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Urban Youth Reimagine Trauma: Making Meaning of Experiences with Chronic Community Violence through the Arts

by

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A dissertation submitted to the Graduate Faculty in Psychology
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of
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Abstract

URBAN YOUTH REIMAGINE TRAUMA:
MAKING MEANING OF EXPERIENCES
WITH CHRONIC COMMUNITY VIOLENCE
THROUGH THE ARTS

by

Stephanie Urso Spina

Advisors: Professors Michelle Fine and Suzanne Ouellette

The impact of participation in the "Creating Original Opera" (COO) program was investigated among two consecutive(1999 and 2000) cohorts of eighth grade inner-city students living in a context of chronic community violence. Four research questions were posed: (1) What are these students' experiences of violence? (2) What strategies, if any, do they employ to cope with violent events? (3) What, if any, of the above change over the duration of the project? (4) How might those changes relate (or not) to participation in the opera program?

Data collection included a series of three semi-structured interviews with randomly chosen students (N=8 students each year, total N=16 students; 48 interviews). Observational field notes and supplementary sources including conversations with teachers and administrators, and writings produced by the students in both cohorts were used to complement and contextualize the data and analysis. Analysis was grounded in and emerged from the data. Themes, patterns, and recurring or unusual features were identified and sorted to identify patterns and processes related to the research questions. Data were examined in and across individuals over time.

Findings indicate that the experience provided by COO produced identifiable changes in students' feelings and behavior, including greater psychic integration, increased willingness to speak about traumatic experiences, improved academic performance, a new ability to imagine the future, and a capacity for challenging some sources of oppression. My analysis identifies certain features of the program, as implemented in the study site school, that appear to facilitate these changes. First, the program immerses students in the aesthetic realm — one in which categories and presuppositions can be examined and re-imagined. Second, students' operas directly represent and address the traumatic conditions of their lives. Third, the program engages students in collective activity that fosters cooperation, mutual trust, and a heightened sense of responsibility and agency. Ultimately, I argue, because the traumatic circumstances of these adolescents' lives are themselves a product of political conditions, and because the students' enhanced sense of agency is grounded in critical consciousness, the transformation they evince must be understood on a political as well as a personal and psychological level.

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No work of this magnitude is accomplished by a single person. It is a communal effort and I am deeply indebted to all of those, past and present, whose ideas have nourished mine. The list is long and I will not catalog it here, but many of their names appear throughout the following pages.

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INTRODUCTION

What is violence to me

Violence to me is my neighborhood.

Full of madness, fighting, and killing in the hood.

Stolen cars riding through the night. Crashing and getting chased by the police and thinking

it's nice and fun.

Violence comes from your mind and your surroundings,

meaning your friends who just got to do mischief all day, everyday,

selling drugs for money, no job, no education.

A never-ending vicious cycle.

Life in the hood means death

I see violence everyday in my neighborhood and it is not a good sight. Seeing somebody die is like seeing yourself die.

There is a lot of violence in this state. You see it everywhere you go. There is violence in the school and outside on the streets. People are killing one another or beating up on one another.

A day doesn't go by that you don't see violence.

The thing that bothers me is everybody say you gotta be somewhere or you gotta do something to somebody to get shot. A bullet ain't got nobody's name on it. You could be standing around minding your own business and somebody start shooting. You never know.

These pieces, written by two middle school students from a public school in Newark, New Jersey, reflect the devastating daily presence of violence in our inner cities. It is voices like these that have propelled me to explore the psychological impact that living in an environment of chronic traumatic stress has on youth. The writers were participants in "Creating Original Opera" (COO), a nation-wide in-school program wherein students form an opera company from the ground up. In COO, under the guidance of teachers trained by the New York Metropolitan Opera Guild, students do everything involved in conceptualizing, producing, and performing an original piece of opera/musical theater. The opera program is described in detail later, but it is important to note here that the program at Tito Puente (a pseudonym for the school that was the site of this study) differs from all others in a significant way. While students at similar schools write operas about friendship, historical events, and the like, the students at Tito Puente use the opera as an opportunity to deal with serious issues arising from the context of their lives in an area where traumatic community violence is chronic. Constant trauma, fear, and vigilance are known to promote psychological separation (Terr, 1994), numbness (Lifton & Mitchell, 1995), and hopelessness (Tedeschi & Calhoun, 1995). Yet, these kids, living amidst pervasive violence, thrive in this program. This suggests that the opera may provide a vehicle that adolescents can use to process trauma in ways not otherwise available to them.

Becker (1982, p.1) has described patterns of collective activity by communities of people engaged in the creation of art works as "art worlds." This study seeks to understand what it means for these urban students to participate in the art world created by COO and what relationship that might have to how they deal with chronic community violence. In order to determine the extent to which engagement in this program may help these students

process traumatic experiences, and how this may happen, the following questions are posed:

1) What are these students' experiences of violence?

2) What strategies, if any, do they employ to cope with violent events?

3) What, if any, of the above change over the duration of the project?

4) How might those changes relate (or not) to participation in the opera program?

I begin by clarifying the meaning of violence, particularly chronic community violence in the context of this paper. A discussion of related trauma literature follows. The next section examines art and art worlds in order to identify and define qualities and effects that are specific, and perhaps unique, to this realm of human endeavor. A discussion of the arts literature follows that, drawing on work in psychology and critical pedagogy. Part II begins with an overview of the historical, economic, and political background of the research city and site. Although this context is always important, it is especially so in this effort because it has left an exceptionally persistent legacy with a direct impact on this study. Two weeks before scheduled performance dates, for example, a power play by the school administration forced the cancellation of the 2000 opera. After providing an overview of the COO program at Tito Puente, details of the research sample, design, methods, and data analysis are presented.

Part III begins with a brief introduction to sixteen of the urban adolescents who participated in this study, including a description of the circumstances of their lives, especially their experiences with violence and its aftermath. The following chapter considers the affordances, limitations, and contradictions of personal, social, and institutional supports and constraints available to the students and how they negotiate them. I then review these students' involvement with the arts in general and the opera

program in particular, with particular attention to how they address personal experiences with violence through the opera. Part three examines the impact of the arts on students' developmental changes over the course of the program, drawing on student and teacher accounts over time, with a special focus on the differences between the 1999 opera company, which was able to complete its project, and the 2000 company, which was not. A discussion of the politics and economy of the arts in public education then situates this study in the context of policy from historical, student, teacher, and administrative perspectives. The concluding chapter summarizes the findings of this study, addresses its limitations and directions for further research, and examines the implications and challenges of these findings for educators, youth, and communities.

Research always reflects the perspectives, ideals, and biases of the researcher as well as those of the disciplinary paradigm(s). I have tried to address these issues during all phases of this project and throughout this document. However, there is one presupposition underlying this effort that warrants clarification at this point. That is the view of the self as inherently social. The self-as-social is a particularly salient notion because this study deals with constructs, such as trauma and dissociation, which are heavily conditioned by traditional Western assumptions about the self, personhood, and external reality. There is a fundamental tension, if not antagonism, in Western culture between the individual and the social. In other cultures, like that of the relatively egalitarian Ilongots, there is no notion of the individual self; no social basis for a view of self that assumes individuals have boundaries, need controls, or possess drives that must be held in check (see Rosaldo, 1984).

All meanings, including the meaning of "self" and "identity" are not residues of social forces – they are social. Following Bakhtin and Vygotsky, all meaning, including the meaning of self and identity and the stories that we tell, is a sociocultural and historical

product dialogically created in the course of social interaction. From this perspective, identities are constituted, but not frozen, within social contexts. This does not imply constructionism or determinism, but connotes a more nuanced and fluid notion. (See Parker and Sedgwick, 1995.) The self is not static. It moves in multiple, sometimes contradictory directions at the same time. Thus, although this analysis centers on specific questions and themes, the patterns should not be interpreted as evidence of a fixed self. Furthermore, although individual interviews are the primary method used in this report, the story told is of these young people as a collective.

PART I

THEORETICAL FOUNDATIONS

Chapter 1

Violence, Trauma, and the Possibility of Transformation Through the Arts

Violence

Violence can be physical, psychological, and institutional. It can also be symbolic (e.g. Bourdieu, 1977; Ussher, 1998; McLaren, Leonardo, & Allen, 2000; Freire & Macedo, 2000). Each of these interrelated forms of violence can have serious consequences. Nonetheless, life-threatening physical acts of violence are qualitatively different from other forms of violence. For the purposes of this paper, traumatic violence is considered to be physically life threatening, although I will, on occasion, refer to other forms of violence as a means of exegesis.

Chronic community violence refers to community settings (usually poor major urban areas) where the experience of violence is a nearly continuous, pervasive series of traumatic events and conditions. Community violence is particularly toxic to urban adolescents. Researchers estimate that, at minimum, 50% to 75% of urban youth have personally experienced community violence (e.g. Miller, 1997; Singer, Anglin, Song, & Lunghofer, 1995; Shakoor and Chalmers, 1991; Dubrow and Garbarino, 1989). Those between 12 and 19 years old are two to three times as likely to be victims of criminal acts of community violence than are adults and younger children (Finkelhor & Dziuba-Leatherman, 1994). According to the U.S. Advisory Board on Child Abuse and Neglect, 70% of the two to three thousand children and adolescents murdered each year are between the ages of 12 and 17. Although it is beyond the scope of this paper to discuss these issues in depth, it should be noted that community violence is inextricably intertwined with state

and domestic violence and national ideology (see Fine & Weis, 1998; Spina, 2000a; 2000b). It is violence that is, as Hirschman (1970) pointed out, socially, politically, and economically constructed with no options for consent or dissent beyond blind faith in the system or renouncing it by choosing to exit (see Aronowitz, 2000). In other words, poor inner-city residents are trapped in a situation where their choice is acceptance of their lot or opting out, which may result in even greater powerlessness. There are no viable alternatives.

Trauma

The most recent edition of the American Psychological Association (APA) *Diagnostic and Statistical manual of mental disorders* (DSM IV, 1994, p. 427-428), describes trauma as the

> [experiencing, witnessing, or confrontation with] an event or events involving death (either actual or threatened) or serious injury (including threats to the physical integrity of oneself or others). To be "confronted" with traumatic events would include "learning about unexpected or violent death, serious harm, or threat of death or injury experienced by a family member or other close associates."

Eth and Pynoos (1985, p. 90) define psychological trauma as that which "occurs when an individual is exposed to an overwhelming event that renders him or her helpless in the face of intolerable danger, anxiety, and instinctual arousal." Others, like Herman (1992, p. 33), argue that traumatic events are not rare occurrences, but are extraordinary. Most scholars define trauma as "outside normal human experience." However, critical psychologists like Martín-Baró (1996) and Lykes (Comas-Diaz, Lykes, and Alarcon, 1998; Lykes, 1994b) argue that long-term wars or chronic community violence constitute traumatic experiences as a "normal" part of everyday life.

Trauma research on chronic community violence and youth typically provides limited insights into the lived experiences of young people and focuses instead on the incidence and prevalence of types of and exposure to violence (e.g. Miller, 1997; Singer, et. al., 1995; Bell and Jenkins, 1993; Shakoor and Chalmers, 1991; Martinez and Richters, 1993; Beran, Kurtines, Silverman, and Serafini, 1996), parenting (e.g. Gorman-Smith & Tolan, 1998; Shakoor and Chalmers, 1991), psychiatric symptomatology or pathology (e.g. Davidson, Hughes, Blazer, and George, 1991; Norris, 1992), or delinquency and aggressive behaviors (See Armsworth & Holoday, 1993).

Clinical studies of the effects of war on children perhaps most closely approximate the situation of children living in the midst of chronically violent communities (Garbarino, Kostelny, & Dubrow, 1991a, 1991b). Both conditions share features like a proliferation and use of weapons in armed attacks and reprisals, with a substantial number of "bystander" injuries, and both conditions put families, overwhelmingly headed by single mothers, under enormous economic and emotional stress (Garbarino, et. al., 1991a). Nonetheless, like work on community violence, research from countries at war rarely accounts for how residents deal with the losses, fears, anger, and horror of the situation other than the expression of symptomatology.

The work of Robert J. Lifton, M. Brinton Lykes, and other critical psychologists (e.g. Martín-Baró, 1994) moves notions of trauma beyond epidemiology and the study of behaviors exhibited in coping with the distress of symptoms toward a focus on the causes and psychological processes involved in coping with the trauma itself. Critical psychology recognizes the multi-dimensionality of trauma and challenges us to question models that reify trauma. For example, Lifton (1992) argues that models that focus on causation, prediction, and control promote a tendency toward viewing trauma and reactions to it in

terms of vulnerability, blame, and responsibility. This compounds the trauma for many who have indicated that being blamed for bringing the experience on themselves, and/or for their response to it, left deeper scars than the trauma (Lifton, 1992). Lifton' s approach, which will be discussed in detail in the next section, is simultaneously psychological, social, personal, and political. It does not negate trauma, objectify it as a transgression against the individual/autonomous self, or provide an algorithm for "recovery."

Similarly, Lykes (1996, 1999) decries the design and methodology of most work on trauma, especially the use of controlled studies with representative samples to test hypotheses. She argues that current trauma research "comfort[s] the researcher more than [it] respond(s) to the child and his or her community," both of which experience the research as an outside imposition (1996, p. 164). Lykes makes a case for the importance of establishing relationships with subjects (sic) in time and providing resources to the participant(s) and community. The data, consequently, are dialogically co-constructed and thus better approximate more adequate bases for knowing than traditional instruments. She calls for activist research or "passionate scholarship," a cry that has resounded throughout much recent critical work in this area. (See, for e.g., Fine, 1992; Martín-Baró, 1994; Morawski, 1997; Stanton-Salazar & Spina, 2000; Spina, 2000b.)

Lykes also argues that "contrary to much of the psychological literature," "survival" is neither primarily about the expression of and recovery from pathology nor about resiliency. "It is, rather, about the multiple daily experiences of 'living a life' under 'traumatogenic structures'" (1994a, p.110). How, then, do we (re)define trauma?

Borrowing from Chuck Strozier's description of Lifton's work in his introduction to Trauma and Self, we can define trauma in a way which, although more "self"-centered than I would like, captures both the construct and process of trauma. That is, trauma is a

disruption in the fragile process of symbolization, or the human capacity to imbue life with meaning by representing the self's immortality. Although reminiscent of Rank's notion of man's perpetual struggle for eternal survival, immortality, here, does not refer to eternal life in the religious realm where Rank placed it "beyond psychology" (1958, p. 64), although that may be a part of it for devout believers, but rather a symbolic immortality or generativity that arises only from facing one's own mortality. Trauma, in this existential conceptualization, becomes a process that allows room for the different contexts from within which one conceptualizes and experiences traumatic events that are neither rare nor extraordinary. It demands more in response than the adaptation and coping of the earlier definitions, or the requisite fear, helplessness, or horror specified by the DSM-IV. It requires "a reordering of the dominant symbols and images by which one lives," (Lifton and Olson, 1974, p. 67) which can lead to greater ethical integrity, more courageous moral actions, and a different way of life, i.e. transformation.

Transformation and Critical Consciousness

Following Lifton (1993), transformation (for lack of a better word in the English language) is used here to mean change in the pre-Socratic sense (e.g. Heraclitis, Deleuze), which should not be confused with an Aristotelian (teleological) progression along a hierarchical developmental path. The dominant view of "transformation," held by many researchers and clinicians, is that it is more than a "recovery" or "cure," which is traditionally defined as "accepting" or "making peace" with traumatic memories (Figley, 1988, p. 86). It is an acceleration of personal growth, a move to a "higher" level of functioning, or a "rebirth" as a newer, improved, "transcendent" self (e.g. Tedeschi and Calhoun, 1995; Tedeschi, Park, and Calhoun, 1998). This outcome is reached via a

cognitive re-evaluation of the particulars of a stressful event, i.e. an "appraisal" of one's situation.

In contrast, Liftonian transformation is not an acceptance or cure; not a return to one's prior state; not a leap to transcendence (Lifton, 1993). Transformation is not an outcome. It is a tenuous, continual effort where meaning-making is a constant struggle and traumatic experiences do not have to be extraordinary, overwhelming, or viewed as beneficial in order for a person to move on with her life. Central to Lifton's definition of both transformation and meaning-making is "imagination" (in Brooks, 1974, p. 229).

Imagination, Dewey (1934) said, renders experience aware of itself, fostering the capacity to see what is concealed by familiarity, habit, or ignorance — what Maxine Greene (1978), following Alfred Schutz, calls "wide awakeness." Without it, change is unlikely. It is a space in which to take the ordinary and render it strange to see it anew — or a place to take the contradictory, the strange, the imaginary, the unknown, and render them meaningful. Although not singular to the arts, this capacity is intrinsic to artistic experience and essential to *concientización*.

Concientización (Freire, 1985), or critical consciousness, implies being able to understand, analyze, question, seek one's own meaning, and recognize one's right and responsibility to take actions that have an impact on the explicit and implicit sociopolitical and economic realities of one's life. The assumption that the purpose of learning is to be able to understand the meaning of something is essential to critical theory and pedagogy. In traditional schooling, teaching frequently means slavishly enforcing lesson plans developed by curriculum writers with no relationship to the social contexts — to the lives — of the students. The origins of the "knowledge" being taught and its under-lying ideology are not questioned. In critical pedagogy, on the other hand, teachers facilitate the

student's development of a critical stance toward the bases for meaning and significance, difference and relativity, connections and boundary-breaking; they "teach," as Maxine Greene (1996, p. 29) says, "in such a way as to arouse passion...; to engage the very beings of our students; to encourage openness to new meanings and nuances; to nurture a transformation of thought from ethereal elitist notions of knowledge to substantive democratic actualities of understanding; to increase awareness and agency."

The arts provide a space that can foster critical consciousness. Augusto Boal (1995), for example, writes about theater inviting transformative thinking and knowledge construction by arousing memory, emotional response, and imaginative insight. Miller has written extensively on the use of creativity to combat dehumanization or what she calls the threat of "psychic annihilation" (1976/86, p. 59). Dewey notes that through the arts, "man (sic) constructs a fortress out of the very conditions and forces which threaten him" (1984, p. 3). Greene (1988, p. 133) tells us that the arts "will help disrupt the walls that obscure the spaces, the spheres of freedom to which [we] might someday attend. (Perhaps that is, at least in part, why the arts are given little consideration in schools.)

By enabling one to expose the hidden normative codes of dominant culture (i.e. learning how the system is socially constructed and that it is inherently unfair), a critical consciousness facilitates mobility across multiple and sometimes conflictive borders without sacrificing psychological well-being (See Stanton-Salazar and Spina, 2000). Perhaps more importantly, critical consciousness is emancipatory and empowering — not only raising consciousness but changing lives. It mobilizes schools, families, communities, and institutions in a joint effort toward social justice — toward addressing the causes, not just the symptoms of trauma.

Chapter 2

Art and Education

The Arts

As much as we talk and think about individual talent or works (i.e. products) of art, the art world is a profoundly communal human construction that is socially defined (Czikszentmihalyi & Robinson, 1986; John-Steiner, 1985) and involves the integration of many tasks and the cooperation of many people (Becker, 1982; John-Steiner, 1985). No artist could survive without borrowing techniques and images that come either from the public domain or from other artists. Artists have perennially joined together in groups, borrowing from and building on each other's work. Think of the way gospel and blues artists imitate and borrow from each other (Murray, 1976) or how artists of the Impressionist, Cubist, Dada, Blaue Reiter, or Bauhaus schools built on one another's work (Wolf, 1988). These "art worlds" (Becker, 1982) consist, not of individuals, but of a group of people who contribute to the production of a work of art. In an opera company, for example, the "art world" includes musicians, composers, costumers, set designers, carpenters, electricians, lighting designers, writers, custodians, and those who provide them with necessary materials and equipment (wood, notation systems, rehearsal places, tickets, etc.).

Art worlds are cooperative activities among people in varying degrees of social integration. They are not discrete entities but exist both within and as practical-socio-historical activity. It follows, then, that the creation and appreciation of art is not dependent on the existence of separate, canonized, formal bodies of knowledge about it. Much of what our museums and galleries display and our symphony orchestras perform was not considered "art" when it was created. Many of Mozart's and Bach's

compositions, for example, were commissioned as entertainment pieces or complements to elaborate dinner parties. Their work was not separate and elevated.

DiMaggio (1986) has shown that the creation of museums, concert halls, opera houses, and other organizations of "high culture" was an intentional strategy by urban elites of the late nineteenth century to make "art" less accessible to lower classes. Similarly, the hierarchical separation of art into the "fine" or "high arts" and "low" arts reinforces social segregation. "High" art (e.g. classical music, ballet, opera, painting, sculpture) is (traditionally) male and privileged. "Low" art, often "crafts" (e.g. textile design, basketry) are the purview of women, "other" cultures, and the "uneducated." "Popular" arts, the realm of youth culture, if even considered "art" at all, are the "lowest" (e.g. television, movies, pop music).

Opera, in particular, because of its "elite" connotations and canon of revered compositions by "dead white European males," is often viewed as foreign and closed to other groups. Yet, although opera, as we know it, began as a luxury of the Italian nobility in late sixteenth century Florence, its popularity soon spread far beyond palace walls. As early as 1606, in Rome, traveling companies would present operettas on carts at carnivals and in town squares (Elson, 1901). In Venice, the first public opera house opened in 1637. It was so successful that it was followed by ten more by the end of the century (Elson, 1901). Opera was familiar to prince and peasant. In the United States, in the 1820s and 30s, opera troupes traveled the country. In New Orleans, black and white audiences alike flocked to the opera house. Although segregation was the rule and blacks were relegated to the balcony, the fact that both races were under the same roof for the performance was exceptional (Botstein, 1998).

We tend to consider opera a European art form with roots in ancient Greece, but opera also has a long history in China. Chinese opera draws on a tradition dating from at least the twelfth century, when huge public theaters held crowds enthralled by performances of popular theatrical productions performed with an orchestra and chorus. Across continents, opera was meant to be enjoyed by and accessible to the vast majority of the population — much as movies were in the early decades of the twentieth century and as television is today. It was part of the fabric of life.

In many communities, past and present, all members engage in artistic activity.[1] The exuberant musicality of voices joined in singing spirituals during Sunday services at Baptist churches is one such community. Art is embedded in the everyday life of the society, not withdrawn from it. In this view, art is inherently social and creativity is a dialogic activity. The conventional (i.e. canonical) image of art's unilinear progression toward a single goal shifts to an image that is protean (Wolf and Balick, 1995). Art becomes an aesthetic process — a space where, as Maxine Greene reminds us, a widening repertoire of possibilities can be imagined; where one can go, as Sartre put it, beyond what exists, by trying to bring something into being (1988, p. 22).

Recent and current research in arts education tends to treat the arts as fundamentally instrumental domains[3] and focuses on art's potential to enhance cognitive development (e.g. Winner, 1982; Gardner, 1990; Perkins 1988; McGuire, 1984). Many of these efforts have great value, but they do not capture what is integral to artistic processes. Shirley Brice-Heath (1997), for example, in describing a community art group, emphasizes the verbal transmission of knowledge of the arts (and the organization of which they are a focus) to newer members of the community as key to their value. She explains how the "macro enables micro interactions" and has coined the catchy alliterative phrase "rules,

roles, and risk" to describe the mechanisms of navigation between macro and micro levels. However, although Brice-Heath makes a substantial contribution toward debunking some of the myths about the apotheosis of art, her epistemological foundation is firmly structural and syntactical. These studies do not attend to the aesthetic space inherent in artistic experience — a space where one can "break open a dimension in which human beings, nature, and things no longer stand under the law of the established reality principle" (Marcuse, 1977, p. 72); the space of "wide-awakeness" — of *concientización;* of transformative possibilities.

The work of Vygotsky, Dewey, and others can help us understand qualities of artistic experience that, although not exclusive to artistic experience, are inherent in it. To Dewey, mind is a "verb" denoting "*all the ways* in which we deal consciously and expressly with the situations in which we find ourselves" (1934, p. 263, emphasis added). He writes about the challenges of artistic experience to "systematic" thought — to "many kinds of linear, positive thinking" (Greene, 1978, p.171). Dewey is fundamentally aware of the ways in which artistic experience moves people to an "imaginative ordering and reordering of meanings" (Greene, 1978, p. 171); to reconstruct the present in the light of possibilities; to see with the "double vision" evoked in artists by their "awareness of contradictions, the possibilizing they become capable of" (Greene, 1978, p. 173).

In Art as Experience (1934), perhaps Dewey's most important work, he argues for the universality of creativity, of aesthetic experience. His emphasis is on art as a product of culture through which people express the significance of their lives, as well as their hopes, fears, and ideals. Because art has its roots in everyday life, it transcends individual subjectivity and serves a critical function in relation to prevailing social conditions. The degree to which this critical function is ignored is an indication of what Dewey regarded as

the unfortunate distancing of the arts from the common pursuits and interests of ordinary life. The realization of art's social function requires the closure of this bifurcation. Vygotsky also recognized the universality of creativity as "the rule rather than an exception;" as a "a necessary force of existence" (1930/90, p. 887). However, unlike Dewey's work on art, Vygotsky's has been largely neglected. His book, The Psychology of Art, has been out-of-print for more than 30 years. Nonetheless, although the emphasis among (neo) Vygotskiians has been on his work on instrumental cognitive skills (e.g. problem-solving), Vygotsky himself gives equal weight to "artistic," non-linear forms of thought, arguing for psychology to include indirect evidence and circumstantial clues, not just direct "scientific" evidence (Vygotsky 1915-25/65-68/71; See also Spina, 1997). [2]

According to Vygotsky, artistic experience is a "method for finding an equilibrium between man (sic) and his world..." (Vygotsky, 1915-25/65-68/71, p. 249), a social and artistic process that transcends language and stresses the relationship and continuity between art and the rest of life; a tool of society which brings the most intimate and personal aspects of our being into the circle of social life. The arts convey values, reveal perceptions, provide cathartic experiences (Vygotsky, 1915-25/65-68/71), and increase the sense of possibility (Maddi, 1988). As Langer puts it, art "clarifies and organizes intuition itself" (p. 397) by evoking a "tacit, personal, illuminating contact with symbols" (1953, p. 401).

Involvement in artistic creation has long been called cathartic. Vygotsky, in The Psychology of Art, thinks of catharsis (contra Aristotle) as not just the resolution of personal conflict, but as the "the revelation of a higher, more general, human truth in the phenomena of life" (Leontiev, in Vygotsky, 1915-25/65-68/71, p. ix). Vygotsky argued that the arts in general, and especially drama, serve as cathartic because the conflict and

contradiction between the expected outcome and what actually happens reflect similar discrepancies in life. When confronted with incongruities, as in an unexpected or difficult situation, one cannot rely on what one has "learned" (Vygotsky, 1915-25/65-68/71). The conflict does not map "reality." Logic can neither account for nor resolve this experience, so a more "interpretive" resource (such as the arts) takes it place, fostering a grasp of experience that is beyond language, or what Wittgenstein (1958) called "intransitive understanding." (It is important to note that this is *not* to say that the motive to create art does not exist without inner conflict, or that it is always transformative or that some resolution is always reached or necessary, but rather that the creation of art may offer particular benefit(s) in the processing of conflict and contradiction. In addition, there is the distinct possibility that "resilience" may lead individuals to participate in artistic activity as well as the reverse.)

Art is seen as a processual way of understanding that is not a mental function like memory, emotion, or thinking, although they are all part of experiencing in varying degrees at different times. It is a dialogic, intrapsychic, behavioral, and social process, both external and internal — a dialogic in which multiple, even contradictory, conscious and unconscious experiences are mediated. As Langer describes it, the purpose of art is to explore the "ever moving patterns, the ambivalences and intricacies of inner experience" (1942/79, p.92).

Similarly, in Experience and Nature (1938/81), Dewey defines artistic experience as a mixture of the actual and the potential, the fixed and the continuous, with an endless potential for meaning-making. He characterizes the artist as being involved in the reconstruction of her experience in the process of making a work of art (Dewey, 1934). The crux of Dewey's philosophy is that knowledge is not separate from action (whether

material or symbolic) and is constantly, continuously dialogic. Artistic experience "signifies active and alert commerce with the world; at its height it signifies complete interpenetration of self and the world of objects and events: (Dewey, 1934, p. 19).

According to Vygotsky, and Dewey would agree, the experience of art includes qualities inherent in the actual *processes* of creative involvement. These include a capacity for representation and synthesis that go beyond (instrumental) symbolic depiction of an object to a non-discursive embodiment of that which it represents. Images, while "essential forms of our mental and communal life" (Henzell, 1995, p. 193), are not synonymous with art although they may be a feature of it. That is, there is more to art than what it represents. Engagement in the arts offers one an opportunity to critically engage multiple references and cultural codes, wherein lies the potential to uncover the presuppositions of lived experience — the potential for *concientización* and transformation.

Art education

Curriculum in American schools generally emphasizes received knowledge over creativity and critical thinking (Aronowitz & Giroux, 1985; Giroux & McLaren, 1996; Spina, 1997). Knowledge, however, is not the same as understanding. The nature of understanding, as Gary Shank explains, "is different than the nature of knowing, because understanding deals with meaning and knowing deals with [empirical] truth" (1992, p. 201). It is this striving for meaning-making that defines us as human beings. It is the type of thinking that will most likely be used by humans in any setting or situation that presents uncertainty or perplexity. Yet, it is devalued in schooling where acquiescence is favored over creativity and conformity is preferred to originality (Aronowitz, 1973, 2000). Not coincidentally, so are the arts.

Howard Gardner has rightly said that "Schools and school systems which welcome the arts are a rare commodity on the contemporary American scene" (1988 p. 163). In New York City, two-thirds of all public elementary schools do not have any music or art teachers. Often a district has only one visual art and one music teacher who travel to different schools. In Los Angeles, less than 1% of all students receive comprehensive arts education (Fehr, 1993). Arts education did not appear anywhere in George Bush's 1990 National Education Goals. Yet, in 1991, the U.S. Department of Labor issued a report urging schools to prepare students for tomorrow's workplace by fostering abilities like teamwork, communication, creative problem-solving, self-esteem, invention, and imagination — all of which are fostered by the arts. Why does this paradox exist? In part, the reasons can be found in historical linkages between the arts and art education with social, economic, and political forces. However, given the ideology underlying these influences, which are also the bedrock of public education (See Aronowitz & Giroux, 1985), it may also be because artistic experience has greater potential than any other subject to provide a space where those influences can be exposed and rendered vincible.

In the late nineteenth century, education was already under the influence of the social Darwinism of Herbert Spencer (1861/1966), a model that was further ensconced by the psychological notions of individual potential and human development promulgated by G. Stanley Hall (See Cremin, 1964). "Art" was introduced into public schools only to teach drawing skills required for burgeoning industries and, more importantly, to instill industrial ways of thinking in urban children (Smith, 1872). Art education was utilitarian and mechanical. Drawing was taught by repetitive copying of increasingly complex designs, maps, and scientific subjects like botanical and zoological specimens, as well as machinery. Soon after the turn of the century, scientific evidence for the value of art in

education was demanded and found lacking. David Snedden (1917, p. 805), an educational sociologist at Columbia University, argued that art "ministered to the primal needs of society" and had little importance for the survival and expansion of the "civilized" world.

At the same time, there were educational innovators who disagreed with these positions, but their efforts were far from typical and were frequently ridiculed. Francis Wayland Parker, who became the superintendent of schools in Quincy, Massachusetts, in 1873, firmly believed that children can only learn if something is meaningful to them and that meaning is rooted in their own experience. The role of the teacher was to help children to attend to objects in their environment and to help them express their understanding of what has been attended to. Parker also believed that attending stimulates "intense acts of imagination" and that "attending makes one want to express, while expressing makes one want to attend more" (Efland, 1990, p. 168). Education required modes of expression in a variety of media, including gesture, voice, speech, music, modeling, painting, drawing, and writing. Thus, the arts were central in and critical to Parker's interdisciplinary education. The arts were seen as ways to understand, to secure meanings in the world, across disciplines (Korzenik, 1984).

In 1896, John Dewey established the Laboratory School at the University of Chicago. His purpose was to integrate schooling with the child's experience and environment so that it would have "real significance" to the child and develop [his] "capacity to express himself in a variety of artistic forms" (in Mayhew & Edwards, 1936/1966, p. 25). Interdisciplinary approaches were interrelated with intrinsically interesting activities of everyday life (e.g. carpentry, cooking), with the goal of broadening the child's intellectual life. Learning was organized around activities rather than formal

subjects. Artistic expression grows out of these activities. It is not a separate realm or endeavor but is integral to the generation and understanding of meaning.

The Progressive schools of the 1920s drew on the ideas of Dewey, which were highly influenced by the psychology of William James and Hegel's philosophy of being. Progressivism defined a self consistent with mainstream values, but considered a universal reality (Freedman, 1995) with the intellectual potential to improve lives. However, in public education, behaviorism had a stronger appeal. Behaviorism was seen as an efficient form of social control (Franklin, 1986) and, with its measured responses and predicted outcomes, provided a highly testable curriculum. On the other hand, art was also seen as a humanizing agent, albeit in a standardized form, in an increasingly mechanistic, impersonal school system (Freedman, 1995).

Efland (1990, 1995) identifies three factions in post-World War II educational thought: expressionism, the revival of 1890s scientific rationalism (or formalist-cognitive theory), and (pragmatic) reconstructionism. Expressionism, popular in the late 1940s and early 1950s, is rooted in nineteenth century romantic idealism. The leading proponents of expressionism, Viktor Lowenfeld (1947) and Herbert Read (1945) promoted art education in an environment where children, free of adult imposition, could indulge in "free-expression." Read believed the child artist expressed universal truths in the symbols of the collective unconscious (i.e. Jungian archetypes). Lowenfeld believed that these truths were expressed in developmental stages that followed the progression of human evolution ("ontogeny recapitulates phylogeny"). Lowenfeld, the most influential figure in art education until his death in 1960, considered the social environment a corruptive entity from which children should be sheltered if creativity was to flourish. Teachers would be careful not to interfere in the child's realization of her innate desire for expression, and

"laissez-faire" pedagogy predominated. This romanticized view conflates art with play, divorces art from content and context and reduces art to a "hollow frill" (Fehr, 1993) — a characterization art still suffers from.

