
“God Gave Us Two Ears and One Mouth for a Reason”: Building on Cultural Wealth through a Call-and-Response Pedagogy

**Tyson E. J. Marsh
Iowa State University**

**Shiv Desai
Thomas More College
U. S. A.**

As presented by Lee and Majors (2003), “The use of call and response is a familiar structure [within communities of color] for sustaining talk, for communicating perspective, and for marking engagement” (p. 64). In this paper we delineate the need for a call-and-response pedagogy in engaging students of color in a responsive, critically multicultural manner while creating opportunities for the expression of their cultural wealth. Drawing from over three years of experience as facilitators of an after-school poetry class in a Los Angeles area high school, we synthesize classroom dialogue and student poetry and writing to reveal the potential of such mediums to generate reflexive pedagogy and classroom discourse. We believe this approach offers the potential for teachers and students to engage in a collaborative, democratic process of naming oppressive structures.

Call-and-Response Pedagogy

The Call

The Response

Building on Cultural Wealth through a Call-and-Response Pedagogy

Conclusion

References

Education...

*Occasionally found in schools,
but originates on the streets.*

*What people don't understand is,
you don't learn everything you know in school
like how to love, how to speak,
and if you believe it then that's what you think...*

I just want to say you do learn many things,

*but still, education, to me, is born on the streets,
and just migrated to classroom seats.
I believe many people who value education
made a decision,
a decision to listen,
a decision to learn
a decision to take education seriously.
Once again, education is found in schools, occasionally.*

*Lady D, PEACE class
2004*

Throughout the course of American history, critical expression through the arts has played a central role in the promotion of social justice and the struggle of people of color against racist oppression. From El Muralismo to the Black Arts Movement and Hip Hop culture, art has served as a communal conduit for social justice education as well as the critique and resistance of White supremacy from artists in informal settings and in higher education (Alim, 2009). As put forth by Akom (2009), "As early as the late 1970s, hip hop artists, such as KRS-One, also known as "The Teacher," criticized the educational system, its power, its practices, and its pedagogy. In particular, "The Teacher" was concerned about the role of an embedded Eurocentricity in the US public school curricula and its impact on Black children and youth" (pp. 53-54). While a growing body of research has documented the pedagogical and socially-just possibilities and success of these artistic modes of expression when employed in the classroom setting, this type of socially just art education has largely been limited within the context of K-12 schooling (Akom, 2009; Alim, 2009; Desai & Marsh, 2005; Duncan-Andrade & Morrell, 2007; Fisher, 2005; Kinloch, 2005; Stovall, 2006).

Because of this notable absence, our goal in this paper is to illustrate the critical and socially just possibilities that exist within the cultural wealth (Yosso, 2005) and compelling voices of a group of young poet-scholars in an after-school arts-based class at LAX High School (a pseudonym), an urban high school in Los Angeles. Describing the development and implementation of the Political Education, Art, and Creative Expression (PEACE) class at LAX High School, we undertake what Street (2003) describes as a dynamic dialogue between theory and practice. Presenting the theoretical and practical impetus for developing the PEACE class, we exemplify how theory informs practice and vice-versa, drawing from and building upon critical race theory and critical race methodology highlighting the voices, counternarratives and cultural wealth of the PEACE class students (Denzin, 2000; Solórzano & Yosso, 2002; Yosso, 2005). As expressed poetically by Lady D, "Education, to me, is born on the streets, and just migrated to classroom seats." In line with her claim, it is our aim to contribute to the growing body of research that advocates for translating the experiences of youth

in the out-of-school context to classroom practice, while emphasizing the critical and creative use of the arts by communities of color in the struggle for social justice (Gustavson, 2007; Hull & Schultz, 2002; Street, 2003). We begin by introducing what we have come to conceptualize as call-and-response pedagogy, after first situating its practice against the contemporary landscape of the neo-liberal standards-based reform movement.

As argued by Quinn (2006), social justice art education “require[s] engagement with the political, social, and economic structures that are our surround, through investigation of what matters in the lives of teachers and students, and emphasis on collective action for social change” (p. 16). However, as expressed artistically above by Lady D, a young Black, female, poet-scholar whom we had the pleasure of working with in an out-of-school educational context, social justice art education for young people of color happens in schools “occasionally,” largely due to the continued emphasis on the neoliberal standards-based reform agenda in K-12 education.

Critical scholars, practitioners, community activists, and students have long argued that the neoliberal reform agenda has contributed to the corporatization and militarization of public education, particularly in districts and schools serving working-class students of color (Saltman & Gabbard, 2003). Charged with ensuring students’ success on high-stakes assessments, teachers have been tacitly coerced into “teaching to the test,” as they perceive their jobs to be on the line (Au, 2009; Saltman & Gabbard, 2003; Sunderman, Tracey, Kim, & Orfield, 2004). For students, “teaching to the test” can translate into increased scrutiny of their behavior, and within this corporatized, militarized environment, students quickly learn that in order to succeed they must be consumers, as opposed to co-constructors of knowledge, or face disciplinary consequences (McLaren & Farahmandpur, 2005). Au (2009) contends high-stakes testing and teaching to the test can present a triple bind for working class students of color. The standardization of the curriculum can serve to reproduce the cultural norms and values of the dominant culture (White, middle-class, heterosexual, able-bodied, male) while relegating diverse identities to the margins (McLaren, 2003). In this way high-stakes testing can produce disparate and negative outcomes for students of color as they run the risk of succumbing to stereotype threat (Steele & Aronson, 1995). Just when students of color most need the opportunity to connect their experiential and cultural knowledge to curricular content in meaningful ways (Au, 2009; Prasad, 1998), with high stakes testing and teaching, the curriculum is narrowed in such a way that instructional time is lost in subject areas that hold the most promise of authentic learning connections, including social studies, language arts, and the fine and performing arts (Au, 2009; Prasad, 1998). Given the critical and historical role that art has played as a tool of resistance in communities of color in naming oppressive structures and the struggle for social justice, such cutbacks are cause for considerable concern (Anzaldúa, 1987; Baraka, 1963; Gilroy, 1993; Lorde, 2001; Moraga, 1984). As standards-based reform efforts continue to drive educational policy, it is imperative that we work with young people, within and outside of the formal educational setting, to co-create spaces that foster the expression of their voices

and cultural wealth. Call-and-response pedagogy provides us with a way of doing such work.

Call-and-Response Pedagogy

Building on the work of Smitherman (1977), Foster (2002) describes call-and-response as:

A type of interaction between speaker and listener(s) in which the statements ("calls") are emphasized by expressions ("responses") from the listener(s), in which responses can be solicited or spontaneous, and in which either the calls or responses can be expressed linguistically, musically, verbally, non-verbally, or through dance. (p. 1)

Within such interactions, both the "call" and "response" are rooted in the cultural knowledge and understandings of participants, which in turn contribute to the creation of new meaning (Johnson, 1994). While "call" and "response" can be articulated through various artistic modes of expression, Sale (1992) argues that performed and improvised interaction between speaker and listener "ensure[s] that the art will be meaningful or functional to the community" (p. 41). To be succinct, the democratic and communal nature of call-and-response tells a story and, as it is told and retold, it takes on new layers of meaning, perspective, and possibility for those involved in the process (Sale, 1992, p. 42). In connecting the concept of call-and-response to K-12 education and pedagogy, we draw on Freire's (1982) notion of dialogue as well as Gay's (2010) conceptualization of culturally responsive teaching.

As argued by Freire (1982), "Founding itself upon love, humility, and faith, dialogue becomes a horizontal relationship of which mutual trust between the dialoguers is the logical consequence" (p. 91). Thus, in establishing the conditions for dialogue to take place, it is critical that educators are constantly aware of the unequal power relationship that exists between teacher and student, while working with students to name and overcome it. Creating the opportunity for dialogue to take place, the teacher must be willing to become a student, while creating opportunities for students to become teachers in the process of meaning-making and addressing oppressive structures. Further facilitating this process, Gay (2010) reminds us that it is imperative for teachers to utilize culturally responsive strategies that draw upon the cultural knowledge, lived experiences, and critical modes of expression employed by students of color. When presented with the opportunity to draw upon their personal experiences and cultural wealth, while having a say in their education, students of color are more likely to engage in dialogue (Knaus, 2009; Yosso, 2005). A call-and-response pedagogy serves as a form of resistance to standards-based reform and high-stakes testing by giving voice to working class students of color who are disproportionately affected by these policies, practices and decisions; those who would be silenced are provided the opportunity to engage artistically and

creatively in their own education.

In situating ourselves in this work, it is critical that we mention that our conceptualization of call-and-response pedagogy is also rooted in our own individual K-12 educational experiences as working-class students of color. The classroom discourse and curriculum that we experienced was largely void of the voices that represented our respective communities. It was not until college that we began to voice our lived realities through spoken word and hip hop culture. Our personal experiences with these liberating forms of artistic expression inform our understanding of call-and-response pedagogy. In conceptualizing the PEACE class, because of our own histories of being silenced in the process of schooling, we were committed to creating a safe space where participants could share their lived realities and experiences on an equal footing with their peers and facilitators and do so using the critical and artistic modes of expression that we employed as tools of survival in our own undergraduate experiences. The “call” for us committing to this goal as graduate students and, subsequently, as education professors was our alarm over the deficiency orientations we were exposed to in our work in the LAX-GEAR UP Partnership. In striving for something better, as we explain below, the PEACE class was born.

**The Call:
The LAX-GEAR UP Partnership,
Dominant Cultural Capital, and Deficit Thinking**

Located in a predominantly Chicana/o, Latina/o, and African American working-class community situated in the flight path of Los Angeles International Airport, LAX is the flagship high school of the LAX School District. At the time the data for this study were collected, LAX served a student population of 2,100 which, according to the California Department of Education (2009), was 50% Hispanic, 48% African American, 2% White, Pacific Islander, Filipino, and Asian. In addition, LAX High School was a Title I school with 49.7% of its student body on a free or reduced lunch program and 24.6% of its student body considered to be English Language Learners (California Department of Education, 2009). While LAX high school has graduated its share of scholars, actors and actresses, professional athletes, hip hop artists, and local politicians, the school and the district had been struggling to meet the mandates of the *No Child Left Behind Act*. With an Academic Performance Index (API) of 538 on a scale of 200-1000, LAX High School was labeled as an under-performing school: the statewide target API was 800 (California Department of Education, 2009).

Risking state takeover, LAX district administrators and teachers teamed up with faculty in the Graduate School of Education at U.C.M.E (a pseudonym) and secured federal GEAR-UP grant funds to aid in the district’s effort to meet Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) and improve the college-going rate for LAX High School graduates. Specifically, the purpose of this partnership would be to bring students up to grade-level proficiency while establishing a college-going

culture. Framed in sociological and theoretical terms, the aim of the GEAR UP program was to expose the predominantly working-class student-of-color population at LAX High School to the college-going cultural capital prevalent amongst their White, suburban, upper and middle class “peers” (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1977; McDonough, 1997). This process was facilitated by the implementation of various mentoring and tutoring programs as well as fieldtrips and college visits over the course of three years.

While these programs served to familiarize students with the college-going cultural capital they would need to gain access to a higher education, as time passed, discussions between graduate student researchers, LAX teachers, GEAR UP staff, and the principal investigator served to problematize this practice as it was felt that we were failing to place value in the cultural capital possessed by students of color at LAX High School. Recognizing the critical importance of creating spaces where LAX students could express and build upon their lived realities and experiences in creative ways, there was a push for the inclusion of projects that would emphasize and value the cultural knowledge and identities of students. After much discussion, funds were set aside for project proposals that would supplement the emphasis on improving student performance in math, science, and English with a specific emphasis on the arts. With the “call” to draw upon the cultural capital of students of color at LAX through arts-based projects, we turned to critical race theory as a conceptual and methodological “response.” It was the framework we used to name and address oppressive structures such as White privilege and dominant notions of cultural capital through the centering of narratives and counterstories produced by LAX High School students (Solórzano & Yosso, 2002).

The Response: Critical Race Theory/Methodology and the PEACE Class Genesis

Rooted in the struggle against racist oppression and spawned in critique of critical legal studies’ emphasis on the manner in which the law and policy reproduce class inequality, the central argument of critical race theory is that racism is inherent in American culture, society, and institutions (hooks, 1994). In relation to education, Solórzano and Villalpando (1998) argues that a critical race theory and methodological framework acknowledges: 1) the centrality and intersectionality of race and racism; 2) the challenge to dominant ideology; 3) the centrality of experiential knowledge; 4) the interdisciplinary perspective; and 5) the commitment to social justice. In various ways, each of these themes played a role in the development of the PEACE class in response to the call to draw upon the cultural capital of working-class students of color at LAX High School.

Critical race theory is concerned with naming and critiquing systems and structures of racism and racist oppression through the centering of the narratives and counterstories of people of color (Solórzano & Yosso, 2002). In opposition to

the dominant ideologies' one-sided stories, the counterstories and narratives of people of color serve the purpose of outlining their racialized experiences while drawing upon their voices and lived realities, understood as their experiential knowledge (Ladson-Billings, 1998; Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995; Love, 2004; Solórzano & Yosso, 2002). Critical race theory recognizes the historical role that interdisciplinary engagement with the arts has played as a critical site for people of color in expressing their voices and counterstories in service of a commitment to a more socially just world. For this reason, we began to conceptualize the PEACE class as revolving around these artistic traditions. In drawing upon these traditions, we intended to acknowledge and draw upon the community cultural wealth of participants, or what Yosso (2005) has identified as the "array of knowledge, skills, abilities and contacts possessed and utilized by Communities of Color to survive and resist macro and micro-forms of oppression" (p. 77). In translating the work of critical race theorists into critical race praxis, the PEACE class began to materialize.

As noted above, the PEACE class was designed to serve as a counterspace where students of color at LAX High School could come together and safely engage in dialogue while drawing upon their cultural wealth and sharing their counterstories and narratives. The PEACE class syllabus outlined the overall purpose of the class as follows:

In weaving together music, spoken word, written word and art, the [PEACE] class seeks to engage participants while assisting them in developing a critical consciousness and voice. Through reading, writing, and sharing poetry as well as other forms of artistic expression, students will reflect on their lived experiences. Through this process, students will be able to describe their world in terms of their individual lived experiences and the histories of their respective communities. In assisting students in developing a critical consciousness and voice, the PEACE class syllabus will evolve out of student dialogue, writings, and other forms of artistic expression. Through this process, students will use their knowledge and experience to educate one another on critical issues of their choice. The goal of the class is to EMPOWER students to take on the dual role of student and teacher (PEACE Class Syllabus, 2004).

Our experience working with GEAR UP and conversations with LAX students had led us to recognize that their average day at LAX High School was highly structured, leaving little room for them to discuss the critical issues that informed their everyday experiences. In creating the deliberately unstructured space of the PEACE class, we felt that we would be able to attract students that needed an extracurricular activity focused on *their* needs and interests as opposed to the demands placed *on them* by the district and state. Through word of mouth and the posting of flyers throughout the school, the first PEACE class meeting attracted nine students. During this first meeting we took the time to get to know each student, and discussed their artistic interests, which ranged from Death Metal to Hip Hop and from poetry to Anime. We also shared a little about ourselves, our interests, and discussed the purpose of the class. In addition, we

asked the students to set rules for classroom dialogue which spoke primarily to concerns regarding supporting and respecting one another as well as encouraging everyone to participate democratically. At the conclusion of the class, we encouraged them to invite their friends to the next meeting, particularly those interested in creative modes of expression and discussions around racism, sexism, and other forms of social injustice.

Over the course of the next three years, the PEACE class attracted over 60 students between the ages of 15 to 18 from African American, Latino, and Filipino backgrounds. While not all students attended on a weekly basis due to athletics, family responsibilities, work, or the other extracurricular commitments that occupied their out-of-school experiences, it is important to note that the space was always open to those in need of a venue to talk or write about their experiences. Although it is impossible to capture the depth and range of the eclectic experiences that informed the PEACE class, in the pages that follow we draw from the insights, perspectives, and artistic expressions of class participants that we believe best exemplify the critical democratic possibilities that exist when students are not silenced by standards and benchmarks, but rather encouraged to express their community cultural wealth and counterstories. This goal and process is central to what we have come to conceptualize as call-and-response pedagogy.

Building on Cultural Wealth through a Call-and-Response Pedagogy

We went into the PEACE class knowing from our own experiences that spoken word, poetry, and dialogue would be effective pedagogical tools in locating students' cultural wealth. However, it was really up to class participants and their constant relevant, reflective, and responsive practice to place value in acknowledging and maintaining the expression of that wealth. This required the effort and trust of all participants toward the end of creating a safe, respectful, and critical space. It is through this relationship that a call-and-response pedagogy began to take shape and facilitators and students took on their role together as authors of meaning. The notion of a call-and-response pedagogy is embodied in the following exchange between Dre, an African American male student, and Danita, a Chicana graduate student facilitator. It took place at the beginning of the class when we "checked in," asking participants to talk about what had been going on in their lives or whatever else they desired to share.

Danita: I could whine some more, but it's not about me.

Dre: It actually is. It's about all of us. So why did you say it? It's about each one of us. So it is about you because you are part of this family and part of this class.

Danita: That's true. I don't want to take too much time and I want everybody to speak.

Dre: Everybody took as much time as they needed. Why can't you?

Danita: That's true. I'll take another minute. So this is what I've been realizing. It's that being in relationships in life, whether they be romantic, familial, friendship...all relationships with people require work. Like learning how to communicate, learning how to hear each other, to respond to one another. My romantic relationship is taking work right now, which is good. I'm ok with that...so my feelings were hurt last weekend. And I'm still upset and I don't like being upset nearly a week later, but it's ok. We are talking about it. We're trying to work it through. (Mike and Dre give her a hug). So that's my reminder for myself and all of us today is that relationships require work and it's good to work.

Dre: I feel you on that. You probably helped somebody out by saying that. See that minute you were about to take away, it opened up and helped.

Danita: That's true. Thank you.

In this example, Dre reminds Danita the importance of not rushing her check-in or feeling "guilty" for taking too much time. More importantly, he reminds other participants that the purpose of check-in is to speak your mind and not silence yourself. Perhaps what is most powerful in this interaction is when Dre states "See that minute you were about to take away, it opened up and helped." From exchanges such as this one, we came to recognize that an essential feature of a call-and-response pedagogy is that it allows for these critical interactions to occur because it enables teachers and students to value one another's lived experiences and, in this way, establish in the conversation a recognition of participants' cultural wealth. In the following example, we see how the culture of affirmation achieved through call-and-response pedagogy allowed students to name and address race and racism as a routine part of school culture. This exchange took place between Phoenix, an African American male, and Truth, a Latino student, during a dialogue about the race riots that occur every year at LAX during Cinco de Mayo—a Mexican celebration of the removal of French forces from Mexico.

Phoenix: Every single year no matter what happens there is always a huge riot. It's always because of race. It's always African Americans against someone who [is] Spanish. It's how it is every single year! Don't matter what they do or what they think it's always the same battle every year. And every year somebody gets hurt or otherwise some people think it's fun and they go bonkers and do all kinds of crazy stuff. I can't even count (*stumbles*) on my hands and feet how many times this school has had a riot on Cinco de Mayo and kids have gotten let out school because of what happens. It happens every year.

Truth: This has been happening since your freshman year?

Phoenix: I'm a junior. This been happening since my brother been going to this high school. Even my mother (*pauses*). My mother graduated from this high school and she said even then riots every single year on Cinco de Mayo.

We had wanted to encourage students to engage in dialogue about this topic precisely because, as Phoenix described, the riots had been occurring for so long and the school's unproductive response was simply to close the school on this day. In engaging students in dialogue and discussing some of the possible reasons for tension, we had hoped to push them to reflect on strategies that might address this problem. We discovered, however, the extent to which individual students were affected by this violence, as well as the fact that their experiences needed to be shared and processed before we could expect them to be ready to get to the stage of developing strategies to address the violence.

For, example, during our discussion Kev, an African America male student, expressed how his brother dropped out of LAX as a result of the riots. He hit a Latino student with a bottle and the police were searching for him. Moreover, Kev explained "how in the year prior he was chased by a group of Latinos during Cinco de Mayo for no apparent reason." He shared how he "got chased all the way home on Cinco de Mayo (*uses hands for direction*) because they said I was dark-skinned and stuff and that I was against them (*uses hand quotes. Nonchalant in the way he tells story*)."

Jumping back in to the conversation, Phoenix began to explain that he thought the riots were a result of gang influence. Phoenix, along with Kev and Secondstagewriter (SSW) pronounced that there were "7 different" gangs in the school, half of them being "black" and the other half "Latino," so "they plan it every year." In response, Danita proceeded to explain Cinco de Mayo to the class as they did not know or were misinformed with regard to the celebration's historical origins.

Danita: Cinco de Mayo is celebrated here because when people immigrated here and left Mexico some people wanted a holiday to celebrate or have a day to remember history...It's become a day where people think it's Independence Day but it's not. It's actually not even a big holiday in Mexico...So why do you think people are fighting on that day between each other?

Students responded to Danita's explanation by attributing the violence to ignorance, misunderstanding, and a lack of respect between cultural groups. Soulja and SSW, both African-American male students, added that Latino students were upset because they felt they were only given one day to celebrate their culture while African Americans had the entire month of February. The following conversation ensued between E.J., an African American graduate student facilitator, and Soulja:

E.J.: Umm interesting. Do you think the blacks get treated better somehow than the...

Soulja: NO! I think we are all in the same shit hole.

E.J.: Explain that.

Soulja: Think about it. White America, they already look down upon us just on where we live... The white Americans and Asians they used to living in

their own little neighborhoods and it's all nice and everything... They go to colleges. When they look down upon us, it's a whole different story. It's like we get some rights. They look down at us for not using the rights properly or it's like an abuse of our rights or whatever. They don't see [us] as equals.

E. J.: When you say us what do you mean?

Soulja: Latinos and African-Americans.

Danita: Like people of Color.

Soulja: Basically like immigrants and.....It's like we are not equal to them.

In this interaction, Soulja argued that Latinos, African-Americans, and immigrants were in the same "shit-hole." He observed that there were stark inequalities between where African Americans and Latinos lived and where Whites and Asians lived. In addition, he noted that the former groups were not matriculating to higher education, as were the latter groups. He also noted that people in power blame people of color for their circumstances rather than examining systemic racism or gross social inequalities.

As the dialogue progressed, SSW provided a new layer to the discussion stating, "But then again we look down upon our own races too. Because we get caught up in the propaganda too. A lot of us are whitewashed anyway....There's some black people who hate being black or some Latino people hate themselves." Soulja added an additional layer of meaning, citing the role that economics might play in fostering racial tension:

Soulja: The two races—Latinos and African Americans—they put each other down. For instance, the blacks always say the Latinos go and take all the jobs and all [that] stuff. The Latinos look down and say they don't use every opportunity they can get so they're not worth anything.

In this statement Soulja summarized a potential source of racial conflict. He surmised that Latinos were seen as a threat because they "[took] all the jobs" or performed jobs once "reserved" for African Americans while also describing the Latino response in stating that African Americans were "not taking advantage" of the opportunities available to them. This rich and complicated conversation was the result of E. J. simply asking Soulja to expand on his ideas. Through a call-and-response pedagogy, Soulja was able to systemically analyze the situation and offer a sharp critical analysis of the riots and their connection to broader social phenomena surrounding race and racism. The dialogue of these PEACE class participants illustrates, we believe, the possibility of a call-and-response pedagogy for creating a space for youth to raise and discuss these kinds of difficult and critical issues. In refusing to ignore them, the PEACE class served as a space where students could face these issues and discuss them forthrightly, while contributing to the development of one another's critical consciousness and getting them ready to think about actions they might take for social change.

We witnessed this readying for action when, at the conclusion of the 90-

minute dialogue, SSW suggested the following:

SSW: We're poets[.] We say what people think (*pauses*). A simple poem can change someone's entire opinion or it could change their lives. A simple song, a verse, a phrase, even a lyric or two can change what a person may think outwardly. If we can do that, then maybe we can save (*stops and shifts thought*), of course, we can't save the whole audience. Maybe we help one person at least...It's like we are the ones who are going to change the world later. We should be able to try it... I know I am going to try.

According to SSW, "A simple song, a verse, a phrase, even a lyric or two can change what a person may think." In line with SSW's observation, as a potential solution to addressing this serious issue at the school, the class decided to host a spoken word/open mic event where students could share their poetry and perspective surrounding the Cinco de Mayo race riots topic, just prior to the school closing on that day. Widely attended by both Black and Latino students, the event marked a significant step in extending dialogue surrounding racial tensions, as well as myriad other topics, beyond the walls of the PEACE class. As a result of the event, attendance grew 200% as the PEACE class became widely recognized as a safe space where students could come and discuss any issues that they were struggling with at home, in the community, and at school.

Given the critical importance of the students' oral dialogue and their insight into the need for and role of creative expression as a tool for change, we dedicated a significant portion of the following class to having students reflect on the discussion in written form. The following poem is Rodrigo's (a Latino student) written reflection on the previous conversation:

*There's too many questions to a problem
How many problems are there?
We have racial problems
We have jealousy problems
We have family problems
And other problems that takes us out
What can we do?
We can fight or we can continue
Like Cesar Chavez & Martin Luther King
Who fought for a fair, just world
Cause we know the battle and the war has not ended
We learn from our hope to teach our wrongs
And that who we be, who we are
Is because of god
Because with god we can transform anything
We must fight till peace and
When we can look at each other as brothers and sisters
Holding hands going to school and getting along
And supporting each other against everybody else.
We must not surrender. We must keep fighting*

*Because our dream is that one day when we die
We leave the world more peaceful and for every race to get along
As brothers and sisters and also know that your sons or daughters
Will be fine when everyone respects each other.*

Rodrigo begins the poem by listing some of the problems (family, jealousy, racial, and others) that might cause people to foster racial hatred within themselves. In addition, he evidences how factors at home might strongly affect how students behave in school. With a spiritual tone Rodrigo pleads with his listeners, expressing that this racial conflict would not please God while encouraging them to think about the mark they intended to leave on this world. Invoking the legacies of Dr. King and Cesar Chavez, he advocates for peaceful fight in response to the racial riots at LAX. Powerfully, he demonstrates that we must “learn from our hope to teach our wrongs.” Rodrigo concludes his poem by explaining that in the struggle for peace, we must never surrender. All of these themes that we see Rodrigo using in his poem reflect insights shared by his PEACE class peers in their dialogue. This for us exemplifies the intertextual nature of a call-and-response pedagogy. Intertextuality emerges again as Dre complements the statements of Soulja, utilizing the analogy of a boat to discuss how African Americans and Latinos face similar struggles.

*I see me and you are on a boat stranded
In the middle of no where
And the ocean has no reflection, no glare,
No lips, no eyes, and no hair
Me and this man have something in common
Something we both share,
But we are both unaware
That we are in the same boat
Neither one of us would amount for the other
Just because we weren't born from the same mothers
Doesn't mean that we're not brothers*

Due to the tensions between communities, this poem relates beautifully to Soulja's comments regarding how Latinos and Blacks live in the same areas, share the same achievement gap and, within the context of LAX, experience a lack of economic opportunities. Instead of focusing on these commonalities, in LAX, these two groups are seemingly at war. Dre's poem is a creative representation of Soulja's previous statements that “blacks always say the Latinos go and take all the jobs and all the stuff” and that “the Latinos look down and say they [blacks] don't use every opportunity they can get so they're not worth anything.” The underlying theme of these poems is potential and hope that both groups might realize their commonalities in struggle and come together in the face of such challenges. Through these poems Rodrigo and Dre invoke a sense of possibility in bringing these two groups together. In setting aside differences, their participation in a call-and-response pedagogy promoted unity in the face of struggle.

Conclusion

Borrowing from the critical insight of PEACE class participant, Dre, “God gave us two ears and one mouth,” meaning that we need to take the time to listen and co-create spaces and opportunities for students of color to express their voices and share their stories within the classroom context. In this era of scripted, censored curriculum and high-stakes testing, the opportunities for students to express themselves are becoming increasingly rare. Further, as teachers are pressured to teach to the standards or face negative repercussions, additional strains in the form of cutbacks and economic hardship even further restrict their ability to connect, attend, and respond to the needs of students. Although these factors can be perceived as barriers to what we conceptualize as a call-and-response pedagogy, this paper reminds us of the rewards it extends to both students and teachers in encouraging them to engage in dialogue and create opportunities for acknowledging and sharing the cultural wealth they possess and bring into the classroom. We believe the praxis we achieved with our PEACE class students exemplifies Street’s (2003) call for a critical dialogue between theory and practice, as we drew from critical race theory in shaping the PEACE class and in engaging the young poet-scholars and community we were fortunate to work with. True to the spirit of the central role that the arts have played in promoting social justice within and for communities of color and informed by our own experiences as K-12 students of color, we re-sourced our cultural wealth to build an affirming space with students. Through the collective expression of our aesthetic capital, we attempted to resituate schooling as a critical democratic endeavor and school as a potential site for challenging oppressive social structures.

References

- Alim, H. S. (2009). Hip Hop nation language. In A. Duranti (Ed.), *Linguistic anthropology: A reader*, (pp. 272-289). Oxford, UK: Wiley-Blackwell.
- Akom, A. A. (2009). Critical hip hop pedagogy as a form of liberatory praxis. *Equity & Excellence in Education*, 42(1), 52-66.
- Anzaldúa, G. (1987). *Borderlands/La Frontera: the New Mestiza*. San Francisco, CA: Aunt Lute Book Company.
- Au, W. (2009). Obama, where art thou? Hoping for change in U.S. Education Policy. *Harvard Educational Review*, 79(2), 309-319.
- Bourdieu, P., & Passeron, J. (1977). *Reproduction in education, society and culture*. London: Sage.

- Baraka, I. A. (1963). *The blues people: Negro music in white America*. New York, NY: Morrow and Company, Inc.
- California Department of Education. (2009). School Reports. In *School Profile*. Retrieved from <http://www.ed-data.k12.ca.us/profile.asp?tab=1&level=07&ReportNumber=16&County=19&fyr=0405&District=64634&School=1934231>
- Denzin, N. K. (2000). Aesthetics and the practices of Qualitative Inquiry. *Qualitative Inquiry*, 6(25), 256-265.
- Desai, S., & Marsh, T. E. (2005). Weaving multiple dialects in the classroom discourse: Poetry and spoken word as a critical teaching tool. *Taboo: The Journal of Education and Culture*, 9(2), 71-90.
- Duncan-Andrade, J., & Morrell, E. (2007). Critical pedagogy and popular culture in an urban secondary English classroom. *Critical pedagogy: Where are we now*, 184-199.
- Fisher, M. T. (2005). From the coffee house to the school house: The promise and potential of spoken word poetry in school contexts. *English Education*, 37(2), 115-131
- Foster, M. (2002). *Using call-and-response to facilitate language mastery and literacy acquisition among African American students*. ERIC Clearinghouse on Languages and Linguistics.
- Freire, P. (1982). *Pedagogy of the oppressed*. New York: The Continuum International Publishing Group.
- Gay, G. (2010). *Culturally responsive teaching: Theory, research, and practice*. New York, NY: Teachers College Press.
- Gilroy, P. (1993). *The black Atlantic: Modernity and double consciousness*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Gustavson, L. (2007). *Youth learning on their own terms*. New York, NY: Routledge.
- hooks, b. (1994). *Teaching to transgress: Education as the practice of freedom*. New York, NY: Routledge.
- Hull, G.A., Schultz, K. (2002). Locating literacy theory in out-of-school contexts. In Hull, G., Schultz, K., (Eds.), *School's out!: Bridging out of school literacies with classroom practice* (pp. 11-31). New York, NY: Teachers College Press.
- Johnson, C.L. (1994). Participatory rhetoric and the teacher as racial/gendered subject. *College English*, 56(4), 409-419.
- Kinloch, V. F. (2005). Poetry, literacy and creativity: Fostering effective learning strategies in an urban classroom. *English Education*, 37(2), 96-115.
- Knaus, C. B. (2009). Shut up and listen: Applied critical race theory in the classroom. *Race, Ethnicity and Education*, 12(2), 133-154.

- Ladson-Billings, G. (1998). Just what is critical race theory and what's it doing in a nice field like education? *Qualitative Studies in Education*, 11(1), 7-24.
- Ladson-Billings, G., Tate, W.F. (1995). Toward a critical race theory of education. *Teachers College Press*, 97(1), 47-68.
- Lee, C. D., & Majors, Y. J. (2003) Heading up the street: Localised opportunities for shared constructions of knowledge. *Pedagogy, Culture, and Society*, 11(1), 49-68.
- Lorde, A. (2001). To the poet who happens to be black and the black poet who happens to be a woman. In *Callaloo*, 24(3), 813-814.
- Love, B.J. (2004). *Brown plus 50 counter-storytelling: A critical race theory analysis of the "majoritarian achievement gap" story*. *Equity & Excellence in Education*, 37, 227-246.
- McDonough, P. M. (1997). *Choosing colleges: How social class and schools structure opportunity*. Albany, NY: SUNY Press.
- McLaren, P. (2003). *Life in schools: An introduction to critical pedagogy in the foundations of education*. Boston, MA: Pearson.
- McLaren, P., & Farahmandpur, R. (2005). *Teaching against global capitalism and the new imperialism: A critical pedagogy*. Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield.
- Moraga, C. (1984) La güera. In Moraga, C., Anzaldúa, G. (Eds.) *This bridge called my back: writings by radical women of color* (2nd ed.) (pp. 24-33). New York, NY: Kitchen Table Press.
- Prasad, D. (1998). *Art, the basis of education*. National book Trust.
- Quinn, T. (2006). Out of cite, out of mind: Social justice and art education. *The Journal of Social Theory in Art Education*, 26, 282-301.
- Sale, M. (1992). Call and response as critical method: African-American oral traditions and Beloved. *African American Review*, 26(1), 41-50.
- Saltman, K.J., Gabbard, D.A. (2003). *Education as enforcement: The militarization and corporatization of schools*. New York, NY: RoutledgeFalmer.
- Smitherman, G. (1977). *Talkin and testifyin: The language of Black America*. Detroit, MI: Wayne State University Press.
- Solórzano, D. G., & Villalpando, O. (1998). Critical race theory, marginality, and the experience of students of color in higher education. In Torres, C.A., Mitchell, T.R. (Eds.), *Sociology of education: Emerging perspectives* (pp. 211-224). Albany, NY: SUNY Press.
- Solórzano, D. G., & Yosso, T. J. (2002). Critical race methodology: Counter-storytelling as an analytical framework for education research. *Qualitative Inquiry*, 8(1), 23-44.

- Steele, C. M., & Aronson, J. (1995). Stereotype threat and the intellectual test performance of African Americans. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 69(5), 797-811.
- Stovall, (2006). Forging community in race and class: Critical race theory and the quest for social justice in education. *Race Ethnicity and Education*, 9(3), 243-259.
- Street, B.V. (2003). What's "new" in new literacy studies? Critical approaches to literacy in theory and practice. *Current Issues in Comparative Education*, 5(2), 77-91.
- Sunderman, G. L., Tracey, C. A., Kim, J. & Orfield, J. (2004). *Listening to teachers: classroom realities and No Child Left Behind*. Cambridge, MA: The Civil Rights Project at Harvard University.
- U.S. Department of Education. (2009). Race to the top announcement. Retrieved April 5, 2010, from <http://www.connectlive.com/events/deptedu/>
- Yosso, T.J. (2005). Whose culture has capital? A critical race theory discussion of community cultural wealth. *Race, Ethnicity and Education*, 8(1), 69-91.