WRITING WRONGS AND IMAGINING CHANGE:

EDUCATING FOR SOCIAL CONSCIOUSNESS THROUGH A

MULTIMEDIA LITERACY CURRICULUM

by

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Abstract

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Advisor: Professor Colette Daiute

This dissertation deploys and develops Vygotsky's concept of social consciousness to study a sixth grade art-based multimedia literacy curriculum designed to educate rather then test. The dissertation argues effective pedagogy must develop social consciousness, defined as a dynamic process involving a conscious awareness of the social-historical context, thinking abstractly about time and place, and beyond the immediate everyday conditions to understand one's own experience as embedded in a broader system of social relations and a sense of social responsibility for change.

The literacy curriculum begins with the study of historic social and political movements as documented in photography and poetry. Students take and develop photographs of their community and write narratives and poetry around the topic "Where I live." Through interviews with the teacher, classroom observations, and discourse analysis of student work, I found participation in this multimodal curriculum enabled students to examine and critically discuss their everyday experiences and challenges (i.e., gangs, violence, wild dogs) in coherence with the greater socio-historical context.

I demonstrate how mediational devices assisted the students' engagement with

contradictory realities and discourses as they conceptualize the meaning of "Newark" (their city). I found the students' sense of self was social; inextricable from the city and the people of the community. Students linked personal success to the success of their community and the city. Metaphor, in particular, proved a powerful cross-modal (visual, textual, oral) mediational device utilized to create coherence as they organized their experience over time and place. Creating coherence and systemizing their experience is essential to the process of social consciousness. Through the multimodal activities of the project, students individually and collaboratively considered and connected "what is" with "what was" as they imagined "what could be."

The analysis shows the breadth of pedagogical possibilities when teachers are supported by administrator to explore their passions and creativity rather than follow rigid test-based curriculum.

Education interested in social consciousness develops conceptual knowledge, abstract thinking, creativity and real life problem solving strategies. These skills, combined with commitment to social change and social responsibility, are necessary as we prepare students to face the challenges of the 21st century.

For Keith and Kaya

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This project would have been impossible without the enthusiasm and creativity of Ms. L and the children at the school. Your lives, words, art and provided endless inspiration and made it all worth it.

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-Jessie, sixth grade student, Newark, NJ

CHAPTER ONE

WRITING WRONGS AND IMAGINING CHANGE: EDUCATING FOR SOCIAL CONSCIOUSNESS THROUGH AN ARTS-BASED LITERACY CURRICULUM

"The pen may not always be mightier then the sword but used in the services of truth- it can be a mighty force"

- Ngugi wa Thiong'o

This dissertation argues that the goal of schooling should be to facilitate social consciousness. The concept social consciousness organizes my study and it is a key concept for the Vygotskian theory of pedagogy to which I seek to contribute. Social consciousness, as I develop it is a dynamic and often contradictory process involving: a conscious awareness of the social-historical context, thinking abstractly about time and place and beyond the immediate everyday conditions to understand one's own experience as embedded in a broader system of social relations. Social consciousness is rooted in meaningful everyday experiences and develops with the understanding that the social system has a history and it changes, and a sense of one's situatedness in the social world. It involves the understanding of oneself as an active participant embedded in a socio-historical context with a sense of responsibility for improving society. Education interested in social consciousness, therefore, aims at developing conceptual knowledge, abstract thinking skills, and problem solving strategies rather then rote memorization. I argue that multi-modal arts-based curriculum is especially effective for the development

of social consciousness.

My study develops this theoretical concept by engaging it with a concrete pedagogy. At the heart of this dissertation is a sixth grade multimodal literacy project in a low income, working-class, predominately African-American school district in Newark, New Jersey. The curriculum begins with the study of historic social and political movements as documented in photography and poetry. Students then take and develop photographs of their community and write narratives and poetry around the topic "Where I live." I call this the "Where I Live Curriculum." Through the qualitative methods of interview, classroom observations, and discourse analysis of curriculum and student work collected throughout the year, this dissertation explores the ways that mediational devices (photography, metaphor, language) integral to the multimodal curriculum (visual, textual, oral) acted as catalysts for social consciousness.

Theoretically, this dissertation is grounded in the cultural-historical approach. I consider the context of project synchronically and diachronically. Figure 1, adapted from Brofenbrenner's Ecological model (1979), illustrates the multilayeredness of my approach.

The organization of the dissertation travels from the outer circle inward in an effort to situate the curriculum and students in the greater socio-historical context. The literature review begins with an overview of No Child Left Behind legislation, its rationales, as well as its destructive effect on curriculum and teacher morale, especially in high poverty areas. The model of education enforced by NCLB is then countered with a model of Education for Social Consciousness.