Lowenfeld's ideas were challenged by Manuel Barkan, who began as a Dewyan but wound up contributing to formalist-cognitive art education, and by June King McFee, one of the few prominent female voices in art education at the time. Barkan (1955) drew heavily on psychology and the social sciences to argue for the benefits of art education as a means to encourage children to interact with their environment and other human beings. He questioned the "scientization" of art, maintaining that the discipline of art was of a different order and that artists, not scientists, should serve as models of inquiry for art education. However, it was Barkan's efforts to deal with the impact of science on arts curriculum that attracted attention. In arguing for the validity of art as a discipline with a distinct subject matter, Barkan equated art with verbal language and proposed that art historians and art critics receive the same consideration as artists as models of inquiry in the arts. Consequently, the overall importance of artistic experience was reduced and Barkan's tripartite model was adopted as the hallmark of discipline-based art education, a model strongly influenced by Bruner's structuralist ideas and congruent with the tenets of scientific rationalism.

McFee (1961) revived the progressive populism of the pre-Depression pragmatists (e.g. Dewey, 1934; Haggerty, 1935) and their experience-based, transactional pedagogy. Her studies of perception led her to question Lowenfeld's visual-haptic dichotomy, which suggested genetic predispositions to learn either through vision or touch, by showing how these dispositions could be accounted for by child-rearing practices. Art teaching, she argued, needs to stimulate multiple ways of perceiving. McFee and other

reconstructionists sought to cure social ills through public education and argued that art education would invigorate schools. Like the pragmatists before them, they believed that art was more than personal expression. It was a means for changing individual life and society. However, reconstructionism never became as popular as expressionism and both were overpowered by more "rationalist" models.

During the Cold War, reconstructionist education came under attack on several fronts. Conservative academic scholars were accusing progressive educators of being "anti-intellectual" (e.g. Bestor, 1953). Right-wing groups accused them of being "anti-American," equating their "permissive" teaching with communism. In practice, there was a continuing loyalty to the ideals of progressive education and expressionism (Efland, 1990), but creative self-expression no longer had currency in public school curricula and budgets.

In 1957, when the Russians launched *Sputnik*, scientific rationalism became the driving force in schooling seemingly overnight, but the groundwork had already been laid. Three years earlier, Rudolf Arnheim (1954) linked formalist theory with Gestalt psychology because both deal with the structure of visual form. In Arnheim's view, the cognitive structures of art, as identified in concepts, vocabularies, and elements of design, provide the keys to art' s value and interpretation. The study of art shifted from a concern with art in daily living to the study of "appreciation" of "masterpieces" of canonical western art. Scientific rationalism emphasizes knowledge transmitted by the teacher, often in a prescribed curriculum, rather than a result of student inquiry. This conservative view, represented by Ralph Smith (1986), increased in prominence during the 1960s, under the influence of the early cognitive theories of Jerome Bruner (1960), which were structuralist, disciplinary based, and tended to exclude feelings. Today scientific rationalism is

represented in schooling by the "back-to-basics" movement and its emphasis on testing and in arts education by the discipline-based art education (DBAE) movement, supported by the J. Paul Getty Trust.

Elliot Eisner was one of the strongest promoters of DBAE. Eisner (1972) argued for a structured art curriculum supported by instructional resources. He decried the lack of testing in art, the lack of understanding of the terminology of art (e.g. saturation, hue, symmetry), and the lack of knowledge about "significant artists" (Eisner, 1972, p. 322). Eisner, with Barkan, was instrumental in re-focusing art education on content, although artistic experience, to a lesser degree, still played a role in their models.

Whatever the theoretical framework or ideological approach, in practice the differences are not so clear-cut. Examining the dialogic relationship among some of the continuities and discontinuities in terms of modernity and post-modernity, both of which are deeply embedded in current practices of art education, and vice versa, will illustrate this situation. The values of modernity arise from Enlightenment ideology and the hierarchical relationships of bureaucratic society. Modernists optimistically believe that all problems can be solved or at least controlled. The emphasis is on progress and newness. Postmodernity embodies social pluralism, ethnic and racial diversity, tradition, and contextualism. A multiplicity of views and values of social and ecological responsibility took precedence over the individualism, rationalization, and teleologically panglossian world view of modernism.

The Owatonna Project of the 1930s perhaps best demonstrates the complex relationship between these contradictory but, at least in practice, not necessarily incongruous standpoints. The project, supported by the Carnegie Foundation, was designed to be carried out in a community that had no previous art program in its public

schools and was not dominated by any particular racial, religious, or economic group. Owatonna, Minnesota was chosen as this "typical" American community, although, as Fehr observes, "Given that Minnesota may be the Whitest state of the fifty, one wonders how many of Owatonna' s 5000 to 8000 residents in 1931 were not working- or middle-class Protestants with roots in northern Europe" (1993, p. 67). Nonetheless, this project is the prototype for collaborative art initiatives among philanthropic foundations, academic institutions, community groups, and individuals (Hamblen, 1995). It is frequently cited as an exemplar of how art can be part of the fabric of life and the environment (Logan, 1955). In this sense, the Owatonna Project exemplifies postmodern values of contextualism and pluralism. Nonetheless, the project developed out of the values of modernity as a product of intervention by academic experts who rationalized and codified artistic processes in terms of production and response (see Hamblen, 1995). Although the community and its values were the project's concern, it emanated from the belief that change can be institutionalized and that rational change is equated with progress.

As I write this, in the wake of the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001, there is renewed interest in the therapeutic value of the arts and some acknowledgment of their universality. It remains to be seen how this will play out, but there appears to be a growing appreciation of the ability of the arts to provide a vehicle to express what cannot be expressed in words. However (and this may be due in part to the nature of the events and the way they were replayed ad infinitum by the media), this art, for the most part, uses a limited range of literal images to create narratives mirroring socially acceptable stories of patriotism, heroism, and stoicism. That is, it is frequently "art" shaped by and viewed through the discursive practices and dominant ideologies of science and modernism — the same forces that have historically contributed to the denigration and scientization of arts

education. That is why, although it is unclear whether the current search for expressive outlets to deal with the traumatic events of 9/11 will have any lasting effect on arts education, there is reason for concern.

In the mid-seventies, Lanier (1975) wrote that the more art education changed, the more it stayed the same. He was talking about the prevalence of studio art across theoretical approaches, but the strongest constant today may be the mismatch between bureaucratic mandates and characteristics fundamental to artistic experience. Many art educators, most not by choice, teach a semester- or year-long art curriculum composed of a series of discrete lessons. Many of these lessons are instrumental and structural rather than creative and experiential. Each lesson lasts exactly as long as the short time allotted to an "unimportant" or "frivolous" subject. But art is not unimportant or frivolous. Nor does artistic experience lend itself to the time constrictions of a single 45-minute class period. Artists often grapple with a problem for long periods of time — over days, weeks, months, even years. They try different approaches, different solutions, until they are satisfied with it. They explore materials, processes, and subject matter in depth. They imagine. They discover. They create.

PART II

THE STUDY

Chapter 3

The Site

The City

Located on the west bank of the Passaic River only eight miles from New York City, Newark is the third oldest major city in the United States and the largest city in New Jersey. It is one of the poorest, most segregated, most densely populated cities in the country. The situation in Newark is the result of a long history of graft, prejudice, civic and social irresponsibility, and economic and political abandonment. Although connections among class, race, and ethnicity and the investment in education are commonplace in cities across the U.S., they are particularly striking in Newark. The following overview is, of necessity, an oversimplification. Nevertheless, it provides a brief introduction to the complexity of forces that have contributed to the decline of this once vibrant city.

When Newark was incorporated in 1836, it was already on its way to becoming a bustling metropolis. By the mid-1800s, jobs in manufacturing, insurance, construction, and retailing were plentiful (Immerso, 1997; Anyon, 1997). The streets were lined with mansions — the homes of prosperous industrial giants who were drawn to the city by New Jersey's refusal to comply with the federal government's "trust-busting" regulations. This produced great wealth but, as in other industrial cities, it produced even greater poverty. As the large trusts were drawn to New Jersey, so were immigrants looking for jobs provided by those industries. Between 1890 and 1920, the earlier Irish and German immigrants were joined by more than 200,000 immigrants from Italy, Russia, and other

European countries. Most found entry-level jobs in manufacturing. Some opened small family stores selling baked goods, shoes, and household items (Immerso, 1997; Winters, 1977). For many, there was no decent place to live. By the turn of the last century, tenements and shanties housed most of the immigrant poor. Cholera and smallpox were rampant. The more affluent began to abandon the city for the suburbs. But the immigrants stayed. They lived in closely-knit neighborhoods, often with others who emigrated from the same towns in the "old country." Social life, often centering on the church or synagogue, provided emotional and sometimes financial support.

By 1935, half of the neighborhoods in Newark, black and white, were considered "poor, very poor, or inferior" (Anyon, 1997, 65), but they struggled to maintain a strong sense of communal ethnic identity and social responsibility. Residents organized and tried to improve conditions, but were overwhelmed by economic, political, social, and demographic forces (See Helmreich, 1999; Immerso, 1997). In November 1937, an editor of the *Newark Ledger* wrote:

> Newark has been lavish in appropriating funds to advance the commercial and industrial development of the city but it has shown less regard for the educational and social needs of the community. Chamber of Commerce opposition has been especially bitter against improvement in hospitalization and educational facilities.

The state of New Jersey was similarly lax. Many states helped their cities by providing approximately 30% of school revenues during the 1930s Depression years, but New Jersey contributed less than 5% to local school districts. In this climate of a severely weak economy and lack of employment, the board of education, via patronage and paybacks, became the city's largest public employer (Strayer, 1942). Unqualified tenured

positions were handed out as political favors, preventing the hiring of new, qualified applicants for years to come.

World War II led to fifteen years of industrial expansion as Newark manufacturing companies increased production. The white male workforce had enlisted in the armed forces and, to compensate, businesses encouraged blacks from the rural south to move to Newark to fill low-skilled jobs (Price, 1975). These were good paying jobs and, even in the poorer Central Ward, families were able to rent adequate housing and buy modest homes (Aronowitz, 2002). They were not rich, and communities were segregated, but blacks, Portuguese, and the newly-arriving Puerto Ricans found employment at decent wages and enjoyed a quality of life that has not been seen in Newark since the devastating de-industrialization of the late 50s and early 60s eliminated working-class jobs (Aronowitz, 2002). The exodus of industry was encouraged by the lure of cheap land, low taxes, and population growth in the suburbs (Winters, 1977).

After World War II, whites did not return to Newark. FHA mortgages helped middle- and working-class white families move to the suburbs. The federal government also subsidized freeway, sewage, and other systems to encourage suburban sprawl, at the expense of mass transit and other urban necessities. By the early 1950s, the majority of Jewish families and working class Irish had left Newark, some driven out by "urban renewal" and the building of highways through their communities or demographic "changes" in their neighborhoods (Anyon, 1997), and others lured by the attractions of suburban living (Helmreich, 1999).

In 1967, 32% of families in Newark's poorest communities, and 23% of families in Newark as a whole, had incomes at or below the $3,000 poverty level. More than 50% of families living in the "projects" and surrounding areas earned less than $5,000 (compared

to 38% in all of Newark). More than 95% of Newark's poorest residents were African American or "Hispanic"(Curvin, 1975). Conditions were overcrowded and substandard or dilapidated. Tuberculosis was widespread. Health care was poor and infant death rates were high. Corruption in the city government was increasing and its effects were perhaps most evident in the public school system

In 1969, the mayor, several council members, the director of public works, the corporation counsel, and several underworld figures were indicted for extortion and bribery (Curvin, 1975. 65). The following year, a $60 million deficit was found in the school budget (Curvin, 1975, 128). Newark was a deteriorating, demoralized city created by a century of corruption, a system of paybacks and extortion, and a state and federal government that was, at best, negligent, and at worst, destructive.

Twenty-five years of efforts to reform the state educational system and rectify the inequities in the schools followed. In New Jersey, however, the reforms were not only "too little too late" but also "tragically misguided" (Anyon, 1997, p. 128). In 1973, for example, the New Jersey Supreme Court declared the state's system of funding education unconstitutional, directing the legislature to remedy the situation. However, instead of infusing funds into poor urban districts, the legislature placed spending caps on local school districts and required a minimum basic skills curriculum for all students (Centolanza, 1986). By using a rote-learning-based curriculum with workbooks and worksheets that were relatively inexpensive, they also freed the state from having to invest in science equipment, computers, and other materials for urban schools. During the next twenty years, the cities, which were closely monitored by the state, offered the basic skills curriculum while the suburbs offered a range of courses and curricula, equipped science labs, and computer technology (Centolanza, 1986). The state education commissioner

supported this move, claiming that "pouring money" into the city districts was futile because students in the urban schools, "even after years of remediation, will not be able to perform in school as well as their suburban counterparts" (Anyon, 1997, 137).

The lack of job opportunities compounded the problems of Newark's poorest residents. During the 1980s, for example, Newark lost more than 81,000 manufacturing jobs. Under- and unemployment, obstacles associated with racism (such as reducing federal and state aid to cities and poor families), and deteriorating race relations led to the further isolation and abandonment of the minority poor in central cities. In 1990, per capita income in New Jersey was $24,936, the second highest in the country. In Newark, it was $9,424. (Salmore and Salmore, 1993, p. 56; U.S. Census, 1990.) Newark' s unemployment rate and the number of its families living below the poverty level are well above the national average. Over 9,000 Newark households are on waiting lists for HUD housing assistance (The Center on Budget and Policy Priorities and the Economic Policy Institute, 1999). Almost 20% of renter households in Newark have incomes lower than 50% of the area median income and pay over half their incomes for rent or are living in severely substandard housing.

In 1998-99, "blacks" made up 62.9% of Newark's public school population, "Hispanics" accounted for 27.4%, "whites" 8.8%, with the remaining .9% a combination of Asian-Americans, Pacific Islanders, and Native Americans (Association for Children of New Jersey, 2000a). Between 1990 and 1996, Newark's population decreased by 6,711. The Current Population Survey by the U.S. Census Bureau (2000) indicates that, in 1998, New Jersey's foreign born population increased 22% to 1,181,000 from 966,600 in 1990. "Hispanic" immigrants (77,200) outnumbered any other immigrant group (e.g. Asian, Canadian, European) by almost 200%, a trend that is reflected in the Newark school where

this study was conducted. Immigration has stabilized the population of Newark's schools, which had dropped by 3,500 in the prior five years, and expectations are that school enrollment will increase by 5,000 by 2003 (Mooney & Alaya, 1999). Across racial categories, about 15,000 "Hispanic" students and 24,000 African American students currently attend Newark schools, which have an enrollment of 44,160. If current trends continue, "Hispanic" students will outnumber African Americans as the largest minority group in New Jersey schools within the next two years (Symons, 2000).

Newark is currently one of three of New Jersey's 595 school districts under state operation. State operation is reserved for "those districts that cannot meet standards and do not demonstrate a willingness to improve their performance." In July 1995, a state takeover team was sent to Newark. Still, fiscal problems continue. An expected $58 million budget shortfall in the 1999-2000 school year had grown to $72 million. Contributing factors included a $12 million deficit in 1998-99, the fourth year of the state's takeover of the district. With the help of a massive state bailout, the district is now on firmer financial footing, but many questions remain about how the management of the district under the state's oversight could fall into such disarray in the first place, whether it will, in fact, turn the situation around, and if it does, will better schools have any effect on other problems, such as crime and racism, that plague Newark?

The streets in Newark are clearly dangerous, despite official reports that, with the exception of 1995, overall crime figures have dropped every year since the number of major crimes peaked in 1991. The number of *reported* rapes, murders, robberies, aggravated assaults, burglaries, and motor vehicle thefts has fallen by 29% since 1991 (Donahue, 2000). The only increase was in incidents of domestic violence, which rose 1%, from 38,836 to 39,069. In Newark, reported crime is down by 13%. This does not,

however, as Attorney General John Farmer Jr. claims, necessarily mean that the streets and neighborhoods are safer. Interestingly, officials attribute the small but continued rise in domestic violence to increased reporting of such incidents and not necessarily to a rise in the number of cases (Donahue, 2000). However, the officials don't make the "reporting" connection where decreases are concerned, although there is substantial evidence that the lower crime rates merely indicate increased political pressure on police to keep crime rates low (See Spina, 2000a). The lowering of crime rates is inflated, especially in inner cities, when citizens fail to report crimes because of fear or because they know police won't respond to a call from their neighborhood (Spina, 2000a). One also wonders, if crime is down, why a $200 million jail to house 24,000 inmates is being built on a 27-acre tract in Newark.

It should also be noted that the imbalance in incarceration rates between white and black youths in New Jersey is among the worst in the nation. A nationwide study sponsored by the Justice Policy Institute in Washington and released in April 2000, found that, although blacks make up 16% of the state's under-18 population, they compose 65% of the state's youthful inmates. Latinos, at 15% of the youth population, make up 22% of youthful detainees. In 1997 statistics, the latest available, all minorities represented just 34% of the adolescent population but 62% of teenagers in juvenile detention. Of the juveniles committed to state correctional programs, Newark represents 66.3% of the county's juveniles and 13.5 of youths committed statewide (And Justice for Some, 2000). Local politicians, responding to the report, blamed "family breakdown" which, according to Assemblyman Alfred E. Steele, D-Paterson, "challenges" minority families more than others (Johnson, 2000).

Asthma is a major health problem facing Newark children (Association for Children of New Jersey, 1999; 2000b). In 1998 alone, hospitals reported 599 cases in Newark children less than 18 years of age, *not* including emergency room admissions (New Jersey Dept. of Health, 2000). Dental and vision problems and headaches have been identified by Newark Public School Nurses as "severe and growing" health conditions among students (Association for Children of New Jersey, 1999).

Poverty, crime, and other problems continue, but there are some signs of Newark's renewal. The recently built $180 million New Jersey Performing Arts Center (NJPAC) represents a major investment in Newark's future and its track record is impressive. Top names in all genres of the performing arts have appeared at NJPAC and drawn large audiences. Newark students have been the beneficiaries of invitations to both sides of the curtain at NJPAC. School groups have attended its shows and performed on its stage. But it remains to be seen if NJPAC can attract the degree of investment required to sustain the city in the long run, and what effect that investment will have on the area.

Near NJPAC, middle-class professionals have moved into recently built reasonably priced townhouses. Sports and shopping facilities are making these areas more attractive. Universities are expanding their Newark facilities. Rutgers, for example, has a new law school downtown, presumably due, at least in part, to the success of Seton Hall's. The Ironbound district, home to 30,000 Portuguese (Helmreich, 1999), is attracting thousands who work in New York City and who find the lower rents and proximity to Manhattan appealing. But so far, efforts to achieve diversity have not been successful and the population remains predominantly black (Helmreich, 1999). The dangers of gentrification also loom large. If Newark succeeds in attracting shops, restaurants, and other businesses that cater to upscale tastes and pockets, will the poor be displaced?

Efforts to revitalize Newark have benefited the city. But, for the students in the poorer school districts, the Newark of NJPAC is another world, not the Newark they know. Although individual units in the projects at the other end of the city have neatly manicured patches of green in front, usually accented with a well-cared-for rosebush or two, the area these students live in is far from downtown in more than miles. As one drives north from Newark's bustling Penn Station, through the Ironbound section and past NJPAC, even the air changes. On a hot, humid summer day the odor from the remaining factories becomes heavier and more oppressive as you move through the landscape of decaying pillared stone buildings, boarded-up, dilapidated apartment complexes, and eerily empty streets reminiscent of a de Chirico painting. Rubble-filled lots and gas stations alternate with crumbling brick houses along the broad, pot-holed streets. Tito Puente sits at the end of a short driveway, surrounded by an attractive, freshly-painted fence and a guarded parking lot for the staff.

The School

Tito Puente is in a section of Newark noted for having the highest levels of chronic community violence (as evidenced by crime statistics) and poverty. It enrolls about 800 students in pre-K through 8th grade.

Some members of the Tito Puente school administration figure prominently in this study, so some background about the administrative hierarchy of the school should be provided, especially as power relationships emerged as an important feature of the context in which the students in this study experienced the COO program. The administration of the school consists of a principal and three vice-principals (one each for grades K-4, 5-6, and 7-8). Turnover has been high. For the first several years, principals were at the school for an average of six months. In September 1999, the semester before this study began,

Ms. Byrd (a pseudonym), a principal who supported the arts and had the longest tenure at the school (a little more than two years) was replaced by an interim principal. In April, 2000, a former vice-principal from New York City became the principal of Tito Puente. She is still there and her tenure may surpass that of Ms. Byrd and bring some stability to the governance of the school. I emphasize "may" for two reasons. First, the Assistant Superintendent of the District also has an office in the building, which can complicate things because the principal does not hold the highest position of authority in the school. Second, vice-principals have a strong presence in the school, which can cause conflicts. For example, Mr. Musselman (a pseudonym), the vice-president for the seventh and eighth grades during the spring, 2000 semester, was so callous and uncompromising, that all eighth grade teachers except one social studies teacher and the opera teacher either transferred to other schools or moved to lower grades not under his jurisdiction.

The school has an instructional staff of 35 and a support staff of 40 serving the overwhelmingly Latino and African American student population. The support staff includes personal aides for handicapped students, many of whom require one-to-one assistance all day long. Almost all of the students live in the nearby "projects." All qualify for the free lunch program.

Tito Puente is in one of the newer buildings in a district where the average age of elementary schools is more than 90 years old. It is big, bright, cheerful, cleaner than most, and airy. Across from the unlocked entrance doors there is a security desk where visitors sign in and get highly-visible brightly-colored laminated 8 1/2 by 11" passes specific to their destination. The desk is staffed by at least one uniformed guard at all times. To the right is the glass-walled main office with its work area demarcated by a tall oak counter/divider. Behind the counter are several desks, a number of file cabinets, typical

office machinery, and six administrative offices, most with their doors closed. Maybe because district and school administrators (and school policies) have changed so frequently over the past three years, there are no names on the doors. On the other side, a long row of chairs line the glass wall. They are never empty. Teachers rush in and out to collect mail from their boxes. Parents come in to pick up sick children, bring forgotten homework, meet with teachers or principals about scholastic or disciplinary problems, or help with some class or PTA activity. Students, clutching passes and feeling very important, stop by on errands from teachers. The office staff is frazzled but friendly; firm but polite. The atmosphere is often noisy, rarely boisterously combative, usually calm, and always bustling. In many ways, it is a typical school with typical students. But in many ways, it is not.

Chapter 4

The Opera Program

When I talk with the kids from Tito Puente, they discuss things characteristic of any other thirteen-year-olds. They talk about celebrities, movies, video games, dating, hip-hop, and sports. But these kids, in the same breath, also speak of crime, crack, gangs, murder, rape, and homelessness. Some of the latter topics have been chosen by Tito Puente students over the past six years as the theme of an original opera.

In the New York Metropolitan Opera Guild's "Creating Original Opera" Program, under the guidance of "Met" trained teachers, students form an opera company and do everything that entails, from coming up with a name and logo design to post-production chores. They choose a theme, write the libretto, design and build lights and sets, create costumes and make-up, compose music, publicize the event, change scenery, usher, and perform. The opera project is structured so that each "job" is interrelated and success is dependent on the entire company — from ideas to design to execution and completion.

In 1983, the first COO Teacher Training Program took place in New York City with a grant from the National Endowment for the Arts. The Metropolitan Opera Guild Creating Original Opera Teacher Training Program is a course of study that provides elementary and middle school music and classroom teachers with the necessary skills, information and methodologies to guide their students through the process of developing, producing and creating original opera/musical theater and incorporating the COO Program into their existing school curriculum. Over the years, the program, underwritten by grants from the GE Foundation and the Geraldine R. Dodge Foundation, has developed and grown, as it continues to do. There are now regional programs across the U.S. and, since 1995, in American sponsored schools abroad.

COO's objectives and goals include, in part, engaging students in an in-depth multi-arts program; introducing classroom teachers and music teachers to an educational program that provides new perspectives on student potential and peer expectation, helps teachers identify and focus the various talents and aptitudes of their students and illustrates fresh approaches to teaching standard curricular subjects; defining opportunities for students to take responsibility for their own learning; providing a program developed for heterogeneous groups of children and not necessarily for the gifted and talented; helping students achieve greater self-confidence and collaborative skills; developing in-service site arts training for both elementary classroom teachers and music teachers that expands their teaching methods, encourages their comfort with risk taking, sharpens their skills and expands their vision of children's capabilities; and providing teachers with the opportunity to compare strategies and share ideas with peers from many different educational environments.

Each school participating in the program must pay a school registration fee ($190 in 2000-01), and agree to and participate fully in the evaluation process. It must provide participating teachers with instructional support, 100 hours of school time (not prep time) to integrate COO into their existing curriculum, a stipend ($150 for the 2000-01 school year) for resource materials to implement the program, and the opportunity to share their knowledge and skills with the entire school staff. Participating teachers must agree to COO's goals and objectives, participate in all training sessions, guide students in the creation of a work of original opera/musical theater during the school year, and participate fully with the evaluation process.

I have been involved with COO since 1995-96, when I first worked on an assessment of the project with Dennie Wolf for *Projects in Active Cultural Engagement*

(PACE II) at the Harvard Graduate School of Education. Subsequently, as a consultant for PACE, one of the sites I visited regularly was Tito Puente. COO is successful in many schools (albeit to varying degrees) in terms of pedagogy, creativity, and interdisciplinary curricula. However, at Tito Puente, it is effective in a unique and particularly interesting way. While students at demographically similar schools choose themes like "the science fair" or "the arrival of a new kid in school" as the subjects of their "operas," the Tito Puente students use the opera as an opportunity to deal with serious issues arising from the context of their lives in a neighborhood where drugs, guns, poverty, and other forms of violence abound. At Tito Puente, students have chosen to use the productions to focus on problems such as homelessness (1997), murder (1998), and drug-addiction (1999). Intrigued by this, I began exploring this phenomenon as part of my doctoral studies at CUNY. My dissertation builds on this empirical and theoretical inquiry while grounding it in the Newark students' experiences "creating original opera" in the racialized and classed context of urban schooling in a community where traumatic violence is chronic.

Chapter 5

Study Design and Data Analysis

Participants and selection criteria

The opera program at Tito Puente sometimes involves other grades, but I chose to focus on eighth graders for two reasons: This group is consistently involved in the program and students about to complete middle-school are at a critical developmental period in their lives. A subset of Tito Puente eighth graders, predominantly poor Latino and African American, participate in the program. The opera program is open to all students and selection is dependent on a variety of factors from student interest to teachers' willingness to cooperate. The two opera teachers talk to students and distribute written summaries about what participation in the opera company involves. They then survey the students to see who is interested. About half of all eighth graders indicate their desire to work in the opera company. However, some classroom teachers will not let students be pulled out for the opera either as a general policy or on a case-specific basis. In addition, not all students join the opera on their own initiative. The opera teachers solicit students whom they know are "in trouble" academically or behaviorally and who did not express an interest in the program. The teachers are persistent and persuasive and recruit about 30% of the company from this group of students. Of all students who ultimately participate in the opera program, two or three usually drop out early, for unknown reasons, before any of the work begins. Finally, about one-quarter of the eighth grade students wind up joining the company. Self-selection obviously plays some role in this process for a majority of the students, but chance (e.g. whether they have teachers who will allow them to miss some regular classes) is also a factor. More than twice as many students want to participate than are able to. Furthermore, students' reasons for choosing to participate vary considerably.

Some, frankly, see it simply as a way out of classes. Others were cajoled into joining by the opera teachers. Some want to join because they have seen previous years' operas or had friends involved with them. Some just want to have fun. Some are curious. Others are drawn to the opera because of a particular interest in music, drawing, building, or acting.

This study uses data from two different (1999 and 2000) "opera companies." By coincidence, the opera companies in each of the two years of the study had the same number of students involved (N = 35 for each company; total N = 70) after two from 2000 left the company early in the program. The average age of the students is 14 (with a range from 13 years 9 months to 15 years two months). About 55% of the students are female and about 45% are male. Approximately 80% are Latino/a and 20% African American, almost the exact opposite of the overall Newark population reported by the 1990 census and a confirmation of the rapidly increasing "Hispanic" population noted by the 2000 census. (See chapter 3 for additional details.) Sixteen of the 70 students also participated in a series of three individual interviews. These students were randomly selected from all participants (by drawing names). (N=8 students from each company, 1999 & 2000, total N=16 students [6 girls and 2 boys in 1999; 4 boys and 4 girls in 2000], 48 interviews). (Interview procedures are described in the next section.)

The main theme of the 1999 opera concerned a drug-addicted parent. The 2000 opera company chose premature death as the main theme. However, drugs, shootings, and other forms of violence appear, to greater or lesser degree, in the storylines of both. Particular interest will be paid not only to the unique characteristics of each opera company, but also one unexpected difference. The 1999 opera company was able to see their production through to completion and mount several performances, but the 2000

opera was cancelled by the administration two weeks prior to performance. Thus, the public performance of the opera became a variable in the program's effect on students' processing of trauma.

In addition to the students, the two teachers who facilitate the program also participated in this effort as informants, consultants, and interviewees. Both teachers have been at Tito Puente since it opened. They were attracted to the school because, although it did not turn out that way for political reasons, Tito Puente was originally conceived of as an arts-based school. Anita Bland has taught in Newark since soon after she graduated from Glassboro State College in 1972, where she majored in education and minored in the visual and performing arts. Jobs were scarce at the time and Newark needed teachers. Encouraged by relatives who still lived in the city, Bland applied for a position and was hired to teach "a sixth grade class of 36 students two weeks after school started and six teachers later."

James Manno is a single 34-year-old of Italian and Polish descent. He has been teaching in Newark for 12 years and in the opera program since 1995. The son of an opera singer, Manno is a graduate of the Manhattan School of Music Preparatory Division. He holds a Bachelor of Music and Philosophy from Ithaca College and a Master of Education in Administration and Supervision from St. Peter's College. Before beginning his teaching career, Manno pursued a career with a rock band.

Like most Newark teachers, James Manno and Anita Bland do not live in the city. James lives in West Orange, a five-mile drive (or, as he puts it, "one long radio song away") from the school. Except for his four years at Ithaca College in the mid-eighties, Manno has lived in West Orange all of his life. The town' s proximity to Newark, New York City, and "lots of music and arts action" has kept him there. Anita Bland lives 80

miles south of Newark, near the Jersey coast where she has, as a single parent for most of their lives, raised her three bi-racial children. The granddaughter of poor Spanish immigrants who settled in Newark, her family moved away from their working class city neighborhood because her father, a merchant marine, missed the water and wide open spaces. Sharing his love of southern Jersey and committed to teaching in the inner-city, Anita still commutes to Newark rather than move or get a job closer to home.

Confidentiality and anonymity

At the principal's request, a pseudonym is being used for the school. Names and identifying characteristics of students have been changed to preserve anonymity. The administration permitted the teachers and other adults participating in the study to make their own decisions regarding identification. Anita Bland, James Manno, and Ruben Gonzalez chose to use their own names. (See Appendix B.) All data is being stored in a locked metal file cabinet in the PI's home and will be kept for a minimum of seven years.

Modes of Inquiry

This research uses three complementary data collection strategies: 1) Semi-structured interviews with individual students; 2) observational field notes; and 3) supplementary data sources including taped conversations with the two participating teachers, essays and scripts written by the students in both cohorts, student artwork, a video and CD recording of the 1999 performance, and a video of a play written and performed by the 2000 opera company in addition and simultaneous to their work on the opera. All data were collected by the principal investigator during normal school hours throughout the spring 1999 and spring 2000 semesters. (See Appendix A.) Focus groups were also held (about halfway through each year's production), but recorded data from those discussions will not generally be part of this analysis.

Semi-structured interviews with individual students.

Interviewing was chosen as a method of inquiry because it provides a way to understand how events are interpreted by the interviewee — about perceptions and reactions known only to the participant. Further, semi-structured interviewing allows opportunities for the researcher to respond to each individual's narrative and deportment and to pursue an issue in depth.

Individuals randomly selected from all participating students (by drawing names) were interviewed on three occasions. All of the 16 selected students agreed to participate, and each took part in the entire series of three interviews (N=8 students from each company, 1999 & 2000, total N=16 students [6 girls and 2 boys in 1999; 4 boys and 4 girls in 2000], 48 interviews). Each interview lasted from 20 to 60 minutes. Interviews were tape-recorded with the consent of students and caregivers (See Appendix B). Interview guidelines were followed to maintain purpose and focus but interviews were semi-structured to allow flexibility to tailor each interview to the participant, building on what each individual participant shared (See Appendix C, interview protocols, for interview questions and procedures). Interviews were transcribed by the PI, substituting pseudonyms for student names and removing any identifying characteristics to preserve anonymity.

Individual interviews were conducted in the privacy of the program teacher's office, which is familiar to students and frequently used by them. Only the PI and interviewee were in the room, which has small groupings of tables and chairs, shelves of production materials, two desks, and student posters and artwork on the walls. The first semi-structured interview (T1), at the very beginning of the project (week one), centered on the student's experience of life in an inner-city, exposure to violence, and what coping strategies, if any, were used to deal with possible stressors resulting from, for example,

poverty, living conditions, and neighborhood violence. (See Appendix C for protocol and questions for the series of three interviews.) The second interview (T2), about halfway through the project (weeks four and five), covered the same questions as the first but focused on the student's experiences working on the opera project in general, and specifically in dealing with a theme based on situations encountered in the student's lived experience. The third interview (T3), at the end of the project (weeks nine and ten), followed up on the themes from the first two interviews and also asked the students to reflect on what the opera experience meant to them. Questions included whether anything had changed or stayed the same, and if so what, in how they thought, felt, and dealt with the stressors in their lives in general and especially regarding the situation that the opera focused on. The third interview with the 2000 cohort was modified to address the administration's unexpected cancellation of the performances two weeks prior to the scheduled dates. In addition, at the end of the third interviews, I shared my overall impressions of the series of interviews in order to give the participant the opportunity to confirm or correct my initial interpretations. (See Appendix A Research design/data collection diagram.)

Observational field notes.

