Can You Tell Me How to Get to Sesame Street?: A Journey Toward a Localized Pedagogy for Shared Survival

A Dissertation
SUBMITTED TO THE FACULTY OF
UNIVERSITY OF MINNESOTA
BY

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IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS
FOR THE DEGREE OF
DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

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May, 2013

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Acknowledgements

Many people in many places mark my path.

First, mom and dad, thank you. You brought me into this world and taught me to search for justice and love in the work I do and the relationships I build. We may not always see eye-to-eye on how this work is possible, but I know that my heart is born from both of yours. Thank you for everything you have done and continue to do for me as I walk into this new phase of life—as a husband and father. I love you both so much.

Sis: I love you and your family. We may not talk often, and we see each other even less, but you are always in my heart and thoughts.

To everyone in Kalia's family, thank you, *Ua Tsaug*. My heart has grown in knowing you. Thank you for sharing your lives with mine. I have learned so much.

Bic, Sonja, Tim, Thom, Walt—you all have been instrumental in my ability to allow my interests and ideas to shape my doctoral journey. To all of the other faculty and staff who have played a role in my journey, especially Misty, John W., Lynn, Nance, Peter, Alexs, Jerry, Michael, John C., Nan and Nan, each of you has in one way or another affected my perspective and helped me mature as a scholar and person.

To everyone who agreed to be a part of my journey in this dissertation, thanks go to you as well. Even if you don't show up here, our conversations were invaluable in me realizing what it was I was really doing (or trying to do).

My colleagues, classmates, study and writing partners: Alex, Matt, Brian, Zac, Shannon, Marisol, Lisa H., Lisa D., Teresa, Annie, Kristen, Brice, Chad, Shari, Silvy, Sherise, Brad, Kara, Katie, Maurella, Sara, Sarah, Heidi, Kari, Sage, Moira, Candance,

and many more. All of the conversations in and out of class, in and out of the offices kept me sane in the course of this degree.

To the University of Minnesota Center for Writing family. I learned so much from each of the people I worked with, and each of the thousands of students. So, if you are one of those people, thank you. An additional thank you to the people who believed in me and hired me, making this learning possible--Kirsten, Katie and Debra.

I have taught in many different places. I am throwing a thank you out to each student who came in contact with me in these roles, and all of my teacher colleagues.

To each of my friends and all of my family. I love you all. If you laugh at my jokes, I love you more.

To my nephews and little brothers, you guys keep me smiling and keep me young--this is one of the best gifts anybody could give me. Thank you for also thinking poo and farts are funny.

A few of my favorite things: coffee, fruit, ice cream, the NBA, summer, Jazz, movies and the occasional beer all deserve honorable mention…I can't really say thank you, but I will continue to enjoy you all. If you provide me with some of these things, thank you.

Saved for Last: Kalia. I love you. I learn so much from this love and your love for me, and the world. Thank you for believing in me and pushing me to finish. I am so excited to see where and how we grow together, especially as we bring a family in the world. Your fire fuels mine; your heart inspires mine. You will change the world, and I am thankful to be a part of that journey.

Dedication

This work is dedicated to family.

To Grandma Betty, Grandpa Art, Grandma Mary, Grandpa Leland, Uncle Rocky, and

Aunt Helen, you all left before I could really say goodbye,

and Baby Jules, you left before we could say hello.

Abstract

Like the children in the opening sequences of the original episodes of *Sesame Street* running into an empty lot and turning curbside trash into a trampoline, this is a document of a journey to discover a Sesame Street in localized contexts--the here and now, the everyday and mundane. Through the use of autoethnographic methods, I document a journey between the reality of my lived experiences, and the theorization of a pedagogical approach exemplified in those early episodes of *Sesame Street*. It is reflective work toward unsettling the spaces where and ways in which I have lived my life; work inspired by what Eve Tuck (2009b), a scholar and Native Alaskan, says is a necessary move from “damage-centered research” to “desire” centered research.

This work is informed by decolonizing and indigenous literature (eg. Smith, 1999). In it I recognize I am complicit with, and a product of, historically racist colonial systems, that oppression is a result of the work of educators and researchers, as well as individuals and families—it is recognizable in the everyday experiences of non-marginalized communities as much as it can be seen in the damage done to marginalized communities. This is written with a deep faith in the possibilities people embody in all their difference, as well as sadness about the continuing action by individuals (myself and people I love included) that limit these possibilities. I believe that the strongest inclinations toward learning are present in everyday lives and relationships, that authentic learning emerges from a desire for people to be with other people. In this dissertation, I examine my complicity with oppressive action as I search for possibilities and narrate my attempts towards strategies of shared survival: reflection, relationships, shared experience, listening and love.

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Introduction

Can You Tell Me How to Get to Sesame Street?

> The chance event might add a layer of conflict or daydream to things. I might unearth old resentments, or set off a search for lessons learned. It might pull the senses into alignment with simple choices or polemics: good luck and bad, laws and liberties, wild rides and common sense. But for now at least, and in some small way in the future, too, the talk will secretly draw its force from the event itself resonating in bodies, scenes and forms of sociality. And the habit of watching for something to happen will grow (Stewart, 2007, p.12)

> Come and play, everything's a-ok! Friendly neighbors there, that's where we meet. Can you tell me how to get, how to get to *Sesame Street.* (Sesame Street)

Sesame Street, Here and Now

The opening credits of the original episodes of Sesame Street (Sesame Workshop, 2006) show children of many different colors, sizes and ages running around, smiling and laughing. With the occasional glimpse of a child playing on a tractor, or a seal poking its head out of the water at the zoo, the scenery in the opening sequence is mostly concrete and urban. There are housing projects ("the projects") towering over the children performing on the monkey bars, and graffiti lining the cracked concrete walls behind the children as they run into an empty lot. In another version of the opening sequence, a black child walking down a city street jumps on a old box spring (just the springs) placed on the corner as trash. Abandoned concrete lots, graffiti and garbage are ubiquitous in these upbeat sequences. The smiling children have found their way (or are finding their

way) to Sesame Street, a space with friendly neighbors and sunny skies. This is ironic as the scenery the children are playing in would be labelled as “undeveloped” and “vacant” space— signs of a dying city—by an urban planner. Yet, laughter and play are highlighted; this is where Sesame Street can and will be found.

Sesame Street was a non-extraordinary space, a space that looked not very different from many streets in poorer sections of many cities. There was cracked pavement and dirt on the walls. People hung out on fire escapes and the front stoops; the store had limited goods— a character lived in a trashcan. This was where the producers of the show invited children to come to learn. As a child watching the show I was brought into this world of concrete and dirty walls, not to “make it better” but to learn with and from the people who lived there. This dissertation is built on a belief, encouraged by this show, that the strongest inclinations toward learning are present in everyday lives and relationships-- that authentic learning emerges from a desire for people to be with other people. Like the children running into the empty lot and turning curbside trash into a trampoline this is a document of a journey to discover a Sesame Street in localized contexts-- the here and now, the everyday and mundane.

Personal Connections

The person I am and continue to become is much more a product of relationships where there is more at stake than in formal institutional relationships (i.e. teachers). Even when I reflect on those teachers that have had significant influence on my education, it was typically because of the ways those relationships extended outside of educational contexts. My primary school was a short walk from my childhood home. My father,

aunt, and uncle had all gone there; some of the teachers were the same teachers who had taught them. My grandmother worked as a volunteer in the school, so on Monday afternoons, when she took care of my sister and me, we found her in the hallways. The school stands as a landmark in my memory of the town where I grew up; it doesn't stand as a separate institution but as part of a larger fabric of people and relationships. Yet, this space that was set up to teach me so well, was inherently flawed; it is not an exemplar of the type of pedagogy being sought in this dissertation (even as I experienced much love, care and support in this environment) but it is instead representative of the colonial and oppressive contexts that limit possibilities and work against a localized pedagogy for shared survival.

The kids of color at my school were bussed in. We were friends, but our lives rarely, if ever, intersected outside of school; friendships and familial ties never had the space to build the same way they did with the kids down the street. I wonder about the experiences of the bussed in students, where school was removed in so many ways from the relationships more immediate, more present, and more familiar to them— those relationships their survival depended on. I wonder if any of my teachers—so familiar with my family, the place where I lived, or the culture I came from—thought about the walls that existed between the lives of these children and this place they were supposed to learn in, and the people they were supposed to learn from and with. I wonder how these dynamics were a part of the "larger fabric" mentioned above, where a history of policy and law—institutionally sanctioned racism (carried out by individuals)— made this

neighborhood as unwelcoming and dangerous for a person of color as I, a white child, was often led to believe poorer neighborhoods of color were.

Damage and Desire

This dissertation is a document of the journey between the reality represented in the neighborhood where I grew up and the space portrayed by those early episodes of *Sesame Street*. It is about unsettling the spaces in which I grew up to expose narratives hidden by an oppressive colonial history (and present). This movement echoes a move Eve Tuck (2009b), a Scholar and Native Alaskan, suggests from "damage-centered research" to "desire" centered research.

Tuck (2009b) writes about how discussions of damage in research continue oppressive conditions and actions, "damage-centered research *and* damaging research […] in which the oppression singularly defines a community" (p. 413). She discusses how many marginalized communities even voluntarily participate in this kind of research in order to make the oppression they face visible, as an attempt to encourage change. However, Tuck explains that the context of colonization and racism that underlie the damage done and felt in many communities is made "invisible and natural" so that narratives of damage, no matter their intent, make "stories vulnerable to pathologizing analyses" (p. 415).

James Baldwin (1993) describes a very similar dynamic, in an open letter to his nephew (on the centennial of the Emancipation Proclamation) discussing the problem of race in the United States:

> Something very sinister happens to the people of a country when they begin to distrust their own reactions as deeply as they do here, and become as joyless as they have become. It is this individual uncertainty on the part of white American men and women, this inability to renew themselves at the fountain of their own lives, that makes the discussion, let alone elucidation, of any conundrum—that is, any reality— so supremely difficult. […] They do not relate to the present any more than they relate to the person. (pp. 43-44)

Damage centered research should be understood in relation to the impulses Baldwin describes. It is “joyless” and does not consider the present or personal contexts of a situation in relation to the institutional aims of research (it does not connect personal history to historical oppression). Damage centered research does not relate to the lives of the people doing the research, but focuses outward on people and places that are perceived as in need of being fixed.

The “something very sinister” that James Baldwin (1993) refers to is racism that hides behind a veil of innocence (pp. 5-6). As researchers ignore their complicity with historically racist and oppressive systems, they inevitably continue the “conundrum” of racism--defining communities as damaged through an institutional lens while failing to recognize their own role in that damage (failing to be critically aware of the lives and experiences of the people being researched, or the relationships they have as researchers with those people outside of the institutional spaces of “education” or “research”).

Damage: A story. A couple of years ago, Kalia (my wife, and a character— along with her family— central to the narratives in this dissertation) was asked to write the

forward to the first book length photojournalistic essay about the Hmong American experience. Kalia and I looked through the photos, and Kalia wrote the forward: a reflection on how the photos in the book recalled memories of her childhood and her grandmother. When the book came out two copies were sent to Kalia's parents. They looked through the photos and expressed disappointment in the photographer's work. There were so many photos of poverty, death, and disease. They said that the photographer was telling a story about the Hmong that did not celebrate or pay attention to the beauty, humor and joy in their lives. While there were a few pictures of people in their finery during a New Year's celebration, or some pictures of food spreads (mostly at funerals), many of the pictures in the book were scenes of poverty, disease and death.

After hearing her parents' reactions, Kalia received an email from a distressed young Hmong woman, explaining that while her family had known and accepted the photographer as a friend they were surprised to see pictures of their grandmother's lifeless body in the book. There had been no process of consent, no discussion of his intentions. The family was successful in contacting people involved with the book, such as Kalia, and the publisher removed the pictures of the grandmother as a result of collective pressure. Still, other issues became apparent through this experience. The author's intention for documenting the Hmong American experience became increasingly unclear. Kalia's parents' observations and the experience of the young Hmong woman's family exposed a project lacking in the reflection necessary[1] for somebody from outside of a culture (especially when that person is from the dominant culture) using another as

[1] This is not advocacy for Institutional Review, but rather reflective practice.

the subject for their art or activism. As much as Kalia saw these pictures as valuable recognition of the presence and experience of families like hers in America, the pictures the photographer and publisher chose showed a predisposition of seeing the people in those impoverished spaces as defined by the damage— death, disease, dirt— while solidifying and perpetuating this damaged image. This became distressing for Kalia's parents as well as the young woman's family in different, but related, ways.

Desire. Kalia's parents were concerned that a book about the Hmong that highlights the "celebration" at funerals and shows extreme poverty paints them and their people as impoverished, diseased and focused on death. Kalia's parents feel that so much of the Hmong experience is already understood (by those outside the culture) in relation to war, poverty and as refugees that this understanding creates an image of them as damaged. Kalia's parents want for people to see what is beautiful about their life, their family. They wish for people to see the love, the laughter and joy in spite of the damage.

Eve Tuck (2009b) suggests research within (and by) disenfranchised communities typically painted as damaged should look toward "desire" rather than damage, "so that people can be seen as more than broken and conquered" (p. 416). It is not, she stresses, to show that things are fine when they are not, but to encourage a complicated "understanding of human agency, complicity, and resistance" (p. 420), that "celebrates […] *survivance*" (p. 422). Tuck suggests that narratives that expose "the hope, the vision, the wisdom of lived lives and communities" (p. 417)—desire— can "upend commonly held assumptions of responsibility, cohesiveness, ignorance, and paralysis within dispossessed and disenfranchised communities" (p. 417). Damage centered research

places the responsibility for change with the damaged community while overlooking the system responsible for the damage (the same system responsible for the research). In turn, damage centered research ignores the value of particular ways of life and being in the world that survive in the face of institutional definitions of worth.

Baldwin (1993) describes desire as responsibility in the face of love: “We have not stopped trembling yet, but if we had not loved each other none of us would have survived. And now you must survive because we love you, and for the sake of your children and your children’s children” (p. 7). A desire centered approach celebrates this process of survival-- this love. It recognizes what is to be learned, that despite the damage done to these communities the people within them are able to continue. This dissertation is a celebration and examination of the potential of love over the limitations of mistrust and judgment (as sanctioned by institutional rules).

Rather than search for damage within marginalized communities, this dissertation builds from Baldwin’s (1993) indictment,

> I know what the world has done to my brother and how narrowly he has survived it. And I know, which is much worse, and this is the crime of which I accuse my country and my countrymen, and for which I neither time nor history will ever forgive them, that they have destroyed and are destroying hundreds of thousands of lives and do not know it and do not want to know it. (p. 5)

I am complicit with, and a product of, historically racist colonial systems (especially as a white, affluent, male for whom these systems work). This dissertation is an examination of this complicity, as well as an attempt toward an alternative conception and

methodology to recognize this complicity while also searching for joy and personal connection with the present moment. This tells a story that attempts to move from damage-centered lenses toward a desire to discover lives and relationships that resist this damage.

Dehumanizing oppression exists in many forms and results in poverty, death, and sickness. A foundational assumption of this dissertation is that this oppression is the result of the work of educators and researchers as well as individuals and families; it is not a distant and removed force, and it is not the fault of those communities to whom we often refer to as damaged. It is recognizable in the everyday experiences of non-marginalized communities as much as it can be seen in the damage done to marginalized communities. Further, this oppression represents a failure to realize our potential as individuals in relationship with each other and the world around us. Recognizing the potential of these relationships necessitates belief in the fundamental beauty of humanity, and an understanding of how we (myself included) participate in dynamic oppressive systems of research, education and daily life.

I am writing this dissertation because I love people; I have a deep faith in the possibilities they embody in all their difference. I am also writing this dissertation because I am saddened and often disheartened at the continuance of actions (large and small) by individuals (myself and people I love included) that limit these possibilities. This dissertation walks a windy path, and emerges out of this tension between the damage that occurs in our daily lives, and the desire inherent in my belief in people. It is

an attempt at a desire-centered approach as I seek strategies to move toward shared survival— survival based on shared experience and love.

Outline of the Dissertation

Not all research is complicit in a process of colonization. Similarly, not all of public education is a failure; yet, the institutions each represents are failed. There are people fighting for, with and within communities, families, and children. I am concerned however, that much of this work is rendered toothless by being carried as exemplars of ways to "buck the trends" or as "experimental" approaches when in actuality these are based in a history of scholarship and approaches to education that are not "experimental" or at odds with some mythical consensus, which are in fact humanist, "popular" socially democratic, and community centered. The political projects these practices take on are threatening to larger oppressive institutions, and are thus marginalized.

Rather than present the project outlined in this dissertation as a double negative, "anti-oppressive", it is more true to understand it as a human approach, something that is ultimately positive and liberating. These approaches, and the approach discussed in this dissertation, are not simply contrarian, left-of-center, or unconventional; they are part of a conversation that is and has been happening— methods, approaches, experiences and individuals celebrating humanity above any narrow approach to education. This dissertation is preceded by a rich history of critical, democratic and popular approaches to education. Thus, before I present my own research, I begin with a literature review (chapter 1) to present a snapshot of this conversation, particularly in how it has influenced the idea of a localized pedagogy for shared survival.

This dissertation recognizes education as a process of wrestling with a belief in humanity, in spite of overwhelming dehumanizing forces (engineered by people). In particular this research is focused on my own journey toward a localized pedagogy for shared survival. The process of the journey as it relates to this dissertation is discussed in relation to the methodology of the dissertation, autoethnography, in chapter 2. In chapter 2, I discuss my own personal journey into, and during, the process and production of the research. Further, I begin to connect the methodology of this dissertation to the practice of a localized pedagogy for shared survival.

This dissertation is an exploration of strategies for shared survival in my own and others' lives and in the fabric of communities. This dissertation is thus about movement between damage and desire-- about a process of discovering space, of getting to know a landscape on multiple dimensions. The guiding forces of the dissertation are related to the discovery of a locality (particularly the spaces that I exist in as researcher). This journey thus can be understood in relationship to Linda Tuhawai Smith's (1999) description of colonial methods of dividing and defining space, with concepts of the Centre, the Line and the Outside (p. 53). The Centre is the political power, the space which is defined and limited by colonial intentions. The Line is the ways in which space and land are divided and defined (maps, borders, science), and the Outside are those spaces which exist outside of the control of the center, and are thus outside of its consciousness. These are the spaces which represent damage.

Beginning with the Centre, in chapter 3 I examine a few brief encounters with what I refer to as the "institution" from varied viewpoints to try and mitigate my own

contentious relationship with educational institutions. In this chapter I suggest that when two people meet as a result of an institutional relationship, the institution itself is a part of this relationship and often dictates the terms of the relationship. Thus, my purpose in chapter 3 is to examine how different people's relationships with the institution guide their actions, both in ways that may be against their best intentions as well as in ways that distance them from the institution or other people. In chapter 3, I discover possibilities for a localized pedagogy for shared survival as it transcends institutional boundaries. I discover how the Centre can also represent spaces where desire can be realized.

In chapter 4 I examine more closely how relationships with institutions relate to conceptions and construction of space (the Line). In chapter 4, I examine my own personal history to explore how mine and others' movements in the places I have lived, learned and worked have been regulated in ways that limit relationships across difference. I begin to draw back the curtain on how these rules have affected who I meet, where we meet, and how we meet each other. In this chapter I explore Smith's (1999) ideas of the Centre, the Line and the Outside in more depth.

In chapter 5 I look more closely at more personal intimate relationships to see how these are instructive, and what they can reveal about approaching "other" people obscured by institutional rules designed (from racist and colonial foundations) to limit human interaction. In this chapter I thus focus on the possibility in the Outside, but also the ways in which this possibility is limited by the Centre. Thus, in the course of this dissertation I outline the necessity of breaking rules and building relationships across borders and within the Centre (chapter 3), my relationship to those rules (chapter 4) and

how these construct or unsettle the Line, as well as the actions and places (i.e. personal relationship building, the Outside) where what is damaged and what desire brings become more apparent (chapter 5).

One Last Thing Before I Begin

I have done well in school because the narrow focus of formal education is so closely aligned with my colonial, Christian, European upbringing. I know the scientific method-- I know how to place value on arbitrary definitions of evidence, process, rigor and validity in narrative arguments that dismiss traditional stories that have grown from ancient experiences of the space in which I am living. Yet, I have been formally taught nothing about how it works to live in a world governed by and known through Dakota language and ritual, or how to resist dominant Eurocentric views from within these traditions. I have not learned about the day to day lived stress of a Hmong family brought as refugees to a white, rural community; or of children of undocumented Mexican immigrants working low paying jobs with high mortality rates. No value has been placed on the types of lessons learned, and passed on, in African American families in predominantly African American communities. I have been taught about the damage, but not about the lives and love, the desire, in these contexts.

Were I asked to step into any unfamiliar environment, the formal education I have been provided has done little in the way of teaching me humility in the face of wisdom gained from different experiences. It has done little to teach me how to become vulnerable and to trust people different from me. What it has taught me is an "efficient" means of living in the world: to make assumptions about the people with whom I share

space, so I can conceivably move more quickly in that space. The education that results from my relationships with people whom I depend on and who depend on me that has taught me respect for human experiences and a belief in the power of those experiences (as they are different and as they are similar) to teach us to live together it is these lessons that this dissertation builds from.

By the time I was born *Sesame Street* had been on the air for nearly 10 years. It was an important part of my early childhood. While it was intended to teach basic skills such as numbers, letters and simple concepts (near, far) to poorer urban children, the lesson that I learned and continue to learn from my memories of *Sesame Street* is about the potential in a caring space full of different people, animals, and monsters— from different cultures, languages and histories. I learned that it matters when there are people willing to take time to listen and care for each other. As an educator and researcher, as a person, I seek to discover these spaces and relationships in daily life and public spaces, to reveal their educative potential and to design ways to meet and realize the full potential of spaces and relationships which are dismissed and undervalued.

The process of doing and writing this research has been a search for desire amidst damage--for *Sesame Street*. *Sesame Street* has pushed me, since I was a child, to look into the world for the lessons I am still learning, to look toward caring relationships with people from unfamiliar places and backgrounds for survival in the spaces we share. This is a journey to *Sesame Street*, through the Centre, Line and Outside (Smith, 1999), where the cracks in the concrete have no bearing on the integrity of the foundations of relationships that give people purpose, and desire to learn to become, together.

Chapter 1

A Review of the Literature: A Localized Pedagogy for Shared Survival

My reality and my dreams emerge from personal experiences, relationships, and history— the places, people, stories and conversations that have brought me to this place. Still, my ability to voice my ideas in a particular language, and to take particular perspectives within my writing comes from the writing I am exposed to. Theory— like a good story, poem, song, or piece of art- creates choices for how to understand the world around me, and the actions of myself and others. The connection I feel to particular writers and authors is because they give me a lens to view my experiences, relationships and interactions. Critical and democratic pedagogies, ideas of place and everyday life, as well as Indigenous and decolonizing thought have provided me with a set of theoretical tools that have informed the idea of a localized pedagogy for shared survival; these texts also outline possibilities and obstacles for me as I make moves towards this kind of pedagogy in my everyday life and finding it in the lives of others.

This literature review simultaneously allows for an elaboration on the idea of a journey toward a localized pedagogy for shared survival. Thus, I begin by exploring literature influenced by Paulo Freire's work, to outline how "pedagogy" is understood in this dissertation (particularly in relationship to the idea of praxis). I then explore literature that discusses the everyday, particularly in relationship to geography (space and place), to highlight how I conceive a "localized pedagogy". Finally, I draw connections to Indigenous literature which outlines at once the concept of shared survival, the type of

action that the “journey” in the title implies, and the gap in the literature which frames this dissertation.

Localized Pedagogy

I have become convinced in my experiences that education is more than learning things and collecting knowledge, what Freire (2005) defines as a banking model. Instead, critical and popular democratic approaches to pedagogy move conceptions of teaching toward an “active and reflective” process, where value is placed on collaborative working and learning environments (Gray, 2003, p. 771). It is this conception of pedagogy and research that I advocate in this dissertation. In short, as the goal of this work is towards social justice and equity, I move away from conceptions of education and research focused on outcomes and products, or towards individual gain. Both pedagogy and research are imagined as collective work.

I have come to understand critical and democratic pedagogy as a means of encountering the assumptions people have about each other, as they manifest in social interactions, systems of thought or institutions. Most importantly these approaches are often geared towards “[understanding] the dynamics of oppression and suggesting ways to work against it” (Kumashiro, 2002, p.31).

My journey into conversations about humanizing educative solutions, started formally in my studies to become a teacher. I taught in two public primary schools, first as a student teacher and later as member of a team of teachers, who approached curriculum and learning inspired by the approach to curriculum and learning in the

preschools of Reggio Emilia, Italy (Reggio Emilia Inspired (REI)).[2] These schools employed democratic approaches to learning; projects and ideas are developed in a multi-dimensional conversation between students and teachers, through documentation (pictures, transcripts, projects) and discussion of that documentation. I became aware of how of a classroom could act, even at a very basic level, as a node in a larger educational network that included the surrounding community and the students' homes.

In the classrooms where I taught, with mostly refugee and immigrant children from diverse socio-economic backgrounds, I saw the possibility for rich and deep networks of learning with people different from ourselves; in turn, I became convinced that an educative network of this sort had the potential to build stronger, more inclusive and connected communities. However, in my teaching I also saw how the structure of schools as well as the limited language used to describe education in political and popular discourse can severely limit the educative promise in diverse communities.

The pedagogical ideas outlined in this text are influenced greatly by Paulo Freire's (2005) work, in particular as it is documented and reflected on in his book *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*. Paulo Freire understood literacy as a key to nurture the reflective abilities of his students in order to promote immediately relevant political action, understood as praxis. He refers to "thematic investigation" (pp. 105-107) to highlight a "common striving towards awareness of reality and towards self-awareness," to experiment with a potential "educational process or for cultural action of a liberating character" (p. 107). For Freire, and his counterpart in the realm of performance, Augusto Boal (1985), there is

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[2] An REI approach as it relates to this dissertation is discussed in more depth in the methodology (chapter 2).

incredible power in being able to name experience using the same tools (words, theatre) that are being used in attempts to dictate experience and possibilities for action.

Freire (2005) warns that "focalized" power is part of a process of division that keeps people in oppressive conditions, where many small groups represent supposed different interests (p. 142). Thus, his pedagogy understands these "supposed different interests" as part of a larger conversation that is deliberately broken up by powerful interests. Authentic educative responses against this oppression can and should emerge from dialogue between communities, parents, teachers and children:

> Within certain historical conditions, manipulation is accomplished by means of pacts between the dominant and the dominated classes—pacts which, if considered superficially, might give the impression of a dialogue between the classes. In reality, however, these pacts are not dialogue, because their true objectives are determined by the unequivocal interest of the dominant elites. (p. 147)

It is not enough to encourage and facilitate the telling of experiences. There must also be an active goal of understanding and learning. Freire's is a pedagogy where everybody is responsible for learning and the learning of others, where "the democratic school that we need is not one in which only the teacher teaches, in which only the student learns, and in which the principal is the all-powerful commander" (Freire, 1998, p. 74).

Raymond Williams (1989), who worked as an adult educator in poor and working-class communities in mid twentieth century (post-WWII) England, makes clear the importance of a similar pedagogical approach:

> The only defence is in education, which will at least keep certain things alive, and which will also, at least in a minority, develop ways of thinking and feeling which are competent to understand what is happening and to maintain the finest individual values. (p. 9)

He further states, "[…] there are in fact no masses, but only ways of seeing people as masses" (p. 11). Williams highlights how the idea of the masses (an imagined collective, who all agree) can distort understanding of what is dominant, often misleading critical, oppositional forces to act as if they are opposed to a majority (the imagined masses) rather than working toward the critical education of those individuals included in the idea of the masses.

Each of these educators makes assumptions regarding the ways in which education is used as a tool to oppress through the definition of experiences and creation of universal narratives. To each, the potential in education lay in the ability of individuals to assess and narrate their own experiences. A worthy curriculum for Freire (2005) seems to be one in which all participants are brought closer together to create a more objective understanding or re-cognition of the world, where trust between people is increased through real interaction. Conversely, the ability to oppress others by limiting the modes of interpretation and possibilities for action resides in a specific class being able (whether conscious or not of this "ability") to not listen, to disrupt others' abilities to communicate about their worlds, to dictate the meaning and definition of others' experiences, and to silence and destroy other languages.

Praxis. Central to Freire's (2005) pedagogy is the idea of praxis, where curricula is dependent not only on action or words but the meeting of the two—the conscious and critical evaluation of each by means of the other. This is essential for understanding how pedagogy is presented in this paper in regards to a reflective life (as opposed to a set of "best practices"). Freire defines praxis within the space of dialogue, conversations where the naming of experience is constantly negotiated between people, where, "no one can say a true word alone— nor can she say it *for* another, in a prescriptive act which robs others of their words" (p. 88). This process of negotiation accentuates the dynamic ideal of humans as becoming rather than being; people are imperfect, "unfinished, uncompleted beings in and with a likewise unfinished reality" (p. 84). Humanizing education thus nurtures this dynamic; reflection versus action is not simply a false dichotomy, but more so, there is movement within the space created by those two concepts as they play out in our everyday lives.

Due to these dynamics, a praxical pedagogy demands continual engagement with our own participation in the action of education (our own learning, our own teaching). This is a process hooks (1994) refers to as "engaged pedagogy": "Commitment to engaged pedagogy carries with it the willingness to be responsible, not to pretend that professors do not have the power to change the direction of our students' lives" (p. 206). The educator's power from a critical standpoint thus lies not in an ability to single handedly change or disrupt the system, but by being one of a myriad of voices and points of view, rather than a single point of authority. Education can affect our understanding of the nature of knowledge and culture can be constructed in conversation with other people

in various contexts, rather than through rules disguised in definitions of "knowledge". Delpit (1995) suggests teachers need to "be vulnerable enough to allow our world to turn upside down in order to allow the realities of others to edge themselves into our consciousness" (p. 47). This is what Freire (2005) means by humanizing education, where education has the potential to open up conversations about human experience, and increase awareness and in turn education can then be shaped by these conversations and experiences.

Localized: space and place, and everyday. The political motivations of critical pedagogy, which relate to broad and universal societal issues (racism, classism, patriarchy, etc.), are approached in localized moments of teaching and learning, immediately recognizing a community's concerns. This can be seen in Paulo Freire's work with peasant farmers in South America (2005); Myles Horton's work in the southern United States with labor, community organizers, activists, and leaders during Civil Rights (1998); Augusto Boal's work in Peru and Brazil (1985); as well as in the work of critically minded school teachers (eg. Delpit, 1995; Ladson-Billings, 1995) and activists (eg. Ginwright, Noguera, & Cammarota, eds, 2006).

While critical pedagogical models vary in regards to context, audience and intent, all of them center around the co-construction of meaning, purpose, and direction of collective action (be that political organizing or classroom learning). Thus, critical pedagogical approaches are often, by necessity, flexible; they are intentionally designed to facilitate open communication, and to invite members of a community into dialogue

To Barr (2007), the idea of praxis (or actionable research) is directly related to what we know only in the process of relationships (“relational knowledge”), not just technical or theoretical knowledge. “The point of course is that ‘knowers’ are not just minds: as embodied, they are embedded in their relationships” (p. 29). Similarly, Kevin Kumashiro (2002) discusses how critical pedagogical approaches situate themselves in student lives:

> Rather than aim for understanding of some critical perspective, antioppressive pedagogy should aim for effect by having students engage with relevant aspects of critical theory and extend its terms of analysis to their own lives, but then critique it for what it overlooks or forecloses. (p. 49)

Ellsworth (1997) also emphasizes the importance of the immediate context and moment in educative relationships. She believes that what many call critical pedagogy is often limited to certain contexts and situations. As such she presents an idea of “performative pedagogy” as a response, as “performative pedagogy’s only life, therefore is in relation to its context and moment” (p. 160). The specifics of a locality and moment in which a given event is happening are more important for the action of teaching or researching than any goal or outcome.

Anti-oppressive action and education do not only happen in schools, “…we are not just teachers when we enter the classrooms, but are teachers in every moment in our lives.” (hooks, 2003, p. 158). There is a fluidity, and range of context, of educative experiences. Raymond Williams (1989) is a bit more feisty in his insistence on the educative potential of human being and becoming,

> A culture is common meanings, the product of a whole people, and offered individual meanings, the product of a man's whole committed personal and social experience. It is stupid and arrogant to suppose that any of these meanings can in any way be prescribed; they are made by living, made and remade, in ways we cannot know in advance. (p. 8)

Local, everyday concerns are central to critical pedagogical approaches as a means of addressing oppression. As such, this dissertation focuses on the educative possibilities in everyday lives and places.

Space and place. Timothy Cresswell (2004) puts forward a geographic understanding of place as "spaces which people have made meaningful. They are all spaces people are attached to in one way or another" (p. 7). Further, Cresswell tells us there is space inside of place, and by necessity, space outside (p. 102). While many people may occupy the same space, they do not share the same lived experience of that space (attachment, meaning). In this dissertation, place is space occupied by a person's life; it is the meanings, movements, and relationships that define a particular space for an individual or community. Learning, in short, is the project of marking ways of navigating and living in shared spaces and creating place, of understanding the different relationships different people have in and with these spaces.

The idea of the "localized" in this dissertation thus refers not only to defined or known space, but the different ways space can be imagined, ordered, and navigated. Y Fu Tuan (1977) acknowledges much is known physically about the world in which we live, yet in a discussion of myth and reality he places more weight on what is unknown: "the

knowledge we have as individuals and as members of a particular society remains very limited, selective, and biased by the passions of living" (p. 85). Cajete (2000) recognizes the limitations in Western conceptions of place as symptomatic of the more severe limitations of Western science, where "the notion of place is a given in that when most Western people speak about a place they assume that everyone has the same reference to that place" (p. 181). There is danger and possibility with this idea of place. Cresswell's (2004) warning is explicit, "seeing the world through the lens of place [can lead] to reactionary and exclusionary xenophobia, racism and bigotry. 'Our place' is threatened and others have to be excluded" (p.11).

Cresswell (2004) also points to possibility:

> When we look at the world as a world of places we see different things. We see attachments and connections between people and place. We see worlds of meaning and experience. […] To think of an area of the world as a rich and complicated interplay of people and the environment—as a place – is to free us from thinking of it as facts and figures. (p. 11)

The idea of the localized in this dissertation is meant to focus attention to the varied ways the world can be seen from multiple perspectives (be made into multiple places). A localized pedagogy is an exploration of the points of intersection and influence between these different places.

The television show *Northern Exposure* (Brand & Falsey, 1990-1993; Chase, Frolov, & Schneider, 1994-1995) shows an example of such a locality: a town, a space, in which people are dependent on each other for survival, where differing ways of

understanding the world become the ways through which that survival is possible. The series' central narrative is the story of a Doctor, bred and educated in New York City, as he becomes incorporated and educated into a small and seemingly isolated place, to which he is at first resistant. This transformation happens through a process of education that necessitates him letting go of a definitive, arrogant "knowing" way of viewing the world (portrayed as western science and medicine) and his place in it. The show places the doctor's experiences in the midst of the life experiences of the other citizens of Cicely. Each of these characters have different relationships with the world in which they live--different ways of making place.

Northern Exposure does not present a world free of conflict, or a world with only one truth. It does, however, reduce the overwhelming obstacles and oppressive forces of Eurocentric/colonial values (of justice, science, capitalism, and ownership) to single characters so that the audience either sees these values overcome in the face of relationships, or as a reduced risk in the face of each character's humanity. This show presents an example of an alternative to contemporary conceptions of space, where limited understanding of place can lead to "exclusionary xenophobia, racism, and bigotry" (Cresswell, 2004, p. 11). In other words, this show presents a vision of a world wherein multiple places (ways of being in and understanding space) are valued and nurtured and any attempt toward narrowly defined space is collectively resisted, wherein western stories of science, medicine and capitalism rub against the realities inherent in books, films, the characters' own experiences and life-stories, the stories of others, dreams, traditional medicine and local mythologies.

A localized pedagogy depends on the relationships we have individually with the spaces in which we live, as well as the people we share that space with. Wilson (2008) describes this in relation to Indigenous beliefs in relationships, not only between humans, but between humans and ideas, and the environment surrounding us:

> Knowledge itself is held in the relationships and connections formed with the environment that surrounds us. This reinforces the earlier point that knowledge, theories and ideas are only knots in the strands of relationality that are not physically visible but are nonetheless real. (p. 87)

Wilson highlights how our ability to know is connected inherently with our ability to live together, to be present and respectful to others; to fully realize the potential of a locale we must be open to the various approaches toward it. Similarly, Daniel R. Wildcat (Deloria & Wildcat, 2001) describes American Indian education as focusing on experience of "customs, habits, and practices. The primary lesson learned is and was that knowledge and understanding come from our relatives, the other 'persons' or 'beings' we have relationships with and depend on in order to live" (p. 33); learning is about local interdependence in our everyday relationships with other people, spirits, animals, plants, etc.

Everyday. Different approaches and possibilities for space appear in the everyday lives of its inhabitants. It is not only important to acknowledge the presence of the other people who share space with us, but to learn attention needs to be paid to their lives. The idea of the local includes not only an understanding of relationships to place, but also an understanding of the everyday. In discussing the poetry of Allison Funk, John Burnside

(2005) emphasizes the import of the "quotidian" in affecting change and nurturing imagination; the everyday is the key to freedom.

Burnside (2005) suggests that imagination is lost in contemporary society and that possibilities for movement are limited to what has been ascribed or predetermined, "Without [imagination], we live as mere persons, not as spirits, guided through life by road maps prepared for us, not by others per se, but by a machinery of hellish otherness in which we, as persons, are hopelessly entangled" (p.60). He continues, "the most common malady of contemporary life (in the 'developed' world at least) is the sensation the self is stolen away on a daily basis," that to move from the "engineered mundane into the (God-)given quotidian" (p. 61) is the answer to this struggle—that it mostly results in moments of chance, but that poetry is a means of recognizing these moments (p.61). He defines the quotidian in contrast to banality, that the "banal is what we make of the quotidian when imagination fails" (p.64). Acts of imagination are thus movement away from the banality of the "engineered mundane", they are a means of being in control. Similarly, Kathleen Stewart (2005, 2007), using a methodology she calls "Cultural Poesis", describes a series of moments to illustrate her theoretical construction of affect and political motivation, describing the potential for action in ordinary moments, often by paying attention to breaks in what is anticipated (engineered).

De Certau (1984) also argues the revolutionary potential of the everyday. He describes the way space is programmed and controlled (by policy, but also in research and science) through the erasure of the artifacts of everyday lives (stories, myth,

actions— what Wildcat (2001) describes above as “customs, habits and practices” (p. 33)).

> Thus to eliminate the unforeseen or expel it from calculation as an illegitimate accident and an obstacle to Rationality is to interdict the possibility of a living and ‘mythical’ practice of the city. It is to leave its inhabitants only the scraps of a programming produced by the power of the other and altered by the event. (de Certau, 1984, p. 203)

At the same time, de Certau (1984) also describes the possibilities for subversion of this control in the ways people choose to live, how the actions they take (individually and collectively), and the stories they tell create new ways for being in space:

> It is a crack in the system that saturates places with signification and indeed so reduces them to this signification that it is ‘impossible to breathe in them.’ It is a symptomatic tendency of functionalist totalitarianism (including its programming of games and celebrations) that it seeks precisely to eliminate these local authorities, because they compromise the univocity of the system. Totalitarianism attacks what it quite correctly calls *superstitions:* supererogatory semantic overlays that insert themselves ‘over and above’ and ‘in excess,’ and annex to a past or poetic realm a part of the land the promoters of technical rationalities and financial profitabilities had reserved for themselves. […] It is through the opportunity they offer to store up rich silences and wordless stories, or rather through their capacity to create cellars and garrets everywhere, that local legends

> (*legenda*: what is *to be read*, but also what *can be read*) permit exits, ways of going out and coming back in […] (p. 106)

To de Certau, stories, mythologies and "superstitions" are significant in daily life and the ways in which we work around attempts to govern and control the uses of space. Through connections to "past or poetic" realms, stories create unexpected, and thereby ungovernable, possibilities for movement in our daily lives.

The work of the political scientist James C. Scott explores ways in which marginalized groups (e.g. Malaysian peasantry (1985) and South East Asian ethnic minorities (2009)) resist and act against the self-preserving interests of nation-states, or dominating colonial cultures, through different cultural practices in their everyday lives. Scott's historical and sociological narratives and analyses expose how strategies of resistance and avoidance of control lead to strong cultures that value community and assist in survival of these communities (as opposed to survival of the nation-state).

hooks (1990) describes this from personal experience. She discusses how the older black women in her life created home places where she learned "dignity, integrity of being" (p. 41) despite a world that was, in many other ways, hostile to her and her family. The home of her grandmother provided warmth and shelter in the midst of hard lives. In support, Hill Collins (2000) presents historical evidence that the work to create these home spaces by black women are effectual acts of resistance.

Stavrides (2007) elaborates on how the creation of spaces in the everyday lives of marginalized folk allow not only for familiarity, but also for difference to meet. Through the use of a historical case study of the placement of refugees from Asia Minor in Athens

from 1922 on, he describes the importance of “porous space”, and threshold spaces, in fostering what he labels as successful heterotopias[3]:

> In an effort to describe [space] as a process rather than a series of physical entities, we can discover practices that oppose a dominant will to fix spatial meanings and uses. These practices mold space and create new spatial articulations since they tend to produce threshold spaces, those in-between areas that relate rather than separate. (p. 174)

By viewing space as dynamic, he argues, we can begin to see ourselves crossing borders and interacting. Everyday practice as part of the idea of locality creates overlays and intersections; it creates opportunities not only for our *own* life, but for creating connections with others,

> The prospect of a “city of thresholds” might constitute an antithesis to the city of enclaves. In such a prospect, becoming aware of the power of thresholds to compare spatially performed identities is already a step toward a culture of mutual involvement and negotiation. Instead of facing otherness as clearly marked in space, one is encouraged to cross boundaries, invent in-between spaces of encounter and appreciate situated identities as open and developing. (p. 177)

Similar analyses and narratives appear throughout human geography (eg. Hou, ed, 2010).

The authors above show how the everyday actions and imagination of individuals outside of the “functionalist technocracy” (de Certau, 1984) or “engineered mundane”

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[3] Building from Foucault (1993 as cited by Stavrides), Stavrides (2007) describes Heterotopias as spaces “where difference meets […] Heterotopias are real places, existing in real societies and inhabited in ways that deviate from what these societies consider and impose as normal.” (p.177)

(Burnside, 2005) of contemporary society, allow for sites of learning (in the sense of discovering possibility and connection) and relationship. Everyday lives in space hold potential as sites of resistance to dehumanizing institutional forces, efforts to “eliminate the unforeseen or expel [inefficient, diverse ways of being] from calculation” (de Certau, 1984, p. 203).

A localized pedagogy depends on an understanding of learning and geography as inextricable and everyday. None of our life spaces are definite; each is realized in a myriad of ways. To engage in a localized pedagogy requires belief in the legitimacy of others’ knowledge. The more we become engaged with and aware of the different ways a single locale is imagined and constructed, the more possibilities there are for us in navigating the challenges of living through acceptance, understanding and learning from difference.