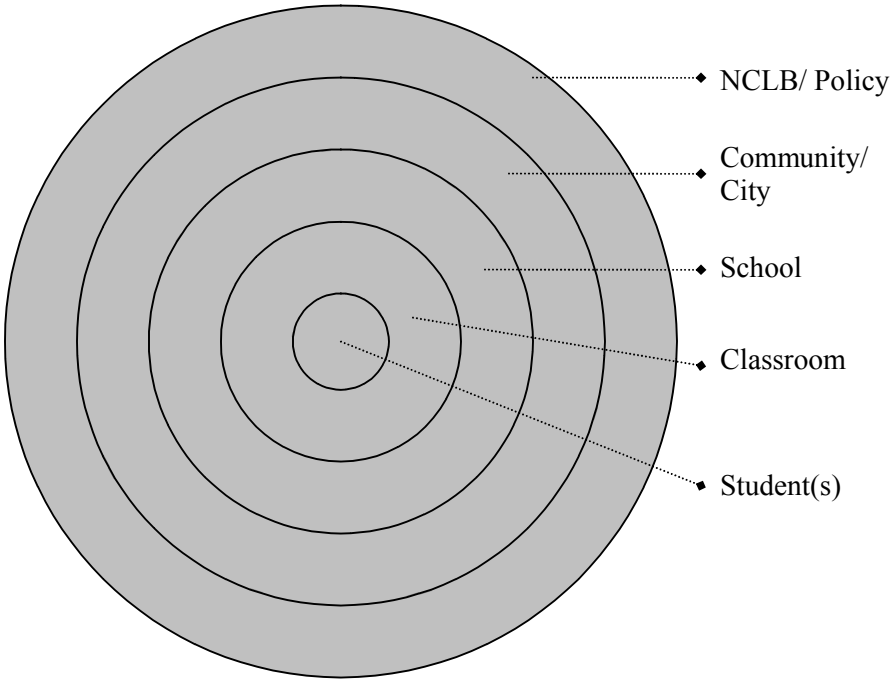

Figure 1. Diagram depicting the socio-historical context of the project

I explore the multiple contexts of the curriculum project (ie: community, school, and classroom), but also where they separate or overlap. For example, I investigate the ways the teachers and students bridge the gap between the school and the community through this culturally relevant multimodal activities. I also examine school culture's effect on the classroom activities, the teacher and the students. This study is in a sense located in these "spaces."

At the heart of this dissertation is the analysis of the student work. A main research goal is to gain insight into the process of social consciousness. I pay special attention to students' conception of the city of Newark and how this concept is constructed in the writings of the students. I compare the genres of Newark found in the adult social imagination to those of the students.

I consider the students' photographs, narratives and poetry as a set of mediational devices used to study the social environment, locate problems and their sources and to offer solutions. In particular, I conduct discourse analysis of the use of metaphor as a culturally relevant cross-modal tool used by the students as they grapple with the complexity of the social world and envision positive social change.

CHAPTER TWO

RATIONALE: THE CRISIS IN AMERICAN EDUCATION

Critique of No Child Left Behind

The *No Child Left Behind Act* (NCLB) became law in the United States in 2002 escalating pressure on children, teachers, and administrators to perform well on tests or risk loss of federal funding. NCLB initially won overwhelming support based on three rationales: preparation for participation in a global economy, closing the achievement gap and creating more objective assessment practices (Hursh, 2005).

Supports of NCLB argue that such reform is necessary to prepare workers for the increasingly globalized economy as the United States is falling behind in the world market. As John Taylor Gatto (2003) points out, education in the United States historically has been driven by the need to prepare workers. Gatto references a speech made by Woodrow Wilson in 1909, when Wilson was president of Princeton University, to the New York City Schools Teacher Association:

> 'We want one class of persons to have a liberal education, and we want another class of persons, a very much larger class, of necessity, in every society, to forgo the privileges of a liberal education, and fit themselves to perform specific difficult manual tasks'. (as quoted in Gatto, 2003, p. 37)

A similar sentiment was expressed in the more recent past (1970) by Roger Freeman, who was an educational advisor to Nixon and an advisor for Ronald Reagan's re-election campaign as governor of California. In his discussion of CUNY and University of California's open admission policies, Freeman stated: "We are in danger of producing an educated proletariat. That's dynamite! We have to be selective on who we allow to go

through higher education. If not, we will have a large number of highly trained and unemployed people." (Franklin, 2000, p.126).

