. By transgender people being killed for being themselves. I wish so bad that people could get along and accept others for who they are." Although these statements reflect the pain that comes with new knowledge, we must respect this pain and learn to transform this pain into resistance. According to Delgado Bernal,

Transformational resistance...is based on a conscious critique of domination and is motivated by an interest in liberation or social justice. It includes a deeper level of consciousness that allows agency to be manifested in ways that are more empowering than that of traditional notions of school resistance (p.91).

Some of our students were able to give a “conscious critique of domination” as Bernal describes above. Furthermore, her critique reflected her ability to describe the way in which dominant hegemony damaged her own community. She states,

People in power don't care about people of color, if they did, something would be done. I don't know who it is, but someone has implemented these foolish ideas into our head. “Our” being society as a whole. We subconsciously divide ourselves because “the man” had originally that that was the way to be. People of color have always been attacked by white supremacy. Since a long long time, lighter skinned people have been viewed as “better.” We see it even today, reflected in our #TeamLightSkins vs. #TeamDarkSkins feud. It's a struggle because we want to unite everyone, but our little subgroups won't unite themselves.

Here, my student was able to make a larger claim against the systems in power. She acknowledges the struggle, however, similarly to Bernal, towards the end she begins to call for unity. This unity could be said to have been motivated by her interest in liberating her community.

### **Get Woke, Stay Woke, Move to Action**

We found that some of our students could not yet transform this pain into resistance quite yet, mainly due to the fact that some students came in a little more “woke” than others. However, some of my students indeed are reacting towards that pain in a way that

calls for action and resistance. It is important to note that action has several faces, it does not just come in the form of protest but also the desire to learn more. One of my students stated that she “hates that people go through these things like detention centers. I wanna continue to talk about immigration and find solutions to help them.” Paulo Freire advocates for the linking of awareness to practice, her practice came in the form of her desire to learn more in order to move towards solutions. Another student called out young people and advised “don’t be afraid to speak up for what is right.”

This resistance came in a collective call to action but also in the individual reflection. “When you guys leave, I’ll go home and think about the topics we discussed. I ask myself why these things are happening and asking myself makes me want to do more things for me and my people.” Not only did our youth begin to question their role but they began to question the larger system at hand and the affects it had in their own communities- they were beginning their process of critical consciousness.

The emotions that came from our curriculum based on social justice inspired my other students to want to act. For example, when asked, “has this knowledge been beneficial to you?” and “what have you done with this knowledge?” My student’s response was one that intertwined inserting repressed stories into the dominant narrative as well as organizing. “I reflect on the stuff that you guys taught me and the skills. In my AP Lit class I presented a piece on the immigrants that we talked about that are in the detainment camps right now in Texas.” This particular student inserted this new critical knowledge into her formal schooling environment because she saw the importance in educating her peers on

the social inequities occurring. In addition, she took this knowledge further and expressed that she wanted to “create an organization that improves how Black girls are looked at...That’s what I got out of what you taught me.” Another one of my students expressed her interest in filming and photography. She currently works in a cooperative that infuses the two and wants to “create a short film on the things learned here.” These emotions that stemmed from the new knowledge they were giving and receiving manifested into a desire to act.

## **Conclusions**

Our goal was to create a process of critical consciousness and self-awareness in our students. This was to be attained through our social justice based curriculum that would create a pathway towards this necessary evolution. To do this, we found we had to create comfortable learning environment that valued vulnerability and that was entirely different from traditional, formal schooling. As teachers, we created this setting by valuing the continual exchange of knowledges between ourselves and our students; thus disrupting the power structures that would normally exist amongst teachers and students. The content of the curriculum was necessary for self-awareness and critical consciousness. The curriculum was diverse in nature and placed the history and current socio political struggles of our students as the central themes throughout each workshop. In turn, the content of the curriculum created new knowledge for students to be able to make further sense of their identities in terms of race and their positionality- self awareness. It was very

important that our students saw themselves in the curriculum for connection purposes. In turn, this new knowledge sparked emotions that ultimately led to action or the desire to act.

We must commit to a different style of teaching that transgresses beyond traditional educational barriers if we wish to transform the current state of education. Offering a curriculum that centers on social justice as its focal point is a step towards the reformation I seek. Perhaps, having more educators of color that teach in this pedagogical style will close the achievement gap and furthermore foster a society in which youth of color see themselves prosper in the ways that their white counterparts are allowed to.

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