To further ascertain, contextualize, and document the processes that are the focus of this inquiry, observational field notes were taken on a regular basis. Writing observational field notes involves entering into a social setting and getting to know the people, how they interact, their daily routines, and other characteristics of daily activities and recording these observations and experiences in writing. It requires close, long-term involvement. This immersion in the setting and with the participants, combined with written field notes, fosters a heightened sensitivity to social interactions and the construction of meaning as

ongoing, fluid processes. It also enables the researcher to grasp, as much as it is possible, the concerns and perspectives of the participants and how they evolve over time.

Field notes were taken during observations and immediately following interviews and focus groups. (Although focus group data will not be part of this analysis, the group discussions did yield information about interactions and consistency of interviewees' "stories," which were included in the field notes and which also informed later interviews. Therefore, observational notes from focus group sessions were used in this report.) During observations, notes were written openly but as unobtrusively and quickly as possible, often as a kind of shorthand memo to be filled in later. Because the opera company was comprised only of students, my participation was limited to an occasional request to hold something, open a jar of paint, find a hammer, or verify the spelling of a word. Nonetheless, I became immersed in the experiences and lives of the participants, both seeing how they responded to events and experiencing the events and circumstances surrounding them myself.

Field notes are the scrawled, sketched (i.e. drawn), and written documentation of what I observed and learned while doing this. These include descriptions of surroundings, the appearance, behaviors, facial expressions, and body language of the participants, and so on. I also recorded my reactions to what was being done or said, in the hope that this would help limit my biases and consciously remind me that what I wrote in my notes was contingent upon my perception and understanding. Each day, on the two-hour commute home after leaving the school, I also recorded self-reflections and other thoughts such as notes on something I wanted to follow-up on or confirm with a teacher or student. On occasion, notations were made at other times if I had a particular question or insight I wanted to refer to.

Supplementary data.

Supplementary data sources included recorded music, videos, poetry and essays written by students, earlier drafts of scripts and lyrics, costume and make-up designs, set designs, and the like, as well as teacher interviews. Most of these were used to provide context and memory prompts for the analysis. Tape-recorded formal and informal discussions with the two teachers, a former assistant superintendent, and a vice-principal both broadened and deepened the scope of this study, and challenged me to do the same. The teachers provided additional relevant information about students, allowed me to compare my observations to theirs, and shared their own stories. Issues raised by the teachers themselves concerning the opera program and related economic, administrative, and bureaucratic issues were of particular interest.

It is important to realize that any method of inscription is reductionist. Transcripts of interviews are products of my interpretive decisions in rendering what I hear into a written document. Field notes, as well, are experiential and subjective. By using multiple, complementary methods, within and across subject designs, and discussing the data and my interpretations with participants, I have tried to maximize the affordances and limit the constraints of my subjectivities. Although they do not escape these tendencies, it is hoped that insights gained from extra- and non-verbal supplementary data (in conjunction with field notes of discussions with the participants about those data) will minimize the problematic but necessary reliance of this effort on linguistic communication.

Data Analysis

Themes, patterns, and recurring or unusual features that became part of the more formal analyses were grounded in and emerged from the data. Thus, many of the categories used in analyzing interviews arose from those data. The "open coding" (Glaser

& Strauss, 1967) of one interview, for example, allowed me to design questions prior to the next that were specific to the initial analysis. This provided an opportunity to reflect if my impressions about something were indeed correct, to clarify or further explore an issue, or to follow up on something I may not have noticed during the first interview but which, upon listening to the tape in preparation for the second interview, now seemed important.

Analysis involved multiple readings of the transcripts to identify and list themes as they emerged. Themes were also drawn from observations, field notes, and students' writings, as well as from theory associated with trauma and transformation and the arts. These themes included, but were not limited to, students' experiences of violence, the strategies they employed to cope with their experiences, how students "make sense" of violence, their expectations for the future, their perceptions of social and institutional supports and constraints, their experiences of schooling, and their experiences with the arts in general and the opera program specifically. (See Appendix D.) Emergent themes were confirmed and challenged by searching for supporting and discrepant data. Codes were assigned to these themes that were then sorted to identify patterns and processes related to the research questions. (See Appendix D, Coding Categories.) Thematic patterns and processes were examined in and across individuals over time. By examining each series of interviews, one can understand the participants' perspectives, contexts, and meanings and their consistencies and contradictions over time. Field notes and non-verbal sources were used to complement and contextualize the data and analysis. Consistencies and inconsistencies were examined in relation to the research questions. In addition to drawing on research and theory to guide the analysis, ways that the findings challenge traditional notions of trauma and responses to trauma were considered.

Each participant was given the opportunity to listen to or read and comment on her or his transcribed interview and/or relevant sections of this document, and the subsequent discussions were considered in writing the final version. However, I am aware that participants have their own biases, may be too close to a given situation, or have competing interests that prevent them from seeing or acknowledging issues that may be relevant to the analysis. Thus, although every attempt was made to ensure that the participants' perspective was accurately reflected, it did not necessarily determine the outcome of the analysis.

Possible confounds

The presence of a researcher can have several unwanted confounding consequences from a "halo" effect of exemplary behavior on the part of the participants to creating tension that disrupts normal activities. The possibility of the Hawthorne effect, which states that any new program can produce positive results independently of its modifications, can not be overlooked. It is possible that what affects the outcome is the sense that participants feel "special" just by virtue of being part of the program and/or study. Hopefully these effects were minimized by my continued presence over time and involvement as a participant observer, as well as by the fact that this program has a twenty-year history, has been a fixture at the school for several consecutive years, and draws a fair amount of media attention. Over the past several years, students in this program have been interviewed by each other for press releases and by reporters for local television and newspaper stories. They have been regularly visited by evaluators and personnel from the Metropolitan Opera Guild. Although, as students confirmed, these were "very different" from participating in this study, the fact that they were so used to the visits and attention

that, according to one teacher, "they take it for granted...they just accept it as part of the routine..." may have helped diminish any possible evaluator effects.

Potential harms and benefits

This study involved minimal to intermediate risk to participants. All work was conducted with IRB approval and with signed informed consent from all participants and each student's parent or guardian. (See Appendix B.) The 16 students selected for individual interviews received an additional set of consent forms specific to the interviews. (See Appendix B.) All consent forms were read to the parties involved in English and/or Spanish, as appropriate, and they were given the opportunity to ask questions at that time. In addition, they were provided with the phone numbers of the principal investigator, her advisors, and Hilry Fisher. Special care was taken in reading the written consent form aloud prior to each interview to ensure that each participant understood that they could refuse to answer any question for any reason and that they could withdraw from the study at any time without penalty. After each interview, (unlimited) time was allowed for informal debriefing and for referral to follow-up counseling as needed. Due to the nature of this study (i.e. it dealt with their experience of violence), school counselors were alerted to the possible need for their services. In addition, a list of resources focusing on child protection, domestic abuse, rape, AIDS, pregnancy, drugs and alcohol was given to all participants. (See Appendix E.) At the end of the study, as an expression of gratitude for their participation, students were given gift certificates for lunch at a local restaurant. Staff members were given tee-shirts and flowers.

The benefits of this study are multi-level. Participants may benefit directly and immediately from their involvement in research. The young teenagers I interviewed reported that the process, while not always easy or comfortable, was worthwhile, and made

them feel "like I was doing something important." They all considered the experience a positive one, and liked being the focus of attention of "somebody really interested in what I had to say" who "takes us seriously." More broadly, it is hoped that this research may lead to a fuller understanding of issues related to trauma and transformation, and the arts and education, particularly for marginalized groups.

PART III

THE STUDENTS AND THEIR WORLD

Chapter 6

Dramatis Personae

Many of the stories presented here are deeply personal. To protect the confidentiality of the participating students, names and identifying details have been changed, but the words, the voices, come directly from the students who, with consent of their parents and caregivers, have courageously articulated and shared their worries, hopes, and fears. Their stories are complex, full of the unexpected and the ordinary, and richly expressive of the multiple, often conflicting currents of their lives.

Urban Teens: Hormones, Hope, and Despair

"Ricky Martin is my favorite singer. He's soooo gorgeous!"

"I like collecting stickers and playing video games. Hangin' with my friends."

"I don't like it when my little brother follows me and my friends around."

"My favorite thing is playing the guitar. It's a chick magnet."

"My sister and me, we have our, like, um, sisterly fights and things but we get along."

The above statements could have been made by almost any teen in any part of the country. In fact, they are excerpts from Tito Puente students' answers to an invitation to "tell me about yourself." In this and many other ways, the 16 thirteen-year-olds who were interviewed as part of this study are like most others their age. They are immersed in popular culture, enamored of the latest singing sensation, preoccupied with the opposite sex, fond of the latest fashions, and fretful when a pimple appears on their face. They go

to school, play sports, watch TV, and listen to music. They care deeply for their families, friends, reputations, and, in some cases, their religious beliefs. They are typical teenagers in many ways, but they live in an environment that has profound consequences for the ways they live their lives. These teenagers live in one of the poorest, most crime-plagued cities in the United States.

Alesha lives with her mother and father. Her mother works in a hospital where her father is a janitor. Alesha has brown eyes and long, wavy dark brown hair that fans out over her shoulders except when she ties it back to play on the basketball team. She loves basketball, big gold earrings, and hip-hop. She does not like school and cannot wait to get a job next year "to help out and have money for clothes and things." Her family moved to the projects five years ago from another neighborhood in the city after Alesha witnessed the murder of her babysitter as a result of a drive-by shooting.

Carrie is a bouncy, energetic teenager who seems to be perpetually in motion. She is outspoken but not brassy. She is average in height and wears her short brown hair streaked with red. Her long nails are polished with glitter that matches the small star sitting high on her right cheekbone. She lives with her mother, a waitress, and her step-father, who is employed part-time in construction. Carrie likes to sing and is the school chorus and her church choir. She also likes to play video games and make jewelry with safety pins and beads.

Tony plays the French horn in the school orchestra and is on the soccer team. He also plays the guitar and likes video games. He is fair skinned with stark black eyebrows and short dark hair bleached blond at the edges. He always wears black. Tony dates but does not have a steady relationship with one girl. He lives with his eight-year-old brother,

their mother, a part-time cashier, her boyfriend, a gas station mechanic, and their two-year-old daughter.

Claudia plays the flute in the school band and is a devout Christian. She has long light brown hair and big blue eyes. She prefers pastel colors and would rather wear skirts than jeans or shorts. The only jewelry she wears is a gold cross on a long necklace and a small gold cross on each ear. Claudia's mother died of cancer nine years ago. She lives with her nineteen-year-old sister, who works at a dry cleaner during the day and Burger King at night, and her maternal grandmother. They are trying to move to a ground-floor apartment so the grandmother, who has asthma and diabetes, does not have to climb the stairs.

Demure is perhaps the word that best describes Carmie. She is warm and friendly but on the quiet side. She dresses conservatively and speaks softly. Carmie lives with her mother, step-father, and eight-year-old half-brother. Her two older sisters are on their own. One is married with two children and lives in Florida and the other, a high school senior, lives near-by with her boyfriend. Carmie is an average student, active in her church, the school chorus, and the art club. Her step-father drives a taxi and her mother cleans houses. Carmie works with her mom on Saturdays.

José is tall, dark, and lanky with the hint of a future mustache and a patch of almost-stubble on his chin. His thick dark hair is cropped short and hidden under a baseball cap whenever he can get away with wearing it in school. He is popular with the girls and likes to play soccer, listen to music, and play video games. He struggles with school and admits to smoking pot once. José lives with his mother, who works in the cafeteria at another school, his sixteen-year-old sister, and his sister's year-old baby, whom he adores.

Vanessa has big round eyes that peek out from under long dark bangs. She is somewhat fidgety and is trying to stop biting her nails. She usually wears dark brown lipstick, baggy jeans, tee shirts, and an arm full of woven bracelets. She plays the trumpet, sings alto in the school chorus, and likes soccer and basketball. Vanessa's parents have been divorced for nine years. She lives in the projects with her sister, a high school senior, and her mother, who suffers from severe arthritis. She has a good relationship with her father. They talk frequently and she spends time every summer visiting him in Puerto Rico.

Gina is dark, pretty, and petite with a warm smile and expressive eyes framed by wire-rimmed glasses. She likes to wear bright colors, jeans, and the gold wire necklace her boyfriend gave her with their names intertwined with a heart. Gina plays the oboe in the school orchestra and is on the softball team. The youngest of five children, Gina lives with her mother, a home health aide, and her father, a restaurant worker. She has a married sister with four children in Puerto Rico. Her nineteen-year-old brother is in the navy. Two older brothers are in jail on drug convictions. She misses all of them a lot.

Paco has a light brown complexion with jet black hair and startling blue eyes. A tall, handsome boy, he looks and acts older than his years. He is animated and friendly and one of the better students. The youngest of seven children, Paco lives with his mother, who works for a house-cleaning service, and his father, who works in a local factory. His four sisters and two brothers live near-by. Paco has nine nieces and nephews, age 5 weeks to 11 years, and some of them are "always underfoot" at the apartment. He frequently baby-sits for them after school and affectionately refers to them as his "rugrats." Paco likes to play basketball, listen to Latin and popular music, and tinker with cars.

Jennifer is a thin, giggly, nervous, self-conscious, capable thirteen-year-old who likes music and math. She plays first violin in the school orchestra, goes to religious instruction twice a week, and is on the soccer team. She wears her black hair in narrow braids with colored beads bouncing at the ends just above her shoulders. Jennifer is the middle of three sisters. They live with their mother who works in a factory. Jennifer's father died when she was a toddler.

Vivacious and talkative, Gloria likes to wear overalls and a dozen small metallic butterfly clips in her long frizzy auburn hair. She has an expressive round face and a small gold hoop through one nostril. She has two sisters, one twelve and one sixteen years of age. Her father drives a limousine and her mother works as a cashier during the day and goes to school at night, a fact Gloria is very proud of. Gloria likes school even though some classes are boring, and she is in the chorus and art club. She also goes to Sunday school and belongs to a crafts group at her church.

Ricardo is a tall, athletic boy who loves to play sports, especially baseball. Although he is on several school teams, he desperately wants to play professional baseball. Ricardo lives with his single mother, who goes to most weekend home games to cheer her son on. He has two older sisters with their own families and a 23-year-old brother who recently completed a three-year drug sentence and currently lives with a girlfriend. Ricardo thinks he would be an even better ballplayer if his brother had been around to teach him to play when he was younger.

Tasha is a petite girl with almond-shaped brown eyes and long dark hair that she wears piled on top of her head with ringlets framing her face. Her hands, with their long artificial fingernails, are constantly playing with the several chains with religious medals and crosses that hang around her neck. She likes dancing and wearing tight jeans with

cropped tops that reveal glimpses of her navel, pierced with a small gold hoop. Six gold studs rim each ear. Tasha lives with her sister and brother-in-law and their two young children. She used to live with her grandmother but when the grandmother moved, her sister let her live with them so she would not have to change schools. She has not seen her drug-addicted mother for four or five years.

Ricky is thin, gangly, and gentle. He does not exude the street-smarts of his peers and prides himself on being well-mannered and meticulous. Some boys call him a "mama's boy," but he ignores them. He is far more popular and comfortable with the girls. Ricky had his first acting experience earlier this year in a school production of *Grease* and now wants to be an actor more than anything else. Not surprisingly, he likes TV and movies, especially soap operas and old musicals. Ricky lives with his sixteen-year-old brother and their mother, a teacher's aide.

Tanya has worked hard to be an above-average student at Tito Puente. A pretty girl with green eyes and light brown hair, she is quiet and serious. She likes sports but has little time for them. She is very involved in her church and her studies, as well as at home where she does much of the cleaning and cooking and tries to keep her eleven-year-old brother out of trouble. Her parents are divorced but Tanya has a good relationship with both of them. Her mother works in a factory and gets home around 7 PM. Her father, currently unemployed, lives nearby and she sees him every weekend. She has been dating her boyfriend for six months.

Carlos is broad and tall for his age, with a chubby, cherubic face, dark eyes, and short curly black hair. He dresses, as most of the boys do, in untied sneakers, low-slung baggy jeans and a tee-shirt with an open, oversized, boldly printed short-sleeved shirt over it. He revels in his role of class clown, but his comic persona does not quite mask an

underlying sadness, insecurity, and rage. Carlos was born to a drug-addicted single mother who died from complications due to pneumonia when he was two years old. Since then he lives with his birth mother's sister — the aunt who adopted him and who, with his wheelchair-bound grandmother, raises him.

These sketches are brief but hopefully they convey some idea of each student's personality and give an indication of the inaccuracy of racial, ethnic, and class stereotypes. The families of students in this study are all poor, overwhelmingly the working poor, with inadequate economic support painfully evident, whether in the form of substandard wages, insufficient social security or supplementary income, food stamps, or rent subsidies, but they defy dominant characterizations of those who live in the midst of poverty and violence. It is clear, for example, that males play a caring role in many families. Machismo dissolves into myth. Poverty is pervasive, but it is not through lack of effort, as many believe. Caregivers work long hours at difficult and sometimes multiple jobs to try to make ends meet but the jobs do not pay decent wages. Caregivers support their children in other ways too. They take them and pick them up from meetings, social events, and sometimes school so the students are not alone on the streets. They attend school and sports events whenever they can. They remind students to do homework and they proudly display school projects and hang successful test papers on their refrigerators. They want their children to get an education and do better than they did. (See chapter 8.) The majority of students and their families and friends are not actively involved in high-risk behavior and will go out of their way to try to avoid danger, although it is difficult if not impossible to do so.

Chapter 7

Living with Violence

Two of the students involved in this effort have been victims of life-threatening criminal acts. Together, the 16 interviewees reported knowing 41 victims of separate incidents of violence, among whom were 19 relatives (parents, siblings, aunts, uncles, and first cousins) and 20 friends. Nine of these were murdered, one by stabbing and eight by gunshots. Another five were shot and survived. Eight incidents were gang-related. Twelve involved illegal drugs. Two students had brothers in jail. Two had cousins in jail. There were three rapes and two reports of domestic violence. In addition, all knew of many other incidents that happened to friends of friends and their families or were learned of through school and neighborhood grapevines.

Violence is constant and inescapable — a fact of life that these young people cope with in a variety of ways from seemingly simple changes in behavior like avoiding certain "trouble spots" in the neighborhood to constructing complex psychological defenses. Every student interviewed, for example, avoids two nearby buildings known to be occupied by drug dealers or armed gangs. No one walks home from school or anywhere else alone, even if only a distance of one or two blocks. Once home, students intentionally stay indoors and away from windows. Nonetheless, their own safety is not the paramount concern of these teenagers. Although, at first, most students deny fearing for their own safety, all students readily express their worry that something bad might happen to others, especially their primary caregiver, younger siblings and cousins (especially males), and friends.

Responses to Violence

Distancing Mechanisms

Concern for others was the only indication in most initial interviews of students' emotional and psychological awareness of their own personal involvement with or proximity to violence. Resignation and distancing of some type were evident at the beginning of each set of interviews. Creating a mental safety shield around one's home, block, or neighborhood, and "not thinking about it," were the most frequent disocciative mechanisms employed. Carlos describes how he habitually escapes into oblivion to avoid thinking about something distressing:

> I go into my room and I lay down and like I got a black light and I got stars stuck on my ceiling and stuff and I just turn on the black light and lay on my bed and look at the stars shining and I kinda concentrate on the stars and how nice it looks and I forget to think and just kind of float there on my bed, in my room — my corner of the sky.

Gloria, another student, denied her proximity to violence (and her emotions) even as she revealed information that contradicted her disavowal and caused her to narrow her safety zone from her block to her house.

> Gloria: Personally, I don't see a lot of violence. I'm lucky that nothing ever happened on my block or nearby...Like I had a couple of friends that were shot and killed 'cause for really dumb reasons, but not here. Like last year I lost a friend in the summer and he got shot over a girl saying he told her something which wasn't true, but her boyfriend killed him anyway.
>
> Stephanie: I'm so sorry. You must feel terrible about it.
>
> Gloria: (shrugs, with no change of expression)

Stephanie: Where did it happen?

Gloria: In the street in front of his house.

Stephanie: Where's his house?

Gloria: Four doors down from mine.

Stephanie: Isn't that on your block?

Gloria: Yeah. But it was a long time ago. Nothing happens in front of my house.

Another student, Carmie, built a safety shield around her person, hiding from her fears behind a pretense of courage and invincibility.

Carmie: Yeah. Um. Next door to my house, the house after mine, they sell drugs and I don't communicate with them at all. They have guns. They're a gang.

Stephanie: A gang lives in the house next door to you?

Carmie: Not the whole gang. Just some of them. But the others are always hangin' out there. The whole gang stays in front of their house. And they, like, um, they have guns and they do drugs in front of the house. They smoke everything. They do crack. There's been some serious fights. Shots sometimes. But I'm not afraid of them... I could walk right through them if I wanted to. They don't scare me. They won't do nothin' to me. I could walk right through them.

Stephanie: Have you ever had to do that? Pass them to go somewhere?

Carmie: No. But it's not because I'm ascared of them. I just ain't had to go nowhere. They wouldn't stop me.

Students also distanced themselves by time. Although they clearly showed signs that belied their self-delusion, encapsulating past events in time was a common ploy. Carlos, for example, claims that his mother's death ten years earlier, as well as his cousin's recent incarceration, didn't bother him because "they happened a long time ago." Yet, his

rage was palpable as he pounded one clenched fist into another, his hands scratched and bruised from striking out at trees and fences. Similarly, students are careful not to reveal anything of past traumatic events to their friends because, like Alesha, they want to "move on" with their lives and keep the past as far away as possible:

> When I hang around with my friends I try to remember nothing from the past and just keep up with what's going on in my life now. I don't want anybody to know what I went through when I was smaller because it's not their concern. It's mine. And if they know then they might bring it up and it's over and behind me now and I want it to stay that way so I don't want them to know.

Time of day also played a role in some students' ability to maintain psychological and emotional detachment. Two of the students who were most involved with violent acts were able to distance themselves during the day, but experienced flashbacks when they went to sleep. One was a girl who had been raped by her cousin the previous summer. The other was a boy who witnessed a shoot-out. As he describes it:

> When I'm awake I don't think about it. But sometimes when I go to sleep I can't control my mind and I start getting like flashbacks about it. I wake up screaming sometimes. In the beginning, it would scare my mother but now she kind of got used to it happening sometimes...I go wash my face with cold water. Then I try to clear my mind and go back to sleep and usually I'm alright...Sometimes it happens again and I do the same thing.

The ubiquity of various distancing mechanisms suggests that they are protective processes that allow students to feel safe, manage the risks and stresses of their lives, and perceive their environment as negotiable. But distancing also has some troublesome

aspects. It mutes emotions like anger or rage and can result in more wide scale numbing (Lifton, 1993).

Anticipating death

Notwithstanding their psychological distancing, a recurrent theme in students' initial interviews, echoing the essays that introduce this paper, is the anticipation of death:

> You could get killed. It could happen to anyone.
>
> When my cousin leaves from my house or his house, I never know if I'll see him alive again.
>
> I wonder about when I hit the corner alone on the streets, what's gonna happen. Like how long me and the people I care about are gonna be on the face of this earth.
>
> You never know when you could die. Anybody could get killed. There's a lot of guns and stuff. People get killed. Even kids. It happens all the time.
>
> You could be minding your own business watching TV and a bullet could come through the window and POP! You dead. Ain't gotta be a reason. Ain't no reason. Just happens. Happens all the time. You never know when it's gonna be you or somebody close to you.

Traumatized by death, loss, and a surfeit of sorrow and grief, children often suffer intense anxieties related to premature death, a phenomenon Lifton (1982) has identified in adult survivor groups as the "death imprint." According to Lifton, death-related anxiety comes from identification with the dead and the sense of being trapped in death with the deceased relative, friend, or other persons who died. It also comes from living with chronic community violence

Beyond expectations of premature death, negative perceptions of their immediate and long-term futures, especially regarding grades and life chances, were expressed by 14 of the 16 students interviewed. This was not a case of "expect the worst and hope for the best." It was an acknowledgment, based on first-hand experience, that this is how things are, an attitude similar to what Way described as "unpredictability and cautious realism" (1998, p. 167). Hope is almost always tempered by fear. A majority of the students were always acquiescently waiting for the proverbial and literal ax to fall:

"I didn't get any F's. Yet."

"I'll be in high school next year. Unless I don't get to graduate."

"I haven't failed anything yet this year.'

"My grades ain't bad enough to get me kicked out yet."

"Nothing bad has happened to me yet, but it's a matter of time."

Split Consciousness: Students' Interpretations of Their Environment

The students' sense of uncertainty and the unpredictability of life (and death) is compounded by media and the dominant discourse that demonizes poor inner-city adolescents and lures them with promises intended to be broken. Given their history of marginalization, isolation, and deprivation, the students' pessimism is not surprising. They are acutely aware of society's negative perceptions of inner-city residents and the practical ramifications of that:

> They think bad things about us. Maybe they just don't like us or they think we're all gang members and drug dealers because most of us live in the projects and that's what [outsiders] think about us — even the people who are supposed to help us. Can you believe it? Even the firemen on those humungous fire trucks and the cops are afraid to come to our neighborhood so it makes it get even worse. But

> really very few people in the projects are involved in crime. Most of us are good people just trying to get by. There's a few who give us all a bad name. But people don't want to know that. They believe what they hear in the news and on TV, but it's not the real picture at all.

As might be expected, many students blame violence on societal factors including a lack of jobs, racism, and classism.

> You can't blame some people. They flunk out of school. The school kicks them out. Or they drop out. But there ain't no jobs for them to do. If they could get a job or a school they like they wouldn't be on the street and they wouldn't feel so bad and mad all the time.

As others have found (e.g. Way, 1998; Cushman, 1998), however, many of the students also agree with mainstream sentiments, with two pointing to poor parenting, four blaming falling in with the "wrong" crowd, and one crediting a lack of religion.

> Like it's a chain reaction. If your parents didn't teach you respect, you're not gonna teach your kids respect. If you like sit down with your kids and try your best to like show your kids how to have respect and you explain it to them then they will stay out of trouble.

This is not as incongruous as it may seem. As Way points out in her study of urban African American teenagers (1998, p. 183), urban minority youth often display what Sondra Harding called a "split consciousness," a world view that results from one's simultaneous location as insiders or participants and agents in society and as socially and economically marginalized outsiders. Students weave these perspectives together in attempts to make sense of and create strategies for coping with their lives in a situation where they consider violence "the way life is:" an immutable, if senseless, actuality.

> It don't make no sense but that's how life is. You gotta take the good with the bad. It's God's will. He made devils and angels. Human nature. Sin. Whatever you wanna call it. It's just the way it is. Ain't nothing you can do. That's life.

Imagining the Future

Students are cognizant of the biases inherent in social representations of inner-city residents, but their acceptance of violence as inherent in life and their correlative low expectations for the future also may indicate that they nonetheless partially succumb to them. At the beginning of the interview series, most students have modest, if any, plans for their future. Uncertainty and unpredictability do not support long-term or ambitious planning. Some students do not plan to finish high school. With two exceptions, career choices are grandiose (a rich and famous fill-in-the-blank) or limited to jobs in beauty parlors and gas stations. (This topic will receive further attention in future chapters.)

Although their circumstances may have a negative impact on students' perceptions of themselves and their futures, there is one positive thread in both boys' and girls' narratives that warrants unraveling: their notions about babies. Vanessa, for example, talks about her eight-month-old goddaughter:

> She's like, when I'm around her she's sooo cute. And like every time I see her face, it's just like I forget about all my problems — it's just, like, all about her. I just picture her face or take her picture out of my pocket and look and it — she's so cute! I just forget about everything else except her. I just love her sooo much.

Another girl tells of a fourteen-year-old friend who became pregnant and miscarried in her first trimester before she told anyone else about the pregnancy.

> She lost the baby eight months ago and she cries hysterically like every time she turns a month — like she would have had the baby by now but every month she

cries. Every month she can't listen to certain songs because she cries. She really wanted to have that baby so much. She wanted to love it and hold it and now she doesn't have anything to look forward to. Nothing good in her future.

When asked about his future plans, one boy says "I'll probably get a job. I'll have to support my family. I could be a mechanic or something." and then talks at length about how he plans to have at least two children when he falls in love. He describes what they will look like, what names he likes, what he'll do for them. He wants to get married, but "only when the children are old enough to take part in the ceremony" because, he says, that is the "most romantic thing" he can think of — "to have the children witness their parents' wedding."

Ten additional students also expressed romantic, idealized notions about babies. It seems that babies not only represent hope and embody the future, they are the only vehicle students will let themselves use to imagine a future; to restore meaning to their lives. Perhaps there is some solace in genetic immortality of sorts. But it is also both distractive and generative. A baby is totally dependent and someone to care for and worry about selflessly, perhaps to replace some of the concern for caregivers that students feel so acutely. Maybe they would feel more able to protect a baby, more in control of at least one person's safety. But the focus on babies goes beyond this. It is also representative of the students' desire to mentor all of those younger than themselves in some way, whether as a role model, messenger, or in some other capacity — to generate a symbolic immortality, a legacy to future generations.

Chapter 8

Supports and Constraints

The existing literature strongly suggests that social support plays a crucial role in one's responses to trauma. For low-income minority children and adolescents, seeking support is made problematic by a plethora of cultural, institutional, and ideological forces that carry the potential to induce in children and adolescents experiences of anxiety, depression, apprehension, or fear, feelings which ultimately can hinder healthy social development, including the development of a positive help-seeking orientation and network-building skills, both crucial for facilitating access to important social and institutional support (Phelan, Davidson, & Yu, 1993, p. 57). Thus, for most low-income minority youth, key emotional and social resources primarily lie within the kinship unit (See Stanton-Salazar and Spina, 2000). We must remind ourselves, however, that although the family can provide support, consistent exposure to segregated neighborhoods, demoralizing school environments, and certain ideological forces may sabotage developmental gains.

The students and their families are embedded in a web of contradictory forces, often adopting a sense of strength and self-sufficiency which may undercut support opportunities and further isolate them socially, psychologically, and emotionally. Self-reliance when one has the resources to support it is not the same as self-reliance under adverse conditions of poverty, segregation, and chronic community violence (Stanton-Salazar and Spina, 2000). The latter is often defined by detachment and estrangement while, in the former case, it is supported by embeddedness in middle class (cosmopolitan) networks of support.

Reciprocal Nurturing: Relationships with Parents and Caregivers

As evident in the previous chapter, students' initial interviews revealed their tendencies to deal with violence virtually on their own. Most students do not turn to caregivers for support, seeking to protect them from additional burdens. The way they see it:

"She has enough to worry about."

"I don't want to add to her problems."

"She's always so tired. I don't want to bother her."

"I don't want to make it worse for her."

"I talk to my father but he would only worry if I told him about [the violence] so we talk about other things. School. His job. Things like that."

The adolescents show care and concern in their desire to protect parents, especially mothers, but their relations with parents and caregivers are complex, and certainly not always smooth. There are disagreements between parents and children and, consistent with the cultural context, age-appropriate teenage rebellions against parental restrictions (e.g. dating a boy and telling the parent you were with a girlfriend), especially with daughters, and requirements (e.g. having to go to church), especially with boys. For the "most part," though, students and their parents "get along" and their relationships are characterized as "caring," "respectful," and "loving."

Students' base their decisions to not seek parental support on their assessment of the physical and psychological demands already faced by the parent, not on a perception that the parent would be unwilling or unable to provide counsel and emotional support. All of the students believed that if they asked, their parent or caregiver would be available for them and even welcome the opportunity to help. But the students rarely ask. The parent is admired for being strong, yet is treated as fragile. Perhaps the need to protect the

parent is a result of the students' need to protect themselves from the feared loss of a parent and/or future care. Perhaps it is part of the young adolescents' way of becoming more adult themselves. The decision not to "burden" parents, though seemingly passive, gives students the sense that they are actively "helping," which they "feel good about."

Nevertheless, many students manage to find someone they can talk to and seek validation and counsel from — an older sister, a godmother or grandmother, and, in one case, a father. The social support literature focuses almost exclusively on the role of parents (Stanton-Salazar & Spina, 2000), but often the main support person in these students' lives is in another city, state, or country. For the ten students (six girls and four boys) in the study who have older sisters, the older sister is the most frequent provider of support, often by telephone calls to distant states or to Puerto Rico. The two girls and one boy who were themselves the eldest child did not serve as confidantes to their younger siblings, likely because they were still so young themselves. The sisters who served as sources of support had already made the transition to adult status. The boys who have older sisters have particularly warm relationships with them, a bond formed early when the sisters played a large part in caring for their younger siblings. Without prompting, the boys speak extensively of the role their older sisters play in their lives, providing understanding and advice, occasional pocket money, or a new item of clothing. The girls have similar relationships with older sisters, but seem to be less dependent on them. The girls tend to have at least one other person, usually an aunt or godmother, who shares the older sister role. This is consistent with research that finds the social construction of gender roles makes it easier for girls to solicit and receive support from other sources (Stanton-Salazar, 2001; Frydenberg, 1997).

Families are by far the main source of support in students' lives, but families also

receive tremendous support from the students in terms of caring, concern, and physical help with care of siblings, parents, grandparents, nieces and nephews, and household duties. One student works illegally at Dairy Queen in a lower-than-minimum-wage off-the-books effort to help her family survive. Another helps her mother clean houses in the suburbs on Saturday so she can complete three instead of two jobs that day. Many of these young men and women see themselves as nurturing caregivers and speak with much love of the time spent caring for younger family members. The caregiver role of students is important to them and goes beyond family responsibility to a desire to mentor, in some way, all younger students. For example, all participating students saw themselves as role-models and considered the opera an opportunity to help or teach the younger ones in the school an important message.

Relationships with Peers

In comparison to the family, classmates and friends are viewed as "untrustworthy" during initial interviews. (The change in this assessment is discussed in chapter 11.) At the beginning of the study, only one student considered friends a possible source of support.

> Lots of kids think that like if they tell somebody something then that person will say something about them or not keep it a secret. That's a big problem here. In this school. You tell one person something and in five minutes the whole school knows. Like I have a friend in 6th grade that's all she does is "Oh this person this and this boy that and this girl this" all day long. But if you really need to talk to somebody, you really need to talk to somebody. No matter what. Sometimes you got nobody but your friends and you gotta take a chance because there ain't nobody else.