No Child Left Behind (NCLB) attempts to respond specifically to a crisis in education in the United States and aims to increase educational and economic productivity in the increasingly globalized economy. Laws such as these, however, fail to grasp how rapid transformations to the economies of advanced industrialized countries, usually discussed under the heading of "globalization," or "de-industrialization" makes learning by rote style pedagogy an anachronism, based on the reproduction of an ideologically docile labor force that has mastery, within limits, of "basic skills," since the jobs that such workers would be prepared for no longer exist. As the industrial and manual, as well as managerial, jobs leave the country there is a labor force that is increasingly unable to compete in the world market.

The Progressivist goal of education as creating knowledgeable citizens has been replaced with the goal of developing students as commodities for the global market (Kozol, 2007). This shift is reflected in the fact that schools are sacrificing social studies education in an effort to comply with NCLB (Center for Educational Policy, 2006). According to a Center for Educational Policy (2006) report, 71% of districts are reducing time spent on subjects other then reading and math – with social studies being the subject most effected. Furthermore the report shows that elementary schools leaders report a 22% decline in art and music instruction.

NCLB fails to realize that to be competitive in the world market, students must be knowledgeable of their social- historical context. According to the National Council for the Social Studies (2003): "The purpose of social studies is to help young people develop

the ability to make informed and reasoned decisions as citizens of a culturally diverse, democratic society in an interdependent world." This includes discussion around issues of social injustice and inequality. As Flanagan and Faison (2001) emphasize: "To promote a deep democracy, young people need to know the full story of history and be encouraged to become engaged in and take a stand on issues of concern to their communities" (p. 12). Such high quality curriculum is necessary to create an innovative, critically thinking workforce prepared to address the complex problems faced by our society now and in the future. Whatever the merits of NCLB's first rationale, the legislation has created a trend undermining its goals.

The second rationale of NCLB, according to Hursh (2005), is that global competition requires increasing productivity. Productivity increases require the elimination of the achievement gap between rich and poor and black and white in this country. Hursh points to George Bush's Secretary of Education, Rodney Paige's response to a recent Organization for Economic and Cooperative Development report. Paige states:

> 'This report documents how little we receive from our national investment. His report also reminds us that we are battling two achievement gaps. One is between those being served well by our system and those being left behind. The other is between the US and many of our higher achieving friends around the world. By closing the first gap, we will close the second. (Quoted in Education Review, no author, 26, September, 2003)' (Hursh, 2005, p. 611).

The promise of closing the "achievement gap" rallied supporters for NCLB. Legislators called the difference in reading scores between blacks and whites "an educational

emergency in the United States" (Hursh, 2005, p.611). Paige went so far as asserting NCLB as the fulfillment of Brown vs. Board of Education:

> The [education] achievement gap is the civil rights issue of our time. The law creates the conditions of equitable access to education for all children. It brings us a step closer to the promise of our Constitution. It fulfills the mandate in Brown v. Board of Education for equal educational opportunity. It honors the trust parents place in our schools and teachers, with a quality education for all children, every single one. (Paige & Jackson, 2004) (as quoted in Hursh, 2005, p. 611)

President Bush pledged that NCLB would eliminate the achievement gap between black and white students and between poor and middle class students by the year 2014. This is the basis of the requirement for 100% proficiency on standardized tests in math and reading. English as a Second Language students and students with disabilities must pass the proficiency requirements at the same rate as other students. The tests are only given in English and if any group of students in a school fails to make Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) the entire school is deemed failing. The professed goal of closing the achievement gap is clearly positive, however, in practice NCLB simply punishes schools for having large ESL and/or special needs populations.

The third rationale of NCLB, increasing objectivity in the assessment of students, is achieved through mandated yearly testing. NCLB mandates testing every year for students beginning in the third grade. It is argued that "standards" will improve as regular testing brings market-type pressures on public school. Schools that consistently fall below 100% proficiency will lose funding, face private or state takeover, staff cuts,

reconstruction of curriculum, and risk being shut down.

Yet as Paul Tough (2006) pointed out in a recent New York Times piece, this has not increased accountability, as administrators and state officials find loopholes in the application of NCLB assessments. Each state is able to determine its own criteria for proficiency, passing in one state may be failing in another. Mississippi, for example, has declared 89% of its fourth graders to be proficient readers, the highest in the nation. However, the National Assessment of Educational Progress shows that only 18% of Mississippi fourth graders know how to read at an appropriate level, the second lowest score in the nation (Tough, 2006). Other states are catching on and petitioning to have their requirements lowered and are being granted their requests.