Shared Survival

The everyday creates opportunities for movement outside of prescribed conditions as a means towards realizing the shared nature of survival. In order to survive and thrive, we depend on each other. A localized pedagogy exposes the beautiful dynamics of humanness that allow for our shared survival. A localized pedagogy is an attempt to realize educative approaches where different ways of viewing the world communicate and coexist rather than compete for dominance. Sandy Grande (2004) defines part of what she calls “Red Pedagogy” as recognizing “that the world of knowledge far exceeds our ability to know. It beckons all of us to acknowledge that only the mountain

commands reverence, the bird freedom of thought, and the land comprehension of time" (p. 176). Our survival depends on an ability to live in space, and to live together.

The concept of Shared Survival as it is understood in this dissertation owes much to Indigenous scholarship. What follows is an exploration of these connections, in particular as they relate to fundamental institutional and societal change (a decolonizing project). This idea and approach to change is then framed by what Tuck (2009a) presents as the four Indigenous epistemologies (sovereignty, relationship, balance, contention). The elaboration of the concept of Shared Survival as it relates to approaches to change with selected Indigenous and decolonizing literature simultaneously exposes the "gap" in the literature which this dissertation explores.

Decolonizing connections. Many Indigenous scholars, in particular those discussing decolonizing and anti-colonial activism and thought (Alfred, 2005; Denzin, Lincoln, & Smith, 2008; Grande, 2004; Smith, 1999; Waziyatawin, 2008; Wilson, 2008) show how contemporary educative institutions are antithetical to the idea of multiple ways of knowing; instead, educative institutions are understood in relation to their attachment to colonial systems.

The colonial process is one of building forts and claiming property. It is an effort, not only to protect, but also to control people by controlling nature. It is a lonely, selfish, and greedy endeavor. Knowledge, in colonial systems, is valued as a tool for domination. Indigenous scholars show how our society is currently still in the midst of colonial rule (Alfred, 2005; Grande**,** 2004**;** Miheshuah, & Wilson, 2004; Smith, 1999; Wilson & Yellow Bird, 2005; Waziyatawin, 2008; Tuck 2009a; 2009b; Tuck & Yang, 2012) The

colonial method of defining and limiting what is worth knowing about nature and other people to the cages of museums, zoos, published literature, and scientific names (eg. Cajete, 2000; Deloria & Wildcat, 2001; Alfred, 2005; Smith, 1999; Waziyatawin, 2008) is simply an effort to protect colonial interests (as opposed to collective individual interests). In a colonized environment, knowledge is recognized as something held by only a few select members of society; it is partitioned, defined, and limited to a particular way of viewing space and its inhabitants that supports a colonial claim to land and ownership (Smith, 1999; Alfred, 2005).

Taiaiake Alfred (2005), a First Nations scholar, makes the claim that colonial systems of knowledge and government pursue “simplistic notions of peace such as certainty and stability, for these are conceptions that point only to the value of order” (p.27). Defining space is a tool towards efficiency in order to define and manage the world and its inhabitants. This comes at the cost of dehumanizing and oppressing many people (individuals, families, cultures and communities) who do not view the world in the same way as those policing forces, whose beliefs and ways of being become illegal as their lives do not fit prescribed uses of space.

Sandy Grande (2004) lists five of what she calls the “deep structures of colonialist consciousness” (p. 69). The first of these is especially instructive:

> *Belief in progress as change and change as progress.* Both progress and change are measured in terms of material gain (e.g., more education, more income, more production, more status) to be acquired through economic and technological growth, and to which there is no preconceived limit. The ensuing quest for more

> breeds a fierce, though often tacit, competitive ethic whereby individuals rival for the control of limited resources and power. (p. 69)

Waziyatawin (2008) points out how colonial systems, despite a focus on progress, are responsible for human damage; she shows how they cause people to struggle to survive, rather than promote survival. She shows how colonial systems break apart families in the name of justice and welfare, and destroy bodies through alcohol, unhealthy diet, and pollution. Art Munin (2012) supports these types of claims with numbers. He shows how racism[4] is evident in regards to demographic and statistical information regarding health-care access, environmental justice (the toxicity of where particular people live), juvenile justice (who is being prosecuted and how), the K-12 achievement gap (quality of and investment in education), and access to higher education.

Tuck (2009b) points out how the blame for the damage caused by colonialism gets deflected,

> The trouble comes from the historical exploitation and mistreatment of people and material. It also comes from feelings of being overresearched yet, ironically, made invisible. […] Young men, though visible in the literature, are invariably portrayed as either victims or perpetrators. These characterizations frame our communities as sites of disinvestment and disposession; our communities become spaces in which under resourced health and economic infrastructures are endemic. They become saturated in the fantasies of outsiders. […] For many of us, the

[4] The idea of race, and the practice of racism, is intimately tied through history to colonial practice and understanding of the world (as something that can be objectively defined).

> research on our communities has historically been damage centered, intent on portraying our neighborhoods and tribes as defeated and broken. (p. 412)

Blue Swadener and Mutua (2008) also point out how researchers can "reify hegemonic power structures, thereby creating marginality" (p33); they continue, stating the processes of research need to be more reflective and aware of how they might be doing this, and the purpose of research also needs to be more collaborative and reflective of a value of local knowledges and ways of living. Tuck (2009b) calls for a moratorium on "damage centered" research, as she believes this is more likely to perpetuate the problems of colonialism. Instead she calls for focus on how particular practices are responsible for the damage. More importantly, similar to Blue Swadener and Mutua (2008), Eve Tuck (2009b) calls for a celebration of resilience and the possibility inherent in traditional ways of being and living.

Tuck (2009b) and Blue Swadener and Mutua (2008) both stress the importance of traditional ways of knowing and being, as well as traditions and customs. Grande (2004) says, "the struggle for freedom is not about 'dressing up in the trappings of the past and making demands' but about being firmly rooted in 'the ever changing experiences of the community'" (166). Tradition to Grande is less about what is known than *how* things are known.

An ethic of respect and listening to communities is thus important to recognize the localized pedagogies for shared survival that are ubiquitous in the everyday lives of marginalized folk. Definitions for localized, humanizing education already exist (and have for a long time) in many marginalized and Indigenous peoples' vocabularies and

cultures. For example, Jones and Jenkins (2008) refer to the qualities Maori Elders' use to decide on membership in collaborative projects: "Right Spirit, kinship and apprenticeship" (p. 481). Similarly, Madison (2008) refers to "ancient" writing and theory that speaks to being humble, having clear motivations, and being honest about whose interests are being working toward (pp. 396-97). These alternative definitions and understanding of learning and being together in space allow me to understand and discuss an alternative educative vision.

Shared survival implies more than an idea of making it through day by day. As the literature points out, many marginalized communities and cultures, despite the damage done to them, have strategies for resilience, or survival. Alfred (2005) notes the need for change and thus, the idea of shared survival is as much a marker of pathways to change as it is pathways for resistance. Wilson (2004) states how "decolonization in its farthest extension moves us beyond mere survival and becomes a means of restoring health and prosperity to our people by returning to traditions and ways of life that have been systematically suppressed" (p. 71). Waziyatawin's (2008) call to decolonize is a call to restore health and balance, to build toward peaceful coexistence (pp. 167-175). Similarly, Alfred's (2005) goal is a "real and deep notion of peace" (p. 27) rather than "justice". While Alfred recognizes justice is important, he sees it as necessarily backward looking, and as such unable to encompass the full scope of a decolonizing (humanizing) movement; the pursuit of justice is only a step toward a decolonized peace (p.27). Decolonizing work is movement toward "peaceful coexistence" (p.35). Within Indigenous scholarship, as in much anti-oppressive scholarship, the implications for how

to move towards this world requires a different kind of revolution, not simple liberal reform, but also not the kind of revolution that reinstates a different ruling power. Alfred says he writes “from *within* change” (p.34).

This dissertation is highly indebted to Indigenous thought and a broader decolonizing project. Eve Tuck and K. Wayne Yang (2012) are concerned about the use of the language of decolonization as a way of discussing other approaches toward social justice, as a metaphor:

> It is not uncommon to hear speakers refer, almost casually, to the need to “decolonize our schools,” or use “decolonizing methods,” or “decolonize student thinking.” Yet, we have observed a startling number of these discussions make no mention of Indigenous peoples, our/their struggles for the recognition of our/their sovereignty, or the contributions of Indigenous intellectuals and activists to theories and frameworks of decolonization. Further, there is often little recognition given to the immediate context of settler colonialism on the North American lands where many […] conferences take place. (pp. 2-3)

By discussing decolonization without recognition of its immediate context, as well as the Indigenous voices (scholars, activists, people) who developed the term, the real work of decolonization is undermined, and the concept slowly becomes meaningless in relation to its original intent.

Tuck and Yang (2012) suggest that this is a coping strategy (of sorts) that settlers, aware of their complicity, take on when confronted with the messy work that decolonization would entail:

> The absorption of decolonization by settler social justice frameworks is one way the settler, disturbed by her own settler status, tries to escape or contain the unbearable searchlight of complicity, of having harmed others just by being one's self. […] It is a desire to not have to deal with this (Indian) problem anymore. (p. 9)

Thus, decolonization used as a metaphor for other approaches ignores the work of unsettling that settlers need to do. Decolonization is different than a movement toward reform of a current system or belief in a particular brand of progress (vision of the future); it is instead a project toward fundamental change which requires the current way of seeing and being in the world to be unsettled: for property to be relinquished, for lands to be returned, for government to be dissolved.

In Eve Tuck's (2009a) reflection on her work with various participatory projects with youth, she realizes a need for a broader approach to theories of change. She finds herself in her work, dealing specifically with schools and education policy, wrestling with a paradox of revolution and reform. This paradox is defined by the slow movement of reform, and its dependence on the system in place, and the often too quick impulses of revolution and its tendency to reinstate similar structures of power with the only difference being those at the top. While change is necessary, neither of these approaches is satisfactory. Thus, in order to effect change (recognizing the limits of both sides of this paradox), Tuck states it is important to step to "a new vantage point." From this new vantage point, Indigenous ways of knowing can be understood as pathways toward change. Tuck points out four specific Indigenous epistemologies (Sovereignty,

Contention, Relationship, and Balance) (p. 55). These provide an outline to present (only some of) the wide range of Indigenous and decolonizing thought that has informed this dissertation, particularly in relation to the concept of shared survival and the approach to change which a journey toward a localized pedagogy for shared survival represents.

Sovereignty. Tuck (2009a) contrasts the conventional misrepresentations of sovereignty as "a right or condition" with a definition that regards it as a way of knowing. "Sovereignty encapsulates what I know about knowing, where knowing comes from and goes to, how knowledge stretches and rises, even and because of the punching down" (p. 56). It is a "real thing" that has gone unrecognized in the face of treaties, apologies, and the like. It is not simply a recognition of land rights, but also "social, cultural, and spiritual (tribal) identities and to our own envisioned political development" (p. 56). Sovereignty, as it is connected to Indigenous ways of knowing the land/space that has been stolen from them, is a recognition of multiple ways of viewing the universe, and that these require different ways of interacting with space. Thus, sovereignty also necessitates keeping spaces open to allow for different ways of viewing the world, respecting the natural environments role in the connected relationships between living and non-living entities.

In Grande's (2004) *Red Pedagogy,* she questions models of sovereignty that emphasize redistributive practice (of land, money, etc.):

> If the emancipatory project begins with the assumption of the "finished" project of indigenous colonization, how is that liberatory for American Indians? Thus, while revolutionary scholars rightly challenge the inherent inequalities of

> capitalist society, the metaphors of power, exchange, and labor remain tied to whitestream notions of property. (Grande, 2004, p. 49)

A true move toward sovereignty would necessitate the allowance of multiple ways of being in the world, of seeing and acting in the world; it would require a dismissal of geo-political (nation-state) borders. Shared relationships to land and place require communal care-taking and stewardship. Spaces have to be open to various ways of navigating and acting in them. How land "belongs" to its native inhabitants, sovereignty, is in contrast to colonial ideas of ownership as these limit peoples' abilities to practice certain cultural, political and social roles and identities.

Grande (2004) aligns sovereignty with an ideal of democracy, as opposed to assimilation, enfranchisement, incorporation, and homogenization (to name a few of her conceptual and historical antonyms/misunderstandings of the term). Popular discourse maintains that unless assimilation occurs, individuals and specific communities are keeping to themselves, that discussions of sovereignty are exclusionary. It is interesting in light of these criticisms to wonder to what extent the dominant culture, especially within educational institutions, acts as separatist and exclusionary. Further, in what ways are dehumanizing practices maintained and actively cultivated or sought through these exclusionary practices? In discussing sovereignty, Sandy Grande maintains it is not a move towards separatism, but rather a move towards restoration (p57).

According to Grande (2004), a Red Pedagogy is not a post-colonial statement or assertion of Indigenous-ness within existing governmental structures, but rather a project of decolonization, of asserting and communicating other ways of knowing, being and

communicating within communities and among individuals on the earth. Grande's sovereignty places land within individuals and heritage, as separate from colonial, governmental politics. This is not meant to de-emphasize the importance of land in arguments for sovereignty; rather, land and nature become non-political entities inseparable from lived experience.

The idea of sovereignty necessarily exists outside of an understanding of land ownership. While it relates to Indigenous "rights" to land, it is not exclusionary in the same way as the colonial practice of drawing borders (defining space). Sovereignty stands in direct opposition to ideas of private property and national boundaries. Sovereignty is less a claim of ownership over land and more a claim to existence.

Relationship. In addition to sovereignty, to Tuck (2009a), respect and attention to relationships are essential in any meaningful action towards change. According to Blue Swadener and Mutua (2008), a big problem with human research is that sustained relationships are not formed. Urban schools become "data plantations" (p. 35), hot spots for the problems and thus locations of research. This location of research, and the problems it works to solve, is part of the process of colonization. Again, by making relationships with people and space secondary, by placing primary value on the information generated, research reproduces problems it sets out to solve. Knowledge and education that emerge from "damage centered" research (Tuck, 2009b), are thus tied more to this non-relational information than to the places and people that it is, on the surface, referencing.

Shawn Wilson (2008) explores the importance of relationships in regards to Indigenous meaning making in his book *Research is ceremony: Indigenous research methods.* Similarly, Greg Cajete (2000) points to the importance of relationships in regards to research and "native science". Each of these Indigenous scholars point to the same truth that Eve Tuck (2009a) refers to when she names relationship as one of the four Indigenous pathways to knowledge. Tuck describes the relationships between ideas outside of a linear or temporal framework, and instead in clusters. Wilson (2008) also focuses on the coexistence of ideas, the importance of ideas, and knowledge as it rests in the hands of the person using it. Relationships are between people, people and ideas, creatures, land, spirits, dreams.

Wilson (2008) describes several types of relationship: "Relations with People", "Relations with the Environment/Land", "Relations with Cosmos", and "Relations with Ideas"; these are interdependent, different relationships create a web of relationality that starts from the individual as placed within a larger collective. He claims knowledge is relational, that the value of relationship can be seen in many native languages, where objects are named not by what they are, but their use, and the relationship we have with them. Each person's viewpoint is essential not only to their belonging, but also the support they provide other people from another spot in the circle, the "foundational platform" of many Indigenous worldviews (p. 92). Our relationships with ideas thus allow us to help others within space by naming our position and providing additional

points of view; within this worldview, reality is based upon our relationships with other people and as such "judgment of another's viewpoint is inconceivable"[5] (p. 92).

Cajete (2000), in his outline of *Native Science*, describes how relationships with other people, ideas, animals, and spirits are essential to our ability to survive, to come to understanding and knowledge:

> In contrast to the relatively one-dimensional Newtonian-Cartesian view of nature, Native people perceived multiple realities, of which the reality experienced by our five senses was only one of many possibilities. In such a perceived multiverse, knowledge could be received directly from living and non-living entities. (p.178).

The value of an individual's place is as it exists in the broader scheme of things (Deloria & Wildcat, 2001).

Blue Swadener and Mutua (2008) state that research needs to be concerned instead with participation in "ongoing (non-missionary) ways" of building relationships (p. 36). Smith (1999) stresses the importance of humility and respect, "To accept a gift and to reciprocate gives dignity to the receiver. To create something new through that process of sharing is to recreate the old, to reconnect relationships and to recreate our humanness" (p. 105). In short, the process of recognizing others' humanity is the process of relationships. As Glesne (2007) suggests it is a part of a process and practice of hospitality (p. 175), it allows for a recognition of difference and misunderstanding.

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[5] Within Wilson's (2008) text two of his friends discuss how this is evident in schools, where many young indigenous people have a hard time because they are asked to "[s]take a position on something/ Stan: violating their cultural norm [of being open to, and learning from, other viewpoints]" (p.62).

Tuck (Tuck & Fine, 2007) recognizes relationships as part of a necessary, "intimate epistemological shift" (p.155).

> Relationship is among, within, between, a collective of *us.* […] Collectivity does not start with the individual as the 'real' first unit and build up to the group. Rather, collectivity begins with the group and stretches to include, celebrate and support the diversity of its members (Tuck, 2009a, p.62).

Recognition and valuing of our varied relationships creates educative moments facilitated for, by and between people, ideas and space (rather than by and in the interests of a colonizing force). Relationships allow for balance between the individual and the collective.

Balance. Tuck (2009a) presents the epistemology of balance as a way to highlight the work in maintaining equitable relationships. In her discussion of research ethics for a decolonizing practice, Battiste (2008) suggests that "the challenge is not so much about finding receptivity to inclusion" (p.498); instead, the challenge is avoiding assimilation, as it is the process of colonization. It is necessary to facilitate conversation and work toward respect before any "meeting" or inclusive practice can actually occur (if it ever can fully). As such, the work for educators and researchers is creating awareness of "systematic challenges for overcoming Eurocentrism, racism, and intolerance" (p. 498) Tuck (2009a) presents this process as encouraged through the Indigenous epistemology of Balance as "a counter to latent dogmatism, such as fetishizing equal distribution, market logic, or even 'democratic' practices such as one person, one vote" (p.60).

Waziyatawin (2008) shows, very simply, how the epistemology of balance necessitates large-scale change:

> Our ancestors placed value on the notion of balance as it represented the ideal way of being in this world. […] We can no longer afford to allow some segments of the populations to pursue an agenda that might harm the rest of us. This means we need to abandon fundamental institutions in North America—even the current system of government. (p. 169)

As Brayboy (2000) suggests, “the distinction between theory and practice is potentially artificial and limiting” (p. 424). Balance emphasizes that it is important to give space and listen to means of expression beyond accepted Western styles, especially Indigenous languages and modes of communication: song, oral storytelling, etc. (Blue Swadener & Mutua, 2008, p. 38), and the ways of being, seeing and experiencing communicated therein. A balanced approach necessitates re-imagined pedagogy.

Contention. Finally, Tuck (2009a) presents contention as a means of recognizing the natural conflict that emerges in relationships, not as something to be avoided or minimized, but respected and learned from. Drawing heavily on the work of Alfred (2005), Tuck (2009a) states the idea of contention can help shape the ways we reference and think about engendering change. Eve Tuck describes contention as “a process of individual and collective self-education [,] a process of interrupting hegemony, linearity, and unilateralism […] a process in which to determine and hone [intact] ethics” (p. 58). Tuck continues suggesting this process is especially important to ask as we determine how best to use “spaces of collectivity” (p. 58). Contention, as outlined in much

decolonizing/Indigenous thought, is important as it notes the harder aspects of coexistence and the subsequent import of learning about what we do not understand when we find ourselves in contentious situations as a means of growing collectively.

Contention makes it clear that different people have different approaches, values and ideas and we still have to work together to make the world a better place while valuing these differences; contention provides an outline for the dynamics of relationships. According to Grande (2004), historical attempts to include American Indians or to reconcile fail because they do not recognize differences in understanding.

Smith (1999) says,

> The denial by the West of humanity to indigenous peoples, the denial of citizenship and human rights, the denial of the right to self-determination – all these demonstrate palpably the enormous lack of respect which has marked the relations of indigenous and non-indigenous peoples (p. 120)

This process is dehumanizing. Tuck (2007) describes how, when confronted with these realities, representatives of colonial systems (people) find ways to continue hurtful, colonizing practice, by stopping decolonizing work and allowing the status quo (colonial system) to continue unchallenged:

> ‘I didn’t know.’ ‘I didn’t mean it.’ ‘I don’t know how to stop it.’ ‘What can I possibly do?’ These questions freeze and petrify. These responses of white guilt and colonizers’ guilt distract from what a real/an ethical conversation about ongoing colonization and ongoing decolonization requires: preparedness, listening, reflection, and reparation. […] Preparedness involves an intimate

> epistemological shift, thoughtfulness, and anticipation; listening, humility, and respect. (Tuck, 2007, p. 155)

Brayboy (2000) suggests, "knowing that I have these biases of who counts as 'real' and being critical of myself and others who hold similar ones, does not preclude me from engaging in the very behavior to which I am opposed" (p. 424). In other words, we are constantly placing ourselves and others at risk when we enter into relationships (especially in research) because it is impossible to entirely escape the systems of domination, which as ethical researchers we should be attempting to dismantle. Consciousness does not make one exempt from being a part of continuing systems of oppression; we are continually implicated and compliant with the process of colonization. This is, however, not an excuse for inaction. To start, an awareness of what or who we believe "counts as 'real'" allows for us to engage in important work.

Jones and Jenkins (2008) discuss the process of contention in light of obstacles for its practice. In Jones and Jenkins (2008) narrative white students want combined classes, and to work to overcome difference, while Indigenous students do not. To the Indigenous students, difference is a desired reality, not something to try and overcome. They stress the inability of the colonizer to understand, and the subsequent inability of the colonized to speak, even with the best intentions of the colonizer. Essentially, understanding is impossible and attempts at universalizing language are inherently limiting. "Us cannot stand in the way of the hyphen; it can only name an always conditional relationship-between" (p. 475). The more desirable approach is not to make everyone the same, but to become better at handling difference.

Tuck and Yang (2012) understand these assimilative impulses (to erase difference) in relationship to settler attempts to allay moves towards decolonization:

> In order for the settlers to make a place their home, they must destroy and disappear the Indigenous peoples that live there. Indigenous peoples are those who have creation stories, not colonization stories, about how we/they came to be in a particular place - indeed how we/they came to *be a place*. Our/their relationship to land compromise our/their epistemologies, ontologies, and cosmologies. (p. 6)

Contention is important because attempts to escape difference become obstacles to decolonization. Traditional institutional approaches struggle with contention, because contention stresses an *in*ability to “define the conditions or the socio-political space within which, [colonizers] believe, getting to know each other becomes possible” (Jones & Jenkins, 2008, p. 477). Contention is about being honest as well as being humble and respectful in the face of others’ honesty. It is not about winning an argument but about being open to other points of view. This is a key to approaching diverse communities which represent multiple ways of seeing, communicating and experiencing the world.

The Open Door (The Gap)

What manifests as we explore the circle of Indigenous epistemologies (sovereignty, relationship, balance and contention) presented by Tuck (2009a) is a different understanding of the interdependence of human being, the spiritual world, and the living world. These Indigenous epistemologies, in literature and life, outline an ethic of understanding of valuing every person’s unique relationship with, and journey through

the world as well as recognizing each person's dependence on supportive relationships with those who share his or her living space. It is such an ethic that informs this dissertation, and the concept of a pedagogy which works toward shared survival.

Tuck and Yang (2012) make it clear, however, that "Decolonization is not a metaphor"; it is a real political project separate from, and often in contentious relationship with Western critical approaches due to its unsettling[6] nature. While critical theory and approaches to pedagogy, in particular as presented by Freire (2005), are important inspiration to this project, I also recognize Bowers' (2001) criticism of critical theory as one with Western scientific ways of knowing and how that aligns with criticism from Indigenous scholars[7] (Wilson, 2004; Grande, 2004; Tuck & Yang, 2012). Tuck and Yang (2012) explain how various critical approaches, or "moves to innocence" enacted by non-Indigenous folk can counteract the intent of a decolonizing project. They

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[6] Tuck and Yang (2012) use this term to refer to the literal "unsettling" that would have to occur in the case of decolonization- the destruction of settlement and the repatriation of land.

[7] While the connection between anti-oppressive critical pedagogical approaches and decolonizing/indigenous thought are important for the purposes of this dissertation, the places where these projects differ is also informative. Specifically, Waziyatawin, writing as Angela Cavender Wilson (2004), notes how a decolonizing project, while inspired by the critical work of Freire (2005) is also decidedly different. First, Wilson (2004) makes it clear, "we do not deny consciousness or 'culture' to other spiritual beings that inhabit this universe with us" (p70). While Freire (2005) remarks on the superiority of humanity, and an inability for animals to communicate (p.125), Wilson (2004) shows how a move to "reclaim humanity" necessitates being open to that which is unknown, not only about the knowledge of fellow people, but of the natural environment and the other spirits and living beings (plants, animals, etc.) that inhabit space. In addition, in regards to broader critical discourse (which often cites Freire (2005)), Grande (2004) critiques what she labels as "whitestream" critical discourse, "principally structured on the basis of white, middle-class experience, serving their ethnopolitical interests and capital investments" (125). Grande and Smith (1999) both discuss how the idea of the "post-colonial" (evident in much critical discourse) project erases the reality of continuing colonialism and its effects.

conclude by suggesting an "ethic of incommesurability", where "settler futurity" is relinquished (pp. 35-36). They explain decolonization is not complimentary to current systems but rather is "unsettling"; "Decolonization is not an "and" it is an elsewhere" (p. 36). Decolonization does not imagine a future that builds from our present moment; it is not attached to colonial ideas of "futurity" (p. 36).

I am not an Indigenous person. While I try to understand and to be fair in my presentation of decolonizing and aligned approaches (eg. Grande's (2004) *Red Pedagogy,* Cajete's (2000) *Native Science*, and Wilson's (2008) *Research is Ceremony*), I lack personal understanding and experience of being an Indigenous person in a colonized world (and have first hand experience as a settler). I have to be careful not to participate in colonial ways of knowing (assuming knowledge of something/one outside of myself, culture and experiences). I have to make sure that I do not redefine/obscure the unsettling intentions of decolonizing work, or to absolve my own presence as a settler. My approach to this dissertation, and the ideas behind it, have been influenced deeply by decolonizing and Indigenous work; however, I do not use the word "decolonization" to describe my work out of respect for the term and the people it belongs to, but more importantly in recognition of my role as a settler. Instead, these approaches allow me opportunities to investigate and understand my participation within colonial systems (as they are antithetical to a localized pedagogy for shared survival).

As Grande (2004) says, "Indigenous resistance to the grammar of empire […] must be examined in terms of the racist, nationalist, and colonialist frameworks from which it emerged" (p. 167). The role of the settler (non-Indigenous person) is not to find

ways of incorporating Indigenous thought and decolonizing metaphors into ideas of reform and progress, but to recognize how he is (I am) complicit, even in the midst of critical acts and understanding, with a colonial system.

Grande (2004) suggests, “the process of defining a Red Pedagogy is necessarily ongoing and self-reflexive—a never ending project that is continually informed by the work of critical and Indigenous scholars and by the changing realities of Indigenous peoples” (p. 166), that the “decolonial imaginary” is one where “indigenous and nonindigenous people will work in solidarity to envision a way of life free of exploitation and replete with spirit” (p. 176). Similarly, Waziyatawin (2008) describes a project that necessitates the dissolution of current systems of government, education, etc., as they are the engine behind colonial oppression, but invites Wasicu (white) people into this project. In each of these, it is essential that Indigenous folk lead the way to a future in which “humanity is recognized” and humanity “rehabilitated” from the oppressive processes of colonization (Waziyatawin, 2008, p.174).

I’m reminded of Jones and Jenkins (2008), wherein Jones interrogates the logic of her own “white/settler” desire for collaboration. In order to engage in a localized pedagogy for shared survival, these desires need to be complicated and challenged (p. 471). This is where research ends, these are the limits: the product can only be the approach, humble and respectful attempts at forming balanced relationships. The

negotiation of relationships in the face of difference, and a dominant cultural influence, is dynamic and impossible to reconcile within that influence.[8]

As Jones and Jenkins point out, attempting to erase the space between cultures "does not work" (p. 475); "The hyphen is nonnegotiable" (p. 475). My own presence as a settler, and the gap between critical and decolonizing/Indigenous political projects define the space that I choose to traverse in my journey toward a localized pedagogy for shared survival.

Smith (1999) writes that,

> In all community approaches *process* – that is methodology and method – is highly important. In many projects the process is far more important than the outcome. Processes are expected to be respectful, to enable people to heal and to educate. They are expected to lead one small step further towards self-determination (pp. 127-128)

This dissertation addresses the gap produced by the unsettling process of decolonization. As I work to produce research (this dissertation and the relationships that inform it), this

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[8] This is also explored within much critical literature. Famously, Audre Lorde (2007) was invited to speak at a feminist conference where she was the only voice that did not represent middle-class, white, heterosexual influence. She addressed the inefficacy of a movement that does not recognize how it reproduces the systems of oppression it portends to address; "The master's tools will never dismantle the master's house". Graff (1992) suggests a lack of awareness of this paradox (fighting an anti-institutional fight within the institution) is responsible for the ineffectiveness of many critical projects (p. 14). Kumashiro (2002) notes that there is a lack of a means to make clear that critical work is "work [which can] never be concluded…the paradoxical work involved in anti-oppressive educational research and practice" (p. 203). He suggests that critical practitioners need to first be critically aware of themselves (ch. 2), to recognize their own complicity with practices and/or placement within the same institutions they expose as oppressive.

gap presents itself in the space between action and words (praxis). This gap is represented in the literature by Waziyatawin (2008) as a "disconnect between the way we see ourselves and the way we operate as a society" (p. 168); it is the paradox between my being a part of a dehumanizing colonial institution and history while trying to do humanizing work (being a white, property owning male working toward an accredited doctoral degree and trying to be a part of a process of decolonization). I walk into this gap, imagined as a door, slightly opened, ready to reveal possibilities. I walk, with the belief that if I am critically aware of myself and my movement into this gap, I can discover space for relationships to be built-- for the hard, continual work of building relationships to be action toward meaningful change.

Chapter 2

Methodology: A Continuing Journey

> […] to what extent does any cultural member, ethnographer or otherwise, operate in autonomy, in isolation from the very mechanisms that dictate the doing and the culture that gives context to being and knowing? Like blood, cultural performance is a fluid connective tissue that links the body to community. (Alexander, 2006, p. 70)

> This goal will be achieved if everyday practices, "ways of operating" or doing things, no longer appear as merely the obscure background of social activity, and if a body of theoretical questions, methods, categories, and perspectives, by penetrating this obscurity, make it possible to articulate them. (de Certau, 1984, p. xi)

Introduction

One day when Kalia's littlest brother came over after school, we sat together and read our separate books. He looked at the cover of my book and asked; "What are you reading?"

"*On Writing Ethnography*" (Van Maanen, 1988), I told him.

He asked, "What's ethnography?"

I did my best to explain it in a way that I thought he might understand. "Ethnography is when people go somewhere new and they live there and they learn all about the language, the food, the people and the things they do."

His response has been instructive, as I have explained the ethics and approach of my work to others, ever since. “Like Mom and Dad?”

This caught me off guard. After years of being in a PhD. program, I am still struggling with how to make the kind of conceptual moves that this soon to be 8 year old had just made. His parents have been American Citizens for close to a decade, coming to the United States as Hmong refugees from Laos in 1987. He knows from his parents’ many bed time stories that they came from somewhere very different into this place where they needed to learn so many things over again; he knows that where he was born is a place where many things are still foreign and new to them. He knows his and his siblings’ responsibility to help his parents navigate the world outside of their home, a world not designed for them, which is most often not even aware of them, their language, their culture, or their way of understanding the world. There is a rigor in the work that they do daily which is more intense than the work of any anthropologist. The everyday strategies they employ to survive and navigate America are as instructive, if not more so, than any methodology in any book or practiced by any social scientist, because the stakes are higher.

Conversely, halfway through my PhD I was the teaching assistant for a class on hip-hop and poetry. A masters student from France, not enrolled in the University, sat in on classes, and took notes. As a fan of hip-hop music, he decided to do an ethnography on Minnesota hip-hop. He went to shows and interviewed artists. Interestingly, it was a requirement that he enter a foreign space to go back to France and write about it. I assumed that there was something deeper to his pursuit of this knowledge, but while he

enjoyed hip hop and he built a lot of relationships within the scene, the end product of his research would be a paper written in French, for a French audience about Minnesota. The relationship between his fieldwork and academic work was lopsided. I imagine he has continuing relationships with the people he met while in the Twin Cities, however, when I asked about the purpose of his work these sounded more like fuel for a fire (his degree), than any sort of sustainable practice where the research helped to build, beyond the immediate relationships, some international connection or the local scene's reflective understanding of itself.

Dwight Conquergood (1991) points to this as the promise and problem with ethnography. He discusses ethnography's distinctiveness as it privileges "the body as a site of knowing," where "rigor, disciplinary authority, and professional reputation are established by the length of time, depth of commitment, and risks (bodily, physical, emotional) taken in order to acquire cultural understanding" (p. 180). At the same time, he points to a contradiction in traditional ethnography, that "published ethnographies typically have repressed bodily experience in favor of abstracted theory and analysis" (p. 181). Behar (1996) notes a similar contradiction as follows:

> Our intellectual mission is deeply paradoxical: get the 'native point of view' *pero por favor* without actually 'going native'. Our methodology, defined by the oxymoron 'participant observation' is split at the root: act as participant, but don't forget to keep your eyes open. (p. 5)

Conquergood (1991) elaborates on this, "Recognition of the bodily nature of fieldwork privileges the processes of communication that constitute the 'doing' of ethnography:

speaking, listening, and acting together" (p181). Yet, Conquergood (2002) warns us of "blithely" accepting the metaphor of life as text lest we ignore its connotations of privilege and oppression (p. 147), or as Spry (2001) explains, that the textual and linguistic practices of knowledge often "fix the body as an entity incapable of literacy" (p. 724).

The types of critiques above increase awareness of the ethnographic work that people like my parents-in-law perform daily, and the pitfalls of assuming academic authority. Thus, while I am troubled by the French student's understanding of what was academically valuable, I also recognize the potential in the work he was doing (eg. the relationships he established). I am (and was) saddened at how these did not align in the way he talked about his work. As such, the methods of an ethnographic methodology, "speaking, listening, and acting together" (Conquergood, 1991, p. 181), are where this dissertation focuses and where I place the value of my work.

According to Conquergood (1991), "radical empiricism" represents "a shift from monologue to dialogue, from information to communication" (p. 182). The claims of this type of ethnographic work steer away from statements of knowledge and toward "honesty, humility, self-reflexivity, and an acknowledgement of the interdependence and reciprocal role-playing between knower and known" (p. 182). The methodologies Conquergood hints at are such that they can be learned from people living their lives together and reflecting on our part in these everyday communal acts, as much as, if not more than, they can be read about in methodological texts.

Notes to a Prequel

"He keeps wondering when he will get started. I keep reminding him this is the work he has been doing"-Kalia, talking to a friend about my dissertation.

This dissertation is a part of larger process of discovery. My own experiences with research and teaching leading up to this dissertation have been varied, but with each experience I have become increasingly aware of and concerned about my position as researcher and my presence as a researcher; I have become obsessed with finding the links between my research, my teaching, my learning, my life, and my relationships. Before I examine my methodology in producing this text I find it important to reflect, albeit briefly and incompletely, on some of these experiences especially within the sphere of institutional research.

As an undergraduate psychology major I did behavioral analysis of preschoolers, cataloguing "prosocial" and "antisocial" behaviors in "planned" versus "unplanned" preschool environments. I remember sitting in the corner of the room, trying to maintain distance, but wanting to be involved in their learning and their fun.

In the course of my teaching degree a friend and I produced a film (entitled "Process, a Product") about a class on curriculum and assessment[9], in which we reflected on our experiences to broaden our own understanding of these concepts in relationship to pedagogical practice. We learned based on our shared reflections and the process of

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[9] The course we filmed was an experimental course wherein the students, in the process of producing (writing, directing, staging) an opera, were told to learn about curriculum and assessment. Thus, our film project, wherein we learned about curriculum and assessment in our reflections while filming people learning about curriculum and assessment, whilst they produced and performed an opera, was a process of theorizing our own creative interpretation (the film) of others theorizing in relation to their own creative process. As such, a short explanation of such an overly meta-cognitive creative process is hard to summon.

creation that emerged from that reflection. At the end of my teaching degree I had to do "teacher research", and I sat down with children in the classroom I was interning in, and we played together with music and recording equipment. The curriculum of the classroom, like the classroom I taught in the next year, was inspired by the preschools of Reggio Emilia (Reggio Emilia Inspired (REI)), and so there was an idea of shared exploration and flexible curriculum.[10] After my initial experiences with more clinical observational research, I was drawn to more the playful, relational approach evident in this classroom. The relationship between teaching, friendship, and learning blurred together; I didn't have to stand back. I could be a part of what it was I was making sense of and I could invite others to be a part of that process.

In my doctoral program, I took a course in phenomenology. In this class we read Maxwell Van Manen (1990), who spoke clearly to my experiences and concerns with research; he laid out very intriquing possibilities for future research:

> I am not *just* a researcher who observes life, I am also a parent and a teacher who stands pedagogically in life. Indeed, is it not odd that educational researchers often seem to need to overlook the children's interests (including their *own* children's interests) in order to pursue their research careers which are supposed

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[10] "Progrettazione" or a flexible curriculum, necessitates various ways of looking at and presenting a community's (classroom) experience. Rather than working from specific methods, the REI classroom focuses on dialogue and the existence of various ways of knowing and communicating (Edwards, Gandini, & Forman,1998; Moran, Desrochers, & Cavicchi, 2007). Gardner (1999) described the learning in the pre-schools of Reggio Emilia, Italy: "[…] the particular reactions of particular children to particular experiences become the bedrock, the driving force of the 'curriculum.' The activities of next week (sometimes even the next day) grow out of the results, problems, and puzzles of this week; the cycle is repeated so long as it proves fruitful." (p. 88)

> to be in the interests of those very children? We may even wonder whether in the final analysis the ability to make sense of life's phenomena does not reside in the *strength* of that fundamental *orientation* that one assumes as theorist and researcher (p. 90)

This call for a wholistic approach to research, as it is embedded in our daily lives, stuck with me. As I learned about various other approaches to phenomenology, I became concerned about misrepresenting the stories of others, and so convinced of the contradictory nature of bracketing,[11] or attempting to remove ones own subjective experience from the interpretation of someone else's, that I did a study on the experience of being misunderstood to develop an ethic of misunderstanding— always assuming that I cannot speak for another person's experience, except in as much as I admit probably misunderstanding it and opening my interpretations up for dialogue- which is in part the work in this dissertation.

I became intrigued with the possibility of action research, and later became involved in an action research project, where we worked with teachers on formative assessment. Connections between formative assessment (adjusting curriculum and/or practice in response to assessment of student learning) and action research in this project

[11] The idea of "bracketing" is related to the idea of "appresentation." Dahlberg, Drew and Nystrom (2002) explain this such that when we see someone approaching us, we only see their front, but we experience the entire person (p. 65); this means that "we have no direct access to another's emotions, and perhaps more important, we cannot directly experience what s/he is experiencing." (p. 66) However, they also suggest, "our own past experience of ourselves provides an analogue for understanding others and their experiences" (p. 67) So, in particular phenomenological research, there is an inter-subjective stance, a belief in a universal human nature of experience, accessible through our "own past experience"; yet, through bracketing we are also meant to remove ourselves from subjective experience. Hence, it is contradictory.

were very clear; I watched as teachers became more engaged and reflective in relation to their own teaching and their relationships with students.

I began thinking and reading about other approaches to (reasons for/ethics of) research. I wrote proposals (for fellowships and classes) for open participatory projects, where people could come in and out of ongoing conversations about how to make research work for them and their community. I worked for a summer as a teaching assistant with an ongoing project in popular education[12] influenced by the work of Myles Horton and the Highlander Folk School (1998). A Dakota language activist in one of my classes began talking about decolonization, which sounded like the projects I imagined being a part of.

These experiences and texts made me understand my own critiques of (and discomfort with my own involvement in) research in light of a bigger continuing colonial history, of which I was very much a part- especially as a PhD student. I became aware of the need to notice and name the ways in which I (and the people I know and love) are complicit in systems of racism and colonialism that I was often quick to critique from a scholarly distance.

A year into the coursework for my PhD I was the research assistant for a multi-lingual, cross-generational, ethnically diverse project called "Crossing Borders". The

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[12] "…while enjoying simple living on the prairie of southwestern Minnesota. Students and instructors form a community for living and learning to investigate […] questions [eg.] What is vocation? What is my work in the world? What kind of community do I want to have around me? What do I bring to my relationships and community? What makes communities resilient, able to flourish through change and conflict? [They] also meet local residents to learn how they are living the answers to life's important questions and creating lives worth living." (Philosophy Camp (2009))

research project was a collaborative effort to determine tools and protocols for other groups attempting similar community building focused on diversity. After a week of approaching this project from the perspective of researcher as observer, I was directed toward a more immediate need to build relationships, to be a participant in the project. At the group's first meeting that I was a part of, I was told to participate, to tell a story about an artifact, about what home means to me. I was not able to just be an observer. At the time I reflected on that realization:

> I've been taking time since that initial meeting to get to know these people, if only once, sitting down and having a coffee, doing homework, or going for a walk and talking about ourselves.[…]As these movements and relationships have become clearer, it has also become apparent that in order to learn the lessons Crossing Borders has to teach, one needs to become a part of it. I am uncertain that it is a process, which can be etched in stone and handed out as a formal, measurable curriculum. Instead, it is a process that must be taken on as such […] (Personal notes)

I struggled in Crossing Borders to settle into the role of participant researcher. I searched for a more definite line between the two roles. Settling into a dual role was difficult; the idea I had of what a researcher *is* or *should be* conflicted with my expectations of myself as a friend and a member of a group. This experience was not isolated. In many of my experiences as a researcher and educator I have encountered some dimension of the same question: how do I make the work I believe is necessary a part of my daily life (and vice versa)?

A foundational project. The roots of this dissertation are directly in a project I developed in a theater course on civic engagement in the arts. In this class I was exposed to texts on collaborative research methodologies, collaborative and activist art, as well as more familiar texts (for me) about critical pedagogy. Part of this class was to become involved with an organization doing critically engaged art. My instructor and I decided that I would focus on my own involvement in several research projects and classes;[13] we talked about it as a project toward integration. To determine how to integrate a project with my life, I made a map of my life, dividing my life into boxes (on paper) that represented the projects and spaces in which I interacted with others. I described the nature of relationships, the reasons I was in those spaces, and the positions I occupied; I wrote down concepts and demographics, names and schedules. I became immediately interested in seeing in what ways I invite recognizable difference into the spaces I inhabit. I labeled the ways these boxes intersected; considering factors of race, class, gender, sexuality, age, and language.

When I looked at this map, I thought initially that it would help me recognize the spaces on the map that represented something "outside" the norm, where more difference was apparent. I focused on three of these spaces; and wrote narratives about each, of moments that represented the work I am trying embody. I believed that certain moments of possibility and play would be more apparent in spaces where I was less comfortable

[13] At the time of this class I was also becoming more involved in an intercultural relationship, which has now become a life-partnership. This relationship, with a Hmong woman is a large part of the narratives I explore in chapter 5 in this dissertation.

and less practiced. In the course of this project I realized this reflection was limited in its logic.

I revisited my map and my narratives and noticed that something was missing. By creating a static representation (map) of the spaces through which I moved, power became invisible, possibly because relationships were left unexplored. The map could not stand alone. Narratives were the space in which these relationships of power could be dissected, or at the very least represented in a certain light. They shed light not just on the spaces in which I was performing, but also the roles I was taking in my construction of a personal narrative.

I realized that when I focused on issues of power[14] in the areas of my life, while personal growth might occur and new processes might become apparent in unfamiliar spaces, the real work to be done was in familiar spaces that were almost invisible as they were so practiced and rehearsed. I wrote a narrative about an experience with my family, shared it with my class, and facilitated creative group responses. Through these responses, I became aware that the way in which I wrote the narrative could represent the characters as two dimensional, that I needed to be more fair to the people in my life in my representations; I realized how the audience was aware and thoughtful about aspects of my life which I had not focused on: my classmates saw humor where none was intended,

[14] The idea of power and power differentials has revealed itself as a sticky language to use when working to celebrate and elaborate on the power I see in people often considered "powerless" or in need of "empowerment". Yet, my position as a white male and how this creates particular walls and distance between myself and other people is of central importance to this dissertation. Thus, rather than becoming entrenched in more complicated analyses and theories regarding power per se, it emerges in this dissertation in relationship to the language of colonialism.

and heard things in the story that I was not aware I was telling (but that I had felt in writing the story).

The project for this class made me realize the work that narratives can perform for myself as a writer, as well as in sharing research with an audience. In it I realized the significance of focusing on more familiar moments, people and spaces in my life. I saw how careful I need to be in my writing, to be fair to people I love, but also became aware that it is not always possible to avoid particular interpretations of my work and life. This dissertation is a direct descendant of the work in this class. Ever since this project, I have worked to determine how closely my life as a researcher, student and a teacher mirror my relationships and experiences outside of the classroom.

Autoethnography

In my arts and civic engagement course, I was introduced to several artists, organizers and thinkers looking to establish more dialogical, socially engaged approaches to art. Grant Kester (2004) says that simply having an ideal of communicative experience is not enough, that the ways in which power can silence or privilege certain ways of speaking and being are often ignored or forgotten even by those holding certain ideals. Instead, Kester suggests a more nuanced approach: “One capable of differentiating between an abstract, objectifying mode of discourse that is insensitive to the specific identities of speaking subjects […] and a dialogical exchange based on reciprocal openness […]” (p. 90).

The methodology of this dissertation is my own movement toward reciprocal openness: a process of active self-reflection and learning. A handful of authors use

"autoethnography" as the descriptor of work which I see as closely related to my own (e.g. Bartleet, 2009; Bochner, 1997; 2000; Crawford, 1996; Ellis, 2000; 2004; Hollman Jones, 2005; Jacobs, 2005; Richardson, 1993; 1995; Smith, 2005; Spry, 2001; Tillmann-Healy, 2003**;** Warren, 2001). Yet, there are also academics doing work under titles such as "cultural poesis" (Stewart, 2005; 2007), performance ethnography (Denzin, 2003), instructional (auto) ethnography (Alexander, 1999), critical (auto)ethnography (Diversi & Moreira, 2009), and "existential anthropology" (Jackson, 2005)**,** that follow similar guidelines and share the same goals as mentioned above. There is also work that sits on the edges of ethnography (Behar, 1996), and performance studies (Conquergood, 1985; 1991; 2002; Pelias, 1999) that push toward the galaxy of interdisciplinary work that might best be described as "alternative methods of qualitative and ethnographic research" (Bochner, 2000; Clough, 2000; Denzin, 2000; Ellis, 2000; Richardson, 2000a; Richardson 2000b)**.** Further, Denzin (2000; 2003) claims a need for research to access influence, and terms for validity, apart from "Eurocentric" standards, and draw instead on "vernacular, folk, and popular culture forms of representation" (2000, p. 258). These methodologies provide support to step outside of traditional academic ideals of rigor and more towards those other— for now unnamed— artistic, poetic, musical, literary, and human influences that speak more to Denzin's (2000) criteria.

While some trivial differences exist, the similarities between alternative approaches to qualitative and ethnographic research practices and the work of this dissertation, which I describe as autoethnography, are more salient. I have found referring to my method as autoethnography gives methodological space to the influence of other

relevant alternative approaches, values and ethics; it also applies in highlighting the self-reflection (auto) and the process of the awareness of the researcher being and performing in space (ethnography). Despite reference to this term, a single term is inadequate for describing the array of methods employed in this dissertation, as they emerge from this and other allied methodologies, as well as strategies from everyday lives.

Relationships. Ellis (2004) points to the importance of emotional relationships in autoethnography: "to be successful [autoethnograpy] researchers have to be comfortable with emotionality […] They have to be competent in the everyday ways of friendship and supporting others" (p. 136). Similarly, in "friendship as method" (Tillmann-Healy, 2003) the building of honest/authentic relationships is centered as the method of the research. Tillmann-Healy believes research should privilege friendship as a method in it's own right:

> Friendship as a method may be as simple as turning off the tape recorder and cooking dinner with participants; investing more of ourselves in their emotional, relational and political welfare; inviting respondents further into our lives than we ever dared before; […] approaching participants as we would potential or actual friends: with a desire for mutual respect, understanding, examination, and growth. (p. 746)

In my own experiences with democratic/critical pedagogy, and participatory projects, with family, friends, students, teachers, and mentors, I have learned that building strong,

intimate relationships[15] is essential to any human "work", and often is the work I strive toward. Eve Tuck, describing her work with a group of youth of color, explains as follows, "…We will always place a high priority on genuine, honest interpersonal relationships. Without these bonds and this striving to understand and respect one another, no strong foundation for change can exist" (Tuck, et al. 2008, p. 80).

Overall, this is not a project focused on ordered progress, aimed toward some idealized future, but one that is focused on the present as a point of articulation between the past and the future; it is an attempt at recognizing possibility in daily lives. Intimate interactions occur in our daily lives, humanizing moments that value shared survival, yet we are often unaware of the decisions we are making and the ways we privilege certain possibilities and those we continually leave behind. Thus, as my goal is to practice a localized pedagogy for shared survival, and as much as my life is in interaction with others, this is in part a participatory project, focused on interactions and relationships.

Ellis (2004) suggests, "we should always write as though our participants will read what we write" (p. 61). She clarifies that this isn't meant to advocate *not* writing controversial or critical stories, but to write these things ready for response, in order to build dialogue (p.61). The writing is not the research, the relationships are; the writing is

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[15] As Tuck (2009a) recognizes, and as explored in Chapter 1, the idea of contention and balance are important in understanding and approaching these types of honest and intimate relationships. Contention is often a part of how we associate with others, especially when we are being honest, and this may lead to distance and separation. It is important, however, to recognize this and to examine why distance and separation occur rather than to leave them unchecked, as they are tied to our intentions and the research and are often the result of unexamined contexts (histories of racism and colonialism). Distance and separation while they can occur as a result of honest interaction, and can be necessary (see Chapter 1 as well as Jones & Jenkins, 2008), are as often an invisible obstacle to our ability to be in relationships with others.

a tool to further develop those relationships and the researcher's self within them. Conquergood (2002) states that this shift from "speaking about" to speaking with (p. 10) research subjects is necessary in order to step away from the ethical traps of most ethnographic research (i.e. "The Custodians Rip-Off", "The Enthusiast's Infatuation", "The Skeptic's Cop-Out", "The Curator's Exhibitionism" (pp. 5-9)). In order to be involved in a conversation, he says, it is imperative to recognize one's self in the research: "The aim of dialogical performance is to bring self and other together so that they can question, debate, and challenge one another" (p.9). Conquergood presents the inclusion of the self as being more complicated than simple reflection, this "kind of performance resists conclusions, it is intensely committed to keeping the dialogue between performer and text open and ongoing" (p.9).

Self. A focus on encouraging continuing dialogue is also evident in the understanding of the criteria for autoethnography; Bochner (2000) states, "conversations focusing on criteria have as their subtext a tacit desire to authorize or legislate a preexisting or static set of standards that will thwart subjectivity and ensure rationality" (p. 269). Autoethnography values subjectivity and is suspicious of objective and rational ideals; thus, the responsibility of performing ethical and valid research results from an honest and open approach, a willingness to respond to and hear others' input more than following a "static set of standards". Self-awareness is a moral imperative of the work I do, both a first step and goal of the research.

The artist Allan Kaprow (2003) describes a process of lifelike art, which follows a similar set of standards:

> What is at stake now is to understand that of all the integrative roles lifelike art can play […] none is so crucial to our survival as the one that serves self-knowledge. Self-knowledge is where you start on the way to becoming "the whole," whether this process takes the form of social action or personal transformation. The expression "to know yourself," stated so flatly, is vague, encompassing anything from relatively light insights that come up in the course of a day to the hard and long process of existential comprehension that can slowly turn a person's life around. What I have in mind when I say "self-knowledge" is the latter. (p. 217)

This dissertation is work towards that "long process of existential comprehension" (p. 217).

Within autoethnography, the personal is represented as political and vice versa (Denzin, 2003, p. 23; Holman Jones, 2005). In Bryant Keith Alexander's (2006) work, he realizes (upon being exposed) that withholding information regarding his role as professor and as a researcher in the field is dishonest to the employees and customers of the hair-salon where he was undercover as ethnographer. Further, he also realizes the nature of relationships and information that are reproduced in his ethnography would reflect a dishonest performance, where the role of ethnographer was present, but never recognized (in the text as well as the field). Crawford (1996) addresses this concern and suggests the value in using auto-ethnographic research is,

> The process of charting the mindscape of personal experience, while unobtrusively attempting to attend to the lives and cultures of others, can go a

> long way to minimize the hubris of traditional ethnographic research […] auto-ethnography is a particular way of framing my awareness so that I must include some account of myself. (p. 167)

The honesty of self in autoethnography allows for the researcher to change in the action of fieldwork (Conquergood, 1991).

Data collection: documentation. The participants in this dissertation span demographics (eg. age, ethnicity, gender, sexuality, class); they are the people in my life: my family, friends, mentors, and colleagues. Beyond this, they are acquaintances who I get a chance to talk to, people who I work with, or people who I end up sitting next to or across from. As importantly, the participants are also the people who share the spaces where my life plays out (people I do not know and have never met). Most importantly, I myself am a participant in this research. The methodology for this dissertation is a combination of relational reflections and experiences; between myself and other individuals, cultures, and space—including conversations and memories. The "data" that I have collected is thus a variety of fieldnotes, transcriptions, and narrated memories.

Documentation as an approach has revealed itself, time and again, as one of the most important elements of all of the work I have done as a researcher and educator. In the REI classrooms where I taught, documentation is central to the process of building from collective experiences. Conversations are transcribed, pictures of activities are taken. Documentation is returned to again and again as something for students, parents, and teachers to reflect on and build upon; it is understood as a dynamic part of the classroom and curriculum, where there is

> Visibility and transparency of the children's processes of research and cognition. An environment that documents not only the results but also the processes of learning and knowledge-building, that narrates the didactic paths and states the value of reference. The environment generates a sort of psychic skin, an energy-giving second skin made of writings, images, materials, objects, and colors, which reveals the presence of the children even in their absence. Narration. (Ceppi & Zini, 1998, p. 24)

In an REI classroom, documentation is a record of where the community has been as well as an invitation to further input, to inform future learning and curriculum.

I include reflections on the REI approach because it forces a broader understanding of documentation (what it is, how it can be used) for this dissertation. My experiences have revealed the power of using documentation as a tool for individual and collective learning and reflection. As such, I imagine this dissertation as documentation that is not just archival, but also a dynamic piece of the larger process of a journey toward a localized pedagogy for shared survival, and as an invitation into that work.

Sharing and conversations.

> Sharing knowledge is also a long-term commitment. […] I use the term 'sharing knowledge' deliberately, rather than the term 'sharing information' because to me the responsibility of researchers and academics is not simply to share surface information (pamphlet knowledge) but to share the theories and analyses which inform the way knowledge and information are conducted and represented. (Smith, 1999, p. 16)

Conversations (of varying degrees of formality) have given this dissertation its shape; they mirror the work I have also done alone in my writing: adjusting ideas, revisiting concepts, reflecting on experiences. These conversations allow me to "share" my research, as suggested in the quotation by Smith (1999) above. My initial purpose for including interviews and conversations as part of my method was that these interviews were a chance for me to reconnect and continue to establish relationships with people. Yet, the level of influence these conversations have had is much greater than I had expected.

The idea that, in its most basic form, an interview is two people meeting, while obvious, is not present in many conversations about research. Within qualitative studies, however, different writers highlight this connection. Madison (2008) states the interview is itself a performative moment, wherein relationships are built, and research is done; it is not free from the contexts of our relationships with each other and the world. More specifically, Denzin (2003) refers to the process of the "reflexive interview" (p. 79), making the ethical motivations behind such an interview very explicit: "The reflexive interview is not an information-gathering tool per se. […] Doing interviews is a privilege granted to us, not a right that we have […] Interviews arise out of performance events. They transfer information into shared moral experience" (p.72). Denzin claims the interview is not a means to acquire data to analyze but rather as a performance event on its own, a moment of reflection and meaning making—analysis.

The interview is thus "performance writing" an approach that also requires "performative reading" (Denzin, 2003, p. 94). Careful to never name any defined

"rigorous" approaches, Denzin emphasizes that the interviewer must pursue "performances, spaces, and sites where stories that cross and recross the borders and boundaries" (e.g. class, race, ethnicity, illness) are told (p. 88). Following Madison (2008) and Denzin (2003), the interviews in this dissertation were established as a point of connection between myself as researcher, educator, and theorist, and the world that I am acting in. Interviews were part of a process of sharing and building relationships.

As suggested by Denzin (2003), my method for these conversations varied. I sat down numerous times with mentors, friends, family, colleagues and acquaintances (not exclusive categories) to discuss my work/life and theirs. The ways in which the people I sat down and had conversations with influenced the larger product were fundamental to the shape the dissertation took. My initial expectations were that the people I singled out (I made a list of 10) might offer an example or two for me to discuss, a shared memory, or an experience of their own. I had mentors who summarized[16] my project in ways that deepened my own understanding of how it communicated, as well as how I developed my own understanding of the project; I had a mentor who explained *how* I might approach such a project.[17] When my former student told me she looked forward to

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[16] eg. "What I hear you're doing is saying that 'doing my own thing, is a collective thing, it's not just my own thing, my thing is the community thing.' What you want to do is encourage people to see that too... that you don't have to sell out or be the man […] It's the community, and really true community too, is what you're after. (W. Jacobs, personal communication, April 30, 2010) "very decent things happen on such a small scale, and they radiate through our experience" (J. Wallace, personal communication, September 29, 2011)

[17] As I expressed concern with taking a more traditional "critical" approach, my mentor discussed her own experiences on boards, in policy work, and in organizing that rather than focusing on how to fit into a dialogue that is not welcoming, I need to work on "changing the conversation" (N. Skelton, personal communication, July, 2011).

hearing how my project took shape, as it was very vague to her, I was forced to reckon with my lack of focus and ask questions of myself and my work. Each conversation had similar influence on my work, in big and small ways.

Some of these conversations have found a place in this text. However, most of these are not formally included in the text. Regardless, each conversation helped me refine my approach and analysis. I initially contacted a group of several people who I thought I would define as my participants. However, many of the conversations that shaped my work were unscheduled and unexpected. Some of the interviews that are included emerged organically. For example, my conversation with Franklin (in chapter 3) was the result of meeting the husband of a colleague of Kalia's when they came for dinner. I was asked to talk about my work, and in response he began to share his experiences. We decided to meet again, and I recorded a more in depth and focused interview, which gave focus to my chapter on institutions.

Impromptu exchanges like the initial one with Franklin often happened and over time they gave me a sense of possible responses, as well as the awareness of particular groups of people. These conversations were sometimes scheduled, sometimes unexpected; sometimes they happened over time with the same person, other times they happened with somebody I only met once. They happened in the car, over the phone, during meals, on walks, while working, on Facebook, email, and in coffee shops.

I had been unable to schedule a meeting with one person I had notified early on about my dissertation; I had worked with him in Crossing Borders, and his story and experiences, as an immigrant from South America and as an elder, had taught me a lot

and I wanted to learn more. As we worked to schedule time to meet, he came to me in my position as a writing consultant several times about his own assignments for his degree. He attended my wedding, and when Kalia's family and I were in the hospital for her father's surgery, this friend appeared as we were leaving, beginning his shift as an interpreter.

Being open to various co-incidences, conversations and encounters as informative for my dissertation, emphasized a variety of experiences of shared space and intersecting stories not only in what was said, but in how they happened. This process allowed me to share my research; it gave me practice communicating the purpose and content of my dissertation; it allowed me to discuss my ideas with people outside of academic circles, to learn from their ideas and experiences. These conversations helped clarify and shape this dissertation, but perhaps more importantly, through these conversations I was able to shift the conversations I was having about education to more accurately reflect a localized pedagogy for shared survival.

Fieldwork. Similar to my expectations for and eventual use of conversations and interviews, I also had ideas about how my fieldwork might look and what it might include. I thought perhaps that I would set myself up in several spaces and observe. I imagined specific places where I would position myself and learn from what I saw. In conversations with two of my committee members, I was encouraged to focus on the spaces I was already in, and the experiences I was having naturally. I began realizing that these each had something to teach me about what I was looking for in the world. Each chapter became about a particular kind of space (institution, home,

neighborhood/community), and how each space was explored took a different shape; it became clear that each space had something different to teach me about a localized pedagogy for shared survival.

While I would often take cursory notes in the moment, more often my field notes were reflective. I would sit down and write out a narrative after many of my experiences during the first few months of my dissertation work. This writing would often happen within a few hours, but could also happen a day or two later (often, for example in the case of Kalia's father's surgery, I was not able to separate myself from the experience). In my narratives, I would focus on what had happened, who had been there, what I had felt, what had been said. I took time to think about moments leading up to certain experiences. As I wrote I would also make quick notes to myself of memories that were associated with these experiences, ideas that they connected to, but my first concern was retelling the story.

If I had time to write, but nothing immediate to write about, I would engage in forward processing.[18] Memories more distant than an hour, day or week prior became

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[18] As I looked forward to something I was about to do, I would write to make connections, to reveal its significance, or to think through my actions in a particular space. An example: "Tonight we go to help my sister-in-law move furniture and a door into a stall at the new Hmong Market in St.Paul where she will open a law office for her practice. My brother-in-law and I will carry heavy furniture through the "alleyways" in the warehouse building, so that she has a desk, and so that they can install a door for her office. While we understand our duty to help her out of love, it is possible to see it as something of value within my research. Her law practice allows a possibility for Hmong folk to deal within and reckon with a U.S. Legal system, with which many of her clients are unfamiliar (but nonetheless caught up in its web of laws and restrictions, which can at times be contradictory to Hmong understandings). Further, the income a law practice will provide to her family, also translates to her being able to help the family at large. […] Thus, I understand my actions as attached to my research in multiple dimensions;

part of this dissertation as I realized their importance to the overall narrative of the dissertation. Often, to get into the practice of writing, I would respond to prompts that had some relation to the subject of my dissertation: experiences of care, my decision to live where I live, care in the University, etc. I decided that to talk about space and place, it was important that I dive into experiences that defined my understanding of a place bigger than my home. As I wrote chapter 4 I spent many hours writing different versions of the story of where I grew up. I talked about the importance of landmarks, of the people in the neighborhood. Yet, my nostalgia for the place took over each time I told the story. I was unable to critically approach my experiences. When visiting my sister in Alaska, on a visit to a Hmong market, the phrase “the bad side of town” became clear not just as a descriptive phrase, but as the drawing of a border (“we don’t often come here”). My awareness of this as influential to my relationships as a child with my classmates who had darker skin, who were bussed in to go school in my neighborhood, started to take a different shape. As I wrote, I reflected on the different places I lived, and the ways in which these kinds of boundaries affected my relationships with specific groups of people, particularly of certain racial and class backgrounds.

The idea of the “field” in this dissertation is thus varied. It exists as I am writing, in my experiences, and in my memory. I have allowed myself to notice aspects of a localized pedagogy for shared survival in various ways. I was often caught unprepared by those things I would notice, especially in my writing, as they required me to reveal details about my life, my memories, the people I love, and myself. My reflections and analyses

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helping and sharing responsibility, standing behind somebody’s work who I believe in…” (personal notes)

were almost always immediate, and sometimes (as I read what I have written) they are still shockingly new.

Data analysis: writing and walking.

> The question ultimately concerns the basis of the everyday narrations, the relation between the itinerary (a discursive series of operations) and the map (a plane projection totalizing observations), that is, between two symbolic and anthropological languages of space. Two poles of experience. It seems that in passing from 'ordinary' culture to scientific discourse, one passes from one pole to the other. (de Certau, 1984, p. 119)

> Heading in any 'straight' or 'rational' line of argument with the hope to arrive at some transcendent moment of mastery and conclusion, I fall instead into the holes between disjointed discursive systems. I stumble into the chasms opened up by lived experiences that map onto no known or authorized concepts, words, or arguments. (Ellsworth, 1997, p. 188)

Writing. The process of writing has played a pivotal role at each stage of this dissertation, but is particularly important in regards to the role it plays in analysis and interpretation. According to Denzin (2003) the authority of autoethnograpy comes not "through the citation of scholarly texts, but through its ability to evoke and invoke shared emotional experience and understanding between performer and audience" (p.13).

Behar (1996) shows how social science expectations— the need to write acceptable text— can disrupt researchers' abilities to act ethically or humanistically, citing a story about a photographer trying to save a young girl drowning in a mudslide

(while on assignment to cover the disaster) (p. 5). It is thus important, even when writing, to find a way of addressing enough of the expectations of the institution while not losing sight of the purpose of this work, especially as those expectations run counter to the ability to do humanizing work. The search for modes of expression and practice that encourage dialogue, via emotional honesty, is perhaps one of the most important features of autoethnography, and in turn the writing in and of this dissertation.

Jack Zipes' (1995) description of a story teller is instructive for how to approach the telling of this dissertation while holding up the values of a localized pedagogy for shared survival:

> Storytellers are not just performers. They may perform, but they are first and foremost listeners and animators. They listen to tales before telling or performing them. They listen to phenomena, experiences, and conditions, and they observe. Then they share experiences and animate people to learn something from the shared moment of the telling. (p. 7)

Zipes is speaking specifically about folk tales, but it is the interest of shared learning that he suggests motivates the story teller; he focuses on how the sharing of a story itself is instructive. I do not tell folk tales in my dissertation, but I have approached the writing in this dissertation as not only a moment of performance of expertise, but of invitation into thinking about the possibility of something different: something that exists, but which we do not pay attention to.

Similarly to how a folk tale might have us searching for magic, for life in the rocks, or under the ripples of the waves, for trolls, fairies, or dragons; and similarly to

how once we begin searching, and we are open to the existence of magic, we can begin to discover unexpected things; I want this dissertation to have people searching for a localized pedagogy for shared survival. I have spent time "listen[ing] to phenomena, experiences, and conditions"; I have been observing these. My goal for the writing has been to share my experiences searching, listening, observing, with the hope that this might "animate people to learn something from the shared moment of the telling" (Zipes, 1995, p. 7).

The writing of autoethnography is in this way *text*ured; references to theory or scholarship emerge as they did (as text, or in thought) in the experiences being told and as they come into focus upon reflection. Possibilities and meaning emerge in the midst of dialogue, performance, story telling, and reflection. As such the text is not explanatory or argumentative; rather, it asks questions and reveals uncertainty (and in turn a need, and invitation, to connect to others). Uncertain moments expose possibility for political, reflective, and pedagogical action (Freire, 2005); they are representative of an "ethics of ambiguity" (DeBeauvoir, 1948) that permeates autoethnography. Ellis (2004) says, "we have to deal in uncertainty" (p. 120). At the heart of this uncertainty is an outward invitation to share in the process of coming to know, or learning. Richardson (1993) tries to discover ways of building her text so that "space is left for others to speak, for tension and differences to be acknowledged, celebrated, rather than buried alive" (p. 706), so that the text reflects an understanding that sense making is a shared experience.

Dillard (1982) suggests, in the case of a novel, that this shared experience happens between the writing and reading: once someone hands over the interpretive work

to the reader, that writer must be ready to also relinquish the didactic power of theory. The novel, according to Dillard, is interpretative, "in the special sense that it is, by intention an object to be interpreted" (p. 150). A well written novel therefore forfeits its right to have a final say in its interpretation; it is in contrast to attempts made by traditional social scientists to "render as much of the world as [they] possibly can as coherent as [they] possibly can" (p.151). This dissertation is not a novel; however it is also not "traditional" social science. It is somewhere in between these impulses that the moral imperatives (as well as the ethical and academic traps) of autoethnography rest (Gingrich-Philbrook, 2005; Holman Jones, 2005). As such, there are methodological lessons to be learned from more artistic, interpretative forms of writing.

Ellis and Bochner (1996) hope to "enlarge the space to practice ethnographic writing as a form of creative nonfiction, to take certain expressive liberties associated with the arts, but to feel the ethical pull of converting data into experiences readers can use" (p. 28). Autoethnography's relationship to the arts is not an attempt to discipline arts for the benefit of social science, but to *un*-discipline social science using the example of the arts for the benefit of a broader political project. Denzin (2003, pp. 137-142) recognizes the power of poetry as influential to his own work, as well as his response to others' work. Diversi and Moreira (2009), Holman Jones (2005), Pelias (1999), and Richardson (1993) all experiment with poetry as an expressive tool. Richardson (1997) says, "in writing sociological findings as poetry, I felt I had discovered a method which displayed the deep, unchallenged constructedness of sociological truth claims, and as method for opening the discipline to other speakers and ways of speaking" (p697).

Behar (1996) looks to Pablo Neruda, Salman Rushdie, and Sandra Cisneros, as literary influences that shape her work as an ethnographer. Behar (1996) tells stories that dig into emotional responses while simultaneously referring to histories and theory that help to illustrate and explain the various powerful or powerless positions felt by and perceived of different characters, namely herself as a researcher. In *Betweener talk: Decolonizing knowledge production, pedagogy, & praxis* Marcelo Diversi and Claudio Moreira (2009) use short stories, reflexive dialogue, pictures, poetry and "performance self-reflexive acts" (p.29) to explore the idea of "betweenness" in relation to their identities and work in the Americas with street kids as well as their own journeys from similar and dissimilar backgrounds. Their work is fundamentally politically situated in relation to the practice of research as well as in relationship to the broader political and economic contexts in which the fieldwork, and writing, takes place. Kathleen Stewart (2005; 2007), using a methodology she calls "Cultural Poesis" describes a series of semi-related descriptive moments to illustrate her theoretical construction of affect and political motivation, the potential for action in ordinary moments. Interpretation is a part of the telling as well as the living in all of these stories. Each of these approaches has been instructive to me, Behar's (1996) emotional honesty, Diversi & Moreira's (2009) humility, Stewart's (2005; 2007) openness to noticing. This dissertation walks in and out of many different narratives in different ways.

In an elaboration on the connection between autoethnographic methods and artistic expression (i.e. Black American art, Chicano film, etc.) Denzin (2003) adapts multiple criteria for autoethnographic methods from Karenga ([1972] 1997:1973 as cited

in Denzin, 2003, pp. 114-115): “Is it political, functional, committed, and free of stereotype? Does it exhibit depth, nuance, detail, coherence and emotion? Are multiple voices and ethical positions present in the work? Does the work create conditions for a critical consciousness?” (2003, p.115) Perhaps asking these questions of herself, Ellis (2004, 18) worries that she might be buying into “the false dualism between story and theory”.

This concern about stepping too far towards the purely academic end of the spectrum laid out by Gingrich-Philbrook (2005) emerges in the literature as a central moral concern of much autoethnography. This stems from a struggle to trust the reader, as well as the lives, stories and knowledge of those involved in the research. Diversi (Diversi & Moreira, 2009) expresses worry about theorizing the Brazilian street kids with whom he worked, as he would “inevitably bury their voices” (p.194). He uses short stories, and focuses on “alternative points of view, dialogue, unfolding action, and flashback to attempt creating the tension, suspense, delay, and voice that compose a good short story—and that are inseparable from lived experience” in order to allow the reader to feel that “interpretation is never finished or complete” (pp. 194-195). While the distinction Diversi makes between theory and story is limited in its scope (not recognizing that work of crafting story and theorizing exist on a spectrum of representation, especially as they each mark different approaches to interpretation by a researcher), his suggestions that the writing and reading of research and experience are a continuing process is an important realization for autoethnography and this dissertation.

Typically, interpretation in autoethnography is threaded into the writing, sometimes as momentary asides (Richardson, 1993; Payne, 1996; Tillmann-Healy, 1996; Jacobs, 2005; Alexander, 2006) and sometimes wholly invisible to eyes searching for a traditional analysis (Stewart, 2007). Ellis (2004) claims that there is no form of traditional analysis in many autoethnographies (p. 44). She cites two of her own pieces, one in which she analyzed a story "in terms of the benefits of narrative writing", and one where the analysis emerged in the interaction of two encircling story lines (p.44). While she does not advocate a complete abandonment of traditional analysis, she highlights the degree to which autoethnography privileges story as an analytical tool as much, if not more, than theory and is in most cases searching for a place in between.

As I sat down to write narratives, or as I began to piece together the chapters that make up this dissertation, the process of the writing revealed itself as a large part of the process of analysis. Decisions to place one story next to another, the decision within each story to focus on various aspects and not others—sometimes these were purposeful, and other times they were haphazard. I was pushed several times to include more interpretation and more immediate written analysis and theorizing in and around these narratives. I struggled to find the balance between letting a story talk for itself, and making its place in the wider context of my ideas more explicit. The distinction between my experiences in the world and on the page has not been very well defined. Sometimes the writing was immediately affected by my experiences, as with mine and Kalia's visit to Alaska. Other times my writing would impact my approach to experience (forward processing was an attempt at noticing how this worked; most of the time, however, it was

a less obvious process). During or after a conversation I might have focused on the idea of care, but when I began placing pieces of the conversation into the dissertation I realized all of the places I had highlighted were less important than the words and stories in between. As I slowed down, and paid attention, I was drawn in different directions, to different things than I might have latched onto if I had moved too quickly through the space, if I had followed the paved highways. As I have worked to understand what might be considered a fairly organic process of analysis, the idea of walking as a method has helped me finding definition.

Walking. As I have moved from writing down narratives, transcribing interviews, and taking notes, I have been involved in processes of analysis. As mentioned, the distinction between the "collection" of data and my processing of it is very blurry. The analysis came before (forward processing), during, or after any experience or conversation. In the course of a conversation, or in the field, the participants in my project and I might begin to theorize, interpret and test assumptions on each other. As something happened, I would sometimes consider it in light of a localized pedagogy for shared survival, and attempt to act accordingly. The analysis was always me trying my hand at movement toward praxis- where reflection and the doing meet.

This dynamic of connection, through praxis, in writing, and in space, especially as it relates to the work of an individual can be understood through the metaphor of walking as methodology. The ease with which we can move from one space to the next, marks the relationships between those spaces. Similarly, there are connections between stories, experiences, people. Walking allows for ways of moving between spaces that may not

otherwise allow for easy movement. It creates possibilities for barriers and obstacles to be reconceptualized as parts of a journey rather than as insurmountable walls, fences, and borders.

In Hayden Lorimer's (2010) essay, "Walking: New forms and spaces for studies of pedestrianism," walking is described as important because it allows us to weave together different moments in space and time. He discusses how, in doing this, walking allows us to understand our place in the world: "to consider matters of being, and becoming, whilst on the move is to fold walking into the quest for greater harmony, and to meet philosophical needs that are both deeper and wider set" (p. 23). According to Lorimer (2010) walking is a "post-phenomenological" approach,

> Where self and landscape are always emergent, constantly shifting through repertoires of the unbidden, of affective and kinaesthetic contact, and then dissipating just as easily. […] becoming happens, on foot, in a greater and more diffuse field of about-ness than the individual can ever encompass. Hereabouts, the walker is both visceral presence and will-o-the-wisp. (p. 24)

Lorimer continues, "walking can become a defining expression of a wider search for alternative ways of living" (p. 24).

Similarly, de Certau (1984) looks to walking as a method and metaphor as well as a process which sheds light on everyday practice, and exposes the limits of institutional understanding and control:

> The long poem of walking manipulates spatial organizations, no matter how panoptic they may be: it is neither foreign to them (it can take place only within

> them) nor in conformity with them (it does not receive its identity from them). It creates shadows and ambiguities within them. It inserts its multitudinous references and citations into them (social modes, cultural mores, personal factors). Within them it is itself the effect of successive encounters and occasions that constantly alter it and make it the other's blazon: in other words, it is like a peddler carrying something surprising, transverse or attractive compared with the usual choice. These diverse aspects provide the basis of a rhetoric. (p. 101)

Walking is thus important to the process of analysis in this dissertation, the movement between reflection and action, or the connection between a story and my life.

The process of my research is my movement as a researcher into the ambiguous territory between research and relationships (and writing and experience), in order to find sites for a localized pedagogy for shared survival. This dissertation, like most research (whether it admits to it or not) has found its path in the course of the doing. I was unable to write this methodology until I had written about my experiences. Theoretical and methodological tools from other texts have guided me in my approach, but until I began talking to people and writing notes about my experiences, I was unable to understand entirely what I was doing, where I was headed, or what else I might have to do in order to make sense and meaning from my experiences. While I knew I would talk about the Hmong market in the course of my dissertation, it was not until I began writing about my place in it that I realized the connection between my experiences there and other experiences that are a part of this dissertation. If it is explicit or not, much of the

landscape of this dissertation found its shape in the course of the writing, as well as in doing the research.

As I collected my data I also knew that my analysis was not only in regards to how I decided to interpret and present the stories and memories in this text, but also how it affected my daily living.

A Continuing Journey

Fionagh Thomson (2007) issues a challenge, for “local research narratives to allow space for disagreement and discussion as we increasingly say farewell to research methods that imagine the world as ordered, and open our eyes to a world of chaos and glorious difference, among all human becomings” (p.216). Her work is animated particularly by the tension between participatory approaches and the impulse to label and define demographics. My starting point is similar; I am not interested in how to more easily understand or categorize the world, but how to better confuse and renegotiate that which I think I know: as Tuck and Yang (2012) would say, unsettling my store of knowledge about my history and my place in a system that I recognize as unsustainable and dehumanizing so that I can better share this world with people different than me.

In their collective piece, “The Dance of race and privilege in community based participatory research”, Chavez, Duran, Baker, Avilla, and Wallerstein (2003) produce a useful metaphor for the *real* work of this methodology, within this dissertation and as I continue with this journey toward a localized pedagogy for shared survival:

> Dancers complement each other’s steps, sometimes leading, sometimes following; they are aware of each other, navigating the dance floor while trying not to step

> on each other's toes. And when toes do get stepped on, they must be self-reflective enough to learn from the experience and not be defensive, to decide whether to continue dancing or take a seat, and to know that these dynamic processes are normal and inevitable, however rewarding or hurtful they may be. (p. 81)

My research methodology is very much my interactions with the world; it requires first that I understand myself and the moves I make through the world, so that I can begin to notice when I am stepping on feet and then adjust accordingly (in practice and in writing). I need to know how I am situated "locally" so that I might negotiate and interrogate my points of entry, to begin noticing what is missing—or more likely excluded-from the rehearsed paths that determine my life, the things I see, and the actions I make. This dissertation is a document of that process.

In addition to the messy work of acting against the system from within the system (especially when we recognize our part in continuing and reaping rewards from the system—and the parts played by people we love), people meeting people is also messy work: we do not always agree, we have fundamental differences. As a researcher and educator, and as a white male with a higher degree, I need to be triply aware of how my criticism can effect or shut down a conversation. As somebody who values dialogue and contention, I must find ways to open up conversation, to be humble in the presence of others' experiences, and to be open to hearing and doing things that might be "unsettling". My methodology must reflect this approach. Rather than search for answers that match everybody's experience, it is instead important to reflect on from where our

differences emerge and how they either assist or hamper our ability to be together, to share space, to understand the different ways the world is seen and can be lived in. Too often assumptions bolstered by the institutions of research and schooling are destructive and damaging. In this dissertation, my focus is instead on my own intimate relationships with friends and family, as well as the institutions I critique, in order to understand how we might extend ourselves to contradict the systemic oppression that is often encouraged through our work as researchers and educators. As a PhD candidate, if I present an argument, it can carry additional weight. I can easily shut somebody down by saying some semblance of the word, "I have a PhD, I studied these things, you are not right"; I have seen this happen.[19] I have seen how this damages people and communities.

My methodology recognizes the risk that I take as a white male inspired by much of the scholarship and activism of Indigenous people.[20] As Tuck and Yang (2012) explain:

> There is a long and bumbled history of non-Indigenous peoples making moves to alleviate the impacts of colonization. The too-easy adoption of decolonizing discourse (making decolonization a metaphor) is just one part of that history and it taps into pre-existing tropes that get in the way of more meaningful potential

[19] Kalia acted as an interpreter for her uncle for a national radio show called Radiolab. In this show they attacked his experiences of chemical warfare during the aftermath of the Secret War in Laos, as heresay, because a Harvard professor had studied bees and said it was bee defication (Walters, 2012). This reification of the Harvard professor and refusal to listen to Kalia's uncle's stories, which mirror the stories and experiences of thousands of Hmong refugees, showed how easily a position of "expertise" could be used to forcibly silence a group of people and their history (despite the gaps in the professor's knowledge: he wasn't in the war, and had never been to Laos). (see Yang (2012) and Kamboj (2012) for reflections on the show and the experience)

[20] A selection of this literature is presented in the literature review.

> alliances. […] Actually, we argue, attending to what is irreconcilable within settler colonial relations and what is incommensurable between decolonizing projects and other social justice projects will help to reduce the frustration of attempts at solidarity; but the attention won't get anyone off the hook from the hard, unsettling work of decolonization. (Tuck & Yang, 2012, p. 3)

These warnings are essential for me to keep in mind as I write this research, and as I continue walking forward with the work that this dissertation documents.

Chapter 3

Institutional Education: Coloring Across the Lines

> Teachers who love students and are loved by them are still 'suspect' in the academy. Some of the suspicion is that the presence of feelings, of passions, may not allow for objective consideration of each student's merit. But this very notion is based on the false assumption that education is neutral, that there is some "even" emotional ground we stand on that enables us to treat everyone equally, dispassionately. (Hooks, 1994, p. 198)

Introduction

When I explain my dissertation to people, they nod with interest. However, immediately after this, they will usually confront me with one or two questions. First, I am often asked if I know of one or another alternative approach to curriculum, be it Montessori, Waldorf, the Freedom School movement, or an approach used by one school in a particular location. Second, I will be asked how it is possible to think about teaching this way, with the pressures on teachers and the "realities" of the school day. I often juggle and experiment with different responses, depending on the audience. I might explain my experience in "democratic" and "student-centered" classrooms; I might go into a history of the preschools in Reggio-Emilia, Italy that inspired these classrooms; I might posture politically (and become immediately disinterested) to talk about the damage created by and the anti-public educational origins of the charter school movement. I often too easily dismiss these concerns, citing my own assumptions and goals in doing this kind of work— *its not my intent to introduce another curriculum, I*

don't like charter schools, schools are dysfunctional. However, I recognize these responses are inadequate.

Each time I have been asked these questions I am forced to reckon with a bigger, related question, "How is a localized pedagogy for shared survival important for institutional education?" In other words, how does my work actually relate to the questions that it arouses. I began work on this chapter thinking that I might explore the exceptions to the rule that schools are oppressive—the times when an educator, school administrator or researcher tips the balance of power in their school or classroom in favor of a community. I thought I might look at educational institutions—public libraries, schools, museums— that create spaces where diverse groups of people meet. However, I worry that despite the amazing work they do, none of these people and spaces have yet to inspire the whole-scale systemic and personal changes necessary to establish an educational system that values shared humanity and existence.

I left teaching in a public elementary school after a year because, despite the work that administrators and teachers I worked with were doing to practice education in a way that was more responsive to students and their families, it felt as if there was no traction in the changes they were trying to produce. I left teaching because I could not see the possibility of change in the larger institution of schools. Instead, I saw how despite an alternative approach, the school where I worked put much effort into fitting institutional expectations. This was true even as discussions of how to engage with issues of educational access and equity at a deeper level than "band-aid" solutions offered by government policy and more traditional approaches were common place.

In one of my first classes in the Doctorate program, I announced while introducing myself, “I am not interested in schools.” Afterwards, there was a moment of silence, the professor did a bit of a double take, I offered a short explanation of my interests, and then introductions continued. The fact, however, is that I care deeply about schools and the work that they can do. I started my work toward a PhD because schools matter to me. However, I am very suspicious of schools and cynical about efforts for reform. Either justified or not, I often react to the question “how is this possible?” as if people are telling me “this is not possible”. My pronouncement in that class, that I was not interested in schools, was a knee-jerk reaction, “I don’t like you either”, to the response I expected to my interests (an effort at silencing my critics before they could speak).

This chapter revisits that reaction. What I meant to say on that first day, on reflection, was “I am interested in education everywhere”. In this chapter I try to maintain a critical stance toward schools[21], but also to reconcile with them. This does not mean I accept the implication that a localized pedagogy for shared survival is not possible in a classroom. Instead, I am working to better understand the dynamic at play between my belief and skepticism[22] in schools. Thus, in part, this chapter is an exploration of how institutions become a part of formal educational relationships between people. Mostly, however, it is an exploration of my own reactions to educational institutions. That said,

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[21] In this chapter I use “educational institutions” and related terms to refer to schools as well as other related mechanisms of an institution such as curriculum, assessment practices, and policy.

[22] This balance is a hard one to keep. An earlier draft of this chapter tipped in the direction of an institutional critique with very little nuance or perspective. I try in this chapter to avoid both a detached critique or celebration of exceptions.

this is not a chapter wherein I absolve the sins of a fundamentally racist and colonial institution. It is also not a chapter wherein I try to do work that others can do much more eloquently and convincingly, to point to the sins of these institutions. Instead, this chapter is my own attempt at mediation, to be thoughtful about the ways in which this dissertation matters to people within institutional spaces (that it is not just an exploration of the ways we learn and care for each other outside of schools) as well as the practice of critical theory and research.

After I examine how the process of learning to be a part of schools pushed a student of mine and me away from careers in teaching, I discuss the limitations in critiquing institutional education from outside of institutions. I examine the ways in which critique can undermine the foundation of a localized pedagogy for shared survival, focusing on a friend's story of leaving teaching after a year. Finally, this chapter concludes with an examination of the possibilities for building relationships across institutional boundaries and how a localized pedagogy depends on people inside and outside of institutions to work toward fundamental change, for shared survival.

Learning to Become a Part of Educational Institutions

> Learning and the assignment of social roles are melted into schooling […] this is neither reasonable nor liberating. It is not reasonable because it does not link relevant qualities or competences to roles but rather the process by which such qualities are supposed to be acquired. It is not liberating or educational because school reserves instruction to those who's every step in learning fits previously approved measures of social control. (Illich, 1970, pp. 11-12)

My story. My distrust of educational institutions can be traced to my formal education into teaching. Towards the end of my education to become a teacher, when I was first exposed to REI methods, I was excited about the possibility in democratic approaches to curriculum. When I interviewed at various schools and I would discuss the practices of developing curriculum with students and of maintaining daily documentation, the teachers and administrators interviewing me would tell me there would be no time to do that at their schools. I would show them my portfolio with excitement, expecting the same in return. After several interviews, the only school that wanted to hire me was a school that practiced a similar REI type approach.

I left teaching after a year. Although at this new school I was encouraged to try new things, and was told by the principal that I had been hired to “rock the boat”, I became disillusioned within a year by being in a school. I had become burned out, because even while the principal told me that I should work to shake things up, I was also being told by him that my career was being put at risk because of my lack of behavior management skills. The school made an effort to help me mitigate the burn out that was occuring. I was provided with a pedagogical mentor. In addition, the planning meetings with the other teachers were mediated by this mentor or one of the administrators. While both the administration and I made improvements in the course of the year, I was already convinced (rightly or wrongly) that the structure and idea of school was incompatible with the democratic, community based approach this school was trying to implement.

Looking back, I can see the ways in which I acted quickly toward criticism and looked for an escape. This school was one of two that I know would have provided

support for me in the ways that they did, but the ways in which I encountered the profession of teaching post my preparation to become a teacher sent me looking in other directions to do the work I wanted to do in education. While I was fortunate to be provided with an education to become a teacher with advisors who held Freire in high esteem, and as an intern in a school that was in the initial stages of developing and learning to practice an REI approach, I was never prepared for the ways in which a more critical lens or pedagogical approach and set of values would require me to encounter resistance (even by those supporting such values— the principal). When I left teaching, I did not feel like I could not do the job. Instead, I left believing that schools could not possibly be the site of change. I decided to pursue a doctorate, applying mostly to programs in urban design, as I was convinced that schools as a system were fundamentally flawed and that the only pathway to community based education was in how cities are designed.

Lessons being learned. This dismissal of the entire system of schools, and suspicion of educational institutions, has since limited my ability to understand my own work in relation to schools and changes in education. While I have developed my understanding of the historical racist and colonial roots of education and research, I have been unable to determine how a localized pedagogy for shared survival pervades those institutions. On reflection, I can see that while there are fundamental problems with the structure and expectations of educational institutions, my own burn out was the result of a lack of preparation, not in regards to practical instruction or critical perspectives, but in regards to the ways in which critical perspectives and approaches are often acts of

transgression and resistance to the colonial roots. When I was taught to become a teacher, I understood "critical" approaches as an approach to teaching literacy, where (at the risk of too simple of a definition) students are taught to ask questions about texts and other sources of information. I did not recognize the approaches and perspectives I was learning as critical of traditional approaches.

As Kumashiro (2002) explains, any approach geared towards "[understanding] the dynamics of oppression and suggesting ways to work against it" (p.31) necessarily rubs against the "taken for granted" or status quo, which underlie educational systems. Educators and researchers who believe in the human possibilities of education, as they "have been judged to have crossed some line that was not meant to have been crossed [whether or not it was intended]" (Cresswell, 1996, p. 23), are necessarily involved in a transgressive approach. In other words, motivation and inspiration for teaching built on ideals of care and shared survival are against the foundational structures and rules of schooling; they are against the law.

The defensive reactions I encountered as a teacher trying to implement critical approaches were a large part of my decision to walk away from the profession. As a teacher, I internalized and withdrew rather than recognizing those odd negative reactions as what is to be expected when contradicting, in action and approach, the underlying foundations of a structure. However, I am still encouraged by critical thought about education and, perhaps naively, see possibility in educational institutions. To discover how a localized pedagogy for shared survival is a part of these institutions, it is important to examine both how and why resistance to more critical approaches happens within

institutions, as well as how my own criticisms can limit the possibilities for movement and resistance within educational institutions (and inadvertently act in favor of the institution I am trying to distance myself from).

A student's story. I walked away from the teaching profession. Yet, in the course of my education toward a PhD I ironically found myself teaching people training to become teachers. In the course of this experience, I saw how the education to prepare teachers caused one of my students to leave the profession before she even started. Early one semester while teaching undergraduate practicum students, primary school teachers in training, this student wrote a note on her assignment expressing her uncertainty pursuing a career in education. I suggested for us to meet to discuss her misgivings and concerns. My own experiences as a teacher had made me very skeptical about teaching, but I also recognized that for teachers to have these kinds of misgivings is important for critical (humanizing) perspective, and that support is essential if someone with critical perspective is going to grow into a career as a teacher. I received an email from the student a few days later saying "I feel as though I do need to talk with someone who isn't sold on ideas about education." (personal correspondence, March 22, 2010)

When this student and I met, I became aware that her concerns were not just related to a single event, but she was instead very concerned with the attitudes she perceived in many of her colleagues. She herself had never dreamed of becoming a teacher. However, because her dreams of being a dance instructor or as a chef working with children had no easily identifiable career plan attached to them, she was getting her degree in response to pressure from her parents. When we met, I listened for a long time

to this student describe her passions to me (food, dancing, children) and her concerns with becoming a teacher. I made some suggestions: professors to meet, classes to take, books to read. I told her some of my own stories and misgivings; I told her about my own reasons for leaving the classroom and my reasons for seeking a higher degree in education.

While she had many friends in the class, she did not often speak up often. Instead, she would write me periodically to express concerns or ask questions about the school where she was placed[23], or about her other classes. Her written reflections for class focused on situations where she was concerned about the assumptions teachers were making about certain children, and the ways they were handling certain behaviors. For the next year after our class, this student continued with her teaching degree.

A year after I taught this student, I received another email from her. She was taking a class in behavior analysis at the same time she was doing a practicum in Special Education. She was frustrated by what she felt as a gap between these two experiences—the joy, care and excitement in relationships she was developing with students in the special education classroom versus the ways she was being taught to measure behavior in her coursework. She wrote me:

> I just feel like we are basically learning how to train these kids to fit into a mold so that we will be able to teach effectively. The other day we were talking about ways to threaten kids and I just thought to myself 'this is so fucked up.' But no

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[23] Once, she tried to speak in Spanish to one the students she was working with, but the student was convinced he would get into trouble. She wrote to me to ask if there was in fact a policy that punished children for speaking in their home language.

> one says anything. I feel like no one in my class is thinking about what we are learning about. I think they just want to learn the definitions of things so they can get that A on the test, but they are not realizing how we are basically turning these kids into robots. I tried to have a conversation with a classmate it about it and she kinda brushed me off. (personal correspondence, April 8, 2011)

Her email expressed a frustration with the things that were being taught as well as her inability to get a conversation started with her fellow students about this. She was frustrated by her education into teaching that she saw translated to the function of school as a whole, to turn "kids into robots".

While this student's criticism was of the things she was learning, she was also concerned that her colleagues might not be critically "thinking about what we are learning about." Her concern about what she understood she was being taught was exaggerated by her inability to find space in the program to discuss it, that when she invited a fellow student to discuss her concerns "she kinda brushed me off." My former student was conflicted because she did not feel she had opportunities to think critically about, or learn from, how the things she was being taught did not match the real meaningful, caring, relationships that were being fostered in her practicum classroom (which she hoped to discover in her own teaching).

Her email to me, the fact that she reached out to an instructor that she had for a single semester, highlighted the lack of resources and recourses she felt were available, "So I basically wrote a diary entry to you and I am sorry." Her concerns were such that her email was entitled "Life Crisis 2":

> This has been bugging me for awhile. I just feel like I won't or don't have the ability to silence a child or tell them when to do something and how and why they should do it. I also realize that I am a bit stubborn and know that schools need a structure and they need to teach in a way for kids to be able to learn. There's just something inside me that is not feeling comfortable. (personal correspondence 4/8/11)

She located her concerns at the same time that she tried to justify the reason for the things she was learning, "schools need a structure and they need to teach in a way for kids to be able to learn." There was an admittance of defeat in this statement. Her experiences learning to become a teacher had somehow implied to her that her concerns were naive, that they had no place in discussions about schooling, that schools are instead places where "structure" is important. As such, her moral concerns were causing a crisis, she began to understand her impulse toward care and discomfort with ideas of behavior management as signs of her weaknesses, and an inability to become a teacher. While she was concerned that what she was being taught was to "threaten" and control children, she was justifying this as necessary for schools to do their work, "for kids to be able to learn" and she began to place herself outside of this conversation rather than a contentious voice in the mix.

When I contacted her to be a part of my dissertation, we sat down to discuss her journey in the degree (which at the time she was still continuing). She talked about more similar experiences. One of her classes had watched *The First Year*, a documentary about several teachers' first years on the job. She mentioned that the class discussed some of

the strategies used by the teachers in the film to connect with students and their families: taking students to lunch, going to their homes, offering encouraging pats on the back. She told me that the other students in her class were uncomfortable with the potential illegality of these actions; when they were shown people engaging in acts of care, these students became concerned about what was wrong and what was right in terms of the rules of school. My former student was stunned as she understood the consensus of her class to be that these teachers were doing something fundamentally wrong. Again, while the extent to which the entirety of the class did or did not agree cannot be known, this is significant because my former student felt as if there was no space for a discussion of the necessity of and reasons for these teachers' caring actions. This feeling is significant as it limited her ability to speak, or to listen for potential allies. Instead, this was another moment which pushed her further away toward her eventual exit from the program.

When I asked her about experiences where she saw what she imagined for teaching, where love encourages learning, she mentioned the special education class where she student taught, as well as an experience she had abroad in Paraguay. However she then told me that in most of the other schools and classrooms where she was placed, that more often than not she observed teachers joking about students. In addition, her buy in to institutional expectations (of a "right way" to teach) was complicating her concerns further. She was not only frustrated with an inability to discuss her frustrations, or a perceived lack of allies, but she was also caught between a frustration about wanting to be taught "how" to teach— that there was too little in the way of "practical" instruction in

her degree program— while understanding that the good teaching she had seen was a result of passion and not any learned skill.

Lessons in learning to become a teacher. Like my student, my own resistance to teaching was a result of wanting desperately to be involved in people's lives but being directed toward a concern with the tried and tested "right" ways of shaping people to fit a system. When I was told by my principal that my career was being put at risk by the ways I practiced classroom management, I focused my efforts on this. It was at this time that I became disillusioned with teaching. I became convinced by the strong reactions (you are putting your career at risk) and ways I was being told to manage behavior that this was what mattered in schools above and beyond the relationships I was building with students. In this position, I could not see any grey areas, or ways of confronting the system other than to dismiss it and leave it behind, to believe (like my student) that there was no place for me in schools because I could not be more concerned with how behavior is managed than the relationships I was building.

The sociologist Dan Lortie (2002) suggests that the teaching profession breeds conservatism, a reliance on institutional order:

> The student's learning about teaching, gained from a limited vantage point and relying heavily on imagination, is not like that of an apprentice and does not represent acquisition of the occupation's technical knowledge. It is more a matter of imitation, which, being generalized across individuals, becomes tradition. It is a potentially powerful influence which transcends generations, but the conditions of transfer do not favor informed criticism […] (p. 63)

He concludes that this process, "[…] is an ally of continuity rather than of change" (p. 67).

Often it seems that many of the people who succeed in school and as a result are attracted to the teaching profession, as well as many of the people behind research and policy are those who, as Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. described[24] as a "great stumbling block in the stride toward freedom […] more devoted to 'order' than to justice" (1990, p. 295). While I am encouraged that there are people who are more concerned with relationships than rules within institutions, I also am continually aware that valuing this in practice is, as Cochrane-Smith (1991) has expressed, a process of "learning to teach against the grain". I have come to realize that the "continuity" outlined by Lortie (2002) extends not only to teachers, the teaching profession, and experiences of schools, but also throughout most popular political discussions of education. As Ivan Illich (1970) fears, the import bestowed upon and the commoditization of compulsory schooling and learning (as well as the 'expertise' required to become a teacher) has made it hard to see, engage and reflect upon how we naturally learn from and educate each other.

Yet, it is also in the dismissal of schools or the abandonment of the teaching profession that individuals such as myself or my student allow the idea and reality of them as places of order and behavioral management to continue. By pointing to the truth

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[24] This is from Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.'s 1963 "Letter from Birmingham City Jail": "I have almost reached the regrettable conclusion that the Negro's great stumbling block in the stride toward freedom is not the White Citizen's Councilor or the Ku Klux Klanner, but the white moderate who is more devoted to 'order' than to justice; who prefers a negative peace which is the absence of tension to a positive peace which is the presence of justice; who constantly says, 'I agree with you in the goal you seek, but I can't agree with your methods of direct action'[…]" (King, 1986, p. 295)

of the colonial and racist foundations in educator practice but by abandoning the profession, I simultaneously ignore good work that is occuring and limit my own ability to build alliances with people that critically approach their profession while remaining in the institution. Rather than complicate the issue of the racism inherent in education by pointing to the ways a localized pedagogy for shared survival extends into and through institutional boundaries, by leaving the profession and being overly critical of the institution, I have reinforced those boundaries, of which I try to place myself on the other side. In short, by leaving the profession and looking for possibilities solely outside of educational institutions (if this were even possible) I allow institutional walls to remain in place.

My student's and my own separation from teaching are both a result of us accepting what we understood as truth about the profession as a whole (as it matches the reality of the colonial nature of the institution). However, what I have been unable to recognize is that my self-imposed exile is also a result of this same process (eg. "if you don't agree, leave us alone so we can continue"). Rather than add to the number of those resisting from the inside, I stepped away to give into exhaustion, to look for possibilities on the other side of the institutional wall.

When something appears so obviously wrong, but is presented and accepted over and over again as right, there is a point of exhaustion where acceptance becomes easier than fighting wrong assumptions. When my student sat in class as her instructor and classmates discussed freely the idea that 'threatening' or 'controlling' students is an essential part of a teachers' job and did not feel permitted to discuss a differing

viewpoint, it was so antithetical to her own understanding of humanity, even her own experiences of a loving classroom, that she began to rationalize what was being said even though she experienced so much unease that she emailed an instructor from a year earlier.

I had many other students, several of whom I recognized would be powerful, caring teachers, unafraid to break rules to meet personal expectations of relationships. Yet, many of the students I worked with were more concerned with the “right way” to teach, rather than respecting (or even knowing to consider) their own intuitions about human relationships and learning. Despite seemingly critical viewpoints, my former student and I were in different ways also a part of the latter group, as we both saw how we did not match “the right way” (and used this as a reason to leave the practice). A localized pedagogy of care is not simply an effort to establish a different approach outside of institutional walls, but one that pervades them, that allows for alliances to be built between those people exhausted by the institution and those resisting it from within, it does not accept the idea of a “right way” to teach.

When my former student conceded to the idea that schools are places of order, and that there is a right way to teach to allow for this, she decided teaching was not for her; when I push similar conceptions of teaching or school to the side in my response to questions about the efficacy of a humanizing or critical approach, I risk separating my thesis from the practice of educators. While I recognize overwhelming colonial tendencies within institutions, I also recognize that there is a strong minority of educators engaging in resistance at all levels of educational institutions.

Dropping Out

As important as recognizing the actors who contribute to the resistance of the colonial and racist tendencies of institutions from within, it is equally important for a localized pedagogy of shared survival to note the ways in which people are placed or pushed outside of these institutions both as as evidence of the colonial nature of institutions and as they are important for creating movement (and change) through institutional walls. By recognizing the movement that does happen (when people drop out, and in our everyday lives inside and outside of institutions) and building relationships across institutional walls, new possibilities emerge that are not defined by institutions but are not limited to spaces outside of them. Building and fostering relationships on either side of institutional boundaries provides allies in resistance to the colonial tendencies of institutional rules, as well as simultaneous movement towards something different (a localized pedagogy for shared survival).

Mass exodus from the school system has been suggested as a strategy by Illich (1970) to deschool society (to dismantle current educational institutions). Similarly, the Maori school system in New Zealand emerged from Maori activists establishing a separate system which eventually gained enough power so that it had to be recognized. Movements such as the Black Panther movement and the Civil Rights Movement are ripe with examples of effective models whereby the organization of alternative institutions fostered revolutionary spirit and outcomes. However, in many of these examples, the dominant system remains. Also, unless there is a majority disinvestment in current institutions, whatever *new* happens outside of those institutions will be defined in large part in relationship to their location outside of those institutions. While organizing new

institutional practices outside of the historically oppressive ones is viable, it is only part of a larger solution, as these movements can become defined by the boundaries drawn between what/who is in and out of the institution.

Further, many people who drop out do not feel empowered to organize systems, as they are often led to buy into a belief in their own limitations (eg. When my student believes she cannot be a teacher). Thus, strategies of a localized pedagogy for shared survival need to re-imagine what is inside and outside of educational institutions; the borders of the old institution cannot be used to define something new, as this new thing would redefine the same boudnaries and it is the drawing of boundaries which is a large part of the colonial power structure.

As discussed, in the case of my student and myself, it can be easy to feel defeated by institutional expectations (even in what may seem like supportive environments). When my former student could not reconcile her experiences of a loving classroom with the things her and her classmates were learning about how to be a good teacher (or her experiences in other classrooms) she felt out of place. She did not feel her understanding of and belief in human relationships being echoed in the instruction she was receiving to become a teacher, and she could not locate strong alliances with other students to resist this instruction. Instead of reflecting on how rules and policies make the relationships she wished to have with students harder, she felt as if her classmates and instructors reflected on the necessity of following those rules. While the rules (the purpose of school as it was being taught) affected her ability to understand caring human relationships as part of teaching, it also affected her ability to build those relationships with similar minded

individuals. Instead, she left a profession that she believed in but whose rules she could not follow as they were counter to this belief.

Similarly, I felt as if my purpose in teaching (building strong relationships with individuals and a community) was constantly undermined by the expectations of the profession and the institution. The rules of the profession led me to exit. I left teaching believing in the power of the "rules" of the institution above the potential power in the people I was working with (students, families, teachers). While dropping out can be a viable and powerful strategy toward resistance, it is not in itself a strategy toward change. The latter depends on a continual belief in people above the rules of the institution, in addition to an understanding that the many racist and colonial tendencies and actions of individuals within institutions results from a placement of belief in rules above people.

The high turnover rate of teachers is in part a symptom of the dehumanizing practices of institutional rules (where order often matters more than people). As much as educational institutions can exhaust teachers, it is perhaps even more evident how they affect the students they ostensibly serves. There has been much written about the ways in which the idea of a "drop-out" ignores the realities of a system of education which actively forces certain people out.[25] As such, Tuck (Tuck et. al, 2008) suggests a better term for what happens to these students is that they are "pushed out" by extreme pressure

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[25] Tuck, et al. (2008) and Menken (2008) discuss the way regents exams and other high stakes testing force schools to push certain students out (from particular communities who traditionally score worse on standardized tests) out of school and towards a GED (so they do not lower a school's score, and in turn the funding it receives); Faircloth and Tippeconnic (2010) wrote a report outlining high drop out rates among American Indian students as well.

when they do not fit institutional expectations (often reflected in student race and class, in line with colonial processes).

Educational institutions historically fail in particular communities (race and social class) (Tuck, et al, 2008; Menken, 2008), yet popular culture and politics suggest that students' laziness or lack of motivation and drive creates dropouts[26]. Thus, communities with lower graduation rates are pathologized as not caring about education. When students drop-out, they often do so in favor of a GED, being misinformed that the GED will be valued the same as a high school degree:

> Youth of color and poor youth […] are explicitly and implicitly pushed out and pushed toward the GED. Our participatory action research has taught us that the value of the GED lies less in it being a gateway to higher education and employment and more in being a get-away from inhospitable high schools. (Tuck, et al., 2008, p. 53)

Similarly, when individuals like my student or myself place ourselves outside of the practice of institutions we limit our ability to affect and be involved with practice within.

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[26] In a "back to school" speech given by President Barack Obama on September 8, 2009 he spoke for 20 minutes about the responsibility of students to not drop out, "at the end of the day, we can have the most dedicated teachers, the most supportive parents, the best schools in the world, and none of it will make a difference […] unless all of you fulfill your responsibilities […] maybe you don't have adults in your life who give you the support that you need, maybe someone in your family has lost their job and there is not enough money to go around, maybe you live in a neighborhood where you don't feel safe, or have friends who are pressuring you to do things you know aren't right, but at the end of the day the circumstances of your life- what you look like, where you come from, how much money you have, what you've got going on at home—none of that is an excuse for neglecting your homework or having a bad attitude in school" (CSPAN, 2009); similarly, there is a series of public service announcements featuring Lebron James, one of which ("Wake up") implies the reason for a student (black male) dropping out is that he is not waking up with his alarm clock (State Farm, 2011).

The stereotype that those outside of educational institutions (including communities which are historically less successful) do not care or understand the value of education, acts as an obstacle to building relationships across institutional boundaries.

Franklin and the Limits of Critical Perspective

Balance between what occurs inside and outside of institutions, of the critique inherent in the process of dropping out while building alliances within the institution, can often be hard to maintain. One story in particular highlights the ways in which any movement other than a move toward contentious alliance results in a reestablishment of the colonial status quo on either side of a critique of an educational institution.

At a dinner party that Kalia and I had with a few friends, after I responded to a question regarding my dissertation, one of our guests talked about his current, at that time, experiences in a charter school catering specifically to African American children. While talking about his job, Franklin leaned back and held his head. He let out a sigh; he was exhausted. He did not know if he could continue as a teacher. He thought the school was doing amazing things, but he also was uncomfortable with the approach that was being taken. He talked about data days where students did not come in to school, where he and his colleagues focused on strong points and weak points of the test in order to determine which subjects they need to focus on more heavily.

A story about Franklin's engagement with issues of educational inequity. Franklin, similar to me, is a white man from a more affluent background concerned with educational equality and access. When I asked him about his passion for equity in education, he spoke about his experiences in high school in Connecticut when the

differences in his education and the education of the kids in less affluent neighborhoods was particularly salient:

> I was on the tennis team in high school for a couple of years, and we'd play these matches […] we were not a good tennis team, but we were going against the Hartford tennis team who would only have three people on them, and you'd kind of steamroll over them. So we went to this match at Hartford high school when I was a sophomore […] We were on this broken down court, and you played with cracks […] there were two courts where you played the singles matches and you would cross through this weird trash filled ravine to get to the courts where you'd play the doubles matches, and our coach huddled us up before this started, and said "Listen, guys you are going to win today… Be generous and kind, just nice to these students. They've just had this thing happen [the Hartford school district was taken over by the state] that is going to mean that their high school diploma is meaningless"

His understanding of educational inequality, is that of an outsider to environments where a lack of resources were the norm; his introduction to inequality was in a difference in resources as well as opportunities (whereas he was graduating from a school with well maintained tennis courts, he understood that the students at this other school has less well maintained facilities and were having the legitimacy of their graduation called into question). He expressed an understanding that the problem in education is not in regards to the value people from a community put into education, but also the value that larger systems, such as the state, put into certain communities.

Why Franklin quit. Franklin's investment in social justice was developed before his decision to teach— he worked as a lawyer focusing on social justice issues and also had worked with policy experts focused on educational equity. However, similarly to me, Franklin ended his classroom-teaching career after only a year. Before he made this decision, he explained to me that in his school a large number of the teachers left at the end of the school year.

> Even while they are having this amazing success, teachers are leaving. […It] has apparently been acknowledged to *the Daily Planet* but never really to the teachers this explicitly, that you're expected to work like 60-70 hours a week, and only about forty of that shows up in your contract, so you are there at seven o'clock and its hard to leave before five thirty and that's pushing it. So you're putting in an 11-hour day, on a weekday and your probably doing something on the weekend, and you're probably doing more than that […] its just really damaging to their personal lives.

Franklin reflected on how the number of hours of work was detrimental to the personal lives of the teachers; that he felt overworked. When I met Franklin a few weeks later, he explained that he was not going to return to this school, or to teaching.

Before Franklin made his decision, when he discussed other teachers leaving, he explained that some of these teachers moved to different schools, and some to different professions. While the exhaustion these teachers faced is not particular to this school, the cause of exhaustion is drawn into relief when considering the type of work teachers are expected to do in this school. While I am not privy to the reasons behind each teacher

leaving, the large number of teachers exiting this school in particular (and not the profession of teaching) suggests something within the school itself that pushes these teachers out.

A critique of Franklin's school. The school where Franklin taught puts incredible value on state tests, such that Eric Mahmoud, the African American founder of this school, has said "The worst thing in the world is to teach to something other than what the students are going to be assessed on" (Brown, 2012). This school has increased the success rate of its students' performance on state standards and tests at such a rate that the Minneapolis Public Schools have requested that more schools open following its model. Its model, simply, is attention to data in conjunction with longer school days and years. In short, while they teach to the test, students are also expected to be in school for a month more than their friends in other schools, and for entire work days (8am-4.45pm; Fridays they get out a little earlier so that teachers can focus entirely on data).

Franklin explained that the founder is an engineer and so there is "very very laser like focus on closing the achievement gap." He continued to explain; "they do this in a lot of different ways, but primarily the things I already described. When test time rolls around, there is a huge focus on the test, you can take the state test up to three times every year, and they take full advantage of that."

Thus, it is not only precision focus on the test, but an understanding of the rules surrounding the testing regimen, for example, that students can take these tests up to 3 times in a year. Franklin explained how student's families volunteer for them to miss

their spring break before “the final round in May” if those students need to take the test an additional time.

Franklin understands that his students were not expected to do well on these tests by broader society. He knows about the achievement gap, and recognizes how this school was closing that gap. Yet, there was an ambiguity between the recognition of the problem and the ways in which he and other teachers were expected to solve it that was leaving him frustrated.

> This issue of educational inequality […] it matters to me. The question of how to address it is one that fucks people up, the problem with dealing with educational reform is people think they have answers and its so tempting […] you want to have answers so badly, because when you look at the conditions, when you look at the system of inequality […]

Franklin believed the focus on testing was giving into temptation to solve the problem of inequity through educational reform, to think it can be solved with a magic bullet, the right way to do things.

As Franklin pointed out, this school brings pride to an area often cited as one of the most dangerous neighborhoods of Minneapolis, and a community (African Americans) placed on the failing side of the Achievement Gap. However, he also could not shake a belief that it does so at a cost. It seems that this school shows the lack of sustainability in a curriculum geared entirely toward data and testing, and as such illustrates what “success” in schooling looks like in regards to the human costs.

Of course, in the wake of the school's success, this cost goes under examined. Personally, I keep coming back to one observation (although others easily follow): In order to succeed these students are away from their communities, homes and families for long periods of time; the idea of a "damaged" community and the pathology that results encourages a system whereby the pathway to success is to quarantine students from their community and to focus intently on institutional measures of success. When the founder of the school suggests that teaching "something other than what the students are going to be assessed on" is "the worst thing in the world" (Brown, 2012), I wonder how he would categorize the lessons these children might learn from their elders and about their community[27]. I wonder about the absence of a clear line past institutional boundaries that makes these connections, if the lack of alliances (or failure to pursue alliances) that permeate these definitions necessitates this dependence on institutional expectations and ideas of what matters in education.

At the end of our initial interview, Franklin expressed his concerns with the approach of the school more bluntly:

> So this is my problem with the achievement gap. Its this problem that we've learned a few good ways how to fix […]. So that can be the problem that we talk about very easily, and that doesn't mean that we shouldn't talk about it, it doesn't

[27] Franklin mentioned certain outreach activities and strategies between the community and the school, but many had limits— an educational night for parents was a condescending discussion about the food pyramid, a state of the art library built in the school was kept under lock and key most of the time, para teachers from the community were fired without warning a week before the end of school.

> mean it is not a problem, it just means that we've narrowed the scope of the problem down to something that we can begin to think about solving […]

In other words, testing creates an answerable problem, such that with enough effort, a school can turn test scores around within two years; however, testing did not create the achievement gap. He continued,

> […] We have created all of these ancillary problems that are associated with test scores and with blunt instruction and treating knowledge as truth, and I'm not convinced that that is solving the broader problem in education.

Franklin's larger point about educational reform is an important one. There is a temptation to find answers, but the problems that are explored are rarely the real problems. Instead, educational reforms are forces to focus on the "ancillary" problems or symptoms rather than address larger injustices that lie at the heart of education— the racist and colonial roots which Tuck (2009b) references.

As Franklin pointed out, a narrow view of education and of the achievement gap seem to ignore much larger injustices that the achievement gap draws into relief. Mahmoud discusses his efforts to attune instruction to a system of formal instruction whose focus is backward, by starting from assessment and leading to instruction, as he recognizes the power of institutional education to limit (or create) opportunities for African American students and communities (as well as other marginalized folk). The importance placed on tests exposes what is valued in educational policy— how knowledge and performance are evaluated and what ways of knowing are valued. If there were no tests this problem would still exist, it would, however, be less apparent and

strategies and possibilities for this school to address these biases would be less obvious or narrowly focused.

As I consider institutional perspectives, I worry that such focus on what is valued or what is “right” according to a system, obscures the realities of students’ lives and their community. Such extreme focus physically and mentally removes students from their families and community. While this school is successful, in regards to mainstream appreciation of academic success, there is an uncomfortable similarity to the history of American Indian Boarding Schools where educators understood their mission as to “kill the Indian, save the child”, where American Indian children were removed forcibly from their homes and versed in White, European etiquette, culture, and history.

Once again, this dehumanizing process can be seen in how a focus on testing removes students from their homes and communities, but also in the continual exodus of educators. As Franklin explained, many did not quit the profession all together. Yet, their decision to leave this school shows how the extreme example of this school, as it represents the underlying values of educational institutions, drains educators of the energy they might gain from more authentic personal relationships. Educators are forced into an unnatural process, rather than focusing on the needs of a child that might be immediately apparent, there is emphasis and instruction to focus on the needs of a child in relation to the “data” (practice test scores and test scores). It seems the exhaustion would emerge not only from the sheer amount of work, but the priorities set in teachers’ relationships with students. While there is a stated expectation by the school administration that teachers practice with “love” (Brown, 2012), this expectation

seemingly contradicts the primary push of the school to create “better” students. The pursuit of a path of love, of accepting and learning about students, appears antithetical to a path of fitting students into a system, especially when the latter is what is valued and becomes a strategy to develop student performance.

Recognizing the school’s success. The administration of this school should not be faulted for their success. Their accomplishments are impressive. In two years students have moved from about a 40% pass rate to an 80% rate. The school has on the surface successfully tackled the issue of the achievement gap (in as much as it references discrepancies in test scores between white and African American students). While Franklin lamented the approach of the school and the expectations placed on him as a teacher, he couldn’t neglect the pride that parents had in the school; talking about one parent’s expressed pride, he said, “It’s a starting point to have wonderful test scores and to have lots of press about it so a parent like this can come in and say, ‘Oh I’m really proud’”. Although Franklin was not happy with, exhausted by, and critical of the approach the school is taking, he also saw the importance of what is occurring in this school. In part, this is what led to Franklin’s exhaustion.

When we sat down a few weeks after our interview, Franklin informed me he had decided to not return to his job. He expressed cynicism that people (particularly white liberals— including ourselves) could say all they want about how testing is bad, but that by doing this they ignore the pride of the families who send their children to this school, and the power of this kind of pride in a community where the typical narrative is one of

damage, not to mention the fact that this success comes at the hands of an African American educational leader.

The limits of critical perspectives. When I criticize the school where Franklin worked, while being aware of the pride community members have in it, I know that I risking a refusal of humility, or as the popular educator, Myles Horton, expressed, “respect for people’s abilities to learn and to act to shape their own lives” (Horton & Freire, 1990, p. 177). While I believe in the power of critical perspectives I also worry about the potential for these perspectives to cause harm, or to limit perceptions of the agency of others.

Entitlement to make assumptions. Again, while I think the criticism above is important to wrestle with, I worry about the entitlement underlying it (as it comes from two white males, both having left teaching after one year). I also worry about the effect of unexamined assumptions that potentially underlie certain criticisms. Once, when sitting down with a woman who I knew as willing to challenge an organization of which we both were members, the potential damage resulting from unexamined critical perspectives became apparent. In our conversation, I was taken aback by the ways in which this woman allowed an institutional lens to guide her understanding of children in her preschool classroom.

This woman is an older woman, who explained to me how she had once been fired for organizing a group of teachers to do self-reflective work. I knew her as an exemplar of a critical approach in action. This understanding grew not only from her own

stories, but my experience with this woman in organizational meetings where she confronted particular viewpoints that limited the work of the organization.

On the day that I met this woman for coffee, I had prefaced our meeting with a need to know more about the organization we were members of and of which she was a founder. When we met she gave me an in depth political history of the group: competing intentions, purposes and personalities. I told her my worries about the group, and about my idea at the time to organize teachers, to create new inroads to accountability through social networking, classroom documentation and reflective practice. She listened and offered critical feedback. Her own stories of getting into trouble and being admonished, while also experiencing the joy and creativity of such shared reflective work. In short, she emphasized the radical nature of her own work as a means to offer constructive feedback to my own ideas. I was very appreciative for her stories and her input.

As we walked to our cars after our conversation, we were about to part ways when she asked me, “So how is it being married to a Hmong woman?” My response was that I was confronted with ideals I speak at length about, but have never necessarily had to live. She reflected on my response and told me she understood this as a difference in values, of autonomy (western society) versus collectivism. I nodded, even though I disagreed (it is much more complicated than a dichotomy of individual v. collective); the meeting had gone long and I was ready to move on with my day.

She then told me a story from a preschool classroom she was working with when a Hmong boy took a toy from a Hmong girl, “the girl just stared at her feet.” As she

described this moment as one where she had to decide between valuing the students' home culture or being clear about what was "acceptable" in school.

I attempted to encourage her to think about the story differently. I suggested that the idea of the Hmong culture being "misogynist" is very a result of very colonial dynamics (Smith, 1999). I told her that in Kalia's family, while interactions between men and women are somewhat different than in the dominant Western culture (not unlike how food, language, religion and culture are different) I have no sense that women are devalued or that deference is paid to the men in regards to decisions. She suggested, in response, that while the origins may be colonial, they are now a part of the culture and that she had seen it in the interaction between this little boy and girl.

In that moment, I did not know how to respond; I knew her interpretation was not only wrong but also damaging. She was telling me what was "acceptable" not only in the classroom, but somehow she thought she knew that this behavior (a boy taking a toy from a girl) was learned in their homes, evidenced to her by the ease with which the boy took the toy, and the way in which the girl accepted the toy being taken. Having seen many similar interactions in white, Hmong and other racial contexts, I know that young boys and girls often steal toys from each other. I also know that the Hmong grandparents I have seen in action teach values of sharing, and taking care, and that when children do these kinds of things it is not acceptable— if it is a boy, if it is a girl, or if they are taking from a boy or a girl. Similarly, in a white household or school, a preschool age boy will not be admonished for misogyny if he steals a toy from another child who happens to be

a girl; rather, that boy will be admonished for stealing a toy without asking, for not sharing.

While the assumptions this woman was making about a Hmong household, and values, angered me, I was more upset when I imagined how the sense of entitlement to make these types of assumptions would play into her interactions with other children and adults. Her assumption that the little girl was being told at home to succumb, and that the little boy was being taught it was ok to take things from women, already made her treat the boy in a way where the lesson she felt she needed to teach him was not about sharing, but about how to treat women.[28] This woman's assumptions fed her own conviction in values that she did not see as shared but as contrasting with a Hmong household. For her, no evidence was needed to bolster her conviction. She even expressed her own values as what is acceptable in school, rather than what she found acceptable. Her conundrum, should she talk to the boy (this is wrong in school) or let him get away with it ("value" his home culture), was misguided. Her own values became the institution's values. While she expressed that these values included the wrongness in taking things, the true values of the institution were revealed in her actions: superiority and authoritative knowing. In the end the boy was not punished because he took something (as would happen in his home); in the end the little boy was punished for playing out an imagined (and projected) set of values ascribed to his family (men are more important than women) which were likely

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[28] This is to say nothing of the ways she might imagine the little girl is treated at home, and this woman's own self-congratulatory imagined position as the (white) feminist presence in this girl's life who teaches her to appreciate herself (when in fact these lessons could very well be learned from the little girl's mother, aunts, grandmothers, and even the men in her life).

very different then the values his family actually taught him, and very unrelated to the true nature of his wrong doing.

Although this woman fancied herself a radical and presented herself as such in conversations, as well as some of her work, her uncritical relationship with the oppressive foundations of schooling (exemplified in this moment) undermined her goals to build more "democratic" and equitable approaches to learning. She accused a little boy of an imagined (from cultural stereotypes) crime (misogyny) based on actions that otherwise (if the boy were white) would be wrong, because it is not caring to take things from other people. By spending more time analyzing the actions of the boy in relation to a set of imagined cultural values, and not once considering her own position as a white teacher of a Hmong boy (let alone the history of men of color in institutions), she not only allowed, but carried out, the oppressive work of school when she acted based on her assumptions of Hmong culture. In short, although this woman has committed herself to alternative methods of instruction and alternative approaches to curriculum, her own work became destructive when she did not examine her relationship to the institutions that enable her work.

Again, by revisiting this conversation, I wonder about my own criticism of the testing culture of Franklin's former school— if my criticisms dismiss the community that values the school and the people who work and study there in a similar way that this woman's perspectives dismiss her students' communities and families.

Being forced to make choices. The damage of this woman's assumptions are two-fold. By labeling the preschool aged boy as misogynist, she placed him in a category

where to “fix” or adjust his behavior the culture that raised him would need to be changed, or destroyed. Thus, in her practice, he became a lost cause. Her understanding of the situation was that she could only admonish him, but that his culture would continue to teach him to behave improperly. In regards to the little girl, however, there is also damage done to the cultural community raising her. These assumptions create a continuing cycle of damage between the individual and the community of which they are a part.

Once, when working with a college aged Hmong woman on a scholarship application, I noted an odd contradiction in her work. She wrote about how she was able to succeed in college because of the support of her family, but then wrote simultaneously about how her family was holding her back because of the presence they expected her to have at family events and meetings. After I read through her paper I discussed with her all of the ways in which she talked about her family supporting her; I asked questions.

This student told me brief stories about sacrifice, role models, love, and care. I pointed to the place where she said they were holding her back; I suggested that perhaps it would be less confusing to talk about it in regards to balancing between two cultures. I told her my own experiences in a Hmong family, that I understood that often times my own desire or need to work can conflict with my responsibilities to family— to be present, to help— but that in the end I do not feel that the family is holding me back because I am also aware of the support they offer (and in turn that I offer others by being present). I explained that I saw it more as a difference between two cultures that value

different things. As I explained this, the student smiled. She became visibly lighter, in disposition and posture.

This woman had been confronted with a narrative that her home culture was holding her back at the same time that she was writing about how supportive it had been. She did not know how to reconcile these two competing narratives. As she was applying to a scholarship, it can be imagined that as she moves on in a system that rests on these types of negative assumptions she might become more susceptible to them, especially if the people who take credit for her moving forward (those in power in the institution) do not give her space to challenge the assumption that her culture "holds her back." If they do not, cannot, or choose not to notice the moments where she reflects on the support and love she has received, she may come to believe over time that it is those in power who were the ones who gave her the support.

This student's march towards success in the system necessitates a belief in this narrative, not about balancing contentious cultures, but about a home culture that holds women back and another that gives them room to move forward (when it is in fact the "beneficent" culture that currently, and historically, holds people like her back). A belief that she is held back by her home culture allows the system to continue efficiently at the cost of the support a young woman such as this could offer others in her family and her home culture; to value and believe in the support offered by her family, the system would have to fundamentally change to encourage this support, to adjust what and who is perceived as valuable. However, the reality is the overwhelming force and underlying foundations of the system necessitate a constant vigilance for students like this woman, to

simply mitigate the damage the system inevitably creates by isolating and devaluing particular human lives.

It seems that similarly to the choice that the teacher's actions presented, or that this young woman faces, by critiquing Franklin's school, without simultaneously valuing the ambiguity that the community's pride creates, the possibilities for movement are limited. Rather than recognizing a need for alliance and relationship building, or of work from within and outside the institution, by critiquing the need of the school to perform well in relation to institutional expectations (rightly or wrongly), I reestablish the impossibility of success within current frameworks. While this is different from the woman above (who valued current frameworks more than student realities), the lost possibility is the same— relationships built and nurtured between people regardless of their relationship to an institutional ideal or practice.

The potential failure of building relationships in critical work. In the same way that I would argue racism (such as represented by the achievement gap) cannot be solved by buying into the institutions that support that racism (testing), I am realizing resistance is not as simple as engaging in critical theory or recognizing historical oppression. As Eve Tuck (2009b) points out, even in more historically rooted academic work, work that recognizes the oppressive context of education and research, narratives that neutralize revolutionary movements as acts of reform[29] are persuasive, "the significance of these

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[29] When Kalia's little brother was in first grade, one day in February there was a small booklet in his homework folder. I do not have access to these pages now; however, I remember the story was a short history lesson: black people were being mistreated by white people, Rosa Parks refused to move from her seat on the bus, Martin Luther King Jr. spoke about his dream, white people recognized their folly and stopped being racist.

[historically oppressive] contexts is regularly submerged" (p. 415). By discussing the oppressive context of education from a critical perspective, I run the risk of distancing myself from these oppressive histories rather than recognizing my complicity. This presents a paradox in approaching change. By criticizing educational institutions, it is very easy to immediately ignore the role—big or small— that I play in its continuity, where my statements are disengaged from my actions; however, if I refused to criticize institutions and focused only on my own practice, I would be ignoring the need for fundamental institutional change. As such, the answer toward discovering alternatives is not to ignore criticism or practice, but to focus more intently on relationships with other people.

Again, to illustrate a way in which criticism can run the risk of dismissing other people's experiences, I look to a conversation with a friend. While working on this dissertation I had lunch with a colleague immediately after one of our department's many regularly scheduled "diversity dialogues." This diversity dialogue was titled "Estudiantes

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Yet, this ignores that there are still great disparities in regards to race in the legal system, politics, education, class, housing, and health (Munin, 2012); as well as in popular attitudes and media representations of race and whiteness. As Timothy Tyson (2004) explains, "The radicalism of Dr. King's thought, the militancy of his methods, and the rebuke that he offered to American capitalism have given way to depictions of a man who never existed, caricatures invented after his death. The real Martin Luther King Jr. went to Memphis in 1968 calling for 'the dispossessed of our nation' to 'organize a revolution.' There he told the nation that 'the whole structure of American Life must be changed'— just before somebody killed him." (p. 107). Similarly, stories about the revolutionary work of the Black Panther movement, of free lunch and breakfast programs, neighborhood medical clinics and leaders like Fred Hampton organizing disenfranchised youth across racial lines, bringing white, black and Latino street gangs into a political alliance (Levins Morales, 2012) are often ignored in favor of pictures of black people with guns. These images are then presented in contrast to Martin Luther King Jr neutralizing the connections between all of their humanizing efforts and revolutionary messages.

MeXicanos at the U Situating 'Home' as a Means for Survival" (De León, Rodríguez, & Topete, 2012**)**. In the presentations, several Chicana/o and Mexicana/o undergraduate and graduate students discussed the ways in which they felt the violence of the University in response to their identities as Chicana/o and Mexicana/o, and how they confronted this violence, their pathways toward survival by bringing aspects of "home"— familiar culture— into the University.

Throughout the discussion, one of the presenters, a PhD student in Gender, Women and Sexuality Studies continually mentioned the gender theorist Judith Butler as an example of how certain texts and approaches to ideas made her feel isolated and removed.

While we ate lunch, my friend and I talked about what we found useful as well as what questions we had about in the presentations. While I expressed a desire to know more about everyday strategies of bringing "home" into the institution (as opposed to larger cultural events that they focused on), my friend criticized the one woman's critique of Judith Butler.

My friend was adamant that it was irresponsible of this student to use Judith Butler as an example, since Butler's work was allied with her position. In short, because Butler's critique could be used to bolster this student's own explanation of her experience, she should not critique Butler. Or, as I cynically summarize it: *After all, Butler is only trying to help*. I listened to my friend's position and then responded, a little bit flustered, that what the student communicated was her experience of Butler, and that experience cannot be argued against. That as a white male very 'at home' in the

institution, I have no basis for saying that this student could not have been threatened or isolated by the work of Judith Butler, or any other academic critical theorist.

My friend conceded my point, but continued to make his own: her critique of Butler was not constructive.

I again expressed my opinion; this student's critique did not need to be 'constructive', it did not need to follow some preset form of criticism— it is powerful enough of a critique that she found Butler to be isolating, that she felt so strongly about that isolation that was bolstered by Butler's work, that she sought means of "survival" in the academy.

This colleague is a good friend and somebody with whom I often reflect upon ideas of critical approaches to pedagogy. I am also aware that his views are continually shifting and adjusting. This colleague is somebody whose work as a teacher and activist, as well as whose theoretical and professional perspectives I respect and admire. However, in that moment, while he did not necessarily ignore the student's experience, my friend's own understanding of the larger institution of "proper" critical theory was so certain that it risked failing to make room for this student's experiential criticism, human experience that exposed the fallibility (and oppressive experience) of a particular critical approach. Once again, while it is not as dramatic as the woman's dismissal of her students, I was reminded how my relationship with and value of certain institutional practices might sometimes take precedence over immediate human relationships.

Again, as I revisit my criticisms of the school where Franklin taught, I wonder how I could approach a relationship with that community if my criticism dismisses their

pride in the school and what it does for their child and community. This is not to dismiss my criticism, but to understand it as secondary to the relationships that I would need to build in order to actually be able to engage in a localized pedagogy for shared survival. In the same way, when I am asked "how is this possible?" my response should be more about the potential of building relationships, or placing primary value in relationships, rather than a knee-jerk reaction of criticism and a dismissal of institutional education.

Building alliances: Contention versus critical distance. It is here that I revisit Eve Tuck's (2009a) reference to contention, specifically as she suggests it as a response to approaching the paradox that exists between reform (eg. Franklin's school) and revolution (or, in this case, critical perspectives). From a different vantage point, I can recognize that the school where Franklin taught is working to address the same issues of inequity that are at the heart of a localized pedagogy for shared survival, and as such, despite real critical differences in approach, they exist as a potential ally. When I approach the ambiguity that arises when I critique this school while recognizing the potential for alliance, I recognize the value of one above the other (alliance as more immediate than critique) in order to create conversations across institutional boundaries. It is these conversations and relationships which in turn create new spaces across institutional boundaries wherein points of contention can be addressed.

In the same way that I suggest that the rules of institutions, as they are designed to maintain order, can stand in the way of human relationships so can a critique that dismisses individuals within an institution. In my first draft of this chapter, I was carried away by my own distrust of institutional education and ignored the points of connection

and relationship between what this school and its founder have accomplished and my own motivations, in favor of establishing a line between what I label a localized pedagogy for shared survival and the practices of this school. Thus, as I walk back toward a desire to change the nature of educational institutions so that they recognize the value of what is outside of them, I need to reconsider my relationship with the people within those institutions. Otherwise, a localized pedagogy for shared survival runs the risk of defining itself entirely in opposition to a potential ally or point of practice.

As such, I can recognize the pressures felt by Franklin's former school to perform well in relationship to institutional expectations as the same felt by those teachers who leave are feeling. In other words, the burden placed on communities labeled as damaged is the same being felt by the teachers and the school administration. However, the process of critique as it stands removed from the institution creates less opportunities for the school to build alliances outside of these expectations and more imperatives for the school to fall in line with them—especially as these institutional expectations are of the failure of the community that the school serves (the ways in which it is damaged). Thus, it is important for me to recognize how a localized pedagogy for shared survival should start from a point of similar anti-colonial intention (if they are expressed as such or not) to address these critiques as points of contention in relationship, rather than as points of separation and division between myself and the people in and around the school.

A value of institutional expectations (whether from a point of critique from outside, as above, or practice within) can cause for people to approach each other recklessly, rather than as equals. The ability to make, and act on, assumptions about

people is often reflective of institutions whose histories I neutralize and fail to address in my own actions (and yet, as a critical educator, I believe I am working against). A localized pedagogy for shared survival is an attempt to place primary focus on these relationships with other people. Yet, the institution (either as a lens or point of critical focus) obscures the ability to see and approach people as they exist outside of institutional definitions. Thus, in order to focus on human relationships there needs to be an awareness of relationships with colonial institutions (both from critical perspectives and within practice), as these often define actions and assumptions. Otherwise, unexamined relationships with educational institutions create situtations in which we feel entitled to dismiss other people, the indispensable partners in a localized pedagogy for shared survival.

Creating opportunities for contention. It is important, in trying to discover opportunities for conversation and relationship building, to be mindful of the contention that will occur, and to create space for it. Early in our relationship, Kalia was teaching. In one of her classes, Kalia had a student who questioned the need to learn about the Reverend Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., stating that because Kalia (a Hmong woman) was at the front of the class and there was a student of color, that racism does not exist. Kalia came back from the class frustrated, assuming that the voice of this student represented the voices of the other white students who did not speak. I suggested that Kalia find a way to give other students a chance to speak or have their voices heard. When Kalia returned to that class, her student made a similar statement. Kalia asked the student to rephrase her comment in a way that would allow her and others to respond, by putting it

in the form of a question. When this happened, other students began to question that one student's perspective.

Later in our relationship, Kalia was at a reunion planning event for her ten year college reunion. The planning committee was entirely white and focused on drinking events and fund raising. Kalia was becoming more and more defeated by what she understood as a lack of recognition of poorer students and students of color who typically feel left out of these events. Each day, her and I would discuss her frustrations. Finally I suggested that were she to speak, she might create an opportunity for others who might feel the same way to express their concerns (reminding her of what happened when she opened the floor to her class to respond to her one student). Kalia decided to stand up in an event for all of the reunion classes (5, 10, 15, 20, 25 years, etc.) to ask the president of the college about the college's commitment to students such as herself after they graduate. After that, many people from other classes, as well as in her own committee expressed gratitude for her perspective and agreement with her critiques. This gave her more room to express her contention within her committee, as well as with the larger institution. That moment of courage exposed potential alliances and created possibilities for action.

While much of this chapter focuses on the limitations of criticism and institutional practice, these stories point both to the importance of recognizing the silent voices that both agree and disagree in work towards authentic, honest and engaged conversations. It is important to recognize the potential and unexpected relationships that may result with people inside and outside of educational institutions, to find opportunities and develop

strategies for opening conversations. This is especially true when it feels like no conversations are happening, because when these conversations do not happen it is easy to believe (contrary to a belief in people) that other people do not care. This absence of conversation forces certain people away (eg. my student) and fosters distancing and dismissive critical perspectives. In order for contention to work toward change, strong relationships need to be built and people's presences (inside and outside of educational institutions) need to be recognized.

Breaking rules, thwarting expectations, recognizing humanity. By standing up and expressing her concerns, Kalia thwarted the conversation that the college (institution) expected. The road toward a localized pedagogy for shared survival is similarly fraught with the risks associated with breaking rules (implicit and explicit), of working against imposed order so that other possibilities, reflective of diverse realities (as they exist outside of institutions) have an opportunity to emerge and affect practice within institutions. In contrast to the mistrust that evolves in cultures of measured performance, wherein "effectivity rather than honesty is most valued…" (Ball, 2003, p. 226), a constant awareness of the purpose of such acts of resistance/revolution forces the discovery of means toward honest dialogue and meaningful relationships with other people (teachers, families, students, universities, administrators, politicians, and community members—inhabitants of the same space).

James C. Scott (2012) discusses how when he lived in eastern Germany, a year after the wall had fallen, if he crossed the street on a red light he would be scolded: "It surprised me how much I had to screw up my courage merely to cross a street against

general disapproval" (p. 18). When this happened, to comfort himself, he would recite a speech in his head:

> It went something like this: "You know, you and especially your grandparents could have used more of a spirit of lawbreaking. One day you will be called on to break a big law in the name of justice and rationality. Everything will depend on it. You have to be ready […]" (p.18)

Scott tells this story to illustrate the importance of paying attention to how smaller movements and actions are governed in order to be able to pay attention to the ways in which we might act against our better judgment to follow laws for fear of consequence, or simply expectation that all laws keep us safe (or have our shared survival in mind).

Scott (2012) continues to describe how the removal of traffic lights has been shown to diminish the number of accidents because responsibility becomes owned by the drivers—they can no longer expect the lights to keep them safe. Laws, especially as they relate to colonial institutions, often do not have people's safety in mind but instead are often designed to regulate efficiency. If automated systems designed to regulate those laws are removed and replaced by signposts which act as reminders, he suggests people begin to actively look out for themselves and others. In short, it is important to recognize how "the regulation of daily life is so ubiquitous and so embedded in our daily routines and expectations as to pass virtually unnoticed" (p.18) in order to recognize when we are blindly paying attention to the metaphorical lights (automated laws that are not questioned, which ignore realities and movement which do not follow those laws) instead of what is actually happening on the road (being aware of each other's existence and

movements). When Kalia stood up, she was paying more attention to the reality of the movement on the road (the absence of students like herself) and less to the flashing lights (the institutional expectations and reasoning for reunion planning and fundraising).

Conclusion

> These heterogenous and even contrary elements fill the homogenous form of the story. Things *extra* and *other* (details and excesses coming from elsewhere) insert themselves into the accepted framework, the imposed order. One thus has the very relationship between spatial practices and the constructed order. The surface of this order is everywhere punched and torn open by ellipses, drifts, and leaks of meanings: it is a sieve-order. (de Certau, 1984, p. 107)

I believe (assume) that many people become teachers because they want to be involved in people's lives, that they want to be part of building a more humane world. Teachers, educators and researchers are not usually bad people with bad intentions; yet, institutional education is a historically racist and colonial system which has never truly been subject to the type of massive overhaul or wholesale continuous reflexive work which would unearth and arrest these foundations. Unexamined relationships with the broader dehumanizing system of schooling, can deprive students and educators of humanizing, caring relationships. Similarly, critical perspectives often serve as a means of building an artificial distance or buffer between these critical viewpoints and colonial histories, often resulting in a dismissal of people as they act in ways consistent with those criticisms (and ignoring their humanity).

As I reflect on strategies for implementing change, specifically on the potential of a localized pedagogy for shared survival within educational institutions as well as how it exists outside of them, I consider the line between dropping out of the system and acting within the system. The space between critique and practice (or praxis). Institutional education becomes less definitive with more movement across this line; more movement blurs the edges, creating "ellipses, drifts and leaks of meaning" (de Certau, 1984, p.107). While educational institutions own a monopoly on definitions of education (Illich, 1970) if enough movement and organization occurs across institutional boundaries, it is conceivable that different possibilities emerge, and that the "imposed order" (de Certau, 1984, p. 107) becomes less imposing.

When developing a localized pedagogy for shared survival, it is important to not limit the idea of "local" as exclusively outside of institutional educational spaces as these are some of the few spaces where people consciously connect. Instead, what is important is how relationships within these spaces are governed in ways that often push people outside of the institution. Thus, while it is important to place primacy on our relationships with individuals inside and outside of educational institutions in order to imagine new possibilities, it is equally important to recognize that people (critical educators—and myself-- included) are the perpetrators of the wrongs resulting from the foundational colonial histories of these institutions. If the responsibility of individuals is ignored, the good intentions of individuals from inside or outside of these institutions count for very little.

In doing the work of a localized pedagogy, as somebody who is mostly outside of schools and comfortable acting from a critical perspective, I need to examine how my criticisms, as well as certain aspects of my life and history, enable oppressive institutional practice as much as I search for ways of acting against these practices. In addition, those who experience the dehumanizing processes of schooling (and are pushed out of institutional education) often feel limited in their ability to act against educational institutions or to create alternative spaces for shifts in perspective. It is in relationships between people, across difference, inside and outside of institutions wherea localized pedagogy for shared survival places the most value. Standing outside of institutions without being involved in organizing and alliance building across institutional boundaries creates few viable alternatives and limits opportunities for voices of dissent and contention to build alliances despite institutional boundaries.

Institutional possibilities. While it is not often encouraged, human connection is always a possibility because of the presence of people within educational institutions. While the inefficiency of human relationships often necessitates that rules be broken from within institutions in order to foster relationships, it is also possible for foundational change to occur by re-imagining the rules of relationships at an institutional level.

When I talked with a friend about her work at a library, she told me about how she was taught that to give people a nod, or to make small conscious gestures can make people feel better about not being a bad parent when their child acts up, and in turn to feel more comfortable in the space of the library (this was the example she gave). Due to the presupposed institutional law of silence in libraries, if a child is crying there is an

expectation that a librarian (or person working at a library) will silence the child, or admonish an adult. In order to change this culture, my friend was being encouraged to "[Be] conscious of the other person, [respect] them, and [try] to make that moment when you are with them, a better one". In this case, the institution is adjusting the laws governing its space and in doing so fundamentally changes the ways it is open to certain populations and particular situations. In creating these types of expectations and permitting this type of behavior in the agents of the institution, the fundamental nature of the library changes.

Similarly, on a recent visit to Alaska, Kalia and I visited the Alaska Native Heritage Center. There was a fairly high price of admittance which we paid. Later, however, Kalia heard a conversation where a family asked if they could just look around, because they did not realize it would cost so much and they were only going to be there for a few minutes. The person behind the counter told them to take their time and enjoy the space. As Kalia and I left for lunch, we asked about being allowed to come back in. There was no hesitance in them saying "of course", and when we returned, with no proof of purchase or proof of the permission we were granted, and despite a different person working, we were let back in with no fuss.

While there are many other aspects of the Alaskan Native Heritage Center that I could write about— the complicated and nuanced way they present their history, the center of the space being an space for human interaction— it was these small actions by people who would typically (in similar institutions) act as gate-keepers, which exemplify

the center's welcoming nature. In this space, and these tiny allowances, there was a welcome that presented opportunities for relationships to be built across experiences.

It is important to recognize these space as exceptions. However, it is also important to recognize how both the library where my friend worked and the Alaskan Native Heritage Center build the potential of diversity and conversation through their open practices. Similar to how the racism that happens in institutions is enacted by individuals submitting to the rules of institutions, while these welcoming actions occur at an institutional level it is the people who practice them who make them work. In this way, practice within the institution creates opportunities for what de Certau (1984) refers to as a sieve-order, where different possibilities interact with accepted frameworks.

When I am asked, "how is that possible?" in relation to a localized pedagogy for shared survival, I will work hard to participate in the conversation, to see it as an opportunity to connect. I cannot be afraid of contention, or dismissive of the work people do in institutions. At the same time, I cannot allow these recognitions to obscure my critiques. It is the simple actions above (a smile, a nod, a welcome) that will inspire my response, both as exemplars and in regards to the manner of my response. These actions represent the human connection that transcends institutions and which lies at the heart of a localized pedagogy for shared survival.

Chapter 4

The Centre, the Line, the Outside: Meeting Spaces, Imagined Places

> Go… to Tibet or Central America or India to "find yourself," if you really think that's where you're hiding. As though there weren't a million stories in every crack in the concrete here, as if the Southside weren't "exotic" enough. The things we make invisible, do not disappear; we only cloud our own perception—Minnesota nice, Minnesota passive-aggressive, Minnesota gentrifier, closet homophobe, white supremacist, bystander […] -Kyle "Guante" Tran Myhre

Part 1: The Centre, The Line, The Outside

> Compartmentalized, space can be better defined and measured. […] Space is often viewed in Western thinking as being static or divorced from time. This view generates ways of making-sense of the world as a 'realm of stasis', well defined, fixed and without politics. […] There is a very specific spatial vocabulary of colonialism which can be assembled around three concepts: (1) the line, (2) the centre, and (3) the outside. […] The 'outside' is important because it positioned territory and people in an oppositional relation to the colonial centre; for indigenous Australians to be in an 'empty space' was to 'not exist'. (Smith, 1999, pp. 51-53)

> 'Normality' is defined, to a significant degree, geographically, and deviance from this normality is also shot through with geographical assumptions concerning what and who belong where. […] By tracing the disruption of this 'spatial economy'—the internalized and naturalized boundaries that relate place to

ideology— we can describe the geography of ideological expectations. (Cresswell, 1996, p. 27)

This chapter takes seriously Tuck and Yang's (2012) assertion that "settler colonialism and its decolonization implicates and unsettles everyone" (Tuck & Yang, 2012, p. 7). Using Linda Tuhiwai Smith's (1999) vocabulary of colonialism (the Centre, the Line and the Outside) I examine my experiences from grade school until now as someone born in the Centre, by virtue of race and class, which has defined the spaces in which I move including an inability (perceived and real) to step outside of the Centre. In this chapter, I discover a process that has defined the Outside, and has limited my interactions with people on the Outside. I then look for some answers about how, as somebody in the Centre, with relationships on the Outside, I can work to unsettle the Line—to do work that will create room for decolonization to happen (and for relationships to be built with a localized pedagogy for shared survival).

The Centre: Memories of school. From the ages of 3 until 12 I lived in a place called Shorewood, one of the older "middle class" suburbs of Milwaukee. My grandparents both had grown up in nearby, wealthier suburbs. My grandfather was adopted as a young boy by his maternal uncle who had established himself, after immigrating years prior, as one of the wealthier citizens of Milwaukee, a "pioneer" of the midwestern auto industry. My grandmother came from a similarly wealthy background--her mother was the daughter of one of Milwaukee's other immigrant success stories.

When I was twelve my family moved away. As I got older I looked back with fondness at this place, a place I knew as a kid like the back of my hand, with generations

of stories amassed for each crease in the palm. One of the parks bore my great grandmother's maternal name, Klode. My dad and I, and often my mother and sister too, would take walks from our house to the lake. On these walks my father would tell me stories from his youth. He would tell me what used to be where and what happened there; he would tell me about the friends and family that shared these stories-- the drug store around the corner that used to be a soda fountain, the old abandoned building near the beach that used to be a clubhouse, the building by the lake on the drive into the city that had been a boarding school for American Indians. I knew which houses along the river had been the houses of my grandmother's youth. The place was rich with my father's family's story,[30] as well as the history that surrounded it.

Before we moved, I had gone to the school to which my father had gone; some of the teachers had been teaching there since he had been in school. Different then when my father went there, the school had a bussing program that had recently been developed in an effort to integrate the schools; however, I hardly ever saw the bussed-in students outside of school hours and school-related events. The suburb my family lived in was almost entirely white in its racial make-up; the students who were bussed in were all of color, mostly black. I can remember one time when I ran into one of these students outside of school, and that was at the frozen custard stand that stood near the highway, an infrastructural landmark, a literal wall in my childhood psycho-geography beyond which

[30] While working on this dissertation, I visited Milwaukee, where my dad's younger brother spent a day driving me around and showing me many of the places that I had never seen, or known about: the compound of houses where my grandmother's family all lived, the building where my great great grandfather had had his furniture store, the building that had at one time been the Hokanson building. I also learned stories about the family-- the different ways they exerted their power and used their money.

only parents and grandparents, or the busses that took us on field-trips drove. The borders, or ends-of-the-earth in every other direction from my home were Lake Michigan, a busy street where the High School was located, another white suburb, and a river.

On weekends, and during the summer, my sister and I would ride our bikes or walk to the playground at our school; we took swim lessons at the high school, and joined the youth swim team. Growing up I felt safe. I was told about the "bad" sides of the city, past the borders of my childhood geography, where as a child I could see people had darker skin and where it was less clean--where more buildings were closing down, where there were more empty lots. In reflection, I am more aware of the stigma that was placed on difference by the other kids in my school. I did not stand up against it when the kid who wore second hand clothes from a decade earlier, or the quiet Jewish girl, or my friend who had just moved with his family from Hungary were made fun of. The black boys who were bussed in, while I do not remember fun being made of them, were the ones who most often got into trouble. It was these boys and girls who came with homework assignments halfway completed—more messy, with the wrong materials, or not following the directions (I can still see them fighting to explain to the teachers why they didn't get it done, or why it was done wrong). These were the boys who were suspended or expelled when they made bigger behavioral missteps, sent back to wherever it was they came from.

I do not remember ever asking my friends about their lives outside of school. I made assumptions; I imagined where they lived— the houses on the other side of the

gates that walled the highway. I imagined their lives in relation to my own and the television shows I watched that had black casts, or that took place in the city: *Sesame Street*, *Fat Albert*, *The Cosby Show*, *A Different World*. The sets on these shows showed neighborhoods that looked very much like those on the "bad" sides of town, while also showing spaces (rightly and wrongly represented) full of love, respect, care, and, in contrast from my upbringing, continual racial and ethnic diversity. When I saw break dancers on television or images of subway cars full of graffiti, when I read children's books about the Harlem Globetrotters, I had an idea this was connected to the lives of my friends: the girls who choreographed a routine to "Poison" by Bel Biv DeVoe for a school talent show, who jumped double-dutch on the playground; the boys who introduced me to Bobby Brown and Another Bad Creation by singing their songs and who were much better than I was at basketball. I relied almost entirely on images from popular culture, and the ways that matched my experience of these friends, to *try* to learn about their lives.

I knew my in-town friends' houses, and parents; often our families knew each other. There was no connection like this with my bussed in friends. The only time I was brought to the sides of the city (I imagined) they were from to interact with people was as I got older and my family's church would visit a city church for a service, and to help at its soup kitchen. The only other connection I had was a family friend who taught in one of the inner city high schools. She told stories of violence and disrespect, but she also always communicated care and commitment to her students.

The movies I saw about inner city schools, *Lean on Me* or *Stand and Deliver*, showed an exaggerated violence and sexuality in these places. I imagined that our family friend worked at these types of schools, schools I figured my friends from the busses were avoiding.[31] I pictured my family friend, a woman I admired very much, as a teacher like the ones I saw in TV shows like *Head of the Class* or reruns of *Welcome Back Kotter,* and I imagined her students similarly— not as the ones in gangs or on drugs, but as people living in a community where these things were more prevalent.

On the other hand, TV tabloids like *20/20* and *Hard Copy* pushed image after image of hypersexual and hyper-violent behaviors of black people in the inner city. Once on a field trip one of my black friends was excited by the announcement on the local arena's board that a certain MC was coming through. At around the same time, *20/20* was showing images from rap shows of women doing a provocative dance called the "Rump Shaker". The blurry videos showed women dancing while men groped them and poured liquor over them; the images from this show and my friend's excitement became attached in my head.

When my family would go to an event downtown, I would hope to run into my bussed-in friends. At basketball games or car shows, I looked to see if they were around, but they never were. I watched out the window as my parents' car drove through the city. I looked in the yards and windows of the houses we passed, thinking I might catch a glimpse of Janelle, Tyrone, Selena, Angela, Edward, Arthur, Ahmad, but I never did. I simultaneously yearned to know about their lives and learned to be scared of the same

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[31] Reinforcing an idea that they were fortunate to come to my school

places I know now they must have come from. Looking back, I can see that the connection between these emotions (fear and yearning) and places were not so clear and yet, they swirled together each time I imagined where my friends were from and what their lives looked like when they were not in school.

The culture that raised me somehow made it seem logical that we lived in different places and received different treatment. Every February in school, and on special episodes of television shows like *The Cosby Show*, *Happy Days* reruns, and *A Different World*, I would learn about a (confused) history of the Civil Rights Movement in the United States. I would learn about how there used to be this thing called slavery, and then this thing called racism which was when white people and black people drank from different fountains and black people were attacked by dogs and fire hoses; I learned, more or less, that Martin Luther King Jr.—by giving a speech— and Rosa Parks—by sitting at the front of a bus— had cured our country of racism forever. The connection between a struggle for civil rights, the work of those leaders, and the people who I saw in the images being bullied, attacked and assaulted by police and white folk was never fully formed.

My friends who were bussed in would grab books on Muhammad Ali from the school library. I wondered why a boxer was so important and why his name was so different. I saw figures like the Milwaukee Alderman Michael McGee Senior on television talking about an inevitable race war in Milwaukee. I was scared by the anger; I did not understand where it came from; I had been taught racism was over. I did not understand that being unable to play with the kids who were bussed in because they lived

in a different neighborhood was related to my being white and their being black, was related to the ways in which the place I was raised was historically developed.[32] I did not understand that the reason I knew these children at all was still an attempt to address the racism that was inherent in the geography and class structure of Milwaukee (one of the most segregated cities in the United States (Logan & Stults, 2011)).

I was frightened by the idea of a race war. I was disheartened by what I understood as fact that my friends and I would be on opposite sides, simply because I was white. I did not like this. I rested my worries by reminding myself that this would happen in other neighborhoods, that I was safe where I lived; I never realized that my reasoning for my safety would have been because there were no black people living where I lived. I never suspected, or even *saw*, the whiteness of my neighborhood— the people I passed when we would go for walks, the folks my dad showed me pictures of and told me stories about from when he grew up, my own family and family history— as part of the problem that this man was reacting against.

I have trouble remembering how I made sense of these far apart worlds, if there was any logic, other than knowing that people live where they live. Now, when I look at a map of Milwaukee I can see there is not much distance between all of the parts of the city. It is hard to make sense of how it never occurred to me until very recently that what

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[32] I first learned about the process of "redlining"-- whereby non-whites' abilities to purchase homes in particular neighborhoods was actively discouraged through a practice of devaluing homes in more diverse neighborhoods whose borders were determined by red lines-- when I was 30 at a conference where we were shown an episode ("The house we live in") from the PBS video series entitled *Race: the Power of an Illusion* (Smith, 2003).

I was told were the bad sides of town were also people's homes, and that those people were poorer and often of color.

Through middle school and high school my family moved twice; there was no familial generational attachment to either place. The second time, we moved to a very white and wealthy suburb in New Jersey. On one of the first days of school I sat down at a table for lunch with a boy I knew from marching band and his friends. One of his friends, a black boy, began talking about stealing a car. I went home and told my mom I was uncomfortable in this school. Looking back, I can see that the boys I sat with at lunch were all just trying to act tough and older than they were. While we practiced marching formations, my friend from band would talk about drugs he did (or didn't do), and his friends talked about things they knew (or didn't know) which were far beyond my experiences, or what I understood as legal (read: right). After that first day, I did not sit with them again; instead, I found my way into a much more white and wealthy world.

My high school was smaller in size (a few hundred); it sent several students each year to Ivy League institutions. There were various tracks: vocational, Advanced Placement (AP), Honors, etc.; the breakdown of these was largely in regards to race and class. In my first year there, as a sophomore, the administration did not trust my capacity to be in all honors classes (as I had been in my previous school) and so they placed me in two "lower-level" classes, biology and English. These classes were much more diverse, but this diversity became absent from my experiences in the course of the next year; first I was moved into honors biology and then in my junior year into honors English. I would pass a few of the kids of color in the hallway in between classes, and on one occasion

was called out for my whiteness ("cracker"), but for the most part my experiences (minus a couple of friends) until college were even more awash in white than when I had grown up. In this town in New Jersey there was the "other side of the tracks", where many of the kids of color and poorer kids lived, but it was small and removed from my experiences in town and at school. Here, we were miles from the nearby cities—Newark, Hoboken, Jersey City— which were now the bad towns rather than just the bad sides of town; the distance between my life and other, less white and less wealthy lives had grown.

While I was in high school a movie came out*, Higher Learning* (Singleton, 1995), in which the main storyline revolves around black nationalist students and a white student who is ostracized and becomes a skin head and Neo-Nazi. The story touched on my fears of race wars from childhood. Ironically, these fears arose in a place even further removed from racial and class diversity, in a movie more about the active systemic ignorance of radical white nationalism in the midst of a white supremacist system. I did not know where I belonged, what message the film had for me as a white kid from a white place.[33] Perhaps, like when I was in elementary school, I felt as if I was already placed on a side, that it was inherent in who I was and that I had no choice but to be on the "white" side of things. However, at the same time I was beginning to understand that there was more to all of this. I was beginning to understand the significance of the moments when the Black characters in these films got mistreated and upset by authority; although when my junior year chemistry teacher, an older black woman, became very excited upon news of O.J. Simpson's acquittal, I did not understand. Similarly, the relationship she had with many

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[33] In one scene a white woman character explains to her African American roommate that she is from, "near Disneyland."

of the black students in the school, who would visit her classroom in between periods, before and after school, and during lunch, was never entirely clear to me.

However, it was movies like *Higher Learning*,[34] that brought issues of race (specifically black and white) to the fore, which began to stretch my thinking about the lives I had always imagined. These movies nurtured the seeds that were planted early in my schooling; they began to grow and affect my understanding of what was happening around me, in places that I had always just imagined as home, as safe and familiar. It was these movies that began to make me realize not only that the lives of my family and those people I lived around were intertwined with the lives of people on the "bad" sides of town-- that in many ways, by living where we did we were more complicit in the difficulty of their lives than we could ever imagine by creating distance, and believing that our lives had nothing to do with each other.

When I went to college at the University of Pennsylvania, an Ivy League school in the middle of Philadelphia, I had trouble fitting into the social scene of college (fraternities). I would go for long walks into the city, through West Philadelphia, where the school is located, past the 30th Street Station, to the Gallery (a mall in the center of the city). As I walked I noted changes in the people that I passed. Once I left the school's borders, which were at the time becoming more and more fortified with high-end shops, I would see many more people of color, mostly black men and women. In my first week

[34] Particularly films by African American Male Auteurs such as John Singleton, Spike Lee and Mario Van Peebles that explored black urban life as well as issues surrounding race.

orientation to the University, I attended a lecture on being street smart; I was being told to be wary of the neighborhood in which the school was located.

Sometime during my second year, I was struggling with my own social anxieties. I was also taking classes in psychology, and so would spend time on my walks teasing apart my anxieties and fears. I parsed through my reactions to social stimuli, to other people and public spaces. I noted that when I passed black men in puffy jackets I became inexplicably tense, and I recognized these reactions were inappropriate. I began to wonder about when I had been told to lock the doors as a kid when my parents drove through the "bad" sides of town.

At the University, I went to movies at the nearest theatre, which no longer exists, but at the time was a local theatre in a bit of disrepair.[35] I went to many bigger Hollywood films, but also went to see movies with predominantly black casts, such as *The Wood* and *The Brothers*. As a child of the suburbs going to an "inner city" movie theatre, especially when it was very crowded (as was the case with each of the movies above), provided me with an entirely different cinema-going experience. There was much more audience response; there was more laughter; more clapping, and most surprising, people talking directly to the characters on screen.

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[35] Cinemagic was subsequently torn down to be replaced with an art house cinema as part of the University's plan to "improve" the neighborhood. The project was taken up by another group, which opened another, more mainstream, cinema. As per the clientele of the new theatre I can only project that the plan to gentrify— to displace the poorer, predominantly black, population that lived in this area, was successful; Judith Rodin, the president of the University of Pennsylvania at the time, wrote a book about her experiences and efforts to "revitalize" the neighborhood, *The University & Urban Revival* (Rodin, 2007).

My time at the University of Pennsylvania outside of classes could be outlined by these types of experiences, the discomfort or unease I felt at the University, and the contrasting comfort I found outside of the University, in the city (places of varying degrees of familiarity— punk shows, the hole in the wall diners, the "First Friday" open art galleries, the streets, record stores). My experiences in the movie theater are still salient many years later. In sharp contrast to the parties and events scheduled for University students, I felt much more comfortable in this space, which existed outside of the experiences I had had through my entire life. Ironically, while I had spent most of my life having certain prejudices about these kinds of spaces, I felt welcomed when I entered them. In the college events I often felt like an outsider, but in these spaces I felt like a part of the crowd or community.

This also happened in the class in which I did the best academically, a course on Jazz History. The instructor was a performer from the Philadelphia area, with connections to many of the local musicians and some of the figures that we studied in our course. One day our class went as a group to the house where the saxophonist and composer John Coltrane kicked his heroin habit, where his cousin Mary[36] lived. This house is in North Philadelphia, the area of Philadelphia which is often referred to as Philadelphia's most dangerous neighborhood-- the "bad" side of town. It is the side of town with larger black and Hispanic populations, and with increased rates of poverty and all of the problems associated with it.

[36] Cousin Mary is the namesake of the second track on one of John Coltrane's seminal albums *Giant Steps.*

At Cousin Mary's house, we learned about her growing up with John Coltrane. We learned about him practicing on a sawed off broomstick with nailed-on bottle caps when he took the bus as a kid. We learned about when he kicked his heroin habit. We learned about programs with the neighborhood, with youth, with gardening, that she was involved in with John Coltrane's son. On another evening our instructor took us to a Jazz club deep in the heart of the same neighborhood—filled with older black folk playing and listening to Jazz, people who welcomed us into their space and took time to ask us to dance, to listen and learn from them. In our classroom, our instructor would tell us how the musicians lives were plagued by many of the ills associated with living in a racist society; the ways that race clouded the history of Jazz as understood by the establishment (who "invented" it, who was a "serious" performer) stories of the musicians we were listening to; the ways that they were mistreated by law enforcement. We learned about the roles these figures played in the civil rights movement and the ways their music reflected their struggles (on personal level as well as more politically). Our instructor, a white woman by appearance, taught us about the music she loved, the music that was how she made her life and living. In turn she taught us about the people, the places and experiences that the music grew from; she cracked the walls of the ivory tower to give her students a glimpse of the world outside of the gentrified fortress the university was working so hard to assemble.

We were awarded extra credit on exams if we could recall stories from the class, if we could recall the personal stories of the musicians, or the significance of their work in a larger historical narrative. I did not always remember what instruments were played

on which record, or what era of jazz it would be included in, but I could always remember these stories.

During my final year at the University, a friend of a friend played organ at a church beyond the borders of the University. We would walk on the stretch of concrete that bridged over the highway, which took us into a side of town we never ventured into in our daily experience as college students. The church was an old church in considerable disrepair, with a very tiny congregation of about 20 mostly elderly folk of Barbadian descent. On the couple of Sundays that we showed up the people welcomed us with warm hugs and handshakes; we ate home cooked food in the basement and heard about their lives and their families.

These experiences are a select few, but it was in the midst of these that I began to notice how gentrification worked. It was not meant to raise the quality of life in a place, but instead to displace certain people in order to create the illusion that the world is safer, cleaner and more "well-off" than it really is—pathologizing the folk on the Outside. The more I was exposed to the places outside the walls of the University and the more I interacted with people in these places, the more clearly I saw how much time the University spent establishing itself as separate from the neighborhood that surrounded it.

It was not hard to connect the dots and recognize the danger in suburban lifestyles like the one that raised me; the active ignorance on the part of many of the students (often including myself) and the University of the people living in the surrounding areas became more evident. There was no easy institutional route to being a more active part of these communities, and so my experiences, beyond a tutoring program with a local school,

were limited. These spaces, to this day, still hold lessons for me despite the fog of memory that makes the details hard to recall. These spaces triggered a more critical awareness in me of race or class; but more importantly they held (hold) lives, families, love— and I was given opportunities to see this (opportunities not readily afforded by the university). The humanity in these places became something I could not ignore. The connection between my bussed-in friends' lives, and the injustice of the idea of a "bad" side of town, became clearer. The people in these places were not ignoring me or dismissing my reality; they could not. I was aware that these places existed or that there was endemic poverty, sickness and violence; yet I learned that the people in these places fought to exist in them, simply so lives could be lived. I learned that the real fight could not simply be against poverty (middle class actions of charity, of tutoring or food and coat drives, began to seem band-aids to a much bigger cut). To exist in these places was a fight against the political, financial, architectural and geographic power of a belief in "bad" sides of town that continued the same conditions that create both poverty and comfortable middle-class white lives.

The movie theatre, Cousin Mary's home, the dive jazz bar, the Barbadian church, and the streets of Philadelphia were thresholds that exposed me, ever so briefly, to worlds similar to those that I previously had only ever imagined, worlds where my grade school friends disappeared when they hopped on the bus home. These were instructive spaces that caused me to question what I had been "protected" from each time we locked the doors. I saw lives, lives no less valuable than the ones I grew up around in the comfort of the neighborhoods where I was raised, being brushed aside, pushed away to make room

for me and others like me, to live comfortably, in ignorant bliss, while I received a college degree.

The Line: Teaching and crossing borders. After college, I found my way— slowly— to teaching in the places that had been displaced to make room for my own "higher" education, the marginalized geographies that I knew growing up as the bad neighborhoods. It was only after my own formative educational experiences, and attempts to find my own place in the comfortable white world that I was a product of, that I began to work in these places that I had only begun venturing into as a college student (at the same time that I was complicit in drawing the boundaries around them). It still would be a long time before I began living in them.

As a college graduate, with about three years of failed attempts at finding a job in the music industry behind me, I decided to focus on a career in education. I had always enjoyed working with children and had a misconception that as a teacher I would have time to pursue other artistic and musical projects. I had studied and lived for a while in Melbourne Australia, and was not happy with United States' politics. I imagined that everything that was wrong with the United States was right in Melbourne. I then escaped a United States full of contradictory and upsetting politics to enter the *idea* of an ideal place. I lived there for three years. In this time, as I pursued a teaching degree and found myself in primary school classrooms, the seeds nurtured by movies like *Higher Learning* and my experiences in Philadelphia began to sprout, to make sense, to push me back into the ambiguity of life in the United States.

My first two years in Australia were spent receiving a teaching degree. The final stage of this degree was a 10-week internship in a classroom. In order to get an internship I had to apply for interviews, interview at different schools and then list my top choices, while schools listed theirs. After several interviews, I was struggling with my top two choices. One of the schools was where I was doing my student teaching at the time, a primary school not unlike the one I had gone to as a kid: an upper middle-class, white, high performing public k-6 school in a more well off suburb, that privileged a type of curricular "creativity" as long as it followed a traditional classroom approach (single teacher, desks, teacher-developed curriculum focused on state standards). The other school was located in the midst of government commissioned apartment buildings: the projects. The school was a k-12 school that had Steiner (Waldorf) classrooms and a Reggio Emilia inspired (REI) k-3 classroom in addition to more traditional classrooms. The school was at the center of much University researchers' work, and the student population was predominantly poorer and often refugee, immigrant and Aboriginal Australian; in the Steiner classroom there were more wealthy white students (some of the more "progressive" parents put there students in the REI classroom, but the demographics of the REI classroom more closely resembled the rest of the school). In the REI classroom there were 60 students, 3 teachers, a couple of aids, another intern and several student teachers that came in and out of the classroom.

As I made my decision there were two points of consideration. First, I was confronted with a different approach to education, an REI approach, which centered on values of community and democracy versus the more familiar traditional, though

“progressive”, approach. Second, though not unrelated, I was making a choice between teaching children more similar to my bussed in friends (from families and lives I could only imagine— poorer folk, refugees, immigrants) and a population of children who, while Australian, were more familiar to me and my own familial and community experiences. As I listed my choices my first was the less familiar one and, luckily, the teachers in that classroom made a similar choice, regarding me.

On an outing with teachers from the suburban school, one of them began talking about how “dangerous” it was where I was doing my internship, how “disrespectful” the students were there. She spoke with authority about the students at this school, yet there was nothing to back up this authority except hearsay, a story or two about extreme trouble students at the school got into. I wondered about her intentions, but remained silent in the face of her disregard and positioning of “them” outside of what is right (lawful, well-behaved, correct) and safe. In listening to her, I became even more committed to going to this school. I wrote the teacher I had been working with at the suburban school regarding my decision:

> I’m a bit frightened by such a large class and range of years and venturing outside of the comfortable white middle class schools I have spent my entire life and teaching rounds in, but I thought it important to put myself into an uncertain environment for the internship where I will really have to stretch myself before I maybe get thrown into such a situation in a job, where Id have no experience […] (personal correspondence 5/26/2005)

Even as I made this decision, and was admitting my own lack of knowledge about the lives of these students—"an uncertain environment", "I'd have no experience"—I was still approaching this classroom with my own prejudices about it, imagining that after my teacher training I might get "thrown into" such a school, as if, compared to the suburban schools I was used to, this was a deadly lion's den (one of the most unsafe metaphors I could have possibly used).

My experience as an intern in the REI classroom, full of teachers and 60 students ranging in age from 5 to 9, contrasted with my other experiences of schools as a student and a student teacher. Students were confident and unafraid to get things wrong, to ask the teachers or each other for help. Students did not want to leave the classroom; there were also several parents who would often be in the classroom and not want to leave. The classroom, however, was not without its problems (of varying import). The students were underperforming according to all of the measures of performance that the state of Victoria put forward. The teachers, volunteers, and student teachers, were predominantly white, while the classroom was very diverse (and this was not at the time a focus of professional development). Of course, for similarly located schools with similar populations, these are commonplace problems. That, however, is not an excuse. I often wonder about the validity of the decision to assume a particular curricular approach, whose origins grew from parental concern and beliefs about education and democracy,[37]

[37] The history of the Reggio Emilia preschools is strongly connected to organizing efforts of working women; women organized and convened meetings to determine how they wanted to educate their youngest children in a strongly socially democratic community in the wake of fascism in the mid century.

yet without community input and often resenting the need to justify itself in the face of rare parental uncertainty.

At the same time, the beauty in this classroom was in the ways children would help each other, the curiosity and confidence with which they approached the world and asked questions, and the continual work on the part of the teachers to find out more about the students and their families to act as advocates. In short, while students underperformed according to the state measures of performance, and could be seen as academically challenged or troubled, these students as a whole were at a level of maturity in their social and world interactions that many more "gifted" children of the same age do not display. While not valued by state standards, with the large number of students of various ages, these were valuable traits and gifts in this classroom.

As a result of my internship, I became convinced at first that the difference in the classroom had something to do with curriculum, that it was a systemic answer. I believed the confidence of the children emerged from an approach to teaching and learning that centered on documentation, on following children's' interests. I approached my actual job interviews with more traditional schools talking about these beliefs. I was regarded with hesitance; when I would talk about documenting learning each day with photographs and stories, the administrators and teachers involved asked how I would find the time. When I spoke about allowing the class to decide what might be exciting to learn they glanced at me with concern, and at times, contempt. I walked proudly into interview after interview believing I had answers.

I finally found a job in another REI school; in my only year of classroom teaching, I taught first grade in an outlying suburb about forty minutes from the city. While geographically each school was very different, one in the middle of the city and the other in an almost rural area, the population that I taught was very similar to the other school with almost half of the local population born overseas— many of the students were recent arrivals or first generation immigrants and refugees. The town's demographics had changed much in the 20 years prior to my year there, a town of "white flight"; it became a home for many recent immigrants and refugees as a large portion of the white population moved closer to the city of Melbourne. The classrooms were a bit different. At this school classrooms were separated by grade. I worked with 2 other teachers with about 40 students (the number was not constant). While this school had a similar focus on student driven curriculum, exploration, project-based learning, and documentation, where the first school worked hard to be an open space (both during school-time and in transition) this school focused much more on skill learning, particularly in literacy and mathematics.

As I went through my year of teaching, I began to notice that while there was real value placed on where the students were coming from, I was also spending a lot of time and energy teaching students (especially those who had just come from overseas) what began to feel more and more like the arbitrary rules of "school".

There were Pacific Islander, Eastern European, Turkish, African, Afghani, Vietnamese and Cambodian children. There were poorer white children, and then one or two who came from more well off families. Many of the families, while always very

gracious in meetings or at open school evenings and other special occasions, remained largely outside the decision making of the school, which was always talking about how to be respectful and to value the diversity of its community. I questioned the approach of a school that claimed ideological inheritance from a group of Italian parents who were concerned about how to educate their kids and determined methods over time through community organizing and meetings; yet, this school never took the time to follow some similar community organizing and democratic hard-work before deciding on its approach to curriculum. I can now see that on open school nights, or during parent-teacher conferences, the school environment was neither a familiar nor a necessarily welcoming space for many of the parents. While I learned so much from having these students and meeting their parents, the possibility to build beyond a discussion of what foods we liked and what the flag of a home country might be was limited by the needs and understanding of what school provides, as well as my own failure to realize that my imagination of their lives was not enough. There was at least one teacher who interacted with her students' families outside of school (and not only the white students) but this was not something I ever did or anything the school ever encouraged.

I left teaching in Australia. At the time, I believed that education would best be served through the networking of community learning organizations which were appearing while schools closed (i.e. Museum and Orchestral education programs, tutoring programs, etc.). However, my own understanding of the spaces in any city was still very particular and ignored the possibility in the places where my students were from, and the

places where I had learned so much and found so much of a connection as an undergraduate in Philadelphia.

In Melbourne, I traveled from one side of town to another, from bar to coffee shop to bookstore, into and around its many trendy alleyways. I realize, in recollection, that there were still large parts of the map of the city and its surrounding areas that were left out of my consciousness. No matter my growing interest, and the investment I felt in my students' lives, their lives still occurred in another realm—an entirely different physical space—outside of my understanding or experience. However, this was self-imposed. I was no longer closed in by virtue of being a child without a car or means of transportation, being told to lock my car doors.

As an adult, I had become successful at ignoring the reality of the different worlds that my students inhabited, unaware that I was simply imagining them. This imagination, which was a necessity when I wondered as a child where my friends went home to, had become the default way I worked past and ignored the real geographic divide between my white middle-class world and theirs. From my childhood through the beginning of my career, I learned how to keep entire communities' real worlds out of my understanding and knowledge of where I lived and where I was from.

My knowledge of where I lived, the place in which I found my home, was in this way ignorant and dismissive of the spaces where the students I spent my time with marked their paths and in which they wrote life stories[38]. As much as I imagined the life-

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[38] In high school, I lived for a month in eastern Germany shortly after reunification. I was shown a schoolbook with a map of the Soviet World. Everything outside of the communist countries was indiscriminate space, a no-man's-land distant and lacking

world of my students, I also was living in my own imaginary place. I could have discovered, learned, and come to a better understanding about the world and the people (students and families) I was working with, had it not been for this force of imagination. By imagining these lives, and not stepping toward knowing them, I gave myself the ability to author their lives (in a way to have more control over my own). When I was accepted into a PhD program, I was being given even more authority over these lives—to shape not only my own but other people's understanding and knowledge about them.

I applied to PhD programs focused on how networking-learning opportunities across institutions within cities and neighborhoods might create richer and deeper educative fabrics of space. It still was not clear to me how my understanding of "place" was still deeply influenced by the settler culture (Tuck & Yang, 2012) of which I am a part, which raised me. After teaching, I saw the problem as contained within the education system, within schools as institutions. I thought the answer was as simple as rethinking how cities are designed, incorporating learning experiences more fundamentally into their infrastructure. I moved into a neighborhood that I thought pursued many of these ideas, where I saw more diversity surrounding the neighborhood than in other parts of the city where I was looking to move. Across from my house there were apartments full of African and African American folk. I was only a few blocks away from a neighborhood with one of the most concentrated East African populations. In another direction, I was only a couple of blocks away from one of the largest American Indian communities not on a reservation.

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detail--a blank space whose borders were defined by the Soviet-Communist world. Similarly, these other neighborhoods defined the borders of where I lived.

A year into my pursuit of a PhD I wrote these words:

> Overall, I perceive a need […] to understand the importance of the pedagogical act […Which] includes listening, but also encouraging a deeper engagement and communication with oneself, other people, traditions, cultures, places […] I have personally been attempting to cross boundaries […] I am also beginning to pursue opportunities for engagement with these issues outside of the University, and will hopefully be further along in this process by the end of the summer. This engagement with individuals communities [outside of the University] is important not only in as much as it will inform my research, but also in an understanding of my place in the Twin Cities.

I was beginning to recognize a need to engage on a more personal level with people, to share lives, as we share the same place. I recognized a need to know where I live, as somebody who values the education in sharing lives. I recognized that it was possible that my world was too one-dimensional. Yet the lives I imagined connecting with were not those Africans and African Americans across the street from where I live. They were mostly the lives of people I was familiar with.

A friend who was an undergraduate and I organized dinners for people to come together and tell stories of their lives. While my friend and I kept having conversations about how to make our dinners more diverse, more inclusive of the community near us, we never actively invited people outside of our circles in; instead of seeing the diversity of the community near us, we saw how far our circles stretched. Yet, however far they

stretched they hardly touched those lives that encircled ours— the African refugees, the American Indian community. The boundaries were geographical as well as relational.

In the next year I became involved in a "school" that focused on work with Immigrant and Refugee elders and youth that was held twice a week in the evening at a high school in a part of town with a large immigrant population, under the auspices of teaching toward the citizenship test. Much of the time with the people in this school was spent in a circle telling stories, thinking about issues. Parents and elders would go to circles demarcated by language and geographic origins (Hmong, East African, Spanish Speaking) and their children would go to a room for youth. There were also many high school aged youth, mostly Hmong, who showed up to get help with their homework. I spent time in the Spanish-speaking circle, in the Hmong circle, and in the youth circle. At this school, the connection between people was, by design, much more familiar. Even if they weren't family, elder Somali women would look after younger women, the elders in many of the circles looked to teach the predominantly white college aged volunteers language as much as the volunteers looked to teach them. There was a role for the elders in these circles. The Hmong women laughed about their shared experiences. Some of the older Hmong folk laughed and shook their heads at the younger white folk and the fact that nobody spoke the same language. Once, the interpreter told me, "She thinks it is great that you are trying to help, but she would like to work with somebody who speaks Hmong because this is not very helpful". I laughed but felt horrible; it was a bitter pill.

I spent most of my time with the youth, helping young people in high school who were still new to the English language to try and find their way around assignments that

asked them to define highlighted words, to repeat the main points of a chapter in a text book. I sat down with some of these teenagers and watched the YouTube videos of Hmong folk singing Rhianna covers. This school connected me with people not unlike those that constituted some of the diversity that bordered my neighborhood, yet I was still not connected to those people across the street. I also spent significant time noting, with a bit of self-righteous criticism, that beyond the few younger folk who acted as interpreters most of the volunteers and people who worked for the school were white and college aged or just out of college. I noted that so many of us did not come from the same neighborhood as many of the people in the school; I imagined that by making this realization I became somehow absolved, that making this kind of observation or critique might be enough.

At the same time, I ran around with little girls in their hijabs playing soccer in the gym; I laughed as we avoided the wooden ball that the Hmong boys kicked over the Volleyball nets while doing acrobatics. I nodded hello to the elders from the different circles. Sometimes, at the end of the evening I would be asked to bring somebody home, to drive a family back to the apartment building where they lived. I made turns off the highway at exits I only ever passed, which I never really noticed. I sometimes criticized the space (in a way embarassingly lacking in self-reflection)for the divide between the white college aged volunteers and the people coming to the school. Yet, despite these criticisms this space was responsible for the fact that I was beginning to share space with other people and doors were being cracked open.

I volunteered at this school as part of a research assistantship with a side project where a small group of people from the different circles met to discuss ways of crossing borders between each linguistic, cultural and age group. This was a multi-lingual, cross-generational group of people. Before a meeting I would sometimes be called to pick up the elder from the group who had immigrated from Mexico or the older woman who was a refugee from Somalia from their apartments. We would go to somebody's home, or meet in a community center. At our meetings, we would eat together. We talked about where we came from. We would talk about what was important to us, and what we were learning from each other. At one meeting, a Somalian man just a few years older than me talked about running away to see Mogadishu when he was very young, and the college age woman whose family was from Somalia listened intently, dreaming of the place she never had a chance to see, thinking about her family who were displaced and dispersed. I talked to the young Hmong men about where they came from, and they would tell me that the place they were from, the camp where they lived most of their lives, no longer existed, that the grass had grown long and the houses had been knocked down. I talked to these young men about their jobs in factories, about their lives; a couple of times I helped them with homework.

As the research assistant, I was supposed to meet with each person in the group to learn about them, to learn a bit of their story. I met one of the two young Hmong men from the group in a large dining hall next to an Asian grocery store where I had never been. I picked up the other from his home, a small house in the midst of other similarly sized and looking homes (a housing project), as he walked out with several other young

Hmong men. I met the two older Spanish-speaking men from the group in a coffee shop, and listened to their stories about what it meant to grow up "black" in Peru, and as a communist activist student in college in Mexico.

The tools that the small cross-cultural group shared with outside groups, our research product, became the processes we were engaged in: the stories we told each other, the questions we asked, the games we played, the food we ate together. In our time together we were becoming friends with shared values and shared laughter. One night at the end of a meeting, the older Somali woman spoke, and the younger woman translated. She told us that after all of these evenings together she could see me as a friend, that before these experiences she would have walked past me, but that now when she saw me she would say "hi", or if she saw somebody like me, she would think for a second about our time together. I nodded. The same was true for me. My world, within the space of the Twin Cities, was growing in complexity, in depth and dimension. I realized how little these people in this group were a part of my life. The older African women that I passed daily suddenly connected to a place in my heart and not just my imagination of a diverse place.

Despite this realization, I can still see so much distance between the ways in which and places where I am more comfortable. I still walk past these women almost daily, and yet I have not set foot into the African markets that dot my walking path to the local co-op. I also have not reached out to any of my African and African American neighbors that live in the apartment buildings across from my house (other than one time to help a man to his feet).

A few months after the meeting where I nodded to affirm what my new friend had said, I watched from the safety of my upstairs window, as the police pulled eight men out of the apartment building, and then after an hour of pulling them one-by-one into their cars, let them go. I cried with frustration, but I did nothing.

It was not until recently that it became clear that much of the diversity, where I live, mostly borders my neighborhood; that the white owned homes sit inside a border created by tall "projects" that house most of the men and women who came to America from Africa can be seen walking up and down the main street. The local association of which I am a part is more concerned with smokers standing in parking lots, the height and materials of fences, or the color of houses, than with the limitations and possibilities of the privilege that positions them as authorities over other lives and ways of being (including the low-cost housing which sits at one end of the avenue).

I have slowly become aware of myself as a part of this privilege and self-congratulating political posturing; I have not been a part of community action that does happen because I am often suspicious and so rest with my criticism. I am beginning to realize that it is important to unsettle the places like those where I was raised (and where I have chosen to live) in how I encounter them both in the present and in memory. In order for my critical lens to be effectual, I also need to change my habits in these spaces, to see and be in them differently.

The Outside: The Hmong market.

For colonized peoples many local communities have been made through deliberate policies aimed at putting people on reserves which are often out of

> sight, on the margins. […] Communities have also made themselves, however, despite policies aimed at fragmenting family bonds and separating people from their traditional territories. (Smith, 1999, p. 126)

As I became more aware of my involvement in the boundary making between my experiences and relationships and the lives and experiences of people on the Outside— the friends who were bussed in as a kid, the people in the city surrounding the University of Pennsylvania, the families of the students that I taught in Australia, and the people who live across the street, and just a few blocks away from my home in the Twin Cities— I fell in love with a woman, Kalia, who grew up in the refugee camps of Thailand for the first six years of her life before coming to Minnesota; a Hmong woman whose family had been displaced from its home in the mountains of Laos, by the American Secret war, and the genocide that followed. Our first meeting took place in a Hmong owned restaurant, and many meetings after this took place in various places unfamiliar and unknown to me, but central to her experiences: the Hmong flea market; the Hmong new year celebration at the Metrodome; a local lake where many Hmong folk take walks, go for runs, play games and go fishing; and various other Asian grocery stores and restaurants. As I went to each of these places, it became clear that each of these spaces was a familiar space to Kalia in a similar way that the town where I was raised was familiar to me, and the places that my family and I had always lived were familiar. The difference was that these were outside of those places, that they were much less white and less limited by certain rules that I had learned to take for granted in the suburban world that raised me. While the kinds of places where I grew up and the kinds

of rules that governed those places have been continually present in Kalia's experiences throughout her life, the spaces which raised Kalia were outside of my consciousness, and possibly would have never entered it had it not been for this relationship.

Since the beginning of our relationship the number of Hmong flea markets in St Paul has increased from one to two. We go at least twice a month to catch the sounds, the smells, the colors, to hear the language being spoken and see (what have become for me, and always have been for Kalia) the familiar faces of Hmong folk. From the first time Kalia had us meet at the older market, it was clear to me that there was something important occurring in this space. As I watch episodes of television shows like *Anthony Bourdain's No Reservations* I can see it is a familiar type of space around the world. On my and Kalia's honeymoon in Mexico, we experienced a similar space outside of the touristy area where we were staying. In the Twin Cities, however, it is not such a familiar site. Most markets are more orderly and geared towards a white English speaking crowd; most of the flea and farmers markets carry souvenirs familiar to Midwestern folk of European descent, white middle-class people who go for an experience and to spend money on trinkets and fresh produce.

In many of the markets in the cities there is a more apparent consciousness towards a public image, towards "events" and promotions. The Hmong market, while bustling and crowded, has few of these affectations. There is the fresh produce, there is stall after stall carrying medicinal herbs and lotions, clothes, CDs and DVDs, and prepared foods, but it is not for a white audience; these markets act mostly as a public space for Hmong folk to gather and to find the foods, clothes, music and movies, that

help them make a home in this foreign place, in the spaces left on the sides of town more affluent white folk avoid.

Early on in our relationship, Kalia and I took my mother to the flea market to experience the sights, food, and movement, to give her a sense of the places that raised Kalia. My mother entered the space with us. She was excited by the children running in every direction; disoriented by the music, sung poetry and video narrations in Hmong emanating from the various DVD and CD booths; and amazed at the colors of the various clothing hanging in the stalls. [39]

We were walking toward the food court when an older Hmong man approached us. He walked with a limp and a cane; he was thin and missing a few teeth. Kalia had never met him before. He spoke with Kalia in Hmong; they smiled and nodded. He shook my hand. He then spoke in broken English, "You go to New Year?" I explained that we planned on going, but had not yet bought tickets. Kalia translated. He responded. He looked at my mother and me, "You stay here," and then he said something in Hmong to Kalia. When he left Kalia explained that he was buying tickets for Mom to go to the New Year so she could see the Hmong youth in their traditional costumes, "our proud and beautiful young people in all of their colors."

The man came back with two tickets. He was smiling. My mother asked, "How do I say thank you again?" Kalia and I responded, "*Ua Tsaug*." "Watch ow" was my mother's reply. Kalia later explained that he must have spent a significant portion of his

[39] Kalia taught my mother about the different costumes, "Those are for funerals", "Those are Thai dresses", "That's what the green Hmong wear", "These are the actual skirts I'd wear on a formal occasion: each pleat has been hand ironed so they are really heavy… These are the lighter ones that we wear for convenience"

monthly social security on those tickets; my mother could have easily paid for them, but his generosity was not something to refuse and it spoke volumes about the people, about being in this place. By being here we were showing ourselves, we were being present to the realities of the people in this place. This was a gift that he was giving us with pride, a gift not to be squandered and co-opted, but experienced.

I noted this was a gift that I needed to always be open to--to be a guest who listens and learns, not a tourist who marks space for his own rest and enjoyment to placate his own imagination and fantasy. In the market, my mom and I stood out as people from the places that actively displace poorer and non-white folk like this man. We were coming into the place that welcomes him, that feels familiar, that doesn't push him away. Here he could welcome us and trust us with this gift: to learn more, to see more, to *be with* more.

We walked on. I was unsure of how to catalogue that experience or how to talk about it. I thought it very unusual, and extremely kind. It was hard for me to believe that that man, who seemingly had little to offer, would buy tickets for my mother to go to the New Year celebration, simply so she could experience more of his people. Kalia beamed with pride for the people she came from, and their own pride and generosity. I could see tears in both my mother's and Kalia's eyes.

We visited Kalia's aunt and uncle who have a booth in the market, and her aunt gave her a hug while admonishing me, "This one better learn Hmong", (as was interpreted later) with a sharp glance in my direction. Kalia's cousin a couple booths away put some oranges in a bag for my mother to take home. My mother tried to pay, but the money was refused.

Almost two years later, another market was built. Kalia and I often visit the markets. Sometimes we bring her mother to one or the other to do some shopping. Sometimes we introduce a friend to the space and the food. Every time my presence as a foreigner is notable in the glances that people throw in my direction, the smiles from the older women, their curiosity and their comments to Kalia about how handsome they think I am (I have come to learn this has more to do with height than anything else). However, as time passes, there have been more and more non-Hmong folk in the aisles, particularly in the food courts where they can buy sausages and sticky rice, papaya salad, pho, and a multitude of other prepared foods. Kalia and I bring our friends there. It is a favorite place, a place we try and share.

In the week following Kalia's and my wedding, we took my nephews who were visiting from out of town—aged 3 and 6 at the time— to the new market. When I went to the bathroom, Kalia took the boys to a market stall selling produce. She asked them to identify the fruit and then to smell it, as there are so many fruits that we never see at the chain grocery stores. They looked and they guessed; the man behind the stall smiled and helped with the identification of the fruit if Kalia or the boys got it wrong. We moved on. Kalia's cousin walked out from behind her stacks of greens and fruits, and gave each of the boys a big hug and smile. The boys responded politely, standing straight for her as Kalia told them who this stranger was.

We walked on, and slowly the boys realized that other children were running freely through the market with no immediate or visible supervision. The youngest nephew took a chance to look at the balloons of Batman and Dora that were tied to a post

at one stall. He pointed at each of the vending machines and asked what they were, and I responded in turn; another little boy sitting in a rolling chair spun around and played this game with my nephew and me. He told my nephew what each machine held. We took the boys to the food court, and bought baked eggs, papaya salad, sticky rice and sausage, and rice noodle salad. My older nephew enjoyed the "pasta" (rice noodle salad) while my younger nephew tore through the eggs. We got them bubble tea. As they finished, they asked if they could run around. They started running back and forth through the hallway of the food court as people walked by.

Children running freely through the space are not out of place at the Market. Still I worried that my nephews might not have fully realized the unwritten rules children in that space understand (I also worried because of my own understanding of what is and is not permitted in public spaces such as this). Kalia, however, was not worried, and unlike other children in the space, my nephews had me following after them at every turn. As I stopped them and asked them to sit down when their play turned to wrestling, a group of boys about 9 and 10 started talking to Kalia. They guessed the boys' ages as well as Kalia's and mine. They celebrated when they guessed correctly, and then commented on how tall my nephews were. My nephews were shy, but these boys were not; they smiled and joked with Kalia as if she was an aunt or a big sister, even though she was a stranger. As we left, Kalia offered them our left over food (significant portions of sticky rice and papaya salad), and they happily accepted. All of my life I had been taught to be suspicious and avoid strangers, and yet these boys had no fear of Kalia and me.

These stories of this place show how it continually teaches me about welcoming, about a localized pedagogy. It encourages familiarity. There is less noticeable concern about controlling[40] certain people and ways of doing things. For Kalia and myself, It is not only the bigger space that is familiar, but also tiny enclaves within it have become ports of call of varying familiarity. Kalia has two cousins with stalls at the newer market and we usually will stop by to say hello, to find out what is happening in their lives, to hold a baby, and to talk to them and their children; Kalia's sister has also opened a stall there, which she uses as a law office, a space to meet clients and to do paperwork (we have been there when family appears, a cousin or two; their children hold each other's hands and run from stall to stall—always aware of home base at Kalia's sister's office). We have our favorite place to get laab (meat salad); we know where the best papaya salads of different varieties are. On each visit we learn about new ways in which we are connected to each of the operations (so and so's mother, cousin, aunt, etc.).

Each time we go, I am transfixed by the freedom with which young children move. They will run around the market, often returning to the safety of one of the stalls: once I saw a little girl with her sister eating candy pass a toddler of no relation; the toddler put out his hand, and the little girl gave him some of the candy she was eating.

I see children doing handstands in the doorways and children who have just gotten out of school, but whose parents are at work, sitting at small chairs and digging

[40] This is occasionally taken advantage of: A couple of years ago, some people selling gold for cash were stealing gold necklaces from small children and older women. There are also often very aggressive fundamentalist Christian missionaries walking through the space telling people they are going to hell if they do not accept Jesus Christ as their savior.

through their backpacks to get their homework. This is not only a marketplace. It is a place where people live their lives and spend their days.

The way that this space acts in the lives of the people who go there often was evident one day when Kalia and I went as a storm was brewing outside. There was a lot of laughter and so Kalia interpreted: “They said, ‘it is raining, we can stay here until it stops’” As the sentiment echoed throughout the halls and stalls, Kalia heard a faint voice from the corner, “We can pretend it is a nightclub!” And then, another wave of laughter.

The neighborhood where I grew up was in many ways similar to the market in my own experience— as it was familiar to me. I learned many lessons about where I grew up. I heard stories that connected it to the stories of my father and his parents. I heard about the history of different locations, I could see through time when I walked through the hallways at my school, played on the playground or rode my bike around the block.

A lot of my history was in and near those places in that neighborhood. The stories about that place that my dad or grandmother told me were how I learned to feel at home and to feel comfortable in building relationships, they were foundational to how I created my own place in that neighborhood. Yet, this sense of familiarity and the possibility it held for a localized pedagogy was undermined by the less explicit lessons of that neighborhood: I learned that there was a bad side of town where we needed to lock our doors; I learned that the black kids who got bussed in for school could quickly disappear after misbehaving; I learned that I was fortunate to have what I have and that I should help others by feeding them soup, donating cans of food, or giving to charity; I learned what I thought was truth, that everybody lived like me, and if they did not, they wanted

to. As a result of these lessons I thought I knew that the world was full of bad places, and figured that what was good, was where I was— what was familiar.

Of course, this is a simplification. As the child of a more affluent family, my parents used their money to take me abroad to Europe to meet relatives in Sweden and family friends in Denmark. They took me to England and France, and encouraged me to do a summer abroad in Germany in high school. We went to roadside museums and learned about battlefields and archeological sites. They taught me that the world was bigger than where I was from, and yet I never was encouraged to venture into those bad sides of towns. There was a sense that there was nothing to learn there, that those were places people just wanted to escape from. While it may be true that those places were less safe than where I came from, where I came from was not necessarily safe for everybody, as the black kids who were expelled and suspended from my grade school could attest. I adventured on the other side of the globe, in cities different but still somewhat familiar, and yet spaces near my home remained a mystery. These were places where I would have met the children my future wife grew up with, places where I would have experienced the world in a way very different from where I was brought up, places where I could accept food from strangers, where other kids would give me candy if I asked for it, where I could run and run and run.

Part 2: Transgressing the Line, Unsettling the Centre

> Because the activities that make a space loose are different from the primary, intended ones (or occur in the absence of them), there is often some uncertainty about what is legal or socially acceptable. (Franck & Stevens, 2007, p.4)

Personal experience, and shared experiences (including those shared over time, and across generations through stories) are central to what I understand as truth: what I know, the decisions I make, the ways I interact with other people; the ideas, places, things and interactions in which I place value. Each of these experiences, whether I recognize it or not, is tied to the spaces in which they occur; what is learned depends on how I take notice. How I take notice, and what I learn, depends on my comfort in any given space, and disruptions of my assumptions about and expectations of a space.

As I have explored more and more the comfort of where I grew up, of where I learned to be part of society, it has become clearer that the idea of a "bad" side of town greatly influenced my understanding of what is "good" and what belongs. The ideal of comfort greatly depends on this idea of what does and does not belong. These expectations strictly define boundaries and entry to the places where I come from, those white settler spaces, the "Centre" as described by Smith (1999, pp. 51-53) based not only on ideas of class and race, but in addition, on a complicated set of behaviors that are deemed acceptable. What belongs are behaviors that necessitate and perpetuate a specific way of seeing the world and in turn keeping difference separate from the expected, predictable, and "normal". The behaviors that are deemed acceptable are hard to pinpoint, but the many behaviors that do not fit are easy to determine. Where I come from there is such a deeply ingrained respect for authority that the focus of the respect is often not even the people that impose the rules, but the rules themselves. The respect for these rules in turn becomes a limitation to our ability to relate to, engage with, or try to understand people who do not (and often cannot) obey them.

Kalia's parents, aunts and uncles watch videos of their homeland, Laos; they talk to each other about what they remember, they share notes on where things were, what happened there. They have been torn from their home--the spaces in which they were most familiar-- by war, but they hold onto memories and share these with each other. The aunts and uncles all have gardens, they raise chickens, they cook many of the same foods as they did in the high mountains of Laos. They have been able to build a bit of the home they were displaced from here in the place where they landed. Walking into their gardens or chicken enclosures feels like taking a step into another place. Some of the comfort in these spaces emerges from the ways in which relationships are built with the place, the way that they can interact with the earth, with the chickens, the ways they move, the work they do in these spaces. When they step into the world that raised me, their actions become limited. They are watched by people like me, are shushed or stared at if they speak at the wrong time or move into a line in the wrong way.

Members of Kalia's family, like many other marginalized people, often have their experiences dismissed. They are told they are wrong and what can and cannot be true by people granted authority from the Centre; very often they are told that where they are from, or where they have settled, is damaged. The places where her family can act comfortably are limited and exist outside of the boundaries of what is authoritative. Kalia's father walks confidently to his chickens in the backyard and stands with pride next to his brothers at big family picnics, but at the Minnesota State Fair he stands cautiously behind his children and grandchildren. He asks me to go with him to buy a beer. His face cannot hide his concern, his sense of helplessness, and his fear. I try to

ease this fear but I know I cannot. I ask him what he wants. He shakes his head and tells me just a beer. I get in line, and notice he is waiting around the corner. I buy him a beer. He smiles and thanks me, and we walk back to where the family is standing, waiting. I walk next to him with a display of pride in an attempt to offset some of the judgment that he senses, that I can't always see, but know exists--especially as I look across from where we are all gathered and see a booth urging people to vote for an amendment to the constitution that would require voters to have photo I.D., an amendment geared toward limiting the voting power of people like Kalia and her father.[41] As many from Kalia's family step into the Centre, the space in which I was raised to feel comfortable, they become wary of the way they are judged, attentive to each of their actions.

It is important, in recognizing the ways in which the Centre severely limits movement, ignores experience and causes distress, to also recognize and highlight the ways in which this is acted against, to "discover practices that oppose a dominant will to fix spatial meanings and uses" (Stavrides, 2007**,** p. 174). The boundaries that define the Centre and the Outside need to be unsettled so that those of us in the Centre can meet the reality of the Outside and the limits of the Line. These acts of opposition "produce threshold spaces, those in-between areas that relate rather than separate" (p. 174).

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[41] This amendment was eventually defeated in the election. Still, according to a Brennan Center for Justice Report in reference to Voter ID laws and related voting law changes, "These new restrictions fall most heavily on young, minority, and low-income voters, as well as on voters with disabilities." (Weiser & Norder, 2011, p. 1). As a low-income minority voter (who also has limited English language ability), Kalia's parents would have been affected by the amendment that was being voted on by the Minnesota electorate.

These moments of loose space— where borders are crossed and transgressed— create opportunities for experiences, stories and ways of being to be present in certain spaces that are different than what is expected. As these are present, they are instructive regarding the myriad of ways people understand and interact with each other and the world. "Loose spaces allow for the chance encounter, the spontaneous event, the enjoyment of diversity and the discovery of the unexpected" (Franck & Stevens, 2007, p. 4) In these moments, new possibilities informed by the collective experience of being and becoming together are present.

Often, the borders between the Centre and the Outside are clear. Kalia's younger siblings, cousins, nieces and nephews cross the Line much more easily, but their home experience still rests Outside (separate from many of their peers and most of their teachers). They are more used to behaving according to the rules of the Centre; they also speak the language. Sometimes their language acts as a minor transgressive act: a dropped article, or a turn of phrase that causes some of us to groan about "horrible English," yet we are simultaneously exposed to new ways of using the language to carry meaning that rub against our expectations.

With the older generation in Kalia's family, the Line is much more evident and explicit. Most of her aunts and uncles speak limited English, and they often successfully maintain distance between themselves and the many institutions that keep the Centre at the center (banks, government, schools, hospitals). When they have to deal with legal matters they contact Kalia's sister, who then works with her knowledge of the law and within it's limits to create spaces of fairness for the family (in a typically unfair system**).**

Kalia's little brother goes to school, but her parents only go to the school building on rare occassions often sending Kalia or her sister in their stead.

The Line is not entirely inflexible. There are often moments when individuals from the Centre or the Outside are in the same space, but individuals from the Centre are unaware, or uncertain about how to transgress that line. Once, on a day when friends and family were invited to Kalia's younger brother's school to watch the students perform story telling, there was a coffee reception following the performance. Kalia and I stood with her mother as we watched the students play with each other. Around us, however, parents milled about and caught up, reestablishing connections.

Being present with Kalia's mother, I thought about how I am typically on the other side of that experience; in meetings and gatherings the Line between the Centre and the Outside is unconsciously reestablished. While talking to friends and acquaintances (most likely from similar schools, places of worship, neighborhoods or activities) it is easy to ignore (and not see) the unfamiliar lives that might be standing in the same room, but that are on the periphery of those experiences of the Centre.

Surgery. While it is important to recognize how the Centre and Outside are reestablished continually, and how this causes those of us in the Centre to miss opportunities for building relationships across the Line, it is also important to see in what ways the Centre space is unsettled by the presence of other people.

On the day when Kalia's dad was going into surgery to treat an infection that had been resting and growing in his ear since he was a little boy, Kalia and I woke up early

and drove to the hospital to meet Kalia's mother, father, older sister, her sister's husband, her brother, and an interpreter.

When Kalia's dad saw the interpreter his face changed from a contemplative expression to a broad smile. It turned out it was a friend from his youth in Laos. All of Kalia's uncles who were in town showed up to the hospital, and then slowly some of Kalia's cousins began to come. Eventually the waiting room was filled with Kalia's uncles, aunts and cousins. There were other people in the waiting room, but slowly our family had taken over a significant portion of the waiting room. One of Kalia's father's sisters came to the hospital with some rice and corn cakes; she placed them on a table and then asked everybody to have some. As Kalia's father went back to get prepared for surgery, more people showed up. During the pre-operation examination they realized they would have to remove more than they imagined from the bone behind his ear, and because of this the surgery would take longer than they expected. Kalia's father was not able come out to see all of the people who had gathered, to be there for him, for each other. The space became filled with Hmong language, with laughter, with stories being told and questions being asked. The cousins sat on the floor and looked at each other's phones. This was a family gathering that I had grown accustomed to.

Eventually a nurse asked us to move into a glassed enclosure, designed as a play space for children, because (as she told us) they were going to change the furniture in the section where we were seated. We crowded into this tiny room. The walls had pictures of animals in a zoo, Kalia and her cousins became more and more aware of the possibility

that we were similarly being quarantined as the new furniture they told us was the reason for us moving took longer and longer to arrive[42].

While there was a feeling that we were being quarantined, there were also signs of accommodation that the institution was willing to make. Despite the signs that made it clear food was not allowed some of us went to get some trays of food from a local Thai restaurant (we were given permission based on a request by Kalia's sister's husband, who also happens to be a white male). Kalia's aunt also brought trays of food. Some of the grandchildren of Kalia's aunts and uncles appeared. When the surgery was over, Kalia's dad's brothers went in groups of two to go see him. He was discharged later that day, and as they wheel-chaired his drugged up and traumatized body out of the post operating room, his brothers, sisters, sister-in-laws, nieces and nephews followed behind. We left and headed home.

Kalia told me that hospital staff have in the past told the family to be quiet. This time, nobody told us not to be quiet. For a short while, the surgery waiting room became a Hmong home full of cousins and aunts and uncles, full of Hmong language and food, and yet there was still a quarantining effect that happened in the solutions they came up with. There is a disjoint between Kalia's family's experiences of a surgery and the way a waiting room is designed by the rules and architecture of the Centre. However, this story also clearly illustrates how tiny actions by people in authority, that are likely against the rules (such as allowing for food to be eaten) can allow for a repurposing of space to open it to other people and experiences.

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[42] The furniture eventually did arrive.

Reflections and Continuation.

> Each of these acts may seem small and insignificant. But, Precisely because these acts do not require overburdening investment or infrastructure, they enable individuals and often small groups to effect changes in the otherwise hegemonic urban landscapes. Although the actions may be informal and erratic, they have helped destabilize the structure and relationships in the official public space and release possibilities for new interactions, functions and meanings (Hou, 2010, p. 15)

> The alternative to dependence on schools is not the use of public resources for some new device which 'makes' people learn; rather it is the creation of a new style of educational relationship between man and his environment. To foster this style, attitudes toward growing up, the tools available for learning, and the quality and structure of daily life will have to change concurrently. (Illich, 1970, p. 72)

The visit to the hospital is only one example of many that stand apart from examples of spaces like the market. The flea markets are placed on the periphery of the Centre; they are designed predominantly for Hmong folk, or other marginalized groups, to gather to find comfort, to experience those things that the Centre does not offer, that are not a part of the Centre's consciousness or understanding of the world.

The flea market stands fixed in a particular geographic space. The space Kalia's family inhabited in the hospital happened actively and in a shorter time frame. As Jeffrey Hou (2010) points out in the forward to the edited volume *Insurgent Public Spaces*, these acts can often seem "small and insignificant," yet over time they unsettle "the structure

and relationships in the official public space and release possibilities for new interactions, functions and meanings" (p. 15). This happens in more ephemeral moments like the hospital; in fixed structures like the flea market; but also in more fixed patterns, such as how public transportation, libraries and parks are used. I chose to focus on the hospital because it shows both how being in place can unsettle the Centre, as well as how people within institutional roles of authority can allow this to happen by undermining their own authority in similarly seeming "insignificant" ways.

These moments are important as they expose the possibility in allowing people to exist freely beyond any narrow set of expectations or strictures other than respect for each other and the space and places they share (a localized pedagogy for shared survival). From an institutional perspective, if, for example, schools or teachers were to make efforts to dismiss certain rules and allow for parentally elected ways of being involved and community presence in the school hallways or on their lots, the lives of marginalized students' would become more visible. The school community would grow in complexity; the school would be promoting education as a means toward a broader understanding of sharing space in communities than the Centre as the ideal. Simply putting certain institutional rules aside to open doors and gates would unsettle institutional practice.

Conclusion

Relationships are central to all of these stories. I could never imagine, or learn about, the lives of my friends who were bussed in and their families, unless I shared their experiences, unless I asked them to share with me, to tell me, or unless I went to their houses or apartments or wherever it was they lived. I couldn't learn about these people's

lives unless we had chances to live together, and these chances were never manifest because no reason would ever be enough for the Centre to let down its guard, to open the walls. My reflections are meant to make it clear how real those walls were in confusing my understanding of space, make clear the ways in which it is governed and inhabited, as well as make clear how powerful these walls were in their invisibility.

The stories I told point to the complexity of the system of interactions we are a part of, from inside or out. It is important from the Centre to be aware of the spaces and worlds those on the Outside inhabit, their perceived absence in our own spaces (even though they are often present), how and when their presence is noted, and how they are present when they enter the Centre (at the State Fair, at the hospital). These stories highlight processes of ignorance, of how concerns of safety and judgment of poverty can create a false metric of human worth, and the ways a child is raised to assist the Centre in its own recreation and in turn the recreation of the Line and the Outside.

Recently, Kalia and I were talking about my upbringing and in this conversation I realized my complicity beyond just the settlement of places. My parents, throughout much of my life, have hired cleaners to come to the house twice a month. Kalia asked me, “Have you ever met them?” I answered, “No”. We continued talking.

The cleaners are people like those who raised her, who have families like hers; one of her uncles and his wife have done this work for years. In previous conversations about the cleanliness of my mother, and the work that my sister does to keep her house clean, I had passed over the fact that there were other people doing a significant portion of this work. In short, to me these people were invisible. On top of this, my answer

showed that I had never really considered knowing them, learning about them, helping them. When Kalia asked if I would be embarrassed to meet these people, I answered, “No”, because I imagined they had pride in their jobs, and I did not want to diminish that pride. As we talked, I realized that however far I had journeyed, however much of the world I had become aware of, I was still confronted with my own ignorance of the lives of people who entered the same spaces I grew up in.

The personal is political. The journey to share space requires the “personal space” of the Centre must be unsettled in addition to the building of more inclusive public spaces and institutions. The Centre exists in the course of the private lives and homes of those, like me, in the Centre; my imagining of the lives of my bussed in friends began when I was unable to play with my friends after school, at our homes.

For shared survival to occur, it is necessary to learn about the lives of other people. To learn about other people’s lives, it is important to share experiences. In order to share our experiences, space also must be shared. In order to share space, the Centre needs to be unsettled. There can be no outside and inside; everyone must be invited. The Line that divides needs to be blurred and transgressed, so that we can watch, stand back, and celebrate as the Outside and Inside become one beautiful mess of experiences and ideas about the world we share. This was only one set of stories and they are not complete; my personal work has not finished. There are many more stories. No one stands apart from this system. No one stands apart from place. And every day, every life is being written in the spaces we share.

Chapter 5

Learning Together: Shared Survival

but I'm sure on the other side of the world, there is a language I have never heard

It is beautiful, and in this dying tongue, there are words for Love and God

that resemble Bread and Wing

Or another forest language in which Mother and Knife

equal Drawer and Sing

And Island Wood is somewhere Desert Milk

And Berry, elsewhere is a Door

And if you added up all these dying words, and the people who speak them

All their memories, histories, and lessons

All their gods, jokes, rituals, and recipes

If you learned and stirred them, over and again, until

each utterance became a star, a new footprint, the marrow of a poem—

(Bok Lee, selection from "Whorled", 2011, p. 116)

Introduction

> […] the meaning of home cannot be sought in the substantive, though it may find expression in substantive things like land, house, and family. Experientially, home was [in this research] a matter of being-at-home-in-the-world. It connoted a sense of existential control and connectedness— the way we feel when what we say or

> do seems to matter, and there is a balanced reciprocity between the world beyond us and the world within which we move. (Jackson, 1995, p. 154)
>
> Researchers and theorists tend to forget that pedagogy is an embodied practice and that pedagogical research and theorizing, too, are pedagogic forms of life. (Van Manen, 1990, p.139)

The following narratives point to the "embodied practice" (Van Manen, 1990, p. 139) of a localized pedagogy for shared survival, especially as it emerges in and between several home spaces. They are a personal examination of my relationships as a son, son-in-law, brother, uncle, and husband. These stories come directly from my experience and perspective, both as they relate to the Hmong household I have recently become a part of,[43] and the household (white, middle class) in which I was raised. These stories serve as an exploration of the process of relationship—a layered, dynamic system of intimate and everyday interactions between people— as it happens in moments and spaces that are less immediately mediated by educational (and other) institutions. After each narrative in this chapter I provide glimpses, labeled as "reflections", into my attempts at understanding, and making meaning from these interactions, relationships and experiences in relationship to a localized pedagogy for shared survival.

The relationships explored in these narratives are recognized as possible sites for "existential control and connectedness" (Jackson, 1995, p. 154) or shared survival.

[43] This is not meant as an examination of what it means to be Hmong, or even the experiences of being a refugee family. While these aspects of these homes and persons cannot be ignored, I approach those aspects of the family, not as an outside researcher or as an insider with "native" understandings, or even as someone looking to erase the divide between what I know and don't know, but rather, as a new member of a family, a son-in-law.

Looking at these everyday relationships can be instructive for the formation of pedagogical relationships, which are often secondary to rules governing conduct in institutional settings, while also recognizing and valuing the type of everyday instruction these relationships provide. However, my intention in using home as a setting for a localized pedagogy for shared survival is not only as an exemplar but also as a recognition of the ambiguous nature of home: both as a site of resistance to oppressive institutions as well as a possible site for that oppression.

Yi Fu Tuan (1977) suggests that home is a “place where the sick and the injured can recover under solicitous care” (p.137). He connects this assertion to cross-cultural, global studies that find, in all societies, “bases where the weak may stay and from which the fit may move out to gather, hunt, or fight […there] are tools, food, and normally some sort of shelter” (Washburn and Devore cited by Tuan, 1977, p. 137). He connects this idea to a definition of place as a “pause in movement”; that the care that occurs for the sick and injured in home serves as a reminder of a persons “dependence on others” (p.138). To Tuan home is a place where we can pause to reflect on our dependence upon others.

Yi Fu Tuan (1977) says that we “do not attend to [objects within our home] as we do to works of art” (p.144); it is thus entirely possible that we do not immediately consider our home when we think about the world around us. This makes diverse experiences of home worth exploring, strategies that are intimate and familiar, but maybe not immediately recognizable when we consider pedagogy. With Tuan’s definition the idea of home can provide a microscope to observe how we act in our closest and most

intimate relationships, the judgments about others that we forgo, the differences we overlook, or the expectations we may hold higher.

This being said, there is a danger in using the metaphor of home too broadly with too narrow of a definition. Cresswell (2004) points to the gentrification of the Lower East Side in New York City to show "what created a nice 'home' for the middle-class was experienced as a displacement by the poor." (P.94) Different groups of people, and ways of life, labeled as "undesirable" are forced out by policies and restrictions limiting movement and particular activities, narrow definitions of home are markers of displacement.

In addition, the idea of home can also recall memories of abuse. Cresswell (2004), in his discussion of place, complicates Tuan's (1977) theories by citing various feminist critiques that, "the image of home as a peaceful and meaningful refuge [is] masculinist—hiding the power realities of power relations in the home which, at their extreme, are linked to battery and rape" (Cresswell, 2004, p.83); home is part and parcel of the world outside it's walls.

Cresswell (2004) continues, citing authors such as Pratt (1999) who "argues that it is much easier to make theory-level statements about home from the position of someone who has a secure one" (Cresswell, 2004, p. 83); instead of focusing on "home" it is important to attend to "the role of place construction and boundary maintenance in the construction of identities" (p.83).

Thompson (2006) discusses how the migrant women she studied felt safe and able to speak their first language in their homes, to "display their ethnic heritage" (p. 21).

These women were not afraid of their difference. Despite the pressures of a dominant culture, home allows for the place to practice an ethnic identity, to not be lost.

Similarly, bell hooks (1990) describes the acts of care that took place in the home places of the older black folk as mainly the domain of the older black women, "the warmth and comfort of shelter, the feeding of our bodies, the nurturing of our souls" (p. 42). This homemaking is discussed by hooks as an act of resistance against a dominant oppressive culture. She points to this potential being undermined by "contemporary efforts to change that subversive homeplace into a site of patriarchal domination of black women by black men, where we abuse one another for not conforming to sexist norms" (p. 47).

hooks' (1990) critique is useful when considering home as the starting point of an exploration, to re-discover a localized pedagogy for shared survival. She points to the force of a dominant culture making its way into people's private lives. She tells the reader that these types of home places require an active effort, a commitment to resistance, of sharing survival in spite of a dominant racist and patriarchal society. Her critique points not only to the possibilities inherent in the idea of home, but the actual purpose it served in her life as well as the lives of many other marginalized folk (esp. poor and of color) having to survive a deeply racist and classist society. While in danger of being overly nostalgic, hooks points to two concurrent possibilities outlined above, both of home as sanctuary and as a place where societal pressures define interactions.

The home, as much as it may be affected by colonizing forces, can also be protected through careful positioning. Pratt (1999), in her study of Fillipina domestic

workers in Canada, describes a similar positioning of identity in space as the negotiation of "visibility and invisibility", the decisions made by these workers of what stories about their lives to tell their employers and which to keep secret (p.152). Outsiders are not necessarily kept out, but their experiences are often mediated.

De Certau (1984) and Scott (1985; 2009) recognize the possibility in everyday movements to overcome institutional governance. Intimate, familiar, "home" relationships can provide lessons about how to be with people in roles as educators and researchers, more instructive than any series of "best practices". However, the fact that these practices are acts of "resistance", and against institutional impulses, means that it is harder to act in this way from within institutions; these relationships and the spaces where they are created and nurtured are, in turn, isolated and quarantined from the institution.

When attention is paid, it is possible to see how the outside world and oppressive institutions can effect the space of a home; it is also possible to see how home spaces can provide sites of resistance to oppressive institutions. More importantly, examination of everyday relationships in home can provide models for relationships as a way to act within institutional settings (thereby providing home spaces and relationships focused on shared survival for all people— those who are marginalized due to class, culture, language and race; those people who have no home; those whose culture has been erased and assimilated; and those who are led to believe their experience or idea of home is correct, as it fits the limited definitions of the dominant institutional culture, and that other experiences are "wrong").

Home is space where we can see intimate human relationships in everyday context. It is not simply a sanctuary as suggested by Tuan (1977), but it is useful as a lens through which to examine both the ways in which we allow relationships to evade institutional expectations, as well as become defined by them.

Narratives and Reflections

A child's worries. On the last night of Kalia's youngest brother's second grade winter vacation we were at her parents' house. At around 9:30 p.m., Kalia's youngest brother attempted to distract us, "Who feels like playing Legos!" Kalia's youngest sister interrupted, "Wait, baby, shouldn't you be in bed? Isn't it a school night?" Kalia's mother, sitting on a stool close to the ground sewing the hems on her husband's work pants, spoke in Hmong and told her eight-year old son to get ready for bed. He resisted. He appealed to his mother, and eventually walked reluctantly to the room where he slept.

About 30 minutes later he was standing in the kitchen. We asked why he was not in bed. He explained that our nephew kept bothering him so that he couldn't sleep. I led him back to his bedroom where I instructed him to close his eyes and turn off the light. Another 30 minutes later he appeared next to Kalia on the couch. Once we noticed and reiterated that he needed to go to sleep, he asked for a drink of milk. He and I stood together in the kitchen; I put my hands on his head.

I said, "Close your eyes. Think about seeing your friends tomorrow at school, think about the fun you will have, about your dreams tonight that are waiting for you."

He listened, breathed deep and looked up at me.

"It is funny, but all I could think of was a knife stabbing a skull."

I told him that I would go back to his room and read to him. He agreed.

As I read, I noticed him turning, eyes open, staring off into space.

During the week he lives away from home for his schooling, at his oldest sister's house. This was the last night after almost a month of being at home before he would have to return to his sister's house to go to school. As I read, I remembered my own days as a kid nestling into my father's arms as he read to me or told me stories.[44]

Kalia's brother was still unable to sleep. I said to him, "I know you have a lot of thoughts going on in your head, but you should try to sleep."

"How do you know?!"

I was a kid who worried about the death of the people around me, about how everything was going to change; and I too couldn't find sleep at nights. The first day at school was always a reminder that time kept moving forward, I was getting older and so was everybody around me. I explained, "I just do".

As I walked out of his room, his mother asked, "Is he asleep".

"No" was my reply, "But he is on his way".

When I was his age, I was unable to go to sleep unless the hallway lights were on. The second they went off, when my parents went to sleep, I would wander to the bathroom every few moments to look in the mirror and wonder about the finality of death. I walked home from school, and occasionally the weight of worry was such that it

[44] Earlier in the same week as this story, while Kalia and I wrapped Christmas gifts on the floor in her parents' room. Kalia's dad was lying down on his bed, telling Kalia's youngest brother a story. Later, I asked Kalia's brother if it was a story he had heard before. "No". I asked about his favorites; he explained that every night he hears another story. The stories come out of what seems like an endless supply emerging from his mom's and dad's experiences and imagination.

forced me to stop: thoughts of my parents' death, my sister leaving for college, of everything changing, the idea of home shifting, growing, splitting. I knew that in the midst of all of that changing, I would have to find my own place in the world, that home would change, and that thought scared me.

At night my dad would read with me and play card games with me. He would sit down with me in the hour before my bedtime and watch old Sherlock Holmes films and reruns of old television shows. However, I was still unable to escape my worries. I did the math and added up how old, or dead, the actors we watched had to be. Often, I would lie in bed, thinking, actively pushing off sleep with worry.

I asked my parents every night to make a promise, that I could find them if I needed them "anytime, any place, any where."[45]

As a child, I could see the inevitability of the shifting foundations of a home. I grew up in the house where my dad had grown up, where my grandfather had died, where my dad's brother, sister and mother still visited. I sensed, perhaps, that home was supposed to be an attempt at calm space in the midst of a constant movement: to college, to grad school, to new families, to new jobs, to growing old and apart. That home was an effort to hold something together. I wanted that movement to stop, for what I knew as home to stay intact, but I also knew that it could not; I knew that my uncle and aunt eventually moved out, and that my grandfather had died.

Kalia's youngest brother lives in the midst of a situation I only feared. His parents are older than mine were when I was his age, the stories he hears about his mom and

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[45] Words that I borrowed from a song by *the Monkees*

dad's childhoods are about a home far away in a place (Laos) he can only imagine. His siblings are all much older, further along with their lives (in college, married). He goes to a school far from where his parents live, and has to move between houses (his parents' and his sisters') because it became evident the teachers at the public school in the very white suburb where his parents live showed no interest in his well-being; the children in his class and on the bus bullied him because of his accent and because he looked different than them, because he didn't fit their expectations—his older brother had dropped out after too much of this kind of mistreatment at the local high school.

Kalia's mom also laments as she sees her youngest son living away from home. She grows sad as she hears her youngest slowly losing his language; she notices the vocabulary slipping, how he struggles to find words or pronounce the tones that make the language, how he speaks in Hmong less often. When he is at his sister's house, his mom cannot be as attentive to what he eats, when he wakes up, how he cleans himself. It is not that he is without a home during the week. His oldest sister and her husband love him and take care of him, but it is not the same as being with his mother and father.

Reflections. This story reveals the depth of the worries of an eight year old and the realities to which those worries are attuned. As a brother, when I reflect on this moment, I can find a moment in understanding by recognizing my own worries at that age: that things would change, that I would loose the support and love of my parents through the process of maturation (going to college, getting married), and finally, through death. Kalia's brother however is already in a position where he must leave his parents weekly.

It is from this point of understanding that I am forced to reckon with the forces that make it so an eight year old is better off going to a private school apart from his parents (an option not open to many other children in similar positions); the larger institutional questions raised by the question of why this is necessary, and why it was easier for Kalia and her sister to apply to new schools, for scholarships, and move their little brother than to address the racist actions (and inaction) that made the move necessary.

Often times there are no apparent options for a family, and so children are forced to handle this racism which can become detrimental not only to students' future choices (as it creates a need to escape, and a loss of interest and attention to education overtime), but also as it increases mortality and is detrimental to individuals' health (Geronimus 1996; 2006). To separate Kalia's little brother from a more racist school environment, also requires that he is noticeably separated from the educational richness of his home, in regards to culture (the language, the food) but also in terms of what is offered by parents to their children. This decision is an impossible one. It results in psychic distress for both child and parent; the necessary choice is, in the end, less destructive to the physical person and their survival in contemporary society, but potentially more destructive to the culture and language which provide more existential support and strength.

There are opportunities, however, hidden in this situation. There are opportunities, which are being avoided, for the school district Kalia's little brother is leaving— to begin addressing the actions of teachers and administrators that ignore the assumptions of race and privilege, to address the behaviors of students who isolate and bully other students

based on the color of their skin or an accent. There is always possibility for the school to invite in diverse experiences and understanding, to create opportunities for communities to be present in the school (making space available before, during or after school for community groups, language groups, markets, gatherings). There are similar opportunities for the new school, for the new teachers. Recognizing the problem (racist institutional practice), while considering the solution the family is forced to make (switching schools) and also recognizing what is being forgotten and lost (the richness and value of a home culture which does not match the foundational culture of the institution) could in the end provide for solutions to the initial problem.

The worries of an eight-year-old boy, and the things they connect to— separation from parents, from his home— cannot be calmed, but they provide focal points to address the problems that created the worries. For teachers, administrators, or any other institutional figure to recognize, value and pay attention to this sort of psychic distress will create opportunities for learning not only for the student, but also for institutional authorities. Questions emerge from this situation: how can educational institutions act as a means of connection between homes, rather than tearing them apart or forcing people to hide within them; how can educational institutions allow themselves to be shaped by the homes that feed into them; how can educational institutions open space for the circulation of a heterotopic culture, rather than a tourniquet isolating and denying the educational power of difference.

Coming home. When I was younger, my family moved from Milwaukee (where we lived from when I was about 3 to 12) to Illinois and then, as my sister went to college

in Boston, we moved to New Jersey. My own journey after high school took me on multiple trips between various destinations on the east coast and Australia. My parents found their way from New Jersey back to the Midwest, to Minnesota. I ended up near my parents in Minnesota. My sister and her family now live in Alaska. At one point, my dad recalls, each of us, my sister, my brother-in-law, my mom, my dad, and myself were each located in separate cities. We have moved for jobs and education, for experiences and because of connections.

Kalia's family arrived in the United States as refugees. They moved because they had little choice. It is the history of the Hmong: from the southern regions of China a couple of centuries ago, to the mountains of Laos, the refugee camps of Thailand and then to California and the Twin Cities. Most of her dad's family now lives here, or in California. Her mom's family is stretched from Laos to Minnesota. Kalia's five younger siblings were all born in Minnesota. To them here is home. When the take a road trip over state lines and they return, they claim they can tell a difference in the quality of the air.

My mom and dad often fly from Minnesota to Alaska to spend time with my sister and her family. Kalia's parents do not get so many chances, if any, to visit their family in California or Laos. In their dreams they find themselves back in those familiar mountains and jungles. They watch videos of Hmong New Year celebrations in different places and videos of villagers raising chickens and water buffalo. In one an older man gives a tour of all of the places that a dragon has appeared and tells the stories he can recall of the place where he has spent his entire life. These are, at the moment, as close as

they can get to the place where their lives began. A year ago they went to Thailand, and on a side trip to visit her mom's family in Laos were turned back when they arrived in the airport.[46] Instead, they had to climb a hill near the border to meet one or two of Kalia's uncles there near the border, only able to look at Laos from a distance. The camp in Thailand where Kalia was born, where her family spent several years, is now a ghost town: fields of overgrown grass and abandon concrete structures.

My maternal grandmother's parents moved from Italy, and my grandfather (paternal) who was adopted by his mother's brother moved from Sweden to the United States. My grandmother had no ties to her parent's homeland, and my grandfather never returned to his.

These homes, and familiar spaces, are close and far, as they are both memories and physical destinations. Kalia's older sister visited Laos and Kalia's mother's older half sister cried at how fat she had become, mistaking her for Kalia's mother. My dad visited relatives in Sweden and was instantly comforted by the gestures of an older cousin that were similar to my grandfather's; my mother visited Scotland, and despite any genealogical proof, saw the face of her father in the older men sitting on park benches. Home is not as staid as the walls of the physical structure that often holds it together; it is an assemblage of memories and dreams for the future. It is place in the world; it is familiar.

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[46] While Kalia's mother, sister and brother were allowed to pass through, they held her father at gunpoint telling him something to the effect of "we kicked you out of our country once, don't make us do it a second time". While Hmong folk are sometimes able to return to Laos, there is a risk associated with it, especially for men from the generation who fought on the side of the United States during the Secret War in Laos.

Kalia's dad raises his chickens in the yard, and in that back corner of the yard in the middle of summer it appears a lot like the videos of Laos that Kalia's parents watch. During the summer Kalia's mom has a garden where she grows chilies, tomatoes, long beans, bitter melon, and the many herbs and greens she uses in her traditional Hmong cooking. Throughout the year, long vines grow from pots throughout the house. Thompson (2006), from her work with immigrant women in Australia, claims that the home and garden are each a "site of power" as they allowed the women she studied the ability to create familiar environments (p.21).

As an outsider these spaces are foreign to me, and yet they are becoming familiar as I become a part of the family. How I am supposed to navigate this process is not clear cut. During the preparation for the Hmong New Year celebration at Kalia's parents' house, the first year of our marriage, I went downstairs to work on my writing as I am never sure how to help in the preparations for a spirit calling or the New Year.

I am not versed in how to kill, pluck, or clean the chickens. At the same time, I had been also looking for time and space to write this dissertation in a way that doesn't keep me far from either of our families (and took this as an excuse, even though it meant I kept distance during less familiar experiences). Kalia's father and her brother, who was home for the weekend from college, walked in and out with chickens that we would later eat, that would be a part of the spirit calling ceremony. There is a pile of featherless chicken carcasses sitting in a large plastic bowl waiting to be cleaned of any remaining feathers.

Kalia tells me again and again that I will need to be a part of this, and I am not adverse, but I do not know what I am doing. I need to take the time to observe, to try to listen. I get more used to the movements of the household around these events. The night of this spirit calling, I helped with making large amounts of rice, continually moving the cooked rice from the cooker into a big bowl, and then rinsing a new batch of rice and placing it in the cooker. Our almost two-year old nephew refused to be with anybody but me until his parents arrived; he and I played. We looked at the chickens and watched the activity happening around us. He would point and turn back to me with an excited expression on his face "qaib qaib!" (*qai qai* chicken). I repeated his words. Even at his young age he was teaching me new words, sometimes even making an effort to translate.

The plan was for some of the cousins to come over. Kalia's brother was home for the New Year celebration, so that he could be there as Kalia's father called in our spirits. We all worry about him doing well in school. Kalia and I speak often to each other about our worries. When she speaks about them publicly, she describes her brother as a good man, the first to help an older person, to stand up for the defenseless, or to pick up a hurt child. She explains her sadness because schools do not value this, that he does not get a grade for his goodness, for the help he provides those around him, the care that he shows the people he loves.

He succeeded in getting his GED two years after he should have graduated. He was learning once again how to "do" school. Kalia and I were worried in part because when we asked him about school, he was uncertain about he answers. He did not know exactly what his assignments were, or when exams and papers were coming up. It felt

less like he didn't care, and more that this was all a new language. Kalia and I were worried that he might not have much time to figure it out if he did not do well. He would look for the comfort of home and could only find that here, with us: his parents, his sisters, his baby brother and his nephews, as well as the homes of his uncles, aunts and cousins.

Reflections. It is not hard to see why Kalia's brother comes home, to a space much more familiar and friendly. Kalia has memories of coming home often to be with her family in her first year of college. I too remember taking the train ride from Philadelphia to New Jersey fairly often to spend weekends at home. For both of us, it was in some sense about missing home, but it was also about escape and so it is hard to blame Kalia's brother for rushing home as soon as Thursday evening comes, to be around more familiar territory, around the children, chickens, dogs, parents and cousins that have surrounded him his entire life.

As a family, we sometimes express a frustration that Kalia's brother should be more worried about his studies. This assessment is very similar to the kind of blame often placed on students like him by educational institutions and popular discourse. At the same time, educational institutions often fail to offer significant support due to predetermined logic that students who do not perform well are simply not putting in enough effort.[47] Because Kalia and I have both historically been successful in school, it is

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[47] I worked for a semester as a teaching assistant for a course that was supposed to assist students admitted to the University on probationary status to learn strategies for "success"; the way this course had been designed was as a baptism of fire, where they had to do an extraordinary amount of additional reading and writing. The implied lesson

less clear to us when we might be stepping over this line—when we are pressuring him in ways that he does not need to be pressured and might instead need support or guidance.

When he discusses the work he has to do, it is in the language of his professors who explain that a book should only take a day to read, or that it is "only" a book report. Yet, these are general statements that take nothing into account about each individual student's approach to, or needs in regard to learning. The work of going to classes is easy as the expectations are clear. Yet, for somebody with less experience of success in school, everything that is expected outside of the classroom is difficult to understand unless there is support. The necessary actions (time management, reading and writing strategies, studying skills, test taking skills) are not taught in most classes, yet the expectation is that each student is capable of all of these.

The difference then between the familial assessment and the one the school is making, although they are similar, is that as his family we spend time reminding him of the work he needs to do (by asking him and sending him messages keeping track), giving him time to work, and suggesting strategies or places to go for support. Kalia offers support by working with him step by step as he writes his papers. While there is a counselor who keeps some tabs on his progress, and resources available if he seeks them out, the school itself does nothing outside of the continuing assessment in each class (which is what he needs support to finish) to keep track of a student's progress. However, mine and Kalia's support from home, as people who are more school savvy, is less salient than help from the institution could be. This is because the actions within the institution

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in that class (intentionally or not) was: the reason you have no been successful is that you have not been working hard enough.

affect its rules and judgements, or put another way, help and support from within the institution would be a sign that real attention was being paid to student situations and experiences like those of Kalia's brother. School, once again, creates a divide between important family work and the work needed to do well in school. While Kalia's brother does not shirk away from his responsibilities helping his parents, it is also clear that to him this takes precedence and as a result he often he sacrifices his schoolwork.

It is clear that this is not a decision his parents want him to make. Further, it is not a decision he does not necessarily have to make, but the lack of support from his school makes it hard to balance responsibilities. Success in education is important in regards to his future options, but there is a value in being a part of day to day family life and work that goes unrecognized in the expectations of school and education. Through the work that Kalia's brother does to support his parents at home, he makes sure that the place he can go to find support and strength stays strong. Likewise, Kalia's brother goes to school in large part to be able to continue to provide support in the future. There is a need to balance between present (helping at home) or future (going to school), but there are few models of how to do this successfully so that one is not sacrificed for the other: if he focuses on school, the support he provides at home diminishes, and if he focuses on home, the opportunities in education are diminished.

For people who are not as lucky to have such supportive homes, or families, educational institutions are no more supportive. These institutions create situations wherein support is needed (either through being a part of the culture that defines the institution, or by having a home and family culture that offer support in spite of it). It is

important to ask how educational institutions can more explicitly provide support for learning, rather than penalizing people who do not have the sorts of cultural knowledge needed to find success. It is also important to ask if there are ways educational institutions (or more importantly the actors within them) can be supportive of the lives of participants outside of those institutions, to value the work that those participants put into supporting their own families and their own cultures, as well as how they might be able to nurture these spaces.

In short, Kalia's brother's upbringing was not a problem; his impulses (besides those that sometimes mirror the misguided impulses of many other twenty-somethings) to help at home are not a problem. The *idea* of being able to measure learning and education, and the *idea* of school as a pathway to an *idea* of success, which are all embedded in what is expected of and by educational institutions do not take into account these aspects of his life. It is important to consider how different education would look if these parts of Kalia's brother's life were actually valued, a vision of education which is reflected in Gloria Ladson Billings' (1995) observations and theorization of eight teachers of African American students as Culturally Relevant Pedagogy.

Many questions emerge when a Localized Pedagogy for Shared Survival is applied to educational institutions, questions that are evident when considering the dissonance between the responsibilities Kalia's brother takes on in his home life and the expectations of educational institutions where students are expected to invest a majority of their energy and resources: What would an educative space look like if it acted in concert with the expectations of home, and the nurturing that emerges from cultures as

well as (some) homes and families? Are there ways that educators and researchers can use their work and their positions to provide support to the environments that offer the support to survive in the midst of the violence of institutions against individuals, to build relationships across institutional walls, and to act against the colonial impulses and foundations of institutional rules?

A Culturally Relevant Pedagogical approach recognizes a "need to be willing to look for exemplary practice in those classrooms and communities that too many of us are ready to dismiss as incapable of producing excellence" (Ladson-Billings, 1995, p. 483). As such, it provides a means of approaching institutional practice motivated by questions such as those above. As these questions are approached by practitioners in educational institutions, a localized pedagogy for shared survival provides a framework to understand those "exemplary practices" which exist in students' every day lives. the ways in which people in marginalized communities act on concerns about "students' lives, the welfare of the community, and unjust social arrangements" (p.474).

Ladson-Billings (1995) asks if this type of approach simply represents "good teaching", "why does so little of it seem to occur in classrooms populated by African-American students" (p. 484). The answer is that these approaches, as they emerge within institutional practice, critically approach institutional expectations of marginalized students and as such require that rules be re-authored or broken. Therefore, relationships across institutional borders are essential to answering these questions (to challenge authority) in practice.

As always, after calling in our spirits, Kalia's father examined the feet and tongue of the chickens to determine the fortune for the coming year. He spoke in Hmong and Kalia translated. "Dad says, the men in the family have to watch out. They have to be careful of authority…" He smiled as he chewed on a bit of chicken.

Negotiating distances. Home and family for Kalia and me stretches across many spaces: our home, my parents', my sister's far away in Alaska, Kalia's parents', and her sister's and brother-in-law's. Near and far, there are distances between our families and the places our hearts reside. We spend time negotiating these distances, especially those within our reach. We drive to my parents' house, her parents' house, or her sisters' house. While these trips are always to see our family, to be with them and spend time together, the space between is often traversed to help attend to chores, to help move furniture, to babysit, to shovel a driveway, to help put up lights.

One night, we had arranged to visit my parents' home for dinner, to watch the Vikings versus Packers game. I had grown up in Milwaukee, and so have grown up a Packers fan; Kalia has spent most of her life in Minnesota, and so the Vikings are her team. As we entered the house I saw Kalia and my dad shaking hands: he agreed to be a Vikings fan. Later my mother asked why he was cheering against the Packers. He explained that he had agreed to be a Vikings fan for the game so that Kalia would not be alone. My mother looked at him sternly, "Just remember where you are sleeping tonight".

That night, Kalia and I were cooking for my parents. Most often my mom will find a recipe and spend much of her time unenthusiastically preparing it. Following the

Packers win, we sat down for a meal. It was simple--Bitter Melon soup, an acquired taste, but a common Hmong dish. My mom had a concerned look as she ate it, the bitter obviously did not cooperate with her taste buds, whereas my dad quickly finished and asked about seconds and immediately filled his bowl. The main course was rice, beef and bok choy lightly seasoned.

It was much quieter than at Kalia's parents' house. Fewer children, fewer phone calls, lower volume on the television, less movement. As we talked over dinner, the phone rang. My sister in Alaska was hoping we could all talk using video chat on the computer later in the evening.

Kalia's phone rang once, twice, three times. This was unusual; to be polite she let it ring to her voicemail. We went upstairs to the computer. After fifteen or so minutes of trying to get the video chat to work, my sister suggested for us to use another program, between her iPhone and my parents' iPad. We talked through a choppy connection, my older nephew laughed and put his foot in the camera of the phone. My younger nephew grabed the phone and turned it off with a big grin on his face. We laughed. Beth called back, but the choppy connection was too much; we said goodnight.

Kalia and I got in the car. Kalia checked her messages. Kalia's sister's husband had called and asked us to come over so we can bring Kalia's younger sister back to our house with us. Kalia was visibly on edge. As we drove, I sensed tension building; I took a deep breath. I focused on the road. Kalia began thinking aloud about her dislike of video chatting.

“But it is good to see the nephews… or your sister.” I tried to make a connection to our experiences with both families, referring to the few times when I had been able to chat with Kalia’s sister in California over her other sister’s computer.

“When you chat, people may be doing other things… it is just small talk… it is hard to hold an actual conversation.”

Again, I agreed, “I know, like when we were on the computer with…” I compared once again to a chat we had had with Kalia’s sister in California.

The air of the discussion changed immediately. This was where the tension was leading.

“I never asked you to chat with her!”

I reacted defensively, confused how this suddenly became personal. An argument ensued.

As the drive continued, the argument did not lose heat. I tried a more “logical” argument, I tried explaining myself, and finally I tried fighting back. I gained some sense of composure and repeated those steps.

“What is wrong?” I asked, trying once again to find calm. There was no answer. As we pulled up to Kalia’s older sister’s house the silence between us was ripe with our misunderstanding and two-way inability to articulate emotion.

Reflections. As we come from two very different realities, Kalia and I often are affected by experiences differently. What may seem commonplace to me can often be a reminder to her of a culture which is dismissive of and makes little room for her family and their culture and experiences. When Kalia saw how my more financially stable,

English-speaking family used certain technology to communicate, to negotiate the distance between family, she also recognized that if the family were to become more separated than it already is her parents have much less access to that technology. I had understood our conversation as a conceptual discussion on the merits of video-chats, while to Kalia it was something else: my inability to recognize my family's privilege, and the difficulty for her parents if their family became dispersed beyond what it already was: Laos, California, etc.

Of course, this gap happens across experiences of gender, race, language, class, etc. These gaps in understanding create emotionally tenuous situations, moments when the distance in our experiences of the world cannot match up. It is, however, also in these moments where there are possibilities to break down, examine and rearrange personal assumptions and habits.

These moments are the places from where empathy emerges, where listening strategies can be employed that do not require stepping outside of oneself, but instead for perspective to be shifted; it is important, if the goal is to increase understanding, that it is a learning experience (not to know something better, but to be ready to listen more attentively to make space for another person).

These types of situations, of gaps in understanding, are related to what Eve Tuck (2009a) presents as contention. These are moments that can be examined and highlighted to assist in the discovery of ways of living together in relationship and in contention. In these interactions it is possible to see how different experiences of the world can interact with and complicate each other. By paying attention to these interactions, and the gaps in

understanding and experience they reveal, it is also possible to learn, in small ways, about others' experiences of the world.

Experiences may not always make sense or be easily communicated; however, they still affect worldview and other experiences or actions. These points of disagreement, misunderstanding, and meeting are often not logical, political, or "rational" positions but emotional, relational, and spiritual.

Contention as a value requires recognition without understanding. Contention does not create the space for other experiences and viewpoints on its own, but requires that we make that space for others. I still do not completely understand the reason that Kalia and I had this disagreement, but recognizing it has made me more aware of certain aspects of the differences in the homes we grew up in, as well as my ability to make my parents' home more open for Kalia.

Recognition of the value in disagreement creates opportunities to examine why it may be happening. When somebody reacts emotionally, that moment of reaction can expose points of contention. It can expose a potential for learning or a potential for adjusting behavior or approach. If a disagreement occurs it is an opportunity to negotiate distance, to build a bridge: not to assimilate two disparate viewpoints, not to find agreement, but to create understanding— a connection between two individuals with different experiences that allows for communication.

Making decisions. After our argument, when we arrived at the door to Kalia's sisters house, we rang the doorbell. Kalia's youngest brother answered, crying.

"They are going to move to Atlanta, and mom and dad are going to go too… I don't want to be left alone."

Our almost two-year old nephew wandered into the room punching his fists into the air and lifting his legs high, dancing to say hello. Kalia's dad walked into the dark living room and sat down on a couch, his phone resting on his shoulder on speaker. He was talking to one of his brothers. We waved. Our nephew looked at Kalia's little brother crying into Kalia's shoulder. He looked slightly confused, lips pursed. I lifted him and he squirmed to be let down, taking my hand. He led me into the next room. One of the younger sisters was on the computer, another lying down on the couch.

"Sit down, we want to talk…" Kalia's brother-in-law leaned back in his chair; he was sitting at the table with Kalia's mom and older sister. He shook my hand, and the conversation began. "I've been offered a job in Atlanta, and I have to make my decision by tomorrow."

The conversation happened around a table full of food: leftovers from a family event earlier in the day, which Kalia and I missed to be with my parents. I looked at the food, Hmong food that I had come to love in the couple of years that I had been spending time with Kalia's family: two varieties of beef laab salad (raw and cooked) made from chopped beef and herbs; sweet and spicy Hmong sausage; sticky rice; and papaya salad all gone save for a couple of tomatoes, peanuts, long beans, lime rinds and tamarind pits drowning in the dark sauce. I wished I was not as full as I was, so that I could eat.

Kalia and I sat together in two chairs squeezed in at the end of the table where it had been pulled out away from the wall.

Kalia's brother-in-law explained that he had been offered a position: Kalia's sister continued, "I haven't been given a job, but the company are saying they will talk to the local government, put a word in for me." They asked our opinions. Kalia mentioned that not only would her parents miss her sister and brother-in-law if they moved, but if her mom and dad were to follow, they would miss their brothers and sisters, nephews and nieces, the Hmong community as a whole.

Kalia said that leaving the Hmong community would have its consequences not only for her parents, but that by taking the babies away from the Hmong community they would be removed from one of very few places in the world where they could get a bigger picture of what it means to be Hmong.

Kalia's dad was not phased by this conversation, he appeared ready to move and even excited by the possibility of living on an acreage in Georgia. Kalia's mom explained her position while looking forward, not at any of us. The translation was sporadic "We will visit in a year… then maybe we will move…"

Later in English she requested, half jokingly, for the eldest of their two boys to be left with her in Minnesota. "What about the baby?" Kalia's brother-in-law asked. Kalia's mom laughed.

"As I see it…" I tried to present the reasons for leaving and the reasons for staying. I suggested that whatever opportunity this represents, that other unseen opportunities were present here. "We need to be patient." I stumbled. "My bias is clear." I discussed my experience moving away from a place where I understood more clearly how I belonged, about living apart from grandparents. I spoke briefly about home, about

how it became much smaller when we moved.[48] I discussed how it probably made it financially possible for my parents to send me and my sister to our undergraduate institutions.

Kalia mentioned her sister's attachment to family, and understanding that they moved to Minnesota to allow for this.

Kalia's sister expressed her want to support her husband, her understanding of his need to be challenged in his work. He expressed his need to provide not only for his family, his wife and children, but also his mother and grandmother in Kentucky and the parents here in Minnesota. "If I take this job, we can afford for mom and dad to retire."

He talked about his choices in the past to move from his home in Kentucky and the choice he and Kalia's sister made when they got married to move to Cambodia for a couple of years. He explained that to him each of these decisions was made based on the financial support he could provide. He explained that if that means moving, he has always been willing and ready to do that. Kalia's sister mentioned her concerns about taking the boys away from the Hmong language, the Hmong community, and more importantly, their grandparents. "I don't want a stranger taking care of my children…"

As we talked, their eldest waved at me. "Bye Bye" he kept saying. He was playing a game; he did not know the significance of what he was saying. He does not dream, as Kalia and I do, of the depth of the relationships that will be built because of our proximity.

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[48] My family moved twice when I was between the ages of 3 and 16. I imagine my parents had conversations after our bedtime to make decisions regarding these moves. I was always consulted; I am also sure they spoke with my grandparents.

Kalia’s brother-in-law said, “I don’t have the right last name, I don’t have a degree from Stanford or Harvard, I don’t know the right people…” He was afraid of there not being another possibility given his education and background, that this might have been it.

Kalia’s sister turned and asked Kalia to read her palm. Kalia’s dad wandered over. He offered his hands, toughened and scarred from his work with steal and machines, for Kalia to read and nudged Kalia’s brother-in-law towards her so that she could read his palm as well. Kalia’s readings hit close to home, although vaguely; she was too afraid to say what comes next, only that no matter what path they took take there was opportunity waiting. Kalia’s brother-in-law asked me to help him move the table back against the wall. As we did, he said in a resigned tone, but with a bit of a wink, “More hands make for easy work.”

I heard Kalia from the other room. “We love you. We support you in whatever decision you make.” “Thank you for including us,” is what I said. We walked to the door.

We left with Kalia’s sister who, at that time, lived with us during the week. We talked on the drive home. Kalia’s sister suggested they wouldn’t move, “It’s not a big deal though.” We talked about the implications of leaving behind the Hmong community, what it means to be Hmong but not speak Hmong. We covered our tracks and repeated the conversation that had happened around the table.

We got home and went to bed. My head spun with questions: if they left, where would that leave us? How could we begin to offer the same support to the family? What

would we do without their support of us? What if the whole family moved? All of these questions boiling down to one regret, that I never told them that I didn't want them to leave.

I woke up; I turned; I thought; I looked at the clock—3.30am. I woke up Kalia. "Did we say everything we could have?" She offered a sleepy reply. An hour later, I was still awake. I tapped her again. Tears began to well up as I wondered if there was anything more I could have done to be supportive in any decision they made, but also to keep them close. She fell back asleep.

The next morning we woke up. Kalia called her sister. Her sister and her sister's husband had stayed up all night talking to each other until the morning came and Kalia's brother-in-law told her sister, "It's time for me to go to work". They weren't going to move. A big part of the decision was the support we give them, the friendship we all share, the homes we were all building; The future we want to build together. A burden had been lifted. However, we also knew that we had to work harder, to dream bigger, to match the dreams of our brother-in-law, the sacrifice he had just made and was willing to make.

Kalia's sister began searching for a place to build her law-firm. She began to step into action.

Reflections. This situation points to a reoccurring theme, the necessity of movement away from family in order to find success. This movement, however, is complicated by an idea of success, which is not simply selfish (making more money) but attached to a more collective identity (being able to better support family). The

movement away from family, when combined with questions regarding language and culture points once again to how the survival of a culture or a language (which in turn are the mechanism of the survival of a family) depends on being together— that for Kalia's sisters children to learn the language and be familiar and comfortable in the culture, they need to be close to a larger family experience of it. Family and culture and the strength of an individual are all interdependent and separate from the support of contemporary educational institutions.

Movement away from family, while it may assist in the survival of family within current systems (money), is also a means in which the current system asserts dominance and diminishes the collective power of larger familial and cultural forces to assist in survival.

Kalia's reaction earlier in the car, in the discussion on the merits of computer video chats, while ostensibly about class and access was moreover a question about family, culture and distance. Even since her sister has bought Kalia's parents an iPad and taught them how to use video chatting programs, it is still a reality that many of the people in their position do not have these tools (or connections to people who can acquire them).

There are questions that need to be asked about the current way the world outside of this family works: without the presence of Kalia's sister, or siblings, how can support be given to Kalia's parents in ways that are familiar (a quality that people from within the dominant system expect from the services offered them, and therefore, ways that it is reasonable that others might expect as well)? If there were no strong cultural or familial

background, where would culture come from? Would it emerge organically from the people around them, or would they be forced to assimilate with a dominant culture, which is often dismissive of them? What is lost when that assimilation happens?

When my family moved from Milwaukee, where I had gone through grade school, and where much of my father's family remained, we moved to a new place. On the first day I went to the new school, I felt something wet in my ear, and heard laughter. I had been given a "wet willy". Throughout our three years there, I was pushed into lockers as I walked down the hall in school and yelled at-- "FAGGOT!" I remember moving to this new space and feeling limited in my movement, uncertain of language and space, of faces and voices. After living in this space, I approached new spaces and situations with apprehension and anxiety. There was a fear of new spaces, of leaving the spaces that were familiar. My movements, and my confidence to move in the world, became limited.

I can only imagine what this would have been like if I did not only move from a more urban to exurban environment, but from a village to a refugee camp, and then to a country where I was constantly told, in an unfamiliar language, how I didn't belong. I can't imagine having to create a home in a space where I do not speak the language. I can only imagine what it is like to be born into a place which is at once home, but in which you are often treated as foreign or illegal. The importance of family and culture and other people knowing these things becomes extremely salient in these considerations, as does the presence of people who maybe do not know these things, but who understand and

appreciate these differences. The smaller either group of people is, the less room for movement there is, the less possibility of impact there is.

My parents' decisions to move our family created certain opportunities due to the financial gain that each move provided. Each of these moves limited our connections to place, people and history that we had in Milwaukee. However, the fundamental difference in the experience of my family and the experiences of Kalia's parents, is that my family's culture was already pretty insular (how we did things within our home) and the ways that it was not, in addition to our appearance and language, "fit" the colonial culture of the institutions responsible for governance, education, and commerce. The work of finding a place within the larger institutional culture was nonexistent for us; that place was already made at every step of the way. This is not to say there were not difficulties, but nothing in comparison to Kalia's family or anybody from any other marginalized community. In fact, the move away from a powerful (white) family network in Milwaukee opened my world, and my ability to empathize with this experience, in ways that may not have been possible otherwise. My experience of place was unsettled.

Educational (and other) institutions do not inherently create ways for people to participate and come together without a common culture; instead they necessitate and operate according to a specific mode of communication and being (at most there are "interpreters" to assist navigation). Further, this mode of communication is not used as a tool toward a larger understanding, but instead in service of itself. While dominant culture is affected by the people inside and outside of it, educational institutions do not nurture this process. Instead, they work toward assimilation, where people are expected

to fit institutional expectations. As such, the work of "being together" is entirely a newcomer's responsibility and requires the acceptance of those institutional expectations. Further, by favoring assimilation, those who fit institutional ways of doing things are taught to be complacent and thus complicit (settled) where understanding and adjustment to outside perspectives and experiences are unnecessary.

Once again, it is those structures (culture, family and language) that educational institutions act against (or at least ignore) that are responsible for individuals' survival. As the pursuit of financial stability and education push people away from each other and their ability to develop localized networks, or strategies for shared survival (creating possibilities for our lives together), the ability to care becomes diminished, people become more isolated and have less support in their resistance of institutional rules and expectations.

If Kalia's sister and brother-in-law had moved, it would be difficult if not impossible to maintain those ties that weekly visits, eating together, and doing things for each other, hold strong and create. This is in addition to how it would affect Kalia's sense of home to have her older sister, whose presence she has always depended on, leave. The distance between grandchildren and their grandparents (the children's primary influence in the Hmong language), would limit Kalia's parents' ability to educate and communicate with their grandchildren. Their ability to share stories, experiences and knowledge about the world would diminish as the children's grasp on the Hmong language would fade. In addition, without the proximity or immediacy of context that set the stage on which

stories are told, certain possibilities for living would be lost to the grandchildren that can only be accessed through those experiences, that knowledge and language.

A localized pedagogy for shared survival requires for educators, researchers, and other individuals in a community to find ways to provide support whereby these distances are covered; where the value in these relationships is realized, where the idea of success is not tied to how well we perform within the bounds determined by institutions, but how well we perform for each other, in the face of each others' needs. A localized pedagogy for shared survival would imagine institutions that are assessed on their ability to perform well for us across differences, finding ways of opening up and adjusting when difference is encountered, by teaching those within the institutions to do the same (rather than see themselves as authorities "teaching" people how to interact and navigate a system, when those people already have ways of interacting and navigating the world).

Like the conversation at the dinner table, a localized pedagogy for shared survival imagines institutions to be worthwhile if they are spaces where answers are not givens, but where space is realized (in the differences between individuals, including their ideas of the future, concerns, and dreams) to determine and practice values that support shared survival (staying together), rather than institutionalized success (moving for a job).

This story points to the strength of family and cultural networks, especially when in proximity as a structure that (at its best) creates possibilities for difference and opens possibilities for different perspectives. In this situation, it is not only the choice presented, but also the decision to open the conversation to family that can be instructive. Ultimately, the decision to stay or go was Kalia's sister's and brother-in-law's; however,

the decision to invite the family into conversation brought us closer together— it created space to have our thought processes heard, to articulate our ideas, to mark possibilities and reinstate values. Each individual added to an overall picture of the potential future: Kalia's father's excitement, Kalia's mother's apprehension, mine and Kalia's concern and dreams of something different (all of us being together), Kalia's sister's husband's uncertainty about his credentials and potential, Kalia's sister's worry about child-care outside of the family.

Of course, the work of a localized pedagogy for shared survival is not as easy as conversations, statements and articulations of dreams, concerns and values; rather, conversations like these are moments of recognizing how the decisions we make and actions we take have to mirror the work we need to do and the world we want to live in— those dreams, concerns and values are the foundation for our actions, not only in making a decision but in the life that emerges from that decision.

(Be)coming together. Growing up, Christmas Eve was a work night for my mother; she would be out of the house for much of the evening performing Christmas Eve services. We would attend one as a family, typically the midnight service, and upon returning home, at the end of my mom's long day of work, we would open one gift each and my mom would read to us from her childhood copy of *The Night Before Christmas*. As my sister and I grew older, my parents began to host a buffet style dinner party for people in between my mother's services, still ending the evening with the tradition we had established in my childhood. The last few Christmas Eves before I was married were a celebration of being together, my parents and I visiting my sister and her family in

Alaska, or them coming to where we were. The Christmas "traditions" my sister and I grew up with had less space in the rush of meeting up, and we simply spent time together to take a moment to breathe.

The first year of my and Kalia's marriage, my sister and her family visited her in-laws in New York, and so they were not around for Christmas. Because it was Kalia and my first Christmas together we worked our best to be as many places as we could, with as much of our family as we could, to spend Christmas Eve with her family and then on Christmas Day go to my parents' house. My parents had invited her entire family over for lunch, and so her sisters, brother-in-law, and nephews all came over.

Christmas reminds Kalia of a fading set of traditions, the possibility of Hmong-ness being swallowed by an inescapable Western colonial culture: Christmas movies full of white and Christian folk in a white, Christian world, Christmas music and material gifts everywhere. I explain to her there is a difference between the representations and the experience. However, I also know that she is right, that when I watch *Home Alone* or *Miracle on 42nd Street* there is enough familiar about the experiences and people in those movies that I can relate, that it connects to particular memories; however, I see very little or no representation of Hmong folk, or any accurate or desirable representation of impoverished folk. To help my understanding, I began to focus on how the differences between our families and our time with each created possibilities for Kalia and myself to discover something different, more true to both of our experiences and upbringings.

On Christmas day, my mom and dad told us that the night before had been the first Christmas Eve they had spent alone since 1975, when my mom was pregnant with

my sister. For 36 years they said they had not had such a lonely Christmas Eve. Kalia and I had been at her parents' house playing *Pictionary* with her siblings and wrapping gifts.

There is nothing especially "Christmas" about this time together. It is simply a reminder, not of an abstract holiday, but of being home. The only hint of the holiday, besides the gifts, is a small plastic tree sitting in the foyer that one of Kalia's sisters bought at a time when she thought it was important the younger siblings' experience what many of the kids at school talked about.

The next day, Kalia's family (sisters, nephews, brother-in-law) came to my parent's house. The nephews wore the Hmong vests Kalia and I had given them; Kalia and I had bought Hmong ornaments for my parents' tree--Hmong patterns and colors influencing our family Christmas. A large Christmas day gathering had been something that had not occurred in one of my parents' houses since I was young and my grandmothers, as well as my father's siblings and their families, came over: my dad's older sister who died when I was about 18; her husband, an older Jewish man who I was very fond of; my dad's younger brother; his wife; and their two children. My memories of those few hours with all of the relatives are some of the only memories I have of all of us together. Those moments were one of the few times in the year when I could see many of the pieces that fit together to explain, in part, the story of where I come from. As I watched Kalia's family gather in my parents' house, I could see some of the pieces that explained where we, as a combined family, were headed.

While we ate our lunch, my mother asked everybody about their memories of Christmas. Kalia's sister recalled her mother getting them gifts from toys for tots, and how, on a recent trip to Wal-Mart, her mother had bought a toy to donate to the charity that had allowed some sense of Christmas to appear in Kalia's childhood home. Kalia's sisters were otherwise silent. Kalia's brother-in-law, raised in a small rural community in Kentucky, recalled large family meals at his grandmother's house. Since graduating from high school fifteen years prior, he had only been able to return once for Christmas.

These stories were new to my parent's home. My mother and father did not share their own memories, from their childhoods, or many from mine. My mother grew up in a first generation, East-Coast Italian family with a working class, white father who came from a farm in the Midwest; my father grew up in the homes of wealthier grandparents and comfortably middle-class parents: a father from Sweden and a mother who had grown up in a very wealthy family. I imagine that when my mother and father were first married, during their first Christmases alone, they became aware of the differences in their memories of home, of the things they held dear or sacred, and the things they valued and which were familiar— not only in the holiday— but in being together: the food, the stories, the people, the movement, the conversations.

Afterwards we opened some gifts. When Kalia's family had left, my dad commented, "I think they really loved the gifts!"

I said, "Yes, but more importantly, it was wonderful that we could all be together."

A few days after our visit my mother put up a picture we took of this new assemblage of family on Christmas day onto her Facebook and comments abounded, "What a beautiful Family!"

My mother has learned to say that Kalia's sisters are her daughters. She recognizes that to the nephews she and my dad are one of many grandmas and grandpas.

A couple of weeks before Christmas my mom had invited Kalia's sisters over to my parents' house to make Christmas cookies. Kalia's cousin joined. Kalia told me her cousin was worried. "Give me some tips" is what Kalia explained her cousin had said to the sister who lives with us, "I've never baked before." Kalia's sister gave her cousin a sideways look, narrowed her eyes and responded with a giggle, "What?" Her cousin repeated herself and Kalia's sister responded, "I've never baked either." Kalia continued with her story, "My cousin told the girls she is nervous, because she has never really been in a white house before. She told them she is nervous and excited." Kalia's youngest sister told her to not worry, that she had been there and there was nothing to worry about.

As Kalia and I entered, arriving before her sisters, I held up a bag of a variety of oranges and persimmons that Kalia's cousin had brought from her mom's stall at the flea market for my mom. My mom perused the fruit, "Tomatoes?" she asked picking up a persimmon.

Kalia's cousin and her sisters all entered the house. Each one gave my mom a hug. As they began work on the first batch of cookies they stood nervously picking up utensils, taking turns reading the recipes. "This is a little less than half a cup" one of Kalia's sisters said as her and her cousin measured out the chopped candied cherries.

Kalia's other sister stood by the mixer reading the directions, and my mom led them through each step.

The last two years my mom has packed a large tray of cookies for Kalia's family. This year the sisters all decided they wanted to come and learn how to make the cookies.

I was very excited, because my mom and perhaps dad might get a better sense of my new sisters and the dynamics of my family; I thought that it might be fun for my mom to work with a bunch of younger women, as I have vague memories of this happening when my sister was their age and a friend might come over to help bake the cookies. I saw in this day, a subtle switch between giving to inviting in, from receiving to participating. I watched as the distance between homes and families was being traversed.

Throughout the day, I paid attention to the girls and how they acted in this new environment; I paid attention to my mother with a new group of daughters surrounding her. Afterwards Kalia told me, that as the girls were leaving, her youngest sister said in her typical sarcastic (but not meaning to be) tone, "We *can* do this next year"; my mom laughed.

This being together allowed me to picture the future, to see, once again, the possibility of us all being together. I pictured a future assembly line, daughters, cousins, and sisters. My sister coming from Alaska, Kalia's older sister being there as well as Kalia's mom. I pictured children running around, cookies being made in big batches, I imagined my mom's life as somehow fundamentally changed, the girls' as changing. I wondered about what would be learned, what adjustments everybody would have to make.

Reflections. A friend, discussing her cross-cultural family experience, explained it thus: “Family is one thing that is really interdisciplinary”. Mine and Kalia’s families represent very different demographics, in regards to class and race. The histories of each of our families are also very different, the religious beliefs and languages, yet we are all brought together in mine and Kalia’s marriage; we are tied together moving into the future.

In daily life there are many interactions (small and large) between many people from different places and backgrounds. Often, these differences are forces that keep people apart; differences in culture, religion, language, race, and class are boundaries that are drawn between people. I had so few interactions with many of those people outside of the boundaries of my experience (white, Christian, middle class) that growing up my understanding of those people developed into something less multi-dimensional— limited to momentary interactions, and popular representations. To Kalia, white and middle class was always evident, in movies, television, and the world around her. The limits of interactions across difference is definitely skewed toward white, middle class folk not getting to know “other” people, unless they explicitly seek such interactions. When considered alongside the fact that to find success (or pathways to survive within contemporary institutions— schools, financial, etc.) marginalized families have to move toward isolation and/or assimilation. The idea of meeting on equal footing is moot. Again, the settled must become unsettled.

My mother’s mother, the child of immigrants from Italy, learned at an early age that to be a “Guinea” with pierced ears was something that would be ridiculed, over time

stepped away from her home language. At the same time, my grandfather, a man from a very "white" rural upbringing, moved to New York so that she remained a part of her family and the support network of an immigrant family (he did not come from a small family himself). Both of my grandparents are deceased, and so it is impossible for me to do anything other than speculate about why he left Illinois and they stayed in New York. However, I sense an ambiguity in my mother that may be reflective of these decisions: an understanding of immigrant experiences and poverty similar to her mother's as a child, and at the same time a belief in the inevitability of contemporary, white, middle-class society and assimilation.

My father's background is more white and more wealthy but not without its own complications due to class and culturally related trauma (his father being raised on a farm in Sweden and moved here at a young age, away from his parents, when he was adopted by a wealthy uncle).

My parents see things from the other side of assimilation, whereas Kalia's parents are guarded against it— as their culture, language, heritage and beliefs are so tied to their identity and way of being. Kalia's father, while he can communicate clearly, and understand much of English, chooses to speak mostly in Hmong because it is in that language, through that way of talking about the world, that he can most clearly articulate his thoughts and what he sees. He is a poet, and so in Hmong he can become creative with his world. It is the language of the ancestors that he calls to when he calls for protection for his sons and daughters, and the language of the spirits of the family when he calls for them to come home.

While our futures are tied together, the understanding or belief in what that future looks like is different. Walls need to be let down, but so do the expectations of what happens when those walls crumble. A localized pedagogy for shared survival requires those from the dominant culture to step back and share in the work (to unsettle) that is currently expected of those on the Outside coming into the Centre as they are forced to participate daily in an aggressively foreign culture. While it cannot guarantee agreement, or even necessarily understanding, it is necessary that there are at least attempts to understand, moments to listen, and to care, to see those people who are marginalized as having something that is missing from the Centre.

Even within the family that Kalia and I are bringing together, there are limits to how and when our parents meet. While each set visits the other's house, there are limited conversations. Simply showing up, while beneficial and heartening, is not enough on its own to cover the gaps in experiences and understanding of the world. The world created by colonial institutions has been so isolating, and so invasive to Kalia's family and culture (and other marginalized folk), that it is not surprising that protective barriers have been built (decisions where to go, who to talk to).

Kalia's and my wedding was a meeting of our cultures, and our engagement was an attempt at something similar to the Hmong tradition. My parents have been at Kalia's parents' home for various family events; and her parents have come to my parents' house. Yet, there is still a distance which is hardly travelled, but in which Kalia and I are building our lives and family. The women working to make the rice for our wedding were Hmong, while I was at my house drinking beers and listening to music with several white

friends. Similarly, in contrast to our wedding where there were many faces of many colors, my parents had a cocktail party day following our wedding, which Kalia and I choose not to attend. Within Kalia's family, an invitation is open, and for my parents an open invitation was a logistical nightmare and so they decided to limit their welcome. In a non-intercultural marriage (white or Hmong) it would likely not be comment worthy if no one from the bride's family is a part of the groom's parents' post-wedding celebration; however, in a marriage such as ours, where our futures depend on a connection across our cultures, this represents a distance that we must actively resist and be in contention with.

It is important for us to resist the distance that exists between our families' experiences so that our (eventual) children can understand all of their grandparents' experiences as powerful and as a present part of who they are (not as a relic lost in the past, or as a misguided and ignorant force that silenced a part of them— I imagine my white grandfather's decision to live near my grandmother's Italian family as an action of support for the cultural influence that was central to her identity). This resistance is also important because as we move into the future together we can keep more possibilities open--to create a world where all of our family can stand together— by celebrating the diversity of experience and world-views that surround us.

I realize that it is important for me to recognize other people as practiced actors in worlds that would be impossible for me to navigate (I would have trouble surviving in a completely foreign culture that does not recognize me, my culture or my language and often acts aggressively to erase these). It is important, if I am going to make connections, to listen and to work at understanding the experiences of different people from different

perspectives. This does not mean that I have to agree with every action, but I need to examine why any sense of disagreement arises.

It is important, as I come from an assimilated family and culture, to be mindful when someone that is different is labeled “cute” or when describing something we disagree with as “wrong”, by acting in any way similar to these we condescend and dismiss. It is important to be open to what other people have to teach us, as a possible way of reconnecting with our own destructed pasts (through those processes of assimilation: the condescension, the dismissal, the movement for success).

These experiences of our families coming together are always exciting and full of possibility. However, they are also limited. Beyond being sometimes celebratory, these moments can also cause distress. When we visited my sister’s family in Alaska, her youngest (who is infatuated with Kalia) commented to Kalia that people who look like her clean the rooms and serve the food in Hawaii. This interaction, occurred in a moment of play and being together. At once it exposed the limits of the world that my sister and brother-in-law choose to show my nephews as well as the importance of Kalia’s presence in their lives.

Further, this was an emotionally wrought situation for Kalia. This was not simply an interaction occurring outside of her home— this was a part of her home and her family. For this reason, each time my sister’s boys visit Minnesota, we make a point of bringing them into those spaces which are familiar to Kalia: We take them to the Hmong market and to Kalia’s sister’s home. We take them into spaces where they can be exposed to different possibilities for the people who look like Kalia— a fun uncle (Kalia’s

youngest brother), tasty food, and older smiling folk who reach for hugs— as familiar, as family.

The limits to my sister's family's life are not meaningless, and Kalia's distress does not preclude possibility. Both point to the depth (the everydayness and embededness) of the work that needs to be done, and the possibility of that work. They expose the dynamics that need to be unsettled to realize shared survival: the individual actions and ways of being which either invite, intimidate or exclude**.**

As it is in these situations, it is not always clear what is inviting, intimidating and exclusionary. Simply being in a home can be representative of all three of these actions (who is present and why, who is in control of what is happening, who is not present). The situations above are both markers of the problems in realizing a localized pedagogy for shared survival, as well as the moments where such pedagogy can be (and is being) realized.

While it is important to recognize the work that still is yet to be accomplished in coming together, it is equally important to see how our worlds colliding on such intimate levels as home and family created the opportunities for learning, for seeing where the future leads, for dropping guards and for listening, for sharing survival.

At Christmas, my parents hear stories of poverty (which for my mother connect to her mother's upbringing), Kalia's sisters are welcomed into a home that for a long time (myself included) has not understood how it keeps them and their family out. When Kalia's cousin visits a "white" house for the first time, when Kalia's sisters come to help

make cookies, new avenues for communication and being together are opened; space, time, action and purpose are shared, and in that time everybody learns.

The presence of individuals in a home as part of a family is something different than a person we pass on the street. It is something that can't be as easily avoided or quarantined.[49] A localized pedagogy for shared survival attempts to make this inevitability a part of our everyday lives, so that those people without homes and families (those people marginalized by society, without the safety provided by a home—for a myriad of reasons such as physical or financial stress and abuse) can also be a part of these types of unavoidable interactions; and so that those homes and families which are separated (by culture, language, class and race) are allowed ways of coming together (which do not necessitate a loss of identity, beliefs, or histories) in moments where we may not always recognize similar purpose or action is shared in the midst of shared space and time.

As I reflect on experiences with both of our families, there are several— both tragedies and celebrations— which have brought both sides of our family together in deep and meaningful ways. In particular, when my ninety-year old great-uncle (my grandmother's brother, visiting from the east coast) sat down to talk with Kalia's father at her parents' house during their Thanksgiving celebration.

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[49] There are people who enter homes— service industry folk in middle and upper class homes, or researchers, government (welfare) employees in poorer homes— where the relationship that brings somebody into a home either requires us to continue to observe the rules of the outside world (ignore, treat them as people working *for* us, enforce rules and govern actions) and thereby bring those rules and racial/class/etc relationships into our homes, or to break those rules entirely, and thereby create possibilities for them to be broken outside. Needless to say, this is an ambiguous process and it can happen in situations between family members as well.

A couple of days after talking to Kalia's father, when Kalia and I were visiting my parents, my great-uncle spoke about his life as a child with a father who did manual labor to support his family (similarly to Kalia's father). The interaction he had with Kalia's father surfaced memories which I had never been exposed to and developed a connection between my history and Kalia's life. As my great-uncle reflected on his childhood, I was able to see where the past and future lead, and how the distance that has been traveled within family history, is similar to the distance being negotiated in our present.

In these moments between our families, possibilities are revealed for love to be harnessed and spread outward as a value that would allow for a sharing of survival not only in our homes, but in the world (as it does in my great-uncle's presence). I understand how the differences between members of a family (especially in the case of mine and Kalia's, but also in the family I grew up in) can be a microcosm of the same differences in the world (although we may not be attuned to these) and have lessons to teach us about how we can interact and be together.

There are situations that allow us to be together despite differences that, over time, show themselves. These are important. What follows needs to be a preparedness for when those differences emerge so that those moments when we are together become the basis for further adjustment and recognition. Our relationships are the foundations for deeper understanding and getting to know. This is not an easy process, but it is necessary, and over time family grows closer. Again, the values of contention, and balance (Tuck 2009a) are essential for these types of intimate relationships to grow and for our world to become more interdependent.

The moments together, big and small are tremendous opportunities to grow our homes— to sneak the work of a home into the world. It is in these shifts that we come into each other's lives in significant ways, that I become part of a Hmong home, that Kalia becomes part of my parents' household (as it becomes unsettled—albeit through love). It is when we begin to create something new. These shifts are continuous, and when attention is paid they can begin to switch the expectation from assimilation, and instead build the strength of family and culture which allow for survival in the midst of institutions which are, overall, dehumanizing.

Being together/Sharing survival. One day when Kalia had left to spend time with her parents, she called and explained that her dad was sad and exhausted, that he was having bad dreams, that he missed all of us. She picked me and her sisters up. We went to Kalia's elder sister's house; we sat around to chat. We ate curry noodles that Kalia's mom prepared. I held the nephews. They smiled, cried, screamed, and rested their heads. Kalia's dad has diabetes but was not watching his diet. I noticed him make a sandwich, and then another; I got sad very quickly.

My father has had diabetes my entire life, and I have watched his attention to what he eats, his exercise, what the doctors have told him. Before Kalia and I were dating, my father read about Kalia's father's diabetes at the end of her book[50] and he became concerned. Since then, when we have dinner with my parents, my dad will explain to Kalia and me the many medical reasons that Kalia's dad needs to take care of himself. He asks for constant updates, and then continues to provide his assessment. He

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[50] Kalia is the author of *The Latehomecomer* (Yang, 2008)

worries about Kalia's dad, given the difference in their routines and the level of attention that they pay to things like blood sugar levels, diet, exercise.

I knew that one of the cream cheese and jelly sandwiches, let alone the two Kalia's dad was eating, was not a good idea after the full dinner that we all had shared. I sat on the ground and played with the nephew, and thought to myself how and when I could say something.

On New Years Eve, Kalia and I were with her family. My parents had gone to Milwaukee to spend New Years with old friends. The cable went out right as the ball was about to drop on the east coast. In the absence of the television, the family looked at the clock and we had our own countdown, clinking glasses of sweet sparkling wine. In between the East Coast New Years and the Midwestern New Years, the entire family sat around in a circle. The older of Kalia's brothers was absent, out to spend time with his cousins.

Kalia stood up to make a speech, half in Hmong, half in English. She said she hoped to write two books that year, she spoke about being better for her family, she pointed out some of her concerns about her sisters, but also talked about how they had given her hope.

She passed to me. We had talked about how this was my opportunity to discuss with her dad how he was taking care of himself.

The year before, when we had sat around, Kalia's dad had offered praise and admonishment in relation to each member of the family's behavior, good and bad attitudes, good and bad grades. Each of his children was addressed individually. We

were each offered a chance to recognize our own goals and positioning for the New Year, as well as anything we would like to point out about other people in the family. Kalia's mom and dad had explained that his mother had done this every year, through the aftermath of the war in Laos: in the jungle, the refugee camps, and in the move to the United States. Kalia's mother explained that she saw it as the main reason everyone was able to stay together and strong as a family unit through all of this. I knew that this year I had things to say, concerns to voice.

"I'm glad that dad's surgery went well, and am happy to be a part of this family, to start this New Year as a part of the family…" These were my words as I passed to Kalia's youngest brother.

Kalia looked to me. "Is there anything else? Now would be the time." I was not prepared to address her dad's diet in that moment, which seemed celebratory. I told her I would find the time. Kalia's youngest brother stood up, and in Hmong said, "I know Kalia says she wants to write two books, but I think she should aim for three. I am sad that my brother can't be here, but having my sisters' husbands here as brothers makes up for that."

Later Kalia told me this was his first speech. Everyone said a little something, the girls talking mostly about losing weight, Kalia's sister about doing more work with her law firm. When Kalia's father, the last in the circle, finished talking, I spoke. I discussed how each of our goals was commendable, that the coming year was rife with opportunity, for Kalia's sister's law firm, for Kalia's books, for Kalia's father's recovery from his surgery, for my dissertation; but I said I realized that it was important that each day we

think about what we can do and how we would do it; I said that large goals in the future while commendable are not plans for action.

I looked to Kalia's father and told him that the way he took care of his diet and what he ate worried me, and that we all love him and want him to be around for a while, that we needed him to take better care of himself. Afterwards Kalia's older sister said, "I'm happy you are my brother."

Two weeks prior, Kalia's dad was going to have surgery. He had an infection in his ear that had been there since childhood and his hearing was quickly disappearing. The doctor told the family that surgery would be the best chance for him to stop the loss of hearing. They would drill into the bone to remove the infection, and then graft a muscle from his temple into the place of his damaged eardrum.

There was a hand tying ceremony at Kalia's parents house before the surgery, the day after Kalia's thirty-first birthday. After a day of preparations, of cleaning space, preparing and picking up food, the house filled with children, teenagers, twenty-somethings, adults and their elders. After helping to prepare food, and setting up the buffet tables, I sat down on a sofa in the basement next to a cousin and found a basketball game on the television.

Many of the men in the room, Kalia's cousins, looked forward at the TV not saying much. Occasionally, there was a remark in Hmong and some laughter. One of the cousins and I spoke for a bit on the value of various NBA trades and the expected performance of the different teams. The children ran from one room to the next, a messy

herd, chasing each other up and down the stairs over and over again. A group of the older children gathered in the back of the room to discuss computer games.

Earlier in the day, one of the older uncles and his sons pulled some chickens from Kalia's father's coop in the backyard. Later, that uncle stood by the doorway. He held the traditional buffalo horns, with the live chicken at his feet and a bowl of rice and eggs with sticks of incense stuck in it. He chanted, and called out for Kalia's dad's spirit to come home. As unintelligible as it was to my non-native Hmong ears, his chant had become very familiar to me, ending with a drawn out "los!" (Come!) and the name of the spirit being called, in this case Kalia's father.

Before the meal could be eaten, Kalia and I had to make a run to the local Wal-Mart to get cotton string to be tied around her father and mother's hands. When we got there, I noticed the holiday items. I had forgotten that not everyone was looking forward in the next few days to a major surgery, that instead many people were focused on the arrival of Christmas, buying presents, and ingredients for large family meals.

We walked through the aisles to find the string to tie hands and we passed a couple of women holding a frozen pizza. This also momentarily shook me. *Aren't they having a big gathering too?* In that second, I was confounded by all of the different lives surrounding me. As we walked with the white string I wondered if anybody knew why we had it.

When I lived in Australia, I could occasionally recognize the discontinuity between my life as an American and the lives of those around me; but as a white American, the assumption has always been that the rest of the world followed my

patterns of behavior. What happened in the home I grew up in was similar enough to most of my friends' homes, and the homes on television— the food that was being sold, and the advertisements, followed a calendar of holidays and events that matched my family's— that I assumed it must have been universal. The trip to Wal-Mart forced a different kind of realization.

When we returned to Kalia's parents' house we were swept back into the busy of the evening. I was able to sit for a few minutes before the hand tying began. A quick blessing was made and then we lined up to tie strings around Kalia's Dad and Mom's hands to wish them health, success in the surgery, and strength to recover from the surgery. Kalia's dad's sister cried and placed her hand lovingly on his head. She leaned her head onto his shoulder as she gave him a hug from behind.

After the meal and some cleaning, the family began to leave. I hugged the aunts as they walked out the door. I ran to shake one of the older uncle's hands; I said "see you later" in Hmong. He laughed and shook my hand with more energy, noting my use of his language.

Two days later, after the surgery, a few of the family who were at the hospital with us continued back to Kalia's parents' house to make sure her dad was ok and to help Kalia's brother feed her dad's chickens. We all sat, exhausted from a day at the hospital. Kalia's uncle began telling us stories from his childhood.

Kalia's sister's husband and I listened to her uncle's stories through Kalia's translation. He talked to us about traveling with his father through the mountains in Laos, and about being left alone in strange villages while his father sold meat. He talked about

how his brothers had been afraid of the strangers, but that because he was not afraid, he talked to the people in these towns and in these conversations discovered a way to help his father. His stories were full of lessons that weren't explicit but hidden in the telling, in their action and as they appeared in the context of our conversation.

When Kalia's uncle had to go, we thanked him for the stories. As we said goodbye to Kalia's uncle's youngest son, Kalia gave him a hard time for losing grasp of the Hmong language. "You can always listen to your father's stories," I suggested.

"Yes, but they take so long. They never end" was his reply.

Earlier, his dad had pointed to the television and explained that the stories on the television that his children watch don't have the same depth, that they are too simple to teach anything about people and the world.

Reflections. Kalia's uncle's stories teach about the world because that is where they emerge from: his life and his experiences. His wisdom is not based on the merit of his age alone, but the fact that in that time he has had many experiences; his stories "never end" because he is still living—because our relationships with each other do not begin and end in neatly packaged narratives, ready for an hour long television drama. Kalia's uncle tells a story because something in the present has reminded him of it, and his story finds its structure in how it connects to what it was that reminded him. In turn, one story leads to another. These stories outline relationships, not only in the story itself, but also between the stories. These stories present possibilities, they expose a train of thought, a way of being.

These stories are important in the ways they shape and represent how Kalia has learned to see the world. In the same way there are shifts provided by the changes in Kalia's younger cousins' lives— the different ways the younger generation looks at the world and has it presented to them. Yet, between Kalia's cousin and her uncle there is a disconnect. Her cousin's language is being lost, and this is the language that his father's stories are in, the language that they emerged from. The change in language, from Hmong to English, happens outside the walls of Kalia's parents' and her Uncles' homes, but it also happens within them.

The family cannot protect itself entirely from those forces that cause a language to change (it cannot avoid the younger generations picking up English), but in the family work can be done to resist those forces that build distance between the generations, that create gaps in knowledge because a story cannot be understood or communicated. Kalia's uncle tells Kalia's sister's husband and I a story, translated through Kalia, and in turn I explain to Kalia's cousin that he should listen more closely.

If the language were lost, so many truths would be lost with it, so many ways of looking at the world or piecing together a story. It is then within the home, and with the family that the language needs to be practiced and stories need to be told.

I have been trying to learn Hmong, although it goes very slowly. After the hand tying when I ran out to shake Kalia's uncle's hand and to speak to him in Hmong, he was happy. Kalia tells me again and again that her aunts and uncles have so much they want to talk to me about. Each time I say something in Hmong to an elder in the family, or at a public event, they begin speaking back with a fast tongue eager for my understanding. I

nod and then explain I do not understand. They always tell me, “you must learn”. Many of them can speak English, but it is in Hmong that they can tell me about being Hmong, that they can explain how the world is from their perspective— they can share their stories.

I know that learning Hmong is important so that I can hear her parents’ and aunts’ and uncles’ stories, but also because I want to talk to Kalia’s parents to explain my excitements and worries, to tell them about how I see the world while hearing about how they live in theirs. At the very least, the moments when it is possible to make an effort to speak in Hmong create their own opportunities, putting me in a position of vulnerability and uncertainty, having to trust Kalia’s family to be patient, to listen, to give me opportunities to make mistakes and to learn more about how they see and experience the world through language.

Being together is important for similar reasons. Kalia’s father’s surgery brought the family together, simply because the surgery would make him more vulnerable; as he approached his surgery he was more in need of people surrounding him, reminding him that they loved him. For those lucky enough to have family, depending on how close they are to that family, there are constant reminders that we are responsible not only for ourselves but those around us. In moments like those above, these reminders give purpose to our work (who am I doing this for) and even errands (going to Wal-Mart).

Coming together does not stop pain, or bad decisions from being made. However, when the family is brought together the focus is simply about making sure we are all able to simply get up and meet each day together, stronger than we would be on our own; it is

a recognition of the importance of a single individual in a much larger whole. These are opportunities to give and to care, but in doing so, the burdens from each other's lives are also shared. We are responsible for each other's well being not only by "taking care" but also by sharing struggle (both our own and others').

Once again, there is a divide between the space where the family meets and the world outside. On Kalia's and my visit to Wal-Mart this distance was palpable. The store was focused on larger holidays, commercialized ideas of being together. My own assumptions in the store were that everybody was preparing for those holidays. In those stores we were together with other people, yet there is such distance between our lives that my assumptions were based on advertisements.

This distance, where what I assumed of other people's lives is based more on the products being sold around me, and advertisements I might have seen on television, resembles closely Kalia's uncle's lament about the stories on television where the stories do not teach anything in depth about the world.

In a localized pedagogy for shared survival, it is necessary to be aware of the worlds of other people, to overcome the disinterest that builds distance, and the assumptions that reinforce the dominant narratives about what people are doing.

Events like the hand tying allow for survival in the midst of a world that often makes that survival a challenge. For those without a home or a family, or those stuck in the narrow possibilities presented by a larger institutional model, having these gatherings be more evident could produce localized movements where survival is shared. Yet, these events happen in homes because there is no space outside, because institutions are so

harsh on individuals and families from “other” communities— these are seen as acts of resistance and survival because they resist the larger institutional culture which rejects this type of solidarity (both as it bespeaks potential political action, and because diversity is viewed as a hindrance to efficiency and in turn progress). Institutions cause isolation, especially in the midst of struggle, thereby exaggerating the burden that this type of gathering and being together works to alleviate and spread. Thus, it is important to learn from these rather than see them as isolated to families— how can our pedagogical approaches be this kind of sharing of struggle (as well as success and celebration)?

A localized pedagogy for shared survival depends on this kind of action; at first it depends on recognition of the moments when decisions are made to either support or ignore the suffering and struggles of the people around us. It requires supporting and giving space to moments in which struggle (or celebration) bring people together. It requires awareness of being together: visibility of different reasons and possibilities for being together.

In short, there are these things we cannot do for other people. Most of us are not surgeons; we cannot perform the surgery; we cannot step into Kalia’s dad’s place to have the surgery done to us instead. There are so many risks, and many possibilities, that are not all anticipated or expected when we look toward the next day or the new year. These are all compounded for people from marginalized communities living realities alongside and within institutions. However, ideas can be shared, thought through and talked about (if a language is shared). It is important to simply take time and make space to be together, to understand the value in this. It is important to share responsibility as well as

the consequences of things that cannot be controlled (and those that feel as if they are in control, or that limit possibilities).

As we left the evening of the hand tying, Kalia's dad turned around and smiled. "Thank you" he said. I nodded. In the course of that day, in the presence and life of a family in a single space, Kalia's dad's attitude and outlook changed. He was reminded, no matter the constant reinforcement to the contrary by the world outside, that he was not alone.

Conclusion

The morning of Kalia's dad's hand tying, Kalia and I woke up at around 3.30am to go to the airport and pick up Kalia's sister who had been away at school for three months. She had not been the best at keeping in touch with her parents, and being at college she was in a very different place, around other students all her age, mostly private school kids, primarily from wealthy families. At the end of the day of the hand tying, I saw the tiredness in her eyes. There was a sense of shock about her, from the return to a home full of people of different ages, speaking different languages, working, joking, and gathering to fill the house with warmth and wishes of health. I remembered my own returns when I was her age, after much less time, and to a much less different environment, but it was still overwhelming.

Earlier in the day she had spent much time with her nephews, youngest brother and sisters. She held them all close to try and make up for the distance that had been between them, a distance she had never experienced before those three months away. The

afternoon and evening had gone by in a flash. She was cautious in returning to her parents, but we all knew they were whom she missed most.

"Is it good to be home?" I asked as we stood together on the stairs and watched the cousins, aunts, uncles, nieces and nephews leave.

Her answer came slowly, hinting at a million thoughts swimming right below the surface of a single syllable,

"Yeah…"

A space to come home to. Institutional expectations and ideas of success are defined within narrow limits. As such, the values that hold families from marginalized communities together are often isolated as they exist outside these narrow limits. They are often labeled as "wrong" and sometimes these homes and families break apart. Again this labeling, dismissal, and pathologizing embolden an idea of particular groups of people and places as damaged (Tuck, 2009b). Tuck calls for an approach to the work of education and research that recognizes "desire" over damage, "not [as in] mere wanting but our informed seeking" (p. 418), "to not take theories of change for granted, but to be sure that our actions make steps toward our purposes […] this is a call for a remembrance of the true purpose of knowledge in/for our communities" (pp. 423-424); importantly, "it is not a call to paint everything as peachy, as fine, as over" (p. 419). These narratives point to a desire for more human relationships across difference and recognizing these as existing in everyday lives, in various ways. They also point to the processes by which this desire is complicated, obscured and erased by institutional expectations and definitions outside of our homes, but also as they are a part of them. The narratives in this chapter

highlight the purposes for and types of relationships in a localized pedagogy for shared survival.

As Jackson (1995) says, home can allow for opportunities to experience "existential control and connectedness" (p. 154). The process of relationships, of being and (be)coming together, that occurs in a home at its best allows us to make connections between events in our lives, in the world outside of the home, the people in our lives, the stories we are told, our pasts and possibilities for our future. A question that I have asked myself throughout my analyses of each story is: how does the everyday show an approach to relationships (understood as pedagogical in their own right) where human lives are valued, as well as, in what ways are barriers placed (and practiced) on the ability to accept difference?

While these narratives clearly place value in the process of relationship, it is a problem, with clear educational and pedagogical implications, that these relationships are not often public or shared across differences other than those differences that appear in our families.

Through each of these narratives, the creation of spaces where we can be together-- in conversation, ceremony and everyday life, in providing strength and sharing the struggles and reasons for celebration--is the starting point for a localized pedagogy for shared survival. The differences between intimate and familiar relationships and the relationships of educators and researchers need to be examined. Through this examination, relationships within institutional settings might become less governed by

institutional rules and more by movements toward a localized pedagogy for shared survival, or care for humanity and a value in diversity of experience.

If learning allows for different people to support each other in different ways, and if the process of shared survival is more public and foundational to people's work as educators and researchers, it might be possible to blur, distort and eventually erase the lines that divide institutionally valued knowledge from everyday learning and relationships. The ways in which learning is defined and wrangled away from the processes of shared survival are diminished as value is placed in the everyday ways we are together—it does feel good to be home, but there is a lot of work to be done to make sure there is space for everybody to come home to.

Conclusion

Facing Reality

somewhere in the unknown world

a yellow eyed woman

sits with her daughter

quilting.

some other where

alchemists mumble over pots.

their chemistry stirs

into science. their science

freezes into stone.

in the unknown world

the woman

threading together her need

and her needle

nods toward the smiling girl

remember

this will keep us warm.

how does this poem end?

do the daughters' daughters quilt?

do the alchemists practice their tables?

do the worlds continue spinning

away from each other forever? (Clifton, 1991, p. 3)

It is precisely what we do not know about how our communities live, learn, collaborate, love, and imagine that *demands* open-ended, risky experiments in new ways of life. (Coté, Day & de Peuter, 2007, p. 332)

Uncle Rocky's Suggestion

As I came to the end of writing this dissertation, my ninety-year-old (great) Uncle Rocky passed away. Several months before his passing he visited us in Minnesota. He was always interested in my work, and so while he was here we discussed my dissertation. He had read my preliminary written exams. Yet, in our conversation, to avoid too much confusion I told him that I was doing ethnography. I figured the conversation would end there.

A couple of days later, while visiting Kalia's parents house for Thanksgiving, he talked to me about how much he enjoyed her family and felt a connection to them. He told me he had been browsing through a book that was sitting out at my parents' house, on Saint Benedict; he was reading about humility. "You know, it's very interesting… That's something you have to think about with your ethnography, right Aaron?" I nodded. I told him I was excited to read it. A few days before he passed, I told him he

would be in my dissertation. He laughed; he sighed. "That's great Aaron. I'm proud of you."

On the day of his burial— which I was unable to travel to— as I was putting finishing touches on the last draft of this dissertation, I read that chapter. I am impressed with how well the message of humility speaks to the continuing work of a localized pedagogy for shared survival and the limitations to its practice, the work I need to do and be aware of.

A Risky Experiment: Humility

In the chapter "Humility: The Lost Virtue," of her book, *Wisdom Distilled from the Daily: Living the Rule of St. Benedict Today*, Joan Chittister (1990) describes humility as opposed to arrogance, whereby individuals decide that they know best and prescribe approaches for other people to follow-- a process of trying to shape the world in relation to our own vision and ideals. With an approach of humility, Chittister emphasizes, "We shouldn't spend our lives telling other people how to run theirs" (p. 63). Instead, humility recognizes what there is to learn from the people and things that share the world (space) with us. Humility is "the foundation of community and family and friendship and love" (p.55):

- We learn that community itself is a source of wisdom for us, that the major relationships of our lives have not been given to us to be exploited by us; they have been given to us to teach us. […] We learn we are not the center of the universe but there is plenty we can gain from others at every age. (p. 63)

- Humility is simply a basic awareness of my relationship to the world and my connectedness to all its circumstances. It is the acceptance of relationships with others, not only for who they are but also for who I am. I do not interact with others to get something out of it; I make my way with all the others in my life because each of them has something important to call out of me, to support in me… (p.65)

Thus, humility, is both a recognition in the value of other people and their ideas, visions, and dreams, as well as a recognition of one's own imperfection; it is a process of reflection.

According to Chittister, this self-reflective stance works to build collective strength in many ways. For one, it requires us to look to others for strength, "We admit our weaknesses and limitations […] We recognize someone else's strengths so that they can call us from our weakness" (p. 60). In respect to a process of shared survival, by practicing humility, by admitting weakness, opportunities are opened for new ways of doing things, and for communication and relationships to be built, "it asks us to accept the fact that there is plenty of room for growth in us […] we can open ourselves to new possibilities within ourselves" (p. 63).

Limitations

While humility as a concept connects to a localized pedagogy for shared survival and the work in this dissertation, it is in regards to the process of humility where Chittister (1990) is of most use for understanding the continuing work outlined in this dissertation. She says, "[…] spiritual development is a process. If the spirituality of the

immediate past is tainted by anything at all, it is the notion that growth is an event" (p.54). In other words, this work is continual and it is constant; it is not an easy process of graduation from one stage to the next.

Toward the beginning of her discussion on humility, Chittister (1990) tells the following story:

> One day the Teacher said, "It is so much easier to travel than to stop."
>
> "Why?" The disciples demanded to know.
>
> "Because," the Teacher said, "as long as you travel to a goal you can hold onto a dream. When you stop, you must face reality."
>
> "But how shall we ever change if we have no goals or dreams?" the disciples asked.
>
> "Change that is real is change that is not willed. Face reality and unwilled change will happen." (p. 53)

This is a project that contends with ideas of progress as associated to colonial visions of the future (i.e. prescribed by colonial conditions), which prescribe best practices for life and require people fit certain cultural molds (and make assumptions that serve a colonial imaginary or dream). Instead, a localized pedagogy for shared survival, and the work of this dissertation work toward "unwilled change" that occurs when we face our own and others' realities.

A localized pedagogy for shared survival reveals and attends to the ways in which our lives are engineered to limit humility, where certain people (i.e. white, affluent folk, predominantly Christian, as well as those guided by Western scientific ideals) are

encouraged to see their lives as more valuable through historic, scientific and popular cultural narratives. Marginalized communities, and individuals within those communities, come to be pathologized and treated as less than through their interactions with people within the institutions that govern many of our lives (schools, etc.), thus necessitating escape or assimilation and self-erasure (giving into another's arrogance).

So much of education reform is focused on the goals and dreams of the disciples in the story above, an imagined utopia or perfect approach whereby all educational problems (goals) are solved (dreams). A localized pedagogy for shared survival, however, recognizes how the solutions that are developed often define (give life to) the same problems they imagine.

When discussing the problem of race in the United States, James Baldwin (1993) wrote to his nephew to be true to himself and the ways the world appeared to him:

> There is no reason for you to try to become like white people and there is no basis whatever for their impertinent assumption that *they* must accept *you*. The really terrible thing, old buddy, is that *you* must accept *them*. And I mean that very seriously. You must accept them and accept them with love. For these innocent people have no other hope. They are, in effect, still trapped in a history which they do not understand; and until they understand it, they cannot be released from it. (Baldwin, 1993, p. 8)

It is important to Baldwin that his nephew does not change to meet white people's expectations, and yet he describes how by thwarting these expecations his nephew must

love and accept those same people trying to tell him what to do; Baldwin is telling his nephew that he must practice humility along with pride and honesty. Baldwin continues,

> […] The black man has functioned in the white man's world as a fixed star, as an immovable pillar: and as he moves out of his place, heaven and earth are shaken to their foundations. You, don't be afraid. I said that it was intended that you should perish in the ghetto, perish by never being allowed to go behind the white man's definitions, by never being allowed to spell your proper name. You have, and many of us have, defeated this intention; and, by a terrible law, a terrible paradox, those innocents who believed that your imprisonment made them safe are losing their grasp of reality. But these men are your brothers—your lost, younger brothers. And if the word *integration* means anything, this is what it means: that we, with love, shall force our brothers to see themselves as they are, to cease fleeing from reality and begin to change it. (Baldwin, 1993, pp. 9-10)

To James Baldwin, the living of life, the discovery of value in life (of not "perish[ing] in the ghetto"), is an act of resistance to the intentions of the white man (and colonial universe which supports and depends on this kind of ignorance).

Real or "unwilled" change cannot occur until the attention is focused inward rather than outward--when focus shifts from a discourse of damage to one of desire (Tuck 2009b); or when settler culture becomes unsettled (Tuck & Yang, 2012). This happens through recognition of the oppressive context (historical and present) of contemporary institutions. As an educator and researcher, I need to be much more focused on how I am complicit and how the institutions that I am a part of expect and reward compliance (and

punish transgression). I must also look for opportunities for humility as they appear in my immediate relationships with those people I come in contact with as a result of my "work"--opportunities to listen and learn (thwarting institutional expectations that I "teach" or define)— both people working inside of and those placed on the outside of institutional boundaries.

Real change does not occur solely through a recognition of the damage done to particular communities, or of the ways in which the institution is damaging, but through recognizing individual (our own and people we are close to) actions within or in service of these institutions—recognizing our relationships with other people as governed by our relationships with institutions (where institutional affiliation is implicitly more valuable than human connection). This requires constant attention be paid to the ways in which we are a part of attempts to tell other people how to live (directly and indirectly) while also paying attention to how we can learn from each others' diverse lived experiences.

This is not easy work, and it is work I have struggled with in the writing and revising of this dissertation. As Chittister (1990) points out, it is not an event; people do not go, suddenly, from being arrogant to practicing humility; it is a constant journey, "we learn we will never arrive and that is all right" (p.63).

This is not a journey toward a desired destination, but a journey toward the present, of "facing reality" and being open to the effect others have on our lives (and in turn the effect we have on others). Sesame Street is not far away; it is here, now. As such, the work to get there is in how we allow other people to help us find it, both by recognizing

value in places often dismissed as dangerous and in unsettling those spaces we imagine as secure (or settled).

How Does This Poem End?

In the opening credits of the original *Sesame Street* the children are finding Sesame Street in places that are otherwise seen as damaged or in need of changing and reform. Yet, these children, as they bounce on curbside trash or play tag in empty lots, have discovered ways in which the world can teach them by being open to possibility. A localized pedagogy for shared survival similarly reaches toward the possibilities that reveal themselves, when less attention is paid to how to manipulate a particular environment or population (to reach a particular dream or vision), less energy is spent on maintaining objective truth (either by following institutional rules or via an unreflective critical stance), and possibilities are revealed through humility in the face of other humans' experiences.

This idea of unwilled change is opposed to an idea of progress so often presented when discussing new "innovations" or reforms in education. De Certau (1984) recognized this idea of progress as fundamentally flawed:

> Driven out of a society which, in conformity with the utopias of earlier ages, cleans out of its streets and houses everything that is parasitic on the rationality of the work—waste products, delinquency, infirmity, old age— the sick man must follow his illness to a place where it is treated, in the specialized enterprises where it is immediately transformed into a scientific and linquistic object foreign to everyday life and language. He is set aside in one of the technical and secret

> zones (hospitals, prisons, refuse dumps) which relieve the living of everything that might hinder the chain of production and consumption, and which, in the darkness where no one wants to penetrate, repair and select what can be sent back up to the surface of progress. (p. 191)

This erasure has become evident on *Sesame Street*. In the years since my childhood, *Sesame Street* has become gentrified. The cracks in the buildings are no longer visible and half of the show takes place in Elmo's imaginary world. The streets and stores are clean; the spaces that *Sesame Street* used to make visible, have become invisible on the show. It is no longer a reflection of the complicated world we live in; it has erased the presence of places that Sesame Street was originally designed to resemble. The ways in which it presented possibilities for these experiences to be a part of everyday language have disappeared from the show.

Thus, the work in finding Sesame Street is not only difficult personal work and a collective journey, it is also in the face of a continuing institutional cultures of oppression, a continuing colonial culture that values individual successes in the service of institutions over shared survival. This is a spinning apart of worlds that Lucille Clifton (1991) laments. A localized pedagogy for shared survival cannot be successful if it attempts to join conversations about educational reform and progress (as de Certau (1984) notes, it will be dismissed as it "hinder[s] the chain of production and consumption"). Instead, it must, as one of my mentors advised, change the conversation, or as Tuck (2009a) suggests, approach change from a new vantage point.

The humanity in any educative endeavor (and vice versa) is lost when approaches begin to be prescribed and defined. Instead, human relationships are a process of reflection and presence: we work with each other, we try new things, we try old things, we recognize each other and each other's experiences. We recognize that we share space. A localized pedagogy for shared survival reveals relationships that happen within, around, outside, and in spite of institutional walls. It relies on the connections (through differences and similarities) between the stories and experiences of people who quit and are pushed out of institutions and those of the people who decide to stay within them. A localized pedagogy for shared survival reveals a different conversation through these connections, one that exists in spite of institutions that define and limit what education is, that reflects the reality educational institutions cannot face--the learning that is a part of all of everyday life, experience and relationships.

This dissertation is built on a belief in the beauty of humans being and becoming together, the power of a localized pedagogy for shared survival. Yet, my reason for exploring this sort of pedagogy is because of the ways in which institutions and the people within them act on the whole, as we often tend toward ignorance of the possibilities inherent in the communities we "serve" as educators and researchers, politicians, administrators and business folk. More often than not, I am brought to tears by stories where institutional affiliation trumps human lives, where arbitrary rules limit people's abilities to live and move freely (in ways many of us take for granted).

The worlds of the quilting daughters and the alchemists in Lucille Clifton's (1991) poem do continue to spin apart. Inertia is hard to break. There is (and always will

be) constant hard work to be done to recognize, value, love and support the people we are with (familiar and unfamiliar). If we move closer to values of humanity, if we loosen our grip on a false sense of security and allow the world to become unsettled, if we break rules and thereby force institutions to work in service of our human relationships rather than defining those relationships, we will learn to share the hard work of survival and being together; the future will not look like anything that can be imagined, and the world will become a much more beautiful, welcoming and loving space for it.

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