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The University of San Francisco

BEING IN DEEP, AUTHENTIC, DRAMATIC CELEBRATION: NARRATIVES OF COMMUNITY CULTURAL WORKERS FOR SOCIAL CHANGE

A Dissertation Presented
to
The Faculty of the School of Education
International and Multicultural Education Department

In Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
Doctor of Education

by
Mi'Jan Celie Tho-Biaz
San Francisco
December 2013

THE UNIVERSITY OF SAN FRANCISCO

Dissertation Abstract

Being in Deep, Authentic, Dramatic Celebration: Narratives of Community Cultural Workers for Social Change

The common discourse in the field of education in the United States during the years 2002 through 2013 centered on the approach of making schools accountable for their students' performance, while aiming to bring proficiency to all students regardless of their socio-economic background. Prior to this study, little research existed on cultural workers who teach, and their associated outcomes with marginalized populations of learners. To fill this gap in the research literature, this study explored the question: How do cultural workers define their work, and in what ways do they connect their stories to the current academic discourse on the purpose of education and gaps in our mainstream educational system? For the purposes of this study, cultural work based education may be defined as an educational initiative, project, or program whereby people who are involved in artistic and sovereignty endeavors practice spoken word poetry, circus arts, public mural arts, contemporary dance and choreography, or self-determination community organizing.

My participant-narrators were eight cultural workers who taught in successful educational initiatives during the years 2002 through 2013. The term participant-narrator is used throughout this study because the participants fulfilled two specific roles: participants who contributed to this research, and narrators of their oral histories. I used a qualitative approach, most specifically oral history interviews as the methodology, and I conducted a four-step data collection process which included: a) conducting three face-to-face interviews;

b) transcribing all interviews, c) participant-narrators reviewing all transcripts for accuracy, and d) revising all transcripts for exactness.

This study's findings revealed cultural workers: a) facilitate learning by intentionally demonstrating conscious care in their instruction; b) connect their stories to the current academic discourse on the purpose of education, and gaps in the mainstream educational system, through their popular education approach; and c) view their work as an active contribution to social change as an outcome to their way of viewing teaching as a process of being solution-bound. Consequently, this research provides potential insights into successful educational strategies with marginalized learner populations that may be successful in meeting achievement goals within mainstream educational K-12 settings.

This dissertation, written under the direction of the candidate's dissertation committee and approved by the members of the committee, has been presented to and accepted by the Faculty of the School of Education in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Education. The content and research methodologies presented in this work represent the work of the candidate alone.

Mi'Jan Celie Tho-Biaz	January 27, 2014
Candidate	Date

Dissertation Committee

Shabnam Koirala-Azad	January 27, 2014
Chairperson	Date
Emma Fuentes	December 12, 2013
Second Reader	Date
Sarah Capitelli	December 12, 2013
Third Reader	Date

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I wish to devote this entire body of research to the two joys of my lifetime; my children, Indira "Endearing" Tho-Biaz Wilder and Isaiah "The Wiz" James Tho-Biaz Wilder. This road has not been easy, however you each have been my steady companions, supporters, and all around confidence boosters. Knowing that you both were watching me every day - no matter how hard the struggle - kept me moving forward and restored my faith in the path.

This research is also devoted to marginalized and mainstream children, who will likely reach an understanding in the necessity of creating a future built on hybrid ways of learning, being, doing, reflecting and visioning that is committed to building and sustaining communities of artists, healers, educators, cultural and sovereignty workers.

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

Page

ABSTRACT …….ii
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS …….....v
TABLE OF CONTENTS ……..viii

CHAPTER

I. THE RESEARCH PROBLEM

Introduction 1
Background and Need for the Study.....1
Statement of the Problem.....4
Purpose of the Study 7
Research Questions.....8
Theoretical Rationale.....8
Significance of the Study.....12

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

Introduction.....14
Historical Background 14
Influences on Cultural Work Education 16
Popular Education.....17
Folk Education.....21
Indigenous Education.....22
Experiential Education.....23
Alternative Education 24
Transformative Education.....24
Empirical Research 25
Hybrid Spaces and Fluid Learning Environments.....26
Transformative Cultural Work Education 28
Chapter Summary 30

III. METHODOLOGY

Oral History Methodology.....33
Research Setting..... 34
Participant-Narrators.....35
Data Collection 37

Interview Questions 40
Data Analysis... 41
Protection of Human Subjects 42
Background of the Researcher 43

IV. RESULTS

Introduction.....45
Gaining Access 45
Research Question #1 48
Research Question #2 56
Research Question #3 69

V. ANALYSIS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Introduction 75
Research Question #1 75
Research Question #2 82
Research Question #3 86
Implications for Critical Theory and Transformative Learning Theory.....92
Discussion.....94
Limitations of the Study.....96
Recommendation for Further Research 96

REFERENCES..... 99

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

During the years 2006 through 2009, I crossed and re-crossed the United States borders with the intention of studying cultural workers. I encountered several groups working for social change while traveling through Northwest and Central Mexico (Centro Las Libres, and Casa de los Amigos); Northeast Brazil (Projeto Dida, Rede Aiye de Hip Hop, and Rhythmic Uprising); and the West Coast and Southwestern States during the US Friendshipment Cuba Caravan (Food Not Bombs, Watsonville Brown Berets Autonomous Chapter, and Freedom Schools - Los Angeles). In each instance, I witnessed a common thread of concerted efforts towards social transformation for the individual and community. Cultural workers can be defined as artists, writers, and poets, who work to combine political and pedagogical practices into their work (Giroux, 1992). For the purposes of this study, I define cultural workers as artists, poets, dancers, choreographers, circus artists, and sovereignty workers. As my participation with cultural workers increased, so did my desire to continue studying and researching these groups and the people who comprise them. Moreover, I wondered if cultural workers could contribute to the expanding narratives of success and transformation which exist in literature about marginalized learner populations in education.

Background and Need for the Study

In the Fall of 2011 several thousand individuals and collectives came together in the United States and abroad, to dialogue about, and question the needs and possibilities for social change through a social movement centered around the call for social and economic equity in our world. The concern over the “widening gap between the rich and

poor," not just in the United States, but across the world was the impetus for this social movement, (Bhatt, 2012), peacefully protesting the disparity between the 1% concentration of wealth and the remainder of the population; the lack of legal consequences for corporations and their leaders who brought about the monetary crisis; the corporate influence on politics; and the unequal distribution of wealth (Bhatt, 2012). Summarizing the economic disparity, Bhatt (2012) states,

> Not since 80 years ago, in 1928, one year before the Great Stock Market crash of 1929 and ensuing depression, had the top wealthiest 1 percent of Americans held so much of the country's collective wealth. More importantly, the top 1 percent captured more of the country's overall economic growth between 1993 and 2008 than the remaining 99 percent of the country combined. (para. 3)

Following the progression from the 60's to present day, protest politics and grassroots participation and initiatives are no longer unconventional avenues for people (Neidhardt & Rucht, 2002, 2011), and there is a clear emphasis on the notion that a large portion of the population has been marginalized by mainstream systems, including mainstream education, and many of these systems are failing a significant portion of the population. Most specifically, Reardon (2011) asserts that the income inequality, which has widened over the past forty years, is correlated to achievement gap between low and high income children in mainstream education. Moreover Reardon's findings conclude that the income achievement gap is large for children who enter kindergarten, and this gap does not increase or decrease over the entire course of a child's progression through mainstream education.

Of the most significant concerns regarding social inequity and poverty on mainstream educational success, The American Psychological Association (2012) lists the following as having the greatest negative effect on learners:

> Chronic stress associated with living in poverty has been shown to adversely affect children's concentration and memory which may impact their ability to learn. The National Center for Education Statistics reports that in 2008, the dropout rate of students living in low-income families was about four and one-half times greater than the rate of children from higher-income families (8.7 percent versus 2.0 percent). The academic achievement gap for poorer youth is particularly pronounced for low-income African American and Hispanic children compared with their more affluent White peers. Underresourced schools in poorer communities struggle to meet the learning needs of their students and aid them in fulfilling their potential. Inadequate education contributes to the cycle of poverty by making it more difficult for low-income children to lift themselves and future generations out of poverty. (American Psychological Association, 2012, p. 2)

While there has not been much documentation on cultural workers who teach, some evidence has demonstrated positive learning outcomes for individuals within a community learning environment, by placing importance on nurture and support, along with shared values and common purposes (Power & Waters, 2004). One example of a learner developed, cultural work education initiative where students are fulfilling their potential is through the Global Action Project, a youth media organization. The Global Action Project offers youth, generally between the ages of 12 – 21, an opportunity to collaborate with adults who are practicing cultural workers to produce media, which may be inclusive of video, photography, web, radio, digital storytelling, and print, in an afterschool setting (Coryat, 2007). Furthermore, the mission of the organization is to provide youth with the necessary relationships and skill set to make media about issues that concern them, and to use this media in order to generate dialogue that contributes to social change.

While the Global Action Project's participants came from under-resourced, marginalized urban communities, the 100 youth who were involved during the 2005 – 2006 school year, were 96% youth of color. Even though these youth participants experienced marginalization, their self-generated media broadcasts reached audiences

"…of as many as 2,500 through festivals, conferences, classroom screenings and town hall meetings, and up to 100,000 people via the internet and cable broadcasts" (Coryat, 2007). The Global Action Project has flourished as the students' desire to know, understand, and critically tackle issues affecting them and their communities.

Whereas student populations that are specifically low income, African American or Hispanic, experience higher drop out rates and are reported to have lower measured mainstream academic success and achievement than their affluent White peers, the Global Action Project demonstrates cultural work education that increases understanding and awareness. Additionally, it typifies the possibility for transformation within a learning environment, which may be of use to mainstream education as it considers approaches to decreasing the achievement gap within the same target population.

Statement of the Problem

As a response to the negative measurable learning outcomes, and in acknowledgment of the problems that second language learners, children of color, and low-income students experience, President Bush signed into law The No Child Left Behind Act in 2002. This Act was a "once-a-decade reauthorization of the mammoth federal Elementary and Secondary Education Act" which was a continuation of a bill originally written in 1965 (Carey, 2012, para. 1). Consequently, a series of requirements expanded the federal role in education during a time of widespread public concern about the state of mainstream education. Moreover, the law was designed to serve students who were ill-served in their local public schools. During the time of the design of NCLB, annual standardized tests were being administered to schoolchildren; schools were being held accountable for their standardized test results; and schools were judged based on

their escalating performance with the goal of reaching 100 percent proficiency by 2014. While NCLB is a federal law, it did give states "vast discretion to set standards, choose tests, and decide what test scores would yield a passing grade" (Carey, 2012, para. 4). During this period of time in the field of education in the United States, the common discourse centered around this approach of making schools accountable for their students' performance, while aiming to bring proficiency to all students regardless of socio-economic background. Yet, in 2013, just one year away from the original NCLB 2014 mandate requiring 100 percent proficiency, many states could not meet their goal. As a result, the Obama administration exempted 39 of the 50 states from the associated test requirements (Layton, 2013). While NCLB did not foster academic success for disadvantaged students, the law and its associated testing did expose truths about the inequity in our education system. "The simple act of publishing annual test scores 'disaggregated' by race, ethnicity, language and disability status has proved that discrimination remains deeply embedded in our public education system, and not just in dysfunctional urban schools" (Carey, 2012, para. 19).

On the other hand, cultural work based education encompasses all learners, and many thrive as educators and learners, in spite of being rejected by the mainstream education system. For the purposes of this study, cultural work based education may be defined as an educational initiative, project, program, or course of study whereby people who are involved in artistic and sovereignty endeavors practice spoken word poetry, circus arts, public mural arts, contemporary dance and choreography, or self-determination community organizing. Cultural workers who teach, as well as their learner populations, may encompass teachers and learners of all ages, and their methods

are most influenced by various pedagogical approaches, including: popular, folk, indigenous, experiential, and transformative education. Moreover, these initiatives and programs can supplement, or be a part of mainstream educational programs and classes.

One can question: if the same population of learners is being served by mainstream and cultural work learning environments, are mainstream and cultural work education initiatives equally insightful, impactful engaging and/or influential in the progress and development towards transforming the whole person?

Proponents of critical pedagogy (Gabbard, 2008; Giroux, 2009; McLaren, 2009) and adversaries to the notion of a “one best system” which serves all (Clinchy, 2007; Miller, 2000; Tyack, 1974) cite the need for new forms of education that invite students into the world of themselves, their emotions, and beliefs and truths, to counteract the pulls of mainstream systems which can be oppressive. Fischman and McLaren (2005) conclude that we see few cultural work initiatives in the academic literature, because the practices of academia traditionally have not valued their way of being, or their pedagogical actions and methods. Cultural workers and their initiatives place major attention on personal relationships, common work and learning, and the care and emotional well-being of all people. While the academic discourse is changing to include more community aspects, what remains to be investigated is deeper, qualitative, educational research that is focused on the broader good (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 2006), highlighting what works in communities and why.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study is to document through narratives, the work of eight cultural workers who facilitate learning spanning the time frame of 2002 to 2013, laboring to transform lives within cultural work organizations. Each of these eight individuals were selected because they were connected to a "successful" cultural work education initiative. By highlighting and identifying specific attributes of their work that is effective at meeting the needs of their participants, this study hopes to propose some substantial educational methods that seek to address the growing concerns of our mainstream education systems. Additionally, this study strives to juxtapose narratives of transformation and success with marginalized learner populations, to the narratives of steadfast failure within the mainstream education context.

Because cultural workers focus on their community work and have less interest in being represented in the mainstream arenas, their voices and best practices seldom reach the formal field of education (Hintz & Milan, 2010). What I hope to accomplish in this study is to continue bridging the divide between formal institutions and cultural work communities, most especially as it relates to the examination of emotional, cultural, creative and informal education practice. Hintz and Milan assert,

> These groups point us to an important section of civil society that is not about campaigning and advocacy; rather they are about the creation of infrastructure and the very direct construction of 'another world.' As such, they are challenging for researchers and for established academic routines and perceptions, but crucial for understanding our contemporary world. (p. 842)

Perhaps there is a critical intersection between these two groups that can be reached, ultimately serving learners and education facilitators from each community in a more comprehensive manner. The focus on cultural work education is simply to highlight

initiatives that work in community and lead to the fulfillment of some tangible goals created by that community. I also acknowledge the presence of political and transformative teachers in the formal education system, however for the purpose of this study I will focus solely on effective teachers in community-based settings as a way of brining their learning's and accomplishments to bear on our assessments of what constitutes effective education.

Research Questions

1. How do cultural workers view and define the way they conduct their lives and work?

2. Do cultural workers connect their stories to the current academic discourse on the purpose of education, and current gaps in our mainstream educational system? If so, how?

3. Do cultural workers view their work as an active contribution to social change? If so, what may be the implications for social transformation?

Theoretical Rationale

The theoretical frames which will guide this study on cultural workers engaged in educational initiatives are: Critical Theory and Transformative Learning Theory.

Critical Theory engages people in critiquing their world, and is particularly concerned with "issues of power and justice and the ways that the economy, matters of race, class, and gender, ideologies, discourses, education, religion, and other social institutions, and cultural dynamics interact to construct a social system" (Kincheloe & McLaren, 2008, p. 288).

The Transformative Learning Theory builds on Psychoanalytic Theory and Critical Social Theory in that it attempts to explain learning as a process of "using a prior interpretation to construe a new or revised interpretation of the meaning of one's experience in order to guide future action" (Mezirow, 1996, p. 162).

Each of these two processes mirror the reflection and action that cultural workers are taking to mutually educate and organize co-agents engaged in transformation for themselves, their local community, and the world at large.

Critical Theory

Critical Theory is the self-reflective process which involves problematizing their social realities. Like most theories, Critical Theory has evolved over time. Giroux (2001) states that earlier critical theorists "did not develop a comprehensive theoretical approach for dealing with the patterns of conflict and contradictions that existed in various cultural spheres" (p. 41). As witnessed during the rise of the Occupy Movement, as well as Idle No More, cultural worker initiatives have coupled economic based quantitative research with the heart and practice of seeking solutions to widespread problems. As Vrasti (2012) wrote:

> Indeed, we have come to 'such a pass that anarchists, pagan priestesses, and tree-sitters are about the only Americans left still holding out for the idea that a genuinely democratic society might be possible' (Graeber, 2011b). This might sound ridiculous to many 'critical' ears who view occupiers as romantic hippies, at best, or trust fund babies, at worst. But one reason why so many people have caught the bug of prefigurative politics is because the protesters are enjoying themselves to the chagrin of the observers, and in so doing, they are reclaiming something that has been either banned from the private sphere or forgotten entirely: living in common. (Vrasti, 2012, p. 125).

It is this "living in common" that cultural workers in particular, have come to critique, problematize, and collectively act to change the world.