NCLB's Negative Effect on Curriculum

Implementing NCLB is costly and the program lacks federal funding, forcing administrators to cut programs deemed peripheral (such as the arts, recess, and gifted and talented programs- along with cuts to science and social studies curriculum) in order to pay for the expensive testing materials required by this legislation. According to the Center for Educational policy (2006), schools that have not made AYP (Adequate Yearly Progress) in the past two years are changing curriculum to align with the standards and assessments. High poverty districts dependant on federal funding have been forced to center their curriculum towards test preparation at an increased rate. As Jonathan Kozol (2007) remarks:

> In most suburban schools, teachers know their kids are going to pass the required tests anyway -- so No Child Left Behind is an irritant in a good school system, but it doesn't distort the curriculum. It doesn't transform the nature of the school

> day. But in inner-city schools, testing anxiety not only consumes about a third of the year, but it also requires every minute of the school day in many of these inner-city schools to be directed to a specifically stated test-related skill. Very little art is allowed into these classrooms. Little social studies, really none of the humanities. (p. 2)

In a study of an elementary school where ninety percent of the students were Mexican-American, Lipman (2004) found that frustrated teachers were forced to teach test preparation instead of continuing a culturally based critical literacy curriculum. Researchers point out that although such culturally-based practices have proven to involve strategies and skills that would benefit all learners, they are often not respected within school environments (Heath, 1989; Lee, 1993; Smitherman, 1977). By forcing schools (especially those with high poverty and a high percentage of ESL students and special needs students) throughout the country to abandon innovative culturally based curriculum for more standardized approaches, NCLB is in fact deepening the gap between home and school:

> Now, especially with the recent Supreme Court decision [on segregation], there's a sense of profound anger among these teachers. A sense that everything they grew up to believe is good and right is being discarded by our society. They also note that despite all the fatuous claims from the secretary of education, the achievement gap between the races has not closed. And even worse, the cultural gap has actually widened because of the narrowing of the curriculum in these schools. (Kozol, p. 4, 2007).

The philosophy underlying NCLB is not new. Implicit is the idea that the main reason for

the achievement gap lies within the individual student or in their home culture. School becomes a place to "fix" the deficits. Perhaps the most poignant example of this has been the approach to African–American students. Instead of examining the historical, continuous, systemic and institutionalized conditions of inequality and injustice, the research on African-American students' achievement and motivation often characterizes students and their families as academically unmotivated and culturally disadvantaged (Barnes, 1972; Boykin, 1992; Cross, 2003).

The deficit model is evident in sectors of the charter school movement, which is supported by NCLB as model education. For if a school fails to make progress for five years, "The school district must initiate plans to fundamentally restructure the school. This restructuring may include reopening the school as a charter school." (US Department of Education, 2000, p 7). The Knowledge is Power Program (KIPP), for example, which has over fifty-four charter schools nationwide, claims to have to made great strides in closing the achievement gap (Tough, 2006). The philosophy underlying these and similar charter school programs reasons the achievement gap is largely due to a failing character: African-American and poor students lack skills that are necessary to succeed in school, skills that are taught in white middle class homes such as self-control, patience, and adaptability (Tough, 2006). As Dacia Toll, the founder of Amistad charter schools, stated:

> "I think we have to teach work ethic in the same way we have to teach adding and fractions with unlike denominators…But once the children have got the work ethic and the commitment to others and to education down, it's actually pretty easy to teach them."(as quoted in Tough, 2006, p. 23).

William E. Cross (2003) criticizes this pathologizing of black culture, where contemporary problems are linked to the negative effects of slavery and character defects instead of continual systemic racism. Furthermore, as Cross emphasizes, this characterization of African –Americans as historically lacking a commitment to education (not to mention the lack of a work ethic and a commitment to others) is just inaccurate.

Cross and other researchers emphasize the importance of teachers and schools building on the strengths of the home, instead of approaching the home culture as defective (Hollins, King & Hayman, 1994; Nieto, 1994). For example, Wade Boykin (1992) explains that cognitive functioning is fundamentally linked to contexts and that academic performance is greatly enhanced when the African-American cultural experience is incorporated into the learning process. Unfortunately, as the Lipman (2004) study and the educational statistics indicate, it is these very programs that are being cut.

Building on such previous research, this dissertation argues that quality education demands curriculum that is meaningful and culturally relevant. Such curriculum is cognitively challenging and is in fact "academic." In addition to stimulating the students, such curriculum allows for creative freedom for the teacher.