The others would not consider relying on friends under any circumstances because they did not consider them as trustworthy as family or they were uncomfortable or fearful of what their friends would think if they showed emotion or "weakness," or committed some other (almost always imaginary) taboo. Paradoxically, however, students did provide a great deal of emotional and practical support to friends who do not have support from other sources. For example, although Vanessa did not confide in anyone besides (sometimes) her sister and godmother, friends told her "their secrets" because she "knows how to keep her mouth shut," even though she didn't trust her friends to do the same. Other students, including two boys with carefully constructed and maintained personas of toughness and indifference, would do things like bring food to school for a friend whose family didn't always have enough money to eat and leave it for them secretly and anonymously.

Cross-purposes: Religion; Kinship Structures

Students often experience conflict arising from practices that compound comfort with guilt. Religious beliefs, for example, can provide solace, but they also add to students' distress. Believing that a dead person is "in heaven" provides comfort to three of the girls but, beyond that, religion can be antithetical. It can promote guilt, compounding the trauma by adding the burden of "not being a good Christian" and fear of punishment (e.g. "going to hell") if one does not find consolation in God or prayer in dealing with violence. In her third interview, Carmie compared her feelings about being in the opera to what she imagines it would be like "to know God; to see God; to know him in your heart and soul." As soon as she said it, she became distraught, put her head down, her hands over her face, and rocked back and forth in her seat, moaning:

I shouldn't say that 'cause, of course, it's not the same. I mean you can't compare God to an opera. Oh, my God! That was a bad thing to say. A bad thing for a Christian to say. I shouldn't think things like that. I just insulted God. I sinned. Oh, my God! If I die now I'll go to hell. Ohhhhh. I'm so sorry I said that. I didn't mean it. Ohhhh....

The fear of spending eternity in the flames of hell is a notion common enough to appear in the 1999 opera script as characteristic of a "church-going" child. In the following excerpt, one of the characters is "hiking on people who are walking by."

Chris: You're so fat, you're both sides of your family!

Passerby #1: You're such a loser!

Chris: Your momma's so old, she farts dust!

Passerby #2: (prim, church-going child) Oh, Lord! Bless you. You are going to burn in hell!...Praise God.

Chris: Well, if you're the type that's going to heaven, I want to go to hell where the action is, baby!.....

Tanya is also a devout Christian. Her aunt in Puerto Rico died from cancer last year. Her cousin is in hiding in a mid-Western state because a local gang wants to kill him for not cooperating in a drug deal. She worries about her younger brother falling in with the wrong crowd. I asked Tanya if praying helped her deal with these things.

It helps with my aunt because I know she's in heaven and I feel better that she isn't in pain anymore. I still worry sick about my cousin and my brother. I know I'm supposed to trust in God, but I still can't help worrying and that makes me worry because I ain't the best Christian I could be in that case. If you trust in God, you shouldn't be worried, but I worry a lot.

Whatever one's religion, individual spirituality can be comforting and a source of strength, but religious dogma can impose additional stressors and strictures which can be particularly injurious to youth already negotiating so many others.

Unintentionally contrary messages are not limited to the realm of religion. Although family networks sustain students, they may also constrain them even though families are rarely perceived by students and their kin as doing so. Kinship networks simultaneously provide support but also may be unwittingly complicit in limiting the chances of youth. Families often impose psychological limits through the transmission of belief systems that may include a variety of conflictive and restrictive messages. For example, interviews indicate that these students' caregivers want them to do better, to get an education and job skills, but fear the students' greater independence and higher status will alienate them from the family and their heritage. Students may want to continue in school, but they also are expected to or feel responsible for contributing to family finances. The mixed messages can be counterproductive.

Three Strains of Silence: Privacy Secrecy, and Suppression

Families also contribute to student's secretiveness, reliance on themselves, and distancing by their emphasis on privacy. A family's emphasis on keeping things like financial difficulties "in the family" and insisting their children not tell anyone about the family's problems encourages young people to remain silent and self-reliant about their own problems as well. As one student from the class of 2000 explains:

> People hide their feelings and stuff because they were taught that. That whatever problems was in the house was kept hush-hush so long that they're afraid to tell their problems. You know. Like a lot of families don't want the kids to worry, to know about problems like with paying the rent and stuff so it gets to be the kids

learn not to talk about problems too. Parents don't want them to worry and keep their problems to themselves and then kids do the same thing back.

The lyrics to the chorus of one of the songs from the 1999 opera indicate the prevalence of this kind of secrecy. The song is titled "Don' t Ask No Questions."

Don't ask no questions why the rent is not paid

Don't ask no questions why the bed isn't made

Don't ask no questions why there's no food to eat

Don't ask no questions about me!!!!

The sanctity of the family also silences youth in ways that are not so apparent. Once girl, for example, was raped by a cousin and unable to tell anyone in her family because the cousin is a family favorite "who can do nothing wrong" and she fears she would not be believed. She also worries that even if she was believed, it "would break-up the whole family" and she wouldn't be able to see any of her relatives anymore, which would "make the situation even worse."

Suppression of voice was another form of silencing encountered by students, many of whom indicated it was a common practice by some classroom teachers. Student perceptions were that this type of silencing was due to race, class, and age biases, as well as ignorance. Teachers' fears and lack of understanding of their students' lives contribute to their suppression of students' voices which, when they are provided an outlet, explode in a loud, angry outburst of resentment:

You gotta leave your life at the door. You know what I mean?...You can't say like "Hey, that stuff in the book about civil rights and racists and stuff, you got it wrong. It's still here. Where you been living?" They don't wanna hear it! They don't wanna believe us! Like we dead or we kids or we stupid so they think they

know more about everything than us. But they don't know nothing 'bout us and our lives. And they don't wanna know.

Surveillance

Students are also sometimes silenced by scrutiny: by being watched, judged, and condemned. The teenagers say they do not feel comfortable talking to clergy because of fear of being judged spiritually or morally lacking, at the least. Similarly, individuals known through attending church services and functions are not seen as sources of support but as auxiliary appraisers of one's adherence to Christian doctrine and behavior.

Students generally view other existing community resources as untrustworthy and "making things worse." When the personal and psychic cost of crossing borders or seeking help is too high, the likely response is to avoid doing so. Lack of confidentiality and fear of reprisal prevents all students except Claudia from considering school counselors people students can talk to, although even Claudia sees it as the lesser evil:

> Like one person I know who had a problem, she went to see [the school counselor] and she gave her the number for the hospital and the hospital gave her somebody to talk to. I think for some people they don't want to talk to total strangers 'cause they think they can't relate or they don't trust them. But other people like that better 'cause a stranger don't know their family and friends and stuff. But you take a chance, 'cause [the school counselor] and the hospital people, if you got a real serious problem, they got a law or something that they gotta tell your parents or call DYFS (Division of Youth and Family Services) so you are taking a big risk. It wouldn't be my first choice, but if you got nowhere else to go to, it's probably better than keeping it bottled up inside.

Many students particularly mistrust the Division of Youth & Family Services (DYFS).

Several cite personal experiences as evidence that the organization targets poor people of color. In 1999, DYFS reported almost 1,500 out-of-home placements for Newark children, an increase of 13% from the previous year (New Jersey Dept. of Human Services, 1999). DYFS is so feared by students, it appeared in the1999 opera script as a fate worse than living with people who give you a "home" only because they get paid to:

> Elaine: What do you mean, this is your foster home and they don't even like you?
>
> Chris: I mean my real mom is dead. She died off of using drugs. She was the only person I ever had. Now these people took me in and told me if I get into any trouble that I was to go back to DYFS.

In "real life," Carlos believes DYFS is a major contributor to his cousins' problems.

> Their mother, a long time ago she used to do drugs. She stopped by when they were about two. When they was little, like a year after she got clean, they were like three and four maybe, DYFS came and took them and they put 'em in a reservation home or something like that—residential home. Everybody was crying and screaming but they took them anyway. Pulled 'em right out of their mother's arms. They didn't get them out till they was about nine and ten. When they got back home they wasn't the same. They used to be nice kids, respectful, nice. But at the DYFS places, they were always gettin' picked on and stuff. They met the wrong people. They learned to fight. If they left them with their family they woulda turned out different, not always gettin' into trouble...But those people (DYFS) don' t think if you live here (in the projects) you got a right to raise your own kids or you don't do a good job but what they do to these kids is a lot worse than they'd grow up with their families.

Institutions and the individuals they employ are not seen as authentic and reliable

sources of social and institutional support. They are seen as antagonistic and alienating because of the social and political construction of their role as informants (e.g. teachers have to report to authorities). This is not so much a disrespect for *all* authority but a pragmatic appreciation that some teachers and school counselors mean well and sincerely want to help but they can't be trusted to because they are required by law to broach confidentiality. As Carlos says:

> I wouldn't never talk to a teacher. Like I could talk to Ms. Bland, she's probably like the only one, but she has to report shit and I don't wanna have that happen. Like when DYFS took my cousins away from their mother. It causes more harm. I don't need that. My family doesn't need that. And I don't want to put somebody like Ms. Bland on the spot like that.

Health care workers are treated with the same suspicion as most teachers, all counselors, and social services. One girl tells of a friend's fear that a doctor would report her rape and make the situation worse. A boy tells of a friend who was wounded by a gunshot for crossing a gang member and who did not want to go to the emergency room for fear that he would be questioned by police. He knew if the police found out about it, the gang would surely kill him.

Ghettoization

Young people not only deal with the specter of danger but a lack of security involving those whose supposed job is to minimize, if not protect residents from those dangers. Mobile community safety resources, such as police, fire, and ambulance services, have a reputation for not responding to calls from the projects.

Almost every student has been effected by biases in systems ostensibly in place to help them. When Alesha's babysitter was shot on the street in front of her house, Alesha

ran upstairs screaming and told my mother and she called 911. My mom was screaming and crying and everything. My mom told me to stay inside and ran out to stay with her but nobody came. No cops. No ambulance. She died. My mother was holding her crying. There was blood all over both of them and the sidewalk. I'll never forget it. She was like a sister to me. I cried for weeks when it happened.

Carlos's cousin was sent to jail for fighting, but "it could have been worse"

This white kid, in Elizabeth, he jumped my cousin and my cousin, he grabbed a bottle and hit the kid on the side of the head with it. Two cops came and they arrested my cousin 'cause the white kid said he jumped him and my cousin, they tried to charge him with attempted murder but they couldn't because the bottle didn't break. They locked him up and he got sent to jail. The white kid got off.

Economic and health care safeguards are also inadequate or nonexistent. One hidden result of this is that students often have household and child care demands on their time and energies at home because caregivers are in poor health, work in low-paying jobs without benefits, or hold down multiple part-time jobs. Two students lost mothers due, in part, to inadequate medical care and a lack of health insurance. There is evidence of environmental health problems among the adults in these students' lives as well, especially respiratory diseases and early onset cancers.

Schools do not provide a respite from passive and active individual and community hostilities. Inner-city students are acutely aware that some teachers "hate" them:

They think that we're not good enough and you can tell in how they look at you and talk to you. They use that we're-better-than-you-are [snobby] voice and ignore it when we raise our hand if we have a question and if they call on us they act mean and make fun of us like we're stupid. They think 'cause we live in the projects we

ain't as good as them and their kids. They should go teach somebody else 'cause they don't wanna be here, that's for sure. They don't think we're good for anything and they treat us like trash and like we ain't got no feelings.

Networking

Access to cultural capital is inherent in middle-class Euro-American *cosmopolitan* networks — a set of social relationships that provides access to resources, privilege, and power, exposure to larger, higher-status, more heterogeneous groups of people. Unlike middle class students, however, poor students as a rule have little or no have access to agents who facilitate their crossing from one social or cultural network to another (Stanton-Salazar and Spina, 2000). In wealthier communities, it is taken for granted that the interests of the children are of paramount concern to the schools and that various agents connected with the schools will therefore introduce students to networks that will enhance their opportunities to learn and thrive. But in poor school districts, such as the one in which Tito Puente is located, parents do not always have the connections, cultural and financial capital, and political clout to ensure that the school operates on their children's behalf.

The *bounded* (Cochran, 1990) networks of the poor and working class, which usually include only homogeneous others in the same situation (Stack, 1974), provide limited opportunities to enter into *cosmopolitan* networks. For example, with the exception of Gloria, whose mother is taking evening classes in practical nursing at a local junior college, most of the participating students are the first in their families to have the opportunity to attend high school. Only 4 students, or 25% of those interviewed, voiced the belief that education can provide them with the opportunity for a better life. (Interestingly, that is the same as the percentage of Latino/a students in the United States who currently complete high school.) When educational levels of students surpass those of

parents, the students are in unchartered waters in terms of what is involved, expected, and culturally appropriate. Some are intimidated and others just don't know how the system works. Students' assessment of the costs, risks, and benefits may result in a compromise such as going to high school but not college, learning a trade in high school instead of taking an academic track, or taking their cue from an older sibling — either by following in their footsteps (e.g. joining the navy) or heading in the opposite direction (e.g. if the older brother is in jail wanting to be a source of parental pride instead of pain).

Teachers can provide a "human bridge" to social networks, to gate-keepers, and to opportunities for exploring various "mainstream" institutions" (Stanton-Salazar and Spina, 2000), thus serving as crucial mediators in students' "border crossings." This involves more than providing access. Entrée alone does not insure access to those not necessarily familiar with the codes of behavior and the underlying ideology of different networks. Teachers and other mentors can maximize students' opportunities to succeed in moving into cosmopolitan networks by providing students with the information they need to negotiate cultural barriers. Tito Puente students' interactions with authorities and school personnel other than the music and drama teachers are, with few exceptions, guarded and impersonal. Nonetheless, some individual teachers — and all teachers involved with the opera program — actively support student access to cultural capital networks by, for example, helping them get into magnet schools or providing access to experiences not otherwise available to them (e.g. personally arranged field trips, invited speakers, etc.) as supplements to what the school provides.

Chapter 9

The Students' Experiences with Art Prior to Participation in COO

Schools often reflect the values of the culture at large. It is, therefore, not surprising that art is marginalized in the public school curriculum, especially in poorer districts. Despite the fact that it was originally planned as an arts-based K-12 school, art classes at Tito Puente are extremely limited. Visual art, vocal music, and computer classes are offered on a rotating basis when their time slot coincides with a free period in a student's academic schedule. At most, students have one forty-five minute music or art period weekly during one or two quarters each year. Some students never have an art class. Music typically involves group singing, possibly in rounds or harmony. Art classes tend to feature simple hands-on activities such as collage, painting, or drawing, perhaps with a brief art history lesson first.

Unlike their middle-class counterparts, many Tito Puente students have had minimal, if any, exposure to professional theatrical performances, concerts, museums, and similar venues. Besides previous school operas, student concerts, and similar events, shows students have seen are invariably because of a class trip arranged by the school, tickets donated by NJPAC or a similar arts organization, or the efforts (and sometimes expense) of an individual teacher. Understandably, transportation costs and buying tickets or paying admission fees when you can barely afford food and rent is unrealistic. The class-ification of art did not go unnoticed by the students. The extravagance of the new artistic experience frequently competed with the aesthetic dimensions. The ambiance of affluence was a common theme in students' descriptions of their experiences with institutional art such as the opera, Broadway, or opulent New York City museums. Often, the experience of "feeling rich" in the luxurious surroundings of the theater or museums

vied for attention with the artistic experience. While some enjoyed the palatial fairy-tale atmosphere, others felt uncomfortable being there or uncomprehending of the vast wealth they were immersed in, from the crystal chandeliers and marble carvings to the admission fee marked on their ticket stubs.

The class-consciousness and institutionalization of art represented by museums and opera houses may be new to these students, but music has always played an important role in their lives. All students reported that they listened to music every day. Three students had a parent who played the guitar. Most had fond memories of at least one person singing Spanish songs in their homes: a mother while doing dishes, an aunt singing along with the radio, an older sibling quieting the youngest with a lullaby. Vanessa's father played a variety of percussion instruments and would get together with a couple of friends regularly "just to play for the fun of it." Claudia preferred Christian radio stations and religious music, but would sometimes listen to pop. Carrie preferred Spanish music and did not like hip-hop and rap, although she was a fan of some Latino/a pop singers. Tony was the most involved in music and played the French horn and guitar. He taught himself how to play the guitar and practiced almost every day, trying to copy what he hears on the radio or improvising by "playing around and just finding something that sounds right."

Nine of the interviewed students, six in 1999 and three in 2000, had prior experience participating in extra-curricular music and art activities at Tito Puente, including band, orchestra, chorus, and/or art club. Instrumental music lessons and rehearsals are on a pull-out basis two or, occasionally, three times a week. In the 1999 group, no student had any prior drama or theater related experience. In the 2000 group, one girl was involved in the dramatization of bible stories and morality plays at her church.

Seven students were involved in either or both a production of the musical *Grease* or (simultaneous to the opera) a video about local history.

Ricky, an actor in *Grease*, the video, and the opera company, describes the video as very different from both:

> It's kinda strange. You don't shoot scenes in any order. It's like you do your part but it' s just like a small piece of the puzzle and then it will be put together in the computer the right way. It was confusing sometimes, but the video was a lot easier. Like Grease, you got one chance to do it. You're live on stage and you can' t get it wrong. Like if you made a mistake or something you had to keep going. With the video, if you make a mistake you could just shoot it again or do the scene over if it wasn't right.

Tanya, the girl who belongs to an intergenerational "drama" group at her church, is frequently asked during services to dramatize bible stories and situations related to sermon topics. According to Tanya, they are not like the opera because:

> They're always short because you have to like memorize your part real quick. It's usually just a couple of sentences. Like this Sunday that just passed I had to do a drama about "how do you feel okay?" It's like you got everything. You got a nice car. You got everything but there's something inside you that you are not happy and so then as a Christian, you like talk to the person and tell them "Look, I got a solution for you. God is the solution for you." You know, really telling them yourself and at the end they say like "I wanna serve this God. I wanna take this sadness from me." And that's it. A couple of sentences. No music or anything. They tell you what to say, you don' t write it or make it up yourself or anything. It just like makes the sermon less boring for the people.

Although the students in the 2000 group who were in *Grease* had some experience more comparable to the opera than Tanya's or those in the1999 company, both cohorts underestimated the difficulty and amount of work involved. Regardless of prior experience, all students described the opera as difficult but enjoyable, hard work but fun ("I never did anything that was such hard work and so much fun;" "I never knew working my butt off could be such fun!")

Chapter 10

The COO Experience

O: Your brother is Isaac? How can he be your brother? He's down and cool and, well...you...well...you know...

C: Just because I do good in school? What's that gotta do with being cool?

Isaac: What's the deal?

O: You never told us you had a sister.

Isaac: What, you gotta know everything? I gotta sister, no big deal. Come on, what we here for?

G: Come on, let's get it on...

D: Come on, what you got?

S: What ya need?

I: The usual. Some ecstasy or roofies.

S: Sure, sure. I got everything.

from the 2000 opera script

Because the topics treated in the COO operas came from their own experience, students expected the operas to be easy to write and produce. Students who had acted in the production of *Grease* mentioned earlier argued that the vocabulary in the opera, especially the slang, was familiar to them and would make their parts easier to learn. They did find it easier to "talk in their own words" than to use 1950s lingo, but the overall work the opera required of them, including memorizing lines, was far more difficult and complex than they expected.

Although the opera experience shared some features with *Grease* in that both were cooperative efforts and required actors, costumes, make-up, props, and lighting, they were also very different in important ways:

Like *Grease* was just entertainment. The opera is more serious 'cause it comes from our lives. It's entertaining too, but we relate to it more. And it's by kids for kids and it's not just like a grown-up's point of view. They don't always understand or agree with kids, and kids — some kids think they know better than adults and don't listen. An' the opera is like so different. Like a TV show, you don't pay so much attention to it. But opera is different and has a magic that touches you. And, like, you know people just painted pictures for scenery and stuff but you forget it's not real. Like when I seen the operas before I was in it even, people was like crying and cheerin' and you like feel, I, you connect with it. And you're like on the edge of your seat. And the words and stuff. It's real life and stuff and that makes it real strong.

Choosing a Theme

Stephanie: So, tell me, how did you come up with the themes for this opera?

José: It was hard. We had to think about it a lot and come up with something that we knew about but that would make a good opera too. At first, there was lots of yelling out and it got pretty intense. There were like all these kids from the 8th grade and we like talked about all kinds of themes and wrote them down. Like drugs, and gangs, and guns. Rape. Robberies. Um. Losing a parent or a friend. Shooting. Stuff like that. Then, like we picked those, um, that was on people's minds most and it was like drugs and somebody dealing with that, so they decided and they voted and that was like how we came up with it.

Stephanie: Where did all of those ideas come from?

José: From real life. Because, it's like they're common problems nowadays. Things like that happens to everybody and like you have to deal with it. It's part of

life. And we thought about what happens most and we're, like, "gangs and drugs and shooting and stuff like that." And then we voted on what was what we wanted to do the opera about and what we could make a story from and we talked about who should be on drugs and what drugs and stuff and we came up with a parent on drugs and dealing with that.

Every student's account of the process of choosing a theme for the opera was similar. They took their instructions to list things that were important to them seriously, drawing on their own experiences, on "real life." Anita Bland summarizes the importance of the theme and the students' suggestions and, ultimately, choices, from her perspective:

I think the process and the kids selecting the theme they want is a real critical piece. I mean people, everybody has their own perspective in their own area. Like for instance, my idea and concept of violence is completely different from theirs. I mean it all comes from your experience or background and they have to have their own script for their own life. And the opera at least gives them an opportunity to at least do that. At least to deal with themes important to them, that they choose.

My experience, and I started in '86, my experience with the operas I've done in the city, is they have always dealt with things kids deal with on a daily basis. I don't understand when something happens how they can take it so easily...there have been times where like, you know, homelessness is an issue that I can't deal with well, yet these kids come in with all this other stuff and they deal with that too. Like, when they came up with the theme "peer pressure" last year, I thought, "well, that's pretty universal for an 8th grade group." You know, they are under a lot of pressure. But their peer pressure went to the point where they were thinking about "what's going to happen if I ever have to kill somebody?" Well, I never ever

> thought about "am I ever going to kill somebody" in my life! It's just not part of my whole concept of life. Yet, for them it is. They go through this. But just that kind of concept — that that would be the answer to anything, helps me understand them a bit better. So it's good for both sides. They get to work it out and probably talk about it, and I think for anybody to vent those kind of feelings is good because these kids have a tendency to mask them.

Themes are chosen on the basis of biography, but stories are shaped by the genre and by the conventions of storytelling. The opera clearly has a beginning, a middle, and an end; an introduction, climax, and denouement, that structure the story. Writers make character, plot, and dialogue decisions with consideration to holding the audience's attention. They are extremely aware of the liberties they take in the name of art, and all students clearly differentiate between fact and fantasy in their operas. During the later interviews, students explain that although the themes (e.g. drug addiction) are real, they know that "real life is not so neat;" "answers are not so easy;" "it wouldn't happen that way in real life;" "things done by the characters to help wouldn't necessarily work in real life even if you could try it." They are also aware that by fictionalizing a possible resolution, a seed is planted that can grow into the realization that "there is something a kid can do," "it isn't always necessarily hopeless," and "even just that it' s okay to say yes if somebody tries to help."

The effect of creating original art based on their own life experiences had significant effects on some of the tendencies noted by the students (see chapter 7) that we might connect with their immersion in a traumatizing environment. Where students had felt a lack of agency, they began to have a sense of their efficacy as possible role models for others. Where they had mostly kept their anxieties and sorrows to themselves, they

began to gain a sense of trust and connection. The last chapter noted the importance each student assigns to being a role-model. Students invariably see the choice of theme as critical to their view of the opera as a fable with an important lesson for younger students. Every student highlighted the opera as a way to teach "younger kids" something of value, such as "not to do drugs," "to be good to your friends 'cause they might not be here tomorrow," "avoid violence," and similar lessons. All students in the opera company believed their personal experience with theme-related issues, which the younger students shared, enabled them to get their message across far more effectively than an outside source could.

The students also felt that their experience with the opera's theme(s) would help them do a better job in their company role. But, possibly because psychological distancing mechanisms were firmly in place when the opera project began, they did not anticipate the other side of the familiarity coin. Nonetheless, as time wore on, many students found that working on something so "close to home" also stirred painful memories. "It hurt sometimes."

We know that, in effective opera programs such as the one at Tito Puente, "substantive and cohesive" collaborative behaviors increase over time (Wolf, 1999, p. 108). Participants become increasingly expert at communication skills like taking turns, asking questions, and offering constructive criticism. What is notable here, however, is also that social cohesion and trust among group members grows, and expressions of emotion formerly seen as unacceptable or negative become acceptable, comfortable, natural, and possibly even positive responses. That is, the social interaction integral to the opera program is integral to the development of trust among the students. That development of trust is directly related to theme-related issues and emotions.

Early in the opera program, some girls express fear that they will cry in front of their friends if distressing memories or upsetting emotions are triggered by dealing with the opera's theme. They don't want to cry because "then they'll (the friends) cry too and we'll all feel bad" or "they'll make fun of me." By the end of the opera program, these same students are saying that "nobody is gonna make fun of you [if you cry] 'cause they have feelings too and working in the opera, it makes you understand things like that more;" "it's easier to deal with when you're not alone," and "it's okay to let your feelings show 'cause you trust people in opera." Prior to joining the opera company, students are cautious and guarded around friends, considering them untrustworthy, as "not-family." Within 6 to 8 weeks, these same students are calling other members of the company "close — like brothers and sisters," "people you can trust, who understand you."

Roles in the Artistic Collaboration

Many adults familiar with the COO program are frequently most impressed by the responsibilities assumed and fulfilled by the students. However, to a large number of Tito Puente students, responsibility is not unusual. Their daily household duties and family obligations include many tasks and concerns the dominant culture considers (and restricts to) the domain of adults. The key word for the opera for the students themselves is not responsibility. It is trust.

The impartial, collaborative nature of the project is crucial to what students ultimately take away from the opera experience. Aside from two boys smitten with acting, students view every role in the company as essential, and of equal importance and prestige. Except for Ricky and Carlos, who aspire to professional acting careers and proudly (and in Carlos' case, grandiosely) proclaim acting the best, most important job in the opera company, no one else saw acting as "special," or deserving of or getting more attention.

Students fill out applications and apply for jobs in the opera company, but not everyone gets the position they apply for. Given my (mistaken) expectation that acting would be perceived as a singular sensation, even if officially part of an ensemble of peers, I asked one student if he was disappointed that he didn't get to be an actor, one of the two jobs he applied for. He replied:

> Not really. I woulda liked any of [the jobs I applied for]. I got one of them. I wasn't too thrilled with public relations, which I didn't actually apply for, but Ms. Bland said that they didn't get enough applications for that and she thought I'd be good at it and asked me to do it. I wasn't too happy about it, but I agreed to give it a try and it turned out not to be so bad and I'm kinda glad to do it now. I'm enjoyin' it.

Other students said that memorizing long parts and performing on a stage in front of a crowd of people were not things that appealed to them. Every student felt s/he was a valuable contributor to the company and the opera, and every role was seen as vital and creative as these two brief but representative exchanges I had with the 1999 stage manager indicate:

> Stephanie: Gloria, do you feel your job is as creative as, say, the composers'?
>
> Gloria: Yeah. I do. It isn't easy to figure out how to be the stage manager and get everyone to be in their places at the right time and things like that.
>
> Stephanie: Who do you think are the artists in the company?
>
> Gloria: We all are. The story comes out of the theme and most everybody if not everybody worked on that. All of us...We all hafta be creative. And even if, like, for instance, if one composer writes a song all by herself, in the end the opera, the

whole thing, is made by everybody and has to work together to be an opera. And opera is art. So, everybody who works on it is an artist.

Roles in the opera, like jobs in the company, are intended to cross gender lines. All students argue that it doesn't matter whether a character is male or female. Characters are identified by letters (A, B, C, etc.) instead of names. Their personalities are developed and the libretto written without knowing if characters are male or female. All students say the sex of a character doesn't matter, since the characteristics could apply to either males or females. Tasha even goes so far as to say that an actor could play either a male or female. In practice, however, crossing gender roles in company jobs is not as easily accepted, although girls cross far more easily into traditionally "male" jobs (e.g. carpenter, electrician). Even though the fine and performing arts have a long history of being perceived as both male-dominated and masculinity-diminished, painting scenery, composing music, and all other artistic "jobs," with one conspicuous exception, were not seen as threatening by the boys. According to the two opera teachers, in the past four years, only one boy in the opera company was willing to work on costumes or make-up. He was teased a bit by some of the other boys, at first. But, as the costume designers developed their ideas and shared their sketches with the rest of the company, he gained their respect and was admired for "having the guts," as well as the ability, to do the job. As of spring, 2000, he was an applicant for admission to the Fashion Institute of Technology.

Anita Bland and James Manno report that it is difficult to tell which students will be drawn to the opera program and which jobs they will apply for and succeed at. Anita will often "take a chance" and give a shy, quiet student a job requiring good

communication skills and assertiveness (e.g. production manager, stage manager) and find that the student "blossoms" into the role.

> Particularly for some of the students who sign up, like two of the girls who were very quiet and gentle, they signed up for management jobs. When I saw what they were applying for, you know, I was surprised but then I was, like, "Okay. Let's see if this works." I think when you first start the project one of the things that they tell you is "make sure you have a production manager who's very strong and that people will listen to." And I agree with that. But then, I mean this will be something like my 12th opera, and I was willing to take a chance. And it paid off. These girls just blossomed. When people had to go to them, it gave them a little confidence, a little clout. Now, like the perception was "if the teacher can believe in them maybe I have to listen too." So, they did.
>
> Even the one little girl from Public Relations — I mean she's down there on the phone talking to everyone, and she's very quiet too, but when she said she wanted to do it, I said "Okay, let's see if she opens her mouth." Because I'd never heard her. That little one! I didn't know her voice for about 3 months because she never opened her mouth. But it's worked out well.

Similarly, students labeled "hyperactive," "unruly," or with short attention spans show unprecedented levels of concentration and engagement with their tasks and with other students. For example, Anita explains:

> Last year, a boy who had one of the leads used to get into a lot of fights. He didn't feel accepted, like he belonged anywhere. Got into trouble with his teachers. I dragged him into the opera. He hasn't been in a fight since day one. Turned out he could act and sing. He was one of our leads. And even with the criticisms and, you

know, the things we do on the stage, he's been great. It's been good for him. After the performance, the little kids would call out the name of his character in the hall when he passed by. He wasn't only accepted. He was admired. Quite a sensation actually. Now he's at the arts magnet school and still doing drama. The local paper did a feature story about him. He's that good! And he's modest and unassuming and even kind of sweet now. He's a different person.

Not Schooling-as-usual

The opera is better than the rest of school 'cause it's about stuff that's important to us. Like if you go to math and do all these problems, it's not bad, but you just sit there and do this like brain exercise and for what I don't know. But I know doing work for the opera matters. Like you're really doing something real.

In the opera, we do stuff that matters...Like my grandma says if I aks her about like something like they teach us about and I aks my grandma like about the Civil Rights, the Civil War, and she says "Tasha, honey, they only tellin' you part of the story." Now who I supposed to believe? Me I see my grandma, she's right and there's still racism and if you black or brown maybe they let you ride the buses now an' stuff but they don't let you live in the good neighborhoods or get the good jobs and go to the good schools 'cept for maybe only a couple a kids. They don't want too many of us. Like they tell you one thing but it's not true. It's not the truth. In the opera, we do stuff that's the truth

The opera is a lot of work. It's hard. But it's fun too. Not all of my classes are boring. Some could be interesting but they just feel more like school and work.

> The opera doesn't feel like work, if you know what I mean. You don't mind doing it. You don't mind workin' hard on it 'cause it's important.

Students feel a complete sense of connection with and in the opera program compared to the personal, social, cultural, and political disconnection experienced in schooling-as-usual. All students in both opera companies describe the opera as difficult "real" work, much harder than any other part of schooling, but also the most relevant, most fun, most rewarding. They say they learn much more and more useful things in the opera than in other classes. Dewey and Vygotsky would not be surprised. Both favored active engagement in cooperative "authentic" activity. Dewey called this method of learning "directed living." Vygotsky likened it to the apprenticeship model (see Rogoff and Lave, 1984). The students call it "real work" and "important."

In most classrooms located in lower- and working-class communities, the emphasis is on management and control of students (Anyon, 1981). Obedience, quietness, and discipline are the goals. Pedagogy generally encourages the rote learning of the "banking" variety (Freire, 1970, 1994) that fosters acceptance of the status quo and undermines reflection, creativity, and imagination. Historically, marginalized populations have not fared well in these traditional classrooms. In the opera classroom at Tito Puente, however, students' experience is a resource, interaction is supported, reflection is required, questioning is encouraged, alternatives are considered, and creativity flourishes. Multiple ways of knowing and doing replace recitation and other traditional forms of "learning." Characteristics such as gregariousness and restlessness that get students into trouble in other classes become assets in the opera company. Within the environment of the opera

program, Tito Puente students connect to themselves and each other. They consider choices, evaluate options, experience success, and imagine possibilities.

Opera work, unlike that in discipline-isolated classrooms that decontextualize concepts, is context-rich. The thematic, artistic, and technological problems the opera deals with are authentic. That is, they are real situations that occur in the wider circle of life as well as in the opera company. Unlike "regular school," the "real work" students do in the opera reflects practices consistent with the demands of the contemporary workplace (See Aronowitz, 2000). Business leaders tell us the 21st century work force needs to have higher-order thinking skills: the ability to analyze, synthesize, and evaluate; to be creative and imaginative; to possess a high level of cooperative decision making, literacy, and communication skills; and the capacity for problem posing and problem solving. These are exactly what the opera program helps produce. It lets students use their imaginations, express their opinions, make decisions, solve problems, and work with and help others. There is no single predetermined "right" outcome, but the possibility for multiple outcomes, arrived at through creativity, trial and error, individual and collective reflection and critique, hypothetical reasoning, framing and resolving problems, practice, strategy building, and high expectations in an atmosphere that supports quality, recognizes that the path to success often meanders through giggles, failures, and heated debates, and challenges students to be responsible, cooperative, and learned.

The opera class is rich in multiple perspectives and, therefore, opportunities for empathy and understanding. Students have a chance to interact with those they might not encounter in classes typically divided along academic scores or linguistic lines. Over the course of the opera program, differences no longer divide; they enrich the community and

catalyze creativity. Students build on one another's ideas and become a collaborative community of learners. As Vanessa explains:

> In opera, you get to talk a lot 'cause you got to discuss things and everything. And you know, like classes is like working with pencils and solving math problems and everything. I mean, we solve problems in opera too, but its different and we do it together, not alone. And the homeworks is different too and, like, in opera, lots of times we decide if we want to do the work for homework and what we want to do. It's not what we have to do, and you don't have to carry a lot of books and it's a different kind of work and a different attitude. In opera, you could express yourself and in other classes like math and science and stuff you don't express yourself like that...In the opera you could show the other persons what your ideas are and everything. You gotta be all the same in other classes but in opera you could have an opinion. You could disagree. You could talk about it. Other classes, you like can't disagree with anything. And then the subject changes to another part before you could even know what you think about something. Or the teacher, if she don't call on you and the subject changes, then that's it. But in opera you could just say it. Everybody gets a chance to say what they think and we decide when we're ready to go to the next part.

Students like being able to talk, think, and "do" instead of just working with pencils and paper. They appreciate being able to disagree, which they say is not allowed in other classes. Students admit the opera room can be noisy and confusing, but consider that a small price for the exchange of ideas and the freedom to move and to participate in discussions as peers, without having to raise a hand and be called on to speak.

> The teacher doesn't decide who gets called on and who can ask questions. Everybody gets to be part of what's going on. You get to talk about stuff and nobody says "Sit down and raise your hand," or "I called on so-and-so, not you," and even if you say something dumb and people laugh, it's okay in Ms. Bland's class and you don't lose any respect...They don't make you feel bad or stupid because if like somebody, like, says something you think is dumb or silly — but like with the writers, like it might give somebody else a good idea for what to have a character say or do, so it all goes into the recipe and makes the opera better in the end.

In the opera company, acting silly or "joking around" is sometimes part of the creative process as well as a tension-breaker during disagreements. Students, however, know that humor is not generally acceptable elsewhere in the school and that "other teachers would kill us if we did that in their class. They'd kick us out!"

Vanessa also touched on another important element of the opera program. Work on the opera is not dependent on the clock, lesson plans, and testing schedules. Time is allotted by students with attention to quality and understanding playing a large part in their scheduling. Other students, including Gina, also realize the benefits and responsibilities this entails.

> The other classes just aren't as interesting or fun. You just start getting interested in a topic sometimes and the next day you're doing something else and you don't stay with it. When you do the opera you know what you're doing and you know you're finished when it's good. We don't get a test or grades so there's less pressure that way. But we want it to be the best we can do so it's not like there's

not any pressure. We put it on ourselves. The pressure, it comes from us on us because we want it to be right.

Striving for excellence requires time. It cannot be limited to forty-five minute class periods or the confines of a subject or classroom. Ideas take time to develop; strategies take time to implement. Quality is achieved by sustained involvement — time to listen to what others have to say, to try different ideas, to weigh alternatives, to experiment.

The Academic Connection

Bearing in mind that it does a disservice to the arts to value them solely for their cognitive benefits, it is nonetheless important to recognize that this study supports the large, albeit generally ignored, body of work linking participation in the arts to improved academic performance (e.g. Ives and Pond, 1980; McGuire, 1984; Perkins, 1988; Spina, in press; Heath, Soep, & Roach, 1998; Caterall and Waldorf, 1999; Burton, Horowitz, and Abeles, 1999; Fiske, 1999), especially for low-income students (Caterall, 1998).

Many of the students interviewed explicitly connect the opera program to improved academic attendance, attention, skills, and performance. They "come to school more," "look forward to coming to school," "concentrate more," "read better," and "learn to think better." According to Anita Bland, it is, at least in part, because the emphasis in the opera is not on traditional school values like competition and test performance. It is on quality, cooperation, understanding, and creativity. Anita explains:

> There is definitely a connection between the kids' being in the opera and improving academically. Their grades go up. It happens all the time. Because things like creativity. Real Learning. Emotions. Those are things that I think school in general, but especially standardized testing, has SQUASHED in them. That it's almost like you have to know what to do on the test but you don't have to know

why and you can't possibly have any feelings about it. And the opera brings those things out. It introduces another whole way of thinking that they're not used to...They learn how to learn; to think of themselves as responsible, as capable.

A lot of these kids, they're in remediation classes and, you know, my personal opinion is that it's just a constant reminder that you're not good enough. You know, I mean how many times is a kid gonna take a test, fail a test...their response is "If I don't do it you can't tell me I can't do it," so they don't do it. And they'll just say that they didn't do it. It wasn't that they couldn't. Things like that. I don't think it works. I've been here 26 years in the city and we've had that (remediation) constantly. And pull out, put it in, you know, take them here, take them there. Whatever. Test scores. It's when they come down here (to the opera room) that they do whatever they need to do and they don't have to worry about all this other stuff. It's not "Can you read?" It's not "Can you write?" "Can you do math?" It's this. I tell them, "I don't really care if I've taught you how to read or write. I just want to know that you know how to learn and you'll learn." And it's not all peaches 'n cream. But I'd put these kids against anybody in the state. And I think, looking at the statistics, that if they're pacing the GEPA they'd ace the Stanford, cause the GEPA is a much harder test. I had a lot in that 180 to 200 range and they're not the scholars, the opera doesn't usually get the cream of the crop. We get the middle kids and the bottom kids but they come out of it on top a lot of them...And they learn that you have to put effort in and that you have to work together for the good of the whole...And ALL of their work improves.

Notably, although it is the policy of "Creating Original Opera" that students must withdraw if their grades decline, not a single student at Tito Puente has ever had to

withdraw from the opera program due to lower grades. (See chapter 12 for further discussion of academic achievement.)

Working (it) out

The fact that students have a choice about whether to participate in the opera or not undoubtedly contributes to the low drop-out rate. It might be argued that students self-select, at least in part, because they already have characteristics that will make them succeed in the program. Both opera teachers disagree with that assessment. Each student is very different, they say, and the reasons each joins is unique.

> True, they do have to be willing to show up, cooperate, and do their job. But that's about all they have in common, and even the degree they do that varies from person to person and even day to day. But they are so very different. I have a mixture up there and they get along and when someone who's, quote unquote, considered nerdy, whatever that is, is told by someone who is like "Mr. Street:" "You did a good job!" it like transcends it all. It's tough enough being a teenager today but it's especially tough for these kids. They're under very extreme pressures. And, for a lot of these kids, they are not considered the most popular or the coolest and some of them are the really bad kids too. They're all coming from different places for different reasons. Most of them commit before they realize how hard the work is and how much time is required. But almost all of them stick it out.

In fact, by the end of the program, students unanimously agreed that it was "the most hardest and most funnest thing" they had ever done. To many, that would have been oxymoronic two months earlier. Every student, regardless of grades, personality, and reputation, even those whose opera was canceled (See chapter 13), called the opera company the "best experience I ever had," or the equivalent. I asked each student what

was the hardest. The first student I interviewed for this study, a boy from the 1999 company, replied with what became the prototypical sentiment: "having it over."

During the two years this study was conducted, only two students in the opera company were barred from participating in the program. The reasons were chronic absence and neglect of duties. Students and teachers report that the rare exceptions who are dismissed from the company usually return contrite and more committed than ever, as the following discussion from 1999 illustrates:

> Stephanie: What do you do when people don't cooperate?
>
> Gloria: You talk to them and tell them to cooperate
>
> Stephanie: Does it work? Does everyone wind up cooperating?
>
> Gloria: Yeah
>
> Stephanie: There's not a kid who wound up not being in the opera?
>
> Gloria: Almost, but not in the end. We kept on talkin' to him. He was an actor. He quit and we talked to him and he came back.
>
> Stephanie: What did you tell him to get him to come back?
>
> Gloria: That he was our best singer. Because he is.
>
> Stephanie: And he came back. And he cooperates now?
>
> Gloria: Yeah. He told the group he was sorry and now he even shows up early and helps out a lot. I don't know what we'd do without him now, even though he was a pain-in-the-butt at first.

On the other hand, two students were dropped from the 2000 opera's public relations team. According to Anita Bland:

> There were four students in public relations originally. They were going down to work on computers but two of them who went down there just used it as time to get

out of class. And the two production managers told them they were literally going to be fired from the job if they continued to do that. They got a couple of warnings but it didn't help. They weren't doing any of the work so it wasn't fair to the others and they left us no choice. It doesn't happen like that a lot. Most years we don't have that kind of problem. But it's better that they learn things like this now too because that's how it is in the real world. You don't do the work, you get fired. It's tough, and I feel bad about it, but it really is the exception.

Anita confirms that the scenario Gloria describes is more common:

> What's usually been my experience is the kids that wind up getting kicked out of the company are usually so upset that they'll do anything...they will open and close the curtain ...anything to be a part of it because then they realize they made a mistake. But they also realize that it had to be that way, that it wasn't fair. And coming from the teachers, like sometimes the kids just block off to the teachers but from their peers it's something else. Now last year we had one kid who just quit out of the blue, but I guess he was really peer pressured into it by his friends who weren't in the opera. He had a really big part. I didn't say anything for about three days and then I looked at the girls (the production managers) and I said, "Well, you're going to have to do something. You need to go speak to him, you know." And they did and I had nothing to do with it, which I shouldn't. And he came back and he was super.

PART IV

TRANSFORMATION

Chapter 11

The Transformative Role of the Aesthetic Space

Previous chapters chronicle students' experiences with, perceptions of, and responses to violence prior to their involvement in the opera program. This section examines how students' participation in this art world is related to changes in their perception, understanding, and development, with a particular focus on the specific contributions of artistic elements.

Maxine Greene writes that the arts provide a "place for those feelings and intuitions that daily life doesn't have a place for and mostly seems to suppress" (2000, p. 293). The opera program at Tito Puente provides such a place. This "place" is similar to other "safe spaces" (e.g. Davis, 1993; Weis and Fine, 2000), in that it provides an environment where students can use their imaginations, express their opinions, make decisions, solve problems, work with and help others, and contribute in a safe environment. However, the COO program at Tito Puente differs from many of these in a very important way — It is also an "aesthetic space."

An aesthetic space provides an opportunity to negotiate, participate in, and integrate multiple and sometimes contradictory and simultaneously existing sociocultural worlds. It offers one the opportunity to critically engage multiple references and cultural codes wherein lies the potential to uncover the presuppositions of lived experience and develop critical consciousness. It is a space where "deep structures" are revealed "behind the curtain of ostensible normality" (see Kincheloe and Steinberg, 1993); where subjugated knowledges intersect and connect to subvert reductionism, obliterate ennui, decenter the

subject, move beyond categorical restrictions, challenge the status quo, and imagine other ways of being.

It should be noted that there are, in fact, many other schools where the program does not serve as either a safe or aesthetic space. The potential of COO to support transformation does not lie simply in the opportunity it affords students to produce a "show," but in its immersion of students in an art world, with its potential to foster relationships, alter beliefs, and engage students in meaning-making. The ways in which the opera program at Tito Puente provides the vehicle for developing these dispositions are not discrete domains. Nonetheless, five key dynamics can be identified: (1) The collaborative community created fosters mutual trust and respect; (2) Social and artistic elements develop empathy; (3) The opera's themes directly address substantive conflictive issues; (4) Artistic experience provides a means of expressing and processing that which may not be able to be verbalized; and (5) Critical consciousness is engendered.

Collaboration and the choice of theme have already been addressed in some detail so, although they will be given some attention in the following discussion, I will primarily focus on the other three factors.

Building Trust and Respect

Significantly, according to observations and interviews, the opera fosters trust and respect. Prior to participation in COO, students' emotional state was characterized by isolation, dissociation, low future expectations, distrust, and a lack of belief that others could provide meaningful help in the face of distressing life situations. The word "trust," with its rarely spoken connotation of safety, as well as the word "respect" (*respeto*) appeared frequently in transcripts of later interviews. Mutual trust and respect are

customarily absent from sociocultural characterizations of and interactions with youth. They are also, not coincidentally, critical to creating a safe space — a space where one can question and imagine, try new things, take risks without fear or danger. Over the course of their work on the opera, students in the company who, as a matter of course, treated each other with skepticism and emotional distance became as trusted, as close as, "familia." Anita observes, "They come to respect each other, to value individual experience and opinions. They come to trust each other." The development of empathetic understanding is an important part of this process. As Carrie tells us:

> Most of the kids in the opera, I didn't know them before...Some of them I didn't even like in the beginning. But after getting to know them and working together, we all got to be friends, even like closer than most friends. Now, the opera is like "my *familia*." ...We have *respeto* for each other and like our feelings and stuff. Like, you could put yourself in your friend's place and like know how she feels. And you could be understanding and like more [considerate] of each other...Just like in the opera, each person has some good characteristics and some maybe not so good or that you find annoying or something. Nobody is all good or all bad. Like the characters, all have some of both, like people. Not all as dramatic as the opera, but still it's like everybody's got lots of different parts...You have to like try to see it from their eyes and even if you can't understand it, you could like accept them better if you could imagine how they feel or that like, maybe like they act that way because of something...Like if a person acts like, um, like they're *dándose tanto bote* (putting on airs), maybe like they're really just like shy or afraid you won't like them and then like you look at it different and maybe try to be their friend. Or

like when somebody who acts tough is really scared. You see people different when you could imagine "What if you were them?"

Developing Empathy

Many students expressed similar feelings about understanding each other, although only two others made an explicit connection to one of the opera program's strategies for character development. That is, each character should have both positive and negative traits. For example, one character was described as "smart, outgoing, neat, jealous, and sneaky." As the script was being written, students learned to ask if a particular response or behavior "fit" the character. At first, Anita Bland would ask questions of the writers like, "What do you think "D" would do if that happened?" of the actors: "Remember, you're sneaking around. How do you act if you're sneaky?"; of the costume designers, "How can you make "D" look so the audience will know what the character is like?;" of the set and lighting designers, "How can you make the room look like it reflects the character it belongs to? If you were neat, and I know none of you are, but if you were, what would your room like?" James Manno would ask the composers to associate a character's qualities with the sounds of the music: "What does "sneaky" sound like? How do you want the singer to sound? The listeners to feel?" After a short while, students were asking each other and themselves similar questions.

Empathy is essential to dramatic character development and portrayal. One must put oneself both inside and outside of the characters and situations, sometimes simultaneously, to interpret and portray them. Empathy may be thought of as the dialogical interaction between these opposite, but at the same time complementary, components. Although the dual functioning of the student in this situation is most

obviously available to those who are actors in the opera, it turns out to be available also to students who participate in other ways since the writers, musicians, set designers, and the rest of the company all engage in the activity of imagining and inventing a dramatic world that is and isn't the world in which they actually live. The characters, the action, the situation, and the environment are all dialogic components of the opera experience. That is, the essence of the dramatic process and theatrical communication consists of dialogic interaction between the text (libretto), the set, lighting, and costume designs, the music, the actors, and the characters. In the context of the Tito Puente operas, this may be particularly salient because the focus of so many different interpretations and responses is a situation students have intimate experience with and serious concerns about (e.g. a drug-addicted family member, premature violent death). The multiple adoption and understanding of complementary and contradicting viewpoints may foster skills in empathizing, both with formerly-distanced others and with formerly-distanced aspects of oneself. Thus, empathy, by definition, requires connection — the antithesis of numbing and dissociation.

Aesthetic Understanding

The opportunity to develop empathy is not provided only by the practical relevance and psychological gravity of the themes and topics the operas deal with and the educative and social aspects of the program. Empathy is also essential to the experience of art's aesthetic qualities. We are all familiar with the odd sensation of disorientation that accompanies our return to "reality" after immersion in a play, novel, symphony, or painting. Following Bakhtin (1990), the empathetic experience of the existence of a lived world independent of the artistic text (including aural and visual texts) is a result of the

complex interaction of personal, aesthetic, ideological, sensory, and technical signs, which creates a chronotopic "reality." Chronotope, literally "time-space," refers to "the intrinsic connectedness of temporal and spatial relationships that are artistically expressed in [art]" (Holquist, 1990).

In chronotopic aesthetic experience, strict boundaries between the conscious and unconscious become amorphous and permeable. The irrational, the repressed, and the suppressed are included as known aspects of the human condition and the self, both literally and figuratively. Thus, the self is more open to experiencing the contradictions.

"Artistic" thinking and experience, even when not specific to dramatic tension or plot and character development, involves an emphasis on oppositional forces encompassed in the same whole. Vygotsky's analysis of Hamlet (1915-25/65-68/71) describes how the dramatic tension of the play derives from the conflict and contradiction between the expected outcome and what actually happens. Vygotsky conceived of this conflict as offering the ability to reach a "new stage [that] emerges not by virtue of what is already potentially contained in what was before, but from a real conflict between organism and environment and from active adaptation to the environment (1930/74, p. 191.) (Environment, here, refers to the historical and cultural environment, not the natural environment.)

When experienced as a process, the creation of art is cathartic in a Vygotskiian sense. It fosters a move toward psychic integration on a plane beyond the parameters of logic and language — and it provides a tangible confirmation of that movement. That is, artistic involvement does more than express or evoke feelings, provide insight, and enable psychological integration. It embodies them. Color and form, sound and symbol, are connected to bodily dynamics of movement, tension, texture, and rhythm. As Nelson Goodman expressed it, "What we know through art is felt in our bones and nerves and

muscles as well as grasped by our minds... All the sensitivity and responsiveness of the organism participates in the invention and interpretation of symbols" (1976, p. 259). The intimate connection between mind and body becomes apparent in the unity of psyche and soma in the artistic process. By unifying mind and body, behavior and consciousness, the arts offer a way around the mind/body dualism of the Cartesian legacy as well as a bridge across the psychological compartmentalization of distancing, dissociation, and numbing mechanisms.

The body connection in art, according to the students, is a very different experience than in sports. This type of experience is not unique to opera, or necessarily limited to the arts, but is characteristic of artistic experience. When I talked with Tony about his guitar playing, he said that he played whatever kind of music he "felt like playing," depending on his mood. He talked about picking up his guitar and playing music that "makes [heavy metal] look like Barney" when he was angry. He said it made him "feel better," but could not say anything more in response to my probing. About ten minutes later, while we were talking about his job in public relations, he interrupted with, in effect, a description of the cathartic effect of music:

> Tony: I got an answer from what you asked before.
>
> Stephanie: To what question?
>
> Tony: About why guitar and not ball or something else.
>
> Stephanie: Okay.
>
> Tony: The music is better, like with the composing, it says something. Not in words, but it says something. Playing' soccer or basketball, it just like uses energy but it doesn't say anything. Music is like a language. Like talkin'. Sports ain't. It

gets the feelings out in that 'cause you use up the energy but when you stop playin', it's still in your head. The music gets it out of your head too.

Stephanie: So you feel different after putting the anger into music than into shooting hoops or slammin' a home run?

Tony: No. They both make me tired.

Stephanie: So what do you do? Grab a "Gatorade"?

Tony: Nah. I go to sleep. (long pause). No. That's not exactly right. I'm thinkin' about when I found out about my cousin last week and it was different. The music is like I'm not just tired, I'm wiped.

Stephanie: What do you mean by "wiped"?

Tony: Tired but like weird. More strange-like. Like, like, I don't know....

Stephanie: Strange how? Dizzy from your ears ringing? Lightheaded? Headache?

Tony: No. Maybe. But more like strange like, like I can't, like (long silence). Um, it's more like I sleep like a baby. Like [my baby sister]. Like when she sleeps through a lot a noise and I don't know how but she's there just sleepin' in the middle of it all.

Stephanie: Like a really deep sleep?

Tony: Yeah. And peaceful. You know how they say like "sleep like a baby." Yeah. The music does that. It puts my mind in peace. After playing ball, I sleep but like I wake up and I'm still pissed, still thinking about it when I'm not tired anymore.

Tanya was another of many who noted that the opera experience was "not at all the same" as sports. She was also one of the few able to, with some difficulty, eventually find words to articulate at least some of what she saw as different. She describes an experience of

integration and completeness (instead of dissociation and fragmentation) when she talks about how, in opera, you "use all of you."

Tanya: Sports are fun. I enjoy playing. But it's not the same as opera. There's a difference.

Stephanie: Can you tell me something about what's different? They're both fun, right?

Tanya: Yeah. But not the same way.

Stephanie: How? What's not the same about having fun?

Tanya: I guess you could say that because the opera is like more serious fun.

Stephanie: More serious fun. That's a good way to put it. Can you say a little bit about what makes opera fun more serious fun compared to fun in sports?

Tanya: It's fun but it's serious.

Stephanie: Can you try to say something about why it's serious, what makes it serious and fun?

Tanya: It's, um, sports are just fun. You get exercise and all, which is good, but opera is, opera has — (frustratedly) oh, I don't know.

Stephanie: This isn't easy, I know. Take your time.

Tanya: Okay. (long pause) Opera is, like, it has a purpose more than fun. Sports is more like just fun. I mean you get exercise and but mostly you ....you....you just don't use all of you as much as the opera.

Stephanie: I know this is hard and I really appreciate your patience. But I have to ask again if you can explain what you mean by that? The using all of you part.

Tanya: Sports is like, you use your body but you don't have to think about it the

way you do in opera. It's like you don't have to think about it once you know how to play the game. You just react. (long pause, looks thoughtful)

Stephanie: Take your time, This isn't easy.

Tanya: Okay. like — it's just like opera is like not just a brain. A brain. And a body. (pause) And thinking. (pause) And it uses your soul too. Yeah. It's like it uses like all of you. Everything you got. That's what I would say. Nothing else I ever did uses all parts of me like opera. (long pause)

Stephanie: What about what you said a little while ago about opera being more serious fun because it has a purpose?

Tanya: Oh boy. (bites lip and stares at ceiling before answering). Like it's more serious. More important.

Tanya says that participating in opera gave her a sense of helping others (because opera "shows the younger kids like not to take drugs . . .") indicating that she now sees herself as an agent of possible social change.

Stephanie: Why do you think it's more important?

Tanya: Cause you learn a lot of stuff and do more different things. (pause) And cause it likes shows the younger kids like not to take drugs and get involved in gangs and things.

Stephanie: Don't sports also maybe help kids not do drugs or join gangs?

Tanya: No. I don't think so. Maybe. But I really don't think so.

Stephanie: Why not?

Tanya: Cause it's like there's no — I' m sorry but I really can't think of the words. (pause) Cause, ummmm. Sports is like. Like you get involved in opera. Like you get involved in sports too but it's not like the opera gets you involved. Like I said,

the opera is like all of you. All of you gets involved. It's different from sports. I don't know what else to say about it.

Tasha, another basketball player, also compared sports and working on the opera:

Tasha: They're different. They're very different. For one thing, every basketball game is different but it's the same too. You know. The same rules. The same plays. You pretty much do the same thing. You play basketball and try to win. That's it. Don't get me wrong, I like doin' that, and no two games are exactly alike, but it is still like the same. That's what basketball is. You understand what I'm sayin'?

Stephanie: I think so. Yeah. Go on.

Tasha: The opera, like, every day is different an' you're learning something new. It's a whole 'nother world.

Stephanie: Like you learn to play basketball better by practicing?

Tasha: Not really. No. That's getting' better at the same thing. Opera is you get better at lots of things.

Tasha focused less on embodied aspects of sports than Tanya did, but both found it noteworthy that the opera program involves a wide and diverse range of content and competencies across holistically integrated domains and disciplines. Participating in an opera production always involves learning — about the situation, about the characters, about relationships, about others, about oneself.

This is not always an intentional or conscious process, a factor that, along with historical privileging of the rational and sociocultural conventions that generally neglect the affective, undoubtedly contributes to the difficulties encountered by those (among whom I include myself) who try to put this phenomenon into words. It is difficult to

verbalize that which, either by its nature or our nurture, is beyond language. We live in a verbocentric society that imposes the conventions of language on practice and carries with it implicit assumptions regarding the kinds of things we choose to describe and how we describe them (Chodorow, 1978; hooks, 1990; Spina, 1995). What we can put into words depends, not only on the words available to us, but on the value system they are inextricably interwoven with.

Many students struggled to find a way to verbalize what they found indescribable about the opera program. About half were successful at finding any words adequate to capture at least some essential aspect of what they wanted to convey, and then only after a long, often frustrating effort on the part of both participants in the interview.

> Stephanie: Do you think the way you do with opera in your other classes?
>
> Tanya: Not hardly at all.
>
> Stephanie: Can you describe how you think in opera?
>
> Tanya: It's like we put our minds together and get a giant mind (gestures and laughs) and everybody is part of it, but it (pause). No. That ain't exactly what I mean. It's not just about mind. Your brain. I mean thinking. (pause)
>
> Tanya: It is hard to talk about some things. I got two languages and it's not enough....the two of them, the words, it's hard for me for both of them to say some things.

Tanya was not, at this time, able to name what else "it" was about besides "mind." Nonetheless, her description is rich and her imagery yields insights beyond the humorous picture it conjures. Tanya's comments about the opera company as a "giant mind" refers to more ("It's not just about mind) than the merging of her own "mind" or thought processes with those of others in the group. They suggest an integration of psychic processes as

well. This is consistent with Vygotskiian arguments about the social origins of mental functioning in the individual. The assumption underlying those arguments is that. interpsychological functioning is inextricably linked with intrapsychological functioning and any change in the former, as Wertsch pointed out (1985), involves a corresponding change in the latter. Tanya seems to draw strength and trust in her own intuitions from being part of the "social brain," a phenomenon that may contribute to empowerment; to a growing sense of agency.

As we continued the interview, I pressed Tanya to explore and articulate the difference between the kind of purely cognitive learning she experienced in other aspects of her school life and the kind of transformative learning she experienced in working on the opera.

> Stephanie: Tanya, if you don't mind, and you don't have to answer if you've had enough, but can you tell me — You said the opera was different from sports and you said because it was more serious fun, which I understand, but you also said it was different in other ways. I'm not sure what you meant by that — what's different in other ways.
>
> Tanya: (seems a bit frustrated, struggling, or exasperated with me and/or her inability to articulate this)
>
> Stephanie: Am I being too difficult? Do you wanna move on?
>
> Tanya: It's okay. It's like the part about like what we said about the words, even in two languages. Like you think something but can't say it. (pause)
>
> Like...like...um...you know it but not really. More like you just know it.
>
> Stephanie: Okay. So, do you mean, are you saying, that what's different is that in opera you think without words? Is that right?

Tanya: I don't know. What I mean is. Like in opera thinking you sometimes, it's like you think really hard with lots of people or like by yourself at night in bed you still think about it and sometimes you don't think but you just kinda know.

Stephanie: Know what?

Tanya: What to do or write or how something should be or say or sound or look. This idea, this light goes on in you and you just feel it and you know it's right.

Stephanie: Like when you finally understand a math problem.

Tanya: No.

Stephanie: Can you say something about what is different between the light that goes on in your head with opera and the one that goes on when you get some math problem?

Tanya: It's not a light in your head. That's more just your brain knowing.

Stephanie: So how is the opera light different, not just your brain knowing?

Tanya: Opera you feel like you know in all of you like you know it's like (pause) you know it must be like, maybe like something like when you fall in love and you just know it and feel it and you know. (She shrugs.) You just know.

Tanya was clearly struggling here to express something at the edges of her experience—something outside the realm of her quotidian life. Even in transcription, the combination of groping effort and deep certainty comes through. To "know in all of you"—and to do so in the company of others who are experiencing a similar and simultaneous kind of discovery of their common experience—seems to produce a deep sense of trust in one's own intuition. Tanya's experience of the opera gave her access to

her own knowledge about the world she lives in and rendered that knowledge conscious in an unprecedented way.

Tanya was not the only one to experience either "different" ways of knowing and/or "just knowing." Remember the earlier discussion of my interview with Tony? I asked him a question he could not answer about how music helped him deal with anger. Ten minutes after I asked him about it, he interrupted another topic because the answer "came to him." Paco reports a similar experience:

> Stephanie: What does working on the opera mean to you? What do you like or not like about it?
>
> Paco: It means a lot. I mean — I love working with my hands...It feels great to see something I've made a sketch of turn into a piece of scenery. I like the smell of the wood and paint. I like to do physical stuff and figure out how to do things.
>
> Stephanie: How do you figure out how to do things? Can you give me an example?
>
> Paco: Like, take the lights. Like one of the characters in this play is dying and really lonely and I had to show that with the lights. I tried different colors and stuff and no matter what I did, it didn't feel right. I couldn't decide if blue or purple worked better but it still wasn't what I wanted. So I gave up and went to build flats with José and suddenly it came to me. I'd use regular white lights but dim them and use a blue spotlight on the kid to sort of focus on him and how he feels.
>
> Stephanie: Sounds very effective. But what do you mean it "suddenly came to you"?
>
> Paco: Just that. I wasn't even thinking about it I was so involved in building the flats and it just popped into my head.

Stephanie: Can you tell me anything more about what you mean by being involved in the work?

Paco: Not really. I just like forget everything else and even what time it is and where I am.

Stephanie: How do you feel about that?

Paco: It feels good. Like my brain goes on a vacation and works real good at the same time. I don't know how to explain it. It's weird, but I do my best thinking when I don't try to think about anything. Not that I don't think about what I'm doing. You hafta be careful with tools and electricity. I can't say it in English. (pause) I can't even say it in Spanish. You hafta experience it.

Stephanie: I think I know what you mean. (pause) I want to ask you something else about what you said earlier. About things "popping into your head." Have other things besides the lighting solution "popped" into your head?

Paco: Yeah.

Stephanie: When has this happened?

Paco: When I'm doing stuff. Building things. Painting 'em.

Stephanie: Does that happen anywhere besides the opera program?

Paco: I dunno. (pause). Not that I can think of right off.

Stephanie: What other kinds of things have "popped into your head" while you were working on the opera?

Paco: I dunno. Things. Like what I'm going to do after school or on the weekend. How to answer some homework question. How a certain scene should look...The other day I was painting some scenery when I hit on the idea of seeing if my parents would let Rudolfo stay with us. I felt bad for him for months and I don't

know why it took me so long to figure out maybe I could do something...

It is possible that students' deep engagement with and psychological investment in the opera project plays a role in the "opera eureka" phenomenon. The psychological literature is replete with notions that address similar experiences, such as "tip-of-the-tongue" (TOT) phenomena, an unawareness of thought processes due to automatization, or a lack of ownership related to low self esteem. Perhaps it is a kind of magical thinking, whether driven by the id or some lingering romanticized beliefs about art. All of these notions may be relevant but they seem inadequate explanations. As almost all participants in this study, students as well as teachers, firmly believe, perhaps it is, indeed, "something more." Anita explains:

> With the opera, these kids plug in to something. It's like, you know, in a classroom, you could probably ask them "what's wrong?" or "Why are you angry?" or this and that and you'll never get an answer. In here, they can work it out somehow. They don't necessarily know how. I don't necessarily know how it happens, but it does. Eventually it just shows up. It manifests itself in other ways — a change in attitude, posture, whatever. It's not even conscious but something is going on. And the way it comes out — it evolves out of the opera experience, out of the art. I can't explain it. But it happens.
>
> Stephanie: What about things like self-esteem, confidence, responsibility...
>
> Anita: Oh, they're all part of it, of course. But — like the kids have more confidence. Yeah. They do. And I'm sure self-esteem goes up. But that's part of what happens — part of the result not the cause of it. It's more than those things. It's not just a "feel-good" kind of thing. I've been at this for many years, and I still can't put my finger on it, and it's not the same for each kid necessarily, but

> something happens every year, with every opera. It's more than a class or an opera. It makes a difference in their lives, even if only for the few months they're involved with it...It means a lot to them.

It *means* a lot to them. Anita uses the term, almost as an after-thought, to indicate that the opera has importance and value to the students. I would argue, however, that the opera has importance and value to the students because it *means*. That is, meaning-fullness, the endless potential for making meaning, is the essence of that "something" about the Tito Puente opera experience that defies verbalization.

Language is, as Merleau-Ponty (1962) reminds us, just one of many human faculties that allow us to participate in and experience the world. However, the privileged position of the rational "voice" reflects a general tendency to dominate and silence other voices (Wertsch, 1990). When language is present, the communicative and meaning-making of pre-, extra-, and non-linguistic expression becomes difficult to see. Furthermore, when other-than-language-based forms of thought and communication are focused on, they are often viewed through the lens of language.[4] This is not to say that what is unique about aesthetic understanding is totally divorced from language. Language is frequently part of art. But what we know aesthetically does not necessarily lend itself to expression in terms of the ideology-laced affordances, restrictions, structures, and categorizations of language.

What is known aesthetically is in excess of language, which is inadequate to address it (Rochberg-Halton, 1986). Aesthetic understanding goes "beyond what is" (Hegel,1940/1971, p. 53). Ask students what COO means to them and they describe their experiences in the opera by comparisons with experiences like "love," "having a baby," and "knowing God," all of which are arguably also best understood through aesthetic

modes. All interviewed students spoke at length about the opera as "different" from other areas of school and life, and, even when they could not identify that elusive "something" that made it "different," they emphasized the degree of difference by describing the opera in terms like "being on another planet" or "another world."

The opera is "a whole 'nother world" to the students in more than one way. But it is, in part, because it is grounded in their world, their "harsh reality" (Silin, 1998). Because the opera deals with the experience of the learner, a space is opened that provides the conditions for students to give voice to their knowledge, hopes, problems, fears, despair, and dreams. It leads to an awareness of what it is to be in the world; an awakening of imagination — "An imagination that brings an ethical concern to the fore, a concern that, again, has to do with the community that ought to be in the making and the values that give it color and significance" (Greene, 1995). It encourages students to question, to seek their own meaning, and to recognize their right and responsibility to take action.

