

**RE-IMAGINING GRIOTS:
INVESTIGATING THE CURRICULUM STORIES
MALE EDUCATORS OF COLOR TELL**

by

Nakeiha Primus Smith

A dissertation submitted to the Faculty of the University of Delaware in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in Education

Fall 2015

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*(Baby Cakes, you were but a seed when mommy started this journey and you’ve had a front row seat to it all ever since. Thank you for keeping me in the moment...“no distractions,” the cuddles, and having awesome dance parties with me. I love you and believe me when I say, you can/will do **anything** with God on your side.)*

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PREFACE: MINDING THE GAP (MY STORY)

“sistateachachile”

*When I was little...
before too much and not enough
were euphemisms for existence
it was just right
playing skool
ms.teacherchalkboard
"tie your shoes"*

*He spoke to me...dropped a seed there to germinate
the ruminations of divine order*

*When I was little...
the root of the "problem"
couldn't understand how deep IT all really was
Whispered instructions marked on His child
manifested in blessings
through the changes...naysayers*

*"Faith is..."
And there it sits ever glowing
His WILL in me
aflame*

*ignited by the power of story, the spirit of learning
truth answered in knowing
When I was little... (Primus Journal Reflection, 2008)*

When my bout with adolescence nearly drove my mother insane, she gifted me a journal to “keep from killing me.” Writing, she thought, would be a great way to express all the disdain, flights of fancy and cruel judgment that my teenage angst could muster. I took to the exercise and somehow writing (save for a few pubescent outbursts) distracted my hormones enough to quiet my mind and tame the shrew I so desperately wanted to avoid becoming. Yes, fodder for daytime soap operas is found

in the journals of teenage girls. In any event, my mother unwittingly gave me permission to tell my story, to record it and make it stick forever. I still have those journals and continue to chronicle my mental ambling in various ways. My wordsmithing, experiments with language and style, often remain on unlined pages. I rarely share my musings with others; they are closeted fist pumps striking only the air. In the last few years, however, and particularly as *Re-Imagining Griots: Investigating the Curriculum Stories Male Educators of Color Tell* came to fruition, authorship, voice, and authority in writing became increasingly significant, not only in my personal expression, but in my work as an educator.

I entered the University of Delaware a pretty naïve and unseasoned educator who thought the gap between what I had experienced as a classroom teacher in the South and the many *bourgeoisie* academics I had encountered over the years could be best rectified by someone willing to cradle the cleft, someone willing to be a living intermediary between edu-speak and the realities of “the trenches.” Policies, pedagogy, and the priorities of American education were somehow skewed, conflated, miniaturized, and just plain ‘ol altered in the gap. I wanted to be that person. I wanted to converse in both realms articulately and work toward eradicating the ventriloquization, dummifying, and outright silencing that seemed to happen somehow, somewhere in the space in between. The gap was murky, noisy, and forced me to explore the ever-shifting tenets of education to new depths. It required I expose myself in ways I had not imagined.

Early on, I confronted education theory and research with frustration. There were seminars, talks, and assignments that felt inauthentic to what I knew and had experienced as a classroom teacher. I thought about my kids, the students I taught who had embodied all the characteristics of a world they were not quite prepared to live in. From juvenile detention regulars to Advanced Placement veterans, the interactions that I had had with *my kids* fueled my desire to understand and make viable links between the two spheres. What was it about how we (students and teachers) learned together that seemed to make a difference? Why did our personal stories, those hushed and ironically connected to *Beowulf* and Chaucer, matter more and more each time we gathered for class? Interestingly, life intervened and during my doctoral studies I was able to resume teaching English. Being a full time Ph.D. student, middle school English teacher, and subsequent university teacher educator placed me center ring in a dynamic circus. And, each new perspective was akin to a fun house mirror, so to speak. By existing, simultaneously, in these often ideologically divergent realms, I have been uniquely positioned at the core of our society's education paradox, the place wherein a type of polarizing, yet magnetic tethering occurs between education stakeholders. Often, these links lead to stories that frequently overlap and sometimes in ways that mute or deafen others. It is because of these stories that I have found my niche. While the experiences of the case study participants are their own and as my pen only amplifies their voices, I too share my narrative. What I know, particularly as an educator and academic, ignite this research. *Re-Imagining Griots: Investigating the Curriculum Stories Male Educators of Color Tell* is one way I hope to listen, learn, and mind the gap.

ABSTRACT

Intricately weaving an experiential view of curriculum (Dewey, 1922) with the ideologies of literary theorist Rosenblatt (1938), semiotics, and feminist epistemology, this dissertation theorizes curriculum as a unique story. Multidimensional, these stories trace knowledge acquisition and production simultaneously. Furthermore, Gates' (1983) historiography of signification within the Black literary tradition contextualizes these stories as amalgamations of racially codified signs positioned to mediate agency displacement. Employing qualitative and narrative inquiry-based case study methodology (Connelly & Clanindin, 1990; Stake, 1995; Yin, 2009), whereby narrative (storytelling) is both data and method, this dissertation study analyzes how male educators of color construct curriculum narratives from their professional and lived experiences, how these stories are deconstructed and assigned meaning (or read) by students, and explores the potential impact these stories have on praxis/learning, as well as their ability to perpetuate, subvert, and/or disrupt hegemonic notions of curriculum.

Chapter 1

INTRODUCTION: WHEN “ONLY” BECOMES THE NORM

It felt more like a Prohibition speakeasy than a classroom. The atmosphere swirled with lives rendered stoic, reflections clouded with smoke, and muted opportunity. It happened because the story we had been told did not seem to fit. Our experiences confined and under pressure, fermented into an illicit concoction with no safe place to be distilled. We came together as brew masters because we had not had a place to offer our drinks. Our sequestered cipher was a community born to tell. Like the Nuyorican, hushed tones and murmurs of "Amen," syncopated stories dripping with life's hooch. Amplified with agency, we congealed into a voice of authority. We turned what was into should have been. Dimly lit with an undertone of subversiveness, the mood in H16 was palpable; it was real (Primus, Journal Reflection, 2012).

During a 2009 TED talk, Chimamanda Adichie warns listeners about the dangers of the single story. With a critical view of Western literature and via poignant personal anecdotes, she shares how we all become “vulnerable in the face of story.” Whether through mainstay historical characters, gender specific social conditioning, or racial/ethnic stereotypes, the stories we encounter are often versions of *only* instead of *and* or *in addition to*. The problem with these single narratives, as Adichie informs, is the “default positioning” and “patronizing well-meaning pity” that results from our incomplete exposure. Furthermore, this limited view of others also has the capacity to impose, affirm, or negate our own identities. When confined with *only*, as Adichie tells, we “write [or become] exactly the types of stories [we] read.” This message is particularly true in today’s American classrooms. Beyond the scope of the traditional

Western literary canon, Adichie's prompting has significant value in education. Further, in an era when the sociopolitical conversations concerning African American and Black life have (#BlackLivesMatter, #TrayvonMartin, #EricGarner, #FreddieGray, #SandraBland, #ConcernedStudent1950, among others) garnered national attention, these stories speak directly to how such "default positionality" in American society continues to be problematic, especially as it manifests in apprehension toward and deficit thinking about Blackness. The narrative which halos Black life and more specifically the lives of Black men, continues to typify them "menaces to society," (Coates, 2015) which not only distances them from authentic participation (let alone contribution) to the society, but erases and mutes those very viable influences they have had to its success. In such a time, the voices of Black men are not only vital to mending these sociopolitical fissures, but they also validate (and hopefully heal) the wounds such lacerations to humanity have wrought on these men, in all aspects of society.

Curriculum, its lessons, activities, discussions, content, skills, and forms of discipline, among other variables, have narrative power. It is story.

Background and Context

As Olson (2000) states, curriculum is "a dynamic interplay of multiple, ongoing, experiential narratives that are continually reconstructed over time through interactive situations" (p. 170). As such, the stories students confront and ingest rest on how educators reify, re-imagine, and revise curriculum narratives during learning.

These narratives, collections of personal story, contextual insight, education experience, and relational understanding, affect curricular development and implementation. The story each teacher brings to the learning context has direct influence on the story they subsequently create. The ideologies they are imbued with, their existence, telling, and repetition, rest within a power dynamic that by design not only instructs, but also constructs opportunities for self-discovery and identification. They guide the trajectory of education whether they are intended to or not. Teachers, in the current state of education, have a certain level of authority in classrooms that often gives their voices primacy in classrooms.

Although there seems to be malleability in the definitional and operational approaches to curriculum, many educators and students face very narrowed views of what constitutes K-12 classroom teaching and learning today. In recent news, debates about common curricula in public education (Taylor, 2015; Strauss, 2014) have become as mainstay as the weather. Teachers and their students grapple with curricular guidelines aimed at bringing unity to and establishing accountability in education.

Stemming from E.D. Hirsch's work on common knowledge, today's iteration of the Common Core, seeks to avert "a lack of knowledge, both civic and general [that] is the most significant deficit in American student's education" (2009, p. 7). Proponents maintain a central body of knowledge at each level of schooling is essential to maintaining America's global competitiveness and national pride. While this ideology has become the lynchpin of public education, these trends have also been

seen in private and parochial schools (Roebelen, 2012; Davies, 2014). For all realms (public, private, parochial), such information is seen to enhance teacher training and evaluation (Wiener, 2013; Youngs, 2013). While accountability is needed and appropriate, much of Hirsch's work, based on citizen acceptability (a general consensus about information to be taught) and effectiveness (how well such information leads to critical skill building) (2009, p. 12), neglects diverse voices...diverse stories. Unfortunately, curricular uniformity places a hierarchal value on knowledge in America. Further still, and with such a focus, we have established (and continue to reify) a sort of curricular canon wherein people of color are often overlooked, made invisible, and/or completely erased.

Curriculum is more than a standardized course of study and without a critical assessment of the narratives embedded within it, "the unstated norms, values, and beliefs that are transmitted to students through the underlying structure and meaning" (Giroux & Penna qtd. in Langhout & Mitchell, 2008, p. 595) will continue to rob segments of the population of an authentic education. The hidden messages of standardization "reinforce institutionalized racism and classism with the meta-communication that working class and working poor [or any group antithetical to White heterosexual maleness], do not belong in school" (Langhout & Mitchell, 2008). Further, it suppresses and/or erases multiple voices in favor of commonality by inadvertently, and sometimes intentionally promoting conformity to a hegemonic narrative (Lewis, 2001; Baker, 2005). Moreover, curriculum enacted in these ways

also strips teachers and students of their fundamental connection to teaching, learning and the experiences of the classroom (Schubert, 1992; Miller, 1992; Olson, 2001).

Problem Statement

Research indicates there is a narrative connection between curriculum, teachers, and learning (Connelly & Clanindin, 2001), yet little research exists to typify curriculum as a holistic story. Even in the face of standardization, teacher/student history, context, and content, the professional practices of teachers often show (Cochran-Smith, 2001; Picower, 2011) their interactions congeal to form curriculum stories. Collectively, these stories tap into the various hues teachers use to paint pictures of their experiences in the classroom, with content, and as they interact with students. They affirm understanding beyond the existential and create spaces for knowledge production, critique, and standards revision (Stillman & Anderson, 2015). They are authoritative data sources that should be used to further understanding about pedagogy, curriculum, narrative, race, gender, and the intersections that lie therein. Further still, even less research has been done to explore how male educators of color craft their stories as they work in American schools. By intentionally exploring these stories, the possibilities for transforming instruction and student engagement increase. Highlighting them redistributes authority and generates agency for a group that has typically been marginalized in education. Finally, they may provide information about how to further refine teacher education, development, curriculum (practically understood), and foreshadow ways to genuinely engage students in these areas.

Purpose

Re-Imagining Griots: Investigating the Curriculum Stories that Male Educators of Color Tell substantiates curriculum as narrative by widening the socio-cultural lens of curriculum and literary theories. Using narrative research, this dissertation applies this concept, curriculum as story, to two case study participants. In exploring this phenomenon in the lives of male educators of color, it highlights the contextual realities of those often relegated to the periphery in education. Further, as *Re-Imagining Griots* assesses how these educators and their students read and construct curricular stories, it offers important insights about how cultural mediation directly impacts instruction, student engagement, and notions of curriculum in the field.

1.1 Research Questions

Re-Imagining Griots: Investigating the Curriculum Stories that Male Educators of Color Tell explores the following research questions:

- How do the professional and lived experiences of male educators of color guide the construction of their curriculum stories?
- How do these stories inform curriculum theory?
- How do they impact curriculum implementation (student perceptions, involvement, & curricular collaboration)?

Summary

Each chapter of *Re-Imagining Griots* is reflexive. Each uses snippets from my personal narrative (as educator and teacher educator) to orient the reader, encourage reflection, and make transparent my intrinsic interest in narrative as a viable branch of curriculum theory. They offer a glimpse into the ongoing interaction I (as the researcher) had with the participants, their narratives (hereafter interchanged often with “stories”), and the reflective processes inherent to the meaning making process. The literature review, interdisciplinary by design, weaves the aforementioned epistemological frames with curriculum and literary theories to reinforce the narrative traits of experiential curricula. An extensive outline of those methods that support gathering and analyzing narrative data, and a detailed analysis of data collected from male educators of color and their students follows this review. From these analyses, I make recommendations for the use of story in curriculum development and teacher education, as well as postulations about the impact such uses could have within the larger education landscape.

Chapter 2

LITERATURE REVIEW: AN INTERDISCIPLINARY FRAMEWORK

Christopher Columbus sailed the ocean blue and stumbled upon bumbling Indians who didn't know what to do. They got along so well they created Thanksgiving to share corn and sing hymns like good Protestants do. Then there was slavery and yes it was bad, but those poor Africans had it better under the lass. Good 'ol Lincoln and a few of his pals decided to end their wretched state, so he abolished it "quick-fast and in a hurry now." Then came Jim Crow and America was sorry. There was hardly any mention of how the world felt about this story. Martin and Rosa led all the poor blacks, women, and gays with a shout. "Freedom!," they cried and BOOM, it all equaled out. And just when the Lovings could get married with a smile, Leonard Peltier, James Byrd, Columbine, and 9/11 shut the place down...(Primus, satirical reflection; 2012).

The preceding reflection showcases a paradox many in education continue to face when dealing with curriculum as a concept. Can it be practically applied? What information matters? From which perspectives? With what bent or lean? Whether a series of events outlined in a traditional course of study, the mode of delivery or the overall tone of the context, there is no one standard for creating, establishing, and implementing curriculum in classrooms. For years, curriculum theorists, and in more modern times, policy makers have tried to operationalize the nature of what "curriculum" means to American education. Though these attempts (and subsequent school-based ramifications) have disrupted equilibrium at times, it has become increasingly clear that understanding what occurs in real classrooms is critical to the conversation. I contend curriculum is story. As such, it fine-tunes the voices heard throughout and impacted by such discourse.

This chapter demonstrates how and why curriculum is story. Section 2.1 outlines the history of curriculum theory and the definitional debate embedded within it. Through this review, I show how an experiential (but not exclusive) view of curriculum grounds this argument. Following this, I use literary theory and oral tradition to draw parallels between narrative and curriculum. In establishing these as cognates, I assert curriculum as story (one wholly dependent upon reciprocity) and teachers as griots (storytellers). Section 2.4 extends the viability of this argument by authenticating story as a viable mode of knowing, particularly for disenfranchised voices. Using feminist and signification theories, I consider how gender and race impact not only curriculum story construction, but articulation as well. The chapter ends with a review of literature about male educators of color. In exposing a major gap in the field concerning their curriculum narratives, I legitimize their exploration. A seed metaphor and accompanying visuals, accompany each section of this chapter to highlight and clarify the synergy between these areas.

2.1 What is Curriculum?

The earliest ideological difference in defining *currere* or course of study transpired between Aristotle and Plato. In fact, 21st century confusion about the “basic constructs and concepts identified and ascribed as meaningful” (Beauchamp, 1982, p. 24) to curriculum may be linked to their seemingly disparate stances. Aristotle’s curricular inclinations stemmed from his beliefs about moral integrity and justice. He believed that “[a]nything that we have to learn to do we learn by the actual doing of it

[...] We become just by doing just acts, temperate by doing temperate ones, brave by doing brave ones” (qtd. in Smith). Within this paradigm, Aristotle supported subject area knowledge and expertise; students learned not only how to answer “what,” but also “how.” One way to ensure exposure to the “right” kinds of experiences was a categorical approach to knowledge focused on critical thinking. This prescriptive view of curriculum ensured morally upright citizens because more masterful adult teachers taught students discipline-based skills.

In contrast, Plato advocated a less rigid stance on the instruction of children. A proponent of gradual intellectual engagement, Plato believed that children best learned through guided, but informal experience. As children reveal their aptitude for abstract theoretical knowledge (or some other role suited to sustain society), they should learn from experts. By inundating children with knowledge through segmented activity, Plato believed, adults encouraged “superficial fluency,” “aimless contention,” and “disrespect for thought” (Walker, 2003, p. 61). Therefore, he believed that learning should occur in stages. Plato’s educational leanings supported his beliefs about what would create the best kind of society. For him, a society must be lead by those capable of deep philosophical thought, people were best suited to hold particular positions in society, and that educators had a moral duty to teach, and teach as experts (Smith, 2012). As a result of these related, but divergent views, the only constant for modern curriculum theorists has been the existence of two ideals. As educators have tried to stabilize theories of curriculum and in effect define the abstract, it has become clear that “[these] theories can be conceived as clustered in families, each having a

different purpose and perhaps a different form. But all theories [those aforementioned] focus on “rationalizing, conceptualizing, and explaining practice” (Ornstein & Hunkins, 1998, p. 179). Given this, curriculum derives from the meaning ascribed to it and can often be categorized in two general ways: prescriptive or descriptive.

A prescriptive curriculum is a content- and skills-based approach to learning whereby teachers disseminate information and students learn it. While most curriculum theorists are not typically reductive in their stance regarding curriculum designations, those with prescriptive leanings (Bobbitt, 1918; Taba, 1962; Oliva, 1997) focus on subject matter knowledge and skills acquisition (all qtd. in Ellis, 2004) much like Aristotle did. Young describes this categorization (curriculum as fact) as “a historically specific social reality expressing particular production relations among men” (1977 qtd. in Goodson, 1995, p. 13). Through this lens, curriculum most readily manifests as either, “a document or plan of study” or “as a system built to create, implement and evaluate” (Beauchamp, 1982, p. 24) or both. Ascribed to behaviorist thinking of the early 20th century, more modern takes on a prescriptive curriculum use measurable, and often skill/task-oriented goals and objectives to mimic the drive for efficiency “as directed by capitalism and/or industrial modes of managing product creation” (Ornstein & Hunkins, 1998, p. 3) from previous generations. Leading the charge in this area were Bobbitt and Charters, among others.

Using behaviorist methodology, they connected skill-based goals with specific learning activities in order to simulate “productive living” (Ornstein & Hunkins, 1998,

p. 179). A prescriptive curriculum can be a lock-step ladder of content-specific variables. Students acquire specific knowledge and skills; they are assessed using formal methods (often summative assessment), and then move on to the next variable in the sequence. Yet, curriculum understood in this way, does not often take into consideration the various learning styles or roles the student, the teacher, or his/her schooling situation play in learning. Here, where prescriptive curricular ideology dominates or is not augmented, “the classroom become[s] a mausoleum, not a civic forum” (Pinar, 1999). Balancing prescribed notions of curriculum, with a more descriptive and an experienced-based lens casts a wider net when interrogating the storied nature of curriculum.

A descriptive curriculum highlights those “[...] concepts, theories, [and] general ideas reflective expressions of acts and events already embodied [or] achieved in experience” (Dewey, 1922/2009, p. 2). Curriculum as an experiential idea stems from a pragmatic and humanistic view of education. John Dewey, along with William Kilpatrick and Harold Rugg (qtd. in Ornstein & Hunkins, 1998, p. 8) encouraged an understanding and implementation of curriculum that merged behaviorist skill orientations with more progressive ideology about the nature of students’ experiences. For these theorists, “the subjective interventions and actions of teachers and pupils” (Young, 1977 qtd. in Goodson, 1995, p. 12) are important to understand, not simply as experience for experience sake, but because they provide a “holistic view of curriculum [that] is vital to helping practitioners interrogate the purposes of schooling” (Joseph, 2011, p. 4). Here, the seed for curriculum as story takes shape (see Figure 1).

In this way, progressivists, such as Dewey, believed that an experientially based curriculum, one purposed to “inspire experimental action rather than to give information as to how to execute it” (Dewey, 1922/2009, p. 2), would spark societal shifts. A practical education, firmly situated in purposeful experience, would help students better relate to the world they lived in.

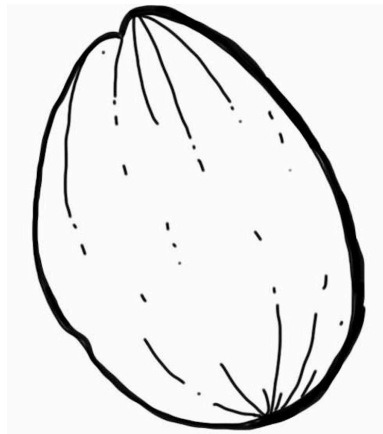


Figure 1. Curriculum as Story Seed: based on experiential learning thread within curriculum theory, which merges action (planting) with a shared and bidirectional experience (fertilization).

Using Ingold’s (2006) ontological theory on dwelling, Ross (2012) extends Dewey’s curriculum as experience ideology by focusing on how curriculum traditionally understood minimizes the highly relational aspects of curriculum whereby “learning is a process of ‘attunement’ to the meaning that inhere in the relationships that make up the world [...]” (p. 304). As such, students’ memories and particular (or peculiar) affectations work in concert to elicit meaning and heighten future moments. For Ross (2012), separating curriculum from meaning making “encourages a valuing of decontextualised knowing of disembodied classificatory

knowledge and facts,” (p. 308). While the tenets of prescriptive-based curriculum alone do not always encourage rote memorization or other forms of decontextualization, modern implementation (Starko, 2013; Greene, 2014) has left practitioners concerned about its ability to foster higher order thinking and consider the individuality of teachers (and students). An experiential perspective of curriculum widens the scope of learning to make room for students as individuals and also takes into consideration *time* and *place*. With this, curriculum shifts from rote delivery to an “[...] extraordinarily complicated conversation [within which] we underscor[e] human agency and the volitional character of human action” (Pinar, 1999, p. 366-367). Again, while prescriptive and descriptive categorizations are not exclusive, curriculum descriptively imagined allows the interdisciplinary nature of its story to be better understood.

Unfortunately, however, and often because there appears to be a lack of clarity, “the curriculum field suffers severely from definitional problems” (Beauchamp, 1982) and a push to concretely name the goals, outcomes and purpose of schooling continue to persist. In the 21st century, these definitions trend toward very deliberate and ordered approaches to learning. According to Bruner (1960), “[l]earning should not only take us somewhere; it should allow us later to go further more easily,” (p. 17). Curriculum for many modern American schools, however, has been defined as a heavily standards-based set of prescriptive activities and pedagogical tools. Hoping to satisfy the demands of education policies such as No Child Left Behind (2001) and its more recent addendums (i.e. Race to the Top and the Common Core), this view of

curriculum has fostered a culture that often dictates homogeneous assessment and measurement. While accountability is important to maintaining a competitive and efficient education system, definitional opacity has often led to misdirection and the gradual erasure of influence among teachers and students. When curriculum shifts from being a set of puzzle pieces easily transferable from one to another to a story created by a collaborative group of tellers, “we can begin to let go of the ‘power’ attributed to the static curriculum, and reposition the power with the learner and the teacher” (Sameshima, 2007). The curricular narratives of teachers (informed by students) stem from particular intersections of memory, history, and identity. Their stories exist and impact learning, no matter how curriculum has been (or continues to be) defined.

2.2 Constructing Curriculum Stories & Making Teacher Griots

“Then we must first of all it seems, supervise the storytellers. We’ll select their stories whenever they are fine and beautiful and reject them when they aren’t. And we’ll persuade nurses and mothers to tell their children the ones we have selected, since they will shape their children’s souls with stories much more than they will shape their bodies by handling them” (Plato, qtd. in Goodson & Gill, 2011, p. 3).

Within most cultures of the world, learning has resulted from mutual knowledge transmission. Whether based in skill, ideology, religious orientation, or practically tied to family/social life, people have consistently engaged in interactive and relational processes in order to survive. In teaching one another, humans have by necessity (invention), experimentation (trial and error), and innovation (curiosity),

established a variety of cultural mores, customs, and artifacts over time. These records, both tangible and intangible, speak to the power of oral tradition, and underscore how the narrative nature of teaching employs and empowers teachers to use curriculum as story.

In her seminal work *Oral Literature in Africa* (2012), Ruth Finnegan juxtaposes the world's affection for written text with lesser acknowledgement of the spoken word. In highlighting a debate that has spanned centuries, she says, "Such forms [oral forms] do not neatly fit into the familiar categories of literate cultures, they are harder to record and present, and, for a superficial observer at least, they are easier to overlook than corresponding written material" (p. 3). In a modern era where literacy, frequently defined by an ability to read and write symbolic text, has social, economic, and other very real implications, it is no wonder why intellectual distance exists between oral tradition and writing. Yet, the very existence of humanity derives itself from the spoken word and "skilled oral art forms preceded and in part predetermined the style of [those] written works which constitute literature in a strict sense" (Ong, 1984, p. 1). This history not only informs current stylistic mainstays of written text, but also sheds light on the initial (and perhaps most important) aims of knowledge transmission: expression, connection, and meaning making.

Historically, oral tradition or "oral narrative" (Hanson, 2009) is ascribed to the African continent, though other indigenous cultures in the Americas, Asia, and others have maintained their cultural identities through similar methods. According to most historians and literary theorists (Finnegan, 1970; Cohen, 1989) attempting to define

oral tradition limits the immense and intense variation spoken narratives have across groups. Yet, as Finnegan (2012) highlights orality, “is dependent on a performer who formulates it [a narrative] in words on a specific occasion [and] there is no other way in which it [the narrative] can be realized as a literary product” (p. 4). In examining the DNA (makeup) of the curriculum story seed, orality (**O**) would be its first building block (see Figure 2). Oral tradition (read: oral narratives, orality, and spoken word) insists on a collective experience of information sharing that is deeply rooted in sustaining cultural identity.

According to narrative theory or narratology, the storyteller inhabits the core of the story (Connelly and Clandinin 1990). As its “central figure” (Carter, 1993), each aspect of the tellers personhood aims in disclosing the narrative, and perceptions guide the trajectory of the story. As the narrative shifts and develops over time, it does not beguile or perpetuate falsehoods, but instead reveals its relational and collaborative power. In this way, “[m]ultiple accounts [of a story] splinter the dogmatism of a single tale. If they undermine the authority of the teller, they also free her from being captured by the reflection provided in a single narrative” (Grumet, 1987, p. 324). As many narrative theorists underscore, storytelling is risky and each story does not need to embody the same form. In many African communities, the *griot* (or female, griotte) represents a “relative unity of a profession anchored in verbal art, in service to noble families, and in the symbiotic relationship of word and music (Hale, 1997, p. 269). He/she is a central figure in society and is often the physical embodiment of those stories that undergird it.

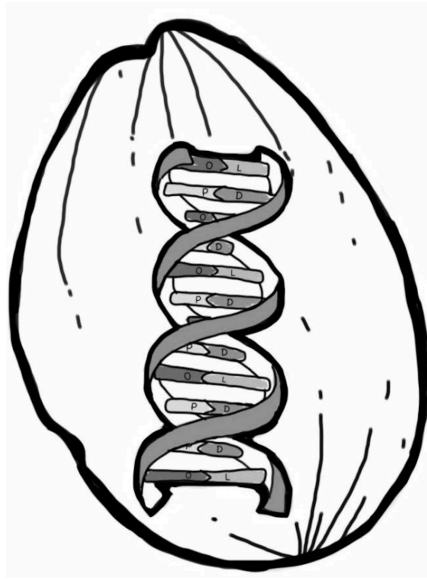


Figure 2. Curriculum Story DNA Base Pairs: Orality (O)—Literary Theory (L); Feminist Epistemology (P)—Signification Theory (D)

Griots As Unique Storytellers

According to Thomas Hale, the term *griot* has historically suffered from etymological ambiguity because of Western inability to ascribe and/or assign written origin of the word (or its etymological ancestors) to Africa (1997). “One reason,” Hoffman says, “for this ambivalence is fear of the power of words or sung by griots” (qtd. in Hale, 1997, p. 249). Since they “are charged with talking social life; they are burdened by a localized politics of representation” (Stoller, 1994, p. 353) and this gives their stories unique power. Their stories act as archives and attest to the existence of civilization before Western dominance.

The role of the griot can be seen early in the development of the great Mali Empire (West Africa) through the oral narrative of Sundiata Kieta. While this story

has since been written, it passed through several Mandinka generations orally and aligned the people to a royal heritage. According to John Gentile (2011), griots “possess[ed] the power to construct Mali’s cultural identity in the present, and therefore, shape its future” (p. 150). Griots, by many accounts (Daniel, 2007; Hale, 1997; Stoller, 1994) were akin to a specialized master class of artisans responsible for teaching, facilitating, and learning the ways of the people to whom they were responsible. Their stories were (and continue to be) invaluable. For the griot, stories are powerful because they are beacons for understanding. Their stories “serve the needs of West Africans who must communicate with each other across numerous linguistic frontiers within Africa as well as with people outside of the continent, be they African or non-African” (Hale, 1997, p. 271). The griot’s role and their stories imperatively align narrative with education because they relay information, maintain genealogical records, teach lessons, and often make historic memory tangible.

The Importance of Curriculum Stories

Curriculum narratives provide “a testimony, a documentary source, a changing map of the [education] terrain: [they are] also one of the best official guidebooks to the institutionalized structure of schooling” (Goodson, 1995, p. 16). Their existence, invisibility or erasure, shapes the trajectory and the overall tone of students’ experiences. As an amalgamation of signs (events, influences, people, etc. to which meaning is ascribed), curriculum stories are penned by a multitude of authors. For literary theorist, Louise Rosenblatt, the interplay between the author, the text (story),

and the reader (teacher or student) offer a viable point of analysis for interpreting and understanding the role such literature has in culture. Through reader response, she asserts, it is easier to ascertain the literary DNA of a story. She says:

A story or a poem is merely inkspots on a paper until a reader transforms them into a set of meaningful symbols. When these symbols lead us to live through some moment of feeling, to enter some situation or event, we have evoked a work of literary art. Literature provides a living through, not simply knowledge about [...] (2011).

Here, the second building block for curriculum as story (**L**) literary theory exists (see Figure 2). Furthermore, Rosenblatt asserts these representations (signs within a text) do not “come to be” on their own, but their message transfers only in the exchange between these signs and the reader. Each exchange or *reading journey* is unique given the stance of each reader (Karolides, 1999). Similarly, curriculum is a story that can be read.

As a set of symbols, the learning activities, conversations, and choices made within a learning situation are imbued with meaning because of what its authors (teachers and students) bring to it as they read, reflect, and continuously revise the experience, yet many of the current buoys afloat in education reflect a very narrow reader and limited scope of curriculum. Specifically highlighting those narratives that reveal inequity, triumph over pervasive disenfranchisement, and relational duality in American education provide a clearer topography. These stories reveal with better acuity, not only the peaks, but also the very tangible valleys embedded within American schools. *Re-Imagining Griots* attempts to codify these stories and make

visible what two male educators of color *live through* as they teach, learn, and interact within a very traditional (read: White) educational landscape.

As literature, curriculum narratives offer meaning along Rosenblatt's efferent (information "carried away") and aesthetic (what is felt via senses or emotion) continuum. It is along this spectrum where both practical information, as well as visceral awareness, commingles to elicit a response whereby:

a reciprocal process emerges, in which growth in human understanding and literary sophistication sustain and nourish each other. Both kinds of growth are essential if the student [or teacher] is to develop the insight and the skill needed for participation in increasingly complex and significant literary works (Rosenblatt, 1995, p. 52).

Unlike a list or table, curriculum is a story that is influenced by the stances of its readers (teachers and students). Bakhtin's dialogic construction also works well to further foreground this notion.

As a literary theorist, Bakhtin (1981) constructed dialogism to showcase how words should not be typified as things, but as: "focal points[s] for heteroglot [diverse] voices among which [a writer's or speaker's] own voice must also sound" and "create[s] the background necessary for [the writer's] own voice, outside of which his artistic prose nuances cannot be perceived, and without which they 'do not sound' (278). This *dialogue* is essential to how curriculum stories are not only read, but are created. Bahktin (1981) states, "to study the word as such [as an inanimate thing], ignoring the impulse that reaches out beyond it, is just as senseless as to study psychological experience outside the context of that real life toward which it was directed" (p. 292). Bahktin further asserts "all socially significant world views have

the capacity to exploit the intentional possibilities of language through the medium of their specific concrete instancing” (1981, p. 290). Education is a “socially significant” endeavor and each instance of a teacher’s narrative beckons our attention because it may offer valuable insights about how, why, and under what auspices learning takes place in American schools. Even in an era of increased standardization, they are insisted upon, overtly or covertly, everyday, as students go about learning. Their words connect to multiple subjectivities in very concrete ways. For male educators of color, specifically, curricular narratives beckon our attention because they exist in such limited quantities. Further, because they are so often left out and unexplored, we miss opportunities to learn from them, expand our understanding of teaching and learning, and shift how curriculum functions in diverse learning contexts.

Curriculum is a story and “conceiving [it] as text or discourse compels us to listen to and make sense of the words, phrases, and patterns of language that” characterize and shape it (Joseph, 2011, p. 6). Through each expression, stories “[...] are not merely raw data from which to construct interpretation but [are] products of a fundamentally interpretive process that is shaped by the moralistic impulses of the author and by narrative forces or requirements” (Carter, 1993, p. 9). It is at the nexus of this interaction where meaning can be deduced and extends beyond the confines of the individual teacher. Beyond the exchange between the storyteller and the audience, the story itself has a specific purpose. Most apparent is the agency the story provides for the teacher. Until vocalized in the narration, there is no validation for an experience beyond the existential. The story, as both mode of interaction and

affirmation, allows the teller to engage in what Elbow deems the “believing game” (1986; qtd. in Connelly & Clandinin, 2001, p. 4).

According to Carter (1993) a story is “[...] a telling or recounting of events characterized by a central figure interacting with a specific context for a specific purpose within a particular time” (p. 6). Carter’s description of story is similar in nature to how other theorists (Craig, 2000; Elbaz-Luwisch, 2001; Lewis, P., 2011) not only define narrative, but also contextualize it. This positioning is important to understanding how story, as a recorded representation (whether via memory or verbal text) gains significance as it develops and shifts with each telling. Griots are unique storytellers who utilize “the societal, historical, and philosophical tones of consonance [to create] an accord by employing stories that ‘are animated by the desire to preserve pasts too often trivialized, built over, or erased, and to pass them on’” (Foreman qtd. in Atkinson, E. 2011). Teachers, as they interact, consider, and remain responsive to their students, often act as griots. Their stories, existing in multiple forms, directly shape the learning experience (read: curriculum) of their students and are worth investigation.

Teachers as Griots

While the specific label of “griot” has yet to be directly applied to teachers, many of the basic tenets found within oral and literary traditions can be found in teaching. Historically, teachers have occupied positions in society that emphasize guiding children toward the specific aims and ideals of a community. Further, until

compulsory education emerged in America in the late 19th century, parents, religious organizations, and master tradespeople were responsible for ensuring that the younger generations had adequate preparation and could positively contribute to society. In order to do this, “stories and fables became the accepted media for teaching the young about their history” (Houston, 2009, p. 19). Along with providing youth with authentic learning opportunities, these stories were the backbone of the American education experience. Philosophers, such as John Dewey, were particularly vocal about the role teachers had in society. He said, “I believe that every teacher should realize the dignity of his **calling**; that he is as social servant **set apart** for the maintenance of proper social order and the serving of the right social growth” (qtd. in Nebeker, 2002, p. 14, emphasis added). As teaching became more revered, ideas about teacher identity, curriculum, and methodology were topics of hot debate (see Section 2.1). Yet, and even in the advent of writing, oral tradition has greatly influenced the role teachers have had (and continue to have) on their students.

One of the most indicative characteristics of the griot narrative is the creative execution of his/her tale. According to Finnegan, oral narratives come into existence because of their performative quality. She says, “without its oral realization and direct rendition by singer or speaker, an unwritten literary piece cannot easily be said to have any continued or independent existence at all” (2012, p. 5). Similarly, teachers, through the use of course materials (whether innovated or prescribed), personal anecdotes, and other ancillary materials “perform” each day as they interact with students. According to Daniel (2007),

the tale told by the storyteller is unmediated: there is no defined text to provide the teller with the words they are going to use; telling as opposed to reading a story leave the teacher more dependent on their own resources and thus more vulnerable before their pupils. (p. 736)

This work, and teachers' awareness of student internalization, substantiates a collective story that "can bring abstract principles to life by giving them concrete form" (Green, 2004, p. 1). While not always of measured quality, but important nonetheless, educators transfer societal dogma when teaching, particularly as they are reinforced.

Even in the midst of standardization, teachers' act as griots because of the very cyclical nature of their craft. Finnegan (2012) and Ong (1984) agree that oral literature is distinct because of its "verbal variability" (Finnegan, 2012, p. 10). Within this construct, oral narratives uniquely differ from written text because an important account of the artist (or teacher) must be made when determining the impact of his/her performance. Here, how the performer "actualizes" a piece is critical. Even in the advent of writing, "[w]hat gave a work its identity consisted very little in what it looked like. The work was what it said when someone was reading it, converting it into sound in the imagination or more likely aloud" (Ong, 1984, p. 2). As teachers echo their narratives over time, their sense of the information and the experience develops, leading to narrative innovation. Some theorists characterize an actualized story as memorization (Daniel, 2007), but the narratives teachers employ cannot be sites of regurgitation because their audiences shift so often.

Finnegan notes that perhaps the most significant influence on an oral narrative is its audience. She states, “there is no escape for the oral artist from a face-to-face confrontation with his audience, and this is something which he can exploit as well as be influenced by” (2012, p. 12). Because oral narratives are sites of meaning making, the audience can directly affect the shape, color, tone, and experience of each telling. Teachers, as griots, “must know their audiences and sociocultural context, as well as their performance texts and traditions” (Stoller, 1994, p. 154) so they can connect to presented narratives. These stories help mutually build or enhance identity (Blue, 2012; Brooks and Browne, 2012), shift nuance or delivery of content (Craig, 2014; Davis et. al, 2011), and allow listeners to interject into the narrative (Buras, 2009). Curriculum stories are shaped because of this profound connection to orality.

The Storied Nature of Teaching and Learning

Stories are not only tools for deducing meaning, but are conduits for “a way of coming to know the other's story and as giving the other voice” (Connelly & Clandinin, 2001, p. 4). Peter Smagorinsky (2001) helps to operationalize the interplay between readers (teachers and students) and text (story) by offering additional theoretical grounding to Rosenblatt's concept. Smagorinsky highlights the dialogic nature of reading while also showing how producing new texts is integral to meaning making for readers. Dialogic by design, the transactional theory of reading has most often been used in English Language Arts (ELA) classrooms by employing reader-response activities. As a pedagogical tool to elicit feedback from students after they

have engaged with a text, educators attempt to glean feedback and assess understanding. Bob Fecho (2012) describes how reader-response has been used for decades in order to create discourse in classrooms. ELA educators prompt their students, either formally or informally, to think about particular characters, themes, and symbols within the novels, plays, and poems within their course of study. As the lynchpin of the transactional theory of reading, reader-response does not solely exist in the domain of English education.

Sutherland, 2008; Siegel & Fonzi, 1995; and Perl, 1994 are among many researchers, practitioners, and theorists across numerous fields to apply reader-response theory to their unique learning communities. At the core of many of these studies is the premise that reader-response is a way to help students not only learn new information, but is also a way for students to “live through” and experience based on what the text sparks in them (1995). Fecho (2012) postulates that the placement of any text (and it can be argued the nature/content of that text) is relational because “we always respond to the texts of our lives (p. 478).” Whether an inquiry-based study on number sense, a physiologic response to heat or a written response to Romeo’s words during the balcony scene with Juliet, reader-response, when enacted, offers an important lens through which to view each stakeholder in the reading journey. Comprised of subject matter content, disciplinary approaches, and other visible/invisible aspects of the entire learning context, curriculum, much like a novel or a play, can be read and by the very nature of the experience it offers or sparks, is highly response-oriented.

As story, curriculum has multiple functions and its purpose does not solely rest in what the aesthetic prompts in its readers or writers. The efferent components of curriculum, like other texts, offer information. These concepts, skills, and assertions help readers develop beyond their current ability much like an editorial can help readers understand differences in style, vocabulary, syntax, and audience. While the aesthetic has a particular role in the curriculum text, disconnecting efferent objectives from their aesthetic promptings only lessens the impact of the overall narrative. Interestingly, Cynthia Lewis' (2000) problematization of the aesthetic within Rosenblatt's theory offers an invaluable springboard for widening the definitions of text, as well as a way to offer more depth on how reader-response could be used. Focusing on the inclination of educators to use Rosenblatt's delineation of the aesthetic stance to "conflate the personal" in ways that distort and/or minimize the textuality of a work (p. 255), she shows how the authority and agency of readers has been simplified.

Lewis contends that the use of reader-response has focused too heavily on personalizing the reading journey (i.e. how does this make you feel?) rather than using the personal as an initial point of critical social and political analysis. While this may seem counterintuitive to the whole aesthetic notion, by deepening how aesthetic meaning is gleaned from text and highlighting the information that stems from the interaction, she re-establishes the authority of the text to speak beyond individual readers and widens the work it is able to do beyond immediate learning. Yet, because reader-response is typically a student-centered pedagogical tool, teacher influence on

the reading journey becomes contracted, and their voice minimally present in the response. In substantiating curriculum as story worthy of critical reader-response, Lewis' (2000) critique offers an important niche for the voice of educators in reader-response pedagogical design. She states:

Rosenblatt's notion of aesthetics is not limited to the personal and pleasurable, they place these categories of response within Rosenblatt's "evocation," and argue that students need to move beyond evocation to interpretation, a skill that can only result from an understanding of the codes and conventions of literary texts. (p. 256)

With Lewis' (2000) expansion, *living through* requires critical moments of identification (or alienation, in some cases) and deduction of information to enact a type of analysis by the reader that reveals internal dimensionality, as well as that present in the text. Here, the story becomes more than emotion, but representative of a collective of influential content and variables, most chosen or observed by the teacher. Her critique, when applied to the curriculum story begs the question, what codes, symbols and motifs exist in the curriculum story? Lewis' (2000) analysis to the curriculum story illuminates the socio-political nature inherent in Rosenblatt's theory by way of a more critical approach to understanding the aesthetic-efferent continuum and in turn, further supports the textuality of curriculum as story. While curriculum narratives may be inherently lean toward aesthetic readings, the role of teacher-griots in school environment make them simultaneously efferent. Teachers are charged with providing spaces where information can be gleaned, gathered, and created. The curriculum story authenticates not only what was/could have been learned, but also

validates the experience and existence of the actual people involved. While there may appear to be a hierarchy of agency in the construction of curriculum stories, there in fact is a more bidirectional interaction at play. Given the role teachers have, as expert learners per se, in classrooms they often initiate curriculum story construction, but this is not always the case. The story becomes valid when there is a reciprocal exchange between teacher and students; this is the crux of reader-response; it is a validation process.

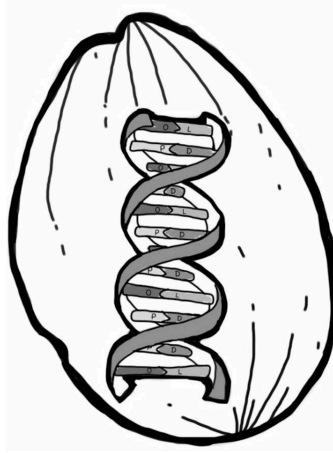
Further, Smagorinsky asserts the production of new textual products, as a means to deepen meaning ascribed to an initial reading journey, is essential to reader-response (2001, p. 34). In shaping curriculum narratives, these textual products can take the form of a written course of study, lesson plan, or even scribbled notes a teacher may take in observing his/her narrative at play within a specific context. These responses, whether tangibly written or not, amplify the overall significance of the narrative because they directly impact future iterations (replication) of the narrative itself. The relational scope of Rosenblatt's transactional theory of reading widens by extending more agency and interactive capacity within this paradigm to the writer. Unique to its form, the creation of "new texts" in response to or simultaneous with the reading journey of curriculum allows its authors to shift roles. Unlike more static forms of literature, curriculum narratives exist primarily because the kinetic links between the text, the reader, and the writer whose roles can shift throughout the reading journey.

As teachers reflect on their students' responses to the curriculum text (read or observe their responses to it), they transfer authorship to them and vice versa. Moreover, as teachers read and reflect on students' responses to their pedagogical approaches (the foci of most reader-response activities) they transfer this knowledge into an acute awareness of their curricular inclinations. What emerges from this cyclical reading journey is the consistent production of new curriculum stories over time. Yet, while there is literary merit in highlighting and assessing curriculum stories, little to no attention has been given to how teachers, particularly of color, often occupy the role of storyteller (or griot) in teaching and learning. While education research explores the use of story in classrooms and how reader response methodology can enhance student engagement (Green, 2004; Langer de Ramirez, 2005/6), research that ties teachers to the narratives they embody, create and ultimately share (and often revise) with their students is limited. Without understanding this process, we cannot fully appreciate the nature of teaching and learning in our society. We will continue to perpetuate curricular canon that suppresses the experiences of those integral to the field.

2.3 Diversifying Knowing: Peripheral Curriculum Stories

Writing is like spreading your legs. People are going to come in. They're going to enter through your orifices. When you read me you're coming into me. There are intimate secrets lodged in my body that I go around exposing to perfect strangers. Every writer is a bit of an exhibitionist. Exposing myself is a conscious act. As soon as I reveal myself to you, open my legs up to you, take my clothes off to you and open my heart to you, I also hide myself." ~Gloria Anzaldúa

Given the invaluable utility of story to augment the voices and endorse the identities of its tellers, curriculum stories have socio-political power. While a story can be used as a means to know self and legitimize individuality, it can also test, negate or affirm other modes of knowing. In research questioning the absence of narrative in education, Patrick Lewis (2011) describes stories as “spaces of resistance, resistance to the narratives of instituted power [...]” wherein people try to gather insight, limn the obstacles present, and counter the status quo (p. 506). While the story may have inherent risks for the teller based on his/her individual stance, some stories beckon scrutiny because they antagonize the power dynamics inherent within a system. For male educators of color, specifically, the griot role and the stories he embodies in his teaching are of unique utility because they go against the grain of the traditional curricular canon that has (and often continues to) suppress them. Given what is at stake in the realm of education, many curriculum stories, particularly those not delivered by proxy or voiced from the margins, are charged in this way. Through feminist epistemology (**P**) and signification theory (**D**) (see duplicate Figure 2 below), curriculum, as story, grows beyond the embedded experiences of individual teacher-griots and their students to reveal their potential for subversive and social justice orientations.



Duplicate Figure 2. Curriculum Story DNA Base Pairs: Orality (O)—Literary Theory (L); Feminist Epistemology (P)—Signification Theory (D)

Feminist Epistemology. Used most often to underscore the impact of authorship within feminist literature, a “[t]heory in the flesh [is] one where the physical realities of our lives, our skin color, the land or concrete we grew up on, our sexual longings—all fuse to create a politic born out of necessity” (Moraga, 1984, p. 23). This politic when applied to curriculum stories, serves to mark them as unique signposts within the hegemonic and calculatedly masculine and white terrain of education in America. *Re-Imagining Griots* was a study born out of such “necessity” because of how both race and gender have worked to silence men of color in education. A historiographical examination (Takaki, 1993; Loewen, 2007; Kozol, 1992) of education in America quickly reveals that the country’s incubatory period founded a system and conceptual understanding of education that served to fortify the

privilege, power, and positionality of White men. In exploring the antagonistic nesting that has occurred to male educators of color within education, this thinking is useful because it: 1) situates teaching by non-Whites as a social justice endeavor, 2) dismantles patriarchal norms inherent to it, and 3) operationalizes how gender, socially constructed and applied, has been used in conflicting ways to subordinate teaching as a profession, marginalize (read: “feminize”) male teachers, and back-handedly empower them in order to perpetuate masculine ideals characteristic of the hegemonic system. Theory in the flesh, an outgrowth of the work of feminist writers (Moraga, 1983) more specifically, allows the epistemological understandings of these teacher-griots (as revealed in their stories) to shift from murmurs to markers. Further,

it is through the griot lens that African American authors [including teachers] construct social harmony through metaknowledge: by emphasizing West African and African philosophical tropes, discourses are simultaneously created, commented, [and] criticized. (Atkinson, E., 2011, p. 3)

The existence of each story diffuses issues related to racial location, gender, sexual orientation, and other facets of their identity onto the larger education landscape.

Gloria Anzaldúa employs “theory in the flesh” in her *autohistorias* and *testimonias* in order to shed light on her experience, but also to vocalize her authority as female, lesbian, and Chicana. In her poem, “The Presence,” Anzaldúa recounts her experience of being a doctoral student and her method for writing. She recalls, “If I had told anyone/I had followed the workings of consciousness/and that it was a spirit looking over my left shoulder/my left shoulder, they would have held/finger to temple and made circles” (Keating, 2009, p. 120). This poem reveals a way of knowing that

does not align with accepted tradition. The image of a person putting a finger to their head and making circles indicates her awareness that what she has described could be considered crazy to others. Would a sane student “listen to” the promptings of a spirit? For Anzaldúa, the presence she heeded was an outgrowth of her culture and faith that groomed her to maintain a respect for what others would consider supernatural. Throughout Anzaldúa’s work, she affirms this way of knowing. In “Haciendo teorías,” she writes:

Theory produces effects that change people and the way they perceive the world. Thus we need *teorías* that will enable us to interpret what happens in the world, that will explain how and why we relate to certain people in specific ways [...] *Necesitamos teorías* that will rewrite history using race, class, gender, and ethnicity as categories of analysis, theories that cross borders [...] (Keating, 2009:136).

Theory in the flesh, as an epistemology (**P**), concretizes one’s experience and offers an important way to enter into conversation with others. Central to theorizing in the flesh is a “profound form of scholarship moving serious study close to the frontiers of art in the capacity to express complex truths and moral context in intelligible ways (Featherstone, 1989, qtd. in Lawrence-Lightfoot, 2005, p. 12). Curriculum stories stretch beyond pure postulation because they are built on the premise that with each telling, each interactive experience, theory is tested, revised, and retold. Stories, in this way, become more definitive as they are affirmed. For male educators of color, curriculum narratives elicit truth from experience, but also affirm practice. Aurora Levins Morales extends this when she states,

My thinking grew directly out of listening to my own discomforts, finding out who shared them, who validated them, and in **exchanging stories about**

common experiences, finding patterns, systems, explanations of how and why things happened (emphasis added qtd. The Latina Feminist Group, 2001, p. 29).

If the curriculum story includes the conversations, activities, expectations, and content embedded within a learning situation, how do the personal theories of its authors impact the type of story that is told at a particular time? By analyzing how male educators of color, specifically, come to know and then translate this knowledge through narratively infused curriculum texts, their stories can serve as conduits of understanding whereby “knowledge [is] imprinted in some way on learner[s]” (Lawrence-Lightfoot, 2005, p.12). On a continuum that could typify/characterize educators in America, men of color are furthest away from the cultural norms of female and Whiteness. While this placement does not inherently connote the amplification of social justice orientations, the stories these men tell and often embody, “contain both power and the art of possibility” (hooks, 2010, p. 53). Though some stories may pulse as narratives of agency, others may perpetuate hegemonic norms. In either case, mining these stories sheds light on the institutional power of education within classrooms. Their readers would not just constitute the students engaged in the initial delivery of these narratives, but also academics, researchers, and policy makers so that future ways of knowing (as expressed and authenticated through story telling) can be more inclusive.

Despite these possibilities, however, theory in the flesh (particularly situated within qualitative research) has undergone scrutiny because of the highly personal nature of the epistemology. How can rigorous research be done within a theoretical

framework whereby subjectivity is key? To this, Anzaldúa's replies that to not "cite authority figures, to get quotations and inspiration from master writers—writers who never had our experiences [and] quote from their disembodied theories" would verify that "theirs [theories] was not an exclusive school of thought" (Keating, 2005, p. 192-193).

Semiotics. A noted semiotician, Charles Pierce (1906) helped found the field by proposing meaning was an outgrowth of a thought process wherein the mind ascribed significance to objects and actions through symbolism. Theory in the flesh aligns well with Pierce's (1906) ideas about signification and further substantiates the authority of subjectivity. Further, signification produces a cultural construct as a reference to that symbol (Siegel, 1983, p. 8) that fortifies the meaning ascribed to it. In short, semiotics explores how signs are culturally mediated to assist in ascertaining meaning. Within a literary text, for example, semiotics supposes that each sign carries its own meaning and when linked with other signs can shift meaning depending on what the interpretant (the first sign created/viewed) signifies to the others. Unlike representation where signs stay fixed within an experience, signification "[...] causes its interpreter [reader/viewer] to take note of objective conditions, to see himself significantly as being implicated in relations which the sign serves to objectify [make reference to]" (Mosier, 1951, p. 43) and thereby move beyond a given experience. This mode of meaning making was further defined by how these signs function structurally within narrative.

Signification theory complements the dialogic nature of text (Bakhtin, 1981) and underscores the relationship triad of Rosenblatt's transactional theory of reading. When applied in this way, the impact of curriculum, as a story (a set of signs and symbols) grows exponentially. For teacher-griots, signification theory substantiates the plausibility of culturally mediated signs, interpretations, and a critical transfer of meaning beyond their individual experiences. Their curriculum stories simultaneously establish knowledge through self and validate knowledge by firmly affixing meaning beyond the self to them. Further, Rosenblatt (1938) and Bakhtin's (1981) reader-oriented/dialogic theories, stress the interactive nature of such texts. Yet, neither of these conceptual frames explicitly addresses how race and/or gender influence how one interacts with, creates, or gleans meaning from such signs texts (here: curriculum stories) within his/her sphere. In examining the racial impact of signification, dialogism, and how these signs are created and read, Henry Louis Gates' (1983) work, along with the concept of *nommo* in West African oral tradition strengthens this idea.

Signification Re-Imagined. Gates (1983) attributes signification theory to historic literary motifs within the Black Diaspora. As an almost counter-genesis narrative to more Western views of semiotics, Gates places signification within a Black linguistic tradition and defines it as "a technique of indirect argument or persuasion; a language of implication"(Abrahams, 1964 qtd. in Gates, 1983, p. 689) most readily characterized in the caricature of the trickster monkey. Through the Signifying Monkey tale, Gates shows how "signifying can also be employed to reverse or undermine pretense or even one's own opinion about one's own status" (1983, p.

681). Using the fluidity of language, the monkey subversively influences the elephant and causes a ruckus in the process. He uses double entendre and hyperbole to play on the Lion's preconceived notions of particular signs and their "traditional" meanings. The Monkey "succeeds in reversing the Lion's status by repeating a series of insults purportedly uttered by the Elephant about his close relatives" (Gates, 1988, p. 56). In this way, the Monkey becomes a mediator of language. His fluency, given his ability to *signify* allows him to 'unknot knowledge' (Gates, 1983, p. 687) and "[dwell] at the margins of *discourse*, ever punning, ever troping [becoming in himself a trope] for repetition and revision" (p. 686). By example, the Monkey shows that signification, when enacted, is not a process of relating the signs to some abstract thing, but is instead action upon and within the codes of language.

Signifying's key characteristic is one's ability to eloquently and articulately re-imagine and re-purpose traditional modes of sign (in this case story telling) and similarly represents the griots use of *nommo* (Atkinson, E., 2011) to cause change. In West African oral tradition, *nommo* highlights a spiritual connection to and "transforming power of vocal expression" (Ale Kubelan, 2012, p. 58) and allows: 1) correction or revision, 2) renaming or self-naming, and 3) extension or multiplicity to occur in story. Mastering this duality (and sometime multiplicity) is akin to what W.E.B. DuBois deems as the possession of a double consciousness (1903) best expressed through an ability to "code switch" so that signs have multiple meanings. It is important to note, however, this extension of signification theory, does not insist (or imply) race/racial identity is inherited. Instead it acknowledges how race, as a social

construct, can impact generational memory. Further, it emphasizes how race (or perceived differences based on race) reinforce notions of capacity, knowledge valuation, and agency in a 21st century society reeling with more overt insights about these matters. Extending signification theory in this way, therefore, reaffirms how the internalization of such constructs can alter the overall expression of a curriculum story (see Figure 3) and impacts the space wherein such a narrative is told (or exists).

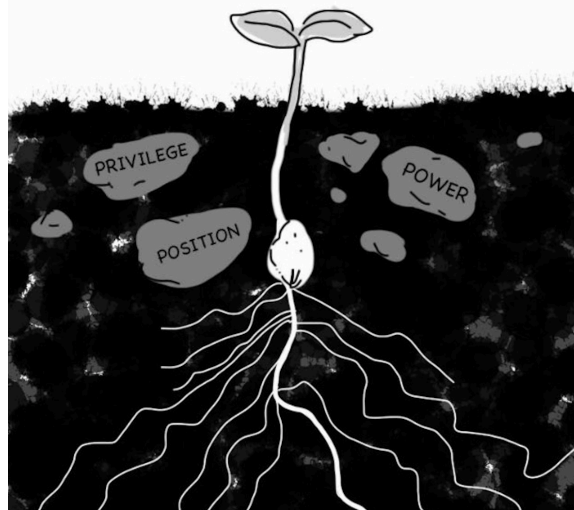


Figure 3. The Story Seed Germinates w/in Social Constructs of Race & Gender

Aligned with what Anzaldúa and Morales express through theory in the flesh, and heightened with the awareness of race, when the Monkey signifies, each word (sign) “[calls] attention to itself by rhyming, repetition and several of the rhetorical figures [such as loud-talking and playing the dozens] used in larger cultural language games,” and (Gates, 1988, p. 53) these devices also mirror traditional linguistic modes, but are often subversive in their expression. Gates (1983) refers to this as

dissemblance, or the “repeating a form and then inverting it through a process of variation” (p. 694). For teacher-griots of color, curriculum narratives reveal areas where such dissemblance may be possible.

Much like the feminist counter-narratives of Moraga (1983) and others, these stories can be told and retold in ways that deviate from the original narrative primarily because of how the signs within them are interpreted and by whom. This dissemblance, particularly when curriculum stories appear to mirror standard or more traditional education discourses, serve to redirect the gaze of administrators, colleagues, and others unaware of the “politic” (Moraga, 1983) embedded within the story. For educators of color, this liminal space is ripe for repurposing the “master’s tools” (lorde, 1994, p. 112). A curriculum story allows educators “[not] to ape the master,” but tell stories “in [a] vernacular [that] uses the knowledges and histories of white cultures [and] other ethnic cultures” (Keating, 2005, p. 189) to “break up the lumber of stereotypes, fossilized beliefs [...] and all other things that impede the free movement of society” (Frye, qtd. in Gates, 1983, p. 699). Much like the Monkey uses signification to redefine language, educators, and particularly those of color, may use their curriculum narratives to implode tradition. Yet, and in contrast, because dissemblance requires a certain level of cultural awareness (how, for instance race and gender inform identity, the education landscape, etc.), **misreading** the curriculum stories of male educators of color is also possible. In both instances, however, further emphasize why such stories are important to evaluate. These seeds germinate and

look (or are ‘read’) a certain way, but there are more to them than what each telling may reveal.

Evaluating the Gap. Most notably, researchers in math (Nathan et al, 2007; Brown, 2008; Roth, 2012) explore how students use subjectivity in order to conceptualize and contextualize math concepts and ideas, defined specifically as signs. In the realm of literary theory, signification has been used a tool for theorists (Ryan, 2007; Bennett, 2010; Scalia, 2012) interested dissecting the literary nuance and style of particular texts, authors, and genres. Ryan’s (2007) work, in particular, explores how the diagramming of stories within semiotic designations (temporal-time, spatial-context/place, and mental-associations) showcases how individuals visualize narrative information. While her specific examination of narrative diagramming do not readily apply to education or to curriculum, Ryan’s (2007) cueing helps to operationalize how semiotics, through narrative diagramming, reveals the multidimensionality of textual signs.

Based on her research, curriculum, as a specific type of narrative could be represented as overlapping circles (see Figure 4) of the spatial, temporal, and mental dimension of narrative processing. Ryan’s (2007) assertion that the “causal relations—the cement that holds the events into a story—may connect temporally separated events” reveals the unique functioning of signs within a story.

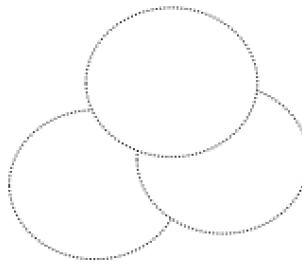


Figure 4: A possible rendering of Ryan’s (2007) method of diagramming narrative when applied to curriculum story. Here, the overall sign could represent the “telling” (utterance or vocalization) of the story.

In this way, the visual representation of the curriculum story showcases its non-linearity, layered, cyclical, and interconnected functioning. Moreover, each dot (or influencing sign) within each dimension of the story has an important role in the meaning of the overall signification of the story.

According to Daniel (2007), assessing the narrative structure of teaching, “provides a tool for metacognitive reflection” (p. 738). Further, he asserts, “[w]hile it is necessary to be able to sequence events in order to create a coherent narrative (initiating event, episodes and resolution), the connections between these elements [or signs] need to be understood in order to make sense of the events themselves” (p. 739). The “signs” that anchor curriculum stories are such tools. In citing the work of Greimas and Cortes (1982), Daniel “identified six functions within narrative,” which were:

- 1) Subject: the character around whom the narrative turns.
- 2) Object: what the subject wants to achieve or acquire.
- 3) Sender: the person(s) or force(s) that moves the Subject to seek the Object.
- 4) Receiver: the person(s) that benefits from the Subject’s successful quest for the Object.
- 5) Helper: the person(s) or force(s) that aid the Subject in their quest for the

Object

- 6) Opponent: the person(s) or force(s) that opposes the Subject's completion of their quest for the Object (qtd. in Daniel, 2007, p. 738)

Greimas' method of diagramming narrative offered an important tool for conducting cross-case analyses of each participant's story (see Section 4.3). It provides a space for understanding how the signs embedded within curriculum narratives texts foster meaning making. Further, this structure makes clear how these signs within stories signify (tie the text to the teller). These visuals could represent the telling, the story itself, as told within each of these dimensions.

While semioticians acknowledge how race/culture influence the codification and subsequent meaning making of textual signs, the use of signification theory to explore the stories of male educators of color is limited. More often used to express the cultural dissonance of authors of color within literary theory (i.e. the work of Gates, Toni Morrison, bell hooks), signification theory as a way to understand curriculum stories or their development is sparse. Jim Garrison's (2009) "Teacher as Prophetic Trickster" showcases the roles in which educators *signify* within the classroom to subvert authoritative forces and offers an entry point for the critical inquiry of how this dynamic occurs within the storied nature of curriculum and emphasized their role as griots.

Garrison's (2009) analysis of the prophetic trickster highlights how some educators "often turn to the trickster archetype to help them deal with rigid, hyper-rationalized bureaucratic structures and mindless technocratic management in order to

preserve creative autonomy and secure psychic rewards” (p. 70). By transposing Gates’ (1983) ideas of dissemblance onto the manifestations of educators’ practice and/or pedagogical inclinations, Garrison (2009) signifies the educator as a specific type of troping character (see Figure 5), who much like the Monkey, “breaks the rules while avoiding capture” (p. 72). This is the very nature of nommo in West African orality. With the lure of perpetuating possibility, these teacher-griots use their stories to re-establish the authority.



Figure 5. A Re-Imagined Curriculum Story: reflection shows potential for social justice orientation and/or contextual distortion (misread).

According to Garrison, possibility and the potential of multiple modes of understanding are at the core of how and why many educators embody this role. Teacher-griots, often within the confines of outside and uninformed expectations, avoid the minutia of homogeneity and empower individuality. Additionally,

through the griot model, each author's approach is distinctive in the creation of community through nommo, in that the stories these writers [or teachers] choose to tell and how they choose to tell them builds different aspects of community by focusing on something different. (Atkinson, E., 2011, p. 12)

Male educators of color, because of the inherent racial, cultural and gendered structuring in education are uniquely positioned to be prophetic tricksters. Their stories can rip “holes in the sacred enclosure” (Hyde, qtd in Garrison, 2009) of educational norms and offer important glimpses into the experiences of men of color in these contexts.

2.4 Amplifying the Stories of Male Educators of Color

In the field of education, the promise and positive potential for idiosyncrasy within instruction, epistemology, and learning has somehow given way to uniformity and rigidity. Yet, many teachers and their students, even within the confines of standardization, have crafted, revised, and exchanged stories that alter or subvert this paradigm. Pedagogy, teacher knowledge, student learning, and the general process of education are greatly affected by the formal and informal narratives these two entities exchange during learning. Because male educators of color occupy a traditionally peripheral place in K-12 education, their stories offer a highly nuanced and

individualized account of the learning experience. When these stories are read, what it means to craft, collaborate on, and understand curriculum, as a story of experience situated within a collaborative context, in its truest form, is clear.

Research on male educators of color typically falls into the following designations: 1) teacher shortage; 2) male educators of color as role models, particularly for at-risk boys of color; 3) teacher education and male educators of color or 4) narrative and male educators of color. Yet, within these categories, much of the research available limits the input of these teachers. Under the auspice of teacher shortage, for example, several researchers have commented on the dearth of qualified men in the field (Wilder, 2000; Quirocho & Rios, 2000; Johnson, 2008; Hainey, 2012). In a study by the Center for Evaluation and Education Policy, one reason for the disparate number of men in education is the societal attitude and tone toward education. As women's work, men have historically deviated from careers in education because of the stigma associated with its feminization (Johnson, 2008). Ed Brockenbrough's (2012) work delved into how this 'gendering' in the field has affected Black, male educators. One of the major insights his work notes is how "patriarchal discourses beyond [the participants'] teaching experiences [...] have permeated the multiple social contexts of these men's lives and have filtered into their navigations of predominantly female professional spaces" (p. 29). These interactions, according to Brockenbrough (2012), seem to place these men at odds with themselves. While his work begins to tap into this conflict, much of it focuses on the teachers'

interactions with their colleagues (particularly female) and his work leaves room to explore the curricular implications (via their stories) of this conflict.

Furthermore, research done on/with male educators of color often point to their potential as role models as rationale for their recruitment and retention (Maylor, 2009; Achinstein & Aguirre, 2008; Roulston & Mills, 2010; Davison & Nelson, 2011; Sternod, 2011; Brockenbrough, 2012b). Notably, Wayne Martino's (2008) work looks at the policy implications of recent trends to place more men of color into school classrooms. He argues that these trends are problematic because they:

rel[y] on certain common-sense assumptions and anxieties about the influence of feminization on boys' developing masculinities which are driven, often implicitly, by a limited understanding about the need for adequate sex role identification as a panacea for addressing the problems boys are experience[e] in schools" (p. 193).

Programs such as Clemson University's Call Me Mister Program, along with more emphasis on the recruitment of male educators of color into teacher education programs (Kohli, 2009; Philip, 2011) exist today, in part because men are needed in order to "save" or "balance" the gendering that occurs, specifically to boys, in schools. Yet, the hiring of male educators of color, within this political paradigm, is wrought with complexities that go unvoiced because of the supposition that men understand how and why this role is necessary for them to embody. By honing in on the experiences male educators of color have in their classrooms via curriculum stories, particularly how gendering and/or masculinization (or emasculation) occurs as they tell these narratives, a more nuanced understanding (from the inside out) of the implications of these trends could be better understood.

Re-Imagining Griots: Investigating the Curriculum Stories Male Educators of Color Tell weaves history, literary and curriculum theories onto the tapestries of race and gender. Through this collaborative exploration of curricular meaning making through the use of story and within a traditionally invisible/muted realm of education (see Figure 6), the voices of male educators of color, their agency, and contributions to the future of education are amplified.

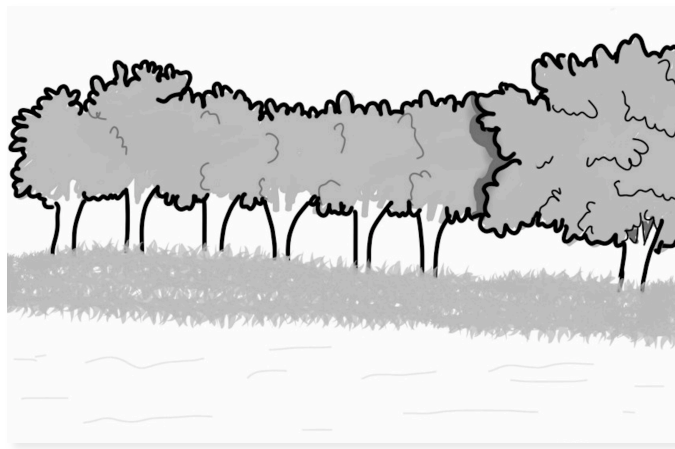


Figure 6. Curriculum Stories of Male Educators of Color within Education Landscape

Summary

The aforementioned theoretical reviews foreground *Re-Imagining Griots: Investigating the Curriculum Narratives Male Educators of Color Tell*. A review of curriculum theory opens the door for a more inclusive way to explain the experiences teachers and students have in classrooms. Their dissonance (or vague inclusivity, depending on one's theoretical inclination) exemplifies the type of ongoing meaning

making processes that occur as teachers, in various degrees of synchronicity with their students, work to learn. The learning process is cyclical. Herein, the experiences of one affect the other over time whether through content or skill (as aligned with prescriptive notions) or with the development of ideology and identity (descriptive). Literary theory, most notably, signification theory and Louise Rosenblatt's *transactional theory of reading*, outlines an interpretive process of sign recognition, relatability, reference, and reflection that transfers well to the iterative and experiential process of learning left ambiguous by curriculum theorists. By delineating the types of information gathered from an experience (sic: reading journey) and how to interpret the stances of stakeholders during this unique interaction, literary theory offers important acuity to the mire of curriculum when applied especially to what teachers do in classrooms.

Additionally, sociocultural and feminist epistemologies complement the development of this theory by providing causality for these experiences and chronicling their impact. What drives the experience? How do teachers and students “come to know” (in various ways) throughout this process? Here, the fine lines left by literary theorists become more definitive. Finally, the stories of male educators of color add a dimension of interactivity and application rare in education. Dynamic and intersectional, curriculum and literary theories, when woven with socio-cultural and feminist epistemologies, offer the following vital understandings: 1) curriculum narratives exist, 2) they impact the relational capacity and agency, and content of teaching/learning contexts, and 3) exploring the nature of peripheral curriculum

narratives are important to expanding an often narrow “master narrative” (lorde, 1994) in education.

Chapter 3 explains the qualitative and analytical concepts used for this study. It outlines the methodologies applied to *Re-Imagining Griots*, and where appropriate, offers an analysis of relevant literature to support this application. Also included are detailed descriptions of study participants and their contexts, as well as data sources, collection, and modes of analysis.

Chapter 3

METHODOLOGY

The aim of this qualitative, narrative-based dual-case study was to explore how male educators of color (through their lived and professional experiences) developed, embodied, and shared their curricular narratives in predominately White education contexts. The study explored those autobiographical, pedagogical, and other contextual factors that supported, oppressed, or otherwise made problematic the curricular narratives at work during teaching and learning. The results are intended to distribute authority and generate agency for a group that has typically been marginalized in education.

Re-Imagining Griots: Investigating the Curriculum Stories that Male Educators of Color Tell relies heavily on narrative inquiry methodology in order to elicit the stories of participants. This chapter showcases how these narratives have been used in education and offers important rationale for its use. It provides a detailed overview of the research design, participant and site information, procedures, data collection, and data analysis methods.

Research Questions:

- How do the professional and lived experiences of male educators of color guide the construction of their curriculum stories?

- How do these stories inform curriculum theory?
- How do they impact curriculum implementation (student perceptions, involvement, & curricular collaboration)?

3.1 Research Design

Narrative Inquiry. Narrative inquiry via life history analysis (Goodson, 1995) provides the method through which curriculum stories come into fruition. Situated squarely within qualitative research, narrative inquiry is a formal process of collaborative data collection and analysis involving mutual storytelling (between researcher and participant) and re-storying of experience within a particular context and time (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p. 20). Even as these components shift and develop throughout the research process, narrative inquiry focuses on understanding story as it unfolds. Much like reader-response, the use of story in education research varies. Even when attempting to elicit specific stories through narrative inquiry, teachers and researchers approach this task in divergent ways. As a result, this research can be categorized into two very general types: narrative as data (the story or storytelling foregrounds the research) and narrative as method (questions about the story serve as the basis of the study). While these designations frequently overlap, narrative inquiry provides the space to value the records of teacher and student knowledge and examine their role in authorship (Olson, 2000, p. 174).

Most notably, researchers and practitioners employ narrative inquiry methodology as a way to elicit responses to particular instructional methods. Through

this mode the question, *what is the story*, serves as the basis for inquiry. Narratives collected through this line of inquiry often touch on issues of voice, agency, and identity. One such study used narrative inquiry to display the concept of border pedagogy as it was used to foster discussions (and stories) between Israeli women (Elbaz-Luwisch, 2001). Having been politically marginalized and culturally silenced, this study explored the utility of narrative as a way to comprehend tenets of diversity, empower the women toward social justice and teach Israeli women how to be “border crossers” (2001, p. 82). In order to acquire these stories, Elbaz-Luwisch had to create a safe space for story sharing. She had to uncloak herself as a researcher and expose her storied identity. As a Jew and a teacher, her identity and voice were also wrapped in the historical context that her participants lived in. She realized that “[a]t the border, then, one is called to give an account of oneself, to tell the truth” (2001, p. 89); she had to share in order for the stories of her participants to be told. As each woman subsequently shared her truth, narrative inquiry became the vehicle through which border pedagogy, as a means to heightening diversity skills, could be assessed. Like Elbaz-Luwisch, I used the informality of story sharing as a way to initiate conversation with the participants of *Re-Imagining Griots*. Because I shared and disclosed my role as an educator with participants, I was able to relate to many of their professional experiences. Furthermore, as an African American educator, our exchanges may have highlighted how our racial locations impacted our professional experiences teaching in private, predominately White settings.

Bernhardt (2009) also uses narrative inquiry to explore the impact of a teacher deviating from traditional pedagogy in order to use autobiographic story in his classroom. The resulting narrative was a qualitative assessment of those stories focusing in on the same issues of history, identity, and voice that Elbaz-Luwisch (2001) had alluded to. Interestingly, Bernhardt's project (akin to practitioner-research) situated his students' narratives at the forefront. Having "[never been] asked about myself in this school," his students grappled with the question, *Who am I?* (p. 62), and he inevitably transferred his teacher authority to them. Who better than his students could most accurately and honestly *tell* their stories? In his use of narrative inquiry, Bernhardt (2009) displays that in assessing shifts in instructional practice one must also explore how the curriculum story can empower readers as it develops.

Based on the aforementioned research, a curriculum narrative can be leveraged to help others disclose their own stories. bell hooks stresses the importance of having "concrete examples of individuals who actually occupy different locations within structures" (1994, qtd. in Elbaz-Luwisch, 2001, p. 83) because they are useful tools of self-advocacy, recognition, and reclamation. These accounts, particularly when grounded in accepted modes of research and authored by marginalized groups, go deeper than conversational exchange or venting, they empower educators and their students to speak powerfully. Narrative inquiry, when used to intensify curriculum stories, taps into "the reasons why we are what we are, do what we do, and are headed where we have chosen" (Connelly & Clanindin, 1988 qtd. in Olson, 2000, p. 171) so that they shift from being moot rumblings to podiums of authority.

With this in mind, narrative inquiry also uses story as method in this study. When employed in this way, a version of the narrative already exists and narrative inquiry is used to analyze or interrogate its meaning. The work of Brown and Kelly (2001) employed narrative inquiry methodology to assess curricular relevance from Black Canadian students' point of view. In contrast to telling personal stories as a way to learn, this study focused on how meaning was ascertained from an existing Social Studies curriculum narrative. They aimed to, "understand, via critical discourse analysis, how [students critical engagement with curriculum] occurs and if students possess certain insights into improving democracy within the classroom" (p. 501). Here, the researchers touched on the socio-political nature of storytelling, which was heightened due to the nature of the content area. Through an analysis of the existing curriculum narrative, in conjunction with the narrative responses of African Canadian students, the researchers sought not only to give voice to students, but allow them to utilize the power of critical interpretation. Markedly different from many curriculum analyses, this study dispelled the notion that students have no agency in classroom environments and do not approach their learning with an analytical mindset (p. 501). In deconstructing the Social Studies curriculum narrative, the students were able to find major issues with what they had been tasked to learn with (and from), particularly because of the storied nature of history. One major key finding showed that students used their reading stances (as raced, gendered beings) to critique and determine their level of engagement with the curriculum. In their critiques, the students noted places

within the curriculum narrative where there were *personal* holes and incongruities.

Brown and Kelly (2001) explain that:

[w]hen a text draws attention to a student's identity marker [race, gender, socio-economic status or sexual orientation] it is not something that can be easily ignored. Students live alongside these discourses of subjugation that may or may not always result in overt forms of discrimination, but nonetheless [...] serve to isolate and marginalize [...]. (p. 507)

This “receptivity” (Stevenson, 1997 qtd. in Brown & Kelly, 2001, p. 502) could foster more open engagement with the text and a more meaningful sharing of stories could occur. Yet, as the students interrogated this story, they become privy to the inherent power dynamic housed within all curriculum narratives. As Strong-Wilson (2007) asserts, curriculum “contends with memory” and “is deeply embedded in lived experience and story and also capable of being excavated and moved [...]” (p. 3).

While this curriculum narrative revealed places of disenfranchisement and silencing, narrative inquiry methodology allowed the student participants of Brown and Kelly's (2001) work to not only critique the story, but craft counter-narratives as well.

Like Brown and Kelly's work (2001), this use of narrative inquiry strengthens my inclination toward it as a viable method for *Re-Imagining Griots*. Having used it in the pilot study, *Listening In: Co-Creating Curriculum with the Boys*, with eighth grade English students in 2011, I found a better way to reflect on participants work products (as sources of data) and their larger curricular implications by focusing in on the stories they told, whether overtly or covertly in their writing. Like Brown and Kelly (2001), *Listening In* was a way for me to make sense of my instructional inclinations (as the result of life history and student feedback) that deviated from

traditional notions of curriculum and pedagogy. In mining this data and “reading” the storied products my pilot students created during data collection, narrative inquiry methodology helped bring tangibility to our story, one that shifted and transformed over time.

Similarly, the work of Davis et al (2011) used narrative inquiry as a way to glean insights from teachers who restructured a standardized science curriculum. While the researchers argue that the study was “not [an attempt] to more richly characterize the teachers’ lived experiences across time, personal and social conditions, and place, as one might in narrative inquiry,” (p. 798), it can be argued that their research methods showcase narrative inquiry methodology to gather data. Beyond this, the aims of the study are heavily situated within time, place, and the teachers’ sense of agency. Much like the work of Brown and Kelly (2001), the researchers sought to examine the agency of elementary school teachers as they read and revised a curricular unit (a particular story within the larger curriculum text), but they also wanted to understand how their choices affected the original curriculum narrative and its fidelity therein.

In tracking the changes the participants made to a general science curriculum, the researchers observed that the teachers did not feel as though the curriculum (and the story it told) could foster the type of learning necessary for their students to fully engage with the material. One participant (Maggie) for example: “drew extensively on her knowledge of and experiences with her current and previous students, as well as her knowledge of their school and family contexts all of which are related to the

general notion of knowing her students” (Davis et al, 2011, p. 804). This “knowing” allowed Maggie to read the shortcomings of the standardized curriculum and make changes to it appropriately. By re-framing several of the assignments to account for her students’ social contexts and prior knowledge, she was able to supplement the standard curriculum and foster better engagement with it. This revision re-storied the original curriculum narrative. Catie undertook similar revisions based on the needs of her students and eliminated components of the standardized science curriculum as a result. Having had previous experience with the curriculum, Catie, in her *re-reading/re-telling* of its narrative wanted to “[emphasize] the importance of letting her students decide what data they wanted to record, and of providing guidance to help them make decisions” (Davis et al, 2011, p. 805). As structured, the original curriculum required the use of specific guiding worksheets for recording data.

While the researchers do not acknowledge the aforementioned as narrative inquiry, her work exemplifies the idea that “life’s narratives are the context for making meaning of school situations” (Connelly & Clanindin, 1990, p. 3). Similarly, it is through narrative inquiry that this study’s “teachers’ narratives [are] more widely valued by themselves and others as a legitimate component of curriculum development” (Olson, 2000, p. 174).

Multiple Case Studies. A multiple case study design helps empirically organize “storied” data and provide a way for me, as the researcher, to “retain the holistic and meaningful characteristics of real-life events—such as individual life cycles, organizational and managerial processes, [...]” (Yin, 2003, p. 2) in contexts

with multivariate influences. Because *Re-Imagining Griots* focuses on understanding both the “how” and “why” of the unique social, professional, and personal contexts of male educators of color, multiple case study design has allowed me to “[...] spend substantial time, on site, personally in contact with activities and operations or the case, reflecting, revising meanings of what is going on” (Stake, 1995, p. 240) without drastically shifting the behaviors of the participants. Because of this methodology, I have been able to embark on several reading journeys (sic: reader response interactions) with collected data. These repeated processes, not only clarify the potential curriculum narratives at work within each context, but also make known those variables (time, positionality, race, and others) that impact how these stories change over time.

Propositions. Given the nature of case study methodology, Yin (2003) suggests the use of propositions is helpful in limiting deviation from the scope of the study. Further, propositions applied to cases restricted by a contextual factor such as time and/or place (Creswell, 1998) are considered “bounded.” Using bounded cases in *Re-Imagining Griots* strengthens the study’s applicability because they allow: 1) “analytical generalization” of the curriculum as narrative theory, 2) expanded theoretical understanding via “literal replication” (similarities) or “theoretical replication” (differences)(Yin, 2003, p. 47) via multiple case analyses and cross analyses, 3) foreground the participants’ voices in this research, and 4) analysis of the data to be guided by these propositions and theoretical framework. The table below

outlines the guiding propositions of *Re-Imagining Griots: Investigating the Curriculum Stories Male Educators of Color Tell*.

Table 1. Case Study Propositions

Proposition	Source (limited literature examples & professional experience)
1. Male educators of color account for a limited population in K-12 education.	Wilder, 2000 Irizarry, 2011 Hailey, 2012 Professional experience
2. Male educators of color report discrimination in their professional lives based on race and subsequent duality in the expression of their personal/professional identities.	Moore, C.M., 2012 Coleman, S. & Stevenson, H.C., 2013 Professional experience
3. Male educators, those of color in particular, report feminization in teaching	Brockenbrough, 2012 Richardson, S., 2012
4. Male educators, in general, are sought for administrative positions and/or feel pressure to leave the classroom	Martino, 2008 Sternod, 2011
5. Male educators of color may function as a unique type of griot in ways that other educators do not because they occupy a space in society caught between the historic, societal and cultural stigmas associated with them as a group.	Noguera, 2014 Emdin, C. 2012 Professional experience

These propositions, the two participants, and restricting the time of the cases to the 2012-2013 school year delineated the boundaries of the cases and the scope of the study.

3.2 Participants and Research Contexts

Recruitment. Participants for *Re-Imagining Griots: Investigating the Curriculum Stories Male Educators of Color Tell* were selected based on their acceptance of researcher invitations. Invited participants met similar criteria for selection. In fall and winter 2012, dissertation committee members, the former director of the Independent School Consortium of Philadelphia, and K-12 colleagues were forwarded an invitation letter (see Appendix A: Participant Invitation Letter) to anyone who met the following criteria:

- Male
- Educator of 6-12th grade History, English (or other Humanities-based subject)
- Self-identify as Black, Latino, Asian, Native American or Mixed Race

Approximately seven potential participants contacted me for additional information. From this pool, three male educators, teaching either in Pennsylvania or Delaware, were formally invited to participate in the study. Three participants were chosen because data collection would occur concurrent to the researcher working full-time as a middle school English teacher. This sample offered a variety of experience without infringing on the researcher's primary teaching responsibilities.

Informed consent and confidentiality. Once a participant was identified, a formal letter was sent to his school's principal/headmaster to request permission to conduct the study and visit the school (see Appendix C: Headmaster Letter). Throughout the course of the study pseudonyms were used for participants' names, their schools, and for any other identifying information gathered. Additionally, all

participants completed a consent form, received a copy of the consent form and participants' rights for their records. Participants were given access to all data collected (notes, recordings, etc.) and had the right to withdraw from the study at any time without penalty.

To ensure in-depth cross-case study analyses, honing in on the life histories, professional, and pedagogical perspectives of the participants across a variety of schooling contexts seemed to offer the best-case scenario for gathering narrative data. With three participants, I would be able to conduct multiple in-depth interviews, observe their classrooms and extracurricular interactions with students, and craft a descriptive account of his experience.

Participant One. Participant One, Atticus, was a self-identified African American male educator who teaches in the history department at College Prep, a co-educational and private K-12 school in Wilmington, Delaware. Having previously held a career in law, Atticus entered teaching. During the study, he taught sections of high school U.S. History, World History, Law & Government. The majority of his students were middle to upper-middle class and White. He considered himself to be a “career educator” and has no aspirations for roles outside of the classroom. At the start of this study, he was in the midst of his twelfth year of teaching.

Participant Two. Participant Two, Nilz, was a self-identified African American male educator who taught in the performing arts department at Arts Academy, a co-educational and private independent school outside of Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. Having previously held an arts career outside of education, Nilz

ventured into teaching as a career change. During the study, he taught two sections of high school arts: Introduction to Acting and Theater. The majority of his students were upper middle class and White. At the start of the study, he was in the midst of his fifth year of teaching.

Participant Three*. Participant Three, Bantu, was a self-identified Black male educator who taught in the English and Social Studies departments at Collective Academy, a co-educational 6-12 public charter school in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. Entering education after working with adjudicated youth, Bantu taught sections of middle school English and History at the time of this study. The majority of his students are working to middle class and Black. At the start of this study, he was in his third year of teaching.

*NOTE: Due to a teaching reassignment to a co-taught remedial class early in data collection, Bantu was no longer a viable candidate and withdrew from the study.

3.3 Role of the Researcher and Potential Bias

As a qualitative study, *Re-Imagining Griots* offered a unique opportunity to delve into spaces where my intrinsic interest (the narrative nature of curriculum), professional experience (as an English teacher and academic), and cultural positioning (African American female) intersected. During this study, my role as a researcher became dependent upon exposing the varied nature of my stance and it allowed me to “become sufficiently acquainted with the social and cultural world[s] of [my] participants” (Josselsen, 2006, p. 547). Narrative inquiry research requires a level of

connectivity between researcher and participant that not only garners trust (as the impetus for disclosure), but a mutual respect for the story, whether shared, co-created, or an amalgam of experience between the two. This type of dynamic was essential to *Re-Imagining Griots* because my participants were able to read

“[...] not what has been made explicit, but rather the subtle interpersonal cues that reflect [my] capacity [as the researcher] to be empathetic, nonjudgmental, concerned, tolerant, and emotionally responsive, as well as [my] ability to contain affect-laden material.” (Josselson, 2006, p. 539)

As such and over time, I became a participant observer. Throughout data collection and time spent with participants, I shared stories laced with cultural discourse and experience unique to many educators of color with my participants.

We discussed the contextual factors of our work environments, their relationships (or dissonance with) our biographies, and made interpersonal connections deeply rooted in our generally shared African American experience. We related, in large part, because of our shared cultural/racial epistemologies. Being “mindful” (Milner, 2007) of my positionality aided data collection and processing because assessing “self-knowledge and self-reflection became necessary” (Josselson, 2006, p. 545). It is for this reason that *Re-Imagining Griots* begins with the acknowledgment of my beliefs and uses them, in concert with participant voices, to “[...] bring to conscious explicit, hidden, or unexpected matters, which [may] have bearing on” (Milner, 2007, p. 395) the study.

3.4 Data Sources & Collection

Data was collected from fall 2012 to spring 2013 and Table Two showcases the alignment between each data source and the research questions. Data consisted of three or four semi-structured interviews conducted in person, three full classroom observations (approximately two to three hours each) and their accompanying field notes, as well as one semi-structured student focus group for each participant (approximately thirty to forty-five minutes). As the focus of this study, teachers were asked questions during interviews to explore their background (race, ethnicity, and other identity markers), their introduction to, understanding of, and experiences with education (as both profession and as a student), and were asked to relate or retell, using story and/or guided memory prompts to provide concrete examples of the aforementioned.

Table 2. Research Question & Data Collection Alignment

Research Question	Data Source #1: Teacher Interviews	Data Source #2: Classroom Observations	Data Source #3: Student Focus Group
1. How do the professional and lived experiences of male educators of color guide the construction of their curriculum stories?	X	X	X
2. How do these stories inform curriculum theory?	X	X	
3. How do they impact curriculum implementation (student perceptions, involvement, & curricular collaboration)?	X	X	X

Teacher Interviews. According to Milner (2007), interviews in narrative research are essential because they allow “[r]esearchers [to] acquire evidential truth in research when they value and listen to the self, to others, and to the self, in relation to others” (p. 395). For *Re-Imagining Griots*, interviews were semi-structured and used open-inquiry prompts (see Appendix D: Interview Protocols) to elicit narrative responses. The first set of interview questions honed in on participants’ biographical narratives and included questions related to their views about education, family life, and schooling experiences prior to entering education as a career. Some questions included:

- How did your family view education? What values were instilled in you about learning? Tell me a story about an important conversation you had with an adult or a particularly poignant “teachable moment” you had as a youth.
- Growing up, who were your teachers? What made them effective/ineffective? Tell me a story about a memorable learning experience with a teacher.

The second set of interview questions focused on participants’ epistemological beliefs, their classroom management/discipline perspectives, and their content-based interactions with students. Conducted after the first classroom observation, these interviews provided the main substance for the study and allowed me to ask follow-up

questions based on behaviors or ideas observed in the classroom. During classroom observations, I focused primarily on recording the chronological “plot” of each lesson, listening to how the teacher and students communicated (directly, passively and within silences). I took notes on those areas that aligned with Rosenblatt’s (1995) efferent and aesthetic notions of “reading” (content, classroom atmosphere, infusion of personal/professional experience, etc.) that were present in or could be inferred from the context. I employed active listening techniques and recorded my thoughts in memos/field notes using thick description. The final set of interview questions (see Appendix D: Interview Protocols) were reflective and were asked after the final classroom observation. These questions prompted participants to assess the value they place (or have placed) on the professional role(s) they assume or have at school, their professional aspirations, and narrative explanations of how students’ experiences impact or influence their work. Below, Table Three provides a visual timeline of data collection, analysis, and reporting for the study *Re-Imagining Griots: Investigating the Curriculum Stories Male Educators of Color Tell*.

Table 3. Data Collection and Analysis Timetable

Tasks	Year One (2012)	Year Two (2013)	Year Three (2014)	Year Four (2015)
Overall Study Design				
Dissertation Proposal Defense	February 2012			
Create/Revise Recruitment Materials	Summer 2012			
Participant Recruitment	August-November 2012			
Data Collection				
Pre-Data Collection & Participant Screening	~October 2012: Nilz Pre-Interview (in person @ Arts) ~November 2012: Atticus Pre-Interview (via phone)			
Nilz Formal Interviews		February 2, 2013: Interview #1 February 12, 2013: Interview #2 March 6, 2013: Interview #3 March 9, 2013: Interview #4 April 4, 2013: Interview #5 Student Focus Group: May 31, 2013		
Nilz Formal Classroom Observations	October 20, 2012: Initial Visit to Arts	February 12, 2013: Class Observation #1 March 6, 2013: Class Observation #2 March 9, 2013: Class Observation #3 May 31, 2013: Class Observation #4		
Atticus Formal Interviews		February 4, 2013: Interview #1 March 6, 2013: Interview #2 April 26, 2013: Interview #3 May 13, 2013: Interview #4 Student Focus Group: May 31, 2013		

Tasks	Year One (2012)	Year Two (2013)	Year Three (2014)	Year Four (2015)
Data Analysis				
Data Transcription		Begins sporadically in Fall 2013 with Atticus' data and conducted via Dragon Naturally Speaking	January 2014: Atticus' data transcribed Fall 2014: Hired transcriptionist and Nilz data transcribed completed	
Data Review & Member Check		Ongoing as each transcript reaches completion	Ongoing until transcriptions complete	
Coding (Rosenblatt, 1995) & Individual Case Analysis		Simultaneous task beginning with completed transcriptions	Ongoing until individual case analysis complete	Spring 2015: Complete (Nilz)
Coding Charts/ Thematic Designations		Atticus: Complete November 2014	Nilz: Ongoing throughout summer 2014	Complete (Nilz): July 2015
Cross-Case Analysis: Including sociocultural impact and narrative structure comparison (Griemas, 1982)				Summer 2015
Reporting				
Integrate findings from analyses into descriptive narrative		Begins with Atticus Winter 2014	Ongoing	Complete September 2015
Dissertation manuscript submitted to committee for review				October 2015

Classroom Observations. During classroom observations, I took note of the teacher's expressed ideas about content, students' demeanor, receptivity, and interactions with the content/teacher, as well as drawing inferences about his approaches to discipline and classroom management. I also noted, via "thick description" (Eisner, 2004), other nuanced facets of the curriculum narrative (physical space and atmosphere, for example) and how these areas manifested in the learning context. Data from observations included field notes, transcribed audio recordings of observed lessons, and class handouts/notes. Additionally, these observations were

used complementarily during one-on-one interviews as a way to clarify the teachers' narrative and establish consensus (Polkinghorne, 2007) in my observations and participants' experiences.

Focus Groups. Students, as part of small focus groups, provided secondary data for this study. Held during non-instructional time, and without the teacher present, students responded to questions about their experiences in the class and with their teacher (see Appendix D: Interview Protocols). The number of students in each focus group varied, but each had between 5-7 students. Students were chosen at random from the participants' class roster list. Focus group questions were guided and aimed at prompting students to explore the curriculum story (i.e. what transpires in class, their understanding of the obvious and not-so obvious themes/motifs, and their ability to connect these areas to observations of the teacher). Focus group interviews were recorded for transcription purposes. Data gathered from these focus groups (one per teacher participant) were used to complement and/or supplement the observations made by the researcher in order to triangulate (Stake, 1995) data collected from teacher interviews and classroom observations. All data was anonymized to ensure the confidentiality and privacy of all participants and their students.

3.5 Data Analysis

During the 2012-2013 school year multiple sources of data were collected for two participants (*see note referencing third participant). Data gathered for *Re-Imagining Griots* supported the interdisciplinary concepts used to ground this study

because it was: oral (teacher interview and student focus groups); highlighted the experiences of teachers and students in authentic learning environments (feminist epistemology) within which meaning was ascribed by participants (signification theory); analyzed via a reader-response framework (literary); and recorded qualitatively (narrative). Data was assessed in multiple stages using the procedure below:

1. Data was prepared for analysis and all recorded interviews were transcribed, field notes placed in chronological order (by date of classroom observation), and focus groups recordings were transcribed. There were at least 3-4 classroom observations and 3 formal interviews for each participant.
2. Data was separated by case study participant (Participant One = Atticus & Participant Two = Nilz) and analyzed separately. During data reviews I listened to and read through each interview and made handwritten notes of my initial ideas, questions, and burgeoning assertions on each transcript. I followed up with study participants to review my notes and to check the accuracy of each account. Follow up was conducted via email or in person after the completion of data collection depending on the participant's schedule and preference.
3. Once this was complete the data, within each case, was then mined for sensory details, notes on weather, demeanor, and other insights useful in writing holistic and thick narratives for each case context. These notes

were drafted into preliminary introductions for each case and served to describe the physical situation over time.

4. Data was then coded using Louise Rosenblatt's (1995) efferent and aesthetic continuum, as delineated by the transactional theory of reading, by hand using a color-coded scheme (orange for efferent data and purple for aesthetic data). Because the information gathered from participants were facets of larger curriculum stories and were "read" by me, Rosenblatt's theory, particularly as I engaged in a form of reader-response, worked to help categorize the efferent data and the aesthetic data and maintain the literary viability of the curriculum narratives as they developed. Efferent data, or the information "carried away" were data inextricably linked to tangible and clearly observable threads found in the case. This data included topics the teacher taught (content), his teaching style and rationale (pedagogy) and personal understandings of knowledge (epistemology). Aesthetic data, or data elicited through a primarily emotive and/or sensory experience, included ideals about classroom atmosphere, meaning deduced or encouraged by personal/professional experience, and suppositions about content (why teach History, for example).
5. These data analyses were then charted (See Tables XX: Sample Coding Charts below) to showcase categorical aggregation (Stake, 1995). These charts were then aligned with the research study propositions to ensure data for each case remained bounded (Yin, 2003). Once this was complete, I

completed each individual case narrative by incorporating data charted from the categorical aggregation and initial case narrative.

6. Finally, a cross-case analysis was conducted to glean similarities and/or differences between cases. Although both participants identified as African American and had other similarities throughout the study, their stories (and how they made sense of them) revealed unique insights about curriculum narratives as tools for shifting the education landscape. Through this portion of data analysis, I hoped to solidify the sociocultural impact of the theoretical propositions of this study. Here, the signification work of Gates (1983) and the epistemological ideologies offered by feminist theorists (Anzaldua & Moraga, 1983 & hooks, 1990) expanded notions of normalcy in teacher identity, expression, and curriculum theory in profound ways.

Chapter Four provides an in-depth account of each case and insights gleaned from cross-case analysis.

Table 4. Sample Coding Charts

EFFERENT DATA	Content	Pedagogy	Epistemology	??
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Taught an African American studies class at HBCU • "This Day in History..." → "Both a means of getting them to think about historical issues an analyze them [...]" (42613) • "You have to have a context to really understand things. That's what history is for me." (42613) • GI Bill of Rights • Obama Presidency • "Anything that happens with African Americans particularly resonates with me because it relates to the issue in American history of our..." (42613) • "So anything that relates to African Americans I like to really emphasize because it's not just about African Americans, but it's about what America believes itself to be and how it hasn't quite measured up to that." (42613) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Judge the individual kid → "see what he can do..." (2413) • "You want to make it something that they're actually connecting to not just memorizing a list of facts and dates." (42613) → The other part is "interpretation [...]" when I give them ideas on tests where they're supposed to talk about the facts of a particular things, like the Versailles Treaty or something, the facts are fine, but there's always a point taken off if they don't say why this is important." (42613) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • "I spent a lot of time on campus, cause my mom would pick me up [...] it just put the whole process of education in my blood and I think that's where my interest germinated." (2413) • "I feel real value for what I'm doing when I'm working with kids and I'm teaching them things." (42613) • "I think the critical thing is [...] history is] about who we are as a people and what we believe, how we got to believe in what we believe." (42613) • "You get a little older, you think about time and you associate certain historical events with a certain time in your life, it becomes personal to you, so it makes more sense." (42613) 	<p>Nakeisha Primus 1/1/15 3:21 PM Comment [1]: Interesting. Amended PW1 for most of life and then began career at an HBCU</p> <p>Nakeisha Primus 1/5/15 10:24 AM Comment [2]: Content references deeply connected to personal → Relationships embedded in content?</p> <p>Nakeisha Primus 1/5/15 10:24 AM Comment [3]: Atticus references me → participant "reads" me as an African American woman with whom he has a shared cultural history. Would this occur if researcher was or appeared to be from a different racial location?</p> <p>Atticus (p.1)</p>
AESTHETIC DATA	Personal/Professional Experience	Classroom Atmosphere	Relational Interactions	Feelings About Content/Suppositions
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • "They [administration] would have me talk to parents about the whole [x] thing, but I would talk to them about my experience at [independent school] and how there's more to me than being an athlete. No one knows what's going on inside of me and how the stage gave an opportunity to express a side of myself that no one knew was there and it helped me find my voice as a young man." (3/9/13) 		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Question: Is it enough to just look similarly to the other black kids → "No, that only opens the door, but that door can close really fast. If your personal experience does not connect and is not relevant to what kids are currently experiencing [...] A person's environment and culture is what connects people. It's not enough to be browned skinned. The resentment is twice as bad when you are the same color and can't connect." (3/9/13) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •
<p>Mission: Gatekeeper & Guide</p> <p>Efferent: Content (Performance from the actor's perspective) Pedagogy (How he does it → class observations) Epistemology (It's about the experience on stage)</p> <p>Aesthetic: Personal & Professional ("I'm here to be a model"; God) Relational Interactions (students & staff → Mr. Director) Identity Development</p> <p>Efferent: Content (Choice of plays for students) Pedagogy (How he pushes students; Basketball team in musical)</p> <p>Aesthetic: Personal & Professional (Time at GA; mom suing school) Classroom Atmosphere (Hushed talks in hallways) Relational Interactions (McDonald's ride home) Change Agent: "Power Plays"</p> <p>Aesthetic: Feelings, Experience (what happened & how it felt) Efferent: What was learned? Why? Content (Info) → It's ok to question authority of person of color, without direct challenge certain ideas become fact; Pedagogy (teaching) → deeply embedded in the field, subvert this through performance duality; Epistemology (which knowledge matters) → challenges to "norm" and valuing of other methods of "knowing"</p> <p>Nakeisha Primus 7/2/15 2:40 PM Comment [4]: Being a gatekeeper requires more than just having access, it requires being able to connect with people at the door otherwise they won't walk through and cannot maintain.</p> <p>Nilz (p. 5)</p>				

Chapter 4

RESULTS

This chapter presents the analyses of data collected from two case participants for the study, *Re-Imagining Griots: Investigating the Curriculum Stories of Male Educators of Color*. Data was collected during the 2012-2013 school year in two distinct private, independent, and co-educational schools in the Philadelphia metropolitan region. While many assume the constraints observed in curricular design and implementation in public schools run counter to private school environments, many in these institutions experience similar pressure toward standardization (Taylor, 2015; Strauss, 2014). This study was conducted to explore the curriculum story concept in these authentic learning environments and investigate how more traditional notions of curriculum may be at work in them. Moreover, this study, deeply rooted in sociocultural and feminist principles, also sought to explicate how male educators of color construct and employ such narratives in their professional lives. The findings presented include qualitative data from teacher interviews, classroom observations, and student focus groups compiled to answer the following research questions:

- How do the professional and lived experiences of male educators of color guide the construction of their curriculum stories?
- How do these stories inform curriculum theory?

- How do they impact curriculum implementation (student perceptions, involvement, & curricular collaboration)?

The results presented herein include full single case study reports (in the linear-analytic mode outlined by Yin, 2003), as well as a cross-case analysis for the study participants. Within each single case analysis, I descriptively frame the learning context, efferent and aesthetic themes (as described by Rosenblatt, 1995), alternate reader perspectives (for triangulation), and sociocultural themes embedded within the data. Within the cross-case report, I highlight the collective narrative trends that emerged between the participants. From these results, I discuss the larger implications of curriculum narratives in education both generally and as unique sites of agency for educators of color.

4.1 Atticus: Secondary (His)tory

My introduction to Atticus occurred through an interesting game of “six degrees of separation.” In soliciting participants for *Re-Imagining Griots*, I mentioned to a former colleague the trouble I was having in finding “enough Black teachers to shadow and interview” (Researcher Email Notes, 10/2012). Having been a doctoral student and a human resources administrator in the independent school world, she worked her magic and gifted me two names. The first, a highly involved teacher at a well-respected co-ed school in Delaware, was too busy to participate fully in the study. Our pre-data collection conversations stretched over months and too frequently felt

rushed. Beyond this, he aspired to lead a school one day and I required teachers whose main focus was teaching.

During our pre-interview, Atticus was certain administration or “anything of the sort” (Atticus Pre-Interview, 11/2012) was not for him. He liked being in the classroom and it was not long into our twenty-minute conversation, I knew he would be a likely participant. Atticus was an interesting subject to observe. More reserved and quiet than even I was used to as an introvert, he let me into his world. Having been a lawyer, college instructor, and film documentarian, I was curious about how his life prior to teaching informed his curriculum story. How did he share (or not) these experiences with students? What motivated him, as a “career-changer” to make history real to students? As a self-described African American, how did he make content choices? Which historic and present-day stories did he choose to tell, provoke, and/or insist upon in his classroom? From his students?

The observations presented in this section highlight how Atticus and his students responded to, interpreted, and gave meaning to these questions. Atticus’ curriculum story is almost as reserved as his outward demeanor. Without deep investigation and an ability to connect personally with him, one would assume he desired to blend in or maintain notions indicative of most U.S. history curricula, which regurgitated tales of oppression, Manifest Destiny, and American bootstrapping. Yet, for Atticus, history content was only the beginning of how his curriculum story served to counteract, and often supplant these ideas.

College Prep Academy. It was a particularly brisk winter day when I first arrived at College Prep. As I hurried to the school, the wind picked up suddenly as if to remind me to record my thoughts as I walked. I turned on the recorder and in listening back to the audio the sound of the wind blowing was audible:

The campus is geographically nestled so one might not realize this is a city. The reddish brick building and landscaped fields act as natural boundaries for the campus. As I turn the corner from my parking spot on an adjacent street, I know I have arrived at the main building when a large open door and a “Bake Sale Here” sign greet me. As I enter the building, Kelly says, “Hello” and I sign in. I sit in a chair with large arms and cursorily glance at the guidebooks, pamphlets, and other school-related material left on the table next to me. The room is paneled in dark mahogany and it gives the room a den-like feeling; it is warm and welcoming. Kelly inquires about my morning, mentions the weather, and lets me know that Atticus will be down shortly to escort me to the Upper School. (Atticus Field Notes, 2/4/13)

Within a few minutes, Atticus arrived and we began our walk through the one building schoolhouse.

“College Prep,” he mentioned, as we traversed the halls, “has all three divisions: Lower, Middle, and Upper in the same general building” (Atticus Interview, 2/4/13). I noticed the intense pops of color characteristic of elementary schools as soon as we exited the corridor of the main office:

Open classroom doors reveal young children sitting on yoga balls busily working at desks. Bulletin boards burst with student work capturing winter themes. We head up stairs and the teen spirit indicative of puberty marks an immediate shift in the atmosphere. Adolescent students quickly walk pass and chatter fills the halls. This space feels familiar; and it is a bit ironic the middle school is located on the middle level of the building. The clanks of lockers closing, seas of book bags, and the anticipatory feeling of “drama” bring a slight smile to my face. Having been a middle school teacher for years, I mention my observations to Atticus. We continue around a corner to the Upper School. It is couched on the wings of the middle level, and has a more

open-air feeling. As we continue to walk toward his classroom, Atticus pops his head in a few of the rooms, and students say “hello.” (Atticus Field Notes, 2/4/13)

Along our walk, Atticus pointed out various subject area classrooms, the guidance counselor’s office, and student lounge areas. I noticed, as we walked down a long window filled hall, the early college admissions letters on a wall ahead of us.

Students’ headshots, along with miniature college pennants (Columbia, Temple, Vanderbilt, Penn State, among others) showcased these noteworthy achievements.

When we round the corner, I realized we reached our destination.

Atticus’ Classroom. Political campaign posters were the most conspicuous artifacts in the room. They clothed the walls and offered a glimpse of Atticus’ historical/political predispositions:

Stretching as far back as President John Kennedy to the three posters of President Barack Obama, it is clear that Atticus has democratic and/or progressive leanings. Interspersed throughout these monochrome and Technicolor placards are framed autographs from notable figures in contemporary American history. I immediately notice the autograph of Toni Morrison, my favorite author (Atticus Field Notes, 2/4/13).

A medium-sized rectangular desk marked the front of the room and was positioned about two or three feet in front of a Smart Board. It was flanked on both sides by whiteboard space. A freestanding tripod housed a cluster of maps, while additional ones gripped the remaining space on the front wall. Student desks were arranged in a backward “C” and windows stacked over bookshelves make up the back wall.

Atticus’ desk occupied the corner behind the lower row of desks. Couches, book bags,

and a few individually scattered desks made their home behind the upper row of desks. Atticus mentioned this area was “where the students hangout during homeroom” (Atticus Interview, 2/4/13). Initially, I situated myself here for observations, but after the first visit I moved to a desk in the lower row for a more unobstructed view.

The last question asked during Atticus’ final interview frame the data presented. I asked this question as a way of ensuring Atticus’ voice would take center-stage in this narrative. We discussed (later in data collection) my theoretical inclinations about curriculum and his insights provided a way to not only member-check the data, but also limn the possibility of speaking for him. When asked, “If you had to list the top three themes of your curriculum story [explained during the last interview], what would they be and why,” (Atticus Interview, 5/13/13) his thoughts centered on helping students interrogate how American history deals with secondary characters, the importance of humor, and being reflective (both as a teacher and as a model for his students). He said, “They are fundamental parts of my belief, so in terms of the way I kind of live and in terms of the way I see myself, they are definitely things I’m trying to pass on to them” (Atticus Interview, 5/13/13). Interestingly the data, mined along the efferent-aesthetic continuum (Rosenblatt, 1995), supports these thematic delineations.

Theme One: Give Voice to the Underdog

Throughout my time with Atticus and in observing the happenings of his classes, it became clear the story he shared with his students, whether directly through

content, his method of instruction, or in his non-academic interactions with them, amplified the voices of historically disenfranchised groups. At first, this idea seemed sublimated in the class routine and Atticus' unassuming personality. Yet, it rose to the top as a prominent trend during data analysis. Atticus often mentioned,

Part of what I'm doing here [teaching at College Prep] is to try to one, to make sure kids are exposed to these stories of minorities and America, but also for them to actually be exposed to a teacher who is African American and has a certain perspective that definitely influences the way I think [...]." (Atticus Interview, 4/26/13)

He saw teaching deeply embedded within his personal history and influenced greatly by his perspectives as an African American man.

Aesthetic Data

Aesthetic data (in using Rosenblatt's aesthetic-efferent continuum) is data elicited via sensory, emotive, and/or relational characteristics. Atticus' curriculum narrative was heavily influenced by his **personal and professional experience**. Like an author's inspiration, his enthusiasm for and desire to teach history stemmed from direct and deeply intimate first-hand knowledge of history concerning African Americans in the United States. He said,

I definitely mention the GI Bill of Rights because it has a personal connection to me. My dad served in the [armed forces] during World War II and he never would have gone to college had it not been for the GI Bill of Rights. Had he not gone to college, he wouldn't have gone to graduate school, he wouldn't have become [an educator], he wouldn't have met my mom and I wouldn't have been born.

For Atticus, his father's participation in World War II directly related to how he viewed history. For him, history (beyond just knowing facts) amplified his

experiences as an African American man with direct knowledge of what being in the armed forces was like for such men when positive race relations were not always reflected in society. He saw his father get an education through his service, but he also lived with the undertones of Jim Crow and Civil Rights as they manifested in his life, and his father's life. He went on to say,

That is something that resonates with me...when I taught my [U.S. Government & Law] class, it was the year Obama was running for president for the first time and he made his civil rights speech and we watched it in class. I was trying to explain to the students, who were all White students, how Black people felt about America wasn't always exactly the same thing White people thought about America. While Black people are patriotic and love their country, they love more about what America is in its ideal form, than what America has actually been. If you come from a group that has experienced discrimination, you can't be as gung ho about your nation as you would be if you come from an experience where you have all these incredible opportunities. It doesn't mean you love your country any less, but it means that you have a lens through which you view it and which you see where the flaws are. (Atticus Interview, 4/26/13)

Atticus' family history critically informed his approach to teaching U.S. history.

Through his lessons, he sought to provide a more rounded experience for his students, so that they too could empathize with the contradictory experiences many people of color had in this country. He was focused on shedding new light on the experiences of people like his father.

This, coupled with being the child of teachers and a frequent accessory to their university classes, shaped Atticus' views of education. He said,

[M]y parents taught at [a HBCU] and my father was also an alum there which is how he ended up there, cause [sic] they were both originally Southerners...and um, education was really important to them. That's how I ended up actually not going to the local public school which was a block away from my home because they knew people who had sent kids there who had not

had a good experience, so they sent me to Catholic school. We were not Catholic, but I got a good education there. (Atticus Interview, 2/4/13)

After his K-12 experience in predominately White schools, Atticus went to law school. Upon completing, he took a variety of jobs including working on a history documentary about W.E.B DuBois that he said, “reignited my interest in history. And I thought maybe I could go back to grad school and be you know...write history, teach history, and be [...] you know, be one of those talking heads” (Atticus Interview, 2/4/13).

Atticus pursued a doctorate in history, but found the subject, at that level, had much more to do with teaching than he thought. He recalled his stint as an adjunct at a HBCU,

I’m glad that I did it because it’s important to see that side of education, and it’s important to remember how critical an education can be and how some kids are really willing to do whatever they have to do to get it. And some kids are not as much. I mean, I talked to kids who were saying like education is for White people and it’s like well, why are you here? And I had a kid once say to me you know, I was marking up his paper and he’s like “I don’t need to know all this stuff, cause I’m going to have a secretary to take care of all that stuff.” And I was like you don’t understand, even if you are lucky enough to get that kind of a job, stuff is going to go out with your name on it and you’re going to be held responsible for it. So you need to know how to check your secretary and you need to know this stuff. (Atticus Interview, 2/4/13)

From this experience, Atticus was able to sense the disparity in how students viewed education. Both his parents were faculty members at this HBCU and imparted their values about education on him. This experience reinforced those values and he agreed his personal story directly influenced his role in the classroom. He saw this impact as an asset.

The most palpable aesthetic data were Atticus' **relational interactions** with students that epitomized a desire to champion the underdog. Prior to teaching at College Prep, he remembered a particular instance with a university student where he felt compelled to emphasize treating people well over mastering the content. After going back and forth with a struggling student at the HBCU, Atticus made it a point to impart a bit of relational wisdom when the student asked for his help. He recalled,

He contacted me maybe a week or a few days before the final asking what he was going to have to do to pass. I told him that I wasn't sure if it would be possible for him to pass. I haven't worked out the numbers if you got a 100 on your final whether you would pass the course or not. Here's the important thing for you to be thinking about, it's about life in general and relationships. You don't have to be perfect, but people will work with you, but they have to feel like you care. If they don't feel like you care, then why should they? [...] I've had others [athletes], who are not as strong, but they come to class and they try and they give something and we worked together and it works out. [...] If you're doing a little bit all the time and you're establishing a relationship with somebody, they'll be happy to work with you, so that's what you should be thinking about [...] You can be really smart and not be responsive to people and be dismissive and it's horrible. **That's part of the African American experience; we have a responsibility to each other in society.** That's why I try to be the kind of person who is fair and open to people [...] I don't actually say it every day to kids in those terms, but I'm hoping that they're getting some of that in the way I deal with them. (Atticus Interview, emphasis added, 4/26/13)

Atticus' sense of personal integrity directly transferred to his interactions with students at College Prep. While the majority of his students were White, Atticus not only embodied the philosophy above just by being present and willing to share these perspectives, but he also made sure the voice of the underdog (defined by him as those with marginalized voice and/or presence in historic accounts) was affirmed for those students who occupied similar racial backgrounds. All of his students, no matter their

racial background now had a personal connection to this experience, thereby making this portion of his story aesthetic. As text, however, these components of Atticus' curriculum story are unique to him. As the initial "reader" of his story, this data *felt* aesthetic because of how Rosenblatt ascribes meaning to this portion of the continuum (see Section 2.2).

Atticus also reiterated his goal of highlighting students' strengths instead of their weaknesses while teaching. He recalled,

It's great when you see a kid who doesn't fit a particular box, but then you see them do a particular type of project where you just see a different side to them and it's something they're interested in and they really bloom. For instance, I have a student, she's an African American student, who came in last year. She came in because her father got a job. He's a doctor and they're from [the South], but he got a job up here [...] I got to know her pretty well because she was one of the people I chose to take to SDLC [Student Diversity Leadership Conference] last year and I was also her [History] teacher [...] The reason I mentioned her was because she's an amazingly talented kid in terms of theatre and singing, but not a great student in terms of test taking in history. Just the way she processes things, it's not a matter of her working hard, she just mixes things up and doesn't really express herself that well. But then you see her on stage and it's incredible or you see her write a paper or do a project about something involving the arts, and it's a revelation. So this is what I would emphasize to her, focus on the stuff, as much as you can, that you're good at. Don't let the stuff that you're not as good at bring you down. Everybody has strengths and weaknesses and you can transcend in the things your aren't as strong in [...] But, she had me write a recommendation, I'm like okay here's the transcript, here's how did, here's what you're not seeing and that's really what the recommendation is and this is an amazing kid and this is what you really need to know [...] So, I try to think about that as I'm dealing with kids and that everyone has different talents. As a teacher, we're here to try to encourage them and train them in terms of analytical skills and writing and things like that. But if they're not as good in those kinds of things, we need to at least do what we can to try to encourage them in other areas too. I think it's important and it's part of them learning to hear their own voice and to go with what that voice tells them and where their own skills and interest and talents lead them. I think it's critical. (Atticus Interview, 5/13/13)

Helping students see the humanity in history, in others, and especially in themselves was fundamental to Atticus' approach to teaching. As a person who "was always interested in social change things like that" (Atticus Interview, 2/4/13), it was no surprise he sought to infuse the importance of personal integrity and empathy into his role at College Prep. Atticus' curriculum story was discernable most readily through authentic personal engagement with him and his students.

Efferent Data

Though germinated by the emotive and often intangible nuances of his narrative, more concrete data augmented the personal tone of his story. This information, much like the initial plot of a novel, emerged first in his perceived history knowledge. He was a "history buff" and his **epistemological beliefs** about what mattered to this body of knowledge were evident in data collection. For Atticus, history was as personal as it was factual. In helping students make sense of history he said,

I think the critical thing about it is, and my hope is that if they weren't interested in history before that they will develop it in this because it's about who we are as a people and what we believe, how we got to believe in what we believe. If you pay attention to any politics of today and you know something about the history, you see that we kind of repeat the same arguments over and over again. We have the same conflicts. (Atticus Interview, 4/26/13)

For him, historic knowledge had meaning and was valid because it was relational, fostered critical thinking (of others, context, and self), and its impact extended beyond the specificity of singular events. He mentioned, "You get a little older, you think

about time and you associate certain historical events with a certain time in your life, it becomes personal to you, so it makes more sense” (Atticus Interview, 4/26/13).

Atticus’ insistence on students recognizing the perspectives of secondary characters in history is evident in many of his lessons.

In making his thoughts about history knowledge tangible, Atticus used the **content** (people, places, ideas) of American History in very affective ways; “the facts” were often appended with personal recollection or glimpses of his innate perspective. He sought to deepen students’ understanding of history’s characters by contextualizing their development in atypical ways. He reported, “Anything that happens with African Americans particularly resonates with me because it relates to the issue [race] in American history” (Atticus Interview, 4/26/13). While not ordinarily overt, Atticus’ investment in the underdog (those voices and experiences not often told or made visible in traditional history accounts) was evident in his teaching. On my first day of classroom observations, Atticus’ almost conversational approach to more peripheral history content was apparent. I noted,

As Atticus gets ready for class to begin, a student offers a nice segue and inquires about pending U.S. history research papers. The conversation evolves into a short brainstorming session for the group. Atticus simultaneously collects paper topics from students, and helps others think about possible areas of interest. He tells a few students they can “pick a figure related to war” in some way. He mentions, “Audrey Hepburn,” “Billie Holliday,” and “Josephine Baker.” Many of the students seem intrigued and one asks him, “What’s your favorite U.S. History Paper topic?” After a few moments and as the class listens, he responds, “the music of the Civil Rights Movement.” It is quiet for a moment and then he introduces me to the class (9:05 AM). I take a moment to let the class know “I’m a teacher too and I want to know how their teacher does what he does.” Atticus chuckles and adds, “It’s not about you” as he motions to the class. (Atticus Classroom Observation Notes, 2/4/13)

During this informal class time, I found Atticus' brainstorming ideas and his personal choice for favorite topic very interesting. Of the American figures connected to a war, he chose women (two African American) typically aligned with the entertainment industry during the mid-1900s. Further, his "favorite U.S. History topic," dealt with music from one of the most impassioned and controversial times in American history. When asked about these particular content choices, Atticus said, "...it's about what America believes itself to be and how it hasn't quite measured up to that" (Atticus Interview, 4/26/13).

Atticus mentioned how the "underdog" impacted his views on diverse content. He said, "[...] how we treat the underdog, whether we respect them and give them opportunities to fulfill themselves [sic] because I think as a society that says a lot about who we are" (Atticus Interview, 5/13/13) and this was particularly clear in an observation of his U.S. Government & Law class. I noted,

10:20AM. Atticus begins class by referencing an article he really wanted to copy for the class. A few minutes before, he and a student had had a tangential conversation about the death of an openly gay mayoral candidate. A few of the students seem out of the loop, so Atticus grabs a chair and sits in front of the room. He seems relaxed. He briefly discusses the facts of the case with the class and a few students ask questions. He reads an article on the Voting Rights Act in Mississippi and its relevance to this candidate's death. Though a few of the students are multitasking (I can see the corners of a Math textbook on a student's desk), they all seem to be listening. This feels like a barbershop conversation. It is both individual and collective...I can't really explain it. After a few questions about how things have progressed in American society for people of color, **Atticus mentions, "...instead of it being very, very bad, it's very bad."** A student asks, **"Well, isn't it better?"** and he responds, **"better isn't perfect..."** (Atticus Classroom Observation Notes, emphasis added, 3/6/13).

Atticus' take on history content seemed pretty standard for his high school classes. His lectures were often in chronological order and his notes bespoke those of typical historians; they were messy and full of anecdotal tales. Yet, as I sat in his class, in what often seemed like a blast from my high school past, he often took moments to validate the facts, figures, people, and places on the margins. Much of this, rested in his instruction.

Atticus' **pedagogical methods** complemented his desire to widen students' ideas about history. While he lectured and students took furious notes, he frequently prompted students with provocative questions or deft commentary. During an early classroom observation, I noted,

9:25AM. Atticus begins a formal lecture about John L. Sullivan and the American notion of Manifest Destiny. The students seem to know he's ready to begin as their eyes move between the Smart Board and their computers. He mentions Manifest Destiny is an **"American ideology and of course, Americans need to expand since they are God's chosen people."** He opens a map and shows the class the area of westward expansion. He covers several decades of Mexican history from the 1819 Transcontinental Treaty to the 1836 Battle of San Jacinto. Throughout, he mentions Mexican abolishment of slavery and indigenous Mexican opinions of American investment in this area. It seems he wants students to have an understanding of the Mexican perspective. As I keep up with my notes, I feel like a student again. The lecture moves on and we learn about James Polk's interest in acquiring Texas and Zachary Taylor's "act of war" by going into the Rio Grande uninvited. As Atticus talks about the Mexican-American War and 1848 Treaty of Guadalupe-Hidalgo, he says, **"Most Americans don't know how we got that land [stretching from the Rio Grande into current Mexico], but Mexicans do" and quips, "might makes right."** Toward the end of the class he asks the class, **"Why would people move west?"** As if on cue, the entire class responds, **"Land..."** (Atticus Classroom Observation Notes, emphasis added, 2/4/13).

Atticus' instruction centered on getting students to "...make it [history] something that they're actually connecting to not just memorizing a list of facts and dates" (Atticus Interview, 4/26/13). Similarly, a brief biography of Phil Sheridan and his role in the Commission of Indian Affairs in the mid-1800s was coupled with a perfunctory, "do things the White way" and the thought-question, "When we talk about the West, we need to talk about American identity. What has made us distinct" (Atticus Classroom Observation Notes, 3/6/13)? Atticus felt it was his duty to draw students in with critical questions and ancillary comments in hopes of bringing more synergy to traditionally presented accounts in American history.

Moreover, Atticus showcased a similar perspective with his students. Analyses of aesthetic and efferent data revealed a willingness to guide students in amplifying their voices. He stated, "While I want a kid to like my subject, I try to take it back a step and say if they don't, that's not their thing, or if it's difficult for them, it's not the end of the world and is there some way to help them beyond that" (Atticus Interview, 5/13/13). This approach to teaching history emphasized Atticus' desire to not only help students interrogate the underdog in American history, but his personal investment in seeing students grow beyond the scope of his class.

Alternate Reader Responses: Acknowledging Different Voices

Whether direct or not, Atticus' deliberateness in giving voice to the underrepresented was further highlighted during student focus groups. The students' input validated the initial data categorizations and offered a viable source to

triangulate this data. Data from Atticus' student focus group revealed the theme of recasting the underdog occurred when Atticus: 1) augmented the voices of marginalized groups, 2) gave students opportunities to observe how personal history (his as an African American man and their own from a variety of backgrounds) impacted understanding, and 3) provoked students' personal agency. While this was not always evident in my limited role as a researcher, his students provided invaluable insight about how the pursuit of "fairness" and equity permeated their interactions and study of history with him.

When asked to recall an experience that showcased Atticus' investment in alternative voices, one student said,

Before he has anyone come to speak or talk to us, he will go to every single person in diversity [club] and talk to them and go 'If you don't feel we should do this we won't do it.' Other teachers would be like, 'By the way, we're meeting this person.' He actually talks to us. For instance, next year we're having a forum about a retired homosexual football player and it would have been cool for diversity [club] to have a lunch meeting with him. But, [Atticus] could have just set it up and said we're doing it, but instead he talked to each and every one of us to see who would be willing to do it and who wouldn't be, why and all. (Atticus Focus Group, 5/13/13)

Another recalled a personal anecdote a few years prior to our conversation. She said,

He was my advisor freshman year and freshman year was a really tough time for me. He was just really nice about everything and I was really struggling in a lot of my subjects because I hadn't been approved for extra time yet [student at time of focus group had an individualized education plan], so he would always tell me 'Just because you're not doing well in some of your subjects, you just wrote an amazing research paper. I was kind of worried because you procrastinated on it, but you did a really great job and you do have strengths in a lot of subjects.' He would try to make me feel better just because I wasn't really as good in Math and Science and I was just really discouraged freshman year. He was really supportive of that. (Atticus Focus Group, 5/13/13)

In addition to acknowledging students' voices, many of Atticus' students were able to provide acute insights about his character. When asked, "Outside of teaching history, what do you think Atticus values? What do you think is important to him and how do you know?" they responded:

Student A: Diversity. He's the teacher of the diversity club [two of the six students were members of the club].

Student B: I think he values honesty and respect.

Student C: Just a minute ago I saw him talking to students, I think they're freshman, and he was saying, 'You told me you would get it [an assignment] in by today' and then they said, 'Oh we don't remember saying that' and he said, 'Yeah [sic] you did,' so he doesn't like when people lie. When people lie, he tells them straight.

Further, they shared how Atticus' personal experiences have shaped learning with him. When asked to provide more depth they affirmed,

Student A: He's really good at **arguing both sides of the story** and seeing both sides of it.

Student B: I think it [being a lawyer] gave him a really big scope of knowledge on a lot of really cool things. So you can talk to him about anything and he knows so much information that's really cool.

Student D: He's proud of what he's done too. He shows us the things he's done, like the other day he showed us the documentary that had his name in it.

Student E: He's really modest about it too. He teaches us how to be modest. For instance, when he had a picture of meeting the President, he doesn't say a word about it until we brought it up and he was like 'Oh yeah, by the way...' [Interrupted]

Student B: Jay-Z remember when you were like, 'If I had a picture with the President, I would be showing everybody' and he was like 'Well that's why you need to be modest about it.' I feel like he's really cool, but at the same

time you really respect him. (Atticus Student Focus Group, emphasis added, 5/13/13)

Most, if not all, of the students interviewed “really enjoyed history” with Atticus.

They had a clear awareness of how his personal values, particularly in acknowledging those cloaked people, places, and ideas, frequently reached beyond the facts to prompt them personally. They seemed to underscore how important being a good person, advocating equity, and genuinely connecting to the subject was to Atticus. Their observations expanded my sense of how deeply embedded this theme was to Atticus curriculum story.

Theme Two: A Rapport Written with Humor

Atticus’ curriculum narrative was infused with his jovial demeanor and approach to teaching from the beginning. Never one to take himself too seriously, humor and authentic interactions set the stage for mutual engagement whether with history content, students, or with the larger world. He said,

With me, I use humor. I try to use humor in a way that draws people in. With humor, it’s a tricky thing because if you’re not careful, you can use it in a way that’s more destructive. My humor tends to be at someone’s expense, but I don’t try to do it in a way that denigrates them. I try to do it in a way that they can laugh at themselves. You have to be careful and look at their own personality and what they can take or not [...] I do it across the board with some of them I knew before or taught in other years. But even the ones, I didn’t, I found that when I establish that sense of humor, which is one of the things [sic] kind of known for, they feel more comfortable and they feel more intimate with me. So, that’s one thing, the other thing is that I try to listen to

them. They have concerns [and] I try to seem responsive to them. (Atticus Interview, 4/26/13)

Atticus' blithe perspective touched every area of his narrative. Even in the more mundane instances of teaching, his jocund sensibility often lighted the mood and/or emphasized the connection humans inherently have to one another. He saw humor as a viable bridge for building affinity and establishing bonds in a student-centered learning environment.

Aesthetic Data

Atticus was wholly invested in maintaining an even-keeled and welcoming **classroom atmosphere**. The door was always open (even during teaching) and a few of his lectures were punctuated with comically timed observations or anecdotes unrelated to the day's major ideas. During my first classroom observation, I noted:

8:50AM. It is the start of class and I hear an African American male student joke with Atticus about his sweater. The student, Brian, mentions how frequently Atticus wears sweaters to school. Atticus responds in kind, by poking fun at him. He laughs and quips back. Several students join the conversation and they are all smiling. Someone mentions the Super Bowl and the conversation seems to dissipate as start time draws near. (Atticus Classroom Observation, 2/4/13)

Later in this class, Atticus showed "A Pep Talk" from the Kid President series on YouTube. As we all watched, the room erupted in laughter as Kid President danced and tried to boost our morale. I was uncertain why we watched the video, but the message, "We were made to be awesome---create something that will make the world awesome" was a great way to start the class. The students were eager and a mood of

anticipation was evident. Atticus' classes (approximately ten observed over four months) all started in a similar way. He checked-in with students, often by making an amusing comment or volleying one made by a student, and asked about extracurricular activities. His classroom atmosphere was accessible and students seemed very comfortable relating to him.

Beyond encouraging a pretty easy going and quick-witted setting, Atticus' cordial rapport extended to his students' parents. His **relational interactions** with them amplified the classroom feel and provided deeper insight about why interpersonal dynamics were vital to his professional experience. He recalled,

I ask the parents [during Back to School night] to raise their hands if they liked history as a high school student. Some of them say yes, but most of them will say no. Then I'll say so do you like it more now than you did then and most of them will say yes. I think part of the reason for that is that they have a longer perspective [...] I also make a joke about it saying that history is one of those subjects, especially in high school, where if you liked your teacher you probably liked the subject. If you didn't like your teacher, you probably didn't like the subject. Then I'll say if your kids like history this year, it's understandable because I'm teaching it. If they don't like it, I don't understand it, and I'll get a chuckle from the parents. (Atticus Interview, 4/26/13)

By including parents "in on" the types of interactions that often transpired with their children, he extended the reach of his classroom. By reaching them on a personal level, he garnered support and aligned their values with those of the classroom. He said,

I think a good teacher uses so much of who they are. I think some teachers make the mistake of trying to be something else, kind of put on the teacher veil or whatever. I think in the end you kind of take who you are and make that work for you. If you value it and you believe it, it will be valuable for the kids and it will work. Plus they'll get a sense of who you are and they'll see that

you're genuine and that works wonders in terms of the connection. (Atticus Interview, 5/13/13)

In authoring such a multifaceted narrative, Atticus always aimed to involve his students (and their families) in meaningful ways.

Efferent Data

For Atticus building a positive rapport with students also enhanced his pedagogical inclinations and instructional choices. While the feel of the classroom was important, his ideas often manifested in clear decisions that directly impacted and heightened the relational nature of the environment. Pedagogically, Atticus' **classroom management** and ideas about **discipline** were directly related to his interpersonal philosophy. During a few of my classroom observations, I noted what seemed to be Atticus' inattention to student misbehavior during a lesson,

9:44AM. The hum of the vent seems really loud as Atticus' lecture touches on several major events about westward colonization, expansion into Alaskan territory, and the Timber and Stone Act of 1878. It is hard not to notice so many students behind computer screens. Probably half the class has an open computer and I can see the glow of the screen reflected in their eyes. They seem shielded and eye contact is minimal. The students chorally respond with correct answers when prompted, but something seems off. There seems to be some sort of distance between the teacher and the students. It's hard for me not to compare or assess because I was an American history kid. (Atticus Classroom Observation, 3/6/13)

When I later addressed his thoughts about managing student behavior, Atticus had a more nuanced view of how to work with students "to get it." He said,

Interestingly enough, it's not that I don't want kids to behave in a certain way; it's just that I don't say anything to them. So sometimes they think that I actually think that's it's okay they act a certain way, when in fact they can't really judge and see when I'm angry because I'm not the type who is going to

yell or shout or anything. It takes a sensitivity to really see that. There was a story once where I was in the hallway and some kids came asking for an extension to do a paper and it was a group of students. First of all, I don't like it when groups of kids ask for [an] extension. If you need an extension, you come to me individually and you explain your circumstances. I will always, without fail, give you the extension, but I want you to learn that you have to man-up and come to me individually and come with a reason [...] If they were picking up on the hints, they would understand that I was kind of short with them, but they just didn't get it. (Atticus Interview, 4/26/13)

Atticus' approach to classroom management and discipline rests almost entirely on the individual rapport he has built with students. He works with them by "judg[ing] the individual kid and see[ing] what the kid needs" (Atticus Interview, 2/4/13). Yet, he has also been careful not to be a prototypical disciplinarian. He said,

Kids need to figure out this stuff by themselves and they need to learn how to be responsible. My imposing it on them isn't going to do anything [...] you may have to impose it [rule or guideline] again if it's completely out of control and it's disruptive, but otherwise they have to learn their lesson. It's more energy for me to have to impose it, than to just let it go. (Atticus Interview, 4/26/13)

Observing Atticus direct inopportune or unnecessary student behavior (as in the aforementioned scenario) was rare. His style and temperament created a very fluid environment and students echoed his philosophy in their focus group responses.

Alternate Reader Responses: "He's a boss..."

I realized early on that classroom observations alone would not provide a holistic view of Atticus' rapport with his students. During such visits, history content was the focus and by his admission, he wanted students to have deep contextual understanding because the subject was so often limited by time. Because of this, he focused on making the information real to the students. Sometimes humor was

appropriate, but more often than not, he focused disseminating the “stuff of history” through formal lectures. Often Atticus stood at a podium or at the Smart Board and relayed chronological facts about a topic. During classroom observations, I often noted what seemed to be pretty passive interactions once these lecture commenced. For example, the class discussion on the Voting Rights Act was only briefly punctuated by a question about the miniseries *Roots*. For most of this lecture, Atticus stuck to his written slides (Atticus Field Notes, 3/6/13). Yet, in moments before class and as I shadowed him through the halls, those often intangible glimmers of an endearing connection were unmistakable. And this theme dominated the student focus group.

When asked to describe him (the very first question of our interview), Atticus’ students spent several minutes highlighting his sense of humor and approachability. They said,

Student A: I think he’s very understanding.

Student B: He’s hilarious, entertaining, cool. He doesn’t state hard facts at you, it’s more like a conversation you’re having when you’re talking with him.

Student D: I like how he grades also and just the way that I enjoy going to history class. Some of my classes I dread it, but I enjoy history with Mr. Atticus.

Student E: I guess everyone else summed it up. He’s really chill, he can be your friend at the same time he’s still your teacher and I like how class is more like a conversation versus just a teacher standing up there and teaching and everyone taking notes. (Atticus Student Focus Group, 5/13/13)

Throughout much of the focus group interview, Atticus’ students emphasized his “care for students” and ability to relate to them on a personal level. While answering my

questions, the students would often interrupt and/or finish each other's sentences because they had each had similar experiences with him. One female student recalled her interaction with him at prom and said, "he always lets people take pictures with him and everyone loves him." In a follow-up interview with Atticus, he mentioned that while most teachers dread prom duty, he actually enjoyed it.

One of the most intriguing responses from his students occurred later in our interview when they were asked, "What is the greatest lesson you've learned so far in his [Atticus'] class or having interacted with Mr. Atticus?" Anticipating a quip about presidential elections or other history-based answer, my sides ached and I was in awe when they responded,

Student A: I did learn that if it's a good burger, you'll [sic] know it's a good burger if you don't have to use ketchup and it still tastes great. Like no condiments. He told us that on the first day of class.

Student B: He's a good singer. He sang us a union label commercial and he sings at lunch. He's good spirited too. We have this day where we bid on teachers, and a lot of teachers get irritated when kids ask them to do stuff, but he takes it in stride.

Student C: He told us that the only way it's going to feel stupid is if you think it's stupid. If you're trying to have fun, you'll have fun. You won't be like 'Oh my God, this is the stupidest thing ever. Why do I have to wear a wig and walk around school all day.' When we were with the Civil War, he goes into great detail about it [...] (Atticus Student Focus Group, 5/13/13)

Even when discussing his classroom management style, his students were very aware of his approach. They knew he relied on individual and personal relationships. Collectively they "felt bad" some of their peers "took advantage of him [trying to

extend assignment deadlines or not paying attention in class],” but two students mentioned,

Student B: I’ve talked to him about [it]. He said that it’s your grade, if you want to do that; it’s up to you.

Student D: He says that a lot. He like ‘It’s your grade, if you want to sit in my class and just online shop, or play video games on your computer, I don’t care...” [Interrupted] (Atticus Student Focus Group, 5/13/13)

Conversely, Atticus’ students knew he cared. They mentioned how he often put notes online for students, helped students after school, and asked them about their lives outside of class.

And they cared about him, as well. When asked, “Do you feel like you know Mr. Atticus,” they said,

Student A: Yeah, I would say I feel like I know him. If we ask something about him, he will take time to actually tell you about it. He told us about his dog...[interrupted]

Student B: I know more about him than other teachers, like my Biology teacher, I don’t know if he has a pet or what food he likes to eat.

Student E: I feel like out of all my teachers, I feel like I know him best.

Student A: I also feel like there are a couple of sides to him I don’t know. Because I know that his Dad passed away [redacted for anonymity] and his Mom passed away [...] So sometimes it makes me really sad because I feel like he’s all alone, but he never really shows a sadder side of him; he’s always happy.

Student C: I’ve never seen him in a sad mood [...]

Student F: I would say yeah because a lot of times outside of class because of diversity [club] and talking to him about next year because I want to be a leader for it and all. He knows a lot about everything. I’ve talked to him about basketball, football, politics. He’ll have a good conversation with you.

Student B: He has a lot of wisdom, which is something that I value.

Atticus' curriculum narrative was easily "read" in his direct and frequent interactions with students outside of the traditional classroom. While I was not sure which came first (how students read his teaching which spilled into extracurricular connection or vice versa), speaking with students enhanced this thematic trend in Atticus' curriculum story. My classroom observations seemed particularly limited in scope as I listened to Atticus' students recall more exchanges with him that were not often observed. Their insights spoke to the special tie Atticus (as the primary author) had to his students (the primary audience) and to shaping the narrative.

Theme Three: A Critical Eye from the History Guy

Inadvertently, I tapped into Atticus' metacognitive understanding of his curriculum story. Atticus' curriculum narrative was not only imbued with instances of critical reflection, but he was uniquely aware of how this tendency perpetually shifted the narrative, even within the time of this study. Because Atticus emphasized personal connection throughout, his curriculum story was one built on continual processing. Through it he, along with his students, constantly considered who they were, how they engaged each other, and their ongoing reckoning with the past—remote, immediate, and emerging. He said,

Those [themes concerning the underdog and humor] would be the fundamental things along with asking yourself why. Why is this important? And getting yourself to think about that both in terms of the event itself, but also in terms of your own biases. I'm looking at it a certain way, but is it possible to look at it a different way? And if you were to look at it that way, why would you look

at it that way? Why am I looking at it the way I look at it? Where's my perspective coming from? Those three things, that's what I'm trying to do day by day. (Atticus Interview, 5/13/13)

For him, being a model for how to think critically and contextually was important.

The data, gleaned from assessing his story aesthetically and efferently, underscored the importance of the aforementioned themes and extended the story's impact.

Aesthetic Data

Atticus' **feelings** about reflection and **internal motivation** played a significant role in ensuring he modeled deep reflection and critical thinking for his students.

When asked what he thinks about before arriving at College Prep he said,

I turn off my alarm, then I turn off another alarm and then I turn off another alarm because I have like three alarms because I'm not really a morning person. I'm thinking this is really hard for me. This is probably the hardest thing about a job for me that a teacher is kind of an early person and I'm a late person. But I actually feel good about getting out of bed [...] And I think about who are the students I have to deal with. For instance, this class that you saw, I have another [history] class that I think you saw once, their personalities are very different. This class is, even though they're talking to each other, they're much more engaged than the other class is. I'm thinking about how are they going to react to what we're going to be talking about today? Then I think about the subject, where are we right now? How is this going to fit with something we just covered? Is there something I can emphasize? Is there something that happened to me recently that might be interesting for them? It might be directly relevant. It might not be directly relevant, but they might find [sic] engaging. Those are the kinds of things I'm thinking about when I get up in the morning. (Atticus Interview, 4/26/13)

Even before he pondered the movement, year, or court case he might use, Atticus'

main concern was how to broaden the learning experience of his students. He

"constantly thought as a teacher" (Atticus Interview, 5/13/13) and often considered

how his students experienced learning in his classroom.

During our interviews, Atticus was often able to display how deeply he thought about teaching, his interactions with students, and what he hoped to teach them. He was invested in the process of learning and sought to help students go beyond surface understanding. He had a definitive “respect for kids who are about the process” (Atticus Interview, 5/13/13). Like many in the social sciences, his internal comfort with inquiry made it easy to ask him highly reflective questions. When asked about his future aspirations he responded,

I think I’ll still be teaching. I may or may not be department chair. I wouldn’t expect anything beyond that. I’m not really interested in administration. I think you need good administrators, but it seems to me that administrators have the worst part of a teacher’s job without having the best part [...] Maybe I’ll add a different class or anything [sic], but I’ll be teaching history. (Atticus Interview, 5/13/13)

Atticus’ curriculum story existed, in large part, because it was intrinsically fused to his awareness of and ability to contemplate it. Each of his experiences in the classroom and with his students reified his motivation and provided significant opportunity to both internalize and mature the narrative over time. Furthermore, this astuteness directly transferred to his use of more concrete teacher tools.

Interestingly, this data straddled a unique zone within the aesthetic-efferent continuum during my reading journey because there seemed to be a bidirectional relationship between how Atticus thought about critical thinking/processing and how this manifested in tangible content choices and student engagement (See Figure 7 below).

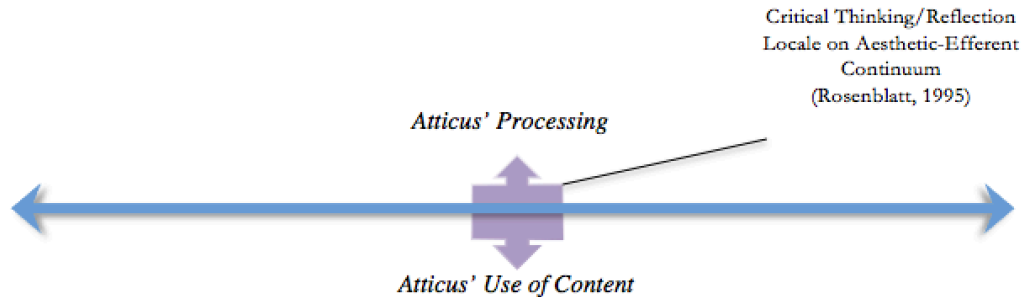


Figure 7. Duality of Atticus' Data-Theme Three: Critical Thinking/Processing

This duality made coding data ascribed to this theme multifaceted. While I could delineate data in my predetermined categories (efferent or aesthetic), this data almost always embodied the type of relational activity I had observed between Atticus and his students. In fact, he said, “What I try to do is think about the experience from their [students] perspective” (Atticus Interview, 4/26/13). Atticus’ content choices, in particular, were directly related to how he thought (or had been thinking) about how his students engaged with history factually, personally, or interactively. So, while I designated this data in similar ways as previously presented, I must note this distinction.

Efferent Data

For Atticus, any good student of history needed an interpretive mind. Being able to assess an event in multiple ways and familiarize oneself with his/her intellectual blind spots would not only foster a deeper appreciation for a particular fact, event or person, but it would also jumpstart internalization, a process meant to

help students personalize their learning. Through **content and instruction**, he set the stage for such activity to occur. During my second classroom observation I noted,

Approximately 9:05AM. Class is already going when a female student (my escort) and I arrive to class. After moving to the front of the room, I have a better perspective of the teacher and the students. Though the door remains open, there aren't many distractions. Atticus starts the class with another episode of "This Day in History" and the narrator highlights the raid on Berlin, Walter Cronkite's final broadcast, and the "cool" inventions of pre-packaged food and Bayer aspirin. After recapping the major headlines, Atticus asks, "What would you consider the most significant [referring to previous episode]?" A female student (number 11 on my seating chart) discusses her thoughts on frozen food being the most significant. She mentions that such an invention gave people more free time. Atticus prompts her further with "It may offer more time (does air quotes) for a wife and mother." He leaves the statement there and a male student picks it up by saying, "That could be a bad thing because they have less family time." Atticus mentions the idea that some people believe that women "should be barefoot and pregnant" though "that's not my position." A few students chuckle at his comment. Another student mentions Berlin as the most significant event of the day. Atticus offers an anecdote about the bombing and how long London could withstand the events in Germany. He transitions and inquires, "No one for aspirin? You may not even think about it, but aspirin is considered like a wonder drug." A student comments about her experience making aspirin in Chemistry class and a female student (number 13 on my seating chart) asks Atticus to "explain Walter Cronkite." For a few minutes Atticus goes into deep detail about the famous news reporter. (Atticus Classroom Observation, 3/6/13)

Each class observed started in this way. Atticus cued "This Day in History" and gave students time to assess the events based on how they would prioritize them. When asked about these episodes Atticus said,

"That [showing and debriefing the episodes] is both a means of getting them to think about historical issues and analyze them...what's more significant than the other, but it's also a way of getting their opinions [...] A lot of the appeal of it is that I really enjoy engaging with the students and finding stuff that we can laugh about and hearing things that make me think, 'Oh, that's interesting.' It's better than a job where you're mostly doing paperwork." (Atticus Interview, 4/26/13)

Once the class had an opportunity to discuss events in this way, it seemed to set the tone for deeper discovery during his formal lectures and other class activities.

In discussing other strategies he uses to foster critical thinking, Atticus noted an instance during his Law class where supplementing a formal case brief helped students tap into the context surrounding desegregation. He said,

To learn that big important figures who do important things had problem that they had to overcome, I think is a great lesson for all of us...particularly for young people when they are trying to figure out how to do things. Right now, in my [Law] class we're showing one of these movies I just uploaded to YouTube. It's called "Separate, but Equal" and it was a TV movie about how the *Brown v. Board of Education* case came to be [...] but the interesting thing about this, this is the first time I've shown this this year instead of just reading the opinions. But to actually show the people who were involved in this and the things they were doing. Not just the students, but the lawyers, and the strategies they were thinking about, the judges and what was motivating them. It makes it, even though I'm sure that there are some factual inaccuracies in it just because it's Hollywood, still makes it even more real for people. (Atticus Interview, 5/13/13)

For Atticus knowing how and why is vitally important to helping students make sense of the history they encounter and create in the world. Beyond being personal values, he modeled these skills in each facet of his curriculum narrative. He said, "the facts are fine, but there's always a point taken off [of tests] if they don't say why this important" (Atticus Interview, 4/26/13). Similarly, his students echoed this sentiment in their reading of Atticus' narrative.

Alternate Reader Responses: "Be Prepared to Argue..."

While not the primary focus of the student focus group interview, several of Atticus' students were aware of the deeply reflective and process-oriented nature of

their teacher. In analyzing their responses to the other thematic trends within the data, much of the feedback garnered whether related to Atticus' insistence on inquiry or not, could align with this theme. When asked to give advice to a new student taking a class with him they responded,

Student B: You'll stay in history.

Student C: Be prepared to talk about stuff in the past or have a conversation or a discussion or an argument. He will go, "Well what do you believe in? and if he goes, "Well I don't believe that's [sound is muffled]..." You can have an argument with him.

NPS: What do you guys mean by "Be prepared to stay in history?" What does that mean?

Student A: This Day in History is what we're talking about.

Student B: We talk about things beyond what we're learning in class at that time.

Student C: It's like a video and the presenter will say, "It's like May 13th," so if we watched it today it will tell you important events that have happened on that date. And at the end he [Atticus] asks you, "What do you think the most significant event [sic] and why?" I think it's just a fun way to start class and we do it everyday. (Atticus Student Focus Group, 5/13/13)

Atticus' students seemed attune to his desire to get them thinking. In fact, their understanding of Atticus' narrative spoke to an awareness of his introspection when asked what other subjects they thought he would be good at teaching. Three of the five students mentioned, "English" and two students (who seemed to know quite a bit about him) said, "Philosophy." These student suggestions highlighted a thorough understanding of Atticus, not only as a teacher, but also as a person. Atticus' students knew him and acknowledged the varied levels of his approach.

In assessing students' perspectives, it was clear Atticus' story was inextricably tied to his personal history and missioned approach to teaching. While perhaps more subliminal and incremental, it became more and more evident his story had social justice implications. The cross-case analysis (Section 4.3) offers in-depth explanation of these trends and displays how Atticus used his narrative to shift the nature of representation (particularly of underrepresented groups in history) at College Prep.

4.2 Nilz: (Em)Powerment Plays

I was introduced to Nilz through a colleague. During a lunch conversation with Sam in the first weeks of the 2012-2013 school year, I had briefly mentioned *Re-Imagining Griots*. A few days later, he formally introduced Nilz and I via email. We were able to meet in person in October 2012.

During our pre-interview, Nilz welcomed me into his office and our conversation transpired as if we had known each other for years. He believed "we should all teach" (Nilz Interview, 10/20/2012), but had no particular aspirations in education administration. His classroom was non-traditional, and as a performing arts instructor, he was drawn to the intimacy teaching allowed in developing student actors. Watching Nilz teach was often a sensory experience. Having spent significant time as a professional in the entertainment industry, his style and approach with students was unlike others I had observed. During our pre-interview, I wondered what drove Nilz to teach? Did he use the performing arts to impart his story? Was content technical or

visceral? What else did he use (students, autobiography, context) to craft the overall learning experience? What types of narratives were important for students to understand and/or tell during his class? Why?

The observations presented in this section highlight how Nilz and his students responded to, interpreted, and gave meaning to these questions. Nilz's curriculum story embodied a duality (maybe even multiplicity) I did not anticipate. While interview and observation protocols were in place, my time with Nilz often became a safe place for him to journey through professional incongruity and explore his acute awareness of the sociocultural implications his story had at Arts Academy. For him, the performing art (acting, theatre, music) offered a way to imbibe his story into the mainstream school culture. Yet, this mode was also how he ensured the integrity of a story, not always fully realized at the school.

Arts Academy. The remnants of summer seemed to antagonize the onset of autumn on October 20, 2012. As I walked through the high school parking lot, I had no idea where to go. I had only ever visited this campus when shuttling my own middle school students to sporting events at Arts. I recalled,

I notice several other cars. It is a Saturday, but the school buzzes with activity. I overhear a few students talk about "a game" and just as quickly as I notice them they're gone. I suddenly feel awkwardly alone as I wait for Nilz to appear. Arts Academy rests on a serene campus cushioned by several other private and parochial schools. There's just enough greenery to provide calm, but the newest structural renovations add an esoteric feel. The parking lot and adjacent baseball diamond have been redone and as I stand in the breezeway between academic buildings, I notice these too, have been given a facelift. I quickly call Nilz to let him know I've arrived. A few minutes later he greets me with a side hug at a side door near the cafeteria. When he steps outside, the door (equipped with a sensor lock) slams behind him. For a moment, he waits

to see if a student or other staff member is around, but he winds up calling the security desk. A male guard lets us in and we make our way inside. (Nilz Field Notes, 10/20/12)

As we walked up the stairs, he joked that our game of phone tag had come to an end and there was a shared sense of relief. Once we reached the second landing of the steps, he opened the door to what looked like the arts wing of the school. There were several couches along an exterior wall, each punctuated by a small round table. When I asked to use the restroom, I noticed several 8½ x 11 inch posters for ongoing auditions and other school news.

The Theater. The Theater was located across from the second floor windows on the right side of the wing and was accented by a heavy black door. Nilz mentioned we would have to go through The Theater in order to get to his office. I noted,

The Theater is a bit smaller than I thought given the size of Arts. As we walk up five or six steps into the space, the stage seems pretty large, but it isn't overwhelming. The floor of The Theater, like most, has a downward incline as we move from the rear to the front. Fashioned with 20-25 rows and three distinct sections (left, middle, right), the space is cozy. There are a few scattered props...a black box, large wooden scenery still in development, and a couple of chairs on the stage. At the foot of the stage rests a Steinway & Sons baby grand piano that has several pieces of paper scattered along its top. To the left of stage, on the floor, is a door. Nilz mentions this is one way middle school students enter the space. To the right is a corridor filled with music stands, chairs and other ancillary props that leads to his office. (Nilz Field Notes, 10/20/12)

During class observations, I typically positioned myself four or five rows from the stage in the middle section. I wanted to be close enough to hear what transpired in the class, particularly as Nilz gave individual feedback to students, but I also wanted to be far enough away as to not inadvertently place myself in the class when he addressed

the students as a whole. This location worked well during data collection. For personal interviews, Nilz and I most often talked in his office.

Nilz's Office. As we walked through the entry of the office, Nilz mentioned, “[The Theater] is purposed for craft, not entertainment” (Nilz Field Notes, 10/20/12) and he invited me to sit on a plush purple couch. I remembered,

The office is narrow and more rectangular than square. Nilz shares this space with two other Arts Academy faculty members and it feels too small for three adults. A bulletin board above the couch showcases his directorial body of work at Arts, as playbills, student thank-yous, and numerous photos from performances flood the wall. His desk, perpendicular to the couch along an interior wall, is a mess. Handwritten notes, copies of screenplays, and a variety of books are stacked high on his desk, though the area around his Mac computer is pretty clear. He hands me a recent playbill and I ask him what he knows about the project. He says, “You want to know how African American teachers are faring [in this area]” and mentions he might be the “most unorthodox participant” as “Arts Academy was in plans not imagined.” (Nilz Field Notes, 10/20/12)

It was here where Nilz and I began a unique journey in storytelling. His ability to grasp the aims of *Re-Imagining Griots* fostered a unique researcher- participant relationship. From the beginning his voice was only amplified by my inquiry. He seemed eager to tell his story and for me to observe how it impacted his work with students.

When asked about his personal beliefs, professional experience, and how these areas intersected to form a story, Nilz was able to articulate a narrative my interview protocols did not anticipate. I ascribe this to his expertise as a performing artist and ability to think introspectively. During our second interview (four months after our initial meeting) he said,

My background has always been a lot of theatre mission and theatre for me, since high school, has always been a means to reach people where they are, and to inspire them, an influence and to do positive things, to challenge themselves to do great things and to help people. (Nilz Interview, 2/3/13)

His dynamism and attunement with his story (even as it shifted) gave him immediate agency. His data, when assessed, revealed themes of empowerment and subversion.

Theme One: Groom Intentional Artists

Data collection at Arts Academy spanned eight months and frequently revealed a zeal and purpose I could only ascribe to Nilz's experience prior to his time there.

While I am sure Nilz's students impacted his devotion to the performing arts, his curriculum story was largely influenced by how he had merged the arts with a spiritual call to serve others. He said,

I started street theatre years ago when I was in college. And that became part of the mission to help educate young people about live [performing arts]...taking it right to the streets where the people are. And then we would go into churches and teach people how to write their own plays about their own issues and themes and all that. (Nilz Interview, 2/3/13)

Having had a "pretty anti-climatic college experience," Nilz found value in transforming the lives of people, particularly children, through theater.

He did this by being a master guide and mentor to performing arts students in and outside of the classroom.

Aesthetic Data

During data analysis, emotive data spoke to this theme and centered on Nilz's **personal and professional experience** as a member of a Christian performing arts

group. While he was first introduced to acting in high school, his time with Mustard Seed gave him first-hand experience teaching and making abstract concepts real to people. During an interview, he shared a video showcasing the group using spoken word, improvisation, and other arts-based media to teach performing arts skills, and enhance how people saw themselves. I noted,

4:15PM. The video is grainy, but Nilz's enthusiasm bounces from him to me and back to the screen as we watch this video on YouTube. Set on a street familiar to most living within the urban landscape called the "ghetto," a group of actors make preparations and transform the blacktop of a city block into a makeshift stage. Passersby look on with intrigue as a theatrical "hype man" invite them over to watch. Two actors execute a burglary scene. The perpetrator's language is harsh. His demeanor is aggressive as he wields a plastic gun and duct tapes the mouth of his "mark" closed. Interrupted, a former criminal and his acquaintance begs him to make a different choice. This "friend" found a higher calling in prison. A tussle ensues as the acquaintance disarms the perpetrator. The victim, spiritually aligned with the reformed criminal, offers forgiveness. Children look on curiously. The scene cuts as another performer invites the crowd to give their lives over to Christ. The performance, enacted on their street and in terms the residents understand, is compelling and many accept the call. (Nilz Field Notes, 3/6/13)

Once out of college, Nilz continued to work with Mustard Seed and landed a job with a major children's television network where he worked one-on-one with adolescent actors as a "dialogue coach and punch up writer" (Nilz Interview 2/3/13). Nilz saw teaching as an outgrowth of these work experiences. He felt much of his role at Arts Academy was to "empower people to write plays and to create plays that will lift people up" (Nilz Interview, 2/3/13). In assessing his curriculum narrative, this sense of agency was clear in his classroom and interactions with students.

Whenever I observed Nilz's performing arts and/or theater lessons he seemed very intentional about the **classroom atmosphere**. He structured class activities much

like theater workshops and presented them in a professional manner when working with students. They knew what was expected and on the rare occasion when they needed reminders, they were able to redirect themselves accordingly (Nilz Classroom Observation Notes, 3/6/13). The atmosphere was direct without being off-putting, encouraging while still being challenging, and uniquely individualized for each student. I noted,

1:06PM. The class tries a performing arts exercise called “hot choice” and it seems as though the students are having a hard time responding authentically to the prompts. Nilz wants students to “think outside the boundaries of [the script], so he jumps on stage to work along side each of the ten students. He gives a line to the class, “Oh wow, you’ve go to be kidding me” and shows the students how a “hot choice” can shift the dynamic of a scene by saying the line in a variety of ways. He says, “Don’t change based on what you see in your peers. If you do, I’m not going to call on you.” The students watch his every move. And, he adds dimensions to the context of the scene (a friend just painted this room, you’re in a Scorsese film with Bradley Cooper, Denzel Washington, and Meryl Streep, you’re being featured on a Justin Beiber soundtrack). The students seem better able to grasp the activity. They deliver a variety of scene interpretations and applaud one another. There is laughter and the mood is light. Some students’ “hot choices” are silly, some are serious, and a few are shy. (Nilz Classroom Observation, 3/6/13)

During this lesson, Nilz created a focused space for students to explore theatrical choices, but he also managed to maintain the safety and fun of the activity. He joined the group on stage and dismantled the teacher-student dichotomy to extend students’ understanding. He infused cultural/generational cues into the space to bring familiarity to the exercise. Unlike a traditional classroom, which housed desks, a chalk or Smart Board, and bookshelves, Nilz’s “class” had the luxury of being a space that replicated scenarios performing arts students would face in reality. In reading this

aspect of his narrative, it was clear he wanted students to learn and work in an environment wherein he could model concepts in tangible ways.

Further, Nilz's **relational interactions** with students amplified the purposed calibration of his curriculum story. During the aforementioned activity, I noted, "One student, Amber, decides not to make a 'hot choice.' Nilz stands next to her, falls down, knocks over a stool, and says, "We have to make choices that one would remember. Paint a picture that no one else has like Picasso" (Nilz Classroom Observation, 3/6/13). Amber, a shy first year student, was challenged by Nilz through his role modeling. After he willingly took part in the exercise, she was better able to contribute to the learning environment. She opened up when placed in a group of her peers and I was able to see a positive shift in her engagement with the activity. His deliberateness in showing versus telling made his curriculum story practical and reader-oriented; he knew everything he did was read, translated, and internalized. As the teacher, each step of his modeling served to inform his students' learning during this particular activity. Amber drew inferences from his direction and willingness to enter the acting space in order to give them cues. These prompts, much like the textual signs embedded within "traditional stories," helped her not only experience the skill the "hot choice" activity aimed to develop, but it also use it effectively. This type of narrative structure reinforced my ideas about the experiential nature of curriculum and teachers' awareness of how their stories influence learning.

Efferent Data

With such a vast background and desire to pave the way for younger actors, data analyses of the concrete ways Nilz's curriculum story could be read were evident in his **epistemological beliefs** about the performing arts. He said his classes were,

where you learn the technical aspects of acting and [where] I teach from pretty much an actor's standpoint. So it's really focused on developing the individual student and getting them to use their **vessel...to be comfortable with their vessel meaning their body, their voice, and their creative mind**. (Nilz Interview, emphasis added, 2/4/13)

For him teaching students how to act and respond in theater required ongoing experience in a variety of situations. As a teacher who taught students with varying skill-levels in the same class, Nilz ensured students had ample opportunities to practice. He went on to say, "I've seen all types of [performing arts] curriculum [sic] for students and for the most part their content-based and we are experientially based and it's all about experience on stage" (Nilz Interview, 2/12/13). With an invitation to "sit back and observe," data collected from Nilz's classes and rehearsals supported his beliefs.

Nilz's students did not have a shared textbook, series of screenplays, or even music selections; he chose scenes, activities, and even the formal stage productions based on how he experienced students' development in class. While many of his classes shared some similarities, his **instructional methods** were often those of a facilitator. He made suggestions, probed students to think outside the given context, and humanize their characters. During a class visit, I noted,

11:09AM. Two veteran upperclassmen take the stage to review their scene, “The Road.” A couple (male and female) discusses their sex lives, growing up as young adults, and pushing through uncertainty. The female student, using a flawless cockneyed accent, says “They rush you from the cradle to the grave” as she shares with her partner how some people use sex as an escape. The Theater is eerily quiet as the rest of the class intently watches the scene. Nilz sits to the right of stage focused on the two actors. Periodically, he interjects with stage directions, but most often he watches and takes furious notes. As the scene comes to a close, he says, “let’s look at some of those f-bombs in there” referencing the language used in the text. He initially asks the actors to ponder such “overt use of such a word.” A brief conversation between Nilz and the two actors occurs. (Nilz Classroom Observation, 2/12/13)

During this time, Nilz highlighted the students’ maturity in handling the subject matter and the female actor’s use of a British accent. He got on stage with the students and offered immediate feedback. As they reflected on the use of vulgarity in the scene, he turned to the audience (where the rest of the class sat) and posed the same question.

Field notes showed,

Most of the students in the audience are fairly new to the performing arts, but he probes them a bit deeper than the actors. After a few minutes, he wraps up class by assigning homework. He asks the students to think about “What does your character want?” A student in the previous scene says, “My character is 17, but doesn’t seem that way” and Nilz offers, “I want you to remain true to the character. Find the voice of the character. What words are necessary for him/her to keep?” (Nilz Classroom Observation Notes, 2/12/13)

Instead of focusing solely on the actors on the stage, Nilz took an individual lesson and broadened its scope to include the rest of the class. Instead of telling them not to use vulgar language, he had them interrogate its purpose in the scene. Ultimately, the students in the scene decided some f-bombs were necessary for effect, but many could be replaced with words and behaviors better suited to convey the characters’

perspective at the time. On a few occasions, he mentioned students needed to make such observations because they made them better actors.

During a visit to “The Great American Musical” rehearsal, Nilz emphasized guidance over direct instruction as the actors prepped the opening scene of the play. I noted,

Nilz gives directorial notes to the student cast. He emphasizes pacing and allowing “the beat of a moment to penetrate.” They take his feedback and set the stage for the first scene. Before the actors begin, Nilz asks them to “analyze each beat” and think about why “x would choose to sit.” He wants the actors to become more aware of how a character might feel and says, “Don’t act” as he tries to articulate his desire to see more empathy on stage. (Nilz Classroom Observation Notes, 3/9/13)

As their guide, Nilz partnered with students as they discerned choices made on stage. In my observations, he rarely corrected a student, but would inquire about his/her choice instead. Through such dialogue, Nilz was able to get the best performances from his students.

Alternate Reader Responses: “He’s not going to sugar coat anything...”

Nilz’s intentionality was supported with student focus group data. The students’ input validated this theme and offered a way to triangulate the data. Data from Nilz’s student focus group showed students supported the assertion of his mentor-like role because Nilz: 1) was approachable and validated the experiences of his students, 2) showcased a level of mutual respect his students appreciated, and 3) used his professional expertise to craft individual teachable moments for them. Having had pretty open access to his classes, students, and a front seat to how his narrative

developed during data collection (via in-depth interviews), the views of Nilz's students were spot on. They were essential to substantiating a valid read of this theme in his curriculum narrative.

When asked to paint a picture of the classroom atmosphere, Harris (taking his second course with Nilz at the time of the study) said,

The first day I ever took his class the first thing he had us do was go behind a wall, hide somewhere, listen to music, and start dancing. Gradually, he made us all individually go up on stage, with everyone in front of us, and dance. It was to get you out of your comfort zone and it set the tone for that sort of environment where you're safe...you don't have to second-guess yourself. That's a vivid image of myself dancing terribly in front of my peers because it was okay. It was an environment where I could do that and not have to worry about judgment or people talking about it outside of the class. It was fine to make a fool out of myself and I wasn't afraid to. (Nilz Student Focus Group, 5/31/13)

During this exchange, Harris made sure to mention how Nilz was honest and often stepped outside of the teacher role to be part of learning activities. Several students mentioned his ability to make learning about emotion, trust, and other technical aspects of theater easier because he created a space where getting to know one another was required.

With an environment ready for purposeful engagement, Nilz's style of teaching greatly impacted his students. His relational approach garnered their respect and made them teachable, no matter how ridiculous or challenging his request. When asked how this was possible, one student recalled,

Anthony: He gives us books with plays and says if we like anything in there you can act that out in [class], he gives us choices. If we don't have a choice, he will help us decide. (Nilz Student Focus Group, 5/31/13)

Nilz's students were able to pick up on the nuances of his teaching philosophy because of how intentional he was in his instruction of them. Even outside of the confines of a 55-minute or 75-minute class, his students highlighted his ability (and often passion) as a role model.

According to them, Nilz had a penchant for extending his expertise to students whenever necessary. Later in the focus group, Irene elaborated,

The first monologue he ever had me do was a girl who had cerebral palsy. As soon as he gave it to me I had a bit of a panic attack because he wanted me to play it like she would play it and I didn't know how to do that. I was really nervous. I didn't know what he wanted me to do. I had to go into meet with him privately and I told him several times that I couldn't do it and that I didn't necessarily want to do it. He did it with me...we would do it simultaneously. He would show me how I could interpret it and how he interpreted it. Just working together and helping me get to the point where I could do it without being afraid or embarrassed or thinking I was being insulting or doing something wrong. That helped me a lot because from that point on I was comfortable with everything he gave me because if I could do that, I could do anything. (Nilz Student Focus Group, 5/31/13)

Throughout data collection, students seeking guidance always (literally) interrupted Nilz's personal interviews. They wanted his opinion on a character's cadence, the meaning in between lines, and more importantly, they wanted him to show them. Yet, he rarely offered one way to portray a character or set a scene. A frequent refrain during these moments was, "How about this? Or this?" He delved, often in the space of a few moments, deeply into their acting sensibilities. He challenged content he had presented during formal class and often introduced new techniques. He gave them ownership by balancing direct instruction with facilitation.

Theme Two: Debut the Man in the Mirror

While Nilz sought performing arts mastery for all of his students, his desire to foster self-awareness complemented this goal. Nilz's curriculum story offered students opportunities to not only "read" his story, but also explore untapped versions of themselves. In fact, as students prepared to block scenes during one visit, one mentioned in jest, "I'm rejecting this [scene assignment] on the basis that it is too accurate" (Nilz Classroom Observation, 2/12/13). His work with students was deeply personal and his curricular choices often mirrored and stretched them. Most were feasible life journeys with which they could identify. While the majority of Nilz's students were White and middle class, there were students of color for whom Nilz used the stage to hone identity development and bolster self-esteem. His personal experiences heightened his ability to empathize with students of color. He said, "I was very sensitive to all the injustice and nuances that were going on in private school at the time [his high school]. I didn't have many advocates. And I had a foot in both worlds [...] and I was lost" (Nilz Interview, 2/12/13). Nilz's curriculum story, as the data revealed, was an opportunity for students of color to recast themselves. He frequently pushed these students, in particular, to redefine their experiences on the stage. He was conscientious of this dynamic and used the performing arts as a platform to advocate for students in ways he had not been as a teen.

Aesthetic Data

Nilz's curriculum narrative was thoroughly influenced by his time as a student at an independent school. These **personal experiences** triggered a series of plot developments that undoubtedly shaped Nilz's role at Arts Academy. He said, "I went to [an independent school] and the irony is I came to school with my hair in twists and I'm walking into school with this hairstyle and so Afrocentric (Nilz Interview, 2/12/13). Nilz's experiences in high school were challenging, particularly because he did not always fit the visual aesthetics the school maintained. He was an athlete and had to contend with the weight of subpar academic expectations. He said,

I did not have one person to stand up for me and say, you know if wants to do some academically rigorous stuff, why not? So, I got lost and what I realized and when it hit me, they would give me a scholarship to play ball and I no longer wanted to play ball. (Nilz Interview, 2/12/13)

When he desired to take Chinese and an advanced math course, he said the school redirected him, which caused tension between the school and his family. After finding resolution, and he stopped playing sports, he said, "it was a teacher who thought I'd be good in theater and that was all she wrote" (Nilz Interview, 2/12/13). Once committed to the performing arts, life at school became more manageable. Yet, these experiences taught him,

if you don't identify yourself you will be identified in a particular way [and] it's inescapable I think, not to have a qualifier that sends a snapshot of who you are [...] So, I have to make it clear that I'm not just an American man. No, I'm not just a man. I'm a father. I'm a Christian. And that's important to me. (Nilz Interview, 2/12/13)

He also understood his experiences linked him to other students and he said, “young people need to know who I am and in that, I’m a role model. I’m an example” (Nilz Interview 2/12/13). And as such, Nilz took this charge seriously.

When assessing his curriculum story in this way, it was clear Nilz’s goal was best achieved through his **relational interactions** with them. He wanted “to get [students] on stage and to challenge them to discover other parts of themselves that they haven’t been challenged to discover before” (Nilz Interview 3/9/13). One decisive way he did this occurred in his quest to get the entire basketball team to participate (in some way) in “The Great American Musical.” He said,

It will be unprecedented to have the whole basketball team, 90% of whom are African American up on stage. And part of what I like to do is get kids up on stage who look like me. It’s been a challenge, but I think it’s going to work. (Nilz Interview, 2/12/13)

And that it did. During a walk he and I took through the arts wing, Nilz was a very effective promoter. I recalled,

We’re move at a pretty brisk pace, and Nilz seems to have more eyes and ears than I can count. He is sensitive to students who offer a nod, quick eye contact, and especially those who stop him briefly to say hello. As we make our way through the upper corridor, he greets an African American young man with a dap [a warm, but often individualized version of a handshake] and one armed-hug. This kid is tall and between these two I feel especially short. The student is in Nilz’s advisory section and he takes a few moments to ask about his classes and life at home. After the student responds and they make small talk, he finally inquires, “Hey, have you thought about the play?” He quickly reminds the student about the time and location of tryouts. (Nilz Field Notes, 2/12/13).

On several occasions during data collection, I observed Nilz take an extra moment to edify students of color and I wondered how far this intentionality went.

Nilz was clear that relevancy and authenticity, beyond shared phenotype, was incredibly important. He knew a common background only,

opens the door, but that door can close really fast [...] a person's environment and culture is what connects people. It's not enough to be browned skinned. The resentment is twice as bad when you are the same color and can't connect. (Nilz Interview, 3/9/13)

Nilz understood the gravity of his role for students of color at Arts and knew it shaped his career there. When I asked if students were aware of this, he mentioned some students "get it" by the time their seniors. This was the reason he has said,

"I can't leave this year because so and so has another year almost every year since I've been here [at Arts Academy]. There's a girl here now that is graduating who is very smart. Her experience at the school encapsulates the complexity of the student crossing worlds and cultures [...] They've all gone through the same storms, not manifest in the same way, but they've all gone through the same thing. (Nilz Interview, 3/9/15)

Yet, his attunement to the lived experiences of these students did not limit his desire to see the growth in all students. And, he made very discernable choices in his teaching to cultivate the cultural capacity of the school at large. These shifts were often some of the more observable components of his curricular story.

Efferent Data

For Nilz, teaching in individualized ways shaped his **pedagogical methodology** and made it easier to observe how he crafted activities (and often life lessons) into his class workshops. When instructing students of color, in particular, Nilz's focus heightened. During a class observation, I noted,

2:20PM. The chatter of students coming and going hovers in the air. As I prepare for my third observation of the day, I notice an African American male student enter The Theater. He sports a high top fade, and a red and black vest that covers a turtleneck. A large wooden necklace (I'm reminded of my time in Ghana) etched with a peace symbol circles his neck and shoulders. As Nilz asks the students about their assignments, this student mills about the stage, toward the back. Nilz promptly moves the class through a series of warm-ups. They do the requisite jumping jacks, "Ohhhssss," and "Ahhss." 2:38PM. Today's main activity forces the students a bit more out of their comfort zones, as Nilz wants them to "throw energy" to one another. Interestingly, the African American student goes first. He makes a barely audible sound and attempts to throw the energy to the next student. Nilz isn't enthused. Either this student is shy or maybe he's aware I'm watching him. Nilz asks, **"Why are you afraid of the sound of your own voice?"** He wants him, and I imagine the class, to match the energy on stage. He wants it to move. (Nilz Classroom Observation, emphasis added, 3/6/13)

While my role as a participant observer was limited, it was clear Nilz and this student had similar exchanges in the past. Once addressed, and after making a connection to volleyball and basketball, he draws this student (along with a few others) back into the activity. In directing the emphasized statement to this student, Nilz challenged his predisposition to linger in the background. In this moment, I knew Nilz had tapped into his own curricular narrative. He wanted students of color to have legitimate involvement in the community, and his words (whether perceived by this student or not) advocated for such engagement. Nilz made sure this student knew it was okay and it was safe to do so. This method edified the student and shifted the overall trajectory of the lesson.

Nilz also revealed his investment in equipping students of color at Arts Academy through telling shifts in **content**. While the majority of students who took his classes were White, Nilz made concerted efforts to have the school's major

productions reflect the 21st century demographics and mores. Besides taking stock of his students' talent level, he pushed productions into modernity by inserting issues he valued into them. A visit during an early rehearsal for "The Great American Musical" I wrote,

I'm a bit early for the "Great American Musical" rehearsal and as I watch the students socialize in the auditorium, I notice an African American female practice on the stage alone. Nothing has officially started, but when I walk up to Nilz (near the piano), I take a moment to watch her. She seems focused and ready for practice to begin. I peripherally mention my observation to Nilz and he says, **"only one line added to the book...interracial."** It seems he turned "The Great American Musical" into a statement by casting the lead role to this student. As he shifts toward his students, he says it's "a good poignant moment that I think the director would appreciate." (Nilz Field Observation, emphasis added, 3/9/13)

When asked about this decision, Nilz mentioned he wanted to "show true relationships, allow students to have fun, and experience a sort of freedom with it." (Nilz Interview, 3/6/13). He elaborated and said these particular facets of the play experience were important because he was not always given these opportunities as an adolescent. Such a choice reflected his desire to help students; those of color in particular, "make good choices and trust their instincts...impulses" (Nilz Interview, 3/6/13). This actor, more than well prepared, delivered her lines and sang without abandon. I knew she had been selected because of her talent. Her racial background just happened to afford Nilz an opportunity to send a keen message to the larger Arts Academy community as a bonus.

Alternate Reader Responses: “Being myself everywhere I go...”

Only one student of color participated in Nilz’s student focus group and I did not want to tokenize his experiences at Arts by asking questions directly related to race. As an African American researcher with formidable experiences in predominately White institutions, I was sensitive to how such inquiries could not only skew the relational dynamic of the group, but also place an undue burden on this student to speak as though his experiences were representative of all students of color. Instead, I used the interview protocol to prompt students’ recollection of personal experiences with Nilz. From this data, I ascertained a deep connection Nilz had with them as a group. Based on how Nilz presented his curriculum story, they perceived (“read”) him as “funny,” “caring,” “comforting,” and a teacher who consistently pushed them to “trust” who they were and “be confident” (Nilz Student Focus Group, 5/31/13). In fact, the data revealed confidence and/or comfort with one’s “self” over twenty times in student responses.

Once this was clear, I further analyzed Anthony’s (the student of color) responses. While he answered the same questions as his peers, his responses offered additional support for Nilz’s investment in students of color as thematic trend in the data. When asked to elaborate on how he knew Nilz was “funny, outgoing, and caring,” he said,

In class and out of class we talk. I got to know him and he got to know me. He’s been helping me with theater since this is my first year and he’s been helping me a lot.

[...]

I met him at the beginning of last year [at the time of the study, Anthony was a sophomore]. I had an interest in theater and acting, but I was always too insecure to really pursue it. I signed up for his class and immediately I knew that this wasn't going to be just any other [class]. It was all about making you feel comfortable with yourself, not just about getting a good performance out of you, which I think is incredibly important. (Nilz Student Focus Group, 5/31/13)

While it was not uncommon for Nilz to maintain connections with students (regardless of racial background) outside of his elective, I had witnessed at least five or six different occasions when these interactions were with students of color, in particular. During an interview, Nilz recalled (to the point of tears) an interaction he had with a group of African American boys he had driven home after play rehearsal. He said,

Three [African American boys] were on the basketball team and there was a night at rehearsal that it really clicked. They were watching me teach and after rehearsal, I took them to McDonald's and dropped them home. The next rehearsal, they would not just listen to the directions, but they would come up and put their arms on my shoulder and say, "Mr. [Nilz], how do you want to do this? And they got it. They wanted to do the show and have fun because they knew what my struggle was. They knew that I was sacrificing so much for them and they wanted to return that sacrifice. (Nilz Interview, 4/4/13)

When I asked Nilz, "what clicked" and "what had he observed in those students," he elaborated,

It was for a brief moment, we all knew we were from the same place. We see the world the same way, we know how we're perceived and we can now sit in this car and kinda exhale and we can be authentic with each other without any distraction or thoughts of how we were being perceived. No games being played. Being in a culture like they...they've been groomed in reading subtexts because they've had to protect themselves and read in between the lines to survive there [...] I think there's only certain opportunities [sic] to show your love for your teacher who is in the trenches and they get it. (Nilz Interview, 4/4/13)

And while Anthony did not say outright, “Nilz has been there for me as a student of color,” I knew from other data and observations, the likelihood was high. In fact, the two shared similar paths as high school athletes and Anthony mentioned, “[...] for him acting opened up many doors. I play a lot of sports and this is something new I can try and see where it takes me” (Nilz Student Focus Group, 5/31/13). Nilz was committed to each of his students, but he took on a special role with students of color; with them, he sought to empower and model possibility. He knew for students of color, in particular, students seeing their teacher as mirror could be powerful. Regardless of context (predominately White or racially diverse), teachers of color, especially men of color are often absent in such roles.

Theme Three: Reckoning with Double (Change) Agency

Data collection for *Re-Imagining Griots* at Arts Academy quickly revealed Nilz had a nested curriculum narrative. On one hand, there was the generally accessible story he embodied and displayed during his classes. Here, the efferent data included concrete and easily observable data related to his content, pedagogy, and epistemology. Further, Nilz’s aesthetic data included more nuanced characteristics of his story including the classroom atmosphere and assessments of his interpersonal dynamics with students. This collection of data, delineated by the first two thematic strands of this section, gave life to Nilz’s curriculum narrative, but it was limited. Nilz’s story, like most, had more than one dimension. In assessing data related to the

theme, “debut the man in the mirror” it was clear there was some tension Nilz experienced as a sought to be a self-described advocate. He mentioned students of color not being able to “get it” until they were well on their way to college and as a researcher with similar professional experiences, I knew that “it” had more to do with facets of his story he kept close and often hidden from the larger Arts Academy community.

While Nilz epitomized a master performing arts teacher, vested in the growth of his students, his role was also wrought with a contextual reality of racial stratification and instances of agency displacement. As a teacher, Nilz had a sort of freedom to instruct, interact, and make choices without much scrutiny. Yet, as part of the larger faculty at Arts, his expertise and authority were often challengeable. Analysis of this data deepened my understanding of his curriculum story and captured how Nilz, as a teacher-griot, reclaimed this portion of his narrative by sharing it with me.

Aesthetic Data

During an early interview, Nilz shared his frustrations concerning his teacher evaluation. This **professional experience** forced him to carry the weight of stereotypical perceptions and this affected his will to continue working at Arts during the time of this study. According to him, an administrator had written a report, which described him as “angry,” “emotionally unstable,” as well as “defensive and terse” (Nilz Interview, 2/12/13). Nilz mentioned the assessment, while primarily focused on

his great work with students, seemed to undermine these positive relationships by taking jabs at his character. Visibly frustrated, he said, “I’ve heard these types of words to describe Black men in a negative way my whole life” (Nilz Interview 2/12/13). He did not understand how or why such diminutive traits had been used to characterize him, especially in the context of a formal teacher evaluation, given his track record with students. When I asked how he addressed his concerns, he said,

So, I gathered myself and wrote a long letter to my supervisor. And I said, this is so disparaging and in violation of my character. And she hit all the stereotypical, trigger words to describe a black male it was and I said, I’m utterly offended by this personal attack and I’ve never had an evaluation of this type of tone. (Nilz Interview, 2/12/13)

After mediation between the administrator, Nilz, and the school’s principal, it became clear (at least to him) that this administrator, a middle-aged White woman, had perceived Nilz’s forthright disposition as a threat. He recalled a faculty meeting where she noted Nilz’s “dissenting opinion” (Nilz Interview, 2/12/13) as anger. When I asked him what could have contributed to this type of “read,” he said, “Honestly, a blind spot. I think any expression of emotion is seen as aggressive or offensive” (Nilz Interview, 2/12/13). While many of his students flocked to him, it seemed these same traits were read less favorably among some of his colleagues. Nilz, in expressing this dichotomy, was visibly irritated and as he and I discussed this situation, my role as a participant heightened. My personal experience, as both an educator and student in predominately White contexts had made me sensitive to the often problematic nature of being well-versed in a community that has different expectations; that can misread or misinterpret the curriculum story I embody or express. The dance of subservience,

deference, and having ones “stuff together” was a tiring one and as we talked, Nilz’s body language (usually taut, but approachable) became more open and in some ways vulnerable as he shared his frustrations.

Interestingly, as Nilz and I discussed this occurrence, his office mates (two White male faculty members) entered and the interview shifted abruptly, creating an **institutional atmosphere** (similar to classroom atmosphere), worthy of analysis. I recalled,

10:00AM. Nilz and I discuss his “juicy news” as I encourage him to discuss his perceptions of Sara’s evaluation of him. He mentions the principal’s separate meetings with each. Nilz knows he wants her to remove the inflammatory remarks and “stick to the facts.” Just when I want to ask if their working relationship has changed, Nilz’s office mates enter the room and there is a palpable shift in the atmosphere. Without missing a beat, Nilz speaks as though he’s in the middle of a thought...like he’s in the middle of a sentence. He mentions an odd occurrence in one class section and the activities I can expect to see, though we have already gone over this information. Sensing his desire to change the subject, I hand him my interview protocol and ask if any of the questions spark an interest. He says, “Yea, ok. Let me think about that,” and he continues rambling about activities I already know about. After a few moments, he says, “Ok. Well let me show you the department,” though I’ve toured the school twice by this point. (Nilz Field Observations, 2/12/13)

As a participant-observer during this moment, I felt the familiar pangs of uneasiness. I had experienced this sort of “the walls have ears” moment on numerous occasions, and also knew how frustrating it was not to be authentic. Once we left the office and were out of earshot, he said,

The reason why I’m showing you this is because we’re on top of each other and we don’t really have a place to be private where students can come and feel like they have the fidelity of their mentor. So, what you have to do is again watch your tongue always because of who’s around, case and point. And it makes you feel bad because you feel like you can’t be 100% genuine in that moment. (Nilz Interview, 2/12/13)

Through non-verbal cueing, he made it clear this portion of his story, and perhaps others, were not safe to tell. In order for Nilz and I to finish our discussion about his teacher evaluation and its racial undertones, we left his office and walked to the gym. He explained,

Believe it or not, a lot of the time we find ourselves here [in the gym]. And this is where many of my students and I talk about many different things, but you're public, but also pretty private. So, you have to try to find these interesting ways to have these kinds of conversations. (Nilz Interview, 2/12/13)

I thought it perplexing that one of the few places on campus where Nilz and his students (often of color) could talk without a suspicious gaze was in the gym. As a literary aficionada, the symbolism in this locale was intense. In fact, as Nilz palmed a basketball and took a few shots during our interview, I couldn't help but wonder if this was how he coped with the apparent layers of displacement. Did this experience, which seemed more frequent than not, speak to an institutional issue and/or context of silencing? While he did not vocalize his awareness in these terms, he mentioned, "I think that part of being here is taking the hits, but also being on the inside. I can **quietly help** other people of color get in the door that otherwise might be really hard for them to get through. I see value in that" (Nilz Interview, emphasis added, 3/9/13). In "playing the game," however, Nilz had to make sacrifices. Much like the teacher evaluation fiasco, he had to choose which battles were worth speaking up about because doing so would have very real repercussions; they could further limit or erase the access he had all together.

Efferent Data

Nilz's interactions with an African American colleague at Arts were integral in understanding his role as a double (change) agent. In a role that assumed he be both trailblazer and translator, he navigated an often-tenuous dynamic during data collection. As he shared these experiences, the multidimensionality and depth of his curriculum story was clear. Further, his observations of and interactions with Mr. Director (another teacher of color at Arts) revealed noteworthy internal meaning making processes concerning his identity, the significance of his positionality at Arts, and the institutional/societal factors that weighed on him in and outside of the school. As a result, his **epistemological beliefs** about teaching and learning were impacted. Through these experiences, his feelings about expertise and how knowledge was valued at the school were confirmed. He was able to see first-hand how unorthodox (read: peripheral; non-White) modes of knowing could be problematic at Arts.

Mr. Director was a part-time faculty member in the department. Outside of Arts, he and Nilz were friends and it was their relationship that opened the door for Mr. Director to join the staff. According to Nilz, Mr. Director (with an extensive professional portfolio, including work on Broadway) had come under the microscope with the Arts Academy administration because of what he believed to be bias. He said,

What he hasn't been able to really do is [navigate] those lines of where he has to turn that off [informality] and turn on his professional demeanor. And I feel like that's been a struggle as a result. I know that from working in this environment for a long time that the White teachers have just started to form an opinion about him. (Nilz Interview, 3/9/13)

Because of this, Nilz looked out for Mr. Director. While he worked through the nuances of his own curriculum story, he simultaneously offered insights to Mr. Director that would hopefully aid in a smoother transition for him. During an interview, Nilz recalled the moment he witnessed Mr. Director “lounging” (not asleep, but relaxing) in the performing arts department shared office. He told him, “You may have worked on a production later than normal, but don’t let people see you laying down. Don’t let people get the wrong impression of you. I honestly resent having to be in that position of having to tell him that” (Nilz Interview, 3/9/13). Nilz did not direct this “resentment” toward Mr. Director, but his expression indicated a deeper dissatisfaction with being under constant review.

Later in the school year, this frustration returned when Mr. Director was selected to lead students in the production of a seminal work. He recalled,

I just had a meeting with [Mr. Director]. He is now covering for one of our colleagues who cannot direct Shakespeare this spring, so he’s the new Shakespeare director. The woman who normally directs and I both conclude that he would be the best director for the show. Ever since that decision was made, we have had to have a meeting with five administrators about scheduling and making sure everyone is returning emails on time. The subtext seems to be saying that we [the two African American instructors] are a little too loose and relaxed. (Nilz Interview, 4/4/13)

It seemed, based on Nilz’s account of this situation, Mr. Director missed or was unaware of the pointed attention on him. To Nilz, Mr. Director was not readily in tune with how his selection and the ensuing debate around it could be problematic. When asked how he understood the situation he said,

In my heart, I don't feel that they really wanted an African American to direct Shakespeare. **A little color is good, too much color is a problem** [...] Yesterday, [an administrator] said in a laughing way that this guy [Mr. Director] has a problem answering emails, he doesn't answer emails. He said, "What's wrong with your computer again? Can you bring it to school and leave that computer [personal computer] home? It was very uncomfortable for me because they sent a clear message about him not returning emails as fast as they would like or at all in an indirect, roundabout way. It took them 15 minutes to say listen, you don't return emails, you need to return emails, so get it straightened out. They just couldn't do that. (Nilz Interview, emphasis added, 4/4/13)

As a more seasoned faculty member in the community with poignant instances of being in uncomfortable power plays himself, Nilz internalized this experience.

As the person who vouched for Mr. Director and perhaps because of a cultural sense of responsibility for him, Nilz felt pressure to ensure his success. He said,

I can't help to believe that their response is tainted a little bit with the stereotypical hardwiring. Even if it's not, I'm hypersensitive about that and it makes it a very awkward situation for me. I was reading the subtext in the room with body language and tone.

NPS: What did you observe?

Nilz: I observed disingenuous smiles from everyone, looking at each other before asking a question to him. Being very careful in terms of how they word their questions, which is condescending in my opinion [...] I see that they are just stomaching this guy to get through this production and **they are being so nice about it that it reads false**. (Nilz Interview, emphasis added, 4/4/13)

Whether the administration's concerns about Mr. Director's performance were valid or not, Nilz's processing of the situation solidified his beliefs about the community. He had come to understand a context of inauthenticity (as he experienced it) and this awareness had lasting effects on how he would express himself at Arts. Because of

how he had come to know his professional environment, he did not share his pure narrative. When asked how this impacted his teaching, he said,

As a teacher I have to force myself to maintain professionalism and not take it out on my students. When I say, take it out on my students, I could just give them busy work or not scrutinize what they're doing on stage, or hold them accountable to meeting the principles they're learning. So, I get to class and I don't feel very inspired until they get in the space and I see them trying to do the work. When I see them on stage truly making an effort, I can't help but to jump in and start teaching. (Nilz Interview, 4/4/13)

In order to be a change agent, Nilz had to dissect his curriculum story and offer only the most digestible parts to the community. Even within the walls of the school, he was an outside insider. As he reckoned with this duality, prioritizing teaching and his students has offered some solace. He said,

I just felt at some point something would happen where it would directly or indirectly force me out the door. I guess it's more of a spiritual thing [...] I think [principal] has been good to me and they have allowed me to operate and run my classes and shows the way I want to run them. That freedom has given me a level of peace throughout the years here. (Nilz Interview, 3/9/13)

While Nilz was a very active student advocate, this role often required he act as a doppelganger amongst the larger faculty. Interestingly, data collection during *Re-Imagining Griots* study provided space for Nilz to reconcile this portion of his narrative and tell it. In finding kinship (maybe?) in me as the participant-researcher, he was able to close his “story circle” (Buras, 2009, p. 438). Interrupted because of silencing and contextual duality, Nilz was able to share his curriculum narrative holistically.

4.3 Cross-Case Analysis: Deconstructing Teacher-Griot Stories

On paper, Atticus and Nilz shared striking similarities. Both were experienced teachers who entered education after fruitful employment in other professional industries. Both had been and were “used to” working in predominately White settings, and saw teaching as a worthwhile endeavor; neither had aspirations to do or be anything else. By most accounts, both were engaging educators who worked hard to create learning environments accessible to their students. Yet, cross-case analysis showed the purpose, position, and depths of their curriculum narratives were divergent. In comparing the: 1) the narrative structure and readers’ responses, 2) thematic alignment, and 3) sociocultural impact of their stories, it became clear that each occupied a specific teacher-griot role aimed at rectifying hegemonic norms and valuations of knowledge.

Narrative Structure and Readers’ Response. As griots, Atticus and Nilz shared curriculum narratives deeply connected to introspective assessments of their students, and their larger professional learning contexts. Both were aware of how students, via their interactions and reactions to them, “read” their stories. In turn, they continued to shape the storytelling process over time. In applying Greimas’ (1982) semiotic method of narrative diagramming (see Chapter Two) as an analytic tool, I ensured accuracy in the initial story analyses (“reading journeys”) by clearly defining the signs at work within each story. Further, I was able to visually outline how, where, and why meaning making took place during the disclosure of their curriculum narratives. In structuring their stories in this way, I was also able to align my readings

(via data analysis) with those of their students (as expressed during focus groups).

Atticus' curriculum narrative schematic (see Figure 8 below) offered invaluable insight about how I, as the participant-observer, and his students understood the dynamic narrative he shared at College Prep. This diagram supported my assertion that Atticus' narrative was consistent between and within each reading. As I triangulated the data, I was able to assign the aforementioned thematic designations to the object function of Greimas' (qtd. in Davis, 2007, p. 739) model because each supported his desire to make history, including lesser-acknowledged stories, connect on a personal level with his students.

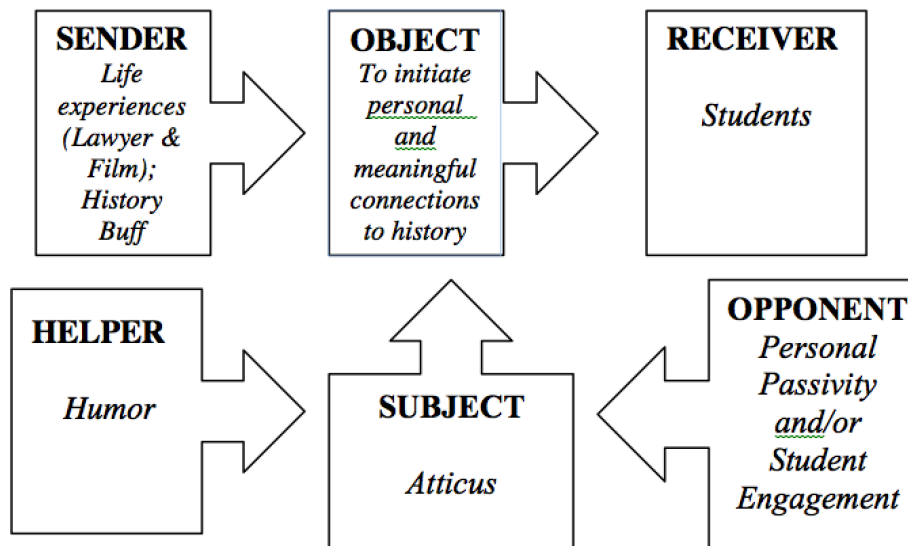


Figure 8. Atticus' Narrative Structure Diagram

Yet, in fleshing out Atticus' narrative in this way, I was also able to add critical dimension to his narrative as I analyzed the data to assess those challenges or opponents to his story. What inhibited a full "read" of Atticus' narrative? Was Atticus

aware of these obstacles? Did he alter his storytelling approach to address potential hindrances, particularly because he so frequently sought interpersonal connection with his students? During the first rounds of data analysis, making sense of these potentialities was difficult. In re-structuring Atticus' narrative visually, I was able to bridge the gap between what I observed during his formal class observations and the information his students provided about their experiences with him. Early on, I noted what seemed to be a discrepancy in the data. On one hand, my observations revealed Atticus' teaching modality to be very formal. Though he was a proponent of humor and direct interaction with students, his lectures were more often lecture based and didactic. Most often, the moments before or after class were where I witnessed glimmers of the narrative his students held so dear. By diagramming his curriculum narrative, I was able to better account for this seeming inconsistency. Further, Atticus' students helped to co-construct the narrative in informal spaces (extracurricular activities, field trips, and during one-on-one interactions that occurred primarily outside of the formal classroom). Though not depicted in the narrative diagram above, I am certain these interactions shaped Atticus' overall "life experiences" and reliance on "humor." It is within these areas, his students took on an invaluable role in influencing the narrative.

In comparing the number of visits I had with Atticus and Nilz, I realized data collection at College Prep was more condensed. I spent nearly eight months in close contact with Nilz, whereas data collection at College Prep lasted for half that time. While the rapport Atticus and I had was good, it did not match the level of familiarity

I was able to have with Nilz. Further, Atticus had a more reserved personality and this coupled with our limited interactions, may have only given me glimpses into his story at certain junctures of data collection instead of in-depth insights. By asking, what challenges did Atticus face in telling his story or having it understood by his students, I dug deeper into the data. Again, it was his students' responses that provided key indicators about where potential misreads or incomplete reads could have occurred. When asked, "If there was one thing you could change or help Mr. Atticus grow in, what would it be," they said,

Student A: Maybe not being more strict, but putting on a little more clamp [sic] so people don't take advantage of him.

Student B: At least have a consequence.

Student C: There's so many people that take advantage of him, it makes me feel really bad.

Student D: I think he does realize it, but he doesn't do anything about it.
(Atticus Student Focus Group, 5/13/13)

In rethinking interview data and reviewing my field notes, Atticus' student responses made sense.

During the lesson when I first noted what seemed to be a misaligned narrative and as Atticus lectured on the seminal *Yikwo v. Hopkins* case, he told his students to "Look at how the thing [law] is applied. **It's not going to be specifically mentioned**" (Atticus Classroom Observation, emphasis added, 3/6/13). In re-assessing this small bit of data along with the aforementioned student responses, I noted that this ideology might have captured Atticus' narrative approach. He wanted, it seemed, for students

to see beyond what was presented. This, as outlined in theme three of his case, was a worthy goal, but it could hinder the delivery and reception of his curriculum story. Further, it might also interrupt how Atticus engaged with the curriculum stories of students, especially with those students for whom his primary mode of instruction did not stimulate. In using Daniel's (2007) version of Greimas' Actantial Narrative Schema (p. 735), I was better able to make sense of Atticus' data and ensure the narrative, as read by his students and I (as participant-observer) was coherent. Further, it made the sociocultural impact of his narrative more visible as I was better able to assess the push/pull factors on it.

Nilz's curriculum narrative diagram, on the other hand, was more complex. It not only revealed the scope and depth of his story (see Figure 9), but it also affirmed the impact context could have on a teacher-griot. By visually showcasing Nilz's story in this way, I was able to validate the purpose of *Re-Imagining Griots*. Through his narrative, in particular, it became clear studying how teacher-griots of color actualize their stories and share them was a worthy endeavor. While Nilz was not (and could not) be representative of all educators of color, the complexity of his narrative enticed additional questions about school climate, cultures of silencing, and the duality of experience these teacher-griots may face in 21st century schools.

Like Atticus, I assessed Nilz's primary curriculum story through a thorough analysis of data gathered from class observations, interviews, and a student focus group. Based on these analyses, and as outlined by the upper portion of his schematic, there was no dissonance in the data. Initiated by early experiences within the

performing arts and coupled with an acute awareness of difference as a student of color, the impetus (or “Sender”) of Nilz’s narrative was connected to his overall aims as an educator. Given this, the binary relationships between subject/object and sender/receiver were clear; how these elements of Nilz’s narrative worked in concert complemented the first two thematic categorizations of the data.

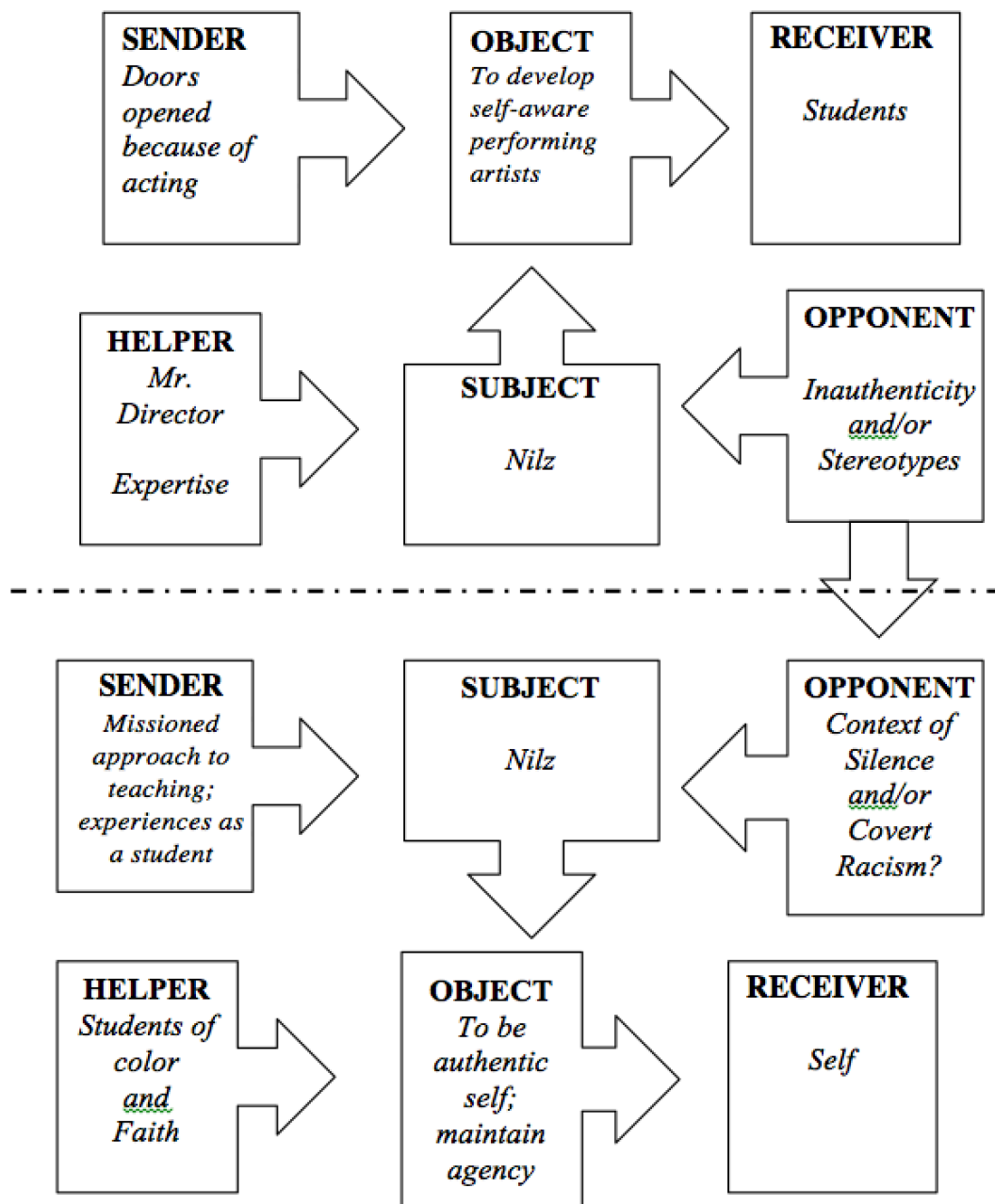


Figure 9. Nilz Narrative Structure Diagram

Reconstructing Nilz's curriculum story as a visual sign, also articulated how opponents to his narrative had a bidirectional impact. I learned that even when Nilz

personified his primary curriculum story (as teacher advocate/master craftsman), he struggled internally with contextual factors that shifted his sense of identity at Arts Academy. This realization produced the lower portion of Nilz's narrative diagram. The connection between the oppositional elements within his story extended the primary actantial model and "encompass[es] a narrator's development" because he had "present[ed] himself in a new way" (qtd. in Gertsen & Soderberg, 2011, p. 790) during our one-on-one interviews.

According to Gertsen and Soderberg (2011), this presentation could be considered peripetia or the turning point of Nilz's curriculum story. While the data did not "tell" the exact moment Nilz became aware of the dichotomous nature of his narrative, it did highlight his ongoing processing of it. This was key in assessing the impact of Nilz's narrative because it could "eventually lead not only to change of action, but also to cultural understanding, learning, and progress in collaboration" (Gertsen & Soderberg, 2011, p. 789). This became clear when he said,

I thought that an environment like this with such a high turnover rate and low retention rate for African Americans, I just felt at some point something would happen where it would directly or indirectly force me out the door. I guess it's more of a spiritual thing. I thought the Lord would have changed my situation a lot sooner than this [...] Is it enough that there's only a couple of kids here that I make that connection with and help them get through this situation. Is that just as important as me going to the inner city and helping 40 students? Absolutely is. (Nilz Interview, 3/9/13)

As he made sense of the space his story occupied at Arts, the anagnorsis, or "recognition of hidden aspects of a situation that marks a change from ignorance [or in Nilz's case frustration] to knowledge" (Gertsen & Soderberg, 2011, p. 789) emerged

in the data. In depicting Nilz's curriculum narrative visually, I was not only able to chart this shift, but delineate those signs integral to this process. When compared to Atticus' curriculum narrative structure, I was able to see how curriculum stories may further develop over time, as I (as researcher) engaged with and was part of participants' professional context. Each figure, however, offered important insights about the nature of curriculum stories by providing more depth to them.

Thematic Alignment. Though their narrative structures had differences, Atticus and Nilz were male educators of color whose views about student identity development aligned during data analysis. Perhaps the hallmark of any good teacher, these men were diligent in their approach to ensuring their students would be better people after spending time in their classes. According to William Ayers (1988), "teachers are in a powerful position to influence others" (qtd. in Sameshima, 2007, p. 4) and through their respective curriculum stories, Atticus and Nilz made this a priority. The most discernable way these men not only fostered student growth, but also glean this from their curriculum stories, was to connect personally with them. In assessing the data, both were purposeful in engaging students' personal/home lives, interests, and where appropriate, infusing this knowledge into their classes.

C. Aiden Downey (2015) asserts "teachers are traffickers of student stories" and because of this positionality their roles are useful in "practical and identity work" (p.7). As Nilz and Atticus shared their curriculum narratives with students, the simultaneously drew upon student narratives. Sameshima (2007) asserts, "critical to the development of teacher's authority is the teacher's understanding of personal

teacher identity” (p. 3). Because the development of their curriculum stories were so dependent upon how students interacted with them, a relational process occurred within which each teacher came to know more about himself through his students. Such a process undoubtedly fostered connection and influenced the atmosphere of their learning environments. Without fail, the analyses of each data set showcased classroom atmospheres, relational interactions, and pedagogical methodologies centered on mutual narrative exchange. Students were free (and often encouraged to) speak their minds, voice their opinions, and respond to challenging questions. These environments made Nilz and Atticus’ classes (as divergent in style as they were) spaces vested in student growth.

Furthermore, both sets of students reported academic success and liked the personal challenges their teachers prompted. Both Nilz and Atticus used the personal connections they fostered with students to upend canonical notions about their subject area. For Atticus, this meant relaying anecdotes about marginalized groups during his lectures and daily requiring students to think about history as a personal endeavor rather than one of rote memorization. For Nilz, this meant taking performing arts skills and having students apply them to real-life situations or transforming traditional content to better reflect their world. In sharing their curriculum stories as sites of personal growth, Atticus and Nilz revealed their awareness of the subjectivities and inherent biases within their respective subjects. Because of this, as Langhout and Mitchell (2008) assert, they were able to curb or at least address academic disengagement facilitated by the hidden curriculum of standardization. In stretching

their students, they amplified their voices and provided access to those often-marginalized in education. Further, Nilz and Atticus also saw themselves as role models for students of color. Their curriculum stories, as counter-narratives, pricked the bubble of negatively stylized caricatures afforded to many people of color in predominately White education contexts (Gordon, 2002; Ladson-Billings, 2012; Pollock, 2010).

Locating Nommo: Identifying Sociocultural Constructs. With clearer structural blueprints and a deepened thematic understanding, it was evident the impact of Nilz and Atticus' curriculum stories went beyond their respective classrooms and schools. As records of experience situated within the American education landscape, each story "repudiate[d] or push [ed]back on larger cultural or master narratives that may impinge or infringe upon teacher's identities" (Downey, 2015, p. 6). These stories challenged the ways/valuations of knowing, validated subjective authority, and used implication to resist traditional notions of curriculum, teaching, and learning. While each narrative had a different saturation of social agency, each teacher-griot used his story to prompt attention to each of the aforementioned areas in important ways.

Teacher As Griot: Validating Stance. Atticus and Nilz's curriculum stories supported their roles and agency as griots. As "interlocutors in the ongoing conversation that constitutes sociocultural life" (Stoller, 1994, p. 359), their curriculum stories spoke directly to pertinent issues in American education. From student engagement and teacher identity to institutional or contextual dynamics, their

stories “always implicated and embodied [them] in their communities (Stoller, 1994, p. 357). Their narratives heightened the dialogic nature of text, but also underscored its connection to orality. As each narrative carried the burden of representation and were made viable through performance, they became inextricably tied to griot culture.

According to Lewis (2011), “our aesthetic understanding of reality is formed and informed through our embeddedness in the generative and creative process of story” (p. 507) and both were made teacher-griots because of their reliance on mutual storytelling. For Atticus, this meant sharing snippets of his personal narrative and taking time to get to know students outside of formal class time. During their focus group, his students emphasized his caring demeanor, willingness to “take pictures at prom” (Atticus Student Focus Group, 4/26/13) as he ventured to not only share parts of himself, but include them in the process as well. For Nilz, this process was twofold. He created an environment conducive to shared voice by consistently asking his students to determine the trajectory of the story. Further still, he gave narrative access to me, as the researcher. In these moments, he shed his vulnerability in order to maintain (or perhaps reclaim) authority. Whether in the formal classroom space or during a hallway conversation, the data revealed these men were able to provide “a more complex and complete picture of social life [teaching and learning, for example]” (Hendry qtd. in Lewis, 2011, p. 506) through their curriculum stories.

Further, Atticus and Nilz’s stance as teacher-griots was exemplified through the performativity inherent to their curriculum stories. In what Finnegan (2012) terms, “verbal variability,” both teacher-griots used their stories to reimagine and repurpose

traditional notions of curriculum. Their curriculum narratives exploited the gap that exists between the audience and the teller through a diasporic understanding of sign interpretation and use. Here, signification was a vehicle for narration (Gates, 1983, p. 688) because it meant “the propensity to talk around a subject, never quite coming to the point” and the act of a narrative offering “direction through indirection” (Gates, 1983, p. 689). For Nilz’s curriculum narrative, performance through signification occurred because of audience variation. Realizing words have power (*nommo*), Nilz, as a teacher-griot, was cognizant of his ability to give voice to the traditionally marginalized (Lewis, 2011; Buras, 2009). Yet, he had to perform his narrative in ways that would not exacerbate his vulnerability (Daniel, 2007). This meant, and as observed in the data, he employed narrative codes, tropes, and used creative measures to ensure a holistic telling. Nilz used silence, repetition, and cultural cues (head nods, “you know what I mean;” basketball and the gym) to express his story when the context hindered a full telling. In these moments, I was not only a participant-observer, but became a “reader-as-witness” (Atkinson, E. 2011). Mitchell-Kernan emphasizes, “the Black concept of signifying incorporates essentially a folk notion that dictionary entries for words are not always sufficient for interpreting meanings or messages (qtd. in Gates, 1983, p. 691) and as such, cultural modes of figuration are sometimes used in lieu of discernable verbal expression.

Similarly, Atticus’ curriculum narrative included instances of dissemblance as a performative tool to “manipulate voices [in order] to shape textual subjectivity” (Stoller, 1994, p. 360). Though most often found in ancillary accounts appended to

his lectures, Atticus' curriculum narrative aimed to disrupt "fossilized beliefs" (Gates, 1983, p. 699) about people of color and disenfranchised groups in America. During several classroom observations, Atticus made it a point to shed light on an elusive tenet, person, or event otherwise left unknown in most history accounts. He knew such awareness could redirect how students engaged with the personal accounts of others in the future. Beyond strategic content (Stoller, 1994), Atticus also used humor as a performative tool for his curriculum narrative. In what Gates (1983) deems "playing the dozens," Atticus drew students in and made it easier for his story to be read beyond its most obvious meanings. His students were aware of his sarcasm and understood how he used it to "break up stereotypes" (Keating, 2005) and "fashion unity and harmony from chaos" (Atkinson, E. 2011). They knew who he was and the messages he wanted them to glean.

Experiential Wisdom. Interestingly, both teacher-griots crafted and shared narratives grounded in the epistemological philosophy of "theory in the flesh" (Moraga, 1983). Through their stories, readers came to understand (history, the performing arts, each teacher) through shared narratives of experiences borne in institutions wherein their roles were sometimes contested or categorized in limiting ways. Atticus and Nilz's curriculum stories highlighted the importance of knowing through experience and they stressed this in their interactions with students.

For Atticus, history was a personal endeavor wholly connected to one's perception of the world. For him, experience or understanding life through the experiences of others shaped his curriculum story. He said,

I think it's even more important that kids be taught in historical terms. For a history teacher, it's pretty amazing because we have so many tools then we had before. It's so much easier to get videos because when I was in school, you had to reel things and order them. Now you can go to Best Buy and pick up what you want and put it in your laptop and it's up there. It's amazing. To me, history is personal. (Atticus Interview, 4/26/13)

He modeled this way of knowing and attempted to tap into the personal sensibilities of his students. He wanted to "encourage longer thought" (Atticus Interview, 4/26/13) by validating their experiences and juxtaposing them with others. Though the structure of his classes and the push for both depth and breadth of content often constrained his ability to share the various narratives he hoped, he found ways to infuse his classes and students' learning with alternative views of historical events, people, and places. When his students said, "be prepared to be in history," they meant it literally and figuratively.

During an early classroom observation, for example, Atticus drew students' attention to the role Mexicans had in early abolitionism. I noted,

After introducing the Transcontinental Treaty of 1819, Atticus begins chapter 13, Westward Expansion. He highlights the land Americans have "control over" is actually Mexican land by asking the class, "Is this really Mexico?" It seems like it is a rhetorical question and he goes on to provide a ratio of White Americans in the region to native Tejanos. It is 3 to 1. He mentions the Mexican government agrees to abolish slavery in 1829 (almost four decades before the American government) and also agrees to cease immigration. I'm not certain about these facts, but this part of the lecture piques my interest. He mentions, perhaps because of the ratio, the White Americans in this region also agree to free their slaves and shift to a system of indentured servitude. I did not know this and it's an interesting take on Westward Expansion in America. (Atticus Classroom Observation, 2/4/13).

In this brief moment, Atticus offered a different portrayal for students to digest.

Whether or not one needed to be culturally attuned to his lectures or not, the act of

resistance (here in an often overlooked or rarely mentioned detail) in this traditional space was significant.

Nilz's curriculum story also sought to redefine how students learned by ensuring his classes and their interactions with him were as authentic as possible. He wanted them to rely on their intuition and internal sense of agency in order to acquire understanding. Much like theory in the flesh, Nilz curriculum story stressed using one's experience to inform practice instead of relying on "disembodied theories" or mimicry (Keating, 2005, p. 192). During the focus group, Irene articulated how this resonated in Nilz's approach. She said,

We had a whole week where we went over trust. We would have to stare at a person in the eyes for a while and you had to be standing really close to one another and he [Nilz] would purposefully pair you with someone you didn't really know [...] Acting is all about trust in yourself because if you don't trust yourself, you're not going to be able to trust anybody you're acting with. So, that was a very important lesson to me and everyone else. Because if you don't trust the people you work with and you don't trust yourself, you're not going to really get anywhere (Nilz Student Focus Group, 5/31/13)

Here, Nilz's curriculum narrative was a unique space of resistance because he sought opportunities to teach students there was a "kind of inter-referentiality between different texts and lived experiences" (Keating, 2005, p. 192) worthy of informing how they understood the world, their craft, and him, as their teacher. Interestingly, however, Nilz was challenged to fully express this idea because he was not always able to share his story (or have it read) fully.

While Nilz empowered the knowledge development of his students by encouraging them to see experience as a worthy instructor, much of his narrative was

suppressed and rarely observed by the larger Arts Academy community. Because of the context, a full telling of his story could be tenuous. Yet, as Elbaz-Luwisch's (2001) work insists, when Nilz faced the border of his story and could grasp the landscape within which it was located, he felt compelled to "tell the [whole] truth" (p. 70). In our discussions, he exposed the depth of his curriculum story and allowed (and at times insisted) I chronicle and shed light on it. In fact, there had been instances at Arts where Nilz could open the door to his story a little wider. He recalled,

They [administration] would have me talk to parents about the whole [network television] thing, but I would talk to them about my experience at [independent school] and how there's more to me than being an athlete. No one knows what's going on inside of me and how the stage gave me an opportunity to express a side of myself that no one knew was there and it helped me find my voice as a young man. (Nilz Interview, 3/9/13)

While the lure for Arts Academy was primarily Nilz's tenure at a major children's television network, when he was given the space, he emphasized those aspects of his narrative that "preserve[d] creative autonomy and secure[d] psychic rewards" (Garrison, 2009, p. 70). For Nilz, being able to ensure student growth and act as a role model for students of color, in particular, helped to bridge the gaps of his expressed narrative. His primary aim was to teach and though it was often challenge to share a whole narrative, he was able to reclaim those significant portions by sharing them with me thereby making me, as participant-observer, a helper to his narrative as well.

Summary

Based on the notion curriculum is story (see Chapter Two), *Re-Imagining Griots* sought to explore how two male educators of color expressed these narratives in predominately White teaching/learning contexts. Atticus and Nilz's curriculum stories were codified using Rosenblatt's (1995) aesthetic-efferent continuum. Through this method, the "reading journeys" of the participants' students and mine as the participant-researcher were thoroughly assessed and produced thematic threads for each teacher. These threads were then compared in a cross-case analysis to identify structural composition, thematic alignment, and sociocultural constructs. In reading and analyzing the narratives of these male educators of color, data analyses yielded the following results:

1. **Curriculum stories are inextricably linked to and amplify teacher identity/purpose.** In assessing the data of both participants, these men holistically viewed praxis (content, instruction, epistemology, etc.), their students, and their professional contexts as an extension of and/or direct mirror of who they were as people. Based on this, it was easy to discern what drove them, investigate areas of dissemblance (either as subversiveness, misreading, or distortion), and connect the overall teaching/learning experience to one central tenet...the curriculum story. Further, in the time span of this dissertation study, this finding emphasizes the voices of male educators of color (particularly Black men) that may go unnoticed or are silenced because of the societal trends of engagement with this population. These stories signify

and important connection between one's identity and agency in influencing the general narrative of a community. They allow for a more inclusive (and authentic) conversation to occur and this is invaluable because identity/purpose are inextricably linked to the narratives we are able to tell, for ourselves.

- 2. Curriculum stories are highly relational.** And dependent on mutual acknowledgment and sharing between teachers and students. Though teachers are often positioned in classrooms as the chief authority, only students (as the initial audience for and respondent to these stories) can affirm this primary influence. In assessing the data, the teachers and their students were the only fixed entities across both cases. While Atticus and Nilz share similar racial backgrounds and teaching was a second career for both, they needed their students (particularly as each read them) to bring life to their curriculum stories by engaging in what Carter (1993) calls the "believing game." Without these exchanges, their stories could not exist.
- 3. Curriculum stories encourage ongoing and critical reflection.** Throughout this process, each participant, along with his students, went beyond traditional notions of curriculum and focused instead on their collective experiences. Their curriculum stories emphasize how learning is a constant process of reflection, especially in relation to others.
- 4. Curriculum stories validate experiential knowledge.** Because curriculum stories are based in the experiences of teachers and their students, they reinforce ways of knowing not always reflected in the traditional literary

canon. For both Nilz and Atticus, curriculum stories gave them agency and access to widen/deepen the scope of what not only they knew to be true, but also to shift what their students understood as true.

Chapter 5

DISCUSSION & IMPLICATIONS

Re-Imagining Griots: Investigating the Curriculum Stories Male Educators of Color Tell affirms how “we all become vulnerable in the face of story” (Adichie, 2009), but it also emphasizes the necessity and invaluable utility of curriculum stories in education. This study aimed to highlight the realities of curriculum as story as expressed in the lives of two male educators of color working in predominately White settings. Guiding these goals were the research questions:

- How do the professional and lived experiences of male educators of color guide the construction of their curriculum stories?
- How do these stories inform curriculum theory?
- How do they impact curriculum implementation (student perceptions, involvement, & curricular collaboration)?

A qualitative and narrative-based case study approach was used to investigate the curriculum stories of the participants. I conducted three to four in-person interviews, three to four classroom observations (which often included more than one class period), and one 30-minute student focus groups during the 2012-2013 school year. Over the course of the study, I assumed the role of participant-observer at both Arts

Academy and College Prep. Overall, I was well received by the teachers and their students; my interactions with other faculty/staff were limited.

In this chapter, I outline how my findings respond to the research questions and discuss their implications to the field. I follow this discussion with recommendations for curriculum stakeholders (policy & theory), teacher educators, school administrators, teachers, and students. To conclude this chapter, I address the limits and challenges of *Re-Imagining Griots: Investigating the Curriculum Stories Male Educators of Color Tell*, in addition to postulating about how this study can impact future education research.

Constructing Curriculum Narratives. In order to be considered narrative, curriculum stories should oral (Finnegan, 2012), based in sign (Pierce, 1906), dialogic in nature (Bahktin, 1981), represent experiential knowing (Moraga, 1989), and initiate a bidirectional reading journey (Rosenblatt, 1995). Atticus and Nilz’s curriculum stories were constructed of aesthetic and efferent data using Rosenblatt’s (1995) transactional theory of reading, which helped to deconstruct the iterative processes of sign recognition, relatability, reference, and reflection as they were read. Efferent data, or the information “carried away” was data inextricably linked to tangible and clearly observable threads found within each curriculum story. This data included the teacher subject-area content, his teaching style and rationale (pedagogy), as well as his personal understandings of knowledge (epistemology). This data was gathered primary through classroom observations and during participant interviews where specific questions regarding the aforementioned areas were asked. Aesthetic data, or

data elicited through a primarily emotive and/or sensory experience, included ideals about classroom atmosphere, his autobiography and suppositions about content. This data was gathered primarily through interviews where anecdotal narratives and memory prompts served to elicit participants' (teachers and students) internal considerations of the curriculum story as it developed and was read.

Furthermore, data revealed where and how social justice ideology (how to shift the nature of teaching and learning) entered into the construction of the curriculum stories. Though these levels varied between participants, I found the teachers' awareness of how their curriculum story came together varied and were dependent on: 1) his ability to reflect deeply about his personal and professional experiences, 2) his rationale for entering the teaching profession, and 3) his critical awareness of the contextual and/or institutional factors that either encouraged, diminished, or made problematic his ability to share his story. This included his personal assessment of how his racial location (gender was discussed less so by participants) impacted content, student interaction, and general ease of existence in these predominately White spaces. The primary influence in the construction of Atticus and Nilz's curriculum stories were how each grew up (and attended predominately White schools) as African American men. For both, these early experiences (Atticus' reported comfort in PWIs and Nilz's sensory attunement with the subtext) acted as a catalyst for what was "read" during the time of this study. Further, data revealed students' awareness of and receptivity to their teachers' curriculum stories also aided

in their construction. As students embarked on curricular reading journeys (Rosenblatt, 1995), they willingly (and sometimes inadvertently) shaped them.

Implications. The construction and existence of curriculum stories establish an important connection between teacher identity and purpose. As a method of reflection, curriculum stories not only aid teachers, but also pre-service educators find agency and feel empowered by their practice. Further, as educators' awareness of teacher identity and its impact on classroom management, instruction, student engagement, among other areas may increase, and they are better able to explore the dynamics of learning with others invested in the process. Additionally, focused analyses and/or collective curriculum story deconstruction within schools or districts may offer insights about teacher retention, burnout, or apathy in practical ways.