NCLB shifts the regulation of the curriculum and the daily routine away from the teacher to the districts and the state, especially in high poverty areas. For example, according to the Center for Educational Policy (2006), 97% of high poverty districts have a specific amount of time required for reading compared to only 55%-59% of lower level poverty areas. The control over curriculum and student learning by external standards simultaneously involves the deskilling of the teaching labor force. The underlying claim

of the accountability movement and NCLB is that teachers need to have less power, that their decisions to pass or fail students are not as objective or reliable as a standardized test. The decreased control over curriculum and the corresponding lack of respect for teachers compound the previous existing problem of teacher retention.

The Issue of Teacher Retention

High stakes testing equates both teacher quality and student learning with test scores, ignoring that education involves skills beyond academic learning (Cochran-Smith, 2006) and the interrelation of cognitive, physical, social and emotional domains of children's development.

It is not just the students who are being evaluated principally through testing, it is the teachers as well. Although NCLB addresses the lack of high quality teachers, its methods for fixing the problem again fall short. "High quality" for NCLB is measured by fulfilling state certification requirements, obtaining at least a bachelor's degree, and demonstrating subject matter expertise, which for new elementary school teachers means passing a test. It is fundamental that teachers are knowledgeable of the subject matter in which they teach, however, content knowledge alone does not necessarily equal high quality teaching, nor does it sufficiently prepare new teachers for the reality of the classroom, especially in high poverty districts.

Teacher shortage is a national crisis (National Commission on Teaching and America's Future, 2003) due to the combination of teacher retirement (almost half of the nation's teachers will retire between 2000 and 2010) and teacher attrition (Ingersoll, 2003). Early efforts concentrated on the recruitment of new teachers by providing alternate training programs. However, as Ingersoll (2003) showed, the problem was not

recruitment but retention. Approximately 50% of the teaching force leaves within any given 7 year period (Darling-Hammond, 2004) with 50% of new teachers leave the profession within 5 years (Ingersoll, 2003). The problem of retention is especially severe in high poverty schools which lose over 1/5 of their faculty in any given year. (Darling-Hammond, 2004).

Teachers cite a variety of reasons for leaving, including: "personal" reasons; poor salary; lack of administrative support; student discipline problems; lack of resources; and poor facilities. NCLB, and the increase in high stakes testing, test-based curriculum, and the stigmatizing of "failing" schools only exacerbate the problem of teacher retention (Darling-Hammond, 2004). Perhaps more then ever before, teachers face increasing expectation and receive less respect and compensation (Cochran-Smith, 2006).

Researchers have found a number of factors leading to higher attrition rates, in particular, the lack of mentors/support system as well as inadequate preparation for new teachers. For example, teachers with non-traditional preparation have a higher attrition rate than those graduating from traditional university based programs (Harris, Camp, and Adkison, 2003). Interestingly and counter intuitively, "idealistic" teachers (those with a strong "service ethic") have higher attrition rates (Miech and Elder, 1996). In other words, teachers who choose teaching as a career because they want "to help people," leave at an increased rate. Kozol (2007) discusses the demoralizing of teachers in the era of NCLB:

> Yes, children do have to be prepared for the economic world -- but the invasion of the public schools by mercantile values has deeply demoralized teachers. I've been in classrooms where the teacher has to write a so- called mission statement

> that says, 'The mission of this school is to sharpen the competitive edge of America in the global marketplace.'(p. 4)

The culture of high stakes testing and the demand to perform or pay the consequences is demoralizing both teachers and the students, particularly in high poverty districts.

The love of children and hope for future generations, which motivates many teachers and brings them into the field, is not considered by NCLB to be relevant to high quality teaching. In fact, in describing "high quality" teachers, NCLB disconcertingly and revealingly makes no reference whatsoever for the caring and relational aspects of teaching and the mutual respect necessary for learning to take place (Cochran-Smith, 2006). Ladson- Billings (2005) emphasizes the importance of the emotional connection between the teacher and African American students, especially if teachers are from a different cultural and economic background. This connection benefits both the students and the teachers. In her collaboration with eight teachers in Boston public school system, Sonia Nieto (2003) found it was the teachers' love and hope for the students and their future as well as their anger at injustice endured by the students that made them stay in the field. An important factor common among the teachers in her study was their active involvement in social justice movements and their commitment to the value of education for positive social change.

Leaving 'No Child Left Behind' Behind

At the beginning of the 20th century Woodrow Wilson declared that Education must reproduce class division. In the early 70's the president's educational advisors re-asserted the need for schools to reproduce class differences. And now, NCLB while claiming to be the solution to the achievement gap insidiously reproduces racialized

inequalities—ultimately exacerbating the "achievement gap."