Consequently, it is not a coincidence that, in most U.S. schools, the arts are usually considered either frivolous and dispensable or inaccessible to all but a talented few and so not worth including in budgets and curricula. Limiting students' access to certain forms of expression (and the integrative processes those forms of expression foster) is a subtle form of manipulation and control. Not explicit like force and violence, it is perhaps more dangerous because of its insidiousness. Paradoxically, however, the segregation of art, either by elevating or disparaging it, undermines it. This segregation also enables art to provide an alternative to dominant ideological forms (Eagleton, 1991). Because artistic expression has been suppressed, it has not been as subject to exploitation and appropriation as much as language. The languages of art integrate thought and feeling thus embodying the possibility of undermining the assumptions upon which modernist culture is based and

providing an alternative to the quest for "objective truth." By moving outside the hegemonic limits of language-linkage (Dewey, 1934; Langer, 1942), the arts mediate the boundary between the expressed and unexpressed, moving toward the possibility of additional dimensions of understanding.

Academic disciplines and the elitist view of art promoted through canonical art history and structural criticism emphasize boundaries and convention. Authentic artistic experience that is not subject to these limits shifts the understanding of art as context-specific to art as an essential agent of human experience (see Spina, 1995). It does not support the exclusionary reproductive practices of informing and conforming, but is characterized by an inherent tension with these roles that carries the potential for making the familiar strange and the strange familiar. As a result, the value is not on the product but in the process — a process that embraces the fluid, often contradictory features of experience that resist crystallization in language and open doors to imaginative possibilities.

Many educators have a prejudice against the possible because it undermines the status quo. It is transformative, not replicative. The cognitive/instrumental bias perpetuates the myth of meritocracy. Instrumental reasoning follows a progression of logical deductions that build on each other. What doesn't fit this model is suspect — an error to be corrected, "controlled," or thrown out if it conflicts with the conventional reasoning that is the "language" of the status quo. Artistic process is beyond those laws that confine meaning to the existing formula. It is a not a predictive mode of reasoning and is concerned more with ontological issues (e.g. freedom, anxiety, death) than epistemological ones (e.g. logic, "reason"). This is not to say that all artistic involvement is authentic, integrative, and transformative. Some artistic experiences can be domesticating. There are some contradictions that art cannot resolve. While some

psychologists express fears that creativity can be used to expand and maintain oppression, destruction, and selfishness (Panes, 1995), it should be remembered that it is also oppression, destruction, and selfishness that inhibit and restrict expression.

An aesthetic space is a liminal space where mind and body are united in authentic activity with both conscious and unconscious dimensions; a space where the opposite characteristics of artistic experience: hyperacuity and tranquility, tension and relaxation, effort and ease, coexist simultaneously (Dufrenne, 1953). "Authenticity" is a Vygotskiian concept applied to interactions when the content of the interaction is needed or important and when it motivates those involved to establish the social context for the transfer or application of knowledge and other resources (Moll & Greenberg, 1990). Authentic activity, in a school setting, must have all the characteristics of real activity created for real purposes in real contexts. That is, it must be holistic and meaningful. An aesthetic space facilitates dialogic understanding, uncovering, and unfolding between the known and the unknown, the taken for granted/taken for truth, the repressed and the privileged, presence and absence, being and nothingness. And it is in the dialectic of these existential conflicts that agency is located (Vygotsky, 1915-25/68/71). Agency is, by definition, integral to critical consciousness. As we will see in the next chapter, it is also critical to transformation.

Chapter 12

Transformation: Perils and Processes

What you can do is more than you thought.

Most of us find we can do things we never dreamed we could do...and we did ALL of it!

I really believe that I can do anything I make up my mind I want to do.

One problem endemic to studying trauma is the danger of romanticizing aspects of the individual's responses to a traumatic situation, to exaggerate the heroic or tragic and run the risk of representing our own preconceptions. While most people can survive horrible experiences and high levels of stress, they may face lifelong challenges to their mental health, to their physical well-being, and to their moral development. It should be remembered that, although they may be functioning well overtly, some "resilient" individuals are suffering psychologically. So, it was with some trepidation that I decided to open this chapter with the above quotations from three students' interviews. It was the accuracy of the opening statements in representing the consensus of the 70 students in the 1999 and 2000 Tito Puente COO programs that ultimately persuaded me that to *not* use them would be a reflection of my own biases.

Nevertheless, I am uneasy with what I feel can too easily be misconstrued as an overly sanguine repetition and perpetuation of "survivor stories." After all of my careful efforts to define transformation as not-necessarily-positive change, the students in this study pulled me toward happy fairy-tale endings and homogenous "American dreams." My researcher radar had detected a "speed bump." (See Weis and Fine, 2000) Not only was the ending to the story too homogenous. It was too conventionally reassuring. It

painted a picture that was not inaccurate, but it was incomplete. It was one-dimensional in a multi-dimensional world.

So, I put on my three-D glasses and saw that, contextualized in the dimensions of time and place, the tone and similarity of the narratives could be better understood. In 1999, the comments were made by students still experiencing the rush of adrenalin and the intoxication of post-performance emotions — that combination of elation, let-down, pride, and exhaustion that follows the echoes of applause and the final fall of the curtain. In 2000, even though the work on the opera and its performance did not reach completion, students were no less proud of what they did accomplish, although rightful indignation was an additional ingredient in the muddle of emotions. Given the impact of context on development and our understanding of it, it is not surprising that these narratives bear a collective similarity to some degree. Furthermore, the tables presented in this chapter, of necessity, abbreviate and condense students' narratives. Neatly summarizing narratives in a table with a purpose cannot escape focusing on aspects that illustrate the phenomenon of interest. Yet, in reality, the similarities across student voices, while accurately represented, do not fit quite so neatly into a grid. There are variations in intensity, detail, emotion, hesitancy, ambivalence, fear, and other qualities not captured in this format. This should not be seen as erasing or dismissing differences, but as indicative of the collectivity in which individuals are seen as parts of the world that also constitutes worlds in themselves.

Thus, while the evidence that follows is overwhelmingly "positive," we must be cautious in our interpretation and extrapolation. Transformation involves insight, but it is not the conclusion of an exercise in logic. It is an evolving non-linear process that may or may not continue without ongoing support. It is important to know that not every "opera story" has a happy ending, although the opera experience remains a highlight in even the

most tragic of participants' lives. Anita Bland tells of three students who were in the opera a few years ago. Two are now on death row. The third is dead:

> There's two students in particular that's a very sad note. They're brothers. And they had a lot of abuse at home. A lot. It was very sad. Now they're both in prison. They happen to have killed their best friend and all three of them were in one of my operas. And it was a real tragic thing a couple of years ago.

Anita recently received a letter from one of the young men. He talked about how much his experience with the opera program meant to him, saying it was the "only good part" of his life. Some opera participants, especially those who live in the most tragic circumstances, need more than the few months in the program provide. Anita believes that more involvement in the arts might have made a difference in the lives of the two young men awaiting execution:

> I honestly believe that these two boys — when they got into high school, had the high school continued developing the fine arts in them, because they were incredibly intuitive, incredibly sensitive, and they could really portray it. Because they had felt that. Because they were in extreme pain. Had they been able to go to a high school where instead of just being battered with books and demeaned with standardized tests, it could've gotten to them through the stage, or through painting, or another of the arts. If they were able to get into a fine arts program, where they could express themselves and, you know, be respected for that, we may have been able to keep them... And I think that's where we're losing a lot of our kids in the inner-city, not just these two but a lot like them, because they do live very emotional, traumatic lives. When they're given the opportunity, whether it's through song, or drama, or art, to express it, then they can deal with it.

Transformation is not a panacea. It cannot be sustained without struggle and support. Transformation, it seems, can perhaps best be defined as a unique and frequently contradictory combination of accomplishment, concern, conflict, ability, ambivalence, awkwardness, purpose, poise, vulnerability, grace, pleasure, pain, joy, fear, dreams, practicality, sadness — a dialogic kernel of possibility distilled in the essence of the social being. It is difficult to track and cannot be captured in systematic steps. It emerges in various ways and in its own time. Yet, there is evidence that transformation is occurring, from students' connection to others and their own feelings to their newfound willingness to consider and prepare for the future. These shifts are revealed in a variety of affective, conceptual, and practical ways, yet they all speak to a growing sense of agency that is apparent across modes and participants, particularly in the 2000 students' responses to the sudden cancellation of their opera.

With that in mind, this chapter examines transformational shifts in consciousness and behavior as evidenced in changes over time in students' relationships to their experiences with violence, reports of their academic performance, the ways they think about themselves and others, and their plans for the future.

Revelation of suppressed stories

As we saw earlier, students entering the opera program were generally cautious about trusting non-family members and had developed mechanisms for compartmentalizing or distancing themselves from the violence that surrounds them. They had become expert at creating a protective barrier that allowed them to maintain a false sense of invulnerability. Eventually, over the course of the opera program, the students emerged from their cocoons and began to recover parts of their pasts that had previously been "forgotten" or kept secret. It is possible that maturation played a role in this process.

Although the length of time was less than twelve weeks, it was the spring semester, graduation was approaching, and the prospect of high school was becoming increasingly real. Although I was known to most of the students from prior work at the school and had spent time getting to know them during lunch breaks and free periods, it is also possible that they revealed their stories because they were becoming more comfortable with me, or that the trust that was developing among the group included or was transferred to me. It is also possible that the interviews themselves were therapeutic. Nonetheless, when I asked some students why they hadn't told me about some of the events they revealed in later interviews in earlier ones, even asking explicitly if they had to "check me out" first or had become more comfortable with the interviews as time went on, they all responded that they hadn't remembered the incidents earlier, had "put it out of their minds," or the like. Even Jennifer, who was extremely anxious about the taping at first, and who I thought simply did not trust that I would keep matters confidential, may have been reacting that way because, as it turned out, she was dealing with her father's murder, which she had been avoiding for years. In our first interview, we talked about choosing the theme of the opera. Jennifer expressed her reluctance to disclose any personal connection to the proposed themes ("I really don't want to talk about that."). I changed the subject to family and Jennifer talked freely about her mother and sisters, the youngest of whom "has a different father" who does not live with the family. She said nothing about her own father until I asked: "What about your father?"

Jennifer: He died.

Stephanie: I'm so sorry. When did that happen?

Jennifer: When I was a little. I was very little.

Stephanie: Do you remember him?

Jennifer: I got some pictures but only from pictures.

Stephanie: I see. What happened to him?

Jennifer: I think he got sick and then he died. I don't remember.

We talked a few more minutes about her mother's job and her sister's baby; then Jennifer abruptly announced that she wanted to stop the interview and erase the tape.

Jennifer: You said I could stop. I want to stop now...I think I changed my mind about doin' this.

Stephanie: You can stop whenever you want, but can you tell me why? Did I say something that upset or offended you?

Jennifer: No. I just don't feel like it no more....

Jennifer ultimately agreed to postpone the decision about erasing the tape until the next interview. The second interview went smoothly until I asked her about a comment she made that students had "more important things to do" after school than "stupid projects" ("My little sister is a lot more important than drawing a map or making one of those shoe box diorama things."), but "the teachers are clueless and don't [care]." When I asked Jennifer if she had tried talking to her teachers about the situation, she became very angry:

Jennifer: I don't want them makin' any trouble for us. It ain't none of their business what I do when I'm not here.

Stephanie: Have you had a problem with a teacher making trouble about something before?

Jennifer: Yes. When I was little.

Stephanie: Can you tell me what happened?

Jennifer: I don't want to talk about it.

Stephanie: That's okay.

Jennifer again demands that I erase the interview tape. We talk about it and she decides, for the time being, to continue the interview. When it is over, she asks to borrow the tape so she can listen to what she said and see if she wants to erase it or not. She returns it to me, intact, several days later. We meet for our final interview three days after the final opera performance. The opera, she says, "made a big difference" in her life. I asked if she could tell me about what was different.

> Jennifer: Like, I was watching the opera and normally I would — if I felt like something was sad I would not pay attention so I wouldn't cry— but there I was and the tears were just crying down my face and I wasn't ashamed if my friends saw me or not, that they would tease me or think something bad about me. I was more — before I kept things to myself and was afraid people wouldn't like me or would hurt me if I [let my guard down].

We talked about how she now felt about wanting to erase the first interview tape:

> Jennifer: It doesn't bother me anymore. I don't mind so much if people find out about stuff that's happened 'cause I feel better with myself. More comfortable bein' the way I am and 'cause that's how I am. I don't gotta be scared or ashamed or anything. And now I know other kids have similar kinds of things they got in their lives so I don't feel so alone as I did.

Still not knowing what happened that had provoked such avoidance and anger, and no longer "bother[s]" Jennifer, I decide to gingerly broach the taboo subject one last time:

> Stephanie: So about that tape, about what you were telling me, can you deal with a question about it?
>
> Jennifer: I guess.
>
> Stephanie: Can you tell me a little more about what happened that you were so

upset about? Are you okay with that? You don't have to but —

Jennifer: My father. He got killed. A cop shot him.

Stephanie: Oh. How awful.

Jennifer: An' he didn't do nothin' wrong. He was just, my mom says he was just a black man in the wrong place at the wrong time.

Stephanie: I'm so sorry, Jennifer. (Her eyes tear up. We hug. When she regains her composure, we continue.)

Stephanie: Did the cop — Did anything happen to the cop for doing that?

Jennifer: Of course not. They didn't have no whatcha call profilin' in those days so it was like "Oops. So sorry. Call the undertaker. I made a mistake but he was black so it don't matter. Good thing I didn't shoot a white man by mistake." See. That's the difference. You could do an opera about that. We could. We didn't but it could be in an opera. But, I'm sorry I freaked out on you about when you asked me about talkin' to another teacher but you can't deal with real life in other classes.

Jennifer recognizes that she has changed and she connects that change to the opera program. Her comments attest to personal, social, emotional, and psychological transformation. Her story is unique, but the revelation of a traumatic event, as well as the changes in her perceptions of self and others is not. Tables 1-A and 1-B summarize and present some of the suppressed stories the other students related over the course of the opera program. As they move from denial to "ownership" of their histories and feelings, from dis-sociation to greater integration as reflected in their newly disclosed stories, the students appear to function better in various areas of their lives, including their schoolwork. Arguably, attentional resources that had previously been dissipated by the effort required to split off and manage distressing experiences and feelings were now available for other purposes.

Table 1-A

Revelation of Suppressed Stories of Violence - 1999

Student	T1	T2	T3
Carrie	Says she is only aware of incidents of violence through hearsay, but stays indoors because it isn't safe to go out	When we talk about the theme of a drug-addicted parent, Carrie says she knows "a lot of people goin' through this" but specifics not forthcoming	Carrie talks about her drug-addicted aunt, a 37-yr-old with two children, currently hospitalized for attempted suicide because she tried to slit wrists.
Claudia	Reports that her mother died of cancer when she was "3 or 4."	Tells of hiding under her bed during shoot-out outside her home, but says she doesn't know anyone involved in violence.	Talks about being afraid and avoiding sitting near windows. Tells of a school-mate who was killed two years earlier.
Gina	Talks about being afraid of violence but her experience, she says, has been limited verbal abuse by school "bullies" when she a new student 2 yrs ago.	Tells of older brother, a drug addict, now in rehab. Then, of another in prison for shooting a man. She and her mother "do not talk about it."	Gina is planning to visit her jailed brother for the first time since his incarceration three years ago.
Gloria	Answers questions about violence with irrelevant story	Says there is no violence "on my block" and almost immediately contradicts this with story of friend shot "in front of his house ... four doors away from mine."	Talks openly about opera theme being upsetting and how having other kids for support helps: "I don't feel so alone and scared ...these are problems a lot of us [face],not just me... I don't feel so alone anymore.
Jennifer	Does not want to talk about violence. Says Dad "got sick and died" when she was "little." At end of interview asks if I can erase tape. I promise to do so if she still feels that way next time.	I bring the tape to the interview. Jennifer says she wants to listen to it, not erase it, and asks to borrow it. I agree to let her take it home.	Jennifer is finally okay with the taping, finally trusting I'll keep it confidential. Before end of final interview she says her father was really shot and killed by a cop for being black and "in the wrong place at the wrong time."
Ricardo	Has cousin and older brother involved with drugs. "There's nothing to tell."	Talks about missing his brother, who is living with a girlfriend, and fear that he may be "doing drugs" again.	Went to visit his brother and reports feeling less worried about him because his girlfriend is "clean" and makes brother happy.
Tasha	Reports she "knows people" effected by violence, but "not family or friends." She just "knows who they are." Hasn't seen her mother for "4 or 5 years."	Her mother's absence doesn't effect her because "You aks me, it all depends on if you aks the right questions and thinks about the good parts not the bad parts. You gotta have the right attitude."	No change in story. Says she "just made up her mind" to change attitude one day and that was it. A sudden, permanent change. No relapses. No regrets.
Tony	Cousin is a "crack-head." Tony "doesn't think about it." Leaves interview a few minutes later.	More relaxed at interview. Doesn't want to talk about cousin, but talks at length about his use of music to "get out" his emotions when he's "angry or something." Denies any connection to COO.	Says opera program made him more aware of feelings about his cousin, and connected the use of music "to get the anger out" to "not thinking about it" not working anymore.

Table 1-B

Revelation of Suppressed Stories/Changes in Responses to Violence – 2000*

Student	T1	T2	T3
Alesha	Doesn't know "anybody around here" who was a victim of violence – has only lived here "about five years."	Tells of witnessing the drive-by shooting death of her friend/ baby-sitter front of her (former) house. Does not want anyone to know about this experience. She "got over it" because she realized the girl was "with God."	She is less concerned with others finding out about her babysitter's murder, although she is not voluntarily telling others about it.
Carmie	Gang lives in and sells drugs next door, but "They won't hurt me. I could walk right through them." No shooting or "real" violence "by my house."	Carmie admits to being afraid of the gang sometimes. She deals with it by praying for the gang members.	Carmie prays for Mr. Musselman but is also working with the others to "try to fix it so it doesn't happen again to somebody else."
Carlos	Knows "a lot of people" effected by violence. Only specifics he gives is that his mother, a drug-addict, died from pneumonia when he was two-years-old. Has been known to hit trees, fences, and walls when angry, usually in response to "untrue" comments about his late mother.	Tells, in great detail, no emotion, of his aunt's bad marriage, drug problems, cousins' difficult childhood, the aunt's good boyfriend who died of aids, an uncle and two cousins in the "Latin Kings" and his cousins' recent jail sentences. If upset, he "escapes" to his room and stares at its starry ceiling "my corner of the sky"	Says he wrote "a couple of letters" to his jailed cousins, but it's too soon to have gotten a response. Carlos is one of the most upset by opera cancellation. His hands have healed. He is no longer responding to anger with his fists. Talks "tough" but, at least for now, it is just talk.
José	"I hear about it but it's not nobody I know."	Tells of two friends who live in physically abusive homes.	He could talk only about the opera cancellation.
Paco	Friend was evicted by mother "right after" father was killed by a stray bullet during shoot-out when she saw him "walkin'with a weed-smokin' kid"	Decides to ask parents to let his homeless friend stay with them.	His friend is sleeping on the living room floor in his family's over-crowded apartment and he just got a job, but only part-time because that's all available.
Ricky	Uses himself for an example related to the theme, but not relevant. Casually mentions that there are drugs, gangs, and knives in the townhouses, "but not my block."	Gangs with knives hang around school, but "they don't pick on me (yet)." He says they're jealous of those still in school.	16 yr old friend beaten and stabbed to death by gang last year. Ricky felt sad for his friend's family and worried that friend's brother might seek revenge and get killed.
Tanya	2 cousins are gang members. 1 is in hiding for not turning in money from drug sales. "Good Christians shouldn't worry."	Worries about 11 1/2 year old brother falling in with wrong crowd.	Tanya is upset over opera cancellation and that's what is discussed.
Vanessa	Tells of friend upset over early miscarriage and then of her own rape by cousin previous summer. Told no one for 10 months, then only her sister.	Says she intends to call 800# rape hotline and get checked for STDs. Says talking about rape helped, but she won't go for in-person counseling or tell mom.	One of few who consider opera cancellation "not totally hopeless." Has called 800# and says will call and talk more.

* The 2000 T3 interviews took place after work on the opera was suspended due to the administration's "cancellation" of the performance.

Enhanced Academic Achievement

Although, as discussed earlier, I consider valuing the arts solely for instrumental reasons misguided, it would be equally remiss to ignore the fact that, although only part of the picture, participation in the opera program does have a positive impact on academic performance. Students report a greater ability to concentrate and to commit themselves to their work as a result of the COO experience. They also develop problem-solving and communication skills, time management and memorization techniques as well as qualities, like confidence and motivation, that have been shown to be related to higher achievement (e.g. Bandura and Schunk, 1981; Breakwell, 1992; Dickinson, 1994).

Of the 16 students interviewed, 13 reported improvements in grades for the third quarter, which was the first grading period during the opera program. Three students indicated no change in grades. Two of the three whose grades stayed the same (Carmie and Jennifer) had grades that fell in the "average" to "above average" range but, at T1, they evaluated their academic standing as "below average." Ricardo, the third of that group, was "a mostly C student" whose other grades"[weren't] bad enough to get me kicked out yet." In March, Ricardo "thinks" he'll "make it" to graduation in June. By mid-May, he is confident he will graduate. (In fact, he even earned two B minuses on his final report card, so his grades did actually go up shortly after the opera program ended.) One student, Tanya, improved tremendously at the beginning of the school year, a full semester prior to her participation in the opera program. In her first interview, Tanya could not give any reasons for this but Anita attributed her new-found success to a "tremendous" leap in her ability to use English.

There are practical reasons for the improved grades as well. The teachers' high expectations challenge students beyond what they believe they can do (Delpit, 1996).

Students in the opera program have few absences because they do not want to miss any of the opera work. They are required to maintain their average and make up work missed in other classes due to their involvement in the opera. Anita also makes sure the opera program is as interdisciplinary as possible:

> Like, take the electrical work. That's a great science lesson. Math. You have to figure you have so many seats how many people can you fit — who goes where, when, what should we do? They use those kind of skills when they're doing scaie models for a set design. If they're mixing makeup or paint colors, you know, what are the proportions? Two to three? Three to two? And it just kind of like permeates everything. Right now they're learning how to use computers to get information and word process and make flyers and things. So, it kind of crosses all areas. They do history when we go to certain things in literature. I relate it to the opera and then we relate it back and to history. It all ties in. People's motivations and all that kind of stuff and what's happening. It's all related. And especially in literacy. Being a literacy teacher, I can't tell you how many times I refer to the opera when we're doing a story: Like "do you remember how we did this in the opera, introduced the characters, how did we do it in the opera — well we do the same thing in reading literature. Look for those clues in what you're reading." and "What's the lesson in this story" "what's the denouement." They learn those things so much better doing the opera and it transfers so much easier than trying to explain it to classes that haven't had the opera experience.

The students are aware that:

> The opera makes you study other subjects more because you have to keep your grades up to stay in the program. We learn a lot in the opera program about a lot of

> stuff from electricity and circuits to carpentry to writing and composing and we use a lot of stuff we learned in other classes to solve problems — like if we need to move something like part of the scenery we could use a pulley. So, we learn a lot of new things and use a lot of things we already know at the same time. And it helps us learn it better.

Given these factors, it is not surprising that grades would improve. What is possibly of greater interest here is that early in the opera program, all of the students, even Tanya, gave passive reasons for their improved marks. They generally saw their higher grades as beyond their control; as a fluke that would not continue (see chapter 7). As shown in Table 2, by T3, students were acknowledging their own role in their success, with many students making explicit links to the opera program.

Table 2

CHANGES IN REASONS GIVEN BY STUDENTS FOR IMPROVED GRADES	
T1-2	T3
I get along better with the teacher this year.	*I study more.*
The work is easier.	*I pay attention more.*
I got lucky.	*I'm trying harder.*
I don't know.	*My brain works better.*
The teachers are better.	*If your grades go down you can't be in the opera.*
The teachers just want us to graduate and get out of here	*Studying is easier...I guess all that work learning my lines got me used to remembering stuff better.*
The teachers are easier graders this year.	*I'm not letting my mind wander so much.*
	I had to get my grades up to be in the opera.
	The opera made me a better thinker.
	I look forward to coming to school now.
	The opera makes me get up earlier and <u>want</u> to come to school everyday.

Future Expectations

Improved academic performance and the growing sense of agency evident in students' attitudes toward their better grades is consistent with changes in the ways the students think about and plan for their futures. In tables 3-A and 3-B, we see that, at TI, students' plans were generally vague and amorphous. Four to eight weeks later, however, for all except José, whose plans remained virtually unchanged, goals became more concrete and steps had been identified and/or taken toward actualizing them. In Paco's case, a recent insurance settlement for serious injuries he sustained in a car accident the previous summer may have contributed to his change in plans. It may be that he began talking about attending college and owning his own shop instead of working as a mechanic, as was the case at T1, because he now had the financial wherewithal to consider those possibilities.

Joining the Navy has become a goal for Claudia, Gina, and Alesha, who all emphasize that it promises independence and funding for college. A television commercial caught Gina's attention and she sent for literature, which she shared with Claudia and some of the other girls. Claudia also found it an attractive option. Alesha discovered the Navy's opportunities independently of the other two girls from talking with two friends who had older siblings who had enlisted. When I asked Alesha, who wasn't even sure she'd finish high school and was set on getting a full-time job as soon as possible so she'd have money for clothes and time for friends, what made her change her goals, she shrugged and said "I guess I just changed my mind." But she had obviously given it quite a bit of thought because she also told me that she picked the navy because she believed she would be least likely to see combat in that branch of the armed forces — and because "the guys are cute!" Her goals also changed to wanting a profession that would allow her to live in "a nice place" and support "a bunch of kids."

Table 3-A

Changes in future expectations/plans - 1999

Student	T1	T2	T3
Carrie	Can't think "that far ahead" (past high school.)	Has no idea what she would want to do.	Thinks she'll finish high school. Will see how she likes it before thinking about what she wants to do after that.
Claudia	Likes music but has not applied for a magnet school.	After HS, plans to get job so she does not have to depend on her sister and brother-in-law for support.	Has been talking to Gina and is thinking other options, like the Navy, that would give her independence and a future, "and maybe some money to pay my sister back a little."
Gina	College is "a waste of time" Wants to be a secretary or cosmetologist.	Goals: family, job, own apartment	Wants to join Navy to get money for college. Wants to be "a professional, a doctor maybe." anything I can be so I can make my parents proud and so they know not all of us are gonna end up the same [i.e. in jail like brothers]" Says "I'm gonna decide my life.. aim higher." Says reason for change is "I just matured a bit.. grew up I guess...got a better idea." How? Where from? "I dunno."
Gloria	Will "definitely" finish high school. Has not applied to a magnet	Thinks she would like to live and work in New York City	After managing the opera company, she's thinking about going into business or some other area where she can "run the show" even if "it's in an office and not on a stage."
Jennifer	Has applied to Arts Magnet because teachers told her she should. Plans to finish H. S. so she can get a job, "anything I can get." Her hopes for the future: boyfriend and baby.		Her opera experience has led Jennifer to think she'd like to be a composer or a music teacher. She still wants a baby, but now she also wants "to do other things for my life too"
Ricardo	Wants to be a professional baseball player right after high school.		Still wants to be a pro ballplayer but now has plans to try for sports scholar-ship -- not because he wants to go to college, he emphasizes, but if you play on a college team you "got more of a chance of bein' seen by a scout and gettin on a pro team."
Tasha	Does not like academic subjects but is looking forward to high school. "after the whole summer off" because "you get other things in high school. too, like you could learn something useful like job skills."	Hasn't thought about what she might like to learn in high school. Prefers to focus on the coming summer vacation.	"Lately I think maybe I could get to be a carpenter or builder or something on account of I liked doin that job for the opera...I ain't the school type but I know a HS diploma is real important so I want to get one. I think carpenters or builders, they gotta make more than cashier jobs or manicures or other stuff I could do. Then maybe I could even build my own house one day 'n get out of the projects."
Tony	"If" I finish high school... Wants to learn "something useful" like A/C repair or mechanic.		His work on PR has "got him to thinking" he might like a career that involves working with computers, which he found he enjoyed and was good at.

Table 3-B

Changes in future expectations/plans - 2000

Student	T1	T2	T3
Alesha	Plans to "maybe" finish h.s. and get a job but doesn't know what kind of job, "Just something to help out [her] parents and have money for clothes and things." Reasons she doesn't want college "costs a lot of money... gotta have good grades...hard to find time to study that much and still hang with your friends."		Thinking of joining the Navy as a way to get money for college. Also considering a naval career but leans to college because her mom would miss her if she was away (at sea) too much. Alesha thinks Navy best because "it's more fun and safer (less likely to be in combat) and the guys are cute." Post-Navy? "A nurse maybe, or a lawyer...something that will let me live in a nice place and have a bunch of kids"
Carmie	Will attend local high school. No planned course of study.		"I definitely liked doing things like writing and using the computer to look things up." Taking academic track at local h.s. Considering trying to switch to magnet sophomore year. Might like to work for newspaper or do public relations or maybe advertising.
Carlos	Wants to be an actor, but is grandiose about it, possible to hide his insecurity.		Still wants to be an actor but is less grandiose and is actually networking (with help from Ms. Bland and a new principal), taking steps toward that goal by trying to get into a summer stock street theater group.
José	Going to h.s. because his mother says he has to. He would rather get a job so his (single) mother wouldn't "have it so hard."	Very pleased to have gotten job for summer.	Since he has to go, wants to learn trade in high school. so he has marketable skills.
Paco	No college plans. Has applied to Technical High School. Wants to be an auto mechanic.		Going to private H.S. at mother's insistence, paid for by car accident settlement. The opera is probably not a factor in that, but Paco is talking about college and being an engineer or owning his own auto shop.
Ricky	Wants to be an actor. No plans. Has not applied to any magnet high schools.	Talking to opera teachers about desire to be an actor.	Plans to work harder to improve grades so he can try to transfer to Arts High School sophomore year, since he is unlikely to get in this year.
Tanya	Plans to finish High School, "maybe college." Wants to be a nurse	Has applied to Science Magnet High School.	Wants to be a doctor. Says she "always wanted to be" but was "scared" because it was so hard but she is no longer "as scared as something hard as I used to be"
Vanessa	Knows she wants to finish H. S. and "doesn't want to work in Burger King or clean toilets or other people's houses." Sees herself "married with a couple of kids" by age 20.		Has decided to take academic course in H.S. "if I can keep my grades up enough, other-wise I can go into tech or something (trade program), but she prefers an academic track because it gives her "more options" and possibly college..might like to be a teacher but even if not, she is determined to maximize her available possibilities for when she does decide on a career.

Other students, like Tony, Gloria, Carmie, Jennifer, Tasha, and Carlos spoke about changes in their future plans as directly related to their opera experience. They found, for example, that aspects of their opera jobs sparked an interest in pursuing a career in that or related fields. Still others, like Tanya and Ricardo, did not make explicit connections, but statements made by other students indicate that the opera program may nonetheless be a factor here. It is also possible that these changes were due, at least in part, to the approaching end of eighth grade and the prospect of moving on to high school. But the majority of students insist that what made a difference in their aspirations was the discovery that learning can be fun; that they can be creative, accomplish difficult tasks, get along with different people, and enjoy the process.

Surprisingly, there is little difference between the evidence of agency expressed by students in the two cohorts, although the 1999 company saw their opera through to fruition and the 2000 company production was abrogated two weeks before the performance dates. In fact, as will become clear in the next chapter, students' increased perception and practice of agency is perhaps most evident following the cancellation of the 2000 opera performance.

Trust and Empowerment

In general, other than explicit references to the opera cancellation, it appears that other evidence of transformation is similar across, as well as within, cohorts. These statements from the final interviews are typical of the responses given by every student when asked if they noticed anything different about themselves; if they felt that, as a person, anything had changed over the past couple of months:

I don't feel so alone and scared...I don't feel any better about it (the violence) really, I guess, but I feel there are more ways to deal with it and I don't feel so alone.

I have more friends and my life is not boring anymore. I got to do stuff I wanted to do until we got stopped so I know I can do something new without being scared to try it and not do good or get embarrassed or something if I make a mistake.

I can do more things I would have been afraid to do before...like walking into the office last week and telling the principal we wanted to meet with him (about the opera cancellation). Even if he didn't want to talk to us, I wouldn't have had the nerve to do something like that before I was in the opera. I have more confidence in myself now."

I'm not so scared to take a chance some people will be a good friend. And I don't feel so bad if I feel bad about something...I don't feel I have to try so hard to keep bad things out of my mind and keep it secret because of what people will think if they find out.

I feel more outgoing now. I'm a better actor and I'm better with being around people and just like talking and stuff.

I feel better about myself and other people.

I know I can do things that make a difference to me and others.

These changes, students say, are the direct result of being in the opera. There is additional evidence of increasing agency that students do not explicitly connect to the opera program, but its ubiquity suggests that the opera program is the common denominator. For example,

during our first interview, Ricardo talked about his brother's drug addiction and how he didn't "want something like that to happen to [him]." I asked if he thought drug addiction "happened" or if there was some choice involved. He responded:

> You think you gotta choice, but other things happen so you don't really always have one.
>
> Stephanie: Like what other things?
>
> Ricardo: You get bad friends. You get into trouble. Things just happen sometimes.

Six weeks later, during a lunchroom discussion I overheard from the adjacent table, a student who was not in the opera program made a remark that expressed the same opinion. To my surprise, Ricardo argued strongly against the position he espoused earlier:

> You *can* pick who you are friends with, and so it *is* up to you...we can't control everything that happens but we don't hafta be friends with somebody if they're gonna be trouble.

Similarly, at T1, Carmie dealt with violence and other troubling aspects of her life by "saying prayers to worship God" because everything "is in God's hands. There's nothing I can do about it." At T3, however, during a discussion about the opera cancellation, she expressed the belief that

> I could do anything if we work hard enough and really set our minds to it...even though there are mean people who will do things to prevent you from doing that ...but you gotta try anyway even if it doesn't always work or you won't be able to change anything ever...You gotta pray for those people on account of they need prayin' for and God tells us to love our enemies and pray for those that hurts us...but I still think we gotta try to stop them from doing bad things in the time until they get enough grace to repent and be a better person.

These are just two of many similar examples. Note that in these, as in other statements that reveal a new sense of empowerment, the pronouns change from the use of the singular (individual) to the inclusion of the plural (social).

Connection

The move from using the singular to plural in students' narratives also underscores the inadequacy of traditional views of trauma and "transformation" to capture the multi-dimensionality of each student's experience. The traditional view, described at the beginning of this paper, represents notions that are grounded in the romantic western tradition of the person as a bounded unique, more or less integrated motivational and cognitive universe, a dynamic center of awareness, emotion, judgment, and action organized into a distinctive whole and set contrastively both against other such wholes and against its social and natural background (Geertz, 1983, p 59). In other cultures, the triumph of the individual is an irrelevant notion because the person is not defined in terms of her own experience but as an aspect of the social — the "we;" the "giant mind" that "everybody is part of."

Students do not learn to "transcend" so much as they learn to connect and to negotiate constraints. Transcendence implies that one emerges from the (unique and exceptional) traumatic experience at a level "above" and separate from the world of that experience. Negotiation implies the ability to stay in that realm (i.e. not repress or deny it) and to find effective ways to work within it to improve the quality of one's experience and to create greater possibilities in life, not only for oneself but for one's community. The result is, as one student said,

> Claudia: You feel alive in opera.
>
> Stephanie: What does "feeling alive" mean to you?

Claudia: Feelin' alive.

Stephanie: Can you say a little more about it?

Claudia: Not dead. Alive. You know. ALIVE!

Stephanie: I think so. Can you compare it to anything else?

Claudia: No. I never felt alive before I did opera.

Stephanie: Do you mean you have more feelings?

Claudia: (getting more exasperated with me.) No. I feel more alive.

Stephanie: Is that the same as enjoying what you're doing?

Claudia: More than that. It means bein' Alive.

Stephanie: I'm not trying to give you a hard time, Claudia, just trying to understand exactly what feeling alive means to you, because what you think is important to me and I want to make sure I get it right, so please have a little patience with me here if you can. Okay.

Claudia: Okay.

Stephanie: Do you mean feeling alive feels like you're healthier? Or have more energy? Or more hope?

Claudia: I got all those things energy and I feel fine but that ain't what I mean.

Stephanie: What about hope?

Claudia: I wouldn't call it hope. That's too [out there].

Stephanie: What would you call it? Take your time and see if you can find a word for what you'd call it.

Claudia: (very long silence) Maybe not hope but maybe not hopeless. No. That's not right either. (Another long pause). Maybe poss-i-bil-i-ty. (says it very slowly

in a far-off dreamy kind of way, then suddenly "snaps" back more sure of herself) Yeah. That's good. Possibility.

Stephanie: Thank you. I know you had a hard time with that. Possibility. That's a good word.

Stephanie: Can you tell me a little bit about the possibility part of feeling more alive —

Claudia: Auugh!

Stephanie: Sorry. Can you bear with me just a little more? Please.

Claudia: Just that I feel more like that it's possible to do something — I can do something I like. I get good at. It's not boring.

Stephanie: Okay. Anything else come to mind when you think about feeling alive and about possibility?

Claudia: Just that it's possible to feel alive and feelin' alive makes havin' a life feel like a possibility. It's like (long pause) Like the feelin' you get when a new baby is born. Like when my sister's baby was born last year. Like there's gonna be a future. You don't know what kind or how long or if it's gonna be more easier or more harder or more sadder or more happier or what but just knowin' it's gonna be there at all is kinda a miracle.

Chapter 13

Transformation and Critical Consciousness

The transformation evident in the Tito Puente students who participated in this study was not merely manifest as a kind of personal growth: their growth also occurred at a level that we could understand as political. My observations strongly suggest that the students' transformations include the development of "critical consciousness." As noted earlier, critical consciousness is characterized by a heightened awareness of the often unspoken rules that govern people's lives, an ability to conceptualize, articulate, and challenge dominant assumptions and values. Given that the traumatic circumstances of these adolescents' lives are themselves ultimately a product of political conditions (racism, economic injustice, class division), it is arguable that their trauma cannot be effectively addressed in ways that do not include a political dimension. If trauma engenders a sense of powerlessness and despair, then a movement beyond trauma must include a new or renewed sense of agency, including political agency — an ability to address the underlying circumstances of one's condition.

The 2000 opera company at Tito Puente, already struggling with life crises arising from poverty and chronic violence, faced a specifically political crisis when one of the principals of their school effectively cancelled their opera. In this chapter, I want to call attention to the strikingly empowered way in which the students responded to this crisis. The students showed a remarkable ability to recognize and analyze the ways in which power was operating in their school, to think strategically about how best to defend their own interests, and to manage their feelings about profoundly frustrating, angering, and unjust actions of the school administration. The emotional, analytical, interpersonal, and political skills displayed by these students reflects a level of critical consciousness that I do

not believe they would have displayed prior to their immersion in the creative process of creating the opera they were never allowed to perform.

Tito Puente can be seen as a microcosm of the national and cultural political macrocosm. Like all schools, Tito Puente is organized hierarchically, with the state government at the top of the power pyramid, followed by district and local administrators, and with the students at the bottom. The teachers, caught in the middle, are sometimes agents of the administration and sometimes victims of its dictates. The administration is in a position to impose its priorities and values on students and teachers alike, and it places a high priority on preserving its own power and the status quo. One aspect of this attachment to the status quo was evident in the administration's low regard for the arts. Just as academic "basics" are consistently lauded by conservatives in the culture at large as the only valid solution to the crisis in national education, so the administration at Tito Puente appeared to regard the opera program, and the arts in general, as dispensable activities with little bearing on the school's primary mission to educate. The fact that the opera program demonstrably improved students' academic performance seems to have gone unremarked by the administration and by some of the teachers who don't participate in it. James Manno reported:

> You have quite a few teachers who don't cooperate with the program at all. They're like "I'm not letting my kids out." You know, they argue like "[The students are] just wandering around. They don't do anything."
>
> We've tried talking to individual teachers and giving them information on the program, copies of the two chapters about COO from the Art Works book, materials from the Met, newspaper stories, and things like that. But it hasn't helped.

Many of the students confirmed this lack of support for the opera program on the part of some teachers who object both to the way in which opera participation disrupts the regimented nature of the school day and also to the kinds of subject matter the students explore in their operas:

> Carrie: My math teacher told me that we should put more energy into her class like we do with the opera. I think some teachers think the opera is a waste of time and we should just be studying their subjects more. [Some teachers] don't let anybody in the opera 'cause they don't want them leaving their class. But they don't get it that the opera helps us with their subjects too 'cause we learn about all kinds of things, not just one thing, but stuff from other subjects too.

> Paco: A lot of teachers think it's not good for us to show about stuff like drugs and shooting. They don't want to know about it. But that's life. That's what goes on. Some teachers think doing operas with violence in them will only make us do more violence. But all they talk about in history is like the Civil War, the French and Indian War, and this war, and that war, and droppin' the atomic bomb. An' they show a lot more violence on TV than we use. And it's for no reason, really. When we put violence in the opera, it's part of the story, the reason for the story, not like just to scare people or something.

The effects of the political hierarchy also emerged during an interview I conducted with Dr. Ruben Gonzalez, who had been the District Assistant Executive Superintendent when Tito Puente was still in its embryonic stages. His experience working at the Emerson School of Performing Arts, a junior high school in Yonkers, New York, had

made him an avid supporter of the arts in education and he had hoped to bring the arts to Tito Puente and the students of Newark.

> It was watching the faculty and students in Yonkers that got me so interested in the arts. When I saw what a difference the arts made. When I made a comparison between the kids that were in the arts and the ones that weren't, that were into shop and things like that, the kids in art were the most energetic, enthusiastic, academically successful, the most in terms of benefiting from the curriculum at the junior high school....I saw that the arts made a big difference in the students' lives. I couldn't put my finger on all of it. But I know that the kids in the art program at Emerson were the most engaged. I'd even go as far as saying that the kids in the music and art and drama programs had better attendance, better grades, better behavior, and they seemed happier and more alive.
>
> The arts help them expand how their world can be...that part of their life, you know, makes them whole. And it opens up another world to them that they, in fact, can achieve and feel good about themselves and life.

Having seen the transformative power of arts education, Gonzalez hoped to bring this kind of experience to Tito Puente:

> In the area where Tito Puente is, most of the kids are Hispanic. I conducted an informal survey and I found out that once the kids finished eighth grade, they would be headed to local high schools, not the magnets. I wanted to build a program at Tito Puente that would eventually, through that experience, help them get into the special high schools. Unless the program started in the early grades, the kids wouldn't have that opportunity — the option to go to a specialized high school. And the arts can do that. I've seen it happen. But the program has to start

> early enough, with teachers who have the art background and someone in charge who supports it.

Gonzales was able to watch his vision for Tito Puente take shape, only to see it overshadowed by other interests when a state takeover removed him from his position. And he explicitly addressed the part politics plays in the school system:

> The political piece is crucial. You need somebody in place in the political piece...The principal who I recommended [to head Tito Puente] went for the concept....She was totally in favor of it, very supportive and enthusiastic. The staff was brought in with the arts concept in mind....[But] when I left, you know, all types of things changed. It's been a struggle...When I was removed, it was a result of the state takeover....And the woman who replaced me, she became the new assistant superintendent....My understanding is she made Tito Puente her office. And she moved in there. Probably because it was the newest building. So I would think she took away some of the programs just by virtue of taking over some of the space there, moving in her staff and all. And they've had a lot of turnover in principals there. Unfortunately, unless there's someone there to really push the arts, and fight for them, it doesn't happen....I'm sad that I couldn't continue with the arts at Puente and see it flourish the way I want it to....It would have been nice to see the whole concept carried out because it really would have made a big difference. I miss the school and the lost opportunity.

The frustration voiced by Gonzalez is echoed by the arts teachers at Tito Puente. James Manno, the music teacher, commented on administrators' lack of a vision and its effect on the arts:

> The administration — we've had six principals in six years! And all of their visions were different...We had Ms. Byrd for a couple of years which was good while it lasted and then that was that. She thought for herself too much though, and that didn't cut it with the powers that be.
>
> Ms. Byrd was a big supporter of the arts, the [opera] program. But because of the changes in the administration, when she left, the vice principals were put in charge of scheduling and they could care less about the arts, more about academics. So they scheduled the arts out, and the arts teachers all became prep teachers to give the entire school five preps. It kind of felt like we were set-up because now you have no arts going on.
>
> I really don't understand why we don't have the administration's support. I mean the opera kids have been on TV. They were on *Eyewitness News* last year, NBC's *Today Show* the year before that, as well as other news shows. They even performed six shows at PAC last year! That should be such a feather in the district's cap. But there's no vision there. You need a consistent, united vision all the way to the top and we just don't have it.

It is noteworthy that Manno identified Ms. Byrd, the champion of the arts, as a subversive force who threatened "the powers that be" and the arts teachers as victims of a hostile, all-powerful administration. His account reflects his political reading of the situation at Tito Puente in which the arts teachers are agents of change, defenders of the students' best interests, and are thwarted by an unreflective, conservative administration. Anita Bland shared this view:

> The bureaucracy this year is just terrible. The change in administration — the things that go on! This year it's been unbelievably bad and I don't understand how some of the administrators can be behind some of these things. We've had many different administrators and we don't get consistently the kind of support we need, but I still don't really want to stop doing the operas. So I do it "in spite of." And we've been doing it in the morning, before school....We're supposed to have like at least 125 hours. Something like that. So far, I have less than forty for the whole project. It's very discouraging.

The fate of the 2000 opera performance was, unfortunately, just one manifestation of the political and economic circumstances that have a direct impact on the arts in the Tito Puente school district. It is also regrettably representative of the state of the arts in public education throughout the country.

The Fate of the 2000 Opera

I have referred hitherto to the *cancellation* of the 2000 opera performance because that is how the teachers and students referred to it. It should be pointed out, however, that the administration did not quite cancel the opera: Mr. Musselman, the vice-principal for the upper grades, scheduled a school prom for the date that had been set aside for the opera's performance. Anita Bland explained:

> Technically, they [the administration] didn't actually cancel the opera, they just moved the date and gave us notice that we'd have to perform it two weeks ahead of schedule but they told us so late, so far into the opera, that it was impossible to move it up two weeks with three weeks' work left to go. And they knew that. All because one man decided the school should have a prom.

Her words imply that she regarded the administration's move not as an act of carelessness, but as a conscious effort to thwart the opera: by scheduling the prom when it did, the administration was able to "call it [the fate of the opera] a scheduling conflict, not a cancellation." Ms. Bland was particularly angry that the substitution of prom for opera showed a total disregard for the students' own priorities and for the circumstances of their families.

> The kids, their families. They weren't given any consideration in all of this. They tried to make it clear that they'd all rather have the opera than the prom or a trip to Washington. And the last things these families need is the expenses of a prom — and they will go all out for their kids, even though they can't afford it.

In creating this "scheduling conflict," the administration used top-down authority to override the preferences and indeed the best interests of those at the bottom of the power hierarchy, while disingenuously representing its actions as innocent of political intent. For an event that engaged the students on every level — intellectually, emotionally, creatively, and socially — the administration substituted an event about which the students cared little. It seems particularly insulting to the opera program that the 2000 opera was scuttled not even in favor of some "basic" academic activity but in favor of a prom, an event that no one can claim offers students more than diverting social activity. Furthermore, as Anita Bland's remark on the expense entailed in the prom makes clear, a prom puts pressure on students to divert energy and resources to consumerist activities that support mainstream cultural values — buying dresses, renting tuxes, getting hair done. It also engages students in frequently detrimental aspects of teen culture such as social competition and premature dating. But the view of the vice-principal, Mr. Musselman, was that "every kid wants to have a prom." To him, the students were generic "kids" and their wants must be generic

wants reflective of the concerns of the dominant culture — concerns that tend to divert people from examining the true conditions of their lives.

Because of these circumstances, most students viewed the prom with emotions ranging from ambivalence to hostility, as the following responses to "Are you going to go to the prom?" indicate. Tanya was one of six students in the 2000 opera company, and one of only two interviewees, who intended to go to the prom. Her remarks reflect the kind of "split consciousness" discussed in Chapter 7, as she succumbs to the lures of the prom but fulminates over the fate of the opera :

> I feel in a better position than most because I have a boyfriend and so going to the prom is something I could look forward to, but I wish it didn't mean that we couldn't have the opera. I'm still really angry about that. I feel like I shouldn't go to the prom. But my mom says I should go because even if I don't it won't bring the opera back. And she said she'd buy me the most beeyooteefull dress. It' s blue and strapless and it's soooo gorgeous!....I still feel terrible about the opera and I'm mad as hell about it, but I guess I don't want to miss my prom AND my opera.

Most students however, viewed prom attendance as a symbol of defeat:

> Carlos: No. I definitely don't want to go. My aunt, she said she'd give me the money but it's expensive and I'd hafta get a suit or a tux and I feel like that if I go to the prom it means Mr. Musselman wins and I can't tell you — I hate that man so much I don't even want to go to graduation but I have to for my aunt and grandma, but it's gonna be sad instead of bein' a happy occasion.

Knowing that there is more than one side to every story, and finding it difficult to understand the vice-principal's insensitivity, I requested an interview with Mr. Musselman. He granted the interview but would not allow me to tape-record the session, although he

agreed to let me take notes. He said that my request to interview him had "caught him off guard" and that he "was not aware that the play (sic) had been cancelled." He claimed that neither teachers nor students tried to speak to him about it and he was "not aware there was any problem at all...Something else must be going on here..." He had no idea what that "something else" might be. When I pressed further, Musselman said that he recalled that "maybe one young lady said that the prom date was the same as the play (sic) performance date" but he "did not see it on the schedule and no one called it to his attention." He "couldn't see what all the fuss was about" because "every kid wants to have a prom."

The students reacted with anger and outrage. Their first response was to try to accommodate to the demands of the new schedule. They discussed the pros ("At least we'd have *something*."); the cons ("But what about the kids who aren't actors? They'd all be left out of it!" " Do we really want to do it if it's not gonna be good?") the practical problems ("Mr. Manno isn't gonna be here until next week...How can you do an opera without music?" "I can't learn all of my part by Monday. I just got the script a couple of days ago!"); the possibilities ("We could do it without the scenery." "We could do a play instead of an opera." "We could read our parts."). Ultimately, however, they realized that their opera was doomed.

According to Dewey (1934), an experience that does not run its course to fulfillment is not complete. The 1999 opera was consummated. The 2000 opera was forcibly aborted. But the students from the class of 2000 did not leave it at that. Perhaps they had had their fill of disappointments; they were tired of "waiting for the axe to fall." Perhaps it was "something more" that made the students determined, if they could not see the opera through to fruition, to insure that the same thing wouldn't happen to those who followed in their footsteps. Two days after the calendar had been changed, the opera

students held another meeting. As the following except demonstrates, the students' anger was accompanied by a determination to assert their views and their rights, and especially to try to shape the political world of their school. The students not only consistently expressed their personal desire to contribute to the future, as they had from early in the project, but sought the means to take effective action as a unit, affirming a connection between personal and social.

—We can't let them get away with this! We gotta do something! (This statement was met with a chorus of agreement punctuated with shouts and cheers. When the noise quieted down, the discussion soon became serious, but students remained extremely emotional, far more so than the words convey.)

—We could make an appointment to talk to Mr. Musselman.

—You could make an appointment to talk to him. I wanna make an appointment to kill him!

—Yeah. Let's beat him up!

—Teach him a lesson!

—You can't do that. That makes you no better than he is!

—But I bet he'd change his mind.....

—Let's get real.

—Yeah. We don't wanna make it worse.

—Okay. We could try talkin' to him and

—He won't talk to us! You crazy?

—Even if he did, it would only go in one ear and out the other.

—But we should at least try.

—We did. Remember? A bunch of us went downstairs and tried to talk to any of the principals but they said they was all too busy and didn't have any time for no more appointments this year.

—And Mr. Musselman and them, all the office doors were closed.

—But I got a look at the calendar. And you could even see where they erased the dates we had to cover up their lies!

—It would be better to do it in writing.

—Yeah, if we write it down they could be in the middle of it and there ain't nothin they could do to change it, but like, if you talk to them, they take what you say and twist it an' try to get you to say something their way...

—or they trick you into sayin' somethin'

—Yeah, writing is safer and you won't get nervous and forget part of it or something.

—But if we write it, I mean they could not read it

—That's a possibility but it's the only way we would get to say what we want to say without them tryin' to make it be about somethin' else if ya know what I mean.

—I still think we should do an opera about it. About adults not listening to kids and how bad that is to do to kids.

--The grown-ups would see it as other people, not themselves. They would say other teachers and principals are like that, but not them.

— But the kids would get it. They'd know what was going on. The kids are smarter than the teachers. Adults are stuck up. They always think just 'cause they're older they know better, but it ain't true.

—They don't think kids are people

—We should go on strike

—There's only a couple of weeks left to school. That won't work now. There's not enough time!

— I'd make the opera the same like whatever we want it to be about but make it longer to say something about adults not listening.

—We should have a meeting with parents and teachers and students and the parents could make them listen more maybe to what their kids have to say. To what we have to say.

—But the teachers could say they're too busy an' they ain't got no time for it and then that won't happen either.

—We could try to get some of the teachers on our side to help us get a meeting. We might not have much of chance but it would be something.

—We gotta do something. That's for sure.

—Yeah. But we gotta decide what.

—How about we write a letter and get it signed by everybody promising not to do this again. All the principals and everybody so even if they tried to move the date, you would at least have a written promise to fight about.

—Yeah. And we should video tape it so we got proof they said it.

—Yeah. Like they'd let us do that!

As this transcription of their discussion shows, the students displayed considerable political maturity and sophistication about their situation. They thought strategically about how best to assert themselves, anticipated the countermoves the administration was likely to make (including its capacity for dissembling), and consistently moved from expressions of outrage to realistic assessments of what they could do. They

formulated a meaningful goal—preventing such abuses in the future—instead of dwelling on mere rage or desire for revenge.

Eventually the company decided that the best thing to do would be to talk to other students informally and to write letters that they would ask Ms. Bland to hold and deliver to next year's opera company. The letters would explain what had happened and suggest things the next group could do to prevent their opera from being ruined.

In the final interviews with the 2000 cohort, this was a topic on every student's mind. The following two excerpts are representative of the students' thoughts and feelings about what messages those letters should include:

> Paco: To plan for something like this happening. Expect them [i.e. the administration] to try to do this. Learn to have to put up with the teachers. Like when they want a meeting, we have to drop everything and go to the meeting whenever it is. But when we want a meeting, they ain't got no time, they can't drop anything. We gotta drop anything for them but they can't drop a minute for us. It's the same with all the principals. They all think they're better 'n everybody. An' they think we're turds. Excuse me, but it' s true. And that's how they treat us. An' you gotta take it or it makes your life worse.

> Tanya: We are gonna tell them what happened and give them some ideas to stop it from hurting them. And we're gonna get as many kids as we can to sign it 'cause maybe if it's enough of us they might listen a little better than if it's just the opera kids.
>
> Stephanie: Like what kind of ideas?

Tanya: We gotta tell them you can't trust those people in their offices down there. They gotta be careful because the principals and them don't care about them or what they feel about or want. Maybe like take a picture of the calendar with the opera on it when they make the date so you have proof if they change it. Or maybe have all the principals sign agreements to have the opera. And if they want a prom to pick a date early before there are too many things happening or decide earlier and have it in April or January or something.

Anita Bland summarized the situation:

The kids are very smart about some things. They know they got screwed...But I admire their handling of the whole situation. I mean, one of the things that came out of it, them not being able to present their opera even as a reading, is that they realized they were in this together and they approached it together and stuck together. All on their own...The fact that they wanted to try to do even a piece of it is a compliment to the whole process but, unfortunately, it's a reality check too. But they know the score and they know they're not going to be listened to downstairs (i.e. administrative offices) And the fact that they are putting themselves through all this trouble, first to try to perform even some of it and then to put their time and energy into helping others not have the same thing happen, I mean there's nothing in it for them to do all that work but it was their idea and they're really committed to doing whatever they can, even though they know the obstacles they're facing. I'm really impressed at the will and strength and generosity they have to do that. They're not defeated. I thought they would be, but they' re not.

Maybe it speaks to the power of process, even without a product. Perhaps, as Carmie said:

I feel disappointed and sad and angry but it would have been a lot worse ... if we didn't get to do any work on the opera at all. As far as I' m concerned, we're still a great opera company and we are proud of the work we did get to do...They can't take that away from us!

Carmie agreed with every other student in the company that, "doing something about it" helped.

I felt a lot worse before we decided to talk to the other kids and write letters and stuff. I still feel bad but like if we could stop it from happening again to anybody else it would at least do some good and we could end with a good memory of that — of doing something about it and not just letting them keep doing things like this.

As angry, hurt, disappointed, and upset as they were, it was clear that something was different. The students were not accepting this as another of the many disappointments and false promises they had come to expect. And there was a difference in the way they responded as a group and as individuals. Two months earlier, for instance, Carlos would likely have responded to the opera cancellation by breaking down a door or punching a hole in a wall — i.e. by taking out his aggression on "safe" targets, and ultimately on himself as his outbursts resulted in cut and bruised hands. But I noticed that his hands weren't bruised or scarred.

Stephanie: I know how you feel about the opera cancellation and how upset you are, Carlos, but look at your hands— they look okay. You been hitting something softer?

Carlos: I haven't been getting that mad. More like disappointed.

Stephanie: Even about the opera?

Carlos: Oh. I'm upset about it. REAL upset. But I kinda made peace with everything else.

Stephanie: What happened?

Carlos: I just got tired of feelin' mad all the time, I guess. Maybe I got it all out of my system. Or maybe I'm too depressed to be mad now. I don't know. I'm glad it's the end of school. I could use a break.

Stephanie: How long ago did stop feeling mad?

Carlos: I dunno.

Stephanie: Before the opera was cancelled?

Carlos: Yeah. I thought that would make me real mad again and believe me, I'm mad as hell at Mr. Musselman, but I dunno. If I wanna hit anything, it's that man. I'm not gonna do that, like I said. But he's a real turd.

Stephanie: You wouldn't really want to hit a turd, would you?

Carlos: Aaauuuggghhh. (He clowns around about that briefly and lightens up)

Media manipulation

Students demonstrated their critical consciousness not only in their analysis of the administration's actions and in their response to it, but also in the views they expressed about the news media. Students like the attention and prestige they get from having the local TV news or a daily newspaper visit Tito Puente and do a story about the opera program. Some of them have had similar experiences at Tito Puente involving science projects or sports. They are acutely aware of the media attention as a way to combat negative public perceptions of inner-city youth and schools. But they are also aware of the ways the media perpetuates that image, even while ostensibly trying to alter it.

I think it's great that they come and record us and show parts of the shows to the world to let them know we can do so great. It's exciting to be on TV...but they make the shows sound like a lot of gossip and don't treat it as serious as it is.

I think it is good that they let everyone know that there are talented kids in Newark but what I don't like is that sometimes they make it more than it was and like they wouldn't do that if we was from a 'burb but 'cause we're from Newark they don' t treat us the same as other kids...It's good that people see we're not all bad, but I just don't like how they do it all the time. Like they make us like we're different than most ghetto kids but most of the kids are more like us than the gangs and stuff. So, they do some good but they do some bad too. That's what I think about it.

The students are aware that the news media creates public opinion and how they themselves can manipulate this to some extent, but they also know that the way they are represented is mostly out of their control. Nonetheless, because they can see the difference between representation and reality (perhaps because they themselves produced representations in their operas), they have the power (i.e. critical consciousness) that comes with the ability to treat representations as tendentious or interested rather than as transparent transmissions of the truth.

They're comin' to show that we're doing something good. But they're only doing it like as a story to help their ratings...They don't really care. That's how it is....They put two minutes about the opera and two hours about shootings and robberies and some girl gettin' her hair cut off in the school....As long as they get their money they [the media] don't care...The other day, like there was a famous scientist who was here. He was here! And a couple of days before *The Sopranos* (a television

> series) was about a girl who got her hair cut off. There was a man who made history here and there was only one reporter! And there was a girl in the school, because another kid cut her hair off like on *The Sopranos*, there was at least twelve reporters asking her questions because she got her hair cut off! There's a man over here that's more important and they give the stupid girl more time than a famous scientist who made history and went outta his way to talk to us!

Critical consciousness provides a deeper understanding of the assumptions underlying socially conditioned or constructed aspects of one's experience. It is a consciousness that obliges one to take action. The students' comments as a whole can be seen as a critique of the values promoted by the school system and grounded in the wider economic, social, and political context (of which the news media are both representatives and instruments). Their actions, however, go beyond critique to agentic involvement in strategic endeavors designed to counter oppression. Prior to their involvement in COO, students recognized injustice but accepted it as "a fact of life," or "just the way things are." Over the course of the program, they developed a willingness to work to right perceived wrongs and a trust in their ability to make something good come out the difficulties they experienced — in this case, by attempting to save the next class of opera students from the disappointment they had suffered. The students did this with a realistic assessment of their situation and their options, with careful consideration of alternatives available to them, and with genuine concern for others. They did this, in their words, not because they had to, but "from their heart."

Chapter 14

Summary, Limitations, and Directions for Future Research

Summary

A central goal of this study was to understand how the opera experience at Tito Puente and the students' engagement in artistic experience contribute to their ability to make sense of their lived experience and their personal world. Toward that end, this dissertation examined four research questions. In response to the first question, I established that all students in the study had experienced high levels of chronic traumatic violence. Two students had themselves been victims of violent acts. In total, the 16 interviewees reported personally knowing 41 victims of separate incidents of violence and, through second- or third- hand accounts, countless others. All of the other 54 students in the two opera companies revealed similar experiences.

The second research question explored how students coped with violent events prior to participating in COO. Findings indicate that although they were not shocked by the violence they had come to expect, they were traumatized by it. They could not (or did not) allow themselves to imagine otherwise. Students used a variety of distancing mechanisms to encapsulate and avoid the emotions related to their experiences of violence. Nonetheless, despite their efforts to "not think about it," their behavior indicated that the dangers and tragedies of their environment were never far from consciousness, as the students carefully avoid locations and situations that might place them in danger, worried about those close to them, and expected to die prematurely and violently.

The third and fourth questions looked at changes in students' responses to violence during the duration of the opera project and how those changes might be related to their participation in the opera program. Evidence of transformation was found in students'

narratives and actions. The experience provided by COO produced identifiable changes in students' feelings and behavior, including greater psychic integration, increased willingness to speak about traumatic experiences, improved academic performance, a new ability to imagine the future, and a capacity for challenging some sources of oppression.

Features of the program, as implemented at Tito Puente, that appear to facilitate these changes include the following:(1) The program immerses students in the aesthetic realm — one in which categories and presuppositions can be examined and re-imagined; (2) Students' operas directly represent and address the traumatic conditions of their lives. (3) The program engages students in collective activity that fosters cooperation, mutual trust, and a heightened sense of responsibility and agency. Ultimately, I argue, the changes seen in these students must be understood on a political, as well as a personal, level.

By providing verbal, extra-verbal, and non-verbal avenues for expression and meaning-making, the arts provide a space where students can deal with their traumas and move through them. The sociocultural and aesthetic milieus are not adjunct to but constituent of mental activity (e.g. Vygotsky, 1978; Geertz, 1973). The creation of meaning works in multiple directions. Past experiences may acquire new meanings after they have been explored in the opera; relationships with other people may be changed through work on a shared project; students' understanding of "reality" may change as a result of living in an aesthetic space. Aesthetic experience seems to have, by its very nature, a profound psychic effect of unifying experience and bringing contradictions into focus, if not resolving them. Furthermore, participation in a communal "art world" reinforces and amplifies these effects by bringing disparate voices and experiences into a unified whole and creating an environment of trust that makes it safe enough for students to feel and to remember things that they had not previously been able to tolerate or

integrate. Thus, the "unifying" forces of aesthetic experience and of group cohesion may have dissolved some of the barriers not only between/among individual students: they may have dissolved some of the psychic barriers that compartmentalized or repressed certain memories and parts of students' experiences, facilitating a move from dissociation to association; from predictability to possibility; from ennui to agency.

Because the operas produced by the students at Tito Puente deal with the students' own experiences, they provide the conditions for students to give voice to their knowledge, hopes, problems, fears, despair, and dreams. They encourage students to question, to seek their own meaning, and to recognize their right and responsibility to take action. At the beginning of this study, students were already quite aware of society's marginalization of them and their community and how even well-intended school policies could harm them. They were so well acquainted with the paradoxes and practices of power that they accepted them as facts of life. Over the course of the program, however, students began to question the status quo, and ultimately work to change some of the injustices they encounter.

Limitations

This study has certain limitations that should make us cautious about generalizing on the basis of its findings. First of all, the sample size in the study is small. Second, because the student population involved in the study was exclusively poor Latino/a and African American eighth graders, it would be important to determine if the approaches employed by the Tito Puente COO program are equally effective means of addressing traumatic experiences for students of other ages and cultural and economic backgrounds. It also remains to be determined whether or not programs that are pedagogically similar to the opera program discussed but involve different art forms (e.g. dance, sculpture, photography, architecture) and/or different levels of collaboration would be equally

effective. Another issue not examined in this study is whether the students receiving the arts-based instruction perceived themselves to be receiving special treatment and whether they showed improvement merely as a result of such perception (the Hawthorne effect). These issues would require further analysis.

Significance of findings

These limitations do not overshadow the significance of this study's findings, however. The study examines the way in which a group of students and their teachers situate the violence in their lives within a broader personal, educational, and social context for understanding. Understanding the creative processes involved holds promise for contributing to both theory and practice. Theoretically, the study may lead to a fuller comprehension of issues related to trauma and transformation and learning and development, particularly for marginalized groups. Paradigmatically, this understanding may at least partly replace the prevailing ideological emphasis on negative behaviors in at-risk populations (Spina, 1998) with an emphasis on positive involvement in creative processes that may have the potential to transform social forces. Pragmatically, it may also assist educators in learning how to be more effective, both in pedagogy and in the development and implementation of psychological and behavioral intervention and prevention initiatives, especially when addressing issues related to violence among young people. The realization of any of these may also help increase recognition of the importance of the arts in education.

Perhaps most importantly, by recognizing the paramount importance of student perspectives in understanding and addressing the complexities of their lives, and including their voices in the discourse on violence and education, it is hoped that this study will help

us to come to terms with the forces that hinder the creation of viable alternatives for these young people.

This study contributes to the literature in a number of disciplines including education, psychology, critical theory, the arts, and sociology. It reinforces and builds on the work of others (e.g. Greene, Dewey, Fehr) who have long advocated for authentic artistic experience in schools. It situates notions of trauma and transformation in line with the views of critical psychologists and connects artistic experience to personal, psychological, social, and political transformation within a larger societal matrix. It complicates the debates about school reform by underscoring the inadequacy, if not detriment, of "back-to-basics," standardized testing, rote learning, and other factors that restrict access, stifle development, and further estrange marginalized students.

We have seen that, for students who participated in this study, trauma, and responses to it, do not fit models where violence is extraordinary and unusual. Thus, it is no surprise that so many interventions based on that model and designed to remedy situations such as these do not work — and sometimes even make conditions worse (see Noguera, 1995; Spina, 2000c). So, on their own, many students manage to find comfort in creating their own space, the imagined crime-free block, their own "corner of the sky" — a safe place they can retreat to. These places provide a respite, but the relief is only temporary. The opera program is not designed as an intervention, but many of the students at Tito Puente use it as an opportunity to create a space where, instead of escaping from trauma, they can safely enter into it and begin to process it, consciously or not. The illustrations of transformation that emerged from the data strongly suggest that the arts can

contribute to the development of critical consciousness and empowerment; to transform students' ways of being in the world.

If experience with the arts gives students the ability to "feel alive," and to overcome at least some obstacles to success, then the arts should be a central part of schooling. Yet, despite the Herculean efforts of many supporters of the arts (e.g. Eisner, Brody, Gardner, Perkins), to influence policy, the arts have not fared well in schools. This may be, in part, because the vast majority of arguments in favor of the arts are based on short-term, utilitarian, instrumental reasons (see Lagemann, 1995). My argument, following Greene, goes beyond advocating that schools promote the development of social and technical skills and the mastery of content; I argue that schools need to help students develop those qualities essential to life: imagination, reflection, care, empathy, meaning-making, and a sense of possibility and agency.

Schools and society also need to see community violence in broader terms (see also, Spina, 2000a). It is difficult to overestimate the negative impact of community violence on the development and life chances of residents. Erosion of economic and social capital, lack of jobs, insufficient minimum wages and other burdens born by inner city residents all contribute to the condition of chronic trauma seen in the students at Tito Puente.

Theories on violence and trauma need to find ways to speak about the co-existence of despair and resiliency. It is generally assumed and so claimed that most inner-city violence is based in or the result of "the home." This is not the case. It is environmental, academic, physical, social, and political. We need to rethink our methods and their (as well as our) inherent biases. There is great value in immersion in a setting and in in-depth research over time with individuals. However, we must be as careful to avoid "narrative

traps" as we are those of scientistic logic. The latter has been explored extensively in the philosophy and sociology of science by many (e.g. Latour and Woolgar, 1986; Pickering, 1992; Harding, 1991; Cetina, 1999) who have shown how the underlying assumptions and protocols of practice influence what is discovered and what is not. Yet, despite extensive efforts to address issues of power, objectivity/subjectivity, and similar matters, insufficient attention has been paid to linguistic biases in qualitative research. I addressed the problems surrounding the privileging of the verbal at the beginning of this paper, and will not repeat them here, but I do want to emphasize the typically unrecognized possible pitfalls related to the social construction of narrative in general and of "survivor stories" in particular.

Our culture privileges heroic and transcendent interpretations of experiences consistent with the U. S. tradition of rugged individualism and sociohistorical emphasis on teleological progress. Counter-narratives are pathologized and thereby disempowered by diverting our attention from societal culpability to scapegoating the survivor who does not or refuses to conform to culturally acceptable "norms" (Alcoff and Gray, 1993). Interviewers fall into this "narrative trap" in one of two ways. They either label the survivor as mentally ill or they interpret the story in a way consistent with the dominant model. As a result, we either pity the victim or admire her. Much of the work in psychology involved with constructs like Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) and related symptomatology does the former (e.g. Young, 1995). Most of the current work on resiliency and "transformation" (as transcendence) does the latter (Spina, 1998). In this effort, I have tried to do neither — not to deny the possibility of transcendence, but to legitimate other discourses, other ways of defining and responding to trauma, other ways of knowing and being.

Research related to trauma should not be an effort to "fix people" or to force them to conform to our assumptions, but to understand them in all of their complexity. We need to better understand the practices that construct our sense of self, other, and "reality," and to fix our inappropriate social structures instead — to think in terms of community and quality of life, not "intervention."

As Lifton (1993) argues, trauma is an encounter with mortality that disrupts that which defines us as human beings — the ability to make meaning. Trauma is not necessarily "cured" or "transcended." It is something one toils to live with. Those who, like the students who participated in this study, live under "traumatogenic structures" (Lykes, 1994a, p.110), yearn for and need spaces that support their struggle to make meaning — to "feel alive." The Creating Original Opera program at Tito Puente provides such a space, but it is only for a brief moment in time. The support is temporary and, as suggested by Anita Bland's account of the two young men sentenced to death for the murder of a fellow COO alumnus, may not be enough to sustain transformation over the long term. The situation is compounded by mandatory reporting, high-stakes testing, cutting the arts and after-school programs and other policies that restrict the possibility of creating additional aesthetic spaces.

We also need to recognize that violence and related problems cannot be addressed through programs such as COO alone. If we are really to make a difference in the effects of trauma in people's lives, we must address the causes. This means we must widen the scope of our analysis and recognize the need to work for social and economic change. We must be open not just to non-Western "culture" and ways of knowing and thinking, but to alternative forms (e.g. artistic, spiritual) of thought (from both hemispheres of the world and brain) that are not defined in terms of their relationship with or irreducibility to the

logic of scientific rationalism. We must create "becoming spaces" (Derrida, 1981, p. 27) where we can think, speak, and act in ways that both mark and transgress imposed limits; where we can raise new questions in what may be disconcerting ways; where we can challenge the dominant discourse — and ourselves.

Our schools can do many things to make transformation possible for students. They need to address the lack of congruence between the lives of marginalized students and the reality assumed by teachers and administrators. This cannot be accomplished until teachers are recognized — by themselves, the school system, and the public — as capable, competent professionals, not simply instruments of the status quo who use mechanistic methods to deliver canned curriculum. They need to be supported by teacher educators, school administrators, and each other. School schedules and curricula need to be modified to accommodate authentic art experiences. Teachers need to be educated, not in specific, generic "one size fits all" (Reyes, 1992) instructional "methods," but in critical sociohistorical and political dimensions of education that inform the lived experiences of socially perceived minority students (see Bartolomé, 1994; Macedo, 1994; Freire, 1987). Skill in this type of reflective analysis will enable teachers to better recognize and address the biases inherent in schooling (e.g. discriminatory practices such as tracking, the historically reproductive nature of schools) and to develop culturally responsive, humanizing pedagogical strategies that speak to the reality, struggles, concerns, and imaginations of their students.

Future Research

These data suggest several directions for future research on the potential of the arts to create spaces of transformative possibilities: where those who have been traumatized

can process and integrate their experience; negotiate its constraints; and imagine other ways of being.

For one thing, we might learn a great deal from a longitudinal follow-up study of how the participants in Tito Puente's COO program fare through high school and beyond. Such a study would provide valuable insight into the tenacity or tenuousness of the transformation observed in the students who participated in this study. Comparing those who remain involved with the arts with those who do not would enable us to better determine the effects of artistic experience on traumatized young people. Differences in types of art (drama, visual arts, etc.) and the nature of the artistic activity (individual, collaborative, sustained, short-term, etc.) might permit additional insight and help to more clearly define the variables and mechanisms identified in this study. A longitudinal study might compare the frequency and severity of emotional and psychological problems, at various later points in life, among opera participants and among other Tito Puente students who did not participate in the opera program. It would be instructive, for example, to know whether students who had participated in the opera program are more likely to seek help from others at difficult times in later life than are those who did not participate.

We need to continue to explore strategies that provide opportunities for youth. This study can guide future research by linking personal, social, psychological, and political transformation to the larger social context and structural conditions of people's lives. Understanding this association may provide knowledge needed to create more comprehensive and effective prevention, treatment, education, and policy initiatives that addresses the impact of violence exposure on children and adolescents.

The task is to enable transformative meaning-making by the co-creation of a creative space where critical consciousness defines "success," not as conformity to a

constructed psychiatric ideal, but as meaning making and agency that does not hinge on becoming part of the "system." It is a difficult task that addresses a difficult situation. And, as this study suggests, it just might work.

Endnotes

1. Artistic activity is assumed to be a universal attribute (Dewey, 1934; Sarason, 1990) and is broadly defined to include all artistic endeavors used to create visually, auditory, and/or kinesthetically perceptible works. These include, but are not limited to, painting, literature, poetry, sculpture, printmaking, pottery, architecture, set design, textile arts, cinematography, multi-media, music, dance, and indigenous artistic expression.

2. Contrary to reports that Vygotsky found The Psychology of Art problematic and chose not to publish it, Vygotsky did not abandon his interest in the arts (Yaroshevsky & Gurgenidge, 1997). The arts were a part of life in the Vygotsky home (Vygodskaya, 1995). Prior to his last, fatal bout of tuberculosis, Vygotsky was working with Eisenstein on a theory of film, an outgrowth of his continuing work in the arts (Leont'ev, 1997).

3. I use the word "instrumental" to neutralize the oppositional and hierarchical attributes of "logical" or "rational" terminology, which imply that "artistic" reasoning is illogical and irrational, and therefore lesser (Derrida, 1981). It is also important to distinguish this use of the term from Dewey's use of "instrumentality" to focus on process in ways similar to Vygotsky's notions of tools and activity.

4. I am aware of the implications of what Schutz described as the "paradox of the phenomenological proposition" for this endeavor. Schutz's phrase refers to the "mundane world-concepts and language which are alone at the disposal of the communicating phenomenologist" (1973, 257). This absurd contradiction is inescapable in efforts such as this. There are no answers to the epistemological issues this conundrum raises, but there is a sense in which reflexive awareness of the problem changes the relation of the author and reader to the written text. Hopefully the new dynamic created by raising the issues will at least make them more salient.

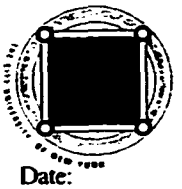
Appendix A

Research Design and Data Collection

Data collection					
Data	1999 Cohort			2000 Cohort	
	Fall 1998	Spring 1999 T1 T2 T3		Fall 1999	Spring 2000 T1 T2 T3
Student Interviews N= 8 per cohort; (Total =16 students; 48 interviews) Topics: Experience of violence and coping strategies Working on opera and dealing with theme Reflections: experience, meaning, changes		✔ ✔ ✔			✔ ✔ ✔
Teacher Interviews (N=2+)		Throughout			Throughout
Administrator Interviews (N=2+)					✔
Field Notes and Supplementary Sources		Throughout			Throughout

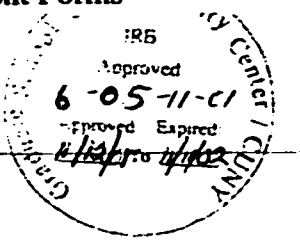
Appendix B

Consent Forms



Ph D Program in Psychology

The Graduate School and University Center
The City University of New York
365 Fifth Avenue
New York, NY 10016-4309
tel 212 817 8749/8751 fax 212 817 1533



Date:

Dear Student and Parent or Guardian:

My name is Stephanie Spina and I am a doctoral student at the CUNY Graduate Center. I am conducting a research study at the Rafael Hernandez School about students' participation in the *Creating Original Opera* program. All eighth grade students in the opera program are invited to be part of this study, which will be conducted during regular school hours.

The purpose of this letter is to ask each student and their parent or guardian for permission for that student to participate in this study. Participation involves classroom observations, including a 20 to 60 minute interview with groups of 4 to 6 students. Students I have interviewed for prior studies have reported enjoying the process and feeling good about their participation in the project. With your permission, I would like to tape record these interviews in order to maintain accuracy. All information gathered will be kept strictly confidential. The names of the school and students will not be used in any reports of this study. Students can refuse to answer any questions. Both parent or guardian and student are free to withdraw consent at any time

If you have any questions about this research, you can call me at (212-817-8710), or one of my advisors, Suzanne Ouellette (212-817-8708) or Michelle Fine (212-817-8710). If you have any additional questions about your rights as a participant in this study, you can contact Hilry Fisher, Sponsored Research, Graduate School, City University of New York, at 212-817-7520. You will be reimbursed for the cost of the phone call.

Thank you for your participation in the study. Please sign and return this consent form to Ms. Bland as soon as possible. Thank you very much.

Stephanie Spina

CONSENT:
My child has my permission to participate in a study of the *Creating Original Opera* program, as described in the above letter. I have read and understood the information in the above letter and have given permission for my child to participate. My child's signature indicates that she or he also understands the information in this form and agrees to participate. I realize that I may withdraw my child (or my child may withdraw) without prejudice at any time after signing this form should either of us decide to do so.

I also agree to the audio-taping of group interviews (check one) _____yes _____no

Student's Name_____

Parent's signature_____Date_____

Student's signature_____Date_____

__ Please check here if you would like a copy of this form for your records.
If checked, please provide a mailing address to send copy to:

Name_____

Address _____Zip_____

Researcher's Signature_____
Stephanie Urso Spina

Appendix B

Consent Forms

Ph D Program in Psychology

Graduate School & University Center / CUNY
IRB
Approved
6-05-11-01
Approved Expires

The Graduate School and University Center
The City University of New York

- **Consentimiento del padre, madre, o representante**

Mi nombre es Stephanie Spina. Estudio en el Departamento de Psicologia del *Graduate Center* de CUNY y realizo una investigación en la Escuela Rafael Hernández sobra la importancia de la participación de los estudiantes en el programa *Creating Original Opera*. Invito a todos los estudiantes del octavo nivel que pertenecen al programa de opera a ser parte de mi estudio. Se llevará a cabo en el primer semestre del año 2000 durante las horas normales de clase.

Este formulario tiene como fin pedirle permiso a los padres o representantes para que sus hijos puedan participar en este estudio. Su participación conlleva observaciones en el aula de clase y una entrevista de 20 a 60 minutos con grupos de 4 a 6 alumnos. Si usted lo permite, me gustaría grabar estas entrevistas. Sólo mis profesores y yo escucharemos estos casetes y sus contenidos nunca se usarán para ningún otro propósito que no sea el de este estudio. Toda la información que se recopile se mantendrá en la más estricta confidencialidad y se guardará en un archivo cerrado al cual sólo yo tendré acceso. No se empleará el nombre de la escuela y en ninguno de los reportes de esta investigación se utilizará el nombre de los niños colaboradores. Los alumnos pueden negarse a contestar cualquier pregunta o, si usted o su hijo o hija así lo desearan, él o ella puede retirarse del estudio en cualquier momento.

Participar en este estudio no conlleva ningún riesgo para sus niños, aparte de la incomodidad que quizás pudiera surgir al explicar cómo se relacionan sus propias experiencias con su experiencia en la opera y el tema que trata. Para ayudarlos a resolver cualquier tipo de problema que surja durante o después del estudio, se le proporcionará a los estudiantes una lista de recursos y servicios gratuitos. No obstante, los alumnos que he entrevistado para otros estudios previos dicen que han disfrutado las entrevistas y que se han sentido bien con su participación en la investigación.

Es posible que este estudio llegue a publicarse, pero si así fuera todos los nombres de los niños participantes se mantendrán en el anonimato. Se proveerá a la directora o director de la escuela con un resumen del estudio final. Si le gustaría tener una copia, por favor deme su nombre y dirección para hacersélo llegar en cuanto esté listo.

Si tiene alguna pregunta sobre esta investigación, puede llamarme al (212)817-8710, o alguna de mis profesoras, Suzanne Ouellette al (212)817-8708 o Michelle Fine al (212)817-8710. Para alguna otra inquietud sobre sus derechos como participante en este proyecto, puede dirigir sus preguntas a Hilry Fisher, de *Sponsored Research, The City University of New York*, al (212)817-7520. Se le reembolsará el costo de la llamada telefónica.

Muchísimas gracias por su colaboración en este estudio.

Nombre del alumno/a____

Firma del padre, madre, o representante_____________________________Fecha____________

Si_____ No______ doy mi permiso para que se graben las entrevistas.

Firma de la investigadora____________________________________Fecha____________
Stephanie Urso Spina

______ Por favor, marque en la pequeña línea anterior si desea una copia de este formulario para sus récords y provea su nombre y dirección para enviársela:

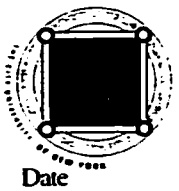
Nombre____

Dirección____

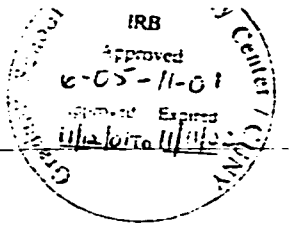
____Código Postal____________

Appendix B

Consent Forms



Ph D Program in Psychology



The Graduate School and University Center
The City University of New York
365 Fifth Avenue
New York, NY 10016-4309
tel 212 817 8749 8751 fax 212 817 1533

Date

Dear Student and Parent or Guardian:

Last week you gave permission for _____to participate in a research study I am conducting at the Rafael Hernandez School. In addition to participating in the overall study, as outlined in the previous letter (See attached copy), s/he is one of eight students who have been randomly selected for a series of three additonal individual interviews.

This letter is to ask each of the eight students and their parent or guardian for permission for that student to be interviewed individually. With your permission, I would like to tape record these interviews in order to maintain accuracy. All information gathered will be kept strictly confidential. The names of the school and students will not be used in any reports of this study. Students can refuse to answer any questions. Both parent or guardian and student are free to withdraw consent at any time

If you have any questions about this research, you can call me at (212-817-8710), or one of my advisors, Suzanne Ouellette (212-817-8708) or Michelle Fine (212-817-8710). If you have any additional questions about your rights as a participant in this study, you can contact Hilry Fisher, Sponsored Research, Graduate School, City University of New York, at 212-817-7520. You will be reimbursed for the cost of the phone call.

Thank you for your participation in the study. Please sign and return this consent form to Ms. Bland as soon as possible. Thank you very much.

Stephanie Spina

CONSENT:
My child has my permission to participate in a study of the *Creating Original Opera* program, as described in the above letter. I have read and understood the information in the above letter and have given permission for my child to participate. My child's signature indicates that she or he also understands the information in this form and agrees to participate. I realize that I may withdraw my child (or my child may withdraw) without prejudice at any time after signing this form should either of us decide to do so.

I agree to the audio-taping of interviews (check one) ___yes ___no

Student's Name_____

Parent's signature_____Date_____

Student's signature_____Date_____

__ Please check here if you would like a copy of this form for your records.
If checked, please provide a mailing address to send copy to:

Name_____

Address_____

_____Zip_____

Researcher's Signature_____
Stephanie Urso Spina

Appendix B

Consent Forms

Ph D Program in Psychology

The Graduate School and University Center
The City University of New York
365 Fifth Avenue
New York, NY 10016-4309
tel: 212 817 8749/8751 · fax: 212 817 1538

Consentimiento del padre, madre, o representante

La semana pasada usted le condedió permiso a _____ para participar en una investigación que realizo actualmente en la Escuela Rafael Hernández. Además de participar en el proyecto en general, como se lo describi en la carta anterior (vea copia anexa), su hijo/a es uno de los ocho estudiantes que ha sido seleccionado/a al azar para colaborar en tres entrevistas individuales adicionales. Las entrevistas se llevarán a cabo en horas de clase regular durante el primer semestre del 2000.

Este formulario tiene como fin pedirles permiso a los estudiantes y a sus padres o representantes para entrevistarlos individualmente. Si usted lo permite, me gustaría grabar las entrevistas, las cuales durarán de 20 a 60 minutos. Sólo mis profesores y yo escucharemos estos casetes y sus contenidos nunca se usarán para ningún otro propósito que no sea el de este estudio. Toda la información que se recopile se mantendrá en la más estricta confidencialidad y se guardará en un archivo cerrado al cual sólo yo tendré acceso. No se empleará el nombre de los niños colaboradores. Los alumnos pueden negarse a contestar cualquier pregunta o, si usted o su hijo o hija así lo desearan, él o ella puede retirarse del estudio en cualquier momento.

La participatión do los alumnos en entrevistas individuales no involucra ningún beneficio ni perjuicio más allá de los sugeridos en la carta previa (vea copia anexa).

Si tiene alguna pregunta sobre esta investigación, puede llamarme al (212)817-8710, o alguna de mis profesoras, Suzanne Ouellette al (212)817-8708 o Michelle Fine al (212)817-8710. Para alguna otra inquietud sobre sus derechos como participante en este proyecto, puede dirigir sus preguntas a Hilry Fisher, de *Sponsored Research, The City University of New York*, al (212)817-7520. Se le reembolsará el costo de la llamada telefónica.

Nombre del alumno/a_____

Firma del padre, madre, o representante_____Fecha_____

Si_____ No_____ doy mi permiso para que se graben las entrevistas.

Firma de la investigadora_____Fecha_____
Stephanie Urso Spina

_____ Por favor, marque en la pequeña línea anterior si desea una copia de este formulario para sus récords y provea su nombre y dirección para enviársela:

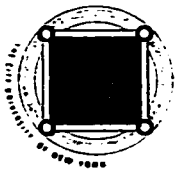
Nombre_____

Dirección_____

_____Código Postal_____

Appendix B

Consent Forms



Ph D Program in Psychology

The Graduate School and University Center
The City University of New York
365 Fifth Avenue
New York, NY 10016-4309
tel: 212-817-8743 fax: 212-817-1533

Date
Dear Teacher/Administrator:

My name is Stephanie Spina and I am a student in the Psychology Ph.D. Program at the CUNY Graduate Center. I am conducting a research study at the Rafael Hernandez School about the impact of students' participation in the *Creating Original Opera* program.

I would like permission to include you, as a teacher or administrator involved with the program, in this study. Your participation would involve talking with me about your experiences with this program. With your permission, I would like to tape record these interviews in order to maintain accuracy. The discussions will take from 20 to 60 minutes each, and will be held in a location of your choice. The tapes will only be heard by my advisors and myself. They will never be used for any purpose not related to this study. All information gathered will be kept strictly confidential and will be stored in a locked file cabinet to which only I have access. The names of the school and students will not be used in any reports of this study. The principal has left it up to you to choose to use your own name or a pseudonym. You are free to withdraw consent to participate at any time and to refuse to answer any questions.

There are no known risks involved in your participation in this study but you may experience discomfort in answering some questions about your own or students' experiences with the opera in general, and in particular with life experiences relevant to the theme of the opera. Teachers and administrators I have interviewed for prior studies have reported feeling good about their participation in research.

This study may be published, but the name of the school as well as names of students (and adults, if requested) and their identifying characteristics will not be used in any of the publications. A summary of the completed study will be provided to Ms. Bland, Mr. Mano, and the principal of the school. If you would like a copy, please give me your name and address and I will send you one in the future.

If you have any questions about this research, you can contact me (212-817-8710; Stephanie_Spina@post.harvard.edu, or my advisor, Michelle Fine (212-817-8710; mfine@gc.cuny.edu). If you have any additional questions about your rights as a participant in this study, you can contact Hilry Fisher, Sponsored Research, Graduate School, City University of New York, at 212-817-7523 or hfisher@gc.cuny.edu.

Thank you for your participation.

CONSENT: I agree to participate in a study of the impact of students' participation in the *Creating Original Opera* program, as described above. My signature indicates that I have read and understood the information in the above letter. I realize that I may withdraw from the study without prejudice at any time.

I agree to having my discussions with the researcher audio-taped

(check one) _____yes _____no Date_____

Participant's Name_____Participant's Signature_____

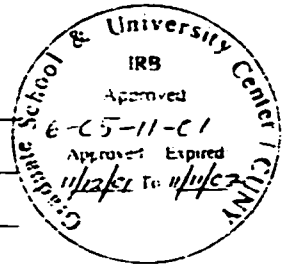
__ Please check here if you would like a copy of this form for your records.
If checked, please provide a mailing address to send copy to:

Name_____

Address_____

_____Zip_____

Researcher's Signature_____



Stephanie Urso Spina

Appendix C

Interview Protocol

FIRST INTERVIEW

SECTION A: BACKGROUND
The first interview will begin by asking about the student's background: age, family members, friends, etc.

SECTION B: SCHOOL AND ACTIVITIES
This will be followed by asking the student what they think about school, what they like and dislike, how their grades were last year and how they are now, if there are discipline issues (e.g. lateness, cutting classes), and what, if any, activities the student participates in both in (e.g. band, chorus) and out of school (e.g. community activities)

SECTION C: THE OPERA
The next goal is to ascertain what, if any, prior experience the student has that is similar in some way to the opera project, such as work on a class (or other) play, being on stage for band or chorus, etc.

SECTION D: THE THEME OF THE OPERA
The interview will then move to an exploration of how the students chose a theme for the opera, where they got the ideas from, and why they chose a particular theme.

SECTION E: RELATION OF THEME TO EXPERIENCE
Since the program is designed so that students choose a theme about something they are familiar with, this section of the interview will explore the relationship between the theme and experience of the students in general, and this student in particular.
IF ANSWER INDICATES NO RELATION, SKIP TO SECTION G

SECTION F: FEELINGS ABOUT EXPERIENCE WITH THEME OF THE OPERA
This part of the interview explores how the student (or other students, if not personally relevant to this student) feels about what was revealed about their experience with theme, how those feelings and the situation may or may not have changed over the past, what the student (and others involved, if relevant) has done or thought about the situation, what the student finds helpful and not helpful.

SECTION G: ALTERNATE THEMES
Further exploration will ask about other ideas that were suggested for a theme but were not chosen, why that might have been the case, and whether the student(s) know anyone in this situation. IF YES, REPEAT SECTION F

SECTION H: EXPECTATIONS
The next topic is an exploration of what the student thinks the opera company experience will be like in terms of like/dislike, difficulty/ease, fun/boredom, (possible) job in the company, compared to any prior experiences, etc., gearing questions to the particular student.

SECTION I: CLOSING
The interview will close with thanking the student and asking if there is anything else they'd like to say and if they have any questions about the interview or research project they'd like to ask. Students will be also be told that I am available after the interview if they want to talk to me about anything.

SECOND INTERVIEW

SECTION A: INTRODUCTION
A few minutes to chat with students to create atmosphere of ease for interview.

SECTION B: OPERA COMPANY ROLE (GENERAL)
By this time all students will have jobs in the company and will be actively involved in them. Interview will begin with a general discussion of student(s)' jobs and experiences with the company. For example, they will be asked about what they like best and least, what the hardest and easiest parts of it are for them and why they think that is. They will similarly be asked about what they find the most fun, what they are proudest of, and if the job is what they expected it to be and how or how not. The students will be asked if they have encountered any particular problems related to the job or another aspect of the opera company, and if/how they were resolved.

SECTION C: OPERA COMPANY ROLE (SPECIFIC)
Questions in this section will be tailored to different jobs, but each student will be asked about processes involved in conceptualization and execution of their jobs, any problems encountered and how they were solved, etc. For example, writers will be asked how they got the ideas for what the characters were going to say and how they were going to say it. We will explore, for example, if the characters are based on anyone the writer knows and the process of writing the libretto with others. Questions about the relation between the opera story and characters (fiction) and "real life" will be explored. Composers will be asked about the processes involved in writing the songs. Questions about how they chose a particular beat or melody, whether it was based on something specific they were familiar with, what they are trying to convey and why, etc. Designers of sets, lighting, and costumes will be asked how they decided to design something the way they did, what they are trying to say to the audience, and why. They will also be asked questions similar to those asked others about individual and group work, process, where ideas come from, etc.

SECTION D: RETURNING FOCUS TO THE THEME OF THE OPERA
This section repeats a general line of questioning from the first interview, sections E and F. In addition, questions about how the student feels about dealing with the theme, if having familiarity with a situation like that focused on by the theme has any effect on doing the opera for you and/or other students, and if, for example, it makes doing the opera easier or harder. The interview will then explore student's feeling about the situation now and how it compares to how they felt about it before they started working on the project, i.e. at the time of the first interview. Follow-up questioning will explore what the student finds the same or different, what has or hasn't changed, and why they think that is so.

SECTION E: CLOSING
The interview will close with thanking the student and asking if there is anything else they'd like to say and if they have any questions about the interview or research project they'd like to ask. Students will be also be told that I am available after the interview if they want to talk to me about anything.

THIRD INTERVIEW

SECTION A: INTRODUCTION
A few minutes to chat with students to create atmosphere of ease for interview.

SECTION B: THE OPERA EXPERIENCE IN RETROSPECT
This interview begins by exploring students' feelings (about the opera, self, and classmates) at the end of the opera project. Areas explored will include the overall experience, expectations, and surprises, and (see second interview, section B) likes, dislikes, problems, etc. Role-specific experiences will also be explored. (e.g. actors would be asked how close to the way they really are was the character they portrayed, etc.)

SECTION C: ASSESSMENT
Students will be asked if working on the opera had any effect on their schoolwork, attendance, etc. They will be asked about their grades at the present time and if any change is noted, students will be asked why they think that is and what may have contributed to it.
They will also be asked if anything else changed. Follow-up here will be informed by student's prior interviews.

SECTION D: FANTASY AND/OR REALITY?
This section explores how "true-to-life" students think the opera's story was. The interview will then compare it to what the student knows about the theme from experience. It will then explore if there are any perceptual and/or actual changes in how the student feels about and/or deals with any similar situations

SECTION E: IF I KNEW THEN....
Students will be asked what, if anything, they might do differently if they had this to do over again. They will be asked what they know now that they didn't know earlier but with they had. There will be a general discussion of what helped the student make it work, and if they'd like to do something like this again.

SECTION F: CLOSING
As in previous interviews, this interview will close with thanking student, asking for any other comments, and letting student know I will be available after the interview and by phone should they have any questions.

Appendix D

Coding Categories

TRAUMA

1. How do young people in a poor urban area speak about their exposure to chronic and repetitive traumatic violence?

codes: Students' experiences of violence:

a) Exposure to/experiences of violence

type (e.g. shooting, murder, robbery, rape, etc.),

frequency, proximity

(e.g. use of self as example; happened to relative, friend, other, hearsay)

unique/chronic

b) Students' explanations for violence

lack of parental discipline, "just the way it is," drugs, gangs, lack of jobs,

school (e.g. irrelevance, "dropping-out," expulsion, "flunking out")

c) Emotional and psychological impact of repetitive traumatic violence

emotional and psychological responses to violence

(e.g. denial, "not thinking about it," keeping it secret, "acting out," crying, anger, accept as "fact-of-life", despair, disconnection, bravado, fearlessness, frustration, resignation, concern for others, fear, worry)

d) Student expectations for the future

Education, job/career expectations, agency or futility of action, none, death, victimization, health, family

RESPONSES TO TRAUMA

1. How do students say they intentionally modify their behavior in response to community violence?

codes: Intentional, behavioral responses to violence

(e.g., staying indoors, staying away from windows, talking to someone about it, not walking home from school, etc.)

2. How do students "make sense" (or not) of violence?

codes: Meaning-making

(e.g., god and religion; expected; ambivalence; family problems, societal reasons)

3. How do students perceive and negotiate existing social and institutional supports and constraints?

codes: Social and institutional support and constraints

a) Social and institutional support

(e.g. someone to talk to; counseling; church, school, community, family, friends, etc.)

b) Social and institutional constraints

(e.g. silencing, racism, ghettoization, schooling, lack of confidentiality in school counseling, lack of social services, etc.)

c) Networking

(e.g. mentor/mentoring; group identification/participation; exclusion/ inclusion, helping/help-seeking orientation/behavior, network connections, sociocultural restrictions/access)

TRANSFORMATION

1. What evidence of transformation do students present?

codes: perceptions of agency (or lack of - e.g. helplessness, resignation, futility)
changes in future expectations
changes in responses to violence and/or ways of making sense of violence
revelation of suppressed stories
changes in "voice"

(e.g. Use of "I" and "we," passive voice/active voice, past, present, and future tense)

THE ARTS

1. What role does the opera program play in helping students re-imagine trauma and create transformative possibilities?

a) What are student experiences with the arts?

codes: Experiences with the arts other than the opera program
Setting (e.g. familial, school-related, other)
Type (e.g. music, drama, visual arts, dance; formal/informal)
Duration (frequency, amount of time)
Experiences with the opera program prior to study
Experience with the opera program
Students' perceptions of program

(e.g. effects on attendance, other classes, self-reports of academic performance, self-esteem, responsibility, cooperation, challenge; enjoyment (fun), effort (challenge, difficulty, work),

seriousness (importance), relevance, etc.) roles (e.g. equality or hierarchy; complicates gender, good/bad dichotomies)

Social representation of COO (media, community, etc.)

Abuse of opera privileges

Creativity, expression

Dealing with theme of opera

(e.g. ease/difficulty, familiarity, "fact / fiction," value (i.e. teaches younger kids; counters demonization by press and public, etc.)

b) How do students compare COO to the rest of schooling/other classes?

codes: Pedagogical, behavioral, and affective similarities and difference

(e.g. participation, enjoyment (fun), effort (challenge, difficulty, work), seriousness (importance), relevance)

Awareness of the political, economic, and pedagogical situation of the arts in education

Perceptions and understanding of the existence and operation of administrative and general school politics/policies regarding the arts

Academic views of art as unimportant

Political economy of arts

Segregation of the arts

Art as contested site

c) How do students describe the arts in general as ways of knowing/making meaning?

codes: The arts and meaning-making / arts as a way of knowing

(e.g. evidence for extra- and non-verbal ways of making of meaning, including but not limited to embodiment, social aspects, emotional, psychological)

2. Do the students themselves make any connections between the opera program and any changes in perception or behavior related to transformation?

codes: Connections between the opera program and transformation

(e.g. changes in perception of or plans for future, how students think about themselves/school/others/the arts and other aspects of their lives)

Connections between non-opera related events, situations, etc. and transformation

Appendix E

Newark Hotline List

List of resources and helplines

Aids:

National AIDS Hotline 24 hour phone service providing basic information about HIV/AIDS. English (800) 342-AIDS (2437) Español (800) 344-7432

The Teen AIDS Hotline 1-800-440-TEEN (8336)
Fri. and Sat. from 6 pm to Midnight (hablamos español)

Alcohol Abuse:
Alateen & Al-Anon (hablamos español) 1-800-344-2666

Child Abuse:
National Child Abuse Hotline (800) 422-4453
NOTE: to skip a lengthy tape recorded message and reach a counselor, press 1 when recorded message begins. (hablamos español)

Domestic Violence:
Domestic violence NJ Hotline 1-800-572-7233
(hablamos español) TTY Accessible

Drugs:
National Cocaine Hotline (800) COCAINE (262-2463)
24 hour information and referral; crisis intervention. (hablamos español)

Alateen & Al-Anon (hablamos español) 1-800-344-2666

General:
Covenant House Nineline (hablamos español) 1-800-999-9999
TTY: 1-800-999-9915

Covenant House Nineline is a 24-hour, toll-free crisis hotline that handles calls from youth with a broad range of problems. Some are new or long-time runaways. Most calls, however, are from young people who are still at home. Some call because they need help talking to their parents. Others call because they are victims of child abuse or need help dealing with a drug or alcohol problem. The Nineline also receives calls from youths who are contemplating suicide, and from youths affected by violence in their communities.

Rape:
Rape, Abuse, and Incest National Network (RAINN) 1-800-656-HOPE (4673)
24-hour national hotline for victims of sexual assault. (escoje numero tres para español)

Sex and Gender related:
HIPS Hotline 1-800-676-4477
for adolescent prostitutes. 24 hours. (hablamos español en la noche solamente)

OutYouth National Peer Counseling Hotline 800-96-YOUTH (969-6884)
4:30pm - 8:30pm Daily

Planned Parenthood Hotline (800) 230-7526
Counseling and information on birth control, sexually transmitted diseases, pregnancy, and related issues. (hablamos español)

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