Because curriculum stories may provide a more clear view of what transpires in classrooms and schools, they may also validate or offer insights into why some teachers “close the door” (rely on personal experiences with students to dictate what goes on in classrooms rather than rely solely on imposed standards) in schools. Curriculum stories take as many variables (content, students, context, teacher beliefs, etc.) into consideration when they are constructed and may provide an account of how these variables work together in classrooms. Further, and perhaps because many teachers have an inherent understanding of the holistic nature of curriculum, teachers support students by exchanging narratives that go beyond traditional notions of curriculum. Most importantly, *Re-Imagining Griots* sheds light on the experiences of male educators of color. Often unvoiced in larger education discourse, the

construction of these narratives provide an important look at how the issues of race and gender impact what transpires in classrooms from teachers' experience. These stories are inclusive of all aspects of identity (sexual orientation, religion, language, family dynamics) and affirm how intersectionality functions within the walls of the classroom for both teachers and students.

Expanding Curriculum Theory. In drawing parallels between curriculum theory and literary theory, the curriculum stories of these two male educators of color reinforce the idea that learning is experiential (Dewey, 1922). Furthermore, these curriculum stories also reveal how integral students' ideas, perceptions, and "reads" impact and shape the learning experience. Beyond this, curriculum stories, as evidenced by the finding of *Re-Imagining Griots*, also expands how those in education conceptualize more prescriptive (read: standards-based) notions of curriculum. Curriculum stories impact the field because they highlight how content, most often, becomes a secondary (if not tertiary) consideration when teachers and students interact in classrooms.

Expanding Curriculum Theory: Implications. In expanding curriculum theory to include curriculum stories, this research opens the door for a societal paradigm shift in education. Even if trends toward standardization continue, curriculum stories better equip school-based personnel, especially teachers to infuse these holistic narratives into how they go about teaching and learning. Through them, they could balance content and/or skills-based modules with a deeper understanding (and hopefully appreciation of) how their students experience such foci. Further still, they can use

curriculum stories (as unique sites of agency for students) to garner meaningful feedback from them. Curriculum stories not only work in concert with more prescriptively inclined ideas about what students need to know, but they shift such conversations because they include those most readily affected by those very notions; teachers and students.

Along with a broader view of curriculum theory, curriculum stories help to substantiate culturally relevant/sustaining theories (Ladson-Billings, 1995; 2014) as worthy not only of teacher pedagogy or practice, but also as a tool for internalizing equity as it relates to self-concept and agency for all educators. Typically CRT/CST is philosophically cushioned (Weinstein, 2003; Pinto, 2014) as something good teachers do because 21st century students (from a variety of backgrounds) need them to do so. Yet, curriculum stories make CRT/CST more reciprocal in nature. How can administrators, colleagues, schools/colleges of education, and policy be more responsive and/or culturally sustaining in preparing, retaining, and developing teachers? How do these practices extend to teachers of color (or other disenfranchised groups), in particular? Curriculum stories when enacted in these ways complement the literature on teacher resilience, persistence, and self-efficacy and may help shed further light on the experiences of male teachers of color, in particular.

Finally, curriculum stories confirm the existence of hidden curriculum (Pollock, 2004) narratives within schools and policy work to displace teachers' agency, authority, and voice. Atticus and Nilz highlighted the tension of being equity-conscious educators as their professional institutions either supported or challenged

these dispositions. For Nilz, in particular, his curriculum narrative showed why expanding the tenets of curriculum theory were necessary; his role was dependent on self-silencing.

Recommendations. The following recommendations for university teacher preparation programs, school administrators, policy makers, and in-service educators stem directly from the themes that emerged from Atticus and Nilz's curriculum stories. In some cases they outwardly mentioned as an idea or we discussed a general concept that provided me, as the participant-researcher, deeper insights about teaching and learning with curriculum stories. Other recommendations, however, are based on my analyses of the data and insights gleaned over time reviewing it. These recommendations, in particular, were shaped by my experience as an African American educator in predominately White schools. These recommendations require a willingness to see teachers and their students as vital to learning in classrooms. While this may seem obvious, recent trends in education reveal this point must be reiterated.

Teacher Education Programs

- Allow pre-service candidates authentic opportunities to reflect on their curricular dispositions: autobiography, epistemology, suppositions about content, perceptions about student/teacher interactions, and others as they arise often and throughout their induction (as precursors to an actualized curriculum story)

- Simulate and have tough conversations about varying experiences and what teachers and students bring into classrooms. Luis Moll's (1992) funds of knowledge also apply to teachers, many of whom rarely interrogate what they know, how they know it, and how these ideas influence teaching.
- Require pre-service educators have a wide variety of field placements when/where possible. These early experiences will not only shape their overall curriculum narratives, but also make them more receptive to those that differ from their own.
- Avoid teaching (or proselytizing) about standardization in ways that negate the experiential nature of teaching and learning. Even in the most challenging teaching situations, curriculum stories are at work and can alleviate the stress of testing, perceptions of lessened creativity, and insularity.
- Encourage faculty to explore (within departments) individual, institutional, and community curriculum stories. How are these constructed? With the input (or at the exclusion) of which entities? Do they align or negate each other?

School Administrators

- Allow, where feasible, curriculum stories to complement formal teacher evaluations. This will give teachers an opportunity to construct (or analyze) their curriculum stories as a way to improve instruction, student

engagement, content knowledge, and investment in the overall institution.

Through them school administration can also glean wisdom about potential sites of hidden curriculum and be able to address them in ways that validate teachers' experiences.

- Use curriculum stories to form Professional Learning Communities (PLCs), assign mentors, and guide meaningful professional development. Curriculum stories allow administrators to keep step with the school's pace and pulse by involving teachers in its strategic plan.
- Encourage (or require) teachers to use student feedback (shared as anecdotes or stories) as a way re-imagine authority and expertise in the classroom.
- Model the importance of curriculum stories by sharing, reflecting, and consistently interrogating your own.

In-Service Teachers

- Reclaim curricular authority and expertise by incorporating curriculum stories into professional goal setting, holistic lesson planning, and as a tool to assess your unique learning environment(s)
- Revise, re-imagine, and/or review those events, incidents, and significant moments that alter, deepen, or expand the story you share and co-create with your students. Do so often and with intention.

- Share your curriculum story (as it evolves and/or as it is told) with students as a way to provide context, rationale, and establish connection with your students, parents, other teachers, colleagues, professional organizations, etc.
- Lean into those facets of your curriculum story that reveal areas of discomfort and/or challenge your sense of identity, empowerment, or agency in your teaching/learning context. Where appropriate, share these observations with administration.
- Record your curriculum stories and use them as seeds for practitioner-research. Your curriculum stories (as sites of epistemology, instruction, content, and meaning making) can change policy, alter beliefs about how students learn, and bridge the gap between practice and theory.

Education Policymakers

- Seek to understand how a collective (school, district, region) of curriculum stories can provide invaluable threads to assessing need and/or shifting vision when determining policy.
- Avoid the urge to separate or insulate standards-based education from its experiential core. Students and teachers go about learning in a variety of ways, but curriculum stories emphasize those narratives at work and made meaningful in particular contexts. These insights do not work in

opposition to “what students should know,” but provide a clearer picture of how they come to know.

- When and wherever possible visit local schools to see how curriculum stories work in real time and shift as teachers engage with new audiences. Use these experiences to begin the process of making education policy practical and not just ideological.

Students

- Know that you have an invaluable role in shaping how and what you learn in school, even if it does not seem so. Your teachers take cues from you (your interests, level of engagement, and your silence) in the classroom. Do not be afraid to help your teacher explore those areas that matter to you...in a respectful way, of course.

The goal of these recommendations would be to encourage wider awareness and understanding of curriculum stories. As sites of meaning making for teachers and students, curriculum stories can be invaluable tools for school-based and systemic shifts in the nature of education. As was revealed in this study, teachers construct curriculum narratives from an array of personal experiences, contextual factors, professional insight and education. This study showcased how when shared or embodied in the act of teaching, curriculum stories are validated, expanded, and read by students, who too bring more than a desire to learn into classrooms. Therefore, awareness of curriculum stories is just the beginning. *Re-Imagining Griots: Investigating the Curriculum Stories Male Educators of Color Tell* not only

emphasizes the usefulness of such stories, but their ability to re-shape and re-imagine a curricular canon deeply rooted in American education.

Limitations of this Study. The most evident limitation of this study was the number of participants profiled. *Re-Imagining Griots* focused on only two male educators of color (and their students) teaching in predominately White schools in the Northeast United States during the 2012-2013 school year. Limiting the study in these ways provided an opportunity to conduct expansive case study research about curriculum stories of male educators of color, but it also eliminated the study's generalizability of the findings to a more diverse population. Though this may be true, the theoretical underpinnings of this study, curriculum as story, applies to all educators no matter their racial/gender identity.

Another potential challenge of this study was my role as participant-researcher. I sought to limit bias by revealing and referencing my inherent interest in narrative research and positionality as an African American female educator throughout this study. My decision to be a participant observer stemmed from my experience as an in-service educator working in a similar environment to the participants of this study. Through this lens, I was able to garner trust and encourage full disclosure. Given this, however, my stance and the rapport I was able to build with the participants because of it may also pose an internal validity threat to this research. I sought to counteract this potential by including data from the participants' students as a way to triangulate the data "read" from my perspective as participant-researcher.

Future Research Needs. Spending time with Atticus and Nilz provided a window into these areas and their experiences opened the door to such future research. Their experiences clarified how curriculum stories are constructed, how they develop over time and in tandem with those of their students, and how they contribute to a more inclusive knowledge basis for all invested in education. Studying the curriculum stories of these teachers, as male educators of color, in particular, affirmed the importance of moving beyond tolerance and tokenism toward equity.

In the spring 2015 edition of *Ms.* magazine, network television show runner Shonda Rhimes said:

I'm interested in telling stories and in telling stories from a certain perspective. Gender equality, racial equality, equality of any kind, only comes when people stop expecting any one character, or any one writer, or any one story to be representative of everybody or to teach everybody anything, (p. 22-23)

and her words capture the vision I attempted to cast throughout *Re-Imagining Griots*.

I see curriculum stories as the lynchpin of education in our society, yet too often these voices go unheard or are altered. Teachers and their students construct dynamic curriculum stories that shift and shape the learning process. One major area for future research is to explore the collaborative ways (overt, relational, or otherwise) students and teachers impact schools beyond content and/or skills acquisition. Further, curriculum stories, in concert with notions about how hidden curricula function in schools, could alleviate those stressors within institutions that displace, criminalize, alienate, and/or prompt conformity for students and teachers that function outside the

“norm.” Such research would need to be narratively based, but could be conducted in a multiple ways.

Conclusion

Schooling in 21st century America is a dynamic and ever-evolving organism. Yet, within it learning and teaching practice have been compartmentalized in ways that stagnate its growth and viability. For educators of color, in particular, this division creates voids that restrict agency and expertise very tangible ways. Results from *Re-Imagining Griots: Investigating the Curriculum Stories Male Educators of Color Tell* reveals ways curriculum stories disassemble these silos and fill the gaps. They help increase synergy in the field of education by giving voice, in a more balanced and holistic way, to those too often pushed or placed on its outskirts.

Throughout this research study, data were collected to substantiate curriculum as story and explore how two male educators of color constructed these narratives while part of specific learning contexts. This data accounts for the thematic findings presented in the case and cross-case analyses. Atticus and Nilz provided an exhaustive view of their experiences, which emphasized the literary, relational and sociocultural building blocks of their curriculum stories. These findings indicate more work is necessary in not only re-establishing teacher (and student) agency in classrooms, but also in shifting the hegemonic norms inherent to schools that displace men and educators of color. This awareness will enable education stakeholders to

work better together as they authentically integrate as many curriculum stories as possible into the conversation.

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Appendix A

PARTICIPANT RECRUITMENT LETTER

Dear Colleague,

My name is Nakeiha Primus and I am currently an 8th grade English teacher at The Haverford School. I am also a PhD student at the University of Delaware. My dissertation research is about sharing voices of male educators of color. I am hoping that you'll let me tell your story.

As a participant, you would be required to

- Complete 3 or 4, forty-minute interviews (in person or via email response at a time convenient to you)
- Allow me to observe you teach 3 times between January and April 2013.
- Help me secure parent/guardian permission for 5-7 students for a one-time focus group discussion

If you are interested and meet the following requirements, please contact me directly at nprimus@udel.edu or by phone at [215-205-1912](tel:215-205-1912):

- Male
- Teach 6-12th grade History, English (or other Humanities-based subject)
- Self-identify as an African American, Black, Latino, Hispanic, or Asian (including Mixed Raced)

I hope you will consider allowing me to learn from you and your experiences.

Warmest Regards,

Nakeiha Primus

Appendix B

INFORMED CONSENT (TEACHER)

University of Delaware
Informed Consent Form

Title of Project: Re-Imagining Griots: Investigating the Curriculum Stories Male Educators of Color Tell

Principal Investigator (s): Nakeiha Primus

Other Investigators:

You are being asked to participate in a research study. This form tells you about the study including its purpose, what you will do if you decide to participate, and any risks and benefits of being in the study. Please read the information below and ask the research team questions about anything we have not made clear before you decide whether to participate. Your participation is voluntary and you can refuse to participate or withdraw at any time without penalty or loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled. If you decide to participate, you will be asked to sign this form and a copy will be given to you to keep for your reference.

WHAT IS THE PURPOSE OF THIS STUDY?

The purpose of this study is to explore the stories teachers tell with their students. In many African, Asian, and other indigenous traditions, the griot (or the storyteller) is the physical embodiment of a culture's history and memory. In education, teachers have often mirrored the role and responsibilities of the griot. Educators use curriculum to magnify particular aspects of culture and guide students toward a better understanding of self, society, and the world. Yet, like the griot, educators are not just mere conduits of information. In choosing perspective, content, emphases, and by being keenly aware of their audience, educators become unique types of storytellers. Curriculum, as story, is the evidence of interactions between teachers and their students, as well as proof of the experiences within a classroom.

You are being asked to take part in this study because you were recommended by **[name source]** who felt your background, teaching style and position at **[school name]** was a story worth exploring.

WHAT WILL YOU BE ASKED TO DO?

Three male educators of color who teach in public, independent, or parochial schools will be solicited to participate in this study. As a participant you will:

- Complete 3 or 4, sixty-minute interviews (in person or via email response at a time convenient to you). Questions during the interview will prompt you to think about your content area, your beliefs about education, your own educational history/background and your role as a teacher,
- Be observed in your classroom 3 times (approximately 2-3 hours each visit) between January 2013 and April 2013. I will observe your classroom environment, interactions with students, lesson planning and delivery, as well as potential extracurricular responsibilities, and
- Help secure parent/guardian permission for 5-7 students for a one-time thirty-minute focus group discussion by distributing and collecting permission forms.

WHAT ARE THE POSSIBLE RISKS AND DISCOMFORTS?

There are no risks to students or teachers. Data collected for this study will not influence student grades or assessments, nor will they affect teacher performance reviews or evaluations, but may help make participants more reflective.

WHAT ARE THE POTENTIAL BENEFITS?

As a result of this study all participants (students and teachers) may become more reflective about their experiences in the classroom, but there is no guarantee this will occur. Beyond the participants of this study, the larger field of education and society will benefit from knowledge gained from this study in several ways. These include:

- Increased awareness of how curriculum is implemented from non-traditional perspectives
- The influence students have on curriculum development and implementation
- An understanding of how curriculum could be considered a unique type of story.

HOW WILL CONFIDENTIALITY BE MAINTAINED?

I will make every effort to keep all research records that identify you confidential to the extent permitted by law. During presentations, it is possible that excerpts of our interview discussions will be used and your voice will be heard. Any data used in publication will reference de-identified transcripts.

Written and audio transcription data (including a pseudonym list, field notes, class products, etc.) from classroom observations and interviews will be transferred via USB to

the CEHD (at the University of Delaware) server monthly. Paper files (originals of scanned data, permissions, and field notes) will also be secured in a locked file cabinet of my graduate advisor. Only she and I will have access to these data files. These data files will be kept indefinitely, but will be destroyed should you decide at any point to withdraw from this study.

Your research records may be viewed by the University of Delaware Institutional Review Board, but the confidentiality of your records will be protected to the extent permitted by law.

WILL THERE BE ANY COSTS RELATED TO THE RESEARCH?

There are no costs associated with participation in this study.

WILL THERE BE ANY COMPENSATION FOR PARTICIPATION?

There is no monetary compensation for participation in this study. Students who participate in a focus group, however, will be compensated for their time with lunch.

WHAT IF YOU ARE INJURED BECAUSE OF THE STUDY?

If you are injured during research procedures, you will be offered first aid at no cost. If you require additional medical treatment, you will be responsible for the cost.

DO YOU HAVE TO TAKE PART IN THIS STUDY?

Taking part in this research study is entirely voluntary. You do not have to participate in this research. If you choose to take part, you have the right to stop at any time. If you decide not to participate or if you decide to stop taking part in the research at a later date, there will be no penalty or loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled. Your refusal will not influence current or future relationships with the University of Delaware or Ms. Primus.

As a student, if you decide not to take part in this research, your choice will have no effect on your academic status or your grade in the class.

WHO SHOULD YOU CALL IF YOU HAVE QUESTIONS OR CONCERNS?

If you have any questions about this study, please contact the Principal Investigator, Nakeiha Primus at 610-872-4942 or by email at nprimus@udel.edu or her advisor, Dr. Rosalie Rolon-Dow, at rosa@udel.edu.

If you have any questions or concerns about your rights as a research participant, you may contact the

University of Delaware Institutional Review Board at 302-831-2137.

Your signature below indicates that you are agreeing to take part in this research study. You have been informed about the study's purpose, procedures, possible

risks and benefits. You have been given the opportunity to ask questions about the research and those questions have been answered. You will be given a copy of this consent form to keep.

By signing this consent form, you indicate that you voluntarily agree to participate in this study.

Signature of Participant

Date

Printed Name of Participant

Appendix C

HEADMASTER/PRINCIPAL LETTER

University of Delaware
School of Education
Newark, DE 19716

**[School Address
City, State, ZIP]**

Dear **[Headmaster/Principal]**,

My name is Nakeiha Primus and I am currently the 8th grade English teacher at The Haverford School. I am also a PhD student at the University of Delaware. This fall, I will begin collecting data for my dissertation. Merging curriculum theory and literary theory, my dissertation research aims to amplify the narratives of male educators of color by taking an extensive look at both the overt and covert ways their personal stories (history, autobiography, and experiences as educators among other variables) influence and impact their teaching. Educators use curriculum to magnify particular aspects of culture and guide students toward a better understanding of self, society, and the world. In choosing perspective, content, emphases, and by being keenly aware of their audience, educators become uniquely positioned storytellers.

Through **[name contact]** I was introduced to **[Teacher Name & School]** as a potential case study participant. Earlier this week, I had an opportunity to speak with **[Teacher]** explain the aims of my work and invite him to take this journey with me. As a participant, he would:

- Complete 3 or 4, forty to sixty minute interviews,
- Allow me to observe his classes on 3 separate occasions between January 2013 and March 2013, and
- Help me secure parent/guardian permission for 5-7 students for a one-time focus group discussion. This focus group will be conducted at school during a non-instructional time as a way to get students' perspectives on what they observe in class.

During our conversation, I mentioned that this study is non-evaluative. Its aim is not to **[Teacher Name & School]**, but to elicit the narrative(s) he and his students share during learning. All names (teacher, students, school) will be replaced with pseudonyms unless otherwise

directed and any publications/presentations that should result from the data will be reviewed by him.

After speaking, he agreed to be a participant, but I would like to formally seek your permission to visit **[School Name]** and conduct the aforementioned dissertation study. If you have any questions or concerns, please feel free to contact me by email at nprimus@udel.edu.

Warmest Regards,

Nakeiha Primus
University of Delaware
PhD Candidate

Appendix D

SEMI-STRUCTURED INTERVIEW PROTOCOLS

Teacher Interview One: Pre-Observation

1. Tell me about your self. Where did you grow up? If you were to write the first few lines of your autobiography, how would you start? Why?
2. What were your major interests as a child, teen, young adult? How did you get interested in these areas?
3. Describe your family and home life. What kinds of traditions did you participate in? Social events? Outings?
4. As a child, how did you learn best about the world around you? Tell me a story of how you satisfied your curiosity as a child.
5. How was discipline handled at home?
6. How did your family view education? What values were instilled in you about learning? Tell me a story about an important conversation you had with an adult or a particularly poignant “teachable moment” you had as a youth.
7. What was school like for you? Describe your favorite and least favorite aspects of school?
8. Growing up, who were your teachers? What made them effective/ineffective? Tell me a story about a memorable learning experience with a teacher.
9. Fifteen years ago what were you doing and what did you imagine yourself doing 15 years before then? Describe what life was like. How would you describe your outlook on life?
10. How did you enter the field of education? Why did you enter the field of education? How would your five year-old self respond to your current occupation? What would he say? Why?

Teacher Interview Two: Post Observation One (Content & Pedagogy)

1. Why do you think students need to study [subject]? What value do you think it has in today’s world? Is [subject] particularly important to your students? Why?
2. Describe your approach to teaching. How do you prepare? What are your resources? Do you keep notes/lesson plans?
3. If your students were asked to describe you/your class, what would they say? Why?
4. How often do you solicit student opinions about your teaching/content area?
5. Describe the atmosphere of your class. How does it feel? Tell me a story about a particularly “good” class and a “bad” class.

6. When do you feel most inspired as a teacher? What do you do to re-create these moments?
7. What happens when you feel disconnected from what you're teaching or your students? How do you address this?
8. How can a student be successful in your class?
9. Tell me a story about a very challenging student. What made this student challenging?
10. What role do/should parents play in your classroom? Why?
11. What do you do on the first day of classes with your students? Why?
12. How well do you think your students "know" you? How do you think they've gleaned this information? Your colleagues? Parents?
13. Is [school] supportive of your approach to teaching/learning? Why?
14. Besides teaching, what other responsibilities do you have at your school?
15. After a student has taken your class, what do hope was learned? Why?
16. What major issues/topics/ideas must you cover every year? Why?
17. Fill in the blank: when I wake up in the morning to go to work, I _____. My students' _____. Teaching _____. In five years _____. When former students return _____. In ten years _____.

Teacher Interview Three: Post Observation Three (Discipline & Extras)

1. Who or what keeps you accountable? (In your job?) What motivates you?
2. Outside of completing their assignments, what are your students responsible for in your classroom? How do you keep them accountable? Motivated?
3. When a student is in trouble in your class, what happens? If I were looking in on a conversation what would I see? How should/do students approach you?
4. What do you do to maintain your work/life balance?
5. What values are personally important to you? Describe how you may model (consciously or not) these attributes to your students.
6. If you were asked to teach another [class] what would you teach? What wouldn't you teach? Why?
7. What variables can cause you to alter your teaching? Tell me about an instance you had to redirect your content unexpectedly. What happened? How did you feel afterward?
8. How do you participate in your school's community?
9. Fill in the blank: when I wake up in the morning to go to work, I _____. My students' _____. Teaching _____. In five years _____. When former students return _____. In ten years _____.

Student Focus Group Semi-Structured Protocol

1. Describe [teacher's name].
2. Outside of teaching [class], what do you think [teacher's name] values? Does for fun? What do you gather [teacher] is like outside of school? What gives you these impressions?
3. Imagine a new student was going to take [class], what would you tell him/her about the class? About [teacher's name]?
4. So far, what's the greatest lesson you've learned in [class]?
5. Do you think [teacher] values your opinion? Why?
6. Imagine you could assign [teacher] to teach anything at your school, what would it be? Why? Name one strength and one weakness of [teacher]?
7. How do you feel when you're in class with [teacher]? Tell me a story about a memorable activity or lesson. What happened during this time?
8. Do you seek [teacher] outside of class? For personal advice or help? Why?
9. Does [teacher] have any catchphrases or repeated sayings? Why might he say this?
10. What subjects/ideas/content does [teacher] tend to focus on in class? Why do you think this might be the case?

Appendix E

PARTICIPANT CONSENT (STUDENT)

University of Delaware
Informed Consent Form

Title of Project: Re-Imagining Griots: Investigating the Curriculum Stories Male Educators of Color Tell

Principal Investigator (s): Nakeiha Primus

Other Investigators:

Your child has been invited to participate in a research study focus group. This form tells you about the study including its purpose, what your child will do if he/she decides to participate, and any risks and benefits of being in the study. Please read the information below and ask the research team questions about anything we have not made clear before you decide whether to give your child permission to participate.

Your child's participation is voluntary and he/she can refuse to participate or withdraw at any time without penalty or loss of benefits to which they are otherwise entitled. You should know that even if you give your child permission to participate in this focus group, he/she is not obligated to do so and can choose not to participate. If your child decides to participate, he/she will be asked to sign an assent form and a copy will be given to him/her to keep for reference.

WHAT IS THE PURPOSE OF THIS STUDY?

The purpose of this study is to explore the stories teachers tell with their students. In many African, Asian, and other indigenous traditions, the griot (or the storyteller) is the physical embodiment of a culture's history and memory. In education, teachers have often mirrored the role and responsibilities of the griot. Educators use curriculum to magnify particular aspects of culture and guide students toward a better understanding of self, society, and the world. Yet, like the griot, educators are not just mere conduits of information. In choosing perspective, content, emphases, and by being keenly aware of their audience, educators become unique types of storytellers. Curriculum, as story, is the evidence of interactions between teachers and their students, as well as proof of the experiences within a classroom.

You are being asked to take part in this study because you are a student of **[teacher name]** at **[school name]**.

WHAT WILL YOUR CHILD WILL BE ASKED TO DO?

Five to seven students were randomly chosen from my class observations. There will be one focus group conducted toward the end of the study as a way to get student thoughts about the class. Focus group participants will be asked questions about **[teacher's name]** approaches to delivering information, use of outside material, as well as their feelings of connection to the class and teacher. This focus group will last between 30 and 45 minutes, will be audio-recorded, and take place during lunch, study hall, afterschool or another non-instructional time. Your child will not be required to miss class to attend this focus group.

WHAT ARE THE POSSIBLE RISKS AND DISCOMFORTS?

There are no risks to students or teachers. Data collected for this study will not influence student grades or assessments, nor will they affect teacher performance reviews or evaluations, but may help make participants more reflective.

WHAT ARE THE POTENTIAL BENEFITS?

As a result of this study all participants (students and teachers) may become more reflective about their experiences in the classroom, but there is no guarantee this will occur. Beyond the participants of this study, the larger field of education and society will benefit from knowledge gained from this study in several ways. These include:

- Increased awareness of how curriculum is implemented from non-traditional perspectives
- The influence students have on curriculum development and implementation
- An understanding of how curriculum could be considered a unique type of story.

HOW WILL CONFIDENTIALITY BE MAINTAINED?

I will make every effort to keep all research records that identify you confidential to the extent permitted by law. During presentations, it is possible that excerpts of the focus group discussion will be used and your child's voice will be heard. Any data used in publication will reference de-identified transcripts and will not identify your child by name (or other identifying attribute). Publications and/or presentations resulting from this research will not share personally identifiable information.

Written and audio transcription data (including a pseudonym list, field notes, class products, etc.) from classroom observations and interviews will be transferred to a University of Delaware server monthly. Paper files (originals of scanned data, permissions, and field notes) will also be secured in a locked file cabinet of my graduate advisor. Only she and I will have access to these data files. These data files will be kept indefinitely, but will be destroyed should you decide at any point to withdraw from this study. Your research records may be viewed by the University of Delaware Institutional

Review Board, but the confidentiality of your records will be protected to the extent permitted by law.

WILL THERE BE ANY COSTS RELATED TO THE RESEARCH?

There are no costs associated with participation in this study. Students who participate in a focus group will be given lunch.

DOES YOUR CHILD HAVE TO TAKE PART IN THIS STUDY?

Taking part in this research study is entirely voluntary. Your child does not have to participate in this research. If he/she chooses to take part, they have the right to stop at any time. If he/she decides not to participate or decides to stop taking part in the research at a later date, there will be no penalty or loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled. Your refusal will not influence current or future relationships with the University of Delaware, [teacher name], or Ms. Primus, the researcher. Additionally, if you decide not to take part in this research, your choice will have no effect on your academic status or your grade in the class.

WHO SHOULD YOU CALL IF YOU HAVE QUESTIONS OR CONCERNS?

If you have any questions about this study, please contact the Principal Investigator, Nakeiha Primus at 610-872-4942 or by email at nprimus@udel.edu or her advisor, Dr. Rosalie Rolon-Dow, at rosa@udel.edu.

If you have any questions or concerns about your rights as a research participant, you may contact the University of Delaware Institutional Review Board at 302-831-2137.

Your signature below indicates that you are agreeing to give your son/daughter permission to take part in this research study. You have been informed about the study's purpose, procedures, possible risks and benefits. You have been given the opportunity to ask questions about the research and those questions have been answered. You will be given a copy of this consent form to keep. By signing this consent form, you indicate that you voluntarily agree to participate in this study.

Signature of Participant Parent

Date

Printed Name of Parent

Printed Name of Participant

Appendix F

STUDENT ASSENT FORM

2012-2013 Certificate of Informed Student Assent

By signing this form below, I agree to participate in the focus group for the study entitled, *Re-Imagining Griots: Curriculum Narrative and Male Educators of Color*. I understand that the focus group will prompt me to think about **[teacher]** and **[class name]**. I understand that I will be asked questions about what I see, think, and feel during my experiences in class and to describe my observations.

I agree to participate in one focus group sessions (no longer than 30-45 minutes) with 5-6 other students. I know the researcher, Ms. Primus (University of Delaware PhD candidate), may use my responses, audiotapes of our discussion for her study, but at all times my identity will remain **confidential**. This means that she will lock the transcripts of my responses and the audio files in a cabinet and on a password protected file on a server at the University of Delaware. I understand that Ms. Primus will use a pseudonym (a fake name) if my specific thoughts or work will be used in professional papers or presentations. I also understand that I will be asked to keep the responses of my peers confidential. I understand that the researcher, Ms. Primus, may share the written portions of my thoughts with me for accuracy.

I understand that my participation in this focus group is voluntary and will not have any positive or negative effect on my grade or class standing. I also understand that my teacher **[teacher's name]** will NOT see or review my responses during this focus group. I understand I can quit the focus group at any time **without penalty** and that any previous information used solely for the study will be destroyed.

I understand that I can contact Ms. Primus by email at nprimus@udel.edu or her advisor, Dr. Rosalie Rolon-Dow, at rosa@udel.edu if I have any questions about the study.

If I have any questions about my rights as a research subject, I may also contact the University of Delaware Institutional Review Board Chair by phone at 302-831-2137.

I understand that I will be given a copy of this assent form for my records.

Student Name:

Student Signature & Date:



RESEARCH OFFICE

210 HULLIHEN HALL
UNIVERSITY OF DELAWARE
NEWARK, DELAWARE 19716-1551
Ph: 302/831-2136
Fax: 302/831-2828

DATE: January 16, 2013

TO: Nakeiha Primus
FROM: University of Delaware IRB

STUDY TITLE: [379808-1] Re-Imagining Griots: Investigating the Curriculum Stories Male Educators of Color Tell

SUBMISSION TYPE: New Project

ACTION: APPROVED
APPROVAL DATE: January 16, 2013
EXPIRATION DATE: January 15, 2014
REVIEW TYPE: Expedited Review

REVIEW CATEGORY: Expedited review category #7

Thank you for your submission of New Project materials for this research study. The University of Delaware IRB has APPROVED your submission. This approval is based on an appropriate risk/benefit ratio and a study design wherein the risks have been minimized. All research must be conducted in accordance with this approved submission.

This submission has received Expedited Review based on the applicable federal regulation.

Please remember that informed consent is a process beginning with a description of the study and insurance of participant understanding followed by a signed consent form. Informed consent must continue throughout the study via a dialogue between the researcher and research participant. Federal regulations require each participant receive a copy of the signed consent document.

Please note that any revision to previously approved materials must be approved by this office prior to initiation. Please use the appropriate revision forms for this procedure.

All SERIOUS and UNEXPECTED adverse events must be reported to this office. Please use the appropriate adverse event forms for this procedure. All sponsor reporting requirements should also be followed.

Please report all NON-COMPLIANCE issues or COMPLAINTS regarding this study to this office.

Please note that all research records must be retained for a minimum of three years.

Based on the risks, this project requires Continuing Review by this office on an annual basis. Please use the appropriate renewal forms for this procedure.

If you have any questions, please contact Clara Simpers at 302-831-2137 or csimpers@udel.edu. Please include your study title and reference number in all correspondence with this office.