In words NCLB attempts to address fundamental issues facing education in this country: the achievement gap between rich and poor and black and white; the lack of accountability for failing schools especially in poor districts; the need for retaining high quality teachers; and the overall quality of the US education system as compared to other industrialized countries. However, NCLB institutionalizes rote learning (and teaching) under the guise of solving some of society's deeply rooted social problems. Such a narrowly construed vision of education will not prepare students to attain NCLB's aim of economic competitiveness and much less the more noble goal of preparing students to think critically about the world and to change it. Instead, an approach aimed to facilitate students' social consciousness is in order. This dissertation develops Vygotsky's theory of social consciousness as the basis for a radical pedagogy with implications for curriculum content and methodology.

CHAPTER THREE

CONCEPTUALIZING EDUCATION FOR SOCIAL CONSCIOUSNESS (ESC)

DIFFERENT MEANS FOR DIFFERENT ENDS

Theoretical Foundations of *Education for Social Consciousness*

NCLB and its emphasis on high stakes testing reflects the “banking concept” of education (Freire, 2000). Within this approach, knowledge is “deposited” into the students by an all knowing teacher and the tests act as a monthly statement summarizing the transactions. The "banking concept” of education neglects the social-historical context of learning. Freire (2000) counterposes this banking approach with liberatory or problem-posing education, which encourages critical consciousness and social change as students actively participate in the learning process and society.

The goal of education, for Freire (2000) is to develop critical consciousness or *Conscientizacao* defined as “learning to perceive social, political and economic contradictions and to take action against oppressive elements of reality” (p 17). Such an educational approach is necessary to prepare students to deal with society’s problems. Education, for Freire (2000), can develop a “critical consciousness” and provide the person with a sense of agency as a subject rather than the object of their situation. A similar concern for agency is put forth in research focusing on “civic consciousness” (Flanagan & Faison, 2001; Ladson-Billings, 1994; Lee, 2003) defined as "a critical consciousness about how to work for power within our democracy" (Lee, p. 45, 2003).

According to critical pedagogy, the classroom setting is not neutral, it is inherently political. Teachers and students should reflect upon, question and challenge oppressive beliefs and practices (Giroux, 1997; Kincheloe, 2008; Shor, 1992). Enrique

Trueba (1999), however, points out that critical pedagogy falls short. Although the stress on critical reflection and awareness is important, critical pedagogy does not give insight into "how to take the emancipation route and how to construct pedagogy" (p. 594).

Cultural-Historical Activity Theory (CHAT) has made important contributions to developing pedagogy that provides tools for student success. (Lee & Smagorinsky, 2000; Moll, 1990) School is part of the socialization of the child, involving students more deeply in the social world and passing on cultural tools to help them understand and act upon their world. This does not mean a passive appropriation of the dominant culture, instead, the child is viewed as an active learner developing knowledge of their self as situated in an socio-historical context. In this way, the individual is actively engaged in a dynamic process of becoming conscious of themselves as historical beings (Stetsenko & Arievitch, 1997). As Luis Moll (1990) discusses, the purpose of education in the Vygotskian approach is to "help children appropriate and take control of their own learning, and develop strategies for understanding the social world" (p.13).

Within this approach, learning is understood as a social process. Human knowledge is passed through generations through the use of tools and symbols. Holland and Valsiner (1988) describe the process: "Symbols both linguistic and visual/artistic, are mediating devices that become a means that the newcomer learns and demonstrates that they have mastered an understanding of the cultural models" (p. 260). These mediating devices "are first encountered in interactional contexts, but are eventually internalized. They become the metonyms that support the cognitive organization of cultural knowledge" (p. 260). It is a dialectical process, as the mediational devices are a means of understanding cultural models and also serve to develop and change them: "Cultural

models are elaborated and developed through their interrelationship with narratives, metaphors, proverbs, and artifacts such as paintings- all of which we would label mediating devices" (Holland & Valsiner, 1998, p.263).

Ideally, the school setting will provide students with cultural tools to understand and participate in society and strategies for solving the problems they encounter. The classroom setting enables the creation of social contexts (or Zone of Proximal Development) for mastery of and conscious awareness in the use of such cultural tools (Moll, 1990). Culture is an expression of social relationships; artifacts are important tools for human development, but also act as weapons for oppression and liberation within a gendered and racialized class society. This latter point is emphasized by Paulo Freire and the school of critical pedagogy. As James Wertsch (2000) points out, "The Vygotskian point is that mediation is the key to analysis; the insight contributed by Freire is that this mediation is a site of contestation, control, power and resistance" (p. 11).

