Decolonizing the Elementary Classroom:
Possibilities and Constraints in the Common Core Era

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by

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ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

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Decolonizing pedagogy requires teachers and students challenge classical and present day colonial colonialism. Questions arise when examining the implementation of such practices in the elementary classroom, especially since the passing of the Common Core: Is it possible to implement such pedagogy in the midst of restrictive standards and dehumanizing testing? With the recent shift to the Common Core in California, few examples of transformative applications exist at the elementary level, and even less with decolonization as a central focus. The purpose of this study is to examine the practical realities of implementing a critical decolonizing pedagogy in a Common Core elementary classroom. The following questions guide this study:

1- What are the colonizing conditions facing an elementary decolonial educator?
   a. How does a decolonial educator navigate, confront and address these conditions in her classroom?

2- How do the classroom, the youth, the community, and my experiences transform my pedagogy along the way?
3- How do I as an educator, develop the support you need to confront your own traumas of teaching under colonial conditions?

Using a mixed methods approach, blending autoethnography and portraiture, data was collected throughout the 2012-2014 school year, and consisted of observations, artifacts and field notes from a public school in Los Angeles. The fifth grade classroom was in a low-income urban community of color in South Central Los Angeles, comprised mostly of Latino and Black students.

Multiple examples of decolonial curriculum were possible within language arts and social studies common core standards. Despite limitations in the classroom schedule, activities addressing student trauma were imbedded throughout the year, in both academic and informal settings. Substantial constraints were found within standardized testing, both with the state-wide assessments online, as well as with the project-based assessment for the school district. Lastly, participation within a collective of decolonial educators was necessary to sustain such classroom practices and resist colonial practices being encouraged by the school and district.
The dissertation of Carolina Alicia Valdez is approved.

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2015
This dissertation is dedicated to my mother, Dr. Cristina Gomez. 
You sparked my love of learning, teaching, justice, and community.

To my students who have taught me more than I ever learned in my formal schooling.

And to my family in Education 4 the People. 
Thank you for supporting my growth, healing, and transformation.
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Chapter I: Introduction:

“The greatest weapon in the hand of the oppressor is the mind of the oppressed.”
-Steve Biko

I began teaching amidst the shift within public education to examine student success according to high stakes standardized assessments, with a recent push to assess effective teaching by students’ test results. The professional development in the schools in which I have taught has always been focused on analyzing students scores—what color and shape students are testing at and how to move them up to the next shape and color-- and less focused on the actual development of teachers. Never receiving support in developing my teaching practice from district institutions led me to seek out developmental support from informal spaces, such as education conferences, colleagues, and grassroots teacher organizations. It was within these informal spaces that I developed my teaching practice, and evolved in my political development as a social justice teacher, critical teacher, and most recently as a decolonial teacher.

How I came to this work

I joined a local social justice teacher organization my first year teaching and noticed immediately that it lacked elementary teachers, with the vast majority being single subject teachers. I longed for elementary educators to build with but still appreciated the support of any like-minded educator, albeit one teaching a different subject and grade level than myself. It was through this organization that I attended my first social justice conference for teachers. I was excited to learn of new methods and lessons I could incorporate in my teaching practice but was disappointed to see there was only one workshop on elementary teaching. I was even more disappointed when I attended the session and it focused on games to help young children discuss
injustice but none were aligned with the standards I was required to teach. I recall thinking—

*These are great supplements but how do I teach the district curriculum from a social justice stance?*

It was this reflection that led me to present my curriculum at the following conference and I was taken aback by how it was received—people loved it. My session, which was designed for 35 participants, was standing room only with more than 60 elementary educators in attendance. They all said the same thing—*We need more elementary sessions like this! I love the practical examples with the standards listed, I can go back to work on Monday and teach this immediately!* I concluded the session with participants gathering in small groups according to their grade level, with a copy of the standards for each, to brainstorm ideas of similar lessons according to their specific context; however, I noticed only a few groups were able to generate concrete lesson examples. It seemed evident that there were many elementary educators that wanted to teach social justice curriculum but were unsure how to go about translating the content standards into practical applications. I continued to share my curriculum and the response was always the same. This then led me to want to explore my process—*how did I go about translating the standards into engaging critical and developmentally appropriate activities?*

Workshop participants also had a number of questions about implementing such practices: *How do parents receive such critical lessons? How do students perform on standardized assessments? How does administration feel about what you’re teaching? How do you and your students fund the purchase of supplementary literature and project materials?* I answered their questions according to my teaching context at the time, but being RIF’d
(Reduction in Force) and relocated to four different school sites within a span of five years I quickly realized the difference a context makes in being able to implement critical teaching practices. It is also important to note that at this early point in my career I was unfamiliar with social justice theoretical frameworks, such as critical pedagogy, transformative resistance, or decolonial pedagogy because my credential program did not expose to me to critical theories—all I knew was I was providing my students with the education I wish I had received as a child. It was not until my involvement in social justice teacher organizations that I was exposed to these theories and realized what I was teaching in my classroom. Thus, my research is grounded in my lived experiences as a public school elementary teacher in Los Angeles and development as a decolonial educator.

**My Process of Political Development & Decolonization**

Understanding that my values drive my research agenda and teaching, it is important to note my political development as a decolonial educator. My mother planted my passion for educational justice as a child. Having immigrated at the age of seven, my mother worked in the fields every summer alongside my grandparents. But come September, school was the priority. Married at the age of seventeen, my mother knew education was instrumental in community change and became a bilingual elementary teacher. I grew up watching her put in countless hours after school to organize literacy campaigns for parents, and witnessed district attacks because of her political work. After organizing parents around language waivers when proposition 227 passed outlawing bilingual education, my mother was relocated to a new school each year in an attempt to keep her from building with the community. It was through this mother/daughter
pedagogy that I saw the power an organized community held, as well as the lengths the status quo will go to neutralize those who attempt to change things. My mother instilled the need to struggle for justice in me, which I have continued to fight for since her death my freshman year in college.

I received an excellent elementary education according to various definitions. I had amazing teachers that implemented engaging hands-on activities, received supplemental art classes weekly by an art instructor, and physical education three times a week by certified PE teachers. I enjoyed learning throughout my elementary education, but I did not receive the culturally relevant or critical education that would have empowered me as a student. I never learned about my history, read about people that I could identify with, or was encouraged to ask questions within school. Luckily, my mother met these needs by providing me culturally relevant literature and critical counter-narratives, which helped me fight the internalization of the negatives views I was receiving in my schooling. One powerful example was when my fourth grade class took a fieldtrip to the site of the Battle of San Pascual, a battle within the Mexican-American war. My mother refused to let me attend because she felt the “picnic” was minimizing the murder and theft of Mexican life and land. This experience and the numerous others like it led me to vow that I would become the teacher I had always wished I had, one that fused the engaging hands-on projects that I received in my schooling with the culturally relevant liberatory learning I received at home.

My political development evolved throughout my adulthood in waves with my involvement in collective organizations, with the first beginning in my undergraduate schooling.
The first two years of college were difficult in that I was mourning my mother, but by the third year I was ready to become involved on campus. I joined a Chicana feminist organization at San Diego State University (SDSU) and became active in its leadership immediately. We organized around various issues pertaining to Latina women, such as balancing college and family life, sexual assault, and body issues, with the central focus the recruitment and retention of Latinas in higher education. It was within this space that I came to identify as Chicana, and suck out Chicano Studies courses to further develop my understanding of Chicanismo.

After graduation I moved to Los Angeles and completed my Master’s and Credential at the University of Southern California (USC). My first semester teaching elementary in 2007 was difficult as I learned the ropes of teaching; I did not always know what I was doing but I knew what I would not do-- teach the same dishonest Eurocentric history that I had received in school.

That spring marked my second wave of consciousness as I began organizing with an organization of Raza teachers, which worked to use education as a tool for liberation. Active for five years, I served within various leadership positions and oversaw numerous projects. A central piece of our monthly meetings was a political education segment, in which we read theory, engaged in dialogue, and shared curriculum. It was within this space that I began to identify as Raza and was first introduced to critical and decolonial theory.

Although the Raza organization was my main focus, I felt there were community issues it was not addressing, such as police terrorism and gender oppression. Thus began my third wave of consciousness when I started organizing with a Los Angeles coalition against police brutality and a transnational Filipina feminist organization in 2010. It was within these spaces that I
developed my analysis of police terrorism as enforcing colonialism within internal colonies, drawing connections with the colonial violence outlined by Fanon (1963), as well as my gender analysis reading The Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State within the transnational feminist collective.

My current wave of political consciousness began in January of 2012, when a core of twelve educators began discussing creating a multiethnic space that would center colonialism as a lens for analysis and action against its byproducts. We felt it imperative that there be a liberatory organization for educators that addressed the needs of all People of Color in our communities, both Black and Brown. This transnational solidarity recognizes the colonial/imperial oppression in our native countries that cause migration to the United States, in addition to the continued oppression endured via internal colonialism in urban neighborhoods. The collective gathered in the summer to clarify our inter-communal stance and create our mission and vision centered around transformational love and justice.

*Education 4 the People* was born-- a multiethnic organization of decolonial educators seeking to create autonomous liberatory spaces inside the classroom and beyond, to promote growth, healing, and transformation. Recognizing schooling and miseducation as vehicles of oppression to colonize and dehumanize our communities, we view decolonizing education as a tool to build a mass based movement to transform the colonial schooling system. The organization’s goals address various forms of oppression by connecting pedagogy, personal healing, and community action. In addition to political education and community campaigns against neoliberal policies such as high stakes testing, merit-based pay, and the outlaw of ethnic
studies, the organization also created teacher survival programs. Such programs include Teacher Inquiry Groups to provide our members the authentic professional development lacking in our schools, as well as wellness activities via meditation, healing circles, and yoga. A long-term goal of the organization includes creating a decolonial k-12 community school, similar to the Black Panther Oakland Community School of the 1970’s, in which students are equipped with the skills to question and act on their world, while also preparing them intellectually for college acceptance.

It is this mixture of experiences with my mother, my K-12 schooling, college, and community organizations that has led to my development as a decolonial educator. The vast majority of my political development occurred via informal spaces of learning: in community organizations, via readings and popular education.
Chapter II: Literature

Theoretical Framework

Although the achievement gap has been reexamined as an educational debt, acknowledging the historical, economic, and sociopolitical debts of urban communities (Ladson-Billings, 2006), the debts can be better contextualized as the results of internal colonialism (Gutierrez, 2004), which in turn impede student success. Because of a dispossession of resources within urban ghettos, communities of color are left battling the byproducts of poverty: violence, poor healthcare, unemployment, and drug abuse, among many others. For this study, I employ transformative decolonial pedagogy as a means of weaving critical pedagogy, critical race theory and decolonial pedagogy to examine the construction and implementation of Common Core based decolonial pedagogies in a public elementary classroom.

Critical Pedagogy

Critical Pedagogy has been argued by some as a possible solution in addressing urban ills while increasing student academic success (Duncan-Andrade, 2005; Duncan-Andrade & Morrell, 2008; Freire, 1970; McLaren, 2003; Morrell, 2010). The foundation of critical pedagogy lies in critical theory, which centers on the analysis of power—“Who has it, how it’s negotiated [and] what structures in society reinforce the current distribution of power…” (Merriam, 2009, p. 35). Consequently, the goal of critical pedagogy is to challenge the status quo, and empower the masses to transform society.

The roots of critical pedagogy can be traced to Paulo Freire (1970), whom many consider to be the founder of critical pedagogy. Central to Freire’s work was the examination of
dehumanization within oppression, thus arguing that education must serve to humanize students. Freire introduced critical pedagogy, or problem-posing education, as the antithesis of banking, in which teachers dehumanize students when they fill students with knowledge as though they are empty vessels (Freire, 1970). Instead of banking, dialogue is the foundation of critical pedagogy in which teachers and students are both humanized as they engage in discussion to discover or create knowledge together. Freire (1970) also highlighted the need for praxis—for action and reflection, as a cyclical flow guiding not only teachers’ practice inside the classroom, but also in organizing community resistance. The end result of his critical pedagogy was collective action for a just world.

One of the leading present-day critical theorists, Peter McLaren, a former student of Freire, argues that prior to implementing critical pedagogy in the classroom, educators must first be critical theorists (McLaren, 2003); that is, they must have political clarity on the role schools play in reproducing the status quo. McLaren’s research identifies the goal of critical pedagogy as the study of past and present social conditions of oppression, and organizing to fight oppression via collective action (McLaren, 2003). McLaren (2003) further emphasizes the importance of reflection in praxis, and stresses that educators must also reflect on student resistance (such as behavior, clothing, etc.) to redirect their resistance and help students transform themselves, prior to transforming their community. With critical pedagogy’s focus on economic power (McLaren, 2010), it often fails to address race thoroughly, requiring the use of a race theory.

Critical Race Theory
Critical Race Theory (CRT) examines race and its intersections with education. CRT is a useful lens when examining education issues and its activist component lends itself as a tool for transforming the U.S. schooling system. Originating out of the Critical Legal Studies in the late 1970s, CRT places educational issues within an historical, cultural, and economic context to deconstruct race and the institutions that continue to support whiteness (Bernal, 2002; Delgado & Stefancic, 2001). Thus, CRT examines the societal structures that work to disadvantage People of Color and advantage Whites rather than viewing racism as an individual act of deviance. (Bernal, 2002; Mills, 1997).

Derrick Bell, a leading founder of CRT and professor of law at New York University, wrote numerous articles critiquing racial laws that placed Band-Aids on symptoms of racism, rather than addressing the root of racism—white supremacy (Bell, 1992). Within education specifically, Bell (1992) criticized the Brown Vs. Board of Education decision, which aimed to desegregate schools within the United States and was hailed as a progressive victory in race relations by many. Despite the unpopularity of his critique by both sides of the political spectrum, Bell (1992) argued that the court case was a result of interest convergence in which Whites only agreed to desegregation because they had something to gain—the loyalty of People of Color at the height of the Cold War at the height of government officials fear of the rise of communism among third world nations ("The Permanence of Racism," 1992). In addition to Bell, Mari Matsuda, Kimberlé Crenshaw and Richard Delgado laid much of the foundational theory (Delgado & Stefancic, 2001), with Gloria Ladson-Billings and William Tate (1995) laying the argument for the application of CRT within the field of education.
Although there is variance in agreement on basic tenets of CRT, most agree on at least three, with the first being the centrality, normalization, and permanence of racism (Delgado & Stefancic, 2001; Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995; Solorzano & Bernal, 2001). CRT holds that race plays a central role in the lives of People of Color and that racism is engrained in the structural fabric of the nation, and thus is the norm rather than the exception. Historically, the creation of race and normalization of racism in the nation began with the European arrival to the continent and colonialism, as a means of justifying the dispossession and exploitation of land, labor, and resources of People of Color by Whites (Mills, 1997). Hence, with civil rights legal aims targeting only overt racism, such as segregation, name-calling, hate crimes, etc., racism has thus gone underground and daily micro-aggressions continue to penetrate institutions, organizations, and ways of thinking, which are difficult to challenge because of their invisibility (Bonilla-Silva, 2010; Lopez, 2003; Solorzano & Bernal, 2001).

Another central tenet of CRT is that it challenges liberal notions of neutrality, color-blindness, and meritocracy (Delgado & Stefancic, 2001; Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995; Solorzano & Bernal, 2001). The key to challenging meritocracy is in noting that although not all Whites are better off than People of Color, the life chances of White are significantly better (Mills, 1997). One strategy in challenging mainstream ideologies is through the use of counter narratives, telling the marginalized stories of People of Color, in addition to the use of revisionist history\(^1\), which highlights the dispossession experienced by People of Color by Whites within colonialism. CRT holds that the experiential knowledge of People of Color is central to

\(^1\) It’s important to note that the term revisionist history is contested in that it is still centralizes whiteness by revising their story, whereas to People of Color around the world it is merely history.
understanding racial oppression and can serve as a healing process from the trauma of racism, while simultaneously serving to build bridges across ethnic groups. It is also important to note that CRT does not believe that racism can be talked away by invoking empathy in the aggressor, and clarifies that the “empathy fallacy” cannot eradicate racism (Delgado & Stefancic, 2001).

Yosso (2005) expands on CRT’s notion of experiential knowledge and disrupts normalized Eurocentric beliefs through her model of Community Cultural Wealth. Community Cultural Wealth thus challenges deficit thinking within U.S. schooling by outlining six types of cultural capital Students of Color carry with them, offering a counter narrative to the Eurocentric deficit frame (i.e. culture of poverty) many educators hold of their students. These six forms of capital include: aspirational capital, linguistic capital, familial capital, social capital, and navigational capital (Yosso, 2005). Perhaps the most critical form of capital identified by Yosso is resistance capital, which holds that students carry a history of resistance exhibited by People of Color globally, in that it can serve as a tool in organizing against racism and exploitation, and for a socially just education. Thus, the notion of experiential knowledge proposes that schools not only recognize the various types of Community Cultural Wealth, but also integrate them into the curriculum as a foundation to build students’ knowledge (Yosso, 2005).

Understanding the complexity of racism, CRT explicitly highlights the intersectionality of race as another tenet that serves to acknowledge the various means of oppression used to marginalize, such as class, gender, sexuality, age, etc. Consequently, CRT is interdisciplinary, drawing connections between the historic and contemporary when examining the intersections of race with other forms of oppression (Bernal, 2002; Delgado & Stefancic, 2001).
Ladson-Billings and Tate (1995) add to their analysis of CRT and education by examining the intersection of race and property. Building off Critical Legal Studies’ historic notions of People of Color as property, they argue “whiteness as the ultimate property,” that is, “the basis for rights to property—was defined to include only cultural practices of Whites” (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995, p.58). The property functions of whiteness include the right of disposition, that is, that whiteness is transferrable. When applied to education, just as native students’ success within boarding schools was measured by their willingness to assimilate into white culture, students today are rewarded in schools for conforming to white norms of dress, speech, and concepts of knowledge (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995). In addition to student rewards for conforming to white characteristics, student who act nonwhite, are targeted with disciplinary measures. Another property function of whiteness is the right to use and enjoyment (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995), evident within white schools versus schools in Black and Brown neighborhoods when examining the type of learning taught (critical thinking versus rote memorization) or literal space within schools (i.e. overcrowding). Reputation as property is also applicable, such as with the reputation of urban (Black & Brown) schools and the reputation of suburban (white) schools (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995). Finally, the right to exclude is applicable to education, evident within the outright denial of schooling for Black slaves, then with segregated schools for People of Color, and currently within integrated schools resegregated via charterization, tracking, magnet programs, and school closures (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995; Oaks, 1985).
Ladson-Billings (1995) further differentiates CRT from other race theories in education, in that it does not seek to reform the current system, and thus critiques the status quo and it’s supposed reforms, highlighting the impossibility of maintaining “the spirit and intent of justice for the oppressed while simultaneously permitting the hegemonic rule of the oppressor” (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995, p.52).

Solórzano and Delgado-Bernal add a tenet to the discussion on CRT and education, arguing that a commitment to social justice is central to the application of CRT when examining education (Solorzano & Bernal, 2001). It is this commitment that offers a liberatory response to oppression leading towards the empowerment of People of Color and the elimination of racism. Thus, the addition of this tenet counters the belief that CRT is cynical when it states that racism is permanent, and clarifies that a complete restructuring of society is necessary to eradicate racism in place of the legal reforms that have been won in sectors of society.

Solórzano and Delgado-Bernal add depth to the analysis of collective agency by analyzing the forms of resistance using a quadrant axis (Bernal & Solórzano, 2001). According to the model, people move fluidly along the axes between reactionary, conformist, self-defeating, and transformative resistance, depending on their critique of social oppression and motivation for social justice. Solórzano and Bernal further differentiate between internal transformation, critical consciousness and healing, and external transformation in which students act to transform their environment. It is this transformative resistance that is crucial in facilitating the decolonization of student thinking and behavior, which is necessary for the collective struggle to decolonize indigenous being and land.
Although CRT explicitly calls for the radical restructuring of society to eliminate racism, and alludes to the role of economics in the social construction of race to justify the dispossession experienced by People of Color, CRT fails to explicitly call this what it is—the dismantling of capitalism. As Malcolm X said, “You can’t have capitalism without racism” (Breitman, 1965). This is not to say that racism will disappear if capitalism is eliminated, as many Marxists have argued (McLaren, 2010), but rather that racism cannot be eradicated as long as capitalism is in place because it requires that a group be “at the bottom of the well” (Bell, 1992). Although socialist countries have shown improvement in racial equity, discrimination and underrepresentation in upper level positions persist (Sawyer, Peña, & Sidanius, 2004). Just as racism was explicitly taught, such as with phrenologists that traveled through towns presenting
lectures on innate difference of the races, using charts, casts of head, books, and pamphlets to prove the Anglo superiority (Horsman, 1981), anti-racism must be explicitly taught in addition to the dismantling of capitalism.

A limitation of CRT is that although the theory holds that people of color cannot be racist in that they lack institutional power but can discriminate against other People of Color (Hoyt, 2012), the theory fails to thoroughly examine the divisions between People of Color and the very real tension that manifests in urban cities in which numerous ethnicities live in tightly packed neighborhoods. This seems especially relevant in that the theory calls on collective action to eliminate racism, and for this to happen Communities of Color must develop solidarity with People of Color transnationally.

Decolonial Pedagogy

Decolonial Theory can serve to bridge critical pedagogy and critical race theory in understanding the creation of capitalism and race (and racism) within the construct of colonialism (Tuck & Yang, 2012). Moreover, decolonial theory serves to counter colonialism’s divide and conquer strategy and push critical educational approaches forward by uniting People of Color globally based on their shared dispossession experienced within colonialism.

Critical theorists concerned with problems of colonialism maintain the process of decolonization is deeply tied to land (Fanon, 1963; Tuck & Yang, 2012), “which must provide bread, and naturally, dignity” (Fanon, 1963, p.9). Tuck and Yang (2012) charge for the continued clarification of decolonization, arguing it is not simply metaphoric and must address the repatriation of indigenous land and resources. I argue the process of
decolonization begins with the decolonization of the mind, and therefore schooling, in order to comprehend the redress of indigenous land (Fanon, 1963; Freire, 1970). Additionally, similar to the notion that racism will not disappear with the end of capitalism, a return of Indigenous land will not erase coloniality and its affects on thinking and being (Maldonado-Torres, 2007), and therefore decolonization must also engage a process of unlearning colonial ideology. As Fanon (1963) wrote, “To dislocate the colonial world does not mean that once the borders have been eliminated there will be a right of way between the two sectors” (p.6). Therefore, keeping in mind the centrality of land within decolonization, this study will examine the decolonization of the mind and body within schools, as a tool to work towards the decolonization of land.

Literature on colonization and internal colonialism agree that domination is central—the domination of a people and the dispossession of their land, labor, and resources. In The Wretched of the Earth, Fanon (1963) examines the role of violence in maintaining domination of the colonized. In addition to defining in detail the physical violence inflicted, and the psychological trauma/disorders that result from such violence, he also describes the mental violence endured by the colonized (Fanon, 1963). “Colonialism is not satisfied merely with holding a people in its grip and emptying the Native’s brain of all form and content; by a kind of perverted logic it turns to the past of the oppressed people and distorts, disfigures, and destroys it” (Fanon, 1963, p.149). It is this emptying of the brain, which most often occurs within schools, that leads to self hate among the colonized, acceptance of colonialism as a deserved situation,
and thus leads to their participation in and reinforcement of colonialism. Thus, Fanon (1963) defines decolonization as the challenging of colonization, and its byproducts.

Figure 2.2: Theoretical Framework

Building on foundations of critical theory, theorist Sandy Grande (2007) calls for a red pedagogy to decolonize schooling for indigenous students, which highlights points of tension and intersections with indigenous knowledge. Grande acknowledges the reluctance of many indigenous scholars to engage in critical theory, because of its dominance by western theorists (Grande, 2007), yet argues that it is the responsibility of educators to link theory to lived experience and social transformation. Grande challenges the notion that indigenous scholars who employ western tools are sell outs. Rather, she argues that because indigenous peoples must
negotiate colonial forces in their daily lives, they must “know, understand, and acquire the grammar of empire as well as develop the skills to contest it” (2007, p. 330).

Red pedagogy thus extends critical pedagogy’s analysis of exploitation and oppression by decentering capitalism and replacing it with colonialism. This shift frames indigenous history as one of dispossession and questions western assumptions of human superiority to the natural world, asserting both capitalists and Marxists view land and natural resources as commodities to be exploited, albeit one for personal gain and the other for collective gain (Grande, 2004). Instead, Grande (2004) proposes an indigenous view of balance between living creatures and the natural world. Red pedagogy also extends the notion of praxis for collective agency, as a tool to build transcultural and transnational solidarities among indigenous peoples.

In addition to the classical colonialism experienced by the indigenous of the Americas and People of Color globally, in which lands were inevitably drained of their resources and job opportunities that lead to migration to the U.S., People of Color continue to endure internal colonialism within urban ghettos (Blauner, 1969; Chavez, 2011; Gutierrez, 2004). Built upon dependency theory from Latin America (Caporaso, 1978), internal colonialism examines the evolution of foreign colonialism over satellite colonies, into the contemporary domestic colonization of ghettos (Gutierrez, 2004). The theory compares U.S. ghettos to underdeveloped countries in that they are characterized by hunger, illiteracy, cultural starvation, and the psychological effects of being “ruled over by others not of his kind” (Cruse, 1968, p. 76). Although there have been critiques made of the theory, such as that it no longer applicable to Latinos since the majority have migrated after the U.S. acquired the Southwest (Chavez, 2011),
such notions ignore the pre-colonial migration of the indigenous of Latin America across the continent, and only reinforces the notion of colonial borders (Huhndorf, 2009; Smith, 2012).

Central to internal colonialism is the theory of dependency, in which urban ghettos are made dependent upon the metropole to meet it’s needs, due to its systematic underdevelopment (Caporaso, 1978; Chavez, 2011; Paperson, 2010; Tuck & Yang, 2012). In addition to being governed by outsiders, businesses in internal colonies are owned by outsiders, with the income of residents drained out of the community, thus ensuring it be economically dependent on the larger society rather than self sustaining (Chavez, 2011). Adding depth to the theory, Paperson (2010) names containment as a key feature of internal colonialism, evident in the policing of Black and Brown bodies as subjects rather than as citizens, and higher imprisonment rates despite similar crime rates (Alexander, 2010). Paperson (2010) also identifies internal colonies as zones of violence, apparent in the brutality and murder inflicted on bodies of color at the hands of the police ("Operation Ghetto Storm: 2012 Annual Report on the Extrajudicial Killings of 313 Black People by Police, Security Gaurds, and Vigilantes," 2013; Patterson, 1951).

Paperson (2010) goes on to highlight that internal colonies are imaginary spaces, spaces of excess and dislocation, in that their borders are fluid and in constant motion due to gentrification and migration out of the ghetto. Most importantly, Paperson (2010) stresses that the ghetto is Black— Black beyond phenotype— which is used to justify the governance, schooling, and policing of internal colonies. The tenets of internal colonialism are also evident in

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2 The data within this study was compiled by a community organization due to the lack of governmental ability to compile the numbers on police involved murders.
schools within ghettos, with education within the colony created (i.e. content knowledge) and administered by outsiders (Bitterman, Goldring, & Gray, 2013; Howard, 2010).

**Historical Context of Schooling**

“Colonialism is not satisfied merely with holding a people in its grip and emptying the Native’s brain of all form and content; by a kind of perverted logic it turns to the past of the oppressed people and distorts, disfigures, and destroys it.” – Franz Fanon

Education for non-whites within the Americas was created with the purpose of assimilation. It was quickly apparent that schooling could be used to colonize Native Americans with the intent to “kill the Indian, save the man” (Horsman, 1981), thereby creating a workforce ready for labor (Grande, 2007). The first Native American Boarding Schools were created in the 1870’s in which students were removed from their family and tribes, and learned how to be white: speaking English, cutting their hair, wear European clothing, and convert to Christianity (Horsman, 1981). With strict English-only policies, students caught speaking their native language were physically punished (Horsman, 1981). Schooling became mandated for all Native youth by 1893 at the height of the boarding school movement, yet native students resisted the oppressive schooling, with many running away from the abuse (Grande, 2007).
Image 1.1: Tom Torlino as he entered Carlisle Indian School and after the reform process.

Schools as Internal Colonies- A Composite

Jackson Middle School is nestled in the heart of South Central Los Angeles. Named after Andrew Jackson, a slave owner who led the genocide and relocation of various American Indians in the Southeast, the school is full of murals and posters protesting the greatness of this “founding father.” A hundred percent of the students are People of Color, mostly Latino and Black, yet the majority of teachers are white and live a thirty minute drive away. The school administrators also make the morning commute to the school, and being monolingual cannot communicate with half the student and parent population. Teachers read from scripted textbooks and hand out worksheets, all of which were created far from Los Angeles (usually in Texas by white business executives who have no training in education). These texts are based on Common Core Standards, which were created by an elite group of “experts”, who have never stepped foot in South Central Los Angeles and know nothing of its inhabitants, their culture, or assets. When parents attempt to discuss school issues with the teachers and administrators, such as overcrowded classrooms or police harassment on campus, they are told by faculty there is nothing that can be done, these are the district policies and they are “Just doing our jobs.”

In addition to parents struggling to get on campus because school police stand at the entrance, intimidating parents and students alike, one persistent mother was visited at her home by ICE [Immigration Customs Enforcement] officials after threatening to contact the district and the media about the school’s conditions. The parent did not follow through with her threats, for fear of being deported and separated from her children, but with School Board meetings held during the workday, working two jobs, and the district office being an hour and a half bus ride away, she wouldn’t have been able to attend anyway.

The elected school board is not much different from the teachers and administrators. Despite appearing ethnically diverse, representatives live on the outskirts of their district, are not familiar with community issues, and their children do not attend public schools, so they have little motivation to authentically improve school conditions. The board members that were raised in the community have not returned since leaving for college, and blame parents for community conditions. Most have no background in education and are using the position as a platform to run for City Council, yet are making educational policies that directly affect Jackson Middle School. Board members are good friends with business owners and CEOs that develop school materials, from construction companies, to testing materials, to textbooks, all of which are based outside of South Central but make sure to donate to school board elections to ensure their company receives a district contract.

As the composite above illustrates, many urban schools continue to serve as tools to colonize and dehumanize. Despite attempts to provide local control via parent and teacher
committees (Peña, 2000), schools are largely controlled vertically by outside forces (Maldonado-Torres, 2007), will little decision making power within schools. Standards and textbooks, which decide what students are required to learn, are created by those outside of the community ("Common Core Standards Development Work Group and Feedback Group Announced," 2009; Weissert, 2014), and are enforced by administration and taught by teachers who are also outsiders of the community (Bitterman et al., 2013; Howard, 2010). Similar to the separation of native children from their families at boarding schools, parents are often told, explicitly or implicitly, that they are not welcome at schools (Peña, 2000).

In addition to Black and Brown students being heavily policed in their communities, they also endure the same policing on their school campus (Adams, 2013; Ferris, 2014). Black and Brown students have been increasingly criminalized within the last two decades, on and off campus, with juvenile data showing youth of color arrested at rates double that of their White counterparts ("Young People-- Incarceration and Death at Home in the U.S.," 2004), and the recent rise in zero tolerance policies have led to a dramatic increase in expulsions and arrests of Students of Color (Wilson, 2012). The increased criminalization of minor offenses, such as the ticketing of tardy arrival to class (Blume, 2011), have criminalized a generation for offenses that have historically been committed by youth. The net widening and net deepening of discipline has increased the number of students being funneled out of schools and into the juvenile criminal justice system (Irby, 2009), rather than create opportunities to for students to work thorough the trauma they have endured due to internal colonialism (i.e. alcoholism/drug abuse, violence, rape,
etc.), so that they may heal and begin to transform the oppressive conditions that caused the trauma (Cook et al., 2005; Tokuda, 2014).

Transformative action is crucial in differentiating decolonial pedagogy from neoliberal notions of social justice education that define justice and equality as merely getting more students of color into college. Tejeda and Espinoza (2003) reject such notions and argue the goal of decolonial education is not to get more people of color to participate in the various levels of the current oppressive systems, but rather, for students to act to transform the oppressive system (Tejeda & Espinoza, 2003). Decolonial pedagogy recognizes the role of schooling in reproducing colonial frameworks, beginning with the Civilization Act of 1819 which authorized the creation of tribal schools to transform indigenous peoples into Americans (Horseman, 1981), and thus, explicitly works to transform schools into spaces that develop decolonial consciousness. Similar to Grande’s (2007) assertion that we must know that language of empire and develop skills to contest it, decolonial pedagogy recognizes that students must master the traditional curriculum to succeed in education, and thus strives to foster critical students while simultaneously preparing them for admission to universities (Tejeda & Espinoza, 2003).

With this in mind, decolonial pedagogy understands schooling was created to colonize indigenous peoples and transform them into acceptable (white) laborers by stripping them of their culture, language, dress, and indigenous knowledge. Therefore, the theory asserts that communities of color must actively address the byproducts of colonialism (Tejeda & Espinoza, 2003), both historical and those resulting from present day internal colonialism, such as poverty, trauma, drug/alcohol abuse, etc.
Incorporating decolonial pedagogy not only serves to improve students educational opportunities, but also serves to help students to heal from the trauma of colonialism and poverty. My implementation of decolonizing pedagogy connects pedagogy, personal healing, and community action (Chen, Dulani, & Piepzna-Samarasinha, 2011). Notions of social justice are often polarized, focusing solely on personal healing or solely on community action, but decolonial pedagogy views healing as a form of social change (Lorde, 2007). Thus, teachers must develop pedagogical practices that recognize and nurture the dialectical relationship between individual and external healing within students – as urban communities have experienced recurrent trauma due to colonialism, genocide, poverty, and internalized oppression, it is imperative that students address and heal themselves in order to heal the community (Chen et al., 2011; Lorde, 2007; Rich & Grey, 2005).

Also central to decolonial pedagogy and the process of healing is the presence of love in schools (Maatta & Uusiautti, 2013), which often seems non-existent when discussing k-12 schooling policy. Sometimes referred to as Authentic Care, students must feel safe and loved in schools to succeed academically (Valenzuela, 1999). This is often not the case in schools serving students living in poverty due to deficit thinking among faculty and staff, which in turn affects student motivation, engagement, and achievement (Huggins & LeBlanc-Ernest, 2009). It is also the love of self, community, and justice that serves to motivate students to succeed in academics and to return to their communities to act and improve living conditions (Huggins & LeBlanc-Ernest, 2009).
Absent of local communities gaining autonomous control of schools and developing curriculum based on their indigenous knowledge, urban schooling practices must be radically changed. It is well known that content standards are written to reinforce settler colonialism (Calderon, 2014), thus, decolonial teachers must complicate common core standards and curriculum to tell the stories of the colonized, which have traditionally been marginalized in the curriculum. History content standards cannot condense the history of indigenous peoples into one strand, with the majority of strands focusing on European colonization. Moreover, ethnic studies cannot be reserved to a [History] Month once a year, or reserved to a semester course, but rather must be incorporated within every k-12 classroom, applying ethnic studies approaches to the standards (Tintiangco-Cubales et al., 2014). Not only will this provide students the opportunity to create a healthy sense of self and agency, but studies have found ethnic studies to improve standardized test scores and graduation rates (Cabrera, Milem, & Marx, 2012; Sleeter, 2011).

**Decolonial Teacher**

In order to examine decolonial pedagogy in practice, I must first begin with how I have come to define a decolonial teacher. First and foremost, the decolonial teacher challenges the current manifestations and effects of classical and internal colonialism (Coffey, 2014; Paperson, 2010). Furthermore, the decolonial teacher supports students in challenging colonialism by providing students with the analytic tools to unpack dominant and non-dominant discourses and histories (Coffey, 2014). Essentially, the decolonial teacher employs ethnic studies approaches across the curriculum to support students in critically examining colonialism (Tintiangco-
Cubales et al., 2014). Additionally, understanding the original purpose of schooling with Indian boarding schools deliberately designed with an absence of love and humanization, the decolonial teacher centers love and transformation within her pedagogy (Huggins & LeBlanc-Ernst, 2009). It is these understandings that lead to me examine how decolonial pedagogy is implemented at the elementary level within the context of the new Common Core Standards, thus beginning with a review of relevant research examining its practical applications within the classroom.

**Relevant Research**

The recent increase of interest in critical, social justice, and decolonial teaching has led to an overwhelming amount of research, with the most well known fields being social justice pedagogy and critical pedagogy. However, little research across these frameworks examines practical applications, with even less examining elementary schools and applications within the new Common Core standards (DeBray-Pelot & McGuinn, 2009). Because there is such a range in definitions of Social Justice Education, reviewing the literature can become quite a challenge. For the purpose of this study, I will review the literature on elementary social justice teaching from least to most comprehensive examples of transformative applications.

The trend in research on social justice elementary applications tends to focus on language arts and building classroom community, and most often fails to examine transformative action beyond the classroom walls, which is crucial in the struggle for a just world (Allen, 1999; Quintero, 2007; Weaver & Grindall, 1998). One such example examined a collective of elementary educators implementing social justice curriculum on the east coast and compiled a
book based on their classroom experiences. The teacher participants ranged from 1<sup>st</sup> grade to 6<sup>th</sup> grade and examined their use of social justice curriculum across grade levels (Allen, 1999).

The majority of chapters examined fourth and sixth grade language arts, specifically the use of dialogue and class meetings; the latter being a daily segment in which students “voice their opinions, suggest and talk about change, and experience democracy in action” (p. 35) as a method of shared decision-making and governance. Children’s literature was incorporated to facilitate dialogue, with example topics including discrimination, stereotyping, and fairness, although the authors clarify that nearly any content can be addressed via class meetings (Allen, 1999). While the collective attempted to provide examples of social justice curriculum across the elementary grades, most examples failed to examine power, oppression, and colonization in depth, and actually further perpetuated neoliberal notions of justice (i.e. the increased participation of people of color within oppressive institutions as progress). Being that the text was written prior to No Child Left Behind, the examples also failed to address Common Core standards and high-stakes testing (Allen, 1999).

One educator within the aforementioned collective, a fourth grade teacher, examined history through a social justice lens; however, the unit was not linked to history content standards and instead was implemented via supplemental children’s literature. The educator outlined a unit on tolerance, which opened with a reading about the holocaust (Michalove, 1999). The unit shifts to examine racism in history, in which students researched individuals such as Marian Anderson and Roberto Clemente during Black History Month, and concluded with an activity in which students reflected on why people discriminate. Although the chapter detailed practical
applications, the educator failed to provide a critical examination of power or colonialism within the lessons (Michalove, 1999), such as when students reflected on individual reasons for discrimination but never addressed structural discrimination. Furthermore, teaching the liberal notion of tolerance (i.e. the acceptance of differences) rather than a global respect for humanity, fails to challenge neoliberal schooling. Although the Holocaust is a well-known example of cultural genocide, it’s teaching as the genocide in isolation of the various examples of similar atrocities endured by people of color fails to acknowledge the centrality of race within oppression (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995; Mills, 1997; Solorzano & Bernal, 2001).

Black Ants and Buddhists: Teaching Critically and Differently in the Primary Grades, shares the lessons and experiences of a teacher with her early elementary students in western Massachusetts. Within the text, the author narrates lessons and units she implemented on humanization, human rights, and activism. Organized by teaching themes (such as daily routines, activism, history, and peace), the book details implementation via hands-on activities and role-play, and offers examples of student work like responses and reflections, which are imbedded throughout the chapters (Cowhey, 2006). In addition to the narration detailing the lessons, the author includes an appendix in the book that outlines a history unit titled “Exploration and Contact,” detailing each lesson and its pacing, complete with resources and materials. Perhaps the most powerful section in the book, the unit documents indigenous life prior to European exploration in depth, with the educator explicitly making connections to Latin students’ indigenous bloodlines.
The text continues on to highlight a unit examining environmental justice. Unfortunately, the unit focused on the individual responsibility of recycling, and failed to analyze more systematic environmental issues such as the role of race or class in the location of polluting factories or dumps; however, this may be because the class and race demographics of the class did not connect to these realities (2/3 of her students were white students and 37% qualified for reduced lunch). Within the chapter on history, the author details teaching young students about the horrors of American slavery, which most classrooms fail to do (even more so within the primary grades), yet the text emphasizes the same old non-controversial examples, such as Phillis Wheatley and Benjamin Banneker, that are already highlighted in school textbooks. Both examples are safe People of Color within the reformist notion of multicultural education (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995) (i.e. including more people of color within the curriculum as racial equality) that were embraced by white supremacist structures because they serve to reinforce white supremacy, such as Wheatley’s poetry that spoke of slavery as a gift that brought the ‘word of god’ to Africans.

Within the chapter on activism, the author details a project in which her class organized a voter registration drive on their elementary campus. Although the assignment created an opportunity for students and parents to engage in a collective project and exemplified an educator moving beyond the walls of the classroom, the unit failed to question the two-party system or the legitimacy of citizenship as a means of determining who has a voice in developing the community. The unit also perpetuated the neoliberal notion of voting as the means for creating change.
Although Gloria Ladson-Billings’ *The Dream-keepers: Successful teachers of African American Children* does not explicitly cite social justice within the theoretical framework of the study, it does reference critical race pedagogy, as well as Giroux and McLaren (critical pedagogy) when building its case for culturally-relevant pedagogy (Ladson-Billings, 2009). Moreover, with the text detailing examples of elementary applications on such topics as humanization, cooperative learning, critical literacy and analysis as central tenets of culturally-relevant teaching-- in addition to teachers acknowledging their work as political and engaging in collective struggle with students against oppression (pg. 127)-- it can be argued that the text provides examples of social justice teaching at the elementary level.

The pedagogical examples within the book are not presented as lesson plans, yet it narrates in detail examples of classroom applications through the use of vignettes. One vignette tells of a lesson examining the Gulf War with students via current events activities and discussion, highlighting the educator’s role in probing student’s critical examination of global events and their connection/relevance to students’ communities. The text offers numerous detailed examples of elementary applications, but fails to offer examples of elementary educators centralizing colonialism in the classroom.

Recognizing the importance of the development of social justice educators, Bree Picower has researched the scaffolding of elementary social justice educators via their participation in teacher inquiry groups (TIGs). Within bimonthly meetings, experienced teachers supported the development of pre-service teachers beyond the traditional mechanics of teaching, with participants engaging in reading circles, curriculum development, examining student work for
evidence of transformation, listening to guest speakers, and group presentations (Katsarou, Picower, & Stovall, 2010; Picower, 2011). Another critical activity within the TIGs involved pre-service teachers reflecting on their deficit thinking and behavior via empathy journals in order to prepare them to build solidarity with the communities of color in which they will teach (Howard, 2010; Picower, 2011). Picower notes that tension was central to educators’ transformation within the TIGs and that deficit perspectives were not confined by participant race (i.e. teachers of color can perpetuate deficit thinking).

Inquiry meeting agendas varied to include first year teachers speaking on their practice of integrating social justice into the curriculum, to participants observing examples of students’ critical conscious first hand via a panel of 5th graders speaking on race and racism (Katsarou et al., 2010; Picower, 2011). Activities served to challenge participants’ notions of what non-tenured teachers and young children are capable of achieving within social justice education. The collective collaborated to create curriculum on gentrification, genocide, war, and healthy food, and provided opportunities for students to participate in existing campaigns, as well as create their own actions (Katsarou et al., 2010). Curricular collaboration within the TIGs created models of social justice education for the group, which increased participants’ ability to implement the practice in their respective classrooms and aided in reducing the amount of planning time for new teachers. Despite citing that the lessons created were rigorous, the studies failed to note specific content standards addressed within the lessons created. Moreover, although the study detailed the process of supporting the development of social justice elementary teachers, the process highlighted required the presence of experienced social justice
teachers serving as mentors, and did not provide a toolkit that inexperienced teachers without such mentors can pull from to implement social justice teaching in their classrooms.

One of the most thorough examinations of critical applications for the elementary classroom appears in *The Critical Pedagogy Reader*. One chapter is centered within the context of post-NCLB neoliberal education dominated by scripted curriculum, standards and high stakes testing (Peterson, 2009). The author, Bob Peterson, details his applications via a plethora of examples across the disciplines that implement components of critical pedagogy, like problem-posing dialogue, critical literacy, and transformative action. The chapter highlights activities successfully implemented in Peterson’s classroom, supported by work samples of student reflections and transformative discussions, which serve to demonstrative the powerful possibilities with young students (Peterson, 2009). Lesson examples include the use of generative themes, book creation, and classroom dialogues, as well suggestions on scaffolding student lead learning with activities that support student development of self-discipline, which is required for independent learning projects.

Peterson shares creative techniques like dramatization, interviews, circle games, and role-play to facilitate student transformation, as well as the use of cartoons, poetry, drawings, and stories to initiate student dialogue around various community and global issues (Peterson, 2009). As a method of critical literacy, Peterson details his practice of students reenacting the history often omitted in textbooks via readers theatre and special projects, followed by dialogue to debrief on the impact such omissions have on world-views.
Notably different from most social justice research at the elementary level, Peterson offers examples of external transformative action taken by the elementary students despite their young age (Peterson, 2009). In addition to the more common examples of letter writing, community cleanups, and fundraising for needy causes, Peterson details examples of students engaging in actions in the community—from a class field trip to interview striking workers, to a small group attending an unauthorized field trip after school to protest the U.S. aid to the Contras in Nicaragua. Peterson notes that although the whole class did not attend the protest, the student panel presentation the following school day served to model to the whole class the power of collective action.

Even though he lists abundant applications possible for elementary educators, Peterson is careful to note that barriers vary by district, school, administrator, and community. Often referred to as a barrier, Peterson argues that even scripted curriculum and basal readers can be used to facilitate critical dialogue by simply tweaking the approach to the material, in addition to supplementation via field trips, guest speakers, movies, and current event studies.

Rethinking Elementary Education is a compilation of more than sixty lessons and articles for the elementary classroom by various contributors/practitioners (Christensen, Hansen, Peterson, Schlessman, & Watson, 2012). Although there are some articles on general teaching topics such as selecting classroom materials in line with social justice objectives or literature reviews on children’s books, the majority of the text is practical lessons for teachers to adapt and implement in their own classroom. The sample lessons are grouped into subject matter themes such as classroom community, language arts, math, science, and media literacy. Lessons range
from two page lesson summaries to ten page write-ups detailing units (such as pacing, scaffolding supports, state benchmarks/standards) followed by an appendix for resources, worksheets, graphic organizers, readings, and student work samples.

One example, contributed by editor Bob Peterson, highlights teaching fifth grade students in Milwaukee about immigration, and aims to build students’ empathy for immigrants. A brief summary, the article is a few pages long and recounts the implementation of the lesson, citing a few books read within the unit, but fails to offer detailed resources such as handouts, graphic organizers, readings, or work samples. Moreover, although the lesson aims to build empathy within the students, to recognize themselves as a greater part of humanity, the lesson fails to address the role of U.S. policies within the broader discussion of why people migrate to the U.S., nor does it challenge the notion of requiring papers to migrate or the highlight the Indigeneity of Latinos in the Americas.

The most comprehensive article in the text, authored by Katherine Johnson, documents the implementation of a lesson on child labor with 4th graders in a predominantly Black working class community in Portland, Oregon. Johnson details the materials/resources gathered, hands-on and role-play activities, pacing for the unit, age appropriate actions, and even specifies the state and ELD benchmarks covered within the unit. The article includes copies of handouts, readings, materials adapted from more difficult texts, and examples of student work. Although the article is one of the most detailed and comprehensive in the text, the lesson did not deepen students critical analysis when it failed to critically analyze why so many of the world’s families rely on children’s labor (i.e. failed to question capitalism as an economic system).
The text closes with a chapter on struggles that educators face within the profession such as neoliberal education policy; however, the chapter is limited to teacher political education and did not provide examples of teacher organizing with the community against such attacks on education. Overall, the text offers several in-depth examples of social justice classrooms at the elementary level, as well as political education to get elementary educators to reexamine their positions within schools. However, the majority of the lessons fail to analyze colonialism/imperialism within the lessons, and the vast majority of the submissions are by white educators, with only a handful authored by Teachers of Color.

In summary, the majority of literature reviewed examines social justice applications of White teachers. By omitting the contributions of Teachers of Color within the practice as acts of self-determination, this narrative perpetuates the notion of research being conducted by outsiders, as well as the notion of white saviors liberating Communities of Color, as seen in films such as *Dangerous Minds* and *Freedom Writers*. Furthermore, much of the literature fails to question liberal notions, such as tolerance, the Jewish Holocaust as ‘The Holocaust,’ or interrogate structural racism, with not one example of teachers examining colonialism as both a historic and contemporary reality. Most of the literature also fails to examine concrete examples of healing as transformative resistance. Therefore, it is essential that future research examine the process of creating and implementing decolonial pedagogy by Teachers of Color within the elementary classroom, with transformative resistance as a central focus. This research is essential in expanding the understanding of social justice education with the creation of exemplary models of teaching and struggle against colonialism and its byproducts.
Thus, the purpose of this study is to examine the creation of a culture of decolonization by a Teacher of Color within a classroom at the elementary level. Specifically, the study will examine how a decolonial elementary educator translates Common Core Standards to create decolonial curriculum and how students interact with it.

The following questions guide this study:

1- What are the colonizing conditions facing an elementary decolonial educator?
   
   a. How does a decolonial educator navigate, confront and address these conditions in her classroom?

2- How do the classroom, the youth, the community, and my experiences transform my pedagogy along the way?

3- How do I as an educator, develop the support you need to confront your own traumas of teaching under colonial conditions?
Chapter III. Methodology & Methods

“For the Colonized subject, objectivity is always directed against him.” – Franz Fanon

Methodology

The study employs a mixed methods approach blending portraiture, autoethnography, and decolonial methodologies to examine my teaching practice in an elementary classroom as a decolonial pedagogue (Chang, 2008; Lawrence-Lightfoot, 2005; Tuhiwai Smith, 1999).

Understanding the roots of research in colonial expansion and study, with outsiders entering indigenous spaces and analyzing happenings through a western lens (Tuhiwai-Smith, 1999), a self-portrait was fashioned in an attempt to paint the findings from an insider perspective as a means of self-determination.

Drawing on my year-long experience within a fifth grade classroom, autoethnography was used to examine the cultural nuances of decolonial pedagogy through the examination of classroom interactions and dialogue (Hammersley & Atkinson, 1983). Blending this method with portraiture, I created a self-portrait as the central participant to examine the intimate process of creating a decolonial culture in my classroom, seeking to not just tell my story but rather to conduct an in-depth analysis of my process and interpretations of my interactions in creating this culture (Chang, 2008; Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis, 1997). With this understanding, I make no claim of objectivity within the study as some researchers argue is possible with autoethnography (Chang, 2008), and fully embrace the subjectivity of my interpretations of the process and visibility within the study (Butler, 2009; Lawrence-Lightfoot, 2005).
The study utilizes portraiture to pushback on the sterilization of teacher experiences, highlighting the chaos of the classroom, where theory meets application (Chapman, 2007; Lawrence-Lightfoot, 2005). Pulling from the elements of portraiture, the study centers the classroom context in examining my navigation of the colonial conditions encountered, as well as my relationships with students, parents, community, colleagues, and administration (Lawrence-Lightfoot, 2005). Mindful of shifting away from gaps in literature, the study set out to examine the colonizing conditions that emerged in the classroom in order to identify responses to classroom constraints in implementing decolonial pedagogy (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis, 1997). Although the study aims to highlight the successes and triumphs in the classroom, it does not seek to exclude the messy contradictions encountered (Dixson, Chapman, & Hill, 2005).

Central to portraiture methods is the presence of researcher voice and aesthetics within the presentation of findings (Chapman, 2007; Lawrence-Lightfoot, 2005). As a teacher researcher, my voice is imbedded throughout the study both as the teacher enacting the curriculum with my students, and as the researcher examining my teaching practice. Intentional with my purpose to listen for a story, rather than listen to a story (Lawrence-Lightfoot, 2005), my findings are presented within a series of snapshots that unpack the ways in which I tried to create a decolonial classroom with my students.

Tuhiwai Smith (1999) addresses the overlapping of outsider/insider research, clarifying that a researcher is both an insider and outsider even when employing insider research practices. She notes the importance of the insider creating relationships with community and sharing activities. For example, she writes of her research with a Maori organization of mothers in which
she was a member prior to researching it, and engaged in their activities of fundraising and organizing. Similarly, I built relationship with students prior to beginning my research, through fundraising activities and celebrations with them and their families, in addition to being vulnerable with them and sharing my personal traumas like the abandonment of my father and the death of my mother.

My work is grounded in insider research both at the community level and the school level. I live in South Central, less than two miles from my school site. Therefore, I live, work, and shop in the same community as my students. I witness the same byproducts of colonialism on a daily basis, such as alcoholism, addiction, poverty, violence, and police terrorism. However, I am also an outsider in that I am a graduate student in a doctoral program, I have a professional career and income, and own my home.

In addition to my insider role within the community, I am also an insider within the school as an educator. The decision to employ insider research practices was made for several reasons. In addition to wanting to provide an insider perspective on the community, using Tuhiwai Smith’s (1999) research goal of self determination, my research examines ways in which I as a decolonial teacher develop theories in practice in my classroom and use my knowledge of the inner workings of the school to benefit my research. Additionally, the use of my own classroom provided the opportunity for extensive observations, thus collecting data throughout the day and year, rather than a snippet of the day or year. I also use insider research out of necessity due to a lack of identified decolonial educators at the elementary level. Having conducted a pilot study in Los Angeles in 2012, the teachers within the study were engaging in
critical teaching practices within their elementary classrooms, with two addressing colonialism in some form within my observations, but none centered colonialism across their teaching practice or identified themselves as decolonial educators (Valdez, 2013).

**Historical Context**

_The following is a brief summary of the history of Los Angeles, which will be expanded in detail in future publications. For a more detailed history of Los Angeles, reference City of Quartz: Excavating the Future in Los Angeles (Davis, 1990), L.A. City Limits: African American Los Angeles from the Great Depression to Present (Sides, 2003), and Catching Hell in the City of Angels: Life and Meanings of Blackness in South Central Los Angeles (Vargas, 2006)._ 

The original inhabitants of the Los Angeles area included the Chumash and Tongva people, having thrived in the area for thousands of years prior to European arrival (Gatto, 2008). European “explorers” entered Los Angeles in 1542, first with the arrival of the Portuguese, soon followed by the Spanish. The first permanent European settlement was through the Catholic church at San Gabriel Mission in 1771, with the city of Los Angeles officially founded ten years later in 1781 (Angeles, 2014). A group of forty-four, mostly comprised of indigenous and Afro-Mexicans, founded the city at what is now known as La Placita Olvera (Gatto, 2008). With Mexico gaining its independence from Spain in 1821, the discovery of gold near mission San Fernando soon after lead to the city’s first population boom (Angeles, 2014). President Polk entered the U.S. presidency with the intention of acquiring the Southwest, and succeeded in capturing the city after Mexico fought off the first two attempts (Zinn, 2005), with California becoming the 31st state in 1850.
Continued violence in the South after the Civil War led to a steady Black migration into Los Angeles, however, it was “The Second Great Migration,” in the 1940’s of southern Blacks to work in the automobile, rubber and steal production factories that shifted demographics in Los Angeles (Simpson, 2012). With the Black population quickly increasing, white residents felt the value of their property was threatened, resulting in redlines dividing up the city (Simpson, 2012; T-RACES). Thus, with the Black Community centered around Central Ave in South Central, the 110 Freeway and Alameda Street served as the dividing lines in the 1950’s, which was violently enforced by white gangs (Simpson, 2012; Sloan, 2005).

White flight sparked by the Watts riots in 1965 shifted these lines, with South Central expanding west of the 110 Freeway to Crenshaw Blvd, between the 10 and 105 Freeways to the north and south (Chardon, 2011). The introduction of crack in the 1980’s decimated a once middle-class Black community, which was compounded by the closure of factories that had employed Black workers. The combination of unemployment, addiction, and violent policing erupted in the 1990s with the LA Riots, once again shifting demographics in South Central (Sloan, 2005). Many Black families migrated to suburbs in the Inland Empire, while displaced Central Americans fleeing war moved into the community (Chardon, 2011).

Contemporary Context

The research site is located in South Central Los Angeles, where the median household income is $33,321, well below the Los Angeles median income of $49,745. Although the median income is higher than the 2014 poverty guidelines (set at $23,850), the national guidelines fail to take into account the high cost of living for the Los Angeles area, which is 29% higher than the
national average ("AreaVibes," 2011; Swanson, 2014). South Central Los Angeles reports a violent crime rate 32% higher than Los Angeles, with 57% of its residents completing high school, and 11% of residents receiving a Bachelor’s degree ("AreaVibes," 2011)\(^3\).

The school site consists of 866 students, 18% being Black and 81% being Latino, with forty percent being English Language Learners (ELL). School grades range from transitional kindergarten to fifth grade, and the site receives both Title 1 and Title 3 funding (Notebook.lausd.net). The school holds approximately 36 mainstream classrooms, 4 special day classrooms, and 1 resource specialist classroom. The administrator within the school was new to the position, having served as principal for the first time at this site for two years, had never taught K-5 grade levels, and had no experience teaching within a Black and Brown community.

**Participants**

Data was collected during my seventh year teaching, having taught across K-8 grade levels, with this study analyzing my first year teaching fifth grade full-time and the first year of Common Core standards within LAUSD. At the time of data collection, I had a Master’s and Credential in Urban Education, as well as my Gifted Certification, and had begun my doctoral studies in Urban Schooling, having completed my coursework and exams. Although I am the central participant within the autoethnographic study, I will also be examining my interactions with my students and a teachers collective.

\(^3\) This website was used to provide detailed demographics specific for South Central Los Angeles due to a lack of Census data segregated by neighborhood. The site computes its numbers using Census Data, Google Places, FBI Uniform Crime Reports, Environmental Protection Agency Reports, and reports from the Council for Community and Economic Research.
My class of 30 was fairly even in gender (according to parent reporting on school records) with 14 boys and 16 girls. The students in the classroom were clustered in the class according to English Language Development (ELD) level, as English Only (EO), Initial Fluent English Proficiency (IFEP) and Reclassified English Learners (RFEP), with 75% of the class being Latino and the remaining 25% being of African descent. Students ranged on California standardized tests, from Advanced to Far Below Basic, in both reading language arts and math (see figure 4). One IFEP student had an Individualized Educational Plan and received Resource Specialist (RSP) services. Although one student did not have scores on the CA standardized assessments, due to high transiency that prohibited him from taking the annual exams, my pre-assessments found him to be at a pre-kinder level on the San Diego Quick Reading Assessment, and lacking basic addition and subtraction skills. The student was unable to receive RSP services because of his excessive absences, which prohibited the ability to identify him with any learning disabilities.

The organization, Education for the People, is a multiethnic collective of approximately 25 decolonial educators spanning elementary to university level teaching. Monthly meetings consist of general meetings, which facilitate political education and working group breakouts. Teacher inquiry groups also meet monthly, and include reading educational theory and curriculum presentations. The organization also holds special events, such as speakers series,

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4 I include CST data not to reinforce the legitimacy of standardized tests but to show that my class held a broad range, and that students of all abilities engaged in the critical and rigorous activities within the class.
film nights, and curriculum fairs, as well as informal and formal social gatherings for its members.

*Figure 3.1: California Standardized Test (CST) Scores*

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**Data Collection**

Classroom observations, field notes, and work samples were collected throughout the 2013-2014 school year via notes and audio recordings, and included such items as teacher observations and reflections, as well as classroom dialogue. Artifacts include lesson plans, handouts, student samples, and student reflections.

*Teacher journal & Lesson plan book*

Throughout the year I kept a teacher reflection journal to document my interaction with the Common Core in creating the curricula, daily interactions within the class and school site, as well as my interactions within the teachers collective. My reflection journal and lesson plan book will allow me to examine my process of creating decolonial curriculum and provide insight into my struggles and successes in creating a decolonial culture in the classroom while navigating district bureaucracy.
Classroom Observations

Observations were made daily in my classroom and included environment observations, such as student resources available and seating arrangements. Observations also documented lesson topic, method of instruction and activity (i.e. direct instruction, group investigations, etc.), student grouping, materials used, an analysis of power and colonization, and the use of dialogue to guide student analysis of colonization. Observations will allow me to examine interactions with the curriculum and assessments, as well as evidence of students’ decolonization and healing.

Audio Recordings

Classroom discussion, or handing-off discussions, were audio recorded to document student reflections and interactions with the content. Approximately 25 hours of student dialogue were captured over the course of the year. Audio recordings will allow me to examine the role of student dialogue in students’ transformative decolonization and healing.

Documents

Documents include both lesson samples and student work examples. Documents also include student reflection journals, which students kept throughout the year to journal their interaction with the curriculum and will provide insight into students’ process of decolonization and healing.
Table 3.2: Data Sources

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<th>Curriculum &amp; Testing</th>
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Method of Analysis

Data was analyzed according to portraiture’s utilization of emergent themes. Using this framework, I examined the colonizing conditions that emerged within the study (i.e. internal colonialism, Common Core Standards, high-stakes testing, teacher isolation, and unsupportive administration), highlighting the challenges and successes I encountered in confronting each within my classroom. Using my lesson plan book and teacher reflection journal to create a timeline of the year, I placed the voice recordings and document data along the timeline to begin an analysis, clustering the series of snapshots into portraits around the emergent colonizing conditions. It is important to note that the process begin with me--my goals sand reflections-- in that the study focuses on my perspective and navigation of colonizing conditions within a public school. Questions that arose from my reflections guided how I examined the other data sources and resulting analytic memos.

With the data aligned, I parsed the timeline into segments according to critical moments of challenges and successes in confronting colonizing conditions. Using analytic memos to look
at the relationship among the segments, I then group the portraits according to the colonizing conditions that emerged, examining interactions in my struggles with creating/implementing a decolonial culture within my teaching and students’ struggles with their healing and decolonial transformation.
Preface: Colonizing Conditions

Building off the literature reviewed in Chapter two, this study identifies five central colonizing conditions that emerged within the study of my classroom. I identify these five conditions in hopes of illuminating the realities for new teachers entering the classroom, both to provide hope and strategies for navigating such conditions, as well as to have an honest conversation about the constraints for teachers engaged in anticolonial work.

1- **Internal Colonialism** - Naming internal colonialism, as outlined in the literature review, is critical if we are to engage in authentic work in urban communities. Educators working in urban communities must have a clear understanding of internal colonialism, and how it’s byproducts of poverty, violence, and addiction play out in the classroom in order to identify and resist deficit thinking, but most importantly to support students in working through the trauma that has resulted.

2- **Eurocentric Standards and Scripted Curriculum** - Decolonial educators must recognize that the content standards are Eurocentric and serve to reinforce colonialism (Calderon, 2014), and thus need to identify possibilities in complicating the standards to serve decolonial teaching.

3- **Teacher Isolation** - Research has identified teacher isolation as a central cause to teacher turnover (Heider, 2005), yet isolation is amplified when educators engage in critical teaching that pushes back on the status quo (Flores, 2007). Findings revealed the isolation I felt at my school was further impacted by the culture of fear at the school site the administration created.
4- **High Stakes Testing**- With numerous studies detailing the high stakes testing culture present in schools since the passing of No Child Left Behind (Au, 2007; Barksdale-Ladd & Thomas, 2000), this study took place in the first year of the new Common Core Assessments in Los Angeles. A combination of staff and student anxiety with the new assessments, and previous labeling of the school as “failing,” created a dehumanizing testing atmosphere at the school site.

5- **Unsupportive Administration**- Although the administrator initially stated his support for teachers, it became evident early in the school year that he did not support teachers’ attempts at creating spaces for meaningful learning. With no school wide discipline plan and a focus on test preparation in professional development, teachers often left feeling demoralized (Santoro, 2011).

The above colonizing conditions will be exemplified within the portraits that follow, often overlapping and woven together in reference to other portraits, and will be more thoroughly analyzed in the conclusion in Chapter Seven.
Chapter IV: Colonizing Curriculum

Hopeful Beginnings

I scan my classroom and take it all in… it is back to school night and I have been with my new students for three weeks. Despite the short period with them, I have been mindful to build community in the class and lay the groundwork for my goal of helping my students build an analysis of colonialism, starting with an honest definition— the domination of a people and the dispossession of their land, labor, and resources.

It’s my first year teaching 5th grade in South Central and I live a mile from my school site. I had taught in the community before but it was 4 years ago and it was in single subject Science, which I’m not credentialed to teach. But this year will be my year—Elementary is my niche. I’m excited and hopeful of the possibilities. As I scan the room I’m flooded with pride: my social studies board boasts gifted strategies of “Think like a…” disciplinarian, gifted icons, universal concepts, and our big idea for the year, “Power can be constructive or destructive.” The opposite corner of the room highlights our Authors Wall of student writing, and the corner above the sink honoring freedom fighters of color, such as Corky Gonzalez, Harriet Tubman, Frida Kahlo and Malcolm X. A nearby cabinet is adorned in the Pan-African flag and Belizean flag because despite demographic shifts in recent years making Latinos the majority—I know it’s crucial for my Black\(^5\) students to see themselves in the classroom.

I spent the weeks prior to Back to School night building community with my students, introducing the universal concepts of Systems, Power, and Conflict (Kaplan, 2008), and

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\(^5\) I use the term Black, rather than African-American, because of the large population of Belizeans in South Central that do not identify as African-American.
developing our Big Idea. My objective for the year was lofty, to implement a decolonial pedagogy that pushed my students to challenge all forms of colonialism, both classical and current manifestations they confront daily in their community. I had no idea all that it would entail.

**Language Arts**

I began the school year confident in my ability to approach the standards and scripted curriculum, such as the language arts McGraw-Hill Treasures anthology, though a decolonial lens because I had done it before in my previous classrooms.

I sat down with the anthology and flipped through the pages of the first unit entitled “Taking a Stand,” and asked myself the usual questions I considered when lesson planning. *What perspective is being presented? Who/what is missing in this presentation? What can I add to supplement the readings?* It became clear when scanning the unit matrix (see appendix)\(^6\) that despite the name, the unit did not offer models of resistance to injustice. The first selection, “Goin’ Someplace Special,” which narrated the experience of a young Black girl in the segregated south, and another selection, “Shiloh,” addressed animal cruelty, but none of the readings depicted models to fight the examples of injustice. The last selection was the most concerning in that it highlighted colonial resistance against Britain during the American Revolution, yet never questioned the theft of Native land and thereby reinforced settler colonialism. I knew I’d have to carefully navigate the unit and strategically supplement with core literature.

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\(^6\) Common Core Standards and resources for each unit described throughout the findings can be found in the appendix.
My students spent the first few weeks fundraising with our after school store. I had to fund the store’s initial items for sale upfront, and had committed to staying after school with them while they sold their items, but their leadership had shined throughout the process. We raised enough to purchase each student three texts throughout the year that they would add to their home libraries, and we had done it collectively. I knew the perfect text to supplement our “Taking a Stand” unit.

**Self-Determination, not Dependency**

I hurried into the classroom holding the box of books. “It’s here!” I exclaimed, nearly out of breathe. My students looked a bit puzzled by my excitement this early in the morning.

“What’s here?” one asked skeptically.

“Our first book of the year! I read it this summer and it’s amazing, you’re gonna love it!”

As the students began their usual morning routine, pulling out their homework and placing their backpacks in the closet in the back of the room, I excitedly ripped open the box and began dispersing the text to each student. They cautiously inspected the cover as I asked them to write their names on the inside, this would be their book to have. After we reviewed the unit theme, I explained that this text would model a different type of resistance to injustice than most had learned about in school so far. We immediately dove into the text, with me reading first, and then handing paragraphs over to students, stopping occasionally to provide context and answer questions.

Students began reading as the narrator, Delphine, tells of her and her sisters first visit to see their mother, who abandoned them years before. I knew that this resonated with several of
my students since they had already opened up about being raised by single parents; one shared he
had never met his mother. We read the first short chapter together and then I assigned the
following two chapters to them for homework and informed them that they’d have a short quiz
every morning to ensure they had done their reading.

“Ugghhhhh…” several students groaned. I ignored it. I knew that many of my kids
would resist because they had never read a chapter book in its entirety, but that would change in
my classroom. And I knew that by the end of it, they’d love the book.

Our class had been reading the book for a few days now, and had already tackled some
serious issues mentioned in the book, such as parental abandonment and raising younger
siblings. On the second day of reading, Delphine’s mother angrily mumbled, “Didn’t want you in
the first place. Should have gone to Mexico to get rid of you (page 26),” which led to several
questions about what she meant. Knowing this was a sensitive subject, I had students journal
their thoughts, followed by a discussion. I projected the prompt on the board:

In the book, Cecile tells the girls she should have gotten rid of them when she had the
chance. How do you think the girls feel hearing that? Why do people have babies they
don’t want? What can we do to prevent people having babies they don’t want?

After allowing students time to jot down initial thoughts, I began to walk around the room and
skim students’ responses.

Student Journal: I think they feel like their parents don't care. I know because my mom
and dad split up last year... I know what it feels like. It makes you want to go in a corner
and cry.
Student Journal: The three girls would feel really sad and gloomy hearing Cecile say that. Some people don't want their babies, don't want the responsibility of a baby. We can prevent this from happening by putting the children in an orphan house so they can be adopted.

Students then shared their thoughts and feeling in a handing-off discussion, which I borrowed from the previous Open Court language arts curriculum. This consisted of students tossing a ball—used as the talking piece—and learning to regulate their own discussion, rather than look to the teacher to call on them to speak.

After a few more chapters that built the setting in Oakland, California and developed the characters, the text introduced the girls’ first encounter with the Black Panthers. Carefully describing the dark clothing, Afros, and berets, the text begins to paint the story of the Panthers by stressing words such as “The People…” Delphine narrates:

“I was sure they were Black Panthers. They were on the news a lot lately. The Panthers on TV said they were in communities to protect poor Black People from the powerful; to provide things like food, clothing and medical help; and to fight racism. Even so, people were afraid of the Black Panthers because they carried rifles and shouted ‘Black Power.’” (page 45)

With this, I diverted from the text and decided to provide my students with background knowledge of the Black Panther Party. We closed our books and I opened my laptop and projected several internet sites that detailed the Panthers ten point platform and we looked through photographs, depicting both the mainstream narrative as gun-toting radicals but focused on their lesser known survival programs with photos of their free breakfast program, children’s programs, food giveaways, and mobile clinics. After a brief discussion about how the Panthers
Survival Programs met the immediate needs of the community, which inspired current
government policies like the free breakfast program at our public school, we returned to our
texts.

“The three Black Panthers were rapping. Laying it down. Telling it like it is, like talking
was their weapon.” (page 46)

“What does she mean talking was their weapon?” I asked. I glanced around the room to see thirty
blank faces. “Ok, let’s stop here and pull out our reflection journals and write about this.” I
pulled out my teacher journal and wrote the prompt:

In the book, Delphine says that talking was their weapon when referencing the
Panthers. What does she mean?

After turning on the projector, I slowly walked the room glancing over students’ shoulders to see
what they thought this meant. Although the majority were confused by the statement, with some
probing questions around familiar icons such as Martin Luther King, Jr., students began to
understand that it meant to persuade others with words.

Although the characters in the book are still unsure about the Panthers, they soon learn
more about the organization when their mother sends them out of the house the following day so
she can work in peace. The children walk down the street to the Panthers free breakfast program,
and are asked to stay for the summer freedom school by two of the women working there. The
girls note their surprise to see children of various ethnicities participating in the programs and
that the classroom had posters of People of Color, rather than George Washington on the walls,
noting “It wasn't at all the way the television showed militants… passing out toast and teaching
children in classrooms.”
As the story developed, the class addressed numerous common core reading standards through the text, as well as an anchor text for their common core narrative writing. The class’s favorite activities, however, involved art to deepen their analysis of the setting and character development, with students drawing the setting and Open-minded Portraits (Tompkins, 2004) of the various characters, followed by classroom dialogue comparing and contrasting the various characters.

A few days later we came upon a chapter in which the children are complaining about their mother not having a television, and reminiscing about a game they played in which they would count the number of People of Color they saw on TV and how many times they would speak. Seeing this as an opportunity to have students reflect on race in present-day media, I assigned the class a similar task for their homework that evening. They were to pick one half hour show of their choosing, with human actors, and collect data. With students following along as I modeled on the projector, the class set up their charts for their data collection.

The following day, students pulled out their data and we discussed what they collected, as I called on students to share their data with the class.

“Raise your hand if the show you picked was all white.” As I suspected, half the class raised their hand. I called on a student in the back of the class.

“What show did you pick?” I asked.

“Full House.” She responded timidly.

“Full house!” I repeated excitedly. “I used to watch that show. And everyone on there was white?”
“Yes.”

I briskly walked to her desk and grabbed her chart to project it on the board for the class to see. “Whooaaa!” the class murmured. I knew this activity would be eye opening and that students would struggle with the realization that, despite what many had learned in previous lessons on the civil rights movement, racism is very much alive and present in media.

“Ok, she labeled the TV show and the characters. So Stephanie, Jesse, Becky, Danny, basically the whole family is white. Did they have any people of color friends?

“No,” the class responded while examining the findings.

“Yes!” one student contested. “Michelle’s friend.”

“When she was older she had one friend that was Black and one that was Asian.” I interjected.

“But it depends on which episode she watched because when Michelle was a baby she didn't have friends, so everybody was white.”

Images 4.1-4.2- Student examples of race data collected from their favorite TV shows
We then moved on and I asked the class to raise their hand if their show had at least one person of color. Several students raised their hand and I selected a student’s chart to project for discussion. I began to walk the class through the findings. A soft murmur fell over the class as we analyzed them, which showed that the ratio of white actors to actors of color on this show as six to one. We then analyzed another show, which highlighted that in addition to the shows having very few people of color, they also spoke significantly less than the white actors, with a ratio of three to one.

“But she was the main character.” Another student resisted the discomfort of realizing that one of her favorite shows was racist.

“Ok, so you’re saying she spoke more not ‘cause she was white but because she was the main character?”

“Yeah.”

“Raise your hand if you found a show where the main character was a person of color?” Nobody raised a hand.

This activity was our first to examine media and pop culture with a critical lens, which proved difficult for some students. Although the majority of the class was able to see and discuss the racism embedded in their favorite shows, a few students were visibly irritated by the activity and resisted, making excuses for the lack of People of Color until the end. Ironically, this manifested in two of my students who were the quickest to identify racism in the school and community, but were unable to confront racism in their hobbies and past times. This showed that they were able to identify overt racism, but needed to develop the tools to name subversive
racism and micro-aggressions in their daily lives. I took note of the resistance, and planned to follow-up in future lessons examining music and movies.

We continued to read the text, with students learning about the campaign to free Huey P. Newton, the founder of the Black Panther Party. One day, the girls arrive home from a day exploring the city to see their mother being taken away in handcuffs by the police, along with two other members of the Panthers. As we held our handing-off discussion, I began to really understand just how much trauma my students carried with them.

“I identified with Delphine feeling scared seeing her mom get arrested ‘cause I’ve seen my mom get arrested and it’s scary. You don't know what’s going to happen.” shared Brenton. I knew his grandmother was raising him, but this was the first time I had heard him mention his mother. With Brenton’s admission, several more students shared a similar experience of witnessing a parent’s arrest and the fear they felt of not knowing who would care for them. It was as this moment that I fully realized how much pain my students carried with them and that I had to create a space for them to name this pain, for it was clear they needed it. Thus, my pedagogy continued to transform to address student trauma, both through curricular activities and social interactions.

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7 See chapter five for lessons and activities addressing student trauma.
Upon completing the book, students closed the story by creating a class ABC book (Thompkins, 2009) highlighting the main events within the story, which was then placed in the class library for students to revisit throughout the year. We then closed the unit by synthesizing the various means of taking a stand they had learned within the anthology, book, and Raza Studies research projects with a circle map and handing-off discussion. Students identified a plethora of means to fight for justice, including the usual protest and boycott, and adding other less conventional means like the use of art to spread a message, creating an organization, and providing services to meet the immediate needs of the community. Although the class had been initially resistant to the idea of reading a chapter book, they were able to learn knew models of resistance and shared in our closing activity that they enjoyed reading the text.

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8 Ethnic Studies projects are detailed later in this chapter.
Conquest, not Adventure

The next unit in our Treasures anthology was “The American West.” I once again found myself sitting at my desk skimming the unit matrix, asking myself the usual question of whose story was being told. I was not surprised to see that despite some stories containing main characters of color, such as the story of a Black cowboy or a Spanish girl in the southwest, the stories still attempted to normalize the expanding colonialism, and presented Westward expansion as adventure, rather than as conquest.

I chose to open the unit by discussing the experiences of People of Color within westward expansion. I began by introducing the Native American experience with westward expansion as our class reviewed an interactive website that contained an animated map highlighting the loss of native land, down to present day reservations.

“Wow…” gasped several students as they watched the map.
We then shifted to another website to analyze statistics of current living conditions for Native Americans on reservations, which highlighted the poverty, violence, and addiction rates. “Why can’t they be equal with us?” asked Juan, the confusion evident on his face. “We’re equal with whites, why can’t they be equal with us?”

At that moment, two of his friends on opposite sides of the room, corrected him. “We're not equal with whites!” interjected Benton.

“I don't think we’re equal. If we were equal, we’d have whites in this class right now.” Lionel calmly added.

“Uh-huhhhhh.” groaned Benton in agreement.

This would be one of many examples I would encounter throughout the year where classroom discussion played a key role in pushing students’ thinking. It was also a reminder that I had a lot of work to do if I wanted my students to have the tools to critically read the world around them. Although Juan did not see parallels between the living conditions on reservations and his own community, his peers did and were eager to help him see them too. It was also an eye opening moment for me as an educator, because it was evident my Latino students were not aware of their own Indigeneity, and I would have to be mindful of this when developing my Ethnic Studies units.

We continued with the unit opener and discussed the Exodus of newly freed African slaves after the Civil War, as well as Mexico’s loss of the Southwest. But I was cognizant that the unit opener was not enough and I would need to supplement the unit with core literature.
After consulting the curriculum coach on campus for possible texts she could recommend with no luck, I happened upon a website in my Facebook feed that discussed critical Native American children’s literature. After reviewing the synopsis and reading the reviews online, I knew the book *The Birchbark House*, by Louise Erdrich, would fit perfectly within the unit and offer an honest narrative of westward expansion from an indigenous viewpoint. I ordered a class set of the book and eagerly awaited its arrival.

Luckily, the success of our first supplementary book minimized student resistance to *The Birchbark House*, with fewer groans upon the texts arrival. I had also gained insight from the first book and decided to incorporate the use of reading logs to help the students process the text. As a student passed out the texts to the class, I passed out the readings logs and explained them to the class.

“I made you all a reading log that you will takes notes in each night as you read your assigned chapters.” I explained. I had constructed the books the day before, stapling copies of construction paper around pages of bubble maps for the setting and characters, in addition to pages for notes each night of reading. “As you can see, you will be responsible for taking notes each night on the readings. Notes do not have to be complete sentences; they can be main ideas or even questions you might have on the section. You can also include drawings. Each note page includes a section for vocabulary words, so if you come across a word you are unfamiliar with, write it down and we’ll have time each morning to look up the words during MELD?”

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9 MELD: Mainstream English Language Development
Students groaned when the logs were first introduced, but sighed in relief when they realized they could use the logs as they saw fit and were not required to write summaries of the readings. Organized by seasons, the story slowly builds the setting on an island in Lake Michigan, and tells the story of an Ojibwa girl, named Omakayas. Careful to depict her as a typical little girl, the story opens with Omakayas trying to sneak out of the house before her mother can remind her she must clean the hide that’s been drying. Several students giggled, as we read of her groans when she was caught by her mother and sent to work on her chores. With the setting and characters developed in the Summer chapter, the Fall and Winter chapters set out to paint a clear picture of colonialism. The text read:

“'Chimookoman,' said Fishtail... the word meant ‘big knife’ and it was used to describe non-Indian, or white people who were traveling in larger numbers than ever to Ojibwa lands and setting down their cabins, forts barns, gardens, pastures, fur-trading posts, churches, and mission schools. LaPointe was becoming more Chimookoman everyday, and there was talk of sending the Anishinabeg to the west.” (pages 76-77)

The story told of the greed and insatiable hunger of the settlers in a manner that was palatable for the students, and did not bore them like their social studies text often did. Drawing connections to the social studies curriculum we were also reading, students held critical discussions of settler colonialism and the effects it had on Native peoples. In addition to Omakayas family’s concern for dwindling food resources due to settlers hunting on their lands, the story climaxed with the introduction of smallpox to the village by a visitor.

The class had read how the introduction of disease had decimated Native Americans in their social studies text, yet, it was the humanization of the experience in the literature book that students connected to the most. Unlike their social studies texts, the book detailed the fever, pain,
and bleeding gums experienced by Omakayas family, with her being the only one to escape the disease and care for the rest.

“That’s when she saw that the beautiful face of her sister was now covered with ugly sores and vivid lumps, and her mouth, when she opened it to breathe, showed that her gums bled painfully and stained her teeth red.” (page 147-148)

Now familiar with the use of Open-minded portraits, the students created one for Omakayas, completing a new portrait for each season, noting the changes within Omakayas throughout the year. Students saw the shifts in Omakayas from a fun loving girl who disliked chores, to the frightened girl worried about the cold winter, lack of food, and her family’s survival, followed by depression due to the death of her baby brother from smallpox. The book challenged the Treasures unit narrative of westward expansion as adventure, and told the stories of dispossession and death within colonialism and conquest. Students then used their open-minded portraits to complete a Common Core Writing Task as a closing activity for the book.

Image 4.7- A student’s Open-minded portrait of Omakayas.
The use of core literature to supplement the Treasures anthology proved critical in implementing a decolonial language arts. Both texts told stories of colonialism in aesthetically pleasing stories to which students could connect. *The Birchbark House* presented an accurate portrayal of classical colonialism, stressing the dispossession of native land and resources, in addition to the role European disease played in the genocide of native peoples. *One Crazy Summer* presented a counter narrative to mainstream portrayals of the Black Panther Party, but also highlighted the importance of Panther survival programs in serving the community. This model of change was drastically different from those students were familiar with—looking for change from within the government—instead showing self-determination with communities coming together to create the change, and severing their dependency on outside institutions. A good starting point, I knew explicit connections between classical and internal colonial structures would be needed within the social studies curriculum.

**The Study of Self: Ethnic Studies approaches to research**

I began the year intending to implement ethnic studies projects within the curriculum, as I had done every year, however, observing my students struggle in reading their world—blind to their indigenous roots or the white supremacy in their favorite TV shows—reinforced my decision. Thus, in addition to using ethnic studies approaches with language arts and social studies standards, I wove the reading, writing, and speaking standards to explicitly address ethnic studies within research projects.
I scaffolded the introduction to research by first presenting the process within group investigations. We kicked off our month-long Raza Studies unit with a 16 de Septiembre Celebration, and because of remarks made during a discussion on Native Americans; I decided to begin the unit with students researching the various Indigenous people throughout Latin America. Having done a similar activity with a previous class, I pulled a file from my desk as I prepped my lessons for the week after school, searching for the materials I had previously used. They included photographs of objects from the various groups the students were to research, containing photographs of an Olmec head, a map of the Aztec city of Tenochtitlan, a Mayan pyramid and ball court, and the Incan city of Machu Pichu. Materials also included handouts from a kid friendly website on Indigenous Latin American people, which I then copied and grouped according to the topics.

Within their table groups, which were scaffolded by reading and writing levels, students received a photo of an object as I began to describe the process. “Ok, I want you to take a few minutes to silently look at the photo. You can pass it around the group so everyone has a good look. Silently, I want you to start wondering what you might want to learn about the photo. What questions do you have about it?” I explained. I quietly strolled between the groups, observing the students pass the photos around, eyebrows furrowed with curious looks on their faces. “Ok, now I want one person in your group to be the scribe and you are going to write down all the questions your group had for your photo.”

A chatter fell over the room as students selected their scribe and began to share their questions. I continued to mingle between groups in case students had questions. Once the chatter
softened, I introduced the next step. “Now, you’re going to look for the answers to your group’s questions,” I announced as I began to pass out their respective materials. “You are going to read the hand-outs with your partners and then discuss your findings with your group. Once you’re done reading and you’ve talked about your answers, I’ll give each group a poster and you can begin to record your findings.” I then pinned the poster criteria on the board in front of the room to review with the class.

**Poster Criteria**
- Title
- Questions
- Answers
- Drawings/pictures

“In order to receive a four, your poster must contain all four items—A title, your group’s questions, the answers you found, and a visual.” After answering clarifying questions, the students set about their research. I allowed the students approximately 20 minutes to read and discuss with their groups, and then passed out the posters, allotting an additional 20 minutes to record their findings. I had made it clear since the first day of class that students would be talking and presenting regularly, but knew I needed to be explicit in what I expected from students’ presentations since it was still new to them. When groups began to wrap up their posters I reviewed the presentation criteria, reminding them that every group member had to participate in the presentation.

**Presentation Criteria**
- Speak in a loud clear voice
- Face the audience- don’t turn your back on the audience
- Do not cover/block your face

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After lunch, students presented their findings, journaled, and held a handing-off discussion with the following prompt:

*What does it mean to be Native American? Who is Native American?*

My goal for this discussion was for students to expand their understanding of Indigeneity, and that it was not confined to the colonial borders of the United States. The students pushed each other’s thinking on the topic when the conversation shifted to the complex ancestry of Latin America and one student made negative comments about being Native.

Although his statement pained me, I was not shocked by his choice to distance himself from Indigeneity. I flashed back to conversations I overheard as a child between my grandparents around the dinner table, arguing over who was more *Indio*—the accusation thrown across the table like a weapon, intended to wound the other. Among Latinos, Indigeneity was unwanted—a source of shame engrained in us from media and our families, traced back to the beginning of colonialism. This is precisely the reason ethnic studies must be implemented across the subject matter in k-12 education. I went home that day with my lesson plan book determined; I had a lot of work to do.

The following week, we began our Raza Studies research projects. I had compiled a list of various Raza freedom fighters, and students had selected whom they would be researching. I was mindful to include a variety of fighters across Latin America, including men and women of indigenous and African ancestry, so students would have a clearer picture of Latinos’ indigenous and African roots. I also selected individuals who employed a variety of means to fight injustice, so that students would see the multiple means to an end, and that everyone can participate in
struggle using their different strengths to contribute. We visited both the school library and the public library in the neighborhood to gather resources, but sadly neither had materials. It is difficult to incorporate ethnic studies research at the elementary level do to a lack of grade level appropriate resources; however, it was even harder to do so in an underserved school and community like South Central. Still, we made the best of it and printed web resources to supplement.

Since students were still familiarizing themselves with the research process, I chose to keep the project heavily scaffolded, with students creating manila folder people to present their findings. Knowing that the class was still getting their bearings with the research process, the manila folder people allowed students to present their findings in ways familiar to them; within friendly letters, timelines, realia, and art. I reviewed the handout explaining the project and answered questions. Although I provided the materials and class time for students to work on their projects, students completed portions of the work at home. After two weeks of preparation, the class prepared to share their findings with their peers, taking turns to practice their presentations with each other during our language development block.

After lunch on a Friday, the other fifth grade classrooms visited our class to hear the presentations. Set-up much like a science fair, students propped up their folders on their desks, and shared their findings with peers as they walked throughout the room. Our visitors were able to interact with the projects, pulling out timelines and asking questions about the realia attached. Once each class had filed through and returned to their room, I congratulated my students.
“Great job everyone! You did an amazing job today, especially considering this is your first time presenting to other classes! I wish Principal Juarez could have been here to see you, but I’m proud of you!” I beamed as I spoke. Students smirked as they exchanged glances with each other. They were proud too.

Images 4.8-4.9- Students present their Raza Studies project.

A few months had passed and we returned from winter break ready to begin our Black Studies unit. My students were considerably more familiar with the research process at this point, having completed another project researching Native Americans in small groups, so I loosely structured this unit for them to be able showcase their developing research skills. Students selected a Black freedom fighter to research, but this time they developed the questions guiding their research and would select the output for their presentations, with everyone writing their findings as a biography within our writing block.

I had learned my lesson with the Raza Studies unit, so I had spent my winter break researching where I could find grade-level appropriate resources for my students Black Studies
research. I visited the downtown children’s library and was amazed by all the resources they had—they even had books on lesser know freedom fighters like Marcus Garvey and Fannie Lou Hammer! Thus, I emailed the library coordinator to plan our field trip to the library. My administrator initially approved the trip, even suggesting I look into student TAP\textsuperscript{10} cards for the class to receive the reduced student fees. Unfortunately, after running around town planning the trip and securing the TAP cards for the class, my administrator canceled the trip, not allowing us to go\textsuperscript{11}. I scrambled to print copies of Internet sources, many of which were not grade level appropriate.

Despite the obstacles, my students were excited and engaged in their projects. Nearly half the class had taken the initiative to secure sources for themselves, either visiting a library with their parents or researching on the Internet at home. Once students had secured resources, I walked the class through a series of mini-lessons (Kaplan, 2008), supporting the development of their research questions, grouping the questions into themes that would guide their writing, and finally, on the various ways of presenting their findings. Most students selected poster board presentations or creating poster people, with a few students choosing to dress up as their freedom fighter or create a PowerPoint presentation.

I feverishly hurried across the room, dispersing the various supplies students needed. I passed out posters and butcher paper in the back of the room, and reminded students to pair up to have a partner trace them to create their “life size” poster people. I hustled across the room to the

\textsuperscript{10} TAP- Transit Access Pass for the Los Angeles Metro system.

\textsuperscript{11} See the footnote at the end of Chapter 6 for further explanation of obstacles from administration.
writing center to pass out scratch paper, so students could sketch their costumes for their respective freedom fighter. Then, I set up the laptops, which I had found abandoned in a corner of the computer lab and had nursed back to health, in front of the room and gave a brief tutorial on the use of PowerPoint. Once everyone was settled, I continued to roam between groups of students working, both independently and collaboratively, at various stages in their research; some reading and taking notes, others tracing their poster people, and others beginning to record their findings on posters and PowerPoints. I felt rejuvenated seeing my students excited about their work and proud of the growth they had made in a few short months—this is what meaningful learning looks like.

Images 4.10-4.11- Students working on their Black Studies projects

We closed out the work session as we prepared to go to lunch, “Ok, so now that you have the materials you need, you will have to take them home and work on the presentation at home. We will continue writing your biographies in class, but you will be creating your presentation

12 The school administration and technology liaison were unaware of their existence, and approved our use of the laptops since no one had claimed them.
independently at home. And don't forget, we will be presenting this in the multipurpose room at the end of the month to Principal Juarez and the other fourth and fifth grade classrooms!” The students chatted enthusiastically as they lined up, their faces lit up with delight as we walked out to lunch.

Two weeks had passed and today was the day we presented our findings. Students had spent the last two weeks drafting, editing, and revising their writing, and had typed their essays. With only four laptops available to my class of thirty, I had successfully convinced my administrator to allow my students use their JiJi time in the computer lab to type their expository writing, rather than play the district required math games. I emphasized that the Common Core specified students use technology to publish their writing, to which he had no counter argument. We were set to present in an hour and I had several students that were still constructing their biography books and presentations, although most were finished and were practicing their presentations. I scurried about the room helping students with their final touches, and hurriedly gathered the class to go set up.

Luckily, the room was still adorned with the decorations we had created for the Black History month performance I organized the week before, and we only had to rearrange some tables as students began to set-up around the room. The visiting classes began to walk through;

13 Students creating PowerPoints came in during their recess or stayed after school to finish their presentations.

14 Jiji is computer software that develops Spatial-Temporal (ST) Math® using visual math instruction to blend learning math solution in K-12 education.

15 Details on the Black History month Performance and the stress/trauma in organizing it are outlined in the footnote at the end of Chapter 6.
students roamed across the room, stopping to check out presentations and ask questions. Although stressed and out of breathe, I stopped for a moment to take it all in and couldn’t help but smile. In front of me, a student shared his PowerPoint on Malcolm X, as his peers watched with jaws dropped in amazement that he had created the PowerPoint himself. Across the room, a student dressed in black slacks, a black coat, and black beret, taught students how he, Huey P. Newton, had founded the Black Panther Party and explained the numerous services the organization provided. Students all around the room were sharing the stories of powerful freedom fighters with not only their peers but also their teachers. Seeing my students shine as they shared their empowering research made all the extra time it required of me—giving my recess, lunch and time afterschool to help students who didn't receive help at home—worth every minute. I only wished my administrator were here to witness how powerful meaningful learning could be.

Images 4.12-4.13- Students present their Black Studies projects.

Social Studies, not Colonial Studies
With the Common Core Standards for elementary only addressing language arts and math, I turned to the California Social Studies Standards to guide my social studies curriculum. Before beginning with the content standards, I introduced Kaplan’s gifted strategy “Think like a [disciplinarian]”\textsuperscript{16} (2007) and defined anthropology for the students as the study of people and their relationship to the land. Although, the formal definition is limited to the study of humans, I added the relationship to the land since humans do not live in a vacuum and land is often at the center of conflict between peoples.

As I expected, out of the nine social studies standards listed, only one centered on pre-colonial peoples, which manifested as three short lessons—two pages each lesson—in their textbooks. Not satisfied with this, I extended this standard in my lesson plan book to a month long unit across the disciplines. I sat at my desk and flipped through my files, pulling out the handouts I created for my fourth grade students in previous years. I made some minor changes to the original document to reflect the research would be on native peoples nation wide, and set the document aside to make copies later.

I got up from my desk and walked to my black closet where I kept special texts that I did not want to get worn and pulled the resources I had on Native Americans. I then walked to my classroom library and squatted until my thighs burned, pulling more texts that students could reference for the unit. I set the large stack on a side table.

The following morning, I introduced the next research project to the class. “In groups of three, you will research a Native American tribe in the United States. Your projects will have

\textsuperscript{16} Pulling from Kaplan’s strategy, I tweaked the definition of anthropology because of the use of anthropology as a tool for colonization of non-white peoples.
two parts: you will create a poster board presenting your findings with each group member responsible for contributing to the parts of the poster, and you will also be creating a 3D model of your tribes housing, making sure to reflect how they used the materials in their region to create their homes.” As I spoke, I projected photos of example posters and models from previous years, talking through the techniques used in each. “You can see in this example, their tribe created round dome-like homes out of wood and bark, so they flipped a ramen bowl over and glued bark to it. This group used tamale husks to create a straw-like home. Again, the materials you use will depend on where your tribe lived and what resources they had available to them.”

A student began to distribute the handout explaining the project as I projected another worksheet I had created to organize their research notes. “After your group has selected a tribe, you will begin your research. Each project must address the three major sections outlined on your note page: geographic location and adaptation, governance, and traditions and religion. After taking notes on your worksheet, you will write a paragraph for each section for your poster presentation. Since there are three people in each group, it may be easiest to divide up the sections so that each person is responsible for one. You will have time in class to work on your research and poster, but you will be responsible for meeting with your group outside of school to create your model, so you’ll need to exchange numbers.”

With this information, the students grew excited and began to whisper and exchange glances across the room to potential group members. “I am letting you pick your group members, but remember you are being graded as a group, so just because you like to hangout with someone at recess doesn’t mean they will be a good group member. Do you want your friend in your
group if they are not responsible and never do their homework? Probably not.” I knew they would want to work with friends, but I wanted them to think through their decision and not base them on a popularity contest. With that announcement, the whispers shifted, as students paused to think through whom they would want to work with in a group.

After a few minutes of excited debate as students got into groups and exchanged numbers, I quieted the class to give them one last bit of information. I knew that it would be difficult for some groups to get together—if not for parents work schedules then out of parent hesitation in letting their children visit another student’s home. “One last thing, for groups that are not able to arrange a time and place to make their model at someone’s house, I will stay after school so your group can create your model here, but it is still up to you to gather your materials on your own and bring them here to put it together.”

Students spent the next two weeks using the texts and handouts I had gathered, as well as the classroom computers to research their tribes. Each day, students had thirty minutes to gather in their groups, research, take notes, draft and publish their writing, and draw visuals for their posters. A few days before the due date, I provided their posters so that they could begin to construct their presentations.

Most groups were able to meet at someone’s house to construct their models, but two groups took me up on my offer to make their models after school in the classroom. One group did so because their parents did not feel comfortable letting them go to another’s home, so they brought their clay, figurines, and other materials to class to build it together. It was clear the other group’s parents had a more hands-off approach and the students were on their own.
Although I’m not certain the project was clearly communicated to the parents, those students showed up with no materials and little guidance on where to begin.

As the other group began their model independently, I asked the group questions to get them thinking. “Who are you researching? What did their homes look like?” I probed.

“The Navajo. They were round like little mounds…” she explained as she flipped through her book to show me a photograph.

“What were they made out of?” I continued.

“Dirt.”

“Ok, so what can you use to make something that looks like that?”

After some discussion among the group, the girls asked if they could use some of my brown construction paper, so I pulled some out of the back cabinet and placed it on their desk. They then notified me that they were going to the playground to get some materials and would be back. I continued my usual after school grading and planning when they returned smiling from ear to ear with hands full of dirt, leaves, and twigs. I watched as they cut, folded, and taped the construction paper into mounds, then covered them in glue and sand. After securing the mounds to their baseboard, they covered the base in glue and sand, and created small trees out of the twigs and leaves. The other group had also seen the girls struggle for materials, and offered them some of their animal figurines, to which the girls thankfully accepted and secured them to their board.

The following day the students presented their findings, each group taking turns before the class. Students had been creative in creating their models, using Popsicle sticks, cardboard,
papier-mâché, and clay to create the housing; however, I was most proud of the group of girls that made theirs in my class the day before. Although it was not the most appealing visually, I was proud of their resourcefulness and tenacity in creating their model, without adult help. They were proud too. Not to mention, they knew their content inside and out, and nailed the poster presentation.

During the month long unit, some of my boys were having difficulties with each other and were using homophobic slurs on the playground. I had several discussions with the students, documenting their issues and informing parents, but the behavior persisted. Frustrated, I vented to two of the other elementary educators in Education for the People (E4P), and they shared they were having similar problems with their fifth graders. As a result, we met and developed a series of lessons on gender and sexuality and were able to connect one of the lessons to the social studies standards.¹⁷

As part of our unit, the class viewed the PBS documentary *2 Spirits*, which tells the story of a present-day transgender Navajo boy who was murdered by two men. The film explains the history of indigenous people and gender fluidity, with the Navajo recognizing four types of gender rather than the western notion of two. We also visited the PBS website for the film which contained an interactive map showing that most of the world respects fluid genders, with the European binary being the minority. Students took notes throughout the film and journaled in their reflection notebooks, followed by a handing-off discussion. Nearly every student was open

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¹⁷ Further details on the collaborative planning can be found in Chapter 6 under Curricular Support.
to the topic, citing the beauty in personal decisions on gender performance, with one student conflicted between gender fluidity and the western binary.

*Journal Prompt:* According to the Navajo, what were the four genders? How is this different form western culture? What do you think about the Navajo genders? Be sure to provide evidence to support your opinion.

*Student Journal:* I think it’s cool because they can be a girl or a boy, whatever they want to be no matter what people say about them. It’s their choice and not the other people’s choice. You can be who you want to be.

*Student Journal:* I think it’s different because it was two [types] of women and two [types] of men. I don’t like it, I hate men and women kissing the same sex. One thing I like is you like whoever you like and no one can stop you.

This particular student was conflicted due to the normalization of homophobic language in his home, which he shared later within another lesson, writing that his family did not accept his gay uncle. Despite his hesitation in fully accepting homosexuality and gender fluidity, exposing him to alternative viewpoints, especially highlighting that People of Color all over the world are accepting of these differences, was a small victory.

The beauty of this unit was the blending of traditional effective teaching practices, such as project-based learning, art, and the use of multimedia, with critical reflection. Students’ knowledge was assessed via a variety of means, such as writing, art, oral presentations, and

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18 Further details can be found in Chapter 5 under Status Updates.
debate, while supporting their reflection on colonial constructs like homophobia, and thus supporting their transformation.

After wrapping up the Native American unit, we moved on to the arrival of Europeans to the continent. As usual, the students’ textbook presented European arrival as everything but economically motivated, with the unit entitled, “Age of Exploration.” With my goal for the year being that students understand how colonialism impacted Native Americans and Africans, I focused on presenting the financial motivation of colonialism and the violence inflicted to secure land, resources, and labor. I had previously introduced the concept with Rethinking School’s (Bigelow & Peterson, 1998) lesson “The Trial (The people vs. Columbus, et al.)”, which was an interactive introduction to Columbus’s true motive—wealth.

Thus, with the text presenting a watered down version of colonialism as exploration, I focused on the one page in the unit that highlighted the Triangular Trade Route, and supplemented with handouts from A Young People’s History of the United States (Chapter 2: Black and White). As a class, we examined the textbook image that highlighted colonial trade—African slaves moving into the Americas and goods and resources moving out of the Americas to Europe. Students then read the handouts on slavery in the colonies in scaffolded pairs, with the readings pinpointing U.S. slavery as unique from previous types of slavery in the role that race played in the dehumanization of slaves in the Americas. Students then reflected in their journals.

**Journal Prompt:** Who benefited from the Triangular Trade Route? Did all people involved benefit? Explain your reasoning. Make sure to use Key terms. (exploitation, colonialism, etc.).
Student Journal: In the Triangular Trade Route, the people who benefit were Europeans (Spain, France, and England), because they got everything from the Africans and Native Americans. Europeans often used slavery to supply the many people needed to work the land. You can tell [Native Americans] didn't benefit because of the disease that came with the Europeans, and they got enslaved and killed to find gold. If they didn’t... they would chop their hands off. Europeans got everything when they didn't deserve it because they spread contamination.

Student Journal: The thirteen colonies benefited because they got enslaved Africans, sugar, molasses, tools, clothing and other manufactured goods. England also benefited because they got timber, grains, tobacco and rice. Native Americans didn't benefit because people were coming and giving them disease and exploiting them and they died.

Africans also didn't benefit because people from other places exploited them.
Knowing the transformative power in being able to name the world, a large part of my teaching counter narratives included teaching vocabulary. Thus, in addition to teaching the vocabulary outlined in the language arts curriculum, I embedded social studies terms in our weekly vocabulary activities, often adding terminology the curriculum failed to include. For example, within the language arts unit on westward expansion I added the term colonization, and within the social studies exploration unit, I added the term exploitation. Each week, I would introduce the vocabulary with a PowerPoint using visuals, and students would play with the new terms within vocabulary games like word wizard, bingo, and acting them out. Students would also interact with the words within early finisher activities in which they would draw antonym and synonym cards. These vocabulary activities were not only engaging but helped students deepen their understanding of difficult concepts and terminology.

Images 4.16-4.17- Example of a vocabulary antonym card. Vocabulary that aligned with the Big Idea for the year was added to the word wall.

19 Students that finished classwork before others had a list of early finisher activities that they could select from to keep busy and not disturb students still working.
After our thorough examination of the role of slavery within the colonies, I returned to the Native American genocide that took place to secure Native land under colonialism. This time, the text presented a more honest depiction of the “conflict” between the Natives and settlers, albeit still using nuanced language such as conflict rather than genocide. The text mentioned massacres, such as Sand Creek and Wounded Knee, the Trail of Tears, and the deception used within treaties. I also showed a video clip on Wounded Knee and returned to *A Young People’s History of the United States* (Chapter 7: As Long as Grass Grows or Water Runs) to supplement the text because they offered more detailed descriptions.

Students read the handouts in pairs, completing text-dependent questions as they read, and synthesized the texts and video within Tree Maps, which they then used to complete a Writing Task. In addition to synthesizing the information from multiple resources, students were asked to reflect and use the information to develop their opinion on the ethics of colonialism.

*Student Sample: In the Seminole War they fought back because they were tricked... it was right for the Seminoles to fight back because they got treated badly.*

*Student Sample: I think it was bad to fight Indian against Indian because you’re killing your own people.... It’s like [Europeans] just don’t want to stop growing. They told lies so Indians would fight Indians and [Europeans] just sat back and once the Indians were fighting they took over their land.*

*Student Sample: It was unethical because it’s not fair or right to take land from Native Americans.*
At this point in the year, students were rather familiar with the concepts of justice and exploitation, and found colonialism to be unethical. However, I wanted students to be able to connect present day living conditions to European colonialism, so we took a critical literacy approach to their textbook lesson on the economic system in the colonies. The text introduced the concept of a free-market economy and detailed several of the professions in the colonies, with the teacher’s edition of the text offering a hands-on activity for students to learn more about the flow of funds within the colonial economy.

The activity involved grouping students into small groups, with each representing a profession, such as a carpenter, farmer, cooper, etc., and I was to play the king. I passed out squares of paper I had prepped the previous day, which represented money, in addition to the task cards that listed detailed directions for each group. I observed from the front of the rooms as students moved throughout the class to the various professions and exchanged monies as detailed in their directions, with students also paying me a visit to pay the required taxes. It was evident that the intended goal of this activity was to illuminate the effect of Britain’s high taxes, which left common folks making little profit, thus leading to the American Revolution. I had a different approach in mind.

At the end of the activity, I instructed each group to count their funds and I recorded each amount on the board so we could examine and discuss them whole group.

“Who made the majority of money in this system?” I inquired.

“The King!” the students shouted in unison.

“And who else?” I probed. “Just the king?”

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“The English merchant!” a few others answered.

At this point I stopped the conversation and projected the lesson’s journal prompt. “Ok, pull out your reflection journals. I want you to look at our findings and answer the following questions: Who benefited from the English colonial economy? What groups were left out of the activity?”

Students pulled out the journals and began writing. As I walked the room, a few students were confused by the prompt but most were thoughtfully writing their response. Once students laid their pencils on their desks, I pulled our red ball out of the back closet for a handing-off discussion and tossed it to the first student speaker. One by one, students identified the English king as the beneficiary and began to name various professions they felt should have been included in the activity. They were stuck in the mindset that European settlers were they only ones involved in the colonial economy— as the text had presented it— but with further probing questions one student’s light bulb lit. “They left the slaves out of the activity. They have the farmer but not the slaves that worked the farms.”

“Ahaaaaaa!” I shouted. “Slaves aren’t included in the activity but they provided the labor in the colonies! What else? Who else was missing from the activity?” Seeing the excitement in my eyes, several more light bulbs lit as hands raised.

“The Native Americans were left out of the activity!” shouted a student.

I returned to the board and drew a triangle, modeling the structure of hierarchy, and labeled the three pieces. “Yes, the king benefited more than the colonists, but the basis for the whole economy is Native American land and the slave labor used to work it. Our economy, the
free-market economy that is still used in the U.S. today is built on top of slave labor and Native land.” This was the critical point I wanted to stress—I was determined to help my students see that history is not just in the past but is the foundation for the conditions today. I wanted them to draw connections between the dispossession of land and labor with the founding of the colonies, and the current conditions of poverty, violence, and police brutality they read about the Panthers organizing against in One Crazy Summer.

Image 4.18- Student reflection on colonial economy.

One the last day of school, we conducted our final circle\(^{20}\) to close out the year, with students sharing the most important thing they had learned that the year. Most students reported learning to take their education seriously and not engaging in “drama” with other students. Students passed the talking piece around the circle and it was little Frankie’s turn. Frankie was a small, sweet kid who wore glasses and didn't speak much in class. He paused for a moment to

\(^{20}\) More information on the use of circles within the class can be found in Chapter 5 under transformative circles.
gather himself before he spoke, it was evident every time he talked in front of the class that he was pushing himself to do so. “I learned that if you take someone’s land, they’re going to get mad.” I was stunned, my mouth slightly open in a gasp. I didn't expect that response—every other student’s learning moment was about personal growth. I don't know how many of my students fully understood what they learned in my class, or how much they will remember in the future. But if one student understands and carries that knowledge with them throughout the rest of their education, I met my objective for the year.

Chapter Footnote: Testing Constraints

It would be dishonest to write about the curricular possibilities in my classroom without acknowledging the largest curricular constraint: high stakes testing. The testing culture in public schools since the passing of No Child Left Behind is felt by students, parents, and teachers. However, the way it manifests in each school varies, so I will briefly share my experiences with it at this particular school site throughout the study. As a critical educator, I know testing does not capture all that students really know, but I also know tests matter. They determine student and school labels (such as Far Below Basic or Program Improvement) and are used to track students throughout their schooling. Thus, I strive to offer my students meaningful learning experiences within the classroom, while also preparing them to perform on tests.

As most schools do, South Central Elementary publicly announced student test scores. Students that scored proficient or advanced on the California Standardized Test (CST) the previous year were invited to the 350 Club party in September. Student invitations were delivered in the middle of class for all to see, so everyone was aware of who did and didn't do
well on the test. At the party, students dressed in elegant black and white clothing, received awards, and had punch and cookies with their parents at the party. I felt for my students who longed to be included in the festivities, but at least student names were not listed publicly in the halls as I had seen at other school sites.

I consider myself skilled in navigating the testing realities of education, so when my administrator called me into his office at the beginning of the year to discuss my students tests scores from the previous year, I knew all the right things to say. I had my students clustered into small groups for targeted instruction, which I incorporated in both language arts and math blocks, and had an answer for each question he asked about how I was going to move students up a level. I even bit my tongue when he suggested I not “worry” about seeing my Far Below Basic students during targeted instruction, and focus on my basic students since they were the ones that “would help the school API score.” I knew I could not in good conscious toss a group of students under the bus but chose not to engage in this battle this early in the school year.

When the district received a testing waiver in October, they decided to toss the CST for the year and transition into Common Core; our professional development immediately shifted to prepare us for the new tests. Although the new standards included speaking skills and project-based standards, professional development focused on what could be tested. Their greatest concern was that students’ literacy skills would make the new tests extremely difficult, and focused on literacy in both language arts and math. Every session became about creating text-dependent questions for the Treasures anthology and Writing Tasks for students to respond to the literature. I complied with their requests; I just developed the questions and writing tasks with
critical material that aligned with my curriculum. Although I did include some test preparation in my class, I refused to dedicate my entire day to it, so I tutored a group of students (without pay) that needed more support after school.

The district rolled out the new Smarter Balance Assessment Consortium (SBAC) test on iPads in May, with a grueling month-long testing schedule. When classes were not testing on the iPads, we were to take the science CST or test prep until it was our turn to take another section of the test. One cart of 40 iPads arrived less than a week before the testing began, with most students having no familiarity with them. Without a testing coordinator at our school site, several teachers received stipends to organize the testing, but it was clear nobody knew what they were doing, including district officials. It was a complete mess.

Students were supposed to have a chance to explore the iPads before testing began—mine did not get a chance to do this. My students struggled with the touch screen and the apps, like strike through and highlighting. The test contained numerous audio sections in which students had to answer questions about a recording; however, the school did not receive enough headphones for each child, so I had to run to several teachers classrooms to borrow headsets, cutting into students’ test time until I returned. The district’s wireless internet was not prepared to handle the load of use and continuously kicked students off, requiring them to log back in and find where they left off. Testing blocks were chunked into two-hour segments, but with all the hiccups teachers started well after our scheduled time, and students took longer to complete the tests than anticipated, so we always ran overtime into the next testing block. The teachers who coordinated the testing were constantly being pulled away from their instruction to help in the
computer lab. My students were told throughout the year that testing determined their academic success but were being set up to fail. They were frustrated and so was I for putting them through it.

In addition to the school wide iPad assessment, the district decided to create a special project-based assessment for the fifth grade. The administrator and coaches panicked—they had not prepared us in professional development for this project. Moreover, the project was interdisciplinary, incorporating language arts, math, social studies, and science standards. The administration had been told fifth grade would still be taking the science CST, and thus had told my grade level to scrap social studies and focus on science instruction, which the rest of my grade level had done. Scrambling, the coaches instructed us to now abandon the Treasures anthology and solely teach the social studies text during our language arts block, so students would be prepared for the project.

I was not worried about the project. I had taught social studies and science throughout the year, so I was confident my students had the background knowledge they would need. Moreover, we had done numerous projects throughout the year, so my students were familiar with research skills and working in groups. I was; however, worried about the project topic. Students were tasked with colonizing space—it was essentially a project based on the film Avatar. Teachers received a detailed script for the unit, outlined in ten stages, which took up our entire instruction time for the day for twenty days. I lost a month of instruction for this assessment, in addition to the two weeks we had lost for the iPad assessment, and I was once again confronted with curriculum that romanticized colonialism.
Despite the 1st stage of the unit allowing students to vote in a town hall on whether they should or should not colonize space, the script instructed teachers to tell their students that the vote was nationwide and the nation voted yes, so they had to move on with the project. Thus, despite my class voting against it, they had to continue and develop a plan to colonize either the moon or Mars. The student handouts outlined the various entrepreneurial motives for colonizing each, such as natural resources and new energy sources. Although, they clarified that there is no life on each, I was disturbed by the use of science for exploitation of resources. Not sure how this assessment would be used by the district, I implemented the project as outlined but had students use their reflection journals at the end of the day to revisit the ethics involved at each stage.

Testing culture is felt throughout public schools, yet it manifests very differently at each site, with this school site being the worst I’ve ever felt it. Although I was able to navigate my school’s use of text-dependent questions and writing tasks to assess the Common Core by applying them to my decolonial curriculum, there was little I could do in navigating the SBAC
test and the district project-based assessment. However, I did resist the testing culture by not succumbing to the pressure to teach to the test and by providing meaningful learning experiences.
Chapter V: Addressing Student Trauma

As Fanon (1970) detailed in his writings, colonialism results in the physical, mental, and emotional trauma of both the colonizer and the colonized. Thus, students living within internal colonialism in present day ghettos are also left with traumas that must be addressed. Despite a lack of services to address their traumas, students in South Central are resilient, strong and tenacious. Students not only continue to show up at school with the heavy bags they carry, but share, talk, and make meaning of their pain—comforting each other throughout the process. The following portraits exemplify students’ strength and persistence in healing and creating hope in their community.

Student Status Updates: Building on Social Media Literacy

I began the year well aware of the community conditions in which my students live. I had taught eighth grade in the community a few years before and was cognizant of the high percentage of students in foster care. I lived two miles away from the school, so I had seen the byproducts of internal colonialism firsthand; the poverty, violence, and addiction. A month into the school year, I had witnessed a drive-by shooting while jogging through the neighborhood. However, it was not until we read One Crazy Summer and Brenton opened up about seeing his mother get arrested that I realized just how much trauma my students carried, and they were desperate for space to talk about it. Several teachers in E4P had presented lessons and units they had taught to address student trauma, so I referenced what they had shared to inform my curriculum.
I decided to use one of my MELD time blocks to let students name and write about their trauma. Knowing that my students were media savvy and experienced with Facebook (I had already dealt with several Facebook arguments that had spilled over into the classroom), I decided to build off their social media literacy. Facebook had recently added a “feeling” option to their Status Update feature, which allowed users to select an emotion for each post and the corresponding emoji for said emotion. Thus, I used this feature as the template for my writing activity. I sat on my couch at home, the TV providing my background noise, as I took a screenshot of the status update box on Facebook. I pasted it into my word document, typed the directions and pasted the writing lines beneath it. I had noticed that my students often lacked the words to name their feelings, so a vocabulary lesson on the various emotions would precede their Status Update, with students recording new terms in their Emotion Dictionaries.

The following day, I cut and stapled paper to create the dictionaries and prepared my PowerPoint presentation introducing the first round of terms. Each word was presented first within a sentence in which students would use context clues to figure out the meaning, followed by the formal definition and the matching emoji as a visual. Six new terms were introduced each week, and students developed antonyms and synonyms for each with a partner prior to applying them within their Status Updates.
Student updates ranged depending on the particular student and the particular events they experienced that week. The majority of student updates consisted of typical events, such as feeling jubilant because they were going to see the new Pixar movie, or feeling depressed because they got in an argument with a friend at recess. However, a good amount of the class shared much deeper trauma, such as confusion when a brother went back to jail or depression when a father had to work out of town for months. The Status Updates helped me keep up with students' lives and informed my pedagogy and interactions with students, sometimes referring students to the school psychologist when needed.

One student, Lionel, shared feeling confused on the anniversary of his uncle’s murder, who was gay, as well as feeling depressed because his family would not explain what happened to him. It was through this writing that I learned about the homophobia in his home, which explained his resistance within his reflection on the 2 Spirit documentary. Colonial schooling serves to dehumanize students by focusing on standards and ignoring the pain students carry due to the poverty, violence and abuse they experience within internal colonialism. The
implementation of the Status Updates may not have resolved the causes of students’ pain, but it did allow them to name their emotions and normalize reflection while providing a humanizing space within the classroom.

![Status Update: How are you feeling?](image)

*Image 5.2- Example of the Status Update worksheet.*

**Transformative Circles in the Classroom**

Although students were opening up within their Status Updates, I knew that it was not enough, and that student trauma was continuing to bubble up within their behavior. Students needed even more space to sit with their feelings, and needed a space where they could discuss their trauma without feeling frustrated with their writing skills. Several teachers in E4P had presented on the use of restorative justice at their school site within a meeting, sharing the
general structure and success stories since implementing it. With my school not having a school wide discipline plan and not wanting to enforce the punitive plan my grade level had developed, I decided to give circles a shot in my class.

Students were already aware they could speak to me about anything. Students would often ask to speak to me outside to share issues they were having, with me following up with students in meetings at recess, but I wasn't sure how open they would be with each other in circles. After learning of another argument on the playground between two of my girls over a boy, I pushed my hesitation aside and decided to hold my first circle.

“Ok, we need to push the desks towards the walls! Everyone sit in a circle on the floor,” I shouted. Several students helped move the tables as the rest of the class sat on the floor, looks of confusion as they glanced around the room, trying to figure out what we were doing. I grabbed the wooden jaguar head I got in the Yucatan off my desk to use as a talking piece and waited for the students to settle down before explaining what was to happen.

“It kills me to see you all fight with each other over silly things when you already have so much bigger struggles in your lives. Sometimes we get hurt or angry by something else, something that happened at home with our parents or sibling, and we don't know how to talk about it. Then we hurt others so they feel hurt like we do. If you all knew what your classmates were going through, you wouldn’t treat them like this, so we’re going to talk about what’s going on with us. This jaguar head is going to be our talking piece, and just like the ball in our handing-off discussions, only the person holding it can speak.” I went on to explain the norms and the privacy of the circle. Students who did not wish to speak could pass and nothing shared during
circles could be repeated outside the circle. To ensure that students felt safe to open up, I did not turn on my audio recorder as I normally did during our handing off discussions, and planned to capture my reflections in my journal after we finished.

I started off the circle by being vulnerable myself and shared what I was struggling with at the moment. “I’m feeling really anxious right now because I’m having issues with a friend of mine who doesn’t seem to really be my friend.” I shared my confusion of not knowing where we stood in our friendship and feeling like she wasn't being honest with me, and then I passed the piece to my left. I did not expect my students to open themselves up in the first circle. The E4P members that had presented on the practice had shared that it takes time to build trust but that using the circles to build community helps build the trust needed to address severe issues when they arise. However, six students into the rotation, one student was brave enough to share her story.

“I’m really scared right now because I don’t know when I’m going to see my dad again. He drinks a lot and one night he was really bad and my mom had to call the cops, and now he can’t live with us anymore and I’m afraid he might never come back.” As she spoke, her chin quivered and a tear rolled down her cheek. She had come to me the week before to tell me what had happened, but seeing her open up in front of her classmates touched me and I began to tear up myself. As she handed the piece to the next student, I looked around the circle and saw that I was not the only one crying with her, several other students had tears rolling down their cheeks too.
That student opening up started a domino effect and nearly every student that spoke after her opened up and shared their most intimate struggles. Two of the toughest boys in the class, Dante and Juan, shared their stories. Dante shared that his mother had abandoned him as a baby and he had never met her. “Why doesn't she want to meet me?” he said softly in between sobs as he covered his face trying to hide his tears. John, sitting next to him, put his arm around him and hugged him while he cried. Then John, gripping the talking piece, pushed through his tears as he shared his desire to spend more time with his father. “My dad works three jobs, so I don't see him a lot. Sometimes he doesn’t get to sleep because he has to go to his other job. I just really miss him.”

I’m not sure what it was that made my students feel safe enough to open up in our first circle, perhaps it was because we had regular discussions in class and talking was normalized within the space, but seeing students cry, not just tears of pain but tears of empathy, bonded us that day. I grabbed the box of tissues from my desk and passed them to students while we finished our rotation, giving each student that wanted to speak the chance to do so.

We all looked a bit disheveled when we wrapped up the circle, so I rounded up the class to head to the bathroom to wash our faces and gather ourselves. As the class somberly lined up after using the restroom, I gathered them together. “I love you all, we’re a family. Group hug!” Students rushed me as we made a thirty plus group hug at the base of the stairwell. We continued to hold a circle each week, with students eagerly asking me if there would be a circle that day. My students finally felt heard and longed for the weekly session to unload the bags they carried to class each day.
**Letter for Healing**

It was May and there were only a few months left in the school year. Although my students’ behavior had improved since implementing the Status Updates and weekly circles, Brenton’s behavior had actually gotten worse. I pulled him outside one morning while the rest of the class worked on a Status Update to check in with him for having an attitude with me.

“What’s going on Brenton? Is everything okay with you? You started the year a different kid—you were never disrespectful, now you give me attitude almost everyday. This isn’t you.”

He kept his gaze on the floor while he began to explain. “Sometimes I’m just angry. I don’t get to see my mom a lot and it makes be angry.” Knowing that his mother had been in and out of jail and that he was being raised by his elderly grandmother I felt his pain.

“I’m sorry you don't get to see your mom, and it's okay that you’re angry. It sucks. I’d be angry too, but it’s my job to make sure you’re learning. I don't make you do classwork to be mean, I want you to learn. Let’s make a deal: if you’re feeling angry and need to take a break you can. I’ll make you a “break” card and you can place it on your desk and go take a break in the classroom library for a few minutes. But I want you to take your journal with you and write about what you’re feeling, and once you calm down I need you to come back to your seat. Is it a deal?”

“Yes.”

I made his break card and he used it a few times over the next two weeks but I began to wonder how many of my other students entered the class each day angry and needing closure. I thought back to the presentations I had seen in E4P and the methods they had used to support
students in expressing their pain, such as through poetry and writing letters, and decided to have my students write their own letters to someone in their life. I decided to introduce the topic by sharing how I had used letters for closure with my parents.

My class was already familiar with my story: my parents had divorced when I was eleven and my father had stopped being a father at that point. They also knew my mother had died of cancer when I was eighteen and I had been on my own since then, so I chose to share my process of closure with each parent to open the lesson. I first shared that I had sent my father a letter in college, letting him know how his absence had hurt me and continued to affect me, and then shared the letter I had written for my mother. “After my mom died I had a lot of guilt. I was young and didn’t make the best decisions… I wished I had spent more time with her when she was sick. I felt so guilty that I started doing things that I knew were bad for me…” I stopped mid sentence and struggled for my words. I could feel my throat closing up, my cheeks were hot, and my eyes started to swell with tears. The room was silent and every student’s eyes were on me. I stopped fighting it and let the tears roll down my cheeks. My students had seen me cry before during our circle time, but this was the first time they had seen me cry about my pain. One brave student spoke up.

“Let’s not talk about this, let’s talk about something happy.” I knew she had good intentions and only wanted to cheer me up but felt the need to address her comment.

“No. We have to be able to talk about stuff that hurts. Life is not perfect, but if we avoid talking about our pain it turns into poison inside us. It’s ok to be sad. It’s ok to cry.” I wiped my face and finished telling my story. “I had so much guilt inside that I was hurting myself and
others with my behavior. So I wrote a letter to my mom apologizing for not being there for her when she was sick. I knew I could never give it to her, but it was my way of getting closure and moving on in my life. I needed to let it out and put it on paper.”

I finished explaining the activity to the class, and let students know they could choose what they wanted to do with their final draft, keep it for themselves or give it to the person they wrote it to. Every student jumped into the lesson—the sounds of their pencils scratching the paper was the only sound in the room. As they worked, I walked around the room and observed some students writing letters to friends they had argued with, others were writing letters of gratitude to parents, thanking them for all they do, while others were writing letters to parents who had abandoned them.

_Dear Dad,_

_I’m writing to you because I want you to know how I feel about you and what you’ve done to me…_

_Dad, it feels like you don’t care about me and my sister. You do not know how much we are struggling to become a family with my mom’s new boyfriend. The sad part is yesterday we were talking about you and after all these years we still love you. I know you came to visit us and you promised you would come more often, instead you didn’t come again. Everyday I say I want to see you again, sometimes I wait for you, then I’m tired of waiting. I’m your youngest kid, you should be with me. You’re a super bad dad, what’s wrong with you? My mom struggles with money! You have a nice house, money and a good job…_
I know you have a wife and [family] you love. You also have daughters with my mom! I’m mad frustrated, disgusted, sad. I always feel I don’t have a dad. I want you to come back. My birthday is on Friday and I bet you won’t even call.

The following day, our classroom phone rang and the office asked me to send a student to the office, her mother had dropped something off for her. I excused the student and returned to our lesson. When she returned, she was carrying a fruit arrangement, similar to those you can order from Edible Arrangements for special occasions. She walked up to me and handed me the arrangement, my mouth agape and eyebrows furrowed in confusion.

“What’s this?” I asked.

“It’s for you. My mom made it for you.”

Still confused, I opened the card attached to the arrangement and a warmth spread over me as I read it. My student had gone home the day before and told her mother about the letter activity, and that I had cried telling them about my mom’s death. Touched, her mother had made me the arrangement and thanked me for sharing my joys and sorrows, and that her daughter would always remember me, not as a teacher, but as a friend. I smiled as I closed the card and hugged my student. I had always kept it real with my students throughout my years of teaching, sharing my life struggles and victories with them, but this letter showed me just how rare it is for teachers to be vulnerable with their students, even parents knew it was rare.
My students carried heavy bags because of the colonial violence they endured in south central Los Angeles; poverty, violence, parental abandonment, and addiction to name a few. The few activities in my classroom could not fix all these issues, but it began the process of healing. For the first time in their education, students were supported in naming their pain and sitting with their feelings, reflecting on the causes and manifestations of pain in their lives, and supported with healthy coping mechanisms like journaling and talking circles. This slow release of pressure allowed students to remain present for academic learning, rather than ignoring their pain and having it bubble up with disruptive behavior, and hopefully paved the way for future growth and healing, so that my students could become healthy members of the community.
Chapter VI: Teacher Support and Survival

I hurried into an ethnic studies classroom at a high school in South Central Los Angeles, less than five minutes south from my school site. Posters showcasing students’ stencil artwork of various freedom fighters lined the wall: Assata, Audre Lorde, and Oscar Romero to name a few. It was Saturday morning and I was not particularly excited for this meeting but knew that I needed to be there. It was our council meeting, the governing body of the teachers collective, Education for the People (E4P), which we founded in my living room two summers before. We started the meeting with a circle because we’ve had a hard time communicating as a council this year and it was clear we were all going through struggles that were affecting our cohesiveness as a leadership. When the talking piece got to me, I echoed what several others before me had shared, “I’m having a rough time right now at my school site. I know I haven’t been present in E4P the way I should and I’m thinking about resigning.”

“I’m really concerned hearing you say that,” shared a council member. “Maybe because I’ve never seen you struggle. You’re always on top of things, your teaching and organizing.”

“You have never seen me like this because I have never felt like this… I’m having a harder time this year than I had my first year teaching.” I was irritated as I said this because I felt like I was having to explain that I am human, but I understood where he was coming from. I felt demoralized this year; more so than I ever had teaching within LAUSD, and my school site and administrator had everything to do with it.21 It was not burnt-out or not having what it takes to teach, I have what it takes to teach; which is why I was successful at my previous three school years.

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21 A detailed explanation of the school context that led me to feel demoralized is explained in the final footnote of this chapter.
sites. I was demoralized, feeling like no matter what I did, it was not good enough at this school. Despite fundraising to purchase texts for my students, staying late to plan and support my students’ projects, and tutoring after school without pay, I was told it was not enough.

The council asked me not to resign and assured me that it is always rough this time of year and that things would ease up after October passed. Although I still felt anxious, I agreed to stay. As a founding member that had rallied everyone to found the organization, I couldn’t walk away just yet. We closed out the circle and jumped into the planning of our upcoming general meeting and shared updates of our working group projects. Despite leadership within the organization adding more work to my already full plate, the organization also provided the much needed support in maintaining my sanity and well-being, as well as in sustaining my teaching practice—support that I was not receiving from my school site or the district.

**Context for the Support & Survival: Unsupportive Administration**

When I first interviewed with the administrator for the position at South Central Elementary, I was honest about my objectives for the year. I told him I was a doctoral student, that I supplemented the Treasures anthology with core literature, and that my curriculum was project-based. He was awed by my teaching portfolio and recommendations, and offered me the job the same day. When I didn’t immediately accept he became frustrated, but I didn’t feel comfortable rushing into it and asked for a day to think about it. I phoned him the next day to accept the position and began receiving the staff emails that week.

A few days before the school year began I arrived at the school to start setting up my classroom. To my surprise, the majority of teachers were there setting up and had been for the
past week. It was strange because I was usually the only teacher at my school site to set up early but remembered that one of the teachers had told me the principal had pushed out the “bad apples” the previous year and brought in new teachers, with eighty-five percent of the staff new to the school and without tenure. I set up my classroom, preparing my bulletin boards, math word tree, and writing center, and even had the principal pop in to say hello and comment on my Chargers football pennant (he was a die hard Raider fan).

I was excited for the year. My grade level team was amazing and I got the class I requested with mixed demographics. The first few weeks were smooth, with my principal allowing me to move forward with our afterschool store to fundraise to purchase our class set of books for the year, and we reached our goal within three weeks. I was a bit surprised when he casually notified me in a professional development meeting that I was done fundraising for the year, since I had enough funds to purchase each student three books throughout the year I was happy with it, and I did not question it.

At a school social in mid-September, the principal asked me how I was liking the school and I told him I was happy. I loved my class and I felt heard and respected as a teacher, which I knew was rare. He smiled and said, “That’s what I want my teachers to feel.” I’m not sure of the exact date the school climate shifted but something occurred in October/November. Perhaps it was the district shift to common core and the principal’s anxiety of not knowing how our school would be judged without the CST exam. Perhaps it was changes in his personal life, with him learning that he was to be a father come spring. Perhaps it was a mixture of all of these and more, but by November I felt different.
Our professional development had shifted to focus solely on common core test preparation, with text-dependent questions and written responses to literature taking up each meeting, including the second hour, which was suppose to be designed by teachers. But that did not surprise me, professional development in LAUSD was always concerned with testing. What did catch me by surprise me was that every few weeks our professional development would conclude with groups of teachers walking around with checklists “grading” other teachers classroom environment.

I always valued classroom environment, and had been the model classroom that administrators would march district officials through because of my engaging bulletin boards and print rich walls. However, this checklist we were given didn’t assess the quality of the environment but more so the arbitrary requests made by the administrator. The list detailed the number of pieces of butcher paper used per board, that rubrics be stapled to each piece of student work rather than posted on the board, and that work be dated no more than thirty days. With having to create new common core aligned activities, my students’ project-based work, and the after school tutoring I was doing, it was taking me a few weeks to get through grading, only to have to replace the work in two weeks. Teachers were not being held accountable for the rigor on each board but rather that it keep up appearances should district officials arrive, and we were being asked to snitch on each other.

Despite professional development being every week for two hours, easily surpassing the annual thirty meetings outlined in our contract, teachers were being asked to plan as a grade level outside of our workday. We were tasked with creating common core aligned text-dependent
questions for each story in the Treasures anthology. Our literacy coach notified us we could not divide up the work and had to develop them together, but were not granted time during professional development or sub leave to do so. All the teachers in my grade level were already at capacity, each having families and other duties, such as the gifted and science coordinators or student council. I was already tutoring after school three days a week and when I wasn't I had meetings for E4P.

Knowing that he could not hold us accountable for meeting outside of our contractual hours, the administrator attempted to shame us, telling our grade-level chair we were the only grade level not meeting the demand, which was not the case. During one of our lunches, we learned that only one grade level was able to meet to plan, and that he had attempted to shame the other grade levels as well, telling them the same thing he had told us, that everyone else was doing it. Since the majority of teachers did not have tenure, no one wanted to speak up. After two months of this, I finally pulled our union chapter chair aside, who did not have tenure himself, and told him that if the administrator did not stop bullying us to meet outside of our contracted hours I would grieve him.

The final straw that broke my back was the principal’s unprofessional behavior in February during Black History Month. My students were working on their third research project of the year and I had spent my winter break researching where to find them grade-level appropriate resources. Our school and neighborhood library were severely under resourced, but I found a plethora of resources at the downtown library and had been emailing the librarian for weeks to arrange a field trip. The principal had approved the trip and suggested I look into Metro
TAP cards to get the student discount rates, which I did. I emailed to notify him that I had visited the Metro office and gotten the class the TAP cards but that it would still cost two dollars per child round trip. Since he had barred me from any more fundraisers and I could not afford to cover the entire class, I emailed him a draft of a letter requesting parents to donate the fee and that I would arrange the cost for students who were unable to pay, clarifying that it was a donation and not mandatory.

When I shared a draft of the letter with him, which was his policy as he did not allow teachers to send any note home without his approval, he texted me that it was against district policy to ask for donations. Confused by this because I had funded field trips at my previous schools with donations, I responded that it was against district policy to require parents to pay for activities but that the letter clearly stated it was a donation and not mandatory. I even researched the policy online (LAUSD Education policy 5895.0) and emailed him the link, pointing out that it was not against policy to accept donations, at which point he stopped responding to my texts and emails. My students never got to visit the downtown library and were disappointed. They were especially frustrated because other than one parent who had notified me she’d need assistance with covering the fee, each student could easily provide the two dollar cost.

In addition to my class working on their Black History research projects that month, my grade-level was responsible for organizing an event to commemorate Black History. One of the teachers had volunteered us to organize a talent showcase; however, nobody on the team had stepped forward to coordinate it. With the event a few weeks away, and no class outside our grade-level signing up to perform, I asked our grade level to change plans. I suggested using my
students’ Black History projects as our event since they would be presenting in the multi-purpose room at the end of the month anyway, but when our grade-level chair ran it by the administrator he refused to let us change and said we had to move forward with the performance.

Other than the November professional development meeting in which we signed up for the event, we were not provided time to organize the event, nor with a plan on how we were expected to coordinate the planning. With my grade-level team making it clear they did not care to organize the event, I did my best to put something together while still supporting my students’ research projects. I created a packet for the faculty on Black History and the African Diaspora with various grade level activities they could teach in their class, putting copies in each teachers box. My class created all the decorations for the auditorium and I attempted to create a program with the few participants that had signed up. When I emailed the program to the principal he asked me to create a flyer, which I told him I could not do because I had a lot on my plate that week, but that I had forwarded his request to the grade level. He responded with the following:

5th Grade teachers:
I do need something by today, I feel uncomfortable that this program is two days away and the teachers do not yet know what time they are to attend. After the performance is over and done with, I need for the entire grade level to reflect on planning and preparation. If I am not mistaken, this event has been on 5th grade’s plate since the middle of our 1st semester. I find it unacceptable to be in this situation two days before the event.

He always closed his emails with “Please let me know how I can support you” and “take care,” but it was evident he did not mean either. He knew he had not granted us time to organize the event, and when we had asked to change the event to suit our workload he did not allow us to change it. After the event, he went to our grade-level chair and bad mouthed the decorations.
At that point, I was done. He had been out of the classroom less than two years but he clearly forgot what it was like being a teacher. I went into the office that day and requested a transfer form—there was no way I was staying another year in that environment. He did not care about his teachers being heard and feeling valued. He also did not value meaningful learning, as was evident in his absence yet again from my students’ research presentations the following week, making it the third research presentation I had invited him to that he had not attended. He prided himself that he would never deny a teacher a transfer and so he approved my transfer that month. But my courage to leave that toxic work environment led to the rest of my fifth grade team transferring out as well.

I had taught with difficult administration before— I’m not sure it’s possible to have a social justice administrator in a public school because they enforce colonial schooling policies—but I had never felt as dehumanized as I did at South Central Elementary. I had never felt like all the extra work I knew I was putting for my students was still not enough. I closed out the school year with minimal contact with him, avoiding him every chance I got, but still heard of his dehumanizing behavior from my colleagues as they one-by-one decided to transfer out as well. Multiple teachers from other grade levels also put in their paperwork to transfer, leading to the director of our local district visiting our professional development to urge us to stay, telling us that we can’t find such an “amazing staff” just anywhere in the district. I’m not sure what he had told her about the numerous transfers but it was clear he didn’t tell her why so many of us were leaving, and she did not bother to ask. Unfortunately, it’s common for LASUD to not ask questions about the high rate of teacher turnover they experience, and teachers won’t stop
leaving until they begin to ask why and address the causes. The toxicity and demoralization I encountered within my school site made me look to outside support to survive the school year.

Curricular Support

We wrapped up our E4P council meeting as members entered the classroom to begin our monthly Teacher Inquiry Group (TIG) meeting. Held for two hours each month, the first hour consists of a reading circle to guide our theoretical framework as a decolonial organization, with the second hour consisting of a member presenting a curricular unit and the rest of the participants providing feedback. In the past few months we had read Constantino’s (1970) “The Miseducation of the Filipino,” a chapter from Grande’s (2004) *Red Pedagogy*, and Paperson’s (2010) “The Postcolonial Ghetto.”

This month, we were reviewing an organizational document entitled “Points of Decolonialism,” that was drafted by two of the TIG leaders drawing from the year’s readings to clarify and define our political stance. We spent the first hour in small groups brainstorming what each of the five points outlined in the document look like in our teaching practice and then briefly shared out whole group. We then transitioned into our curricular presentation with one member sharing her chemistry unit in which she taught the periodic elements through a lens of colonialism and the search for metals, precious stones, and wealth.

These monthly meetings supported me in my curricular development. Not only did the TIG meetings deepen my political understandings of colonialism through readings and dialogue, but curricular presentations provided a plethora of lessons and activities that I could adapt and include in my teaching, while also supporting the presenter in refining their unit. The TIGs
provided a space where I could gather with like-minded educators, share critical teaching practices, and feel validated for the work I was doing in my classroom. Essentially, the TIG provided the meaningful professional development I did not receive at my school site.

Outside of our formal TIG meetings, E4P also provided a space for me to meet critical educators that I could lesson plan with informally. At one of our general meetings, I was venting with two other fifth grade teachers about the homophobic language my students were using on the playground, and that it persisted despite multiple conversations with students and parents. The two educators shared that they were experiencing the same struggle at their school site, so we decided to meet that following Monday for dinner to plan a unit addressing the problem. After ordering our food, we sat down and I pulled out my laptop to take notes as we bounced ideas off of each other.

“I feel like they use that word [gay] because they don’t have other vocabulary to use when they don’t like something, so maybe we can start with a word study of other words they can use instead during our language development block,” suggested Ms. Ayala.

“Sure, but there are people who use it because they really are homophobic, so let’s start with a word study but we still have to address homophobia,” interjected Mr. Sanchez.\textsuperscript{22} “I think we need to teach students that same-sex families are just another type of family. They’re used to different types of families like single-parent, blended, and grandparent families, so we should introduce same-sex families as just another type of family.”

\textsuperscript{22} Mr. Sanchez identifies as a queer transgender person of color (QTPOC).
“Ok, so start with students creating a bubble map on different words they can use instead of gay, then a lesson on same-sex families?” I clarified as I took notes for the group. “I think that’s important. We have a few students at my school who are being raised by two moms and even the teachers don’t know how to approach it let alone teach kids about it.”

“There’s a book we can use, I think it’s called Heather has Two Mommies. I’ll look it up and email you all. We can also show clips on the recent court cases recognizing same-sex marriage legally, that way it’s not about personal opinion but the law,” stated Mr. Sanchez.

“Ya, when we were at the social justice conference last month I went to a workshop on LGBTQ23 education and they suggested citing the new law, SB48, that schools have to teach about the contributions of LGBTQ Americans. Kids can do group investigations on the Queer Rights Movement,” Ms. Ayala added.

“I saw a post on Facebook last week on a new documentary on Native Americans and gender and sexuality…” I shared.

“Ya, 2-Spirits. I haven’t seen it but I read an article about it too,” replied Mr. Sanchez.

“I think that’s dope. We can show the film and link it to their Native American unit that they’re starting in two weeks. From what I read, it talks about how gender binaries and homophobia are western constructs imposed on us through colonization. I’m totally willing to buy it and then give it to y’all to show in your class,” I offered.

We wrapped up our brainstorming with the arrival of our food, and I finished scribing our notes and emailed them to the group. I had started my weekend exhausted and frustrated with my

23 Lesbian gay bisexual transgender queer
students behavior but began the following week rejuvenated and excited to implement the new
lessons we had planned. I am not sure I would have made it throughout that week, let alone
throughout the year, without the support of my colleagues in E4P.

Classroom Management

I walked into our general meeting on Friday afternoon, greeting members as I entered,
and reviewed the agenda as I settled in my seat. Our political education segment, which takes up
the first half of our two-hour meeting, was on restorative justice techniques in the classroom.
Two of our members taught at a K-8 charter school in Echo Park where they implemented
restorative justice school wide, using a grant to pay for the training of teachers and staff. After
one member presented a PowerPoint on the general structure of circles, the use of a talking piece,
norms for each meeting, and circle prompts, two of the teachers on staff spoke on the power of
circles that they had witnessed. One teacher shared how her students use circle once a week to
build community, and that students have opened up and shared both struggles and triumphs in
the circle, with students even convening their own circle on the playground when a problem
arose. The other teacher shared about the use of circles with conflict, and how including parents
in the circle has been transformative for the students and parents alike. At the end of the
presentation, they opened up for questions.

I raised my hand. “What about if you’re at a school that isn’t interested in implementing
restorative justice school-wide? My principal doesn’t address behavior at all at my school and
leaves it up to grade levels to handle behavior issues, and my grade level is happy with punishing
kids punitively. What can I do?”
The teacher who spoke of its use in her fifth grade class responded. “Then do it in your class. Don't worry about what the rest of the school’s doing, use it in your class and you’ll see a change in your kids.” I emailed the teacher the following week and she sent me various prompts I could use in circles and invited me to text or email her if I needed further support.

After implementing my first circle, I shared the experience with my grade level colleagues at lunch that day. “Oh my god, it was beautiful! We were all crying and everyone was opening up, sharing their pain,” I shared excitedly. I told them of the details, how some of the toughest kids in the grade level had cried and consoled each other. Their response was, “Oh wow, that’s great,” and they continued on with their lunch conversation. I was hoping that they’d be interested in implementing circles in their classrooms and ask me how I structured it, but their response showed me that they were not, and to be honest, I did not blame them. With all of us being pulled in multiple directions and with administration scrutinizing our every move, I barely had the energy to keep up with my kids, so it did not surprise me that teachers without a political understanding of internal colonialism and the trauma it inflicts would pass on taking up an additional responsibility.

E4P helped me resist falling into repressive classroom management. After reading Chen and colleagues’ (2001) The Revolution Starts at Home, we had incorporated the use of transformative circles into our organizational structures to address conflict amongst members, but I was still unsure how to use circles with my students in the classroom. Our political education addressed my questions, as well as pushed me to incorporate healing activities across the curriculum with my students. Without the organizations support, I would have easily reverted
to the school norm of ignoring how community issues were impacting my kids and punishing students for the manifestation in their behavior.

Teacher Wellness

I was so preoccupied with my teaching and organizing that my personal well-being was often pushed to the wayside. I started to revert to unhealthy coping mechanisms to get through the week, which in turn affected my teaching. Thankfully, the organization’s wellness activities would re-center my self-care as Audre Lorde referred to as an act of political warfare. In addition to group readings from bell hook’s (2001) All About Love, the wellness committee organized various activities to keep active such as a contingent at cicLAvia\(^\text{24}\), hiking events, and social gatherings to decompress with other members. We also hosted talking circles outside of meeting spaces, in which members could attend to talk through whatever struggles they were facing outside of the classroom. Informally, members would check in with me to see how things were going and reminded me to get together outside of organizational duties.

We founded E4P on the basis of two central objectives: 1) supporting Teachers of Color in their critical teaching practice and 2) organizing teachers into proactive campaigns to create liberatory educational spaces. Because our founding members had experience organizing in various contexts, we knew what we did not want to repeat. We wanted to create healing spaces for our members and knew that we had to develop structures to address conflict, which is inevitable when working with people. We also knew that we could not get educators to engage in

\(^{24}\) CicLAvia is a city sponsored event that temporarily closes streets in Los Angeles to motor vehicles and opens them to other forms of non-motorized transit – pedestrians, bicycles, skateboards, rollerblades, wheelchairs and more.
campaigns if their basic needs as educators were not met. Thus, drawing on the Black Panthers Survival Programs, we created our Teacher Survival Programs to support our members so that they would be able to engage in our campaigns. The organization helped me survive the year, not as a novice teacher, but as an experienced teacher that knew I would not receive the support I needed from the school district, and so I collaborated with others to create it.
Chapter VII: Conclusion & Implications

The portraits in this study examined the possibilities and processes for decolonizing the elementary classroom. Building on existing decolonial literature (Fanon, 1969; Grande, 2004; Paperson, 2010; Tejeda & Espinoza, 2003; Tuck & Yang, 2012), the study serves to enact theory within elementary classroom applications (Allen, 1999; Cowhey, 2006; Ladson-Billings, 2009). Specifically, the study painted vivid pictures of decolonizing pedagogies in practice, highlighting the transformative possibilities for students and educators, simultaneously attending to the colonizing constraints encountered throughout the decolonizing process. The largest colonizing condition that emerged within the study was that of internal colonialism, and the poverty, violence, abuse, and addiction that have resulted from it. In addition to the poverty felt within underserved schools and community resources, the violence, abuse, and addiction inflict trauma that students carry with them to the classroom daily. Therefore, short of being able to “remove” the causes of student trauma, which will only be possible through the decolonization of land and life, it was necessary I address trauma both within the curriculum and via transformative circles.

Throughout the study I was able to meet content standards through a humanizing and loving education that validated students’ lives and challenged colonialism. The most critical tool for supporting student transformation proved to be the pairing of student reflection journals and student dialogue. This coupling provided the space for students to grapple with critical content and push their peers’ thinking within the class. I was also able to counter my feelings of isolation within my school site by turning to Education 4 the People, which supported my political and
curricular development, as well as personal wellness. Although I was not able to overtly confront high-stakes testing and my school administration, I was still able to resist teaching to the test and provided my students with meaningful learning experiences, despite being demoralized by administration.

It is also important to note that the pedagogy examined within the study was not stagnant and was constantly transforming along the way. My navigation of the various colonizing conditions I encountered were layered atop student interactions within the community, school site, and classroom, which was filtered through my personal experiences and understandings. People and classrooms are always in motion, and we (the class and I) were continuously adapting to incorporate the needs of all involved, with addressing student trauma being the largest pedagogical transformation.

My students and I were in a constant cyclical negotiation and co-created curriculum together according to our political space and time. Decolonial theory framed how I identified and navigated classroom conditions such as trauma, but it was also my honestly about my personal trauma that shaped our participation in addressing trauma together. Thus, its important to clarify that decolonial pedagogy is not a simplistic curriculum that can be mass-produced and replicated across varying contexts, but rather is a way of being with students that begins with the teacher’s self-reflection. How do I make sense of colonialism and schooling? How do classical and internal colonialism currently manifest in my teaching context? How do I want to reimagine education to challenge colonialism in my classroom? Decolonial Pedagogy pushes teachers to
ask these questions before one can begin to challenge colonialism within the curriculum and classroom.

In addition to students learning and transforming throughout the year, I was transforming as an educator as well, learning new ways to subvert unexpected colonizing conditions. This
study also transformed me as a teacher-researcher, as I am now curious to research supportive administration (as identified by social justice teachers), and how those administrators navigate, confront, and address the colonizing conditions they encounter within the profession.

Curriculum & Testing

When I first began presenting curriculum at teacher conferences, the most common question was: How do I teach what I’m required to teach using a social justice lens? Thus, my story began with snapshots of portraits exemplifying how to navigate and complicate Eurocentric curriculum through a decolonial framework. The inclusion of core literature served to push back on scripted ELA anthologies, which did not provide opportunities for students to understand how a story plot develops, but also failed to authentically incorporate critical perspectives of diversity. The supplemental literature I used was imperative to my curricular objective in that both texts challenged neoliberal notions of social justice found within the anthology, such as the inclusion of characters of color being “progress” despite said stories continuing to perpetuate dominant narratives and colonialism.

The Birchbark House countered the Treasures anthology’s portrayal of colonialism characterized as “adventure” and showed the realities of colonialism as experienced by Native peoples: the theft of land and resources and the decimation of a people through European disease. One Crazy Summer served to counter the dominant narrative of asking governing institutions for equality, like the movement for desegregation in the South, and modeled resistance to dependency theory via the self-determination exemplified by the Black Panther Party. With the book set in a city similar to South Central, students were also able to connect to
the story’s portrayal of parental abandonment, poverty, and police harassment, thus relating to the text in ways they were unable to with the anthology. The use of both texts together helped students develop an understanding of classical and internal colonialism, and the material affects on people living within each.

The ethnic studies projects were critical in that they exhibited how easily Common Core standards can be taught within culturally responsive research projects. The expository reading and writing Common Core strands, as well as the speaking standards, were organized to support students’ critical thinking and research skills. Through the projects, students learned histories of resistance, which are vital in developing a critical hope within students to combat apathy when becoming conscious of social injustice. Moreover, the ethnic studies projects allowed students to develop their identities and counter racial binaries through the inclusion of diverse examples within ethnic groups, such as breadth of Latinos to include indigenous and African ancestry.

The social studies portraits were vital in presenting how I approached standards to highlight the oppressions created by colonialism, and dispelling the normalization that history in the Americas began with European arrival. Students were supported in deconstructing colonial ideologies, such as Manifest Destiny and gender binaries, and were able to define colonialism as the theft of native land and resources—understanding that it is still stolen land that we live on today. Additionally, student analysis included college level concepts, such as divide and conquer, and linking the colonial economy built upon native land and African labor to the current economic system in place today.
Remaining true to the purpose of portraiture, I highlighted the goodness that is still possible despite colonial constraints, but could not omit the difficulties teachers still face, such as the culture of high-stakes testing. I was able to comply with the school’s request to develop text-dependent questions using critical resources and texts, so that students were familiar with the structure they would encounter in the new assessments. However, I resisted the pressure to teach to the test and instead incorporated any additional support students needed within after-school tutoring. I also reminded students that they were more than the sum of their test scores, and that they were valuable regardless of their test results. Lastly, despite the district’s project assessment forcing students to colonize space, I was able to implement daily reflections with students in their journals problematizing the unit and its exploitation of resources.

Student Trauma

The curricular interventions made possible through a decolonial framework also made visible the traumas affecting my students. Although there are examples addressing student trauma in the classroom, there are few examining the elementary level, and many often fail to highlight teachers being vulnerable with students about their own pain. Rather than framing trauma as me rescuing my students from their trauma, I was vulnerable in showing students my pain and that I continue to struggle with it daily. I was honest in sharing the struggles of my childhood with my students, such as being a bully in middle school because I did not know how to process my parents divorce, so I hurt others so they would feel hurt like I did. It was my pain that inspired me to want my students to receive the emotional support and development that I did not receive as a child.
The Status Update activity was critical for two reasons, the first being that it incorporated social media, which was a staple in students’ daily interactions. The second reason being that it provided students with the vocabulary to name their feelings and created the space to sit and reflect on them—something that I have only recently learned to do as an adult. With students practicing reflection in their writing, the use of transformative circles complimented students’ emotional growth in creating a space for students to be vulnerable and share their struggles with others, to know that they did not need to be silent about their pain, as colonialism has engrained within People of Color for hundreds of years. I was moved and proud when my students opened up in our first circle because it showed that they felt safe—with me and with their peers—to open up.

The final piece of the healing puzzle was having students practice closure through the letter writing activity. With students now armed with the language to name their pain, and understandings that it was ok to tell others about it, it was critical that students practiced releasing their pain. Crying with my students when speaking of my mother’s death was the most vulnerable moment of my teaching career. My students had seen me cry during our weekly circles, but they never saw me cry from sharing my trauma. It was evident in their silence and compassion in that moment that it touched them, but it was even more so evident when I learned that they had shared the story with their parents. I was touched that students’ parents appreciated me being vulnerable with their children and that they believed it was the greatest thing I could teach my students — to be human.

Unsupportive Administration and Teacher Support
The portrait of unsupportive administration at my school site was important in establishing the context and necessity of support I received within Education 4 the People (E4P). The portrait highlighted the dishonesty and lack of trust at my school site, with the administrator’s focus on micromanaging logistics rather than supporting the creation of rigorous curriculum and teaching in the classroom. His focus on minute logistics, such as with the classroom environment checklist and not allowing teachers to send notes to parents without his approval, made teachers feel as though he did not believe we were competent and trustworthy.

The administration constantly failed to acknowledge what teachers did well, never thanking us for project development or after school tutoring. Instead, he constantly demanded more of us and tried to shame us when we were unable to deliver what he wanted. Teachers were asked to organize school events with no support, and administration attempted to require us to meet outside our contracted time. This left many teachers feeling demoralized and dreading coming to work.

Thankfully, I received the support I did not get at my school within E4P. The Teacher Inquiry Groups (TIGs) provided consistent professional development, in addition to the personal relationships developed with members that allowed for impromptu meetings to develop curriculum when the need arose. The organization was also critical in me resisting punitive punishment in my classroom through the introduction of transformative circles. Otherwise, I would have easily reverted to the grade level practice of recess detention and removal from grade level activities. Most importantly, the organization reminded me that my physical, mental, and
emotional wellness not only affected my teaching, but was necessary in sustaining myself in the profession in the long run.

**Implications for Teachers and Administrators**

Elementary teachers must begin to challenge the colonial conditions within their classrooms, starting with Eurocentric standards and curriculum. Teachers must take the time to reflect and complicate curriculum, and resist becoming complacent in perpetuating colonial ideology. Understanding the importance of meaningful learning, critical content must be delivered and assessed via rigorous project-based activities that actively engage students. However, being mindful of the importance placed on testing, teachers must also design assessments within critical lessons that prepare students for the high-stakes tests they will encounter throughout their schooling.

Teachers must also be cognizant that adapting the curriculum is not enough, and that we must also challenge the manifestation of colonialism within our interactions with students, and explicitly incorporate love and healing into the classroom. Urban educators must be context responsive and adapt to student needs to create spaces for healing within the classroom and curriculum. Teachers must also acknowledge that we are never done improving our practice, and that we must continue to improve our teaching through readings and collaborations with other educators.

Collectively, teachers must continue to resist high-stakes tests, as teachers across the state of New York have done since the implementation of Common Core (Kamenetz, 2015). Teachers unions must begin to bring light to the role that lemon principals play in deforming school
reform, and call for school districts to begin to hold principals accountable for the work environment they create and the resulting teacher turnover.

School administrators must also have a political understanding of colonial schooling and their role as “governor” within traditional schooling practices. If administrators claim to hold social justice as a goal, they must be cognizant of the coloniality of schooling within internal colonies, and navigate their role carefully. Further research is needed to examine how much administration can challenge colonial schooling without putting their position at stake; however, they can navigate their role without demoralizing teachers who have committed to challenging colonialism.

Implications for Teacher Education and Principal Leadership

With research calling for the recruitment of Teachers of Color to the profession (Kohli, 2009; Milner & Howard, 2004), we must continue to push the field in politically diversifying programs via the recruitment of teachers with ethnic studies backgrounds. Although Teachers of Color impact student achievement, not all Teachers of Color have developed an analysis of colonialism and oppression because they are a product of the same oppressive schooling we are trying to disrupt. Thus, educators with ethnic studies backgrounds, whether it be formal course work, work in cultural/community organizations, or a self-taught a process via independent readings, are able to begin teacher education programs with an understanding of the domination, dispossession, and displacement experienced by People of Color within colonialism. This framework is necessary in developing teachers trained to complicate standards and curriculum, and requires much more than a semester course to develop. If educators begin teacher
preparation programs with this framework, space within programs opens to train educators in
decolonial ethnic studies pedagogies, rather than the bulk of coursework devoted to developing
these political understandings. Thus, recruiting teachers with ethnic studies backgrounds will
allow educators more time to apply theory with support, and workshop curriculum and pedagogy
development within teacher education programs.

With white women being the large majority of educators entering the profession, teacher
preparation programs must continue to support candidate’s political development, and push for
race, class, and gender courses to include deconstructing colonialism. White educators must be
supported in examining race, class, and gender through a lens of colonialism to understand how
People of Color have been dispossessed since the birth of the nation, as well as the privilege they
have been afforded within it.

Teacher education programs committed to social justice must also prepare teachers to
build the network of support they will need to sustain their critical practice once they enter the
field. Social justice teachers entering the profession at the height of neoliberal reforms are often
the sole educator at their site challenging colonialism and injustice, causing them to feel more
isolated than their counterparts. Understanding that neoliberal schooling will never provide the
support that critical educators will need in creating liberatory teaching, teacher education
programs must prepare teachers to develop the supports they need themselves, thereby
challenging dependency theory found within urban schools.

Principal leadership programs that claim to support social justice education must prepare
furniture administrators to confront colonialism within schools, humanize teachers and staff, and
implement authentic professional development. Programs must be honest with candidates about the realities of urban school districts, such as high-stakes testing, and must prepare administrators to appease district requests while supporting teachers in creating spaces for critical authentic learning. Just as teachers must be prepared to navigate colonial conditions in order to sustain their teaching practice and survive the profession long-term, administrators must also be prepared to navigate these two opposing worlds.

**Implications for Theory, Research, and Policy**

Reflecting on decolonial theory, I have come to understand that enacting it pedagogically begins with people reflecting on who they are and how they make meaning of their colonial context. It is simplistic to believe decolonial pedagogy can be narrowed to a list of actions or curriculum that can be mass-produced and look the same across varying contexts — that is the epitome of colonial schooling. However, understanding that decolonial pedagogy cannot be packaged for broad consumption, we must also be mindful that theory must address making sense of practice and identify themes of what it can be rather than merely defining it by what it is not. Decolonial Pedagogy involves exploring colonial systems and how they are upheld within schools. It also involves critically examining our current context in urban schools, and understanding that our communities have been systematically and violently dispossessed, which results in various traumas. Rather than merely being about content and kids, it is about interrogating our histories and being vulnerable in the process.

Education researchers must critically examine the role of schooling within colonization, and challenge the ways that schools serve to uphold settler colonialism in the Americas.
Researchers must continue to push decolonial pedagogies in reimagining what schooling can be, but must also be diligent in connecting applications within theory. Researchers must work in conjunction with teachers to examine concrete examples of decolonial applications across varying contexts, and the constraints that must be transformed in order to decolonize schooling. Moreover, research must be made accessible to those in the classroom, utilizing aesthetic methodologies such as portraiture that appeal to teachers, rather than catering to the structures preferred by other researchers. Researchers must also be explicit in articulating that the end goal is not merely to decolonize schooling, but rather that decolonial schooling is a tool to build towards the repatriation of indigenous land and resources.

Educational researchers must also work in conjunction with activists on the ground in pushing school districts to draw on the research documenting the successes of ethnic studies to institutionalize and fund ethnic studies approaches across K-12 education. Although there have been recent victories in the movement to institutionalize ethnic studies in public high schools in California (Strauss, 2014), researchers must push for this beyond a single high school course by documenting the successes across subject matters that are not usually deemed ethnic studies focused (such as math and science), as well as in K-8 education.

School districts must also create the conditions for professional development and administration to humanize students and teachers. With professional development in progressive districts beginning to prioritize student-centered learning and classroom management, administration must also prioritize the humanization of teachers to ensure a healthy work environment and reduce teacher demoralization and turnover.
Appendix

Self-Determination, not Dependency Standards & Resources:

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RL.5.2
Determine a theme of a story, drama, or poem from details in the text, including how characters in a story or drama respond to challenges or how the speaker in a poem reflects upon a topic; summarize the text.

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RL.5.3
Compare and contrast two or more characters, settings, or events in a story or drama, drawing on specific details in the text (e.g., how characters interact).

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RL.5.5
Explain how a series of chapters, scenes, or stanzas fits together to provide the overall structure of a particular story, drama, or poem.

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RL.5.6
Describe how a narrator's or speaker's point of view influences how events are described.

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.W.5.3.a
Orient the reader by establishing a situation and introducing a narrator and/or characters; organize an event sequence that unfolds naturally.

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.W.5.3.b
Use narrative techniques, such as dialogue, description, and pacing, to develop experiences and events or show the responses of characters to situations.

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.W.5.3.d
Use concrete words and phrases and sensory details to convey experiences and events precisely.


Conquest, not adventure Standards & Resources:


http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Reservation_poverty

http://zinedproject.org/materials/the-game-of-silence/


The Birchbark House: Closing Activity

Using evidence from the text, summarize the challenges that Omakayas faced in the book The Birchbark House, and how she was able to overcome them. Based on details from the text, what is the theme of the book?

Criteria:
- Keep your summary concise.
- Use transitions words (One way, another way, the last, etc.)
- Identify at least 3 challenges and the theme of the book.
- Indent.
- Capitalize the beginning of each sentence and proper nouns, use periods at the end of each sentence, and spell all words correctly.

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RL.5.2 Determine a theme of a story, drama, or poem from details in the text, including how characters in a story or drama respond to challenges or how the speaker in a poem reflects upon a topic; summarize the text.

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.W.5.4 Produce clear and coherent writing in which the development and organization are appropriate to task, purpose, and audience.

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.W.5.5 With guidance and support from peers and adults, develop and strengthen writing as needed by planning, revising, editing, rewriting, or trying a new approach.
The Birchbark House: Closing Activity

Using evidence from the text, compare and contrast Omakayas’ feelings/emotions throughout the seasons (i.e. Summer, Winter, Spring) in the book The Birchbark House. How did she change/grow throughout each? What remained the same in her throughout each season?

Criteria:
● Keep your writing concise.
● Use transitions words (At first, then, lastly, etc.)
● Compare/contrast across the 3 seasons in the text.
● Indent.
● Capitalize the beginning of each sentence and proper nouns, use periods at the end of each sentence, and spell all words correctly.

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RL.5.3 Compare and contrast two or more characters, settings, or events in a story or drama, drawing on specific details in the text (e.g., how characters interact).
CCSS.ELA-Literacy.W.5.4 Produce clear and coherent writing in which the development and organization are appropriate to task, purpose, and audience.
CCSS.ELA-Literacy.W.5.5 With guidance and support from peers and adults, develop and strengthen writing as needed by planning, revising, editing, rewriting, or trying a new approach.
The study of Self Standards & Resources

**CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RI.5.1**
Quote accurately from a text when explaining what the text says explicitly and when drawing inferences from the text.

**CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RI.5.2**
Determine two or more main ideas of a text and explain how they are supported by key details; summarize the text.

**CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RI.5.7**
Draw on information from multiple print or digital sources, demonstrating the ability to locate an answer to a question quickly or to solve a problem efficiently.

**CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RI.5.9**
Integrate information from several texts on the same topic in order to write or speak about the subject knowledgeably.

**CCSS.ELA-Literacy.W.5.2**
Write informative/explanatory texts to examine a topic and convey ideas and information clearly.

**CCSS.ELA-Literacy.W.5.2.a**
Introduce a topic clearly, provide a general observation and focus, and group related information logically; include formatting (e.g., headings), illustrations, and multimedia when useful to aiding comprehension.

**CCSS.ELA-Literacy.W.5.2.b**
Develop the topic with facts, definitions, concrete details, quotations, or other information and examples related to the topic.

**CCSS.ELA-Literacy.W.5.2.c**
Link ideas within and across categories of information using words, phrases, and clauses (e.g., *in contrast*, *especially*).

**CCSS.ELA-Literacy.W.5.2.d**
Use precise language and domain-specific vocabulary to inform about or explain the topic.

**CCSS.ELA-Literacy.W.5.2.e**
Provide a concluding statement or section related to the information or explanation presented.

**CCSS.ELA-Literacy.W.5.4**
Produce clear and coherent writing in which the development and organization are appropriate to task, purpose, and audience. (Grade-specific expectations for writing types are defined in standards 1-3 above.)

**CCSS.ELA-Literacy.W.5.5**
With guidance and support from peers and adults, develop and strengthen writing as needed by planning, revising, editing, rewriting, or trying a new approach. (Editing for conventions should demonstrate command of Language standards 1-3 up to and including grade 5 here.)

**CCSS.ELA-Literacy.W.5.6**
With some guidance and support from adults, use technology, including the Internet, to produce and publish writing as well as to interact and collaborate with others; demonstrate sufficient command of keyboarding skills to type a minimum of two pages in a single sitting.

**CCSS.ELA-Literacy.W.5.7**
Conduct short research projects that use several sources to build knowledge through investigation of different aspects of a topic.

**CCSS.ELA-Literacy.W.5.8**
Recall relevant information from experiences or gather relevant information from print and digital sources; summarize or paraphrase information in notes and finished work, and provide a list of sources.

**CCSS.ELA-Literacy.W.5.9**
Draw evidence from literary or informational texts to support analysis, reflection, and research.

**CCSS.ELA-Literacy.SL.5.2**
Summarize a written text read aloud or information presented in diverse media and formats, including visually, quantitatively, and orally.
CCSS.ELA-Literacy.SL.5.3
Summarize the points a speaker makes and explain how each claim is supported by reasons and evidence.

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.SL.5.4
Report on a topic or text or present an opinion, sequencing ideas logically and using appropriate facts and relevant, descriptive details to support main ideas or themes; speak clearly at an understandable pace.

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.SL.5.5
Include multimedia components (e.g., graphics, sound) and visual displays in presentations when appropriate to enhance the development of main ideas or themes.

Indigenous Latin America Websites
http://www.kidspast.com/world-history/0273-olmecs.php
http://www.ducksters.com/history/inca/machu_picchu.php
http://www.ducksters.com/history/maya/pyramids_and_architecture.php
http://www.ducksters.com/history/aztec_empire/tenochtitlan.php

Raza Studies- Freedom Fighters:
Reies Lopez Tijerina- Texas, United States
Jose Marti- Cuba
Rodolfo “Corky” Gonzales- United States
Joaquin Murrieta- California, Mexico
Simon Bolivar- Venezuela, South America
Ernesto “Che” Guevarra- Aregentina, Cuba
Emiliano Zapata- Mexico
Francisco Villa- Mexico
Luis Rivera- Puerto Rico
Farabundo Marti- El Salvador
Augusto César Sandino- Nicaragua
Geronimo- U.S. Apache Indian
Diego Rivera- Mexico
Oscar Romero- El Salvador
Judy Baca- California, United States
Frida Kahlo- Mexico
Sor Juana Ines de la Cruz- Mexico
Hermila Galindo- Mexico
Nidia Diaz- El Salvador
Lolita Lebron- Puerto Rico
Dolores Huerta- United States
Luisa Moreno- United States
Rigoberta Menchu- Guatamala
Ellen Ochoa- United States
Gracia Molina de Pick- Mexico, United States
Lucy Gonzalez Parsons- United States
Sandra Cisneros- United States
Josefa Ortiz de Dominguez- Mexico
Title and 3 facts
Write the title, the name of you person in large print at the top. Below, create 3 bullet points telling the dates of their birth/death, where they lived, and what they are famous for (the main idea).

Letter
Pretend you are the person you have researched. Write a letter to a person in their life as though you are them living at that time period. It should include facts that tell us about their life. The date on the letter should also show when they lived.

Fold-out Timeline
Create an accordion timeline with 8 windows. Write 8 facts about your person, one on each page. Remember, timelines show sequence, so the windows should have facts in order that they happened in the person’s life.

Photos/Realia
Include at least 2 photos with captions about your person. Include one piece of realia, an object that connects with your person.

- Don't forget to decorate the outside of your folder to look like your person!

I am researching: __________________________________________________________

My project is DUE: Wednesday, October 2, 2013

Project Rubric:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name: __________________________</th>
<th>Person researched: __________________________</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Title &amp; 3 facts</th>
<th>Letter</th>
<th>Timeline</th>
<th>Photos/Realia</th>
<th>Artwork/Decorations</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
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</tbody>
</table>

Notes:
BH Freedom Fighters:
Malcolm X
Langston Hughes
Huey P. Newton
Frederick Douglass
Thurgood Marshall
Muhammad Ali
Marcus Garvey
W.E.B Du Bois
Nat Turner
Nelson Mandela
King Tut
George Washington Carver
Jesse Jackson

Sojourner Truth
Harriet Tubman
Ida B Wells
Ruby Bridges
Assata Shakur
Fannie Lou Hammer
Ella Baker
Maya Angelou
Zora Neale Hurston
Wilma Rudolph
Bessie Coleman
Lena Horne
Mary Mcleod Bethune
Shirley Chisholm
Ericka Huggins
Black History Research:  
Student Generated Questions

Intro Paragraph  
Introduce the person you are researching and the topics for the body paragraphs.

Body 1: His/her life  
What is their name?  
When were they born/died?  
Where was your person born?  
Where did they live?  
Did they get married?  
Did they have kids?

Body 2: Contribution to Black History  
Why are they important in Black History? How did the person fight for justice?  
Did he/she work together with others to get what they wanted?  
Did he/she fight against segregation?  
How did he/she fight for justice compared to MLK Jr.? (Compare/Contrast)

Conclusion  
Do you believe he/she was brave?  
Do you believe he/she was intelligent?  
What does Black History Month mean to you?

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25 The following questions were generated by students and grouped whole group by the teacher to model how to link themes into an expository writing frame. Students then used this handout to guide their writing process.
Social Studies, not Colonial Studies Standards & Resources

5.1 Students describe the major pre-Columbian settlements, including the cliff dwellers and pueblo people of the desert Southwest, the American Indians of the Pacific Northwest, the nomadic nations of the Great Plains, and the woodland peoples east of the Mississippi River.

● Describe how geography and climate influenced the way various nations lived and adjusted to the natural environment, including locations of villages, the distinct structures that they built, and how they obtained food, clothing, tools, and utensils.

● Describe their varied customs and folklore traditions.

● Explain their varied economies and systems of government.

5.2 Students trace the routes of early explorers and describe the early explorations of the Americas

● Explain the aims, obstacles, and accomplishments of the explorers, sponsors, and leaders of key European expeditions and the reasons Europeans chose to explore and colonize the world (e.g., the Spanish Reconquista, the Protestant Reformation, the Counter Reformation).

● Trace the routes of the major land explorers of the United States, the distances traveled by explorers, and the Atlantic trade routes that linked Africa, the West Indies, the British colonies, and Europe.

● 5.3 Students describe the cooperation and conflict that existed among the American Indians and between the Indian nations and the new settlers.

● Examine the conflicts before the Revolutionary War (e.g., the Pequot and King Philip's Wars in New England, the Powhatan Wars in Virginia, the French and Indian War).

● Discuss the role of broken treaties and massacres and the factors that led to the Indians defeat, including the resistance of Indian nations to encroachments and assimilation (e.g., the story of the Trail of Tears).

● Describe the internecine Indian conflicts, including the competing claims for control of lands (e.g., actions of the Iroquois, Huron, Lakota [Sioux]).

5.4 Students understand the political, religious, social, and economic institutions that evolved in the colonial era.

● Understand how the British colonial period created the basis for the development of political self-government and a free-market economic system and the differences between the British, Spanish, and French colonial systems.

● Describe the introduction of slavery into America, the responses of slave families to their condition, the ongoing struggle between proponents and opponents of slavery, and the gradual institutionalization of slavery in the South.
California Native American Project

Oral Speech:
- Geographic location and adaptation: Where did they live? How did they use the land/resources around them? What were their houses built with? How did they build them?
- Political governance & Economy: Who lead the group and how were laws made? What did they trade? Did they use a type of money?
- Traditions, religion & legends: What were their beliefs? What stories did they tell? How did they pass their traditions down?

3-D Model of Village:
- must be 3-D and depict housing that the tribe lived in
- include landforms (like a river or ocean)

*Each group will orally present both to the class.

My Tribe is: ________________________________

RUBRIC

Group: __________________________________________
Tribe: ________________________________

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Geography &amp; Adaptation</th>
<th>Government &amp; Economy</th>
<th>Traditions &amp; Religion</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Paragraph:</td>
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<tr>
<td>Drawing:</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Model: ________________  Overall Grade: __________

Notes: 145
U.S. Native American Project

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Tribe:</th>
<th>Notes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| **Geographic Location and Adaptation**  
  Where did they live? How did they use the land/resources around them? What were their houses built with? How did they build them? |       |
| **Political Governance**  
  Who lead the group and how were laws made? What did they trade? Did they use a type of money? |       |
| **Traditions, Religion, and Legends**  
  What were their beliefs? What stories did they tell? How did they pass their traditions down? |       |
Film: Two Spirits

What is gender?

What does Nadleeh mean in the Navajo language?

What are the four genders according to the Navajo? How is this different from Western (European/white) Culture?

How did Nadleeh help Navajo orphans?

How were Navajos judged by their tribe?

How was homophobia (the hatred or fear of gays) introduced to the Americas?

What happened to Fred Martinez? How does bullying connect to what happened?

**Social Studies**  
*Bulletin Board*

**Standards:**  
H-SS 5.2.1 Describe the entrepreneurial characteristics of early explorers.  
H-SS 5.2.2 Explain the aims, obstacles and accomplishments of explorers and reasons Europeans chose to explore and colonize the world.  
H-SS 5.3.3 Trace the Atlantic trade route that linked Africa, the West Indies, the British colonies, and Europe.

**Objectives:**  
Students will be able to trace the Triangular Trade Route and identify which parties involved benefited form the trade.

**Criteria:**  
- Must trace the trade routes between Africa, the West Indies, the 13 colonies, and Europe.  
- Must identify which parties benefited, and which parties did not benefit.  
- Must incorporate at least 2 vocabulary terms form the unit.

**Rubric:**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
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<th>4</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>1</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Work includes all criteria listed above.</td>
<td>Work includes most of the criteria listed above, with some errors.</td>
<td>Work includes some of the criteria listed above, with several errors.</td>
<td>Work includes few of the criteria listed above, with numerous errors.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
FROM INDIAN FIGHTER TO PRESIDENT
1) Using evidence from the text, how was Jackson able to defeat the Creeks in the Battle of Horseshoe Bend? Pg___________ Paragraph___________

2) Citing the text, how did treaties change the Native American perspective on land? Pg___________ Paragraph___________

3) Using evidence from the text, what 3 tactics did Jackson use to get Native Americans to sign the treaties? Pg___________ Paragraph___________

4) According to the text, what promise was made to the Shawnee and Cherokee in the treaty of 1825? Pg___________ Paragraph___________

THE TERRIBLE CHOICE
5) Using evidence from the text, what pressures led to the removal of Native Americans from their lands? Pg___________ Paragraph___________

6) Citing the text, what supplies was the government suppose to supply the Native Americans on their trip west? Pg___________ Paragraph___________

FIGHTING FOR FREEDOM
7) Citing the text, give three numerical facts about the Seminole War. Pg___________ Paragraph___________

8) Using evidence from the text, what were the causes that led to 4,000 Cherokee dying on the Trail of Tears? Pg___________ Paragraph___________
Native American and Settler Conflicts: Writing Task
Using evidence from multiple texts (the social studies textbook, excerpt chapter from A Young People’s History of the United States, and video clips), synthesize the information and explain in detail the conflicts that occurred between Native Americans and the colonial settlers. What are the ethics (right/wrong) of these events? Connecting to the Big Idea, is this an example of power being constructive or destructive?

Criteria:
- Answer all parts of the prompt question
- Provide specific examples of at least 3 conflicts
- Include key vocabulary
- Use transitions words (For example, another way, lastly, etc.)
- Capitalize the beginning of each sentence and proper nouns, use periods at the end of each sentence, and spell correctly.

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RI.5.1
Quote accurately from a text when explaining what the text says explicitly and when drawing inferences from the text.

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RI.5.3
Explain the relationships or interactions between two or more individuals, events, ideas, or concepts in a historical, scientific, or technical text based on specific information in the text.

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RI.5.9
Integrate information from several texts on the same topic in order to write or speak about the subject knowledgeably.
Status Update: How are you feeling?

Using your MELD Emotion Dictionary, complete the status update on how you’re feeling. Make sure to explain what caused you to feel that way.

__________________________________________________________________________
__________________________________________________________________________
__________________________________________________________________________
__________________________________________________________________________
__________________________________________________________________________
__________________________________________________________________________
__________________________________________________________________________

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.L.5.1
Demonstrate command of the conventions of standard English grammar and usage when writing or speaking.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.L.5.2
Demonstrate command of the conventions of standard English capitalization, punctuation, and spelling when writing.
LGBTQ UNIT

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.L.5.4
Determine or clarify the meaning of unknown and multiple-meaning words and phrases based on grade 5 reading and content, choosing flexibly from a range of strategies.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.L.5.4.C
Consult reference materials (e.g., dictionaries, glossaries, thesauruses), both print and digital, to find the pronunciation and determine or clarify the precise meaning of key words and phrases.

Lesson 1: Word Study- “Gay”
- Review other slurs and discuss why they are not acceptable. “Would it be ok to call someone N-word? Why not?” Two reasons people misuse the word
  - 1- They don't like Gays, homophobic
  - 2- They don’t have the vocabulary to accurately express what they are trying to say. “What did you mean to say?” (stupid, silly, disliked something)
- Review the origin of the word Gay
  - Originally meant happy or carefree, began to be used to refer to homosexuals in the 1960s
- Create a Bubble Map with other terms that the student could say in place of gay.
- Possible Extension: In small groups, have students act out a scene when a peer might use the term in a derogatory way and possible ways in addressing the issue.

Lesson 2: Same-Sex Families
- Ask students to draw a picture of a family, this can be a HW assignment or mini-art lesson. Collect the pictures and review them. (Almost all pictures will depict a dad, mom, and two kids.) Review photos of the various types of families, such as single parent, blended families, grand parents, foster parents, adoptive parents, and same sex.
- Review news clip announcing the Supreme Court ruling that same-sex marriages are now legally recognized by the state.
- Read Aloud “Heather has Two Mommies”
- Review Statistics- 1 in 10 people in the U.S. are gay.

Lesson 3: Group Investigation on the Queer Rights Movement
- CA SB48- requires teaching of contributions of LGBTQ people

Lesson 4: Human Rights

Social Studies Connection: Native Americans
- Introduce topic of 2-spiritied people
References


153


The Permanence of Racism. (1992) [Television Series]. In THIRTEEN (Producer), *The Open Mind.*


T-RACES. Testbed for the Redling Archives of California's Exclusionary Spaces. from http://salt.unc.edu/T-RACES/mosaic.html