Transformative Learning Theory

Both Transformative Learning Theory and Critical Theory lend themselves to understanding how and why cultural work organizations use community based education as one of many methods for transformation among those who have been historically and/or currently marginalized by mainstream education. Specifically though, Transformative Learning Theory explains learning as a process "…of using a prior interpretation to construe a new or revised interpretation of the meaning of one's experience in order to guide future action" (Mezirow, 1996, p. 162). Individuals who question their realities and existence often are prompted to do so as a result of personal or social crisis, which may lead to subsequent perspective transformation (Mezirow, 1997). This change in perspective alters the individuals frame of reference, expanding it to be "more (a) inclusive, (b) differentiating, (c) permeable, (d) critically reflective, and (e) integrative of experience" (Mezirow, 1996, p. 163). While Mezirow's (1996) perspective on transformative learning is psychocritical, three contrasting perspectives to this theory have emerged: psychoanalytic, psychodevelopmental, and social emancipatory. A psychoanalytic view of transformative learning is the process of coming to understand oneself (as the individual, not as the collective) throughout one's lifespan, reflecting on the aspects that make up an individual's identity such as the ego, shadow, and collective unconscious (Taylor, 2008). The psychodevelopmental aspect of Transformative Learning is the process of how the individual changes across their lifespan in the ways that he or she makes meaning, in a reflective, continual and incremental progression of growth (Taylor, 2008). The final, contrasting perspective on Transformative Learning is the social-emancipatory view with foundations in the work of Paulo Freire (2000), has as

its goal social transformation for all, where the oppressed and marginalized populations develop a critical consciousness (Taylor, 2008).

In addition to the three contrasting views on Transformative Learning Theory, four new perspectives have recently emerged in the field. These expanded perspectives reflect the multiple ways of consideration and awareness in which cultural workers facilitate change. They are: neurobiological, cultural-spiritual, race-centric, and planetary (Taylor, 2008). The neurobiological perspective of transformative learning proposes that the learning process changes the brain structure, and suggests that transformative learning is rooted in the students' needs and experiences; requires distress prior to discovery; is reinforced by sensory, emotive and kinesthetic experiences; values diversity in learning between females and males; and stresses the necessity for educators to obtain a strong knowledge base of neurobiological systems (Taylor, 2008). Taylor (2008) asserts the cultural-spiritual view of transformative learning centers on how learners construct narratives - personal and social storytelling - as part of their transformative learning experience, in a culturally and spiritually meaningful and significant approach. The educator's role is collaborative with the learner in the practice of group inquiry, which assists the learner in sharing and revising narratives in the process of learning (Taylor, 2008). The race-centric view of transformative learning is in the early stage of theoretical development, and emphasizes a non-individualistic means of analysis with an accent on the social-political dimensions of learning (Williams, 2003). This view places African diaspora people, most specifically black women, in the center.

According to Taylor (2008), many differences are present between the varying views of Transformative Learning Theory, specifically those perspectives which are

embedded in the individual (psychocritical, psychoanalytic, psychodevelopmental and neurobiological) and "give little attention to context…and their relationship to transformation. Where the individual and society are seen as one and the same (emancipatory, race-centric, cultural-spiritual), transformative learning is as much about social change as individual transformation" (Taylor, 2008, p. 10).

Critical Theory and Transformative Learning Theory combined, mirror the transformation and growth processes in which cultural workers work to achieve in their individual lives, and across socio-economic, race, class and gender diversity within their communities. Moreover, problematizing, and the engagement in action based on critical reflection, express in theory that which cultural worker education initiatives employ in practice.

Significance of the Study

This study has the potential to improve mainstream education through the documentation of education work performed by cultural workers, and the identification of real tools, methods, and solutions that work within a community context. Perhaps pedagogical tools may emerge in the narratives of cultural workers that may be useful to mainstream education reform efforts. Finally, this research may contribute to the growing scholarship on alternative paradigms for social change, specifically among educators and learners involved in compulsory education who do not fit within the confines of mainstream social, economic or cultural demographics.

CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

Introduction

The purpose of this study is to document the story of eight cultural workers who teach, using narrative inquiry methods. This study seeks to document how cultural workers: a) view the way they conduct their lives and work, b) connect their stories to current academic discourse on the purpose of education and current gaps in our educational systems, and c) actively contribute to social change through the collection and dissemination of these narratives. The purpose of this review of literature is to frame this study within current educational research, and to simultaneously illustrate the need for my research. The review of the literature will be comprised of three main themes:

1. An historical examination of the need for and the emergence of educational philosophies and practices outside of the mainstream education system.
2. The philosophical and pedagogical influences which serve as the catalyst for cultural work education.
3. Empirical research which examines the relevance and context of cultural work education initiatives, and provides specific examples for the functions and outcomes of these educational efforts.

Historical Background

According to Osorio (2009), the academic context for producing Latin American Theory of Liberation in Human and Social Sciences is grounded in the history of social community work. The Latin American region experienced significant numerous crisis

during the 1950s, 1960s, and 1970s, which contributed to popular actions and corresponding reactions of repression from governmental forces. Key Latin American examples of popular actions are: a) the overthrowing of Venezuelan military Dictator Marcos Pérez Jiménez in 1958, and b) the Cuban revolution that toppled the Batista regime in 1959. As these kinds of social problems escalated, Latin American governments became increasingly repressive throughout the region, which gave rise to the formation and organizing of revolutionary movements to oppose authoritarian regimes. Osorio (2009) asserts that at the same time social movements were forming, some university students fled the classrooms and their formal studies to enroll in revolutionary groups. This movement away from mainstream educational studies and towards revolutionary groups and social movement organizing provoked scholars to adopt a critical position against the academic perspectives posed by elites of that region (Osorio, 2009). Concurrent to these Latin American revolutions, the anti-Vietnam war student movement emerged in the United States, alongside several other resistance organizations such as African- Americans fighting for civil rights, and the formation of workers unions. Some of these movements paved the way to develop critical thinking informed by current events and systems of oppression throughout the various regions. This in turn influenced the ways of thinking that encouraged social research to transform the oppressive reality through a process of liberation (Osorio, 2009).

As a result of the oppressive and resistant social movements and organizing, grassroots communities emerged throughout the Americas, and a critical approach formed within social sciences in academia, due to grassroots organizing for liberation. There was, as well, a growing realization for the need for popular education—

community based educational initiatives that reached out to the traditionally oppressed, impoverished and marginalized populations. Osorio (2009) asserts that many of the Latin American countries that suffered from military dictatorships (Brazil, Peru, Chile, El Salvador, Nicaragua, Guatemala, Colombia), established reactionary counter actions in religious parishes, and grassroots communities. Each of these larger revolutions began with people fighting in their respective communities against oppression, which then advanced into spaces dedicated to intellectual reflection and consideration. A new process of evaluation and criticism emerged which was then deemed incapable of theorizing the oppressed reality. Consequently, oppressive situations in mainstream systems around the world, including mainstream education, created a foundation for cultural work education to take shape, advancing much needed social solidarity for the oppressed (Osorio, 2009). Furthermore, Rahman (2009) asserts that countries that currently have barriers for their citizens to access mainstream education – specifically countries with urgent mass literacy needs – continue to witness successful volunteer literacy campaigns, in spite of slow or non-movement by government education. In this way, theories and practices constructed by and within the organized oppressed have formed and continue to grow.

Influences on Cultural Work Education

Cultural work education is similar to visionary grassroots education in that both have been influenced by various pedagogical and philosophical approaches and practices, due to their common history of addressing disparity through education that is empowering for the individual, and transformative for the society. Eiben (2009) has identified popular, folk, indigenous, alternative, experiential and transformative education

as a portion of the practices and philosophies which contributed to the development of visionary grassroots education. The contributing relevant influences on cultural work education, and their accompanying pedagogical features, will be discussed below.

Popular Education

The philosophy of liberation is a critique on systems of domination and oppression from the perspectives and experiences of the oppressed, marginalized communities and persons who are routinely excluded from Western philosophy (Kellner, 1991). Variations in class, socio-economic status, social power and capital, physical health, and mainstream educational achievement, are consequences of institutionalized inequalities, and thereby contribute to and maintain systems of oppression. (Sherover-Marcuse, 2000).

One of the basic contributors to liberation of an individual is their direct participation in its conceptualization and creation. Freire asserts liberation is not something someone may possess and then give to other people; liberation is instead, collectively and individually created and won (Montero, 2009). To that end, research based on liberation and emancipation sees all participants' voices as equal. Initiating the idea of education in pursuit of freedom, Paulo Freire positions his ideas and philosophies around the need for the oppressed and marginalized populations to gain liberty (Montero, 2009). Freire's (2000) pedagogy is centered on the idea of conscientization which states the need to "perceive social, political, and economic contradictions, and to take action against oppressive elements of reality" (p. 74). In this way, learners build a new connected relationship between themselves and their knowledge, with reflection and the

overall process of praxis contributing to the learner's transformation. As an active thinker engaged in the idea of how education can facilitate consciousness and liberation, Freire strongly influenced social sciences in Latin America, most specifically the fields of: social work, psychology, critical sociology, theology and the philosophy of liberation (Dussel, 2011; Kellner, 1991; Sherover-Marcuse, 2000).

When teaching from the Freire perspective, an educator is required to see the person engaged in learning as an active participant in their own construction and engagement in the process of transforming the oppressor/oppressed model. Consequently, Freire (2000) asserts educators and the oppressed population must learn how to "read" the world so that they may understand their own desires for liberation, and may better interpret the ways in which mainstream systems function as oppressive entities, specifically mainstream school systems. This research looks to the work of Freire and popular education as an influence on the cultural work education communities studied, and the relationship and respective dissociation with the mainstream academic community.

To reinvent the world through the establishment of a liberating praxis, instead of the continued transmission of the dominant ideology, a shared process of teaching and learning must be generated and sustained. In this way, liberation education is oriented to build other possible worlds (Osorio, 2009). bell hooks (2003) describes the concept of liberating education, or progressive education, as a practice towards freedom whereby individuals learn how to create community, furthering the work that social justice movements initiate with an additional key element: providing support for individuals acquiring critical consciousness who may utilize education as a vehicle for achieving

freedom. "Progressive education, education as the practice of freedom, enables us to confront feelings of loss and restore our sense of connection. It teaches us how to create community" (hooks, 2003, p. xv).

Freire's educational view and theory considered teaching and learning as a "reflection and action upon the world in order to transform it" (Freire, 1970, p. 36). In *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, Freire (2000) explains that the mainstream, traditional teaching style is one where the oppressed can only remain oppressed; they are thought to be lower-than, not capable, and thus the oppressed remain so. Freire beseeches us to see men and women as conscious beings; learners who must be exposed to problems relating to themselves as persons living in a world which is theirs to explore, to embrace, and ultimately to transform. They must take responsibility for their community and environment, and understand that they own their place in the world. This ownership enables them to create a better world; a world that is in the process of transformation. This is education as the practice of, and for, freedom. And so, how they perceive themselves in the world is of prime importance. According to Osorio (2009), praxis can be a liberating transformative process that was used to aid Latin American marginalized people in understanding their oppression and exclusion from participating and thriving within mainstream systems and life.

There were a number of fascinating balances in Freire's (1970, 1994, 2000) writing that align with the stresses of a community. He states that in order to be human, we have to have freedom; this is at the very heart of being human. Freire also advises us that history and culture are the building blocks of humanity, and yet simultaneously, humanity is constantly in the process of creating history and culture. In this symbiotic

relationship there is a struggle: the struggle to be human, free, and to build and construct our own world. This struggle leads to humanization, or it can lead to dehumanization (Freire, 1994). It is in community that each person can find their own freedom and humanity, and can enlarge their capacity to build the unity between knowing, sensing, feeling and activating, which can initiate and sustain community and personal freedom (Osorio, 2009).

The primary goal of a critical pedagogist is the development of conscious reflection in students, guided by passion, personal experience, freedom, and the connection of knowledge to power for eventual constructive action. Additionally, Torres (2008) states that transformative social justice learning occurs "when people reach a deeper, richer, more textured and nuanced understanding of themselves and their world" (p. 14). This model of learning requires both teacher and learner to develop and deepen the practice of personal and social conscientization.

In opposition to transformative social justice learning, McLaren (1994, 2005) argues that the contemporary world holds values that are destructively influential to today's students. Some of these influences are the mass media, globalization, and race/cultural/spiritual relations. In his initial work, McLaren (1994) states that identity of young persons is fashioned around the excesses of marketing and capitalism; that the bottom line, wealth and power has captured the imaginations of this generation and it seems like there is no going back. This thesis encapsulates the very reason for documenting new cultural work education initiatives, illustrating the history and progression of education, which has been generated in response to disparity in achievement and success in compulsory, mainstream education.

Folk Education

Emerging in Denmark during the 1800's, and inspired by Nikolaj Grundtvig, folk education was a social movement to support Denmark's transition to a democracy (Borish, 1991). The need for folk education arose because of the disparity in access to education, which had previously been available only to the upper class, and in the non-native language of Latin. Grundtvig saw this inequity as the source of a rift between the two classes of people, and considered folk schools as a possible solution to creating an education that was available and accessible to everyone, no matter their socio-economic class, but moreover an education that empowered individuals to participate in society in its totality. Consequently, folk schools do not have professional or vocational instruction as their primary aim, instead folk schools' central goal is: personal and social transformation, with an emphasis on assisting people in conceptualizing their own identity and empowering their communities (Freire & Horton, 1990).

Folk schools typically focus on adult learners, however can be inclusive of children, and are built to serve the educational needs of an individual which must be entwined with the vital needs of a community. From that position of honoring the values of individual and community life, in the United States folk schools surfaced, most notably with the founding of The Highlander Folk School in 1932. Myles Horton (1990), co-founder of Highlander, centered his work around connecting participatory education to social change, intentionally operating the folk school exclusively outside the mainstream education system. Subsequently renamed to the Highlander Education and

Research Center, the model for folk education broadened by placing special emphasis on training and empowering community leaders who seek and work for social justice (de los Reyes & Gozemba, 2002).

Indigenous Education

The word indigenous, according to the Tewa educator Cajete (1999), can be defined as "belonging to a locality or originating in a place in reference to races or species that have not been introduced from elsewhere" (p. 189). Indigenous education in terms of learning and teaching, is therefore seen by Cajete (1994), as a process grounded in every day lived experiences, which takes place in community and nature. Specifically, indigenous education and the instruction of traditional forms of knowledge are a conscious response to cultural and linguistic erosion that has been caused by genocide, globalization and colonialism.

Because Freire's (1994) popular education approach is a response to oppression, and many indigenous cultures have encountered oppression vis-à-vis colonialism, there are many parallels between popular education and indigenous education. Both forms of education believe learning is best realized through: nonhierarchical learning and teaching between students and teachers, and learning which evolves in the cultural, historical and everyday environment of learners. Moreover, the main premise to indigenous education is that learning and teaching, as part of an interwoven daily life, can bring about responsible relationships among people in community, and conscientious stewardship with our natural world (Dugan, 1993). To that end, indigenous education – knowing, learning, teaching and being – ensures that the education of a person goes beyond the traditional mainstream Western education model which has a primary emphasis on

reading, writing and arithmetic, as measured through tests. Smith (2005) explains, "Indigenous communities often have a quite different set of questions that frames the key educational issue as being primarily about epistemic self-determination that includes language and culture and the challenges of generating schooling approaches from a different epistemological basis" (p. 94). Indigenous education consequently strives to preserve within each individual, the culture, language and traditions of their entire community and people of origin.

Experiential Education

According to the Association for Experiential Education (2012) experiential education is a philosophical and methodological approach to education "in which educators purposefully engage with learners in direct experience and focused reflection in order to increase knowledge, develop skills and clarify values." The early 20th century work of John Dewey (1938), articulated the need to have experience where the learner is the creator of their own knowledge, as the central process in education. Dewey's perspective on the United States' mainstream education model at that time was that it was an authoritarian system, and not primarily concerned with the learner or their experiences. Additionally, recent research (Nummela-Caine, Caine, McClintic, & Klimek, 2004) supports the effectiveness of learning experiences based on personal experiences.

Alternative philosophies of education contain features of experiential education, and there are several examples of experiential education programs which continue to emerge and expand. Some of these examples include: outdoor education, service learning, cooperative learning, and adventure learning. Moreover, many teaching

methods derive their framework from experiential education's practice of learning through action and reflection.

Alternative Education

A number of approaches to teaching and learning outside of the mainstream traditional model manifested in the 1970's, as a result of the public's disenchantment with educational institutions that were not serving the needs of its learners (Miller, 2002). Accordingly, alternative education generally exists outside of public education schools, and falls into four categories: home-based education, alternative schools, school choice and independent schools.

The participants in alternative education do not believe in a one-size-fits-all, standard education approach. Instead alternative education stresses the value of small class size, and a strong sense of community that is built through close relationships between teachers and students. Additionally, Ron Miller (2009) has recognized five fundamentals that are common to alternative education: respect for all persons; balance; decentralized authority; noninterference between cultural, economic, and political fields of society; and a holistic worldview. Consequently, alternative education shares similar values and overlapping philosophies as holistic education (Martin, 2012).

Transformative Education

An emerging idea related to praxis and critical pedagogy, is transformative learning, which provides a critical framework for holistic theory, understanding and action. Transformative education emphasizes an action and reflective practice that integrates political and environmental issues and concerns of the individual persona and collective community. It has as its end goals: wellbeing via social justice; the cultivation

of mutual meaningful relationships; and personal significance, change, and ecological health (Taylor, 2008). These principles of transformative learning build upon, complement and overlap the intentions of popular, folk, indigenous, alternative and experiential education. Moreover, each of these influences on cultural work education are interconnected approaches to the multiple ways learners learn, and individuals evolve and transform within community. The theoretical–practical synthesis and processes are therefore integral in transformative education for freedom, and the liberation work of cultural work education communities. It is a step towards defining the causal factors and circumstances that prevent the marginalized and oppressed from taking part in politics and the creation of sustainable change (Osorio, 2009).

Empirical Studies on Cultural Work Education

The following review of literature will focus on research which addresses the successes, and the relevance of cultural work education initiatives to the mainstream education system. Cultural work education initiatives can be defined as learning environments that are initiated by local communities that have a shared interest centered on a specific educational purpose such as cultural arts or community based sovereignty.

The cultural workers come from a wide variety of arts and sovereignty backgrounds, not necessarily education, and the cultural workers and learners convene outside of mainstream educational systems or frameworks. Due to the community based nature of cultural work education, most initiatives exist outside of the mainstream educational system, which also extends to formal academic research. This discussion will therefore center on research with similarities to cultural work education. The two

bodies of research explored in this section offer insights into the relevance and connection between cultural work and mainstream education.

Although there is a gap in the literature on research of cultural work educators, tangential research does exist on studies conducted on nonformal, community-based education initiatives and their educators. These studies provide a context for cultural work education initiatives, in that they speak to similar issues, and the outcomes of the research points to the relevance of cultural work education to mainstream education.

Hybrid Spaces and Fluid Learning Environments

While the arts are an ongoing valued part of community based and mainstream learning and instruction, it is not subject to mainstream standardized testing. Literacy, on the other hand, can have community based and mainstream components to its instruction, and therefore is a good candidate for assessing the possibilities of meaningful and relevant experiences of educators and learners within that learning environment. To that end, a case study conducted by Jocson (2005) investigated how youth poetry, particularly critical poetry as taught through the June Jordan Poetry for the People program, played an integral role in the lives of high school students inside and outside the mainstream classroom. The purpose of the study was to collect data, examining the practices and processes of youth participation in the Poetry for the People program, and any possible impact it may have had on the student's interest and engagement in literacy. Over the thirty month process, two student participants emerged from the pilot study through Jocson's (2005) data collection process included:

> Student, teacher, and parent interviews, student poetry artifacts and other related work, archived curriculum and other teaching materials, students' official records, video and audio footage of youth at work in classrooms, cafes, and elsewhere,

> electronic mail exchanges, and field notes from observations in and outside of schools. (p 51)

As this study investigated the development and transformation of the students personally, alongside their comprehensive poetry work, observations were conducted in and out of the school. Consequently, the most significant finding was the extension of poetry writing and performance outside the mainstream English classroom, which flowed into public performance spaces. Jocson (2005) refers to this blending of poetry instruction and learning, between the community and mainstream spaces in an education context as *hybrid literacies*.

While the findings of this study may not be generalizable to a larger population, the lessons learned by the cultural practices of high school youth poets illustrate "the concept of hybrid literacies is helpful to understand the ways that these youth used their abilities to read, write, perform, and listen to poetry and enter public spaces where their voices could be heard…and new positions emerged" (Jocson, 2005, p. 51). What's more, educators may better understand how youth learners are able to successfully engage in cultural practices that have academic significance and value the student as they develop into critically conscious individuals.

Jocson (2005) asserts the overall value of hybridity in literacy learning as evidenced in her study, is in the transformative capacity that exists when educators facilitate hybrid learning practices amongst disparate spaces. This admittance into multiple learning spaces that affirm, support and foster youth as readers and writers, not only creates "literate beings" but also develops and transforms young community members, ultimately transforming our society.

Transformative Cultural Work Education

While researchers and academic institutions are determining the worth of communities and clarifying what they should be learning from them, communities are concerned with doing the practical work for change (Hintz and Milan, 2010). Through pertinent, interconnected work, successful cultural work education initiatives benefit from their supportive relationships, and personal development in skills, knowledge and social interactions. It is this level of interaction that is at the heart of what researchers wish to explore - how rich, nurturing interactions can facilitate learning and growth in communities (Power & Waters, 2004).

Physical community spaces are one aspect of community initiatives and programs that facilitate learning, however the worth of these places is in the facilitation of creation and connection. The value is not rooted, nor dependent, on any one location. The space is merely a physical opportunity to connect community, and facilitate the process of shared learning. Every community member in the group contributes to nurturing and supporting one another. As such, each participant's personal development, change, growth and transformation occurs through various life experiences, accompanying the change and growth of the collective. This simultaneous growth dynamic, combined with social aspects of community, support an integral part of interactions of the collective which contribute to subsequent friendships that form along the path while engaged in community work (Power & Waters, 2004). Expanding on this point, hooks (2003) illuminates the connection between transformative education and the significance of community:

> Dominator culture has tried to keep us all afraid, to make us choose safety instead of risk, sameness instead of diversity. Moving through that fear, finding out

> what connects us, reveling in our differences; this is the process that brings us closer, that gives us a world of shared values, of meaningful community. (p. 197)

With strong bonds, and a nurturing environment that facilitates positive personal development, in the end, communities are as significant to cultural work education as cultural work education is to their respective communities. Renshaw (2002) states,

> The language of learning is a powerful tool to mobilise change. So too is community. The paradox of our present moment is that community is an elusive phenomenon, yet it is being deployed broadly across institutions and the professions to provide a vision for change. The beguiling power of these words – community and learning – needs to be recognised. Our role as educators is principally to clarify what is worthwhile learning and what sort of communities we should be learning for and within. (p. 20)

When cultural work education initiatives go about the business of learning and teaching, it is with a dual purpose: community as well as individual advantage (Power & Waters, 2004). Through the lens of art learning communities, it has been noted that the intensity that accompanies the development of a personal interest is the same quality evident in community. This passionate approach to working, learning, sharing and teaching - as a byproduct of sharing community space - is modeled to all the community members (Power & Waters, 2004). Moreover, when students engage in learning in mainstream classrooms that utilize arts integration pedagogical practices, students exhibit improved rates of comprehension and long-term retention. Furthermore, learning environments that are enriched by arts integrated education not only increase individual academic achievement, they also foster creative communities of academic excellence (Nobori, 2012).

Power and Waters (2004) presented conclusions of a case study that involved 150 participants in 30 different organizations in which they examined the contrast between community and classroom learning. The case study identified areas of concern in formal

schooling, what participants seek to learn in terms of practical learning, and the motivations for involvement in community learning initiatives. Conclusions of the research acknowledged the importance of support, and common purpose and values as key characteristics of community learning in arts settings. Their list of significant findings which have the potential to transform classroom learning included: the positive contribution role models play in the learning of others; and the location and time of learning which contributes to learners' "passionate involvement" that is supported by like-minded peers.

Just exactly how communities instigate forward movement appears to be most concerned with the issue of relevance at a particular time for people involved in progress, which is directly related to the set of people involved with the issues facing their community. This approach to understanding is concerned with the 'why' of learning and progress, and how it is achieved in collectives at different points in time, rather than investigating the 'how' learning has evolved. The latter emphasizes relevance between practical educational needs in a community and its relevance to a particular generation of community students (Renshaw, 2002).

Summary

The purpose of this research is to document the stories of eight cultural work educators. The Review of the Literature first looks at the history and emergence of community based education philosophies and methodologies, and their relationship to social change.

The second part of the Review of the Literature looks at the philosophical and pedagogical influences on cultural work education, most specifically popular, folk,

indigenous, alternative, experiential and transformative education. These personal, participatory and reflective ways of being in educational community are the philosophy upon which cultural work education communities are based. Understanding these principles through the eyes of bell hooks, (2006), Osorio, (2009), and Freire (1999) assists this researcher in determining the framework for observations and questions. It is through this lens that I intend to formulate the research thesis.

The Review of the Literature concludes with empirical research of successful, relevant, community based education initiatives which are transformative in nature, and most similar to cultural work education initiatives. Success and relevance are not however determined by the usual mainstream margin—the bottom line. Instead, success and relevance are determined by the fact that the community is beneficial to its members, is actively working to transform themselves and the world for the betterment of all, and that the community is still active (Gumucio Dagron, 2001). Although the research literature shows us different models of educational communities and schools, the selected cultural work educators and their respective communities for this research have no blueprint; they are dynamic, organic and vastly fluid - each adopting a different form as the need arises. Sometimes they fail to reach solutions, but the struggle for meaning, their connection with one another and with other communities, this horizontal networking, is in itself a solution. This passionate approach of working, learning, sharing, teaching, reflecting, communicating for the benefit of a better world where all are equal is a worthwhile endeavor (Barron, & Darling-Hammond, 2004). It is this spirit that the researcher hopes to capture within this dissertation. Through the voices of cultural workers, the narratives of authenticity and success outside of mainstream

education need to be told. Moreover, these mysteries need to be revealed (Gumucio Dagron, 2001; hooks, 2009).

CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY

The purpose of this dissertation is to document the stories of cultural workers who labored in successful educational initiatives, spanning the years from 2002 to 2013. The participant-narrators consisted of eight cultural workers who live and work in the United States, and were students in the mainstream education system. These participants are termed participant-narrators because they fulfill two specific roles: participants in this research, and narrators of their own oral histories. The objective of collecting and documenting narratives of cultural workers is three-fold: a) to investigate and document how social change in the field of cultural work education has occurred, b) connect their narratives to the academic community through inclusion in this research, and c) actively contribute to their social change through the collection and dissemination of their narratives.

Oral History Methodology

The methodological approach that guided this study was qualitative in nature. Additionally, I utilized oral history as the methodology for this study because, as Loose (2011) states:

> Oral history has been recognized as an invaluable method for preserving the largely undocumented stories of social movements and their actors. Today, hundreds of archives and interview projects document the history and voices of marginalized communities and of feminist, queer, environment and civil rights activists. Less explored, however, is the powerful role that oral history can play in not only documenting radical social change, but actively contributing to it. (para. 1)

In this study, I sought to understand the experiences of cultural workers who live in the United States, and participated in the 20th century and early 21st century

mainstream education system as students. I began the interview process with general questions that became more specific as certain themes were discovered and emerged from the data.

Research Setting

The research was conducted in the homes and community based work spaces in which the cultural workers live and work. Moreover, the researcher endeavored to conduct interviews and record oral histories with cultural workers in community based spaces that were familiar and accessible to them.

Gaining Access and Selecting the Participant-Narrators

To prepare for the interview process, I engaged in a comprehensive week-long testimonial and oral history collection training with Voice of Witness during the summer of 2012, and immediately followed that with a week-long residential Mindfulness for Educators intensive. These two learning experiences supported me in being flexible and present during my oral history collection practice with cultural workers. One aspect of recruitment that Voice of Witness encouraged each testimonial and oral history collector to employ is the "chain of trust." This is a method of asking the people who I already knew in a professional and personal context – people who already trusted me completely – to connect me to individuals who would be meaningful participant-narrators. One month after my training with Voice of Witness, I was contracted as a testimonial collector for Bioneers' Cultivating Women's Leadership intensive, where I would meet two of my participant-narrators, and be connected to a third. Consequently, the participant-narrators I encountered through my personal chain of trust, and this

subsequent study, in many ways derive from the researcher and participant-narrators' parallel work.

Participant-Narrators

The researcher used a purposeful sample, by selecting eight cultural workers. The participant-narrators were selected according to their interest and ability to thoroughly discuss their perceptions of successful qualities of cultural work education. Each of the participant- narrators worked as cultural work educators for five or more years, between 2002 through 2013 when the national discourse about marginalized learner populations in mainstream education emphasized failure rates. Since the research took place in different geographical regions in the United States, the participant-narrators reflected a diverse range of voices, cultures and histories. Additionally, the participant-narrators were recruited through the current relationships the researcher shares with cultural work initiatives. The eight participant-narrators are: Amy, Rulan, Nolan, Tim, Nick, Suaro, Yuka, and Sarah.

Amy is a circus artist committed to social justice. Additionally, she is the co-founder of Wise Fool New Mexico. Having grown up in a small central Pennsylvania town, Amy was exposed to student-activists for the first time, during her second year as a college student. This exposure greatly impacted her choice to become politically active by blending her passion for art with social action.

Rulan is an indigenous contemporary dancer and choreographer. Two of her strongest childhood and young adult influences as a cultural worker were her strict, classical ballet training, as well as traditional indigenous dance, specifically powwow. Incorporating many years of experience in the dance world, and seeing a need for Native

contemporary dance, Rulan founded and currently serves as artistic director and choreographer for Dancing Earth Creations, one of few indigenous contemporary dance ensembles in the United States.

Nolan is a Navajo storyteller by lineage, and he currently serves as the lead spoken word poetry coach at the Santa Fe Indian School; the same school that he attended for middle and high school. Nolan's poetry, writing and coaching work emphasizes the intersection of indigeneity and the arts in community.

Tim is an Irish poet, father, and founder of the Santa Fe Indian School Spoken Word Poetry Program. During his time as an educator, Tim exclusively taught Native American students at Native American schools, and his teaching has been thereby been anchored in the necessity of cultural awareness within education and the arts.

Nick is primarily engaged in sovereignty work and community organizing with the Lakota in Porcupine, Pine Ridge Reservation, South Dakota. Nick grew up in Minneapolis and Pine Ridge, and he is the founding director of Thunder Valley Community Development Corporation, which seeks to create the first ever planned regenerative development in Pine Ridge.

Yuka is Japanese, completed her mainstream higher education studies at art school in San Francisco, and currently serves as the Education Director for Precita Eyes Murals. Yuka's personal, socially engaged cultural work practice is as a public muralist in an urban setting.

Suaro is a public muralist, and the son of Precita Eyes Murals co-founder Susan Kelk Cervantes. Suaro grew up in San Francisco, where he presently works as a muralist

in marginalized communities, and teaches for Precita Eyes Murals along with other Bay Area organizations.

Sarah is a choreographer, dancer and educator. Sarah completed her mainstream education in the Bahamas and Candada, and studied traditional modern and ballet dance as a child and adult. Sarah has taught at Destiny Arts Center in Oakland, California for 23 years, where she currently serves as Artistic Director. Destiny Arts is an inner city, community based educational center focused on art education with marginalized learners.

Data Collection

I began the research process by viewing artifacts such as: archival photographs, videos, films, music, art and books that the cultural worker produced or co-contributed. The intention of this background work was so that the researcher was well-informed about the work and mainstream education history of each cultural worker before the interviews began. The data collection process included an audio recorded three-interview process with each participant-narrator over the course of five months, and each of the interviews were transcribed at the completion of the interview process.

The eight participant-narrators met with me for a three part interview series between 2012 and 2013. Due to the busy nature of the participant-narrators' work lives, I had to be flexible and accommodating: some participant-narrators were only able to conduct the three-part interview series in one day with breaks in between, while other participant-narrators were able to have their oral histories recorded as standalones spanning two or more months. Additionally, the interviews varied in duration. Some oral histories were as short as twenty five minutes, however most interviews were an hour or more in length. Every oral history interview was captured with an audio device,

and later transcribed. In addition to granting permission to be recorded, none of the participant-narrators requested anonymity. The participant-narrator's name, interview date(s), and location are indicated in the following table to provide an overview and clear details about the practices.

Table 1

Participant Interviews

Name	Date(s) of Interview	Location
Amy	December 19, 2012 January 24, 2013	Participant-narrator's home in Santa Fe, NM
Rulan	October 2, 2012 December 5, 2012 December 26, 2012	Participant-narrator and researcher's homes in Santa Fe, NM
Nolan	October 5, 2012 December 21, 2012 February 15, 2013	Santa Fe Indian School Spoken Word Poetry Program office in Santa Fe, NM
Tim	December 18, 2012 December 18, 2012 February 5, 2013	Participant-narrator's home in Santa Fe, NM
Nick	January 8, 2013	Thunder Valley Community Corporation in Pine Ridge Reservation, SD
Suaro	February 26, 2013 February 28, 2013	Precita Eyes Murals visitor location and participant-narrator's family home in San Francisco, CA
Yuka	October 22, 2012 February 25, 2013 February 26, 2013	Precita Eyes Mural Arts and Visitor center locations in San Francisco, CA
Sarah	February 28, 2013	Participant-narrator's home in Oakland, CA

The three-interview process, as outlined by Dolbeare and Schuman (as cited in Seidman, 2006), states:

> The first interview establishes the context of the participants' experience. The second allows participants to reconstruct the details of their experience within the context in which it occurs. And the third encourages the participants to reflect on the meaning their experience holds for them. (p. 17)

The goal of following these guidelines was to have each participant-narrator "reconstruct his or her experience" (Seidman, 2006, p. 15), verbalize how they problematize their world and derive meaning of their experiences as a learner and educator, all while capturing the oral history from their point of view. The purpose of the first interview was to ask each participant to share their life experience within the context of the discourse on failure during the 2002 through 2013 timeframe. The purpose of the second interview was to ask participants to give as many details as possible regarding their experiences as a cultural work educator, in light of that context. And the purpose of the third interview, in accordance with Dolbeare and Schuman (as cited in Seidman, 2006), was to ask the participants to

> reflect on the meaning of their experience. Making sense or making meaning requires that the participants look at how the factors in their lives interacted to bring them to their present situation. It also requires that they look at their present experience in detail and within the context with which it occurs. The combination of exploring the past to clarify the events that led participants to where they are now, and describing the concrete details of their present experience, establishes conditions for reflecting upon what they are now doing in their lives. The third interview can be productive only if the foundation for it has been established in the first two. (pp. 18-19)

Formal field observations could have added additional valuable data to this research, however the researcher was made aware that some informal and personal spaces must remain respectfully undocumented. In one particular spiritual setting, where the researcher was known to be an invited visitor or outsider to the community and culture, community members explicitly requested the researcher never speak or write about certain types of experiences, especially those of a spiritual and healing nature.

Interview Questions

The interview process was guided by three broad research questions. Below are the research questions and the probing questions, for the first interview in the series of three. The second interview questions were developed after the themes emerged from the first interview with each participant-narrator, and the third interview question was developed collaboratively with the participant-narrator.

Research Question #1: How do cultural workers view and define the way they conduct their lives and work?

Interview Questions

A. How would you define what you do?

B. What in your life prompted you to do this?

Research Question #2: Do cultural workers connect their stories to the current academic discourse on the purpose of education, and current gaps in our mainstream educational system? If so, how?

Interview Questions

A. What were your teachers like?

Research Question #3: Do cultural workers view their work as an active contribution to social change? If so, what may be the implications for social transformation?

Interview Questions

A. What does a typical teaching day look like for you?

B. Are there aspects to cultural work instruction that might be helpful to mainstream instruction?

Data Analysis

The researcher conducted an average of three interviews per month, related to the success of cultural work education initiatives. Because some participant-narrators were not able to do three interviews on three separate days, interviews for all of the participant-narrators were transcribed after the series of three interviews were complete, and the transcripts were given to each participant-narrator for review. Each interview was transcribed to identify and code for generative themes, without prescribing prior codes to the interviews. After conducting the first interviews with participants, I conducted additional interviews which were guided by grounded theory (Merriam, 2001), so that questions in the second subsequent interview were asked based on previous participant-narrator responses. In response to a comment that Amy made in the second interview about the relevance, and possible redundancy of an interview question, I determined that the third interview should be uniquely generated by each participant-narrator. Since the purpose of the third interview was to encourage the participants to reflect on the meaning their experiences holds for them (Seidman, 2006), I read a portion of this Methods section that encapsulates the rationale behind each interview in the three part series. I then asked each participant-narrator to create a question that prompted the telling of one or two oral history narratives that exemplified and illuminated the meaningfulness of their cultural work and teaching practices.

I began the coding process for generative themes by reading each interview, one at a time, and recording the main ideas which were expressed. After reading all of the interviews, cross-coding them, and categorizing each under different themes and sub-themes, I began to categorize the themes under headings. I dated each interview, and labeled each audio file with the corresponding interview date. When quoting the

participant-narrators, I used their initials and the number 1, 2 or 3, which correspond to the first, second or third interview. In the case of participants who had the same first initial, I used the first initial and second letter of their first name to differentiate. After reading the interviews several times for commonalities, I prescribed a color to each of the generative themes.

I utilized audio recording for each interview, produced a written transcript of all interviews, and videotaped the final interviews with each participant-narrator's consent. Ritchie (1995) explains the significance of videotaping oral history interviews through the following:

> Transcripts, audiotapes, and videotapes all impart the same basic information, but videotape provides an extra dimension… Transcripts reduce language to written symbols. Tape recordings convey tone, rhythm, volume and speech patterns. But the facial expressions and body language captured by videotape reveal even more of an interviewee's personality. A smile, a wink, a frown, or a look of perplexity would be missed in an audio interview and convey more than what can be reproduced in a transcript. (p. 109)

Unfortunately videotaping the oral histories while simultaneously taking notes and monitoring an audio recorder proved challenging, and I was not able to utilize this method with consistency or reliability. Consequently the visual cues did not contribute to the data or analysis.

Protection of Human Subjects

While the researcher made a formal application with the Institutional Review Board for the Protection of Human Subjects, it was determined that the oral history research activities described in the application met the requirements for an exemption from the Institutional Review Board's review. The researcher still followed appropriate research protocol by maintaining confidentiality of the data, and utilized appropriate

informed consent to protect and inform the participant-narrators. Before beginning the study, the researcher wrote and distributed a letter to cultural workers involved in successful education initiatives. This letter explained the problem and purpose statement of the study and also outlined the specifics, and step-by-step processes. Moreover, the research process, methodology, and interview questions were fully disclosed to each participant-narrator. The participant-narrators were not harmed in any way, and the interviews were conducted completely on a voluntary basis. Because all participant-narrators were over the age of 18, this letter asked for their direct permission to be interviewed.

Background of the Researcher

My perception of cultural work education has been shaped by my personal work as a mainstream educator, cultural worker, learner, and as a mother of a child who thrives in experiential and cultural work learning experiences. My first introduction to cultural work initiatives was as an observer, through my parents work in participatory media projects, street theater, and community education initiatives. The second wave of my familiarity with cultural work came through my own experience as a cultural worker and writer covering the Cuban Caravan. I also witnessed the positive difference in my oldest child's academic achievement when he began attending schools that had experiential, cultural, and arts immersion curriculum embedded in all of their classes, versus mainstream k-12 schools which did not. My first teaching experiences, however, were in mainstream classrooms beginning in 2001, teaching English as a Second Language with primarily undocumented students through a school district in Northern California. From there I continued to teach marginalized populations of adult learners in child development

and teacher education programs at the community college, undergraduate, and graduate degree levels. This combination of experiences spans my entire lifetime, and brings a certain perspective and/or bias to the research. Moreover, the formulation of the research questions and this study derived through my awareness and thoughtful reflection on the successes and failures of cultural work education initiatives that I observed or experienced first hand.

CHAPTER IV

RESULTS

Introduction

The purpose of this study is to document the work of eight cultural workers who facilitate learning from 2002 - 2013, laboring to transform lives within community-based organizations. This chapter will report the findings of these oral history collections as they narrate their stories along the research questions:

1. How do cultural workers view and define the way they conduct their lives and work?

2. Do cultural workers connect their stories to the current academic discourse on the purpose of education, and current gaps in our mainstream educational system? If so, how?

3. Do cultural workers view their work as an active contribution to social change? If so, what may be the implications for social transformation?

Gaining Access

Investigating the practices and educational methods of cultural workers was very challenging because the majority of the participant-narrators have high profile public careers, and some have had negative interview experiences with researchers, anthropologists, graduate students, and journalists. One participant-narrator initially declined to be interviewed, and two voiced strong reservations. Key factors that helped me gain access were: genuinely accepting invitations to participate in community gatherings for the sake of becoming part of the cultural workers' communities, and not for the purpose of recording these experiences as field work; being flexible in terms of

scheduling and location; welcoming the presence of listeners during the interviews who are part of the participant-narrators family, personal, or professional communities; and engaging in the oral history collection process with a spirit of reciprocity.

While it was not intentional or part of the original research methodology design, I found that the three part interview process granted me with the opportunity to build trust over time. Many of the participant-narrators welcomed me and my family to participate in their lives and organizations, and this generally would not have been possible if I only had one opportunity to engage with the participant-narrators, versus several opportunities spanning weeks and months.

Formal field observations could have added additional valuable data to this research, however I was aware, and had been cautioned by participant-narrators, to remain respectful and keep informal and personal spaces undocumented. Most of the community engagements that I was invited to were private, and only open to close community. I found these experiences to be personally enriching and transformative, and illuminating in terms of gaining deeper understanding of the cultural workers practices and values. Consequently, I was able to reflect on these experiences and ask questions in subsequent interviews that were more connected and relevant to their work and this research.

In the very beginning of this process, I learned that participant-narrators felt much more comfortable in sharing their oral histories if I arrived early; shared tea or a meal; and offered my own personal stories before allowing me to record their oral histories. This process in many ways reflects some of the best practices that cultural workers use to engage with many different communities. Rulan describes this kind of engagement as

"reciprocity and the cultural idea of give away, and of…not showing up somewhere and sort of being a tax on resources…you actually have something to give" (R. 1, p. 23).

Another way to establish authentic, reciprocal relationships with participant-narrators is by learning how to humbly enter a community; gaining access only after you have been deemed worthy to receive it; and dedicating the entire body of oral history work as a service to community. While Rulan spoke specifically about her experience in gaining access to communities as a cultural worker with Native groups, I found her engagement practices actually mirrored my experience in gaining access to some of the cultural workers in this study, as evidenced in the following transcript from her first interview:

> Education's been shared with me; it wasn't an easy thing…sometimes I'd go very enthusiastically asking about things in a way that's actually culturally inappropriate…now I can see twenty years later that what I was being taught was in order for you to be eligible and worthy to receive that information, you have to prove that you can be humble enough to serve a community which means sometimes I'm scrubbing the kitchens, sometimes it means making food…but it's just showing…how to be a part of a community circle. (R. 1, p. 25)

While I was never asked to scrub kitchen floors, I was asked to prepare food for the community within an hour of arriving in Pine Ridge to meet Nick. Before I could record Rulan's first interview, I had already attended two of her company's dance rehearsals at her request. I was quick to understand that the invitation extended to my entire family was a gesture to honor and introduce some of the meaningful people in both of our respective lives. Similarly, in order to record Tim's oral histories, I first had to meet his immediate family in their most private space, and at a sacred time: I recorded all of the interviews at Tim's family home, during the first weeks of their newborn son's life.

As it pertains to the idea of gaining access to communities that may be closed or

hesitant with outside researchers, there are two important things to note and consider: deep engagement happens through invitation, not insistence, over a period of time; and intimate and thorough oral history collection comes as a result of genuine respect and community relationships built on trust. There is likely a correlation between how confident and connected participant-narrators feel with their oral history researcher, and the depth of the stories that participant-narrators share regarding their lives.

Research Question #1:

How do cultural workers view and define the way they conduct their lives and work?

All of the cultural workers shared aspects of their work that exemplified family, through their oral histories. Additionally, two subthemes of family were discussed: learners feeling like they safely belong in cultural work learning spaces, and the idea that cultural workers embody principles of conscious care as a teaching method with marginalized learners.

Family

In the second interview with Amy, one theme which surfaced was how her teaching exemplifies family, fosters a sense of safety with the learners, and requires placing trust in the teachers due to the physical risk involved in practicing circus arts. As a response to the first oral history prompt in Amy's interview, she described a moment when she felt like her teaching exemplified family. Specifically, she had this to say:

> In Wise Fool, I feel like the people that I have created with through the years and that I teach with, definitely are my family. There's no doubt about that, and…we really try to create a really safe and supportive environment for people to be able to take risks because that's a lot of what we do. Especially with the circus arts, I feel like it's really about… encouraging people to take that little risk, especially kids, to take a risk in this like safe supportive environment and see…where that leads them. And I feel like in some ways you have to create a sense of family in order for people to feel safe to create that risk. (A. 2, p. 8)

Family and cultivating feelings of belonging within a learning context can differ based on a person's ethnicity, family of origin, and several other factors. Even though Amy is a mother, each of the participant-narrators confirmed through their oral histories that their teaching exemplifies family in ways that are relevant and unique to them. Although Rulan is not a biological mother, she has been mothered in her own family of origin, and has witnessed and experienced family life that exemplifies closeness, intimacy, and positive growth. It is from those feelings and foundation rooted in Native communities that Rulan generates her learning environments.

> The community is the classroom, it's the people, it's staff, it's these layers and layers of layers and they're all in relationship with each other…they literally…know each other, they live in the small community. So the classroom is that community and when I was brought there, the first thing that I was asked to do was work with…the youth…but it's actually intergenerational…There were older people, younger people…it was life. (R. 2, p. 32)

Sense of Safely Belonging

Both Amy and Rulan commented on the need for learning environments that evoke a sense of safety through the cultivation of feelings of family, yet Nolan stated an extension of this thought, in that his learning experience and environment was supported by two educators who felt like parents. "We ran it as a family, and McLaughlin and Madi were sort of our fathers and mothers in poetry and…they let us really have a space that was safe and that was comfortable for us to share our stories" (No. 1, pp. 54-55). As a result of his years of experience as a learner in the spoken word poetry program where he thrived in a safe space, Nolan now facilitates learning as the lead coach, where the learning community can intentionally tackle challenging content through poetry.

> Good writing comes from genuine experience…from that authentic place. You can't fake something like that…just yesterday we had an experience with another student of mine who had a twenty minute poem about his sexuality and how it

> impacted certain parts of his life… his relationship to a lot of his family members, and…he navigated it as bravely as anyone would. He took the time to really flesh out his story; to tell us the stuff that was going on, and there was no fear. There was no fear in any word that he spoke yesterday, and at the end of it, the entire class…was just completely affected, but also completely listening and locked into all…that he was saying. Now that's…writing, that's the real experience…of writing…the classroom gives you permission to do that…through that writing process…those times really mobilize the classroom…And we support that as…classmates but also as that community…we address ourselves as a family, and that's very true in moments like that. (No. 2, p. 59)

Even though Nolan and Nick do not live in the same region of the United States, nor do they work with the same Native American population, Nick shared similar stories about how his work in Pine Ridge engages the community in conversations where they collectively vision the future, and all community regeneration dialogue is driven by a desire to understand "how does my family and our…extended family benefit from these opportunities or from this vision statement? How are we going to incorporate…in our language you say *tiyospaye*, which means extended family…well, how does this fit into our thinking around tiyospayes?" (Ni. 2, p. 107). Tiyospaye, or extended family, within a learning context in Nick's teaching practice, means that everyone – all learners in that community based setting – are considered extended family; both learners and educators are family.

Sarah, on the other hand, finds that her teaching practice is varied when it comes to this theme of family. Although she feels that the "connection that's beyond just building technique" in a dance class is what makes family meaningful in that environment, Sarah also quickly notes that family is a "touchy word." The biggest reason appears to be the relationship that some students may have in their current families of origin, "because there's a lot of dysfunction in families, and a lot of trauma and injury that kids have gotten from their families …I'm really careful with that word. I don't use it

but kids do, and so if they feel that way, great." The feelings of safety and security – feelings that may or may not be associated with being in a family - carry a stronger emphasis and meaning for Sarah as a facilitator of learning. "To me it's are we creating an authentic community that feels safe for kids to share who they are?" (Sa. 2, p. 166). From Sarah's perspective, establishing and maintaining authentic community where everyone feels safe in cultural work learning environments carries a deeper meaning than attempting to re-create family dynamics. In essence, Sarah believes safety is a high priority in learning settings, however safety is not linked to the educators belief in all students and learners being a family.

Conscious Care

Building safe learning spaces and a strong sense of belonging were themes voiced by most of the participant-narrators, however all participant-narrators spoke about receiving and giving conscious care as a mainstay in their teaching practices. Amy describes this idea as placing value and importance in learning environments that not only are welcoming and inclusive, but are also encouraging to learners. At the very onset of Amy's first oral history, she clearly demonstrates how cultural workers are able to consciously care for learners by emphasizing their support, and offering love.

> And just seeing…the young boy who just is kind of coming out in his life and seeing how…important it was for him to have a place where he's totally accepted…totally loved. We see all the beauty that he's bringing into the world and we're constantly…encouraging. (A. 2, p. 12)

Other participant-narrators shared their stories of how their practices of being welcoming, respectful, and loving as cultural workers is actually a request extended to learners to join in the practice of teaching and learning. Rulan termed this practice of conscious care and respect, cultural protocol. The response she received from a Lakota

elder confirmed the importance of conscious care, and noted that while the practice is not new to Native people, it is extremely valuable.

> One of the things that I've learned in my journeys is the protocol. What we do first is…ask for a representative of the local tribal nation…in advance…and we ask permission to perform…to share…to teach their children… Astonishing reactions to that…was in South Dakota and the grandmother…decided to be the one to…welcome us. She had tears coming down her face and she said, this protocol has been forgotten for so long. I feel so good that you, as young people, have remembered this because I didn't think anyone would remember this anymore. And…then we gave gifts. We gave them sage…she gave each one of the…dancers a buffalo earring or a buffalo necklace made out of bone from their buffalo. I mean, this is the Lakota people you know. They're often noted as being some of the most materially impoverished people of the United States but generous…people, especially when you meet them with respect. (R. 3, pp. 46-47)

In addition to requesting permission to engage with a learning community, Nolan spoke about his experiences in practicing conscious care that encompasses very strong, active listening, especially when learners are feeling vulnerable. One particular instance involved the learner's feelings of uncertainty, combined with Nolan's own feelings of vulnerability as the person involved in facilitating the learning process. When Nolan spoke about these challenging feelings, he did not interpret these experiences as disturbances, or an add-on to the learning process, but rather a critical component for authentic learning and teaching to occur and evolve.

> She pulled out this notebook when she started speaking and...she started speaking her story, and the bell rang for class to begin, and I was still listening to the poem, she was still speaking, and by that time all of the students had walked into the classroom… she hadn't seen them come in. They were all settled behind her listening, and it was about fifteen minutes later that she finished the poem, she was crying. You could see that she was rattled by what she had just done…and I…wasn't sure what to do as an educator, as the teacher of that classroom, as the guy that's supposed to steer the ship. I had no idea what to do with that. I've had that experience before as a poet, where you just…completely surrender yourself to the poem, and I've remembered when I was in that situation, all I wanted to know was that someone was listening. And so I looked at her and I said, 'Jamie, turn around…that's your entire family behind you. All of them walked in right as you were speaking, right as you started your poem, as quietly as they could, and

> they were all there supporting you,' and I said 'you know, it's difficult to, to have an experience like that, where you know people are watching, but I didn't see you flinch, I didn't see you hesitate at all…those are the people that are here to support you, when you have experiences like that, when you go into those deep authentic places. We're all here, we're all writers, and we're all human beyond all that. You know, we're listening.' And you know the entire class came up to her, we all gave her a hug, we all gave her support and class started after that. (No. 2, p. 58)

Tim's experience in terms of cultivating conscious care in learning environments is different than Amy, Rulan and Nolan in that he indicated feeling challenged in being so close with his students in Pine Ridge that he actually had a very hard time leaving the reservation. Consequently, Tim intended to teach differently once he arrived at the Santa Fe Indian School, however he was not able to divorce the caring part of himself from his work as a cultural work educator.

> I remember in South Dakota as a very young teacher…I just embraced all those kids so deeply that I had to rip my heart out of my chest to leave…when I came to the Indian School I said…I'm gonna be a teacher you know and…respect the kids, it's gonna be great but I'm not gonna…be their dad and have to show up to all of their events… I think in a sense it's more like a big brother or an uncle in that sort of familial love, but there's… a sense that you're…parenting the young people and you're helping them to…go through their journey and find their way in the world. (T. 2, pp. 81-82)

Like Nolan and Tim's close relationship, Yuka spoke about her experience of being supported in a familial way within the organization where she teaches, by the person who supervises her work. "Susan Cervantes, my director…is the best boss ever…and she's always supportive. She would always come to my art shows. She's just more…like a mother than like a director…I feel very close to her…it's the way she approaches…community" (Y. 1, p. 119).

Sarah also spoke about how she has learned to establish strong connections between learner and educator, however she uses strong listening skills that indicate her

desire to understand, care for, and collaborate with learners. During Sarah's second oral history interview, she recounted a time when she received feedback from her students that they did not want her to comment after everything they shared in an intimate retreat setting. The students said, "we don't really want to hear from you…we want to just share and we want you to just listen." While taking that kind of feedback felt "a little rough from the teenagers," Sarah knew that her students were also "so loving…" and that they "understood the value of my work and they just wanted me to be quieter" (Sa. 2, p. 166). Through the valuing of her students' voice and deep listening, Sarah has learned how to keep the space open to value the work of both student and educator.

Cultural Worker: Practitioners Engaged in Learning

Though the theme of family and creating a safe environment for learning to emerge are exemplified through particular teaching experiences in a circus arts environment, Amy is quick to acknowledge that circus arts is her medium as a cultural worker, however it is her belief that several mediums can cultivate teaching and learning in community that are meaningful for learners and educators.

> Those were just the mediums that came to the forefront…here I am, the practitioner. I'm actually being an activist….And I think that that's what holds across the board when you get people together who are doing this kind of work, is that the medium is like, you know, it's just the medium that you happen to work in. But what you're really doing is the same thing that they're doing. They're just using…spoken word, and you're using puppets, and this person is using…visual arts. (A. 3, p. 20)

One key aspect of cultural work is performance, and the ability to share and amplify what students learn and educators have facilitated within their respective mediums is worthwhile. The experience of preparing students to perform as a facet of

their learning, along with the act of performing, are reported by Amy as having a positive impact on both educators and learners.

> We had said six kids, and he brought eight to the auditions, and then we were trying to…decide, and so then he starts telling us their stories…they live…on the outskirts of Española and they don't have any…running water or electricity…and they've had this hardship their whole lives. One kid's coming out as gay and his family is totally against him and…just…every single kid there was some like intense story. And we were like, 'We'll take them all!'…because we're not going to turn a kid away. And then just watching their process, and watching them perform, and…they just grew twenty times bigger every day that they were on that stage. (A. 2, pp. 11 -12)

While Nolan and Tim practice and teach poetry, they, like Amy, echo the sentiment that performance can be used as a vehicle to motivate and stir educators and learners equally. Nolan describes this process as one that nurtures and nourishes everyone involved, and Tim depicts it as an absolutely necessary component to cultural work. Tim also believes that cultural workers who engage in learning facilitation must be consistently vested in their own creative restoration in order to continue guiding learning in meaningful, relevant and successful ways.

> As an artist… when I was running or leading the Spoken Word program, which I still am but in a different way, I constantly…tried to at least regularly check in and say 'where am I on this artistic path, and how does that relate to…my qualification or…justification in standing up here and teaching this material? If I'm not progressing, then how do I justify being in this position in front of others saying…you should be on this path and learning *x*, *y*, and *z*…' Which is why I could never understand a teacher who teaches the exact same material, in the exact same way, twenty, thirty years in a row because it's like what's been refreshed in you? And what's changing or what's blocked if it's not being refreshed, you know. Just because the faces are different and they haven't heard it before, doesn't mean that that story still is of the moment. So there were several times throughout the process of the nine years …at the Santa Fe Indian School….where I would say I need to do something as a writer, or as a performer, because essentially I was guiding young people in both. (T. 3, pp. 89-90)

Nick on the other hand, engages in his cultural work as a community organizer, and he places heavy emphasis on exploring and understanding what motivates

communities into active participation and contribution to their own learning and development. In Nick's first interview, he wondered aloud, "how do we get people riled up around making stuff happen? How do we get people motivated to do something…" (Ni. 1, p. 103). While Nick and Tim share the belief that learning must be relevant to the learner's life and fueled by their motivation, Nick's community organizer perspective places greater emphasis on individuals and communities that identify their motivations, and then subsequently convert those motivations into a call to action. Less importance is placed on a singular person who guides the learning, or their ensuing need for renewal in their cultural work practice, and greater importance is placed on the collective community and the various reasons they truly desire to learn.

Research Question #2:

Do cultural workers connect their stories to the current academic discourse on the purpose of education, and current gaps in our mainstream educational system? If so, how?

Popular Education: Educator as Facilitator

One hallmark of cultural work learning experiences is the belief in popular education strategies. Specific features include: non-hierarchical learning environments that are empowerment based, and rooted in each learner's personal experiences. Additionally, learning is seen as a mutual occurrence that is a responsibility equally shared between learner and educator. To that end, Amy believes that she learns on a deeper level through teaching, and that her teaching and learning are inexplicably linked. "I feel like teaching to me is really about being in that dialogue…you're both learning…I just have certain skills I'm sharing with the other person, but they always have something

they're sharing with me of equal value, whether they're like 6 years old or 66 years old, you know" (A. 1, p. 5). All eight participant-narrators see their role in learning environments as practitioners who facilitate the process of learning, and Amy recounted one story from this current year of teaching where she felt her role as facilitator was strongly illustrated.

> This woman who…came to BUST…was really quite strong and capable…but when she would get up on the trapeze…she'd get into the position and she would not let go of that bar. Absolutely not. And we were like, 'Okay, you're totally safe here, and I'm spotting you, and just release this one hand, just like this. Just release it, and bring it back.' Could not do it. Could not do it! Really intense, and she's a very intense person already…Through the process of BUST, she really discovered this remembrance in her body of herself…always wanting to be in the air, swinging, and feeling this total freedom in her body, and…at the age of ten she had been molested or, you know, had an experience like that, and she just shut it all down…she never lived in her body like that again. And she was now in her…late thirties, early forties, and all of a sudden was like opening this doorway to…herself when she was a young woman. …And she made this really amazing trapeze routine that was very simple, but she wrote a poem -- a story, it was really more of a spoken word piece…about that experience of…being this person that was like that, and then shutting down and feeling like she had to be totally in control, and her body wasn't okay…And she recorded the story, and she played it while she was doing this very simple trapeze routine. And…just…the simplest letting go of her hand, watching her do that, was like profound…it was this amazing experience, and I feel like…that community moment…of tapping into that fragile place and of coming through…and having this…amazing moment…I can't even describe it…it's all about her and her experience, but it's not at all about her. It's like every single person is sharing that, and creating community around that. And…ten years of BUST, I feel like that group of women, the bond between the entire group was unbelievably strong. Like I just felt like this group, they've created a total family, and the levels of support for each other, and the depth that they were willing to go in front of each other, that she was willing to…do that on stage, and perform it, and have that story told, in her own voice…it was just really moving and really inspiring…This is why I teach. Because I'm just opening a doorway for people to step through and have this experience. They're doing it, you know. I'm just like going, 'Here.' (A. 3, pp. 17-18)

Rulan sees her role as a facilitator too, especially when she is choreographing pieces with her dance company. Popular education is a term that Rulan does not use, however she did describe some of the tenets in her teaching practice, most specifically

her idea of not being someone who is "coming in as an outsider," but instead as a trusted person who enhances "what they have already" (R. 2, p. 33). Rulan sees herself as a facilitator of mutual empowerment, whereby the student and teacher are educating and learning to support the learner to "be in that empowered…position…that mutual thing of…you're teaching me, and then I will reflect it back to you" (R. 2, p. 33). Rulan also believes a link exists between practitioner based teaching, and experiential learning.

> I'm trying to reorient the company away from how I grew up as a dancer, which was based on hierarchy…to…a way of empowering each person in the circle to cultivate their leadership practice…I don't know…the kind of fancy academic terminology, but experiential education is definitely…ongoing, and rich and…constant and…accidental sometimes, spontaneous sometimes…but it's a huge part, huge part. So…as I continue… to teach, I also continue to learn. (R. 1, p. 25)

Just as Rulan elaborated on her non-hierarchical learning and instruction philosophies and practices, Nolan also sees his role as a practitioner facilitating the process of learning in a non-hierarchical, empowered manner. For Nolan, coaching spoken word poetry is viewed more as a conversation, where he invites the learners into his experience as a writer, which serves the purpose of guiding them in their experiences in learning (No. 2, p. 60).

Tim further describes this phenomenon of teaching as a facilitator of "the creative process whereby the students…are sort of discovering and then bringing to life their stories through poetry" (T. 1, p. 69). This happens through a process of:

> Identifying the poem that wants to come and then writing that poem and then crafting, refining, shaping that poem, and then putting it into the air, into their breathe and into their body through a dramatic but more sort of spiritual presentation of it. (T. 1, p. 69)

In the particular case of teaching Native American students, Tim's view is that the entire process is "almost like…the age old…tradition of storytelling in all cultures, but with

Native Americans of course it's a very strong tradition that's still alive and well" (T 1, p. 69).

The final theme Tim touched on was the valuing of students' voice, specifically as it relates to Native American students learning, and cultivating literacy arts through poetry and storytelling. "So with young Natives, which is whom I've worked with exclusively in my…career as an educator, they come from a background and a legacy of storytelling and they're familiar with stories. Usually as the listener though." The challenge and gift of working with spoken word poetry with Native students from Tim's perspective is that "usually the story tellers are the elders, so it's almost like storytelling backwards in a sense that they're writing the material, creating material and then they're bringing it back into the oral tradition," (T1, p. 69). While this process is contrary to traditional Native storytelling practice, it also has the capacity to work:

> Best for young people in order to feel like they have the confidence and authority to be story tellers…they really hone in on what is the story and how am I going to tell it and then bring it into the air and into this direct sharing with…others. (T. 1, p. 69)

The theme of popular education came up through Nick's interviews just as it did in all the participant-narrators, however for the first and only time it was actually referred to by its name, not just described by its characteristics.

> Community engagement…that's the way that we teach. We believe in the total popular education model, like we believe in the idea, the simple idea that…whether you're trying to build a medical facility, a house, a community, create opportunities for youth, that there's no experts that are going to come in on some white horse into Pine Ridge and say, 'We've got the solution for all you Indians.' We believe that…the knowledge that's needed to create the solution is sitting in that room because if they're not sitting in that room, then they're not there, they're not committed to it. And so that's the way that we've approached everything. (Ni. 1, p. 104)

Within the context of public mural art creation and instruction, Yuka believes popular education is best illustrated through consensus and the notion of educator as facilitator. Furthermore, the process of teaching, practicing and engaging in mural arts for the educator is not about initiating or creating the work in a hierarchical manner, but as an equal community.

> You want to give the ownership to the…community who you're teaching the art to…you want to have them feel…the ownership…you don't wanna override their ideas and…influence them in any way…you just want to be directing them…and helping them out…that's definitely one of the things that I learned is…directing the community in their way and…not stepping on their toes, and you know hearing their voice clearly because…when you start…having it your way…especially with kids…they would pretty much stop painting. (Y. 1, p 119).

The theme of valuing student's voice as it applies to Yuka's work, is described as a progression in the mural making method itself. "There is a structure for doing murals, it's like there's an order how to hear everybody's voice and…putting that out on the walls." Valuing student's voice in the framework of mural arts education and the creation process also requires everyone to work together, unifying and combining their individual work into the collective. "With mural workshops…it's not like you grid the wall and each square…belongs to somebody…it's not …divided like that, it's more like…blending" (Y. 1, pp. 119-120).

Working in the same medium as Yuka, and for the same mural arts organization, Suaro describes his cultural work practice in creating murals with the public as a collaborative process that speaks to the theme of popular education. In Suaro's teaching experience, the educator is "facilitating a group of people…whether it's in a school group or even just a group of individuals that want to come together and bring beauty and bring hope." The way this process begins is through a discussion, with emphasis placed on

communication during the initial stage of learning and working together. "You don't even see anything on paper until you've kind of worked out this discussion and communicate to each other what we want to see, and then all those ideas are kind of broken down into a focus" (Su. 2, p 143). Suaro's teaching work not only initiates the learning process in a collaborative, community driven approach, but it also continues throughout the entire mural learning and creation process.

Like Suaro and the other participant-narrators, Sarah's teaching integrates cultural work into learning, however she specifically works in a way that is not "about the technique," but more as a means to fully engage learners. The way that her "whole discipline of the art has morphed into the discipline of deep engagement and collaboration" speaks to the theme of popular education; seeing students as collaborators, and using the learning process as one that drives commitment, deep learning, and student generated instruction (Sa. 1, p. 163).

Desire and Commitment

Passion

Passion and cultural work education go hand-in-hand for each of the participant-narrators, as it appears to represent a symbiotic relationship. Feelings of safety, family, and belonging were expressed as vital components to learning, however the theme of passion emerged during the oral history interviews as a characteristic that draws cultural workers into learning environments and gives them an additional strong reason for remaining. Amy speaks about the feeling she and her learners have when they both experience passion. It appears to ignite teaching and learning similarly.

> The journeys and experiences that I have with my students, they're feeding each other all the time, back and forth, not in either direction, specifically, but always

> back and forth…my passion around teaching and educating. And for each person it's a little bit different, what that is to them, and reliving that moment over and over and over again is what feeds the passion for me to do my work in the world as me, as an artist, because I'm constantly re-seeing over again from someone else's perspective this amazing moment of discovery. (A. 3, pp. 14-15)

Rulan's interviews also illustrated the significance of passion and commitment, especially as it relates to her work in the realm of indigenous contemporary dance.

> I was not a natural born dancer…I had to work at everything…the kind of student I am has to do with passion and commitment…the teachers that I found my way to...knew I wasn't…a super talented ballerina, but they could see the fire in my eyes. (R. 1, p. 26)

When present and pervasive in cultural learning environments, passion and commitment are reported to drive learner success. This occurrence is not reported to come about by happenstance, but rather through the student's desire to achieve, especially if the learning is hard won. Rulan details her own experience in self-motivation as a dancer, and how her early negative and oppressive learning experiences actually fueled her devotion to mastering dance and evolving this legacy into healthy, inclusive, affirming practices in the field of professional, indigenous contemporary dance.

> It's funny…when it got down to it...that pushing me down…made me…a stronger person…it actually impacted the way I would move as apposed to trying to look pretty…I was given beautiful dance solos and principle roles…because of that quality, so I think it was part of me, and it was definitely enhanced by the situation. And then on the other side, in this sort of patience as a strict teacher, and meticulousness of learning how to do things in the right way, the good way, it gave me the sense of this legacy that I would have. It was so hard won that I would want to…be sure to carry it into my work. (R. 3, p. 44)

Rulan has been able to successfully shift from her own oppressive learning experiences in her earlier years as a dance student, to become a choreographer who creates positive learning environments for her dancers, which are charged with passion and her commitment to transforming the field for indigenous dancers.

There is something about creativity being inherent in cultural work education that invites passion into learning environments and increases the capacity for transformation. Even though Nolan states his work with poetry taps into healing and transformative capacities through story, he believes passion is most closely aligned and exemplified in his learning facilitation practice when students have the opportunity to perform.

> I feel good when I'm in the classroom, when I'm doing this…when I can hold a piece of writing and…see someone else beginning the journey, you know, up on stage while they're speaking their own version of truth and…its blossoming stages, like it's just starting to break open, but you can see where it can go. And you can see the sort of potential that it has, and the medicine that it carries, and the power to work on people. I think that's the coolest part and…I really… enjoy it, and I want everyone that encounters this art form to enjoy it too…to feel something. (No. 3, p. 68)

Passion, as it comes through in the preparation and blossoming of spoken word poetry performance, seems to inspire teaching that honors the ongoing process of learning, and reflects the different ways that Nolan teaches passionately and embodies popular and indigenous education philosophies.

Tim expanded on the combination of these ideas in his first interview as he described how he views the role passion plays in his teaching practice, and how mainstream education is currently failing in adequately engaging students in a holistic sense. Tim has specific views of how mainstream education could be improved. He believes learners could be educated in ways that mirror the positive ways their communities function, and make strong concerted efforts to:

> Not divorce the brain from the body, you know or the brain from the heart…the way I look at education as we're currently doing it, if you will, is it's sort of these…almost exclusively left brain type pursuits that…bypass the heart and the body and the spirit, ignore those things and…I want all those nine or infinite number of intelligences to be engaged and thriving in the classroom that I'm gonna facilitate and…to me that begins with…the heart. (T. 1, p. 75)

Sarah also talked about heart centered teaching as a basis for creating and fostering passionate learning environments, however she recounted her feelings in a way that evolved which were not automatic; instead they grew over time.

> I just felt like it was a calling even though it was really hard for me… but I…would pray…do I have to keep doing this and the answer was always yes. Get down there and do it…Get back down there and get on with it…And then I fell in love with it probably after about eight years…And I was like, I hate it. I mean, I loved it and I hated it, and the hated it part was just the resistance that I was having to it. And once I stopped resisting it, I stopped being on tour with dance companies and started actually just really focusing on the work with kids, I realized that it was what I was supposed to do. (Sa. 1, pp. 157-158)

The progression of moving from resisting the role of educator, to loving her work facilitating learning and engagement, speaks to the theme of transformation. In her case, her transformation was spiritual, and while the process took years to develop, once the realization did arrive, Sarah felt it immediately. "I landed in the understanding that teaching was my calling. It just hit me over the head. There was…no gradual process, there was no I have this calling and I'm going to go learn how to do this" (Sa. 1, p. 161). The landing may have been abrupt and instantaneous for Sarah, however the work of sustaining this knowledge, and working from this new level of understanding has taken her ongoing effort. Sarah describes her work as being "lit, open, cracked, ready to go every single class," and in the broader sense, a calling that is stimulated by desire and commitment (Sa. 3, p. 172). Moreover, Sarah has witnessed that when she is passionate in everything that she does in the learning environment, she is able to ask and receive the same level of passion and enthusiasm from her learners.

Expectations

Cultural work educators have and instill consistent expectations of their learners, and this approach is reported to create opportunities for learners to access their own

successful learning outcomes. Expectations can be challenging for learners and may appear harsh, however they are not oppressive or hateful. Expectations are used to infuse another layer in learner driven education. To that end, Rulan shared a story in the third interview that described how expectations in a community learning environment that is interdependent on each other, can actually result in the entire learning community experiencing combined success and transformation.

> They knew that…I was gonna bring out the best in them. And so they were willing to work…weekly by 8:30…Whatever the call time was, they had to be there fifteen minutes early. The first day, they didn't know that there was a test…we'd told the story the night before when we were sitting around the fire in the opening circle and one of the guys was talking about his deer dance and how he'd had an appointment at 4 in the morning to meet his teacher, and he was late, and the teacher didn't speak to him for three years or something like that. The story was told without the clear instruction of "ok, and this means you need to respect the call time." So when the call time was set and it wasn't even a question of him being late, it was that he was not early and prepared for his teacher at 4 am...so we did the same thing. We set our call time, they came strolling in at the call time or a little later, and we were just like "ok," and we made them run around the track, run ten laps…then do pushups…and they learned. That was the beginning of the day, the first day. From there…we worked from 8 in the morning until 8 at night, then we'd do more after that…we didn't have lunch breaks that were very long, and they didn't have any money. I was getting food donations from the farmer's market and the food depot, so they had to get up even earlier, cook their own food, put it into a Tupperware, put it into a cooler, and transport themselves, and be there before call time. And you know what? After that first day, they did it. They learned about being in community, looking out for each other…it's not enough for just one of them to be on time, cause there's only one car. We're doing it on a tight budget, so they all had to cram in and I think the friendships…you'll have those for life, but also the discipline. They left saying "I wasn't sure, I didn't know if I was Native enough." Like nobody ever feels that they're ethnic enough, and then by the end, competence….saying I know I can do anything that I set my mind to, because look what we did! We weren't even in shape but all of a sudden we're like you know running the track, doing pushups, learning Aztec and capoeira…and hip hop all in one day, plus two hours of choreography, plus music theory. (R. 3, pp. 45-46)

Pushing students to meet or exceed expectations is something that Nolan described in his relationship with Tim, before he transitioned into lead spoken word

poetry coach. As Nolan now reflects on this phase of their relationship, and his personal trajectory in learning and teaching, he is able to understand how pushing students is part of the work cultural workers do when they are teaching, and why it actually supports learners achieve excellence. When I asked Nolan to tell me about his teachers, it is interesting that he chose to only acknowledge Tim, and to speak about the impact Tim's level of expectations had on Nolan's learning and teaching life.

> He was a very gentle but stirring teacher, he still is and…he really knows …where you need to challenge yourself, 'cause he can see when you shy away from something and that's…part of his job as a teacher. He…can see you not extending yourself…and you know more often than not…he was actually right…almost all of the time, of what I needed to be challenged on, and how I should go about things…it really made…me work for…my role here and really appreciate the work that he did alone, for…many many years. (No. 1, p. 54)

The theme of consistent expectations also resonated with Nick as he recounted why he moved back to Pine Ridge after a year of travels throughout the United States to pursue a life in community organizing. One of the things that Nick did when he returned to Pine Ridge was to enroll in the tribal college, which uniquely teaches Lakota Studies by medicine people and spiritual leaders. Nick credits this kind of education as having strongly contributed to his style of cultural work via community organizing, as well as having "shaped a lot of…who I am and why I'm doing what I'm doing" (Ni. 1, p 104). In addition to the tribal college, Nick also attributes his mother and father and extended family in influencing his life path and the choices he has made, along with the ways that he has grown, transformed, and changed. To that end, the theme of desire, commitment and expectation overlap with the theme of transformation in Nick's oral histories, but not in the form where one consciously chooses the work of social justice. The way Nick speaks of his transformation is from a personal sense, with the added notion of his

personal path having been woven together to the legacy of the family with which he was born.

> I mean my mother and father, you know, met at Wounded Knee in 1970s. My mom was part of the traditional people here on Pine Ridge that were trying to fight for their rights. My dad and his side of the family came from a civil rights background and so I feel like…in the families that I grew up in, both my mom's side and my dad's side, it wasn't asking the question of…what are you going to do when you grow up? Or what do you want to be when you grow up? To me it was sort of like by their actions as parents, by contributing to society and the community, it was sort of like what are you going to do to contribute to society? What are you going to do to contribute to your people, to your community? And so I guess there was no…conscious…thing, I woke up one day and I was like, oh, this is it. I'm going to do this. To me it was expected. (Ni. 1, p. 102)

Nick's family expected he would contribute to society in positive ways, and that the purpose of his contribution would have a direct and meaningful impact on his community. This level of expectation influences Nick's views on education, identity, cultural work, and his notion for what is possible for the future of Lakota people. When I asked Nick about his expectations of education, his response integrated the different values of the Lakota, with expectations that the current generation embrace the view that their best is yet to come. In order for this to occur, high expectations have to be directly tied to deep meaning for the community. Specifically, Nick had this to say:

> You're looking at education, you're looking at these different things in those contexts of who we are. People, place, identity, all those things are intertwined, and how to find and evolve those things, too. Because we'll be the first to say, like many Indian nations sort of hold up the past so high, hold up the past of how our cultures were long ago so high to this place of, well, we'll never achieve what our ancestors achieved because we could never live in teepees on the prairie. And it's like, I don't know if I want to live in teepees on the prairie, and I don't know if the best days of our people are behind us. Who is to say that the best of our people aren't in front of us. The best days of the Lakota are in front of us, not behind us. And that means that whatever culture that we have, we do have responsibility to evolve it, and to change it, and to adapt it to the time of today…so that the next generation can have something there to evolve and to change. (Ni. 3, p. 115)

Even though several participant-narrators spoke about the importance of cultural workers creating learning environments that personify high expectations, it still seemed a bit unclear about how their process generates community based expectations, and once those expectations are clear, how cultural workers and learners go about achieving them. Is it a construct of building learning experiences in a non-hierarchical manner, or does creativity and cultural work play a significant role in this process? As I listened to the responses of the oral history prompts in each interview series, I started to hear responses to these questions which clarified how cultural workers can use their early experiences as learners to create tools for building their learning environments as educators. Sarah talked about being pushed to succeed, as a result of having strict dance teachers. Although hard work and high expectations can feel challenging, Sarah learned discipline and transformed those learnings into her cultural work education practices which are built on structure. Moreover, Sarah speaks about strictness, expectations and structure with feelings of passion, affection, and gratitude.

> My very first dance teacher was when I was five, and…I had two male ballet dance teachers…Both of them were extremely strict and they just gave me a really strong foundation of technique… I was really into the strictness of it and the structure of it, because I had a lot of chaos in my life as a kid…But I really loved those teachers. They really pushed me and…it wasn't like I felt like they believed in me…It was more just like they pushed me. It's like this is what you're supposed to be doing. Turn your legs out, point your toes harder, work hard. This is what it's about. So I learned discipline from them, and a passion… When I danced in dance companies, my teachers were my directors and they were women….and to me I always wanted to be good at whatever I did, and so I wanted to be around people who were good at whatever they were doing; I found those people and stuck with them. I knew that the art of teaching was just as much of a rigorous discipline as the art of dance and theater, and I was interested in that rigor. And not perfecting it, because there's no perfection of anything, but getting really good at it. And, you know, that whole thing of like it takes 10 years or 10,000 hours to become a master at something? I really got that. After 10 years of teaching I was like, damn, I'm good at this... I'm so much better…I really recognize…my torture the first eight years of teaching was

> …that I was not really that good at it. You know, I could see…because I had a mentor, I could see Kate and how bad-ass she was at teaching.
> (Sa. 1, pp. 158-160)

According to Sarah, having a mentor who can guide the development process of becoming a cultural work educator, contributes to the likelihood of educator success. Having high expectations does not mean that cultural workers turn their passion for their discipline and teaching practice into efforts to attain perfection for the learner or educator. Mastery, and a commitment to rigor, is recognized as the process and goal.

Research Question #3:

Do cultural workers view their work as an active contribution to social change?

If so, what may be the implications for social transformation?

Solution-Bound: Transformation of Cultural Workers

Authenticity

Another aspect of the teaching and learning experiences that contributes to the reported successful outcomes of the participant-narrators, is a commitment to sustaining an authentic cultural work and teaching practice. Embedded in this idea is the dedication to bring one's whole self to the work. As a teacher, Tim clearly feels very close with his students, however having a shared familial bond is not the only primary aspect of his teaching. Tim views his teaching as an artist, and he does not "value the so called academic achievement over doing something that's real and meaningful and…for me it's the only way I can stand up there and teach and say…this is worth doing" (T. 1, p. 75). This level of authentic engagement, combined with his role as a practicing cultural worker, is a fundamental means to creating and sustaining a thriving classroom where he can facilitate literary arts learning in dynamic ways. Even though Tim's cultural and

teaching work embodied a hybrid career, and the learning he facilitated was in hybrid spaces that encompassed mainstream and community based classrooms, in the end, Tim was not able to reconcile his alternative approaches with mainstream education, and he left the classroom.

> As a poet I'm always looking for the real, the deep experience of life and so I wanted that, and I watch other counselors who are mostly interested in how do I get these kids to not annoy me, or get this to work? You know…that wasn't my journey at all, it, and I would burn myself out as I've done throughout my career about like making it the most incredible thing I could, so I think I realized that I loved it, and that there was something in it for me. That I had some aptitude for it …I'm kind of good at this…but then I had my first dilemma which was…I don't want to be in a classroom. I've always detested classroom stuff but yet I want to work with kids. So when the opportunity arouse on the Indian reservation I just said to myself, that's, this is what kids do, and I'm not at the point in my life where I'm gonna change society but I'm just gonna go into the classroom and see what…works for me, and it's always been very alternative. It's been the path that I've followed…I'm gonna work with these institutions instead of spending my time trying to create another institution, and now that period of my life…ended. I'm not sure that I can step into these institutions anymore because they do feel so different for me and…I need to be in an environment that is real, and I'm not pretending anymore. So with no anger or bitterness or anything like that, I stepped away from the classroom and I…don't even want to try to explain it to anybody… I really…loved what I was doing, and now it's not the time for that. (T. 2, p. 85)

Though Tim left the classroom as an educator, his cultural work education practice did not cease. When he realized that he could no longer teach authentically through an academic institution, he sought out his former student Nolan, and began the process of evolving Nolan's cultural work practice to include the role of lead spoken word poetry coach. As a result, Nolan now leads the program in the classroom, and feels comfortable and authentically engaged with the learners. Of this dynamic, Tim believes the evolution of cultural work learner into cultural work educator, who is mentored in their teaching practices by another cultural worker, may be a solution to the problems that mainstream education is experiencing with marginalized learners and educators. Tim's

perspective is that educators, much like learners, have needs which are going unfulfilled and this contributes to the poor rates of successful outcomes. One way he believes the achievement gap can be closed is through the encouragement of educators engaging in consistent meaningful reflection, and administration supporting these efforts.

> And…while I'm on that subject of what else do we need to change about the education…we've created this idea of prep time and valuing the preparation process and creating the lesson plan and all that sort of thing but I don't think we've given the same value to the reflective time…some projects or curriculums have it in there but…no teachers have a reflection period, it's not in their schedule right? They might have to turn in something at the end of the year saying how did…you meet or not meet your goals for this year, but what about that reflective piece, and how do we bring it in more. (T. 1, pp. 78-79)

Tim's belief in dedicated reflection time for educators supports the natural opportunities that cultural work learning experiences provide by virtue of their integrative methods, and performance components. Like Tim, Sarah believes mainstream educators want strategies for teaching excellence, and they also want to embrace and implement solutions that will positively impact learning outcomes and success rates for marginalized learners. Sarah thinks one of the core solutions is providing educators with the tools to integrate learning opportunities for students where they embody what they are learning.

> I remember doing skits in class…and I was more interested in my learning when I was getting up and moving and embodying it, and speaking it and being in it... It's like it's kind of a no-brainer for teachers.... Teachers know that it's useful for education, and not just useful, but imperative because their kids are bored, and they're pissed, and they're quitting…especially high school kids. I mean, there's a huge drop-out rate, especially for…inner-city kids in public schools. There's like…a 50 percent drop-out rate nationally in public schools in inner cities. So, I mean…do you want strategies? Yes, absolutely! Teachers want to be good teachers. They are just locked into a system of standardized testing and fear that they're not going to teach their kids enough for them to graduate…and so I think the time is now…especially in California…for classroom teachers to be exposed to more movement and theater again, and get their kids more lit about their learning. (Sa. 1, pp. 163-164)

Educators who are cultural workers have creative practices that they can share with their learners. This in turn, helps educators and learners embody the subjects with which they are engaged. Sarah asserts, much like the other participant-narrators, that one of the more meaningful ways to get and keep marginalized learners engaged is through creativity and cultural work. From this vantage point, Sarah asserts that cultural work is a way for educators and learners to work together on accessing and implementing successful teaching and learning strategies. Her call to action, especially in mainstream schools that are experiencing high drop out rates, is for more mainstream teachers to be exposed to cultural work that they can integrate into all subjects in the classroom.

Decolonization of the Mind

When I originally designed this study, I only intended to collect the oral histories of cultural workers who are artists because I did not understand the similarities between cultural workers who engage their communities through sovereignty work. Yet as I began evaluating the idea of including Nick's oral histories, and I read about the organization Nick founded, I started to see overlap between his cultural work, his teaching practices, and the educational components shared by the other seven participant-narrators. At the exact same time, President Obama extended an invitation to Nick for the Tribal Nations Conference. My interest was further piqued due to President Obama's comments during the Tribal Nations press conference. The work of Nick and the Thunder Valley nonprofit were liberally praised, especially the instruction in Native language, customs and spiritual practices. What was interesting to me is that these aspects of cultural work are not praised or reflected as values in our current educational policy, which places an emphasis on science, technology, engineering and mathematics,

and provides very little support for the integration of cultural work throughout mainstream education.

When Nick and I met for his interview series in January of 2013, much of Nick's work with his community was immersed in defining sovereignty thoroughly and clearly. According to Nick, sovereignty involves the decision of a community to "take ownership of our future." As a cultural worker engaged in the facilitation of the decolonization process through education, there is an emphasis on investing energy and time in how different members can come together and explore what sovereignty really means. Nick describes a part of this process as a way of engaging all members of the community from an empowerment, and decolonized mindset. Additionally, it is the cultural workers responsibility to engage in inquiry with community members "without preconceived notions that we're the teacher" (Ni. 2, p. 111).

Personally, Nick differentiates between the desire to know and define what sovereignty is, versus being able to teach it. "I think for me it's not so much arriving at the point of wanting to teach it, but more of wanting to learn what it is, and learning what it is in a very practical, meaningful sense of how can it actually…preserve our cultures" (Ni. 2, p. 112). Consequently, the importance of sovereignty and educational pursuits is in their capacity to preserve the Lakota culture in ways that are driven by the community of learners.

Rulan also places great emphasis on the decolonization process, and this work begins with a peeling away "of the techniques that we've all come in with, including myself" (R. 1, p. 26). Decolonization as a tool for authentic learning has as a principal aim to learn how to unlearn. As it relates to indigenous contemporary dance, the purpose

is expressly to move away from the learned forms of movement until each person can "find this ancestral way of moving" (R. 1, p. 26). This process requires much time and a conscious release of old patterns of thinking, doing, and engaging in creative work. For Rulan, the thrust of her decolonization and cultural work practices have encompassed a "forty year revolution…creating indigenous theatre and dance that is rooted in indigenous world view… completely coming out of our perspectives" (R. 1, p. 24).

Nolan also subscribes to the importance of decolonization educational practices, and he credits his process of transformation and a renewed sense of cultural identity to the Spoken Word Poetry Program. He believes that his pride in being a member of the Navajo Nation can be attributed to "what I learned…in school, through this program" (N. 3, p. 67). The essence of cultural work helps learners find balance and ways to come to terms with the world and their place in it as learners and educators. The writing process "is sort of our way of…searching for that harmony in ourselves and seeing how we can…work together" (No. 2, p. 63).

As Nick, Rulan, and Nolan exemplify through their various mediums of cultural work, each of their disciplines and ways of reaching learners are valid. Moreover, the universal value of the decolonization process is in its ability to draw from the innate knowledge of each person, leaving them empowered, engaged in their learning, and positively transformed.

CHAPTER V

ANALYSIS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Introduction

The findings in Chapter IV showed that the participant-narrators: (a) facilitate learning of cultural arts through peer-based environments, however may not identify with the term educator; (b) self-identify and/or resonate with the terms artist, coach, choreographer, community organizer or practitioner; (c) see themselves as maintaining high learning and growth expectations for all involved in the learning process, which requires an equal and simultaneous learning and growing of themselves as facilitators in this process; and (d) believe that valuing student's voice and perspective, alongside an educator's commitment to transformation of self, are equally essential to the learning process contributing to social change.

As a result of these findings, this study provides some insight into how cultural workers connect their work to mainstream education, and address gaps within the mainstream system of learning. In this chapter, I discuss the findings in relationship to: the current academic literature; Critical Theory and Transformative Learning Theory frameworks; and I also offer recommendations for future research and mainstream academic practice.

Research Question #1:

How do cultural workers view and define the way they conduct their lives and work?

Family

Sense of Safely Belonging

The significance of family in creating a sense of belonging contributes to how cultural workers create and sustain learning environments. Amy, Rulan, Nolan and Sarah

commented on the need for learning environments that evoke a sense of family, and related this theme to the sense of having a learning atmosphere that ensures safety for everyone involved. Sarah elaborated on this idea in her second oral history interview by sharing the following:

> And then we talked about it later while we were writing script, and…this kid who talked about his…three suicide attempts, he said this is the first time that he ever felt…really held by a community because he just felt like nobody was trying to fix him or change him or encourage him, or whatever. They were just witnessing in this very loving way. (Sa. 2, p. 166)

Tim also spoke about the experience of belonging, and sense of family, however his experience is different from the other participant-narrators in that he indicated feeling personally challenged because he was so close with his students in Pine Ridge that he actually had a very hard time leaving the school and the reservation. Consequently, Tim had no intentions on building and sustaining close familial ties with his students once he arrived at the Santa Fe Indian School, however the same sort of bonding occurred. "All of the sudden…I'm supposed to start this book word program and these children…are gonna be my children, it's just the way it's gonna be, and I'm gonna be their dad" (T. 2, pp. 81-82).

Literature on indigenous education supports the experiences of Sarah and Tim in that the learning is seen as a conscious process in grounding every day lived experience within the context of community and extends indigenous education to emphasize a sense of community that feels and works like a family (Cajete, 1994). Inclusion, safety, love, and faith are hallmarks of these learning environments, and while Tim is Irish and he has taught exclusively in Native schools with Native children, Sarah is not Native American, and neither are her students. Sarah teaches primarily African American children and

young adults in a predominantly African American community, yet the tenants of indigenous education pertain to non-Native cultural workers who teach and embody pedagogy that is practitioner based.

Conscious Care

Social marginalization has threatened the community and individual wellbeing of marginalized populations over time, due to long-term exposure to poverty, violence and societal ills. Mainstream systemic oppression, trauma and marginalization have broken the capacity for many communities to care for themselves through historic modes of social networks, thereby thwarting restorative individual and community wellness (Ginwright, 2011). Nolan and Tim, both cultural workers in a Native American school, shared in their reflections on the dynamic of working with Native populations of learners who need and benefit from linguistic, spiritual, and cultural restoration to promote healing and growth. In Nolan's third interview, he commented on his mentor's bravery for creating the Spoken Word Poetry Program when it was evident that the poetry and story creation process would reconnect the students to the wounds of the Native American history and present day traumas, as well as the healing that comes from remembrance and cultural restoration. "McLaughlin's a very brave man for…walking into the Indian School setting and pulling these stories out of us…when…it was very clear…that they were attached to some serious heartache and old injuries" (No. 3, p. 67).

While Ginwright (2011) recognizes the negative role that oppression has played in the African American community, he also asserts the positive role caring neighborhood-based organizations have had in healing African American communities. At the heart of this work are the people who implement the programs in these

organizations, contributing to the positive development of young people, as well as facilitating the healing and care. This sentiment is articulated through Sarah's experiences as a cultural worker and educator with primarily African American youth, as well as the other seven participant-narrators who work in Latino, Hispanic, Native American and poor White communities. Sarah and Nick have consciously chosen to live in the same communities as their organizations, and each believe this is an extremely important component to being a meaningful and authentic cultural worker. Sarah contends that, "living in the community where I teach" is a key factor in meaningful work, but more so, by living and working in the same community it is seen as a level of conscious care by both families and students who view it as "sticking around in the kids' lives." Sarah also believes that care is one of the most fundamental reasons for engaging in the educational process, as a learner and educator, because education exists to "learn how to be with each other. How to be human beings with each other, next to each other in a compassionate, loving, respectful, caring way" (Sa. 2, p. 168).

Based on Nick's travels and observations of many different communities across 48 states, Nick learned that "the most powerful people that…were influencing the most amount of change at every level…were in the communities that they were from…And so for me that was like a huge eye-opener" (Ni. 1, p. 102). Consequently, this realization was a big factor in Nick moving back to Pine Ridge Reservation and beginning a career in cultural work as an intergenerational community organizer. Furthermore, Nick believes Native American people, by virtue of their being indigenous people to the land in the United States, have an even stronger tie to the notion of home and place.

> I think that work of reconnecting to identity…it's different when it happens in a place where your people mostly have always been. I think there's some power to that…there's something spiritual to that. Our ancestors walked on this piece of land here, and that we have stories…that we're connected to this earth. (Ni. 3, p. 115)

The learning and growing that comes about as a result of communities and individuals identifying and connecting themselves to their homes, restores a part of their collective cultural identity, and further strengthens the teaching and cultural work of the educators. This suggests that when cultural workers are either from the community with which they work, or have lived in the community for many years, the cultural workers are able to provide a level of conscious care to the communities they serve, thereby creating a much more effective and meaningful impact in the learning environments they create and facilitate.

One benefit of conscious care that was expressed by Rulan extended to the community itself. Even though Rulan works with a very diverse indigenous contemporary dance company, each time the dance company travels to perform or teach in different indigenous community settings, Rulan asks an elder for permission to engage the community. By making this kind of meaningful effort, Rulan as a cultural worker engaging in education initiatives takes into account the individual learners, and extends her conscious care efforts from the individual to their respective community. This speaks to the comprehensively positive role conscious care can have on communities, which can aid in restoring individual and collective wellness (Ginwright, 2011).

Amy spoke about a correlation she witnesses between a students' ability to take risks in their personal learning in order to progress in their mastery, which is directly linked to the responsibility and capacity of cultural workers in the discipline of circus arts

to create extremely safe physical environments. In Amy's experience, once safety is ensured and communicated, the learners tend to respond to the cultural workers encouragement to take risks, increasingly with the "beginning risk" (A. 2, p. 8), especially as they are just beginning to work to develop mastery. And while circus arts is physically demanding and many of the activities such as trapeze, stilt walking, and acrobatics can require very foreign ways of moving and coordinating one's body, this discipline of cultural work represents a greater reason for why a learner might be apprehensive in the beginning of the learning process, and consequently why a cultural worker may be more successful in teaching new skills if they can provide a maximum sense of safety, combined with a genuine level of consistent encouragement.

Cultural Workers: Practitioners Engaged in Learning

Rulan and Nolan, of all the participant-narrators, were very specific in not self-identifying as teachers. Rulan self-identifies as a choreographer when describing her work. Nolan, on the other hand, self-identifies as a spoken word poetry coach, even though he teaches at the Santa Fe Indian School.

> Mi'Jan: What in your life prompted you to teach, to coach?
> Nolan: Ah, well I was sorta primed for it...my mentor, Tim McLaughlin...challenged me to come in to the weekly sessions that we had in the evenings at the Indian School and...so I was trucking down from Albuquerque to Santa Fe ah, two or three times a week to make it to these practice sessions and I was really transitioning into a player coach sort of role...so I transitioned into becoming what he... later called...an apprentice coach. (No. 1, p. 53)

The literature on experiential education, according to the Association for Experiential Education (2012), supports the ideas put forth by Nolan and Rulan which assert that the role of educator is one of practitioner who engages with learners in purposeful ways, through direct experiences. Yuka also spoke about her background in

teaching mural arts where students and cultural workers facilitate mutual learning, understanding, and respect. Yuka explains the concept of mural arts education as a progression of "collaboration, and expressing your ideas, and having each other understand it" (Y. 3, p. 126). In the instance of community-based mural art instruction, learning is a process of direct experience and practice with peers, and the cultural worker is the facilitator in this process.

While each participant-narrator discussed the importance and meaning of their particular cultural work discipline, it was Amy who stated that the discipline is just the vehicle, and not the true essence or heart of their transformative work. Amy believes that while she teaches and practices circus arts and theater, these disciplines are only mediums to facilitate growth in a learning environment.

> Those were just the mediums that came to the forefront…for what I'm doing…I'm actually being an activist…And I think that that's what holds across the board when you get people together who are doing this kind of work, is that the medium is…just the medium that you happen to work in. But what you're really doing is the same thing that they're doing. They're just using like spoken word, and you're using puppets, and this person is using, you know, like visual arts. (A. 3, p. 20)

Amy conveys the idea that the most valuable aspect of practitioner based, experiential education, is the deeper level of learner and educator engagement. Amy has noticed over the years of teaching circus arts, that there are several kinds of learners. Some people best learn through talking and listening, while others are kinesthetic learners who have to move their bodies before they can understand a concept. In this way, the cultural worker approach to teaching and learning by doing, saying, and moving can meet the varied needs of learners.

Research Question #2:

Do cultural workers connect their stories to the current academic discourse on the purpose of education, and current gaps in our mainstream educational system?

If so, how?

Popular Education: Educator as Facilitator

Cultural workers connect their work to the current academic discourse on the purpose of education through their popular education approach to teaching and learning. That said, cultural workers do address the current gaps in our mainstream educational system as it pertains to marginalized populations of learners differently than the mainstream educational system. Five of the participant-narrators engage in learning environments which comprise the same marginalized learning populations that No Child Left Behind (NCLB) attempted to engage via reform efforts: Hispanic, Latino, African American, and low income White students. Additionally, three of the participant-narrators also teach Native American population of learners. Where NCLB attempted educational reform efforts through annual standardized testing, and then judging schools based on their performance (Carey, 2012), cultural workers engage with their learner population through a combination of: expectations, conscious care, and passion for cultural arts and education work. In addition to these core educational values, each participant-narrator views their role in learning environments as practitioners who facilitate the process of learning in a non-hierarchical, empowered manner. Specifically, Amy recounted one story from the 2013 year of teaching where she felt her role as a facilitator was strongly illustrated. "Teaching to me is really about being in…dialogue…

you’re both learning…I just have certain skills I’m sharing with the other person, but they always have something they’re sharing with me of equal value” (A. 1, p. 5).

In terms of popular education, the literature echoes and supports this idea of educators as facilitators who share in the process of teaching and learning, thereby generating a liberating educational experience (Osorio, 2009). Even though Amy was amazed by the different ways that the 2013 circus arts intensive grew and transformed, it was during Amy’s second oral history interview that she clearly articulates a story about this group of women learners who created an environment where the entire group could support one another. From that space of co-learning and co-teaching, each member consequently underwent a process of mental, emotional, and physical liberation without the educator, or any one learner taking ownership of the process or outcomes.

Tim echoes a similar sentiment in how he was able to evolve from his role of central guiding figure, or father, in the classroom setting that mirrored family connectedness and bonding, to a more emotionally sustainable role of compassionate educator who helps learners by “holding the space for them to do what they need to do…not taking on the task or the worry for them…having faith that it’s gonna work out the way it needs to, even if it falls apart” (T. 2, pp. 81-82). In Tim’s experience, this level of closeness also encompasses enough space and healthy boundaries for the learner to have their own experience. The learning process also offers an added benefit of providing much needed freedom and ownership of the learning experience, for both the learner and educator.

Desire and Commitment

Passion

For each of the participant-narrators, the educational and cultural work processes are infused with passion. According to Cajete (2008), Indigenous People experience the educational process in terms of interaction, finding one's heart, and building a foundation to completely and authentically express life. Sarah reflects these ideas, describing her teaching as a combination of "playful, serious, passionate work" (Sa. 3, p. 172). While Sarah's teaching and cultural work career was influenced by the strict discipline of ballet and modern dance training, she is quick to point out that she was truly inspired to teach the way that she teaches based on her passion for social justice work, and creating original dance that is collaborative. Sarah sees a relationship between what cultural workers can expect from their students, and the level of passion that the cultural worker embodies. "If I'm passionate, if I'm full out in everything that I'm doing, the way that I'm teaching them, then I can ask that of them. And if I'm not…then I lose it. Then I lose them" (Sa. 3, p. 172).

Rulan conveys a similar idea in that some of her most formative learning experiences as a youth were in ballet dance training, however as a young adult Rulan trained in powwow dance. Because dance did not come easily to Rulan, even though she very much wanted to be an extremely talented ballerina, she became that much more passionate and committed. Accordingly, her cultural work and teaching practices derive from a place of passion that Rulan conveys as "strikes of inspiration" (R. 1, p. 27). Nelson (2008) affirms this idea of noticing and following the passion with deep interest for both the learner and educator in indigenous pedagogy. Rulan, moves this idea further

in her observation around these strikes of inspiration, offering that passion and inspiration do not build super talented professional dancers, however the goal in her passion filled cultural work and teaching practice is to create experiences that address and engage a whole community, with the additional gift of being a “transformative ritual” (R. 1, p. 28).

Expectations

The expectations that a community has on educators and learners must be current and go beyond the mainstream educational model which emphasizes reading, writing, and arithmetic. These expectations also have to be meaningful, comprehensive and relevant in order to address the needs of preparing individuals to lead and sustain their communities. Similarly, folk education is not concerned with creating education for the sole purpose of professional or vocational instruction. Instead, folk schools derive their greatest meaning from facilitating community empowerment and transformation through the conceptualizing of identity (Lawson, 1991). McLaren (1994, 2005) asserts the goal of development and education, when guided by passion, authenticity, and personal experiences, form a much needed connection between knowledge and power for future action.

Of all eight participant-narrators, Nick’s work is completely based in a rural setting. As such, his oral histories shadow the tenants of folk education, which speaks to the importance of expectations that operate in two directions: expectations of current adults and elders on the next generation to evolve and transform their communities, and expectations that the youth can have of their culture with which to build on the legacy of their elders.

> You're looking at education, you're looking at these different things in those contexts of who we are. People, place, identity, all those things are intertwined, and how to find and evolve those things, too…The best days of the Lakota are in front of us, not behind us. And that means that whatever culture that we have, we do have responsibility to evolve it, and to change it, and to adapt it to the time of today…so that the next generation can have something there to evolve and to change. (Ni. 3, p. 115)

This theme of expectation is also closely tied to one of the central principles in indigenous education: the notion that learning and teaching, when interwoven into daily life, can bring about responsible relationships among people and build conscientious communities (Dugan, 1993). Nick's perspective of how the Lakota may go about determining sovereignty for themselves, and preserving and growing Lakota culture within the context of who they are as a people day-to-day, is an idea that supports the literature on indigenous education as a way to bring about learning and teaching connected to daily life. Moreover, the value of this particular pedagogy is rooted in a foundation of cultural and indigenous perspective, as well as communal ways of being.

Research Question #3:

Do cultural workers view their work as an active contribution to social change?

If so, what may be the implications for social transformation?

Solution-Bound

Embedded in cultural work is the process of transformation of self, as well as the process – not just the manifestation or results – of being solution-bound. Consequently, the impact of cultural work is rooted in actively contributing to social change.

Of the eight participant-narrators, both Tim and Sarah have teaching components of their work where they function as educators who teach other educators. They both spoke extensively on the need for solutions in addressing the mainstream educational

system challenges, especially with learning environments which serve Native American students and students of color. Tim and Sarah shared stories and their perspectives on why chronically high drop out rates exist in public schools across the nation, as well as what mainstream teachers experience and report as difficulties in reaching their students in mainstream classrooms. Sarah has specifically cultivated a teaching practice, in addition to the work she does in dance and social justice at Destiny Arts, where she teaches inner city educators in the San Francisco Bay Area through professional development opportunities and programs. While Sarah believes that mainstream educators certainly want strategies for teaching excellence, she thinks one of the core solutions missing in mainstream education is more integrated learning opportunities for students to embody what they are learning.

As a result of his unique teaching experience in Native American schools, Tim focused his energies on creating solutions for education through his time as the founder and lead coach at the Santa Fe Indian School Spoken Word Poetry Program. In 2012, though, Tim decided to step outside of the classroom and direct the Spoken Word Poetry Program so that he could occupy the role of mentor to Nolan, who is now the lead coach. Both Tim and Nolan envision solution-bound education initiatives from a holistic standpoint, with primary goals of learning and teaching that function as a vehicle for preserving culture and language, in incremental stages, contributing to the betterment of everyone.

Language, culture, tradition and self-determination are central to the learning framework of the Spoken Word Poetry Program. In essence, learning is supported through ways in which education explores and celebrates indigineity (Smith, 2005). But

this approach is not bound exclusively by tradition; some prominent cultural workers view this work as an invitation to bridge traditional with contemporary ways of being, learning and teaching. Trudell (2008) supposes the reason for the current Native American generation's existence is to learn from Elders, interpret what has been lost through oppression and colonization, then to assess the current reality, which is used to arrive at a new set of knowledge to bring positive change forward.

Tim, Nolan and Sarah envision their teaching practices as being solution-bound. An additional aspect to this theme is how cultural arts can be utilized to achieve the solution-bound mindset in educators and learners. Tim has witnessed many students who may lack confidence or feelings of authority in writing, open up to the process of writing and performance through the remembering and telling of contemporary and traditional indigenous stories. Nolan has also observed the same phenomenon as a poetry coach, and experienced this transformation through cultural arts as a student. Sarah articulates this notion of being solution-bound as a practice that is not always challenge-free for educators. She has learned that patience in the educator, combined with learning experiences that integrate embodiment, are equally essential ingredients. Nelson (2008) asserts a similar idea in that there is value in using our whole bodies and different parts of our minds as a means of opening to more fluid ways of knowing and being. This type of embodiment and integration of cultural arts into the learning process is thereby meant to be explored by learners and educators alike.

Transformation of Cultural Workers

Authenticity

Sarah describes authenticity as a cultural worker and educator as the ability to "be real about what's going on for you," which may not be reflected every moment of the teaching day, however the general sense is that teaching authentically provides a safe space for educators and learners to "feel safe enough when the opportunity arises in the structure of this group to share how you really feel about something" (Sa. 2, p. 167). Like Sarah, Suaro believes authentic teaching encompasses safety, while also recognizing that "we all have different ways of looking at things" (Su. 1, p. 131). Authenticity to Suaro, in the context of the mural art creation process, means being direct and honest with himself, and then communicating about the progression of the mural arts process with his students. And Rulan sees authenticity as a necessary component of cultural work evolution, stating that she is "less interested in creating the same work, the same way, every time," but that she feels most compelled to create environments where people are "bringing the whole person into the space…understanding how that impacts how they learn…and what…we learn from each other" (R. 1, p. 29).

Authentically teaching requires interconnectedness. Authentic educators teach from a place that combines who they are, what they believe, where they are from, and how they read the world. This is not a process with the sole aim of mastery, or regurgitation. Each of the eight cultural workers expressed the universal need for fostering learning environments where creativity and innovation can flourish. At the root of authentic learning experiences is the symbiotic relationship between educator and learner. The educator can only create an authentic learning experience to the degree that

they embody authenticity across all of their work and professional lives. For those cultural workers who embody authenticity, they are only effective to the degree that they can practice patience, and clear, direct communication with learners. As a result, and only after these fundamental values have been personified, learners can accept the invitation to learn in ways that are authentic and meaningful for them, completely encompassing their learning style.

Decolonization of the Mind

Unlike the other seven participant-narrators, Nolan facilitates learning in the same program which taught him and grew his practice as a poet. Consequently, Nolan's theme of transformation in learning and teaching derives from this distinct perspective. Nolan embodies Freire's (1970) educational view and theory of praxis as reflection and action that transforms the world. Moreover, Nolan's oral histories – more so than any other participant-narrator - speak to this concept of praxis from the perspective of a current higher education mainstream student, who simultaneously educates middle and high school youth in the same program where he was a student. It is through this unique dynamic of the student-who-becomes-the-teacher, as well as the particular ways that Nolan's participation in the Spoken Word Poetry Program influenced his re-indigenization, that he began to recover his own sense of being Navajo. Nolan's reflections on education come from the same learning place that he currently takes action as a facilitator of learning, and both of these experiences have fostered Nolan's transformation of self.

Rulan also believes in the need for decolonization, as an aspect of transforming self in positive ways. Rulan defines decolonizing practices as:

> Decolonizing body, mind and spirit…the idea of building trust in people's instincts…reinforcing that who they are as Native people is actually who they need…empowering people's individual sense of indigeneity…so they can feel strong about themselves and then make good decisions which will then impact who they are as a community and from that…allow for solidarity between indigenous peoples. (R. 1, p. 29)

This form of decolonization, as explained by Rulan, works twofold: it initiates much needed healing, so that social change can occur. Ginwright (2011) affirms that healing fosters community optimism and transformation of spirit that leads to a healthy and vibrant community life. In cultural worker communities, support is integral to the process of transformation through decolonization. One of the subtle nuances observed through the analysis of the transcripts from the oral histories was how often the collective *we* was emphasized among the indigenous participant-narrators. Nolan and Nick both answered my initial questions in the plural, even though I specifically directed the questions to each of them individually. When I asked Nick "How would you define what you do," he responded "So we" (Ni. 1, p. 101). Nolan responded to the same preliminary question with a thorough description of the Spoken Word Poetry team. These community-rooted responses suggest that indigenous education, as well as decolonization practices, are embedded in the belief and experience that it takes a community effort to bring about personal, individual transformation.

As the idea of transformation pertains to the other participant-narrators and the very diverse learner communities with which they live and work, the role of cultural work is one of preserver of cultural arts, and decolonizer of mind, body and spirit. Rulan is quick to note that cultural work is not fixed, and continues to evolve, stating "how can I teach what is still being invented? It's not a set form" (R. 3, p. 42). Decolonizing the mind as a conscious practice of transformation accordingly changes the process of

education and its outcomes. Much like liberating education as a practice towards freedom (hooks, 2003), the practice of decolonization supports educational learning spaces that build community and provide support for people interested in sovereignty, critical consciousness, and freedom.

Implications for Critical Theory and Transformative Learning Theory

My research not only blends Critical and Transformative Learning Theories, it also extends each of the theories. Critical Theory engages people in critiquing their world, and is particularly concerned with the ways that power and justice are influenced by social institutions such as race, class, gender and education, to construct our social systems (Kincheloe & McLaren, 2008, p. 288). Transformative Learning Theory attempts to explain learning as a process of constructing an interpretation of one's experience based on prior experiences and interpretations in order to direct future action (Mezirow, 1996, p. 162).

This research integrates the two theories in that each of the cultural workers who contributed their oral history narratives to this research not only creates learning environments that foster the process of a world critique, but also define learning as a non-linear, non-individual process. Each participant-narrator emphasized the importance of collective community where learners are educators, and educators are learners. And while interpreting one's experience is paramount in guiding future action, it is not the goal in and of itself, nor is the goal exclusive to the individual. Everything is about, for, created, and sustained by the community, especially in Native communities that place a strong emphasis on the collective versus the individual. The learning and teaching processes of cultural work re-engages cultural awareness and learning, along with

indigenous language and heritage. These sentiments seem to be of special importance, and were specifically expressed by Nolan and Nick, who come from Native tribes that experienced extreme historic oppression via colonization and genocide. Consequently, the learners in their language, storytelling, cultural revitalization and preservation learning efforts do not always have access to their past. To say that these learners have a prior interpretation, or understanding, that they are using to make meaning of current life in order to transcend future life actions, is not accurate.

Transformation of the Cultural Worker-Researcher

I have been a mainstream educator for over ten years, educating some of the same populations of learners as have my participant-narrators in New Mexico and the San Francisco Bay Area. In addition, I have spent the last five years as a cultural worker, primarily in the discipline of story collection and dissemination. This research has facilitated a personal, subsequent transformation in my own cultural and education work, giving me a new perspective on how I view myself and my relationship to the integration of all my work. Collecting the oral histories of each participant-narrator gave me insight into my own teaching and cultural work practice as I reflected on the reactions to each of the interview prompts.

Part of the natural trajectory of learning how to conduct and meaningfully engage in oral history collection is learning how to actively listen to unique responses, as well as learning how to cultivate an appreciation for diverse perspectives. As a result of this research, I have become more confident in my role as a cultural worker, and am now insistent in integrating more of these learnings into my teaching life. Although I have generally made a strong effort to be mindful during the interviews and not interrupt

during any time that the participant-narrators spoke, collecting these particular oral histories posed a challenge: many of the participant-narrators stories about community, liberation, and education, were emotionally charged. In terms of this process, I learned that as a cultural worker and mainstream educator, having prior experience in both roles – singular and integrated – I was better able to ask questions, which was an advantage in building rapport and gaining deeper access. In terms of the research, this was an advantage, and in terms of my own teaching practice, this had an additional benefit of promoting growth and transformation. At the end of this journey I can say that I gained access to, and greater clarity, in successful teaching practices from eight unique cultural workers.

Realizing how important the ongoing practice of transformation of self is to cultivating meaningful learning environments has made me more intentional about engaging in this process throughout my roles as researcher, mainstream educator and cultural worker. Previously I only saw the value of transformation of self in a linear manner, and felt it was best utilized as a cultural worker because cultural work seemed more creative and malleable than teaching. This research has confirmed the importance and necessity of engaging in transformation of self, and bridging that transformation process and enhanced level of awareness into all of the work I do, inclusive of mainstream education and research, most especially with marginalized populations.

Discussion

The responses to the oral history interviews conducted in this body of research assert that cultural workers and the learner communities benefit from the liberal use of creativity within the context of learning. Each of the participant-narrators are passionate

in their work, and their teaching practices demonstrate conscious care. The cultural work learning environments encourage educators to broadly exercise creative license while teaching, and consequently their marginalized learner populations thrive. It is important to note that cultural work learning environments are not compulsory, even though they teach similar facets of mainstream education such as literacy via spoken word poetry; and mathematics, engineering and history through mural arts. As we witness marginalized learners choosing to opt into their educational cultural work experiences, we simultaneously observe many marginalized learners in mainstream K-12 education classrooms who are dropping out, and experiencing challenges in successfully meeting or exceeding prescribed measures of achievement.

The cultural work learning communities which were highlighted in this study illuminate four strategies and lessons which foster successful outcomes in their marginalized learner populations. The specific strategies in cultural work learning and teaching environments are: a) community centered and directed; b) experiential in nature; c) solution-bound, as opposed to oriented on failure; and d) committed to conscious care. As mainstream education environments continue to work within a system that is directed by educational outcomes via institutional tests and mandates, perhaps it is time for educators to reflect on ways that cultural work education can be integrated into our mainstream classrooms as we move forward with school reform efforts and educational policy. Specific attention needs to be paid to teaching practices and processes that embed community derived expectations with popular education teaching methods, instead of focusing solely on teaching practices that value learning outcomes via standardized testing. Moreover, there has to be a shift in education that transitions the field out of

either/or binary teaching and curriculum approaches, and moves the field of education into inclusive, integrative and pluralistic practices. To improve our educational outcomes with all of our learners, the United States must relinquish our limited vision of art and cultural work, and enter into a discussion on ways to integrate the arts and culture into every mainstream classroom.

Limitations of the Study

This study was done in three very different and dynamic regions within the United States. Moreover, the art disciplines that are practiced and taught by each participant-narrator are specifically: spoken word poetry, contemporary African Diaspora and Native dance, mural/visual arts, circus arts and theater. The one sovereignty worker who contributed to this study is Lakota, and from Pine Ridge Reservation, South Dakota. There are many tribes and sovereign nations in the United States, with their own unique languages, cultures, customs, prayers and traditions. The findings may be different with cultural workers who practice different disciplines, or engage in sovereignty work in different parts of North America who may or may not have experienced colonization in identical ways as the Lakota. Additionally, the small sample of eight, and the emergence of a co-created methodology during the third interview, all contribute to the specific findings of this study and may not be generalizable.

Recommendation for Further Research

Research conducted by the RAND Corporation determined a correlation between individuals who were either exposed to the arts or had formal art education in their youth, and their rate of participation and engagement with the arts as adults. Conversely, those individuals who did not have exposure in their youth, do not support the arts as adults

(Brooks, McCarthy, Ondaatje, & Zakaras, 2005). As No Child Left Behind mandates waned in 2012, two new initiatives emerged: Common Core State Standards, and an increase in support for science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM) education. With the absence of cultural arts as an essential component to compulsory K-12 education, the nation faces a future with fewer individuals who are engaged or exposed to the arts, who then grow into adults who do not participate. Suaro spoke about his concern with mainstream cuts to the arts as an ongoing cycle with negative consequences, "the more…this system cuts back art…people…are more separated from it and they have a harder time becoming a part of it" (Su. 1, p. 139). One can only wonder about the long-term impact the United States government will have on this generation of youth when we consider that the House of Representatives committee on appropriations approved a bill in the summer of 2013 to de-fund the National Endowment for the Arts by 49%, proposing to reduce the largest governmental operational budget for the arts to a level not seen since 1974 (Ng, 2013). Two unfortunate possibilities are likely: (a) the current generation of youth will not experience the arts in community based settings or formal education classrooms, and (b) the current work of the eight participant-narrators as well as similar cultural work initiatives throughout the United States, will not have the capacity to grow and contribute to the transformation of communities through learning environments.

While much research has been done on the role and ways that the arts influence cognition and this fields importance in the field of education (Kieras, J., Posner, M., Rothbart, M., & Sheese, B., 2008), it is worthwhile to note that future research endeavors into this topic area of cultural workers who facilitate education, may do well to use

research methodologies that are artistic, creative, and participatory in nature. I came to this understanding and awareness while collecting the oral histories, specifically with Nolan and Tim, because their medium of cultural work is spoken word poetry, or stories. In essence, this methodology compliments much of the work with which they engage in their classroom and cultural work practices. Furthermore, I also discovered that additional considerations must be made, especially when collecting and working with Native communities as an outsider. Trust has to be built, and it usually does not develop in a linear or binary framework.

In my endeavor to collect the stories of eight participant-narrators, I found that I had to be willing to hold the tiger's tail and go in the direction I was being led. If I did not let the research lead me and the participant-narrators, then neither of us would have found our way to co-developing the third interviews - what oftentimes felt like the absolute heart of this research - and I never would have stumbled upon the unique student-to-teacher narratives that Nolan and Tim shared. Collecting the oral history of students who grow into cultural workers engaged in education gives the research a double opportunity. En lieu of a longitudinal study, which can be prohibitive in Doctoral programs because of programming time and funding constraints, the student-to-teacher dynamic captures the stories and learnings from students of these programs, and also shares knowledge of those who become educators and practitioners as adults, and teach from that place and perspective. To that end, administrators, oral historians, funders and researchers should pay great attention to collecting narratives of transformation and growth in learning environments which encapsulate the dynamic of student-to-teacher,

from a multitude of communities that demonstrate success, empowerment, and dedication, much like the cultural worker communities I researched.

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