Herein lies the necessity for the creation of a third space (Gutiérrez, K., Rymes, B., & Larson, J., 1995) in diverse classrooms, as students bring their personal experience into the classroom and grapple with issues of injustice and social change. The students are the experts of their community practices, language and experiences. Students, especially from high poverty areas, are dealing with a multitude of problems in their out of school life. It is important that school gives students an opportunity to discuss and understand these problems with each other and with the teacher: "In so far that the context of the curriculum allows students to more broadly understand their particular historical circumstances it will lead students to be better problem solvers out of school"

(Cole, 1990). So rather then curriculum being isolated and limited to developing abilities on specific school related tasks, education should provide students with strategies and knowledge to assist them in their daily experience in and out of the classroom. When problem solving is meaningful and relevant to the students' lives, school tasks can be purposeful rather then a source of frustration. The Vygotskian tradition is rich with research illuminating successful classroom practices that use mediational devices to bridge the gap between school and community language and practices particularly in urban school districts (Daiute, 2000; Dyson, 2000; Gutierrez, Rymes, & Larson, 1995; Lee, 2003; Mahiri & Sablo, 1996; Nieto 1994). This dissertation project aims to continue this tradition through developing Vygotsky's theory of social consciousness.

Thinking in Concepts and the Development of Social Consciousness in Adolescence

Vygotsky's theories on the development of social consciousness offer important insight into creating meaningful theory based pedagogy and curriculum that emphasizes conceptual thinking and engagement in society. Vygotsky (1998) considered conceptual thinking the basis for social consciousness:

> The mutual connection of concepts, their internal relation to one and the same system also makes the concept one of the basic means of systematization and recognition of the external world. But the concept not only results in a system and serves as a basic means of recognizing external reality. It is also a basic means for understanding another, for adequate assimilation of the historical constituted social experience of humanity. Only in concepts does the adolescent systematize and comprehend the world of social consciousness for the first time. (p. 48)

For Vygotsky, the school environment is an important context where youth's spontaneous

knowledge of objects can gain a more systematic, scientific understanding. He explains that scientific and spontaneous are in dialectical relationship with one another, where "as the scientific concept grows downward through the everyday concept and the everyday concept moves upward through the scientific" (Vygotsky, p. 220). Thinking more "scientifically" about society involves critical and abstract thinking skills: going beyond immediate experience, connecting one's own experience to the socio-historical context; and looking beneath the surface of things to their underlying meanings. Vygotsky (1998) describes this as "thinking in concepts":

> Without thinking in concepts there is no understanding of the relations that underlie the phenomena. The whole world of deep connections that underlie external outwards appearances, the world of complex interdependencies and relations within every sphere of activity and among its separate sphere can be disclosed only to one who approaches it with the key of the concept. This new content does not enter mechanically into the thinking of the adolescent, but undergoes a long and complex process of development. (Vygotsky, p. 42)

There is a developmental aspect of the learning process for Vygotsky, however it is not a maturationalist approach. The development in the ability to think in concepts is related to the new societal roles that are opened to/expected of the adolescent. As the adolescent participates or plans to participate in the social production of society, they are developing their social-political world view:

> The basic change in the environment consists in the fact that it expands to participation in societal production. On this basis, in the content of thinking, societal ideology is represented most of all as connected with one position or

another in societal production. (Vygotsky, p. 43)

In other words, as the adolescents' activity in the world expands, so to does their consciousness. Adolescence is a time when youth either get their first jobs, or begin to think realistically about their future, their life goals, career aspirations and possibilities or limitations. They are becoming increasingly conscious of race, class and gender as they confront these issues first hand: "Problems that life itself poses for the adolescent and their decisive entry as an active participant into this life require for their solution the development of higher forms of thinking" (Vygotsky, p. 44). Within this process, as the adolescent thinks about the world, new connections and deeper understandings develop: "Owing to this extension and deepening of the content of thinking a whole world with its past, and future, nature, history and human life opens before the adolescent" (Vygotsky, 1998, p. 42). Making such connections over time and place involves abstract thinking skills and thinking in concepts.

It is important to note that thinking in concepts involves not only the awareness of the "outside" world, but dialectically entails a deeper self- consciousness: "Understanding reality, understanding others and understanding oneself- this is what thinking in concepts brings with itself. This is the kind of revolution that occurs in the thinking and consciousness of the adolescent" (Vygotsky, 1998, p. 50).

Social consciousness for Vygotsky (1998) is deeply related to the adolescents' developing ability to think abstractly and forms the basis for a "class psychology." Vygotsky's ideas on class psychology are an important, yet largely neglected, aspect of Vygotsky's writings that reflect the strong influence of Marx on his work: "We will see that the formation of concepts discloses before the adolescent a world of social

consciousness and leads inevitably to intensive development and formulation of class psychology and ideology" (Vygotsky, 1998, p. 44). The shared cultural experience and the development of thinking in concepts are basis for social and class consciousness: "It is understood that the sharing of life, work and interests places before the adolescent a number of problems; in the process of solving them class psychology develops and takes shape" (Vygotsky, 1998, p. 43).

Summary

Social Consciousness is a process involves a deepening conscious awareness of the socio-historical context – going beyond the immediate or surface appearances towards developing abstract understandings of underlying connections. This systematizing of experience involves the understanding that society has a history and it changes. It also involves situating one's individual experience into the socio- historical context over time and place, and the understanding of oneself as an active, agentive historical being.

Education, for Vygotsky, is a collaborative process that involves inquiry, problem solving, and the examination of the process of things and their underlying systematic connections. The focus is not learning by rote, but the ability to think conceptually- especially as the child reaches adolescence. In contrast, NCLB strives to maintain the status quo through the production of standardized workers ready to compete for jobs in increasingly global labor market. The difference between the two approaches lies in the differing understanding of children (and human beings for that matter). The NCLB approach views the child (and the teacher) as a "blank slate" to be trained and tested. While Vygotskian inspired pedagogical theory understands children (and the teacher) as

agentive- active participants and creative thinkers constructing and developing concepts about their social and physical world in collaboration with others.

The theoretical model of *Education for Social Consciousness* that is developed within this dissertation is grounded in the analysis of a multimodal sixth grade literacy curriculum in a low income African-American school district in Newark, New Jersey. The teacher is an activist, a practicing poet and photographer who brings her artistic skills and passion into to the classroom. In this inquiry based multimedia project, the children take and develop photographs of their community and write narratives and poetry around the topic "Where I live." I call this the *Where I Live* curriculum.

CHAPTER FOUR

EDUCATION FOR SOCIAL CONSCIOUSNESS IN ACTION: THE *WHERE I LIVE* CURRICULUM

Learning from the Pilot Study

As a preliminary step to this dissertation project, a pilot study analyzed a packet of student poetry and photography from the previous school year (same teacher with a different group of students). The booklet was publicly distributed by the teacher and the students at their photography exhibit and poetry night which I attended. The packet included a photograph and corresponding poem for nineteen students from her class. The analysis of this work served as an introduction to the project and an invaluable source for grounding my codes and developing my research questions.

In the preface to the 2nd edition of the *Handbook of Research on Teaching Literacy through the Communicative Arts* (2006) the editors lament the lack of integration of visual media within education and the lack of a sustained link between classroom and civic learning. Flanagan and Faison (2001) emphasize that there has been relatively little research of the processes whereby children develop affection for the polity and become engaged citizens. In my initial engagement with the pilot study I realized the potential that the *Where I Live* (WIL) project had for learning about multimodal learning and social consciousness. The pilot project integrated the mediational devices of photography, poetry and language.

Similar projects with children have shown the educational value of photography as part of a literacy curriculum. Visual mediums, such as photography, can act as an

anchor for literacy, especially with children who struggle with their writing skills (Daiute, 1992). Furthermore, photography enables youth to bring their home lives into school, helping teachers understand their lives, while encouraging youth to become more conscious of their surroundings and what may be everyday in their life (Ewald, 2001). This was evident in the pilot data. For example, abandoned and burnt out houses are a common sight in this area of Newark, and consequently this was a major theme found in both their photos and writings. The photography depicted scenes reflecting the violence of the street, like teddy bear and bottle shrines placed for young people who have died and R.I.P. graffiti.

The pilot data revealed the important role poetry can play in encouraging the youth to discuss painful circumstance in an empowering way. The children often wrote profound poetry that engaged issues of death and violence the young children were dealing with as well as poignant expressions of fear and pain they experienced in their lives. In the poem below, for example, the student utilizes rhyme to describe his father's death and metaphor to imagine rising "like the stars above the sky" away from "being treated like an animal":

> The world out side my window.
>
> I look out the window and I
> See an unfavorable place that
> You will hate.
> I lost my dad I am still kind of depressed.
> He got shot in his chest
> Over some mess.
> He's in a
> Better place that you will
> Like because you won't
> Have to fight over rights.
> This is a poem for my Dad
> I feel pain from the Rain.

You can throw me
In the dirt but it won't
Hurt. You can call me
Names like I am a game.
You better stop treating
Me like an animal
but I still will rise above
The sky. You can shoot
Me with your eyes
but I still will rise like the
Stars above the sky.[1]

The pilot data suggested to me that writing poetry was an important medium for students to learn about themselves, their environment, the relation between self and environment and their language (Sedgwick, 2000). Their poetic discussions of fear and pain simultaneously expressed a defense of the positive aspects of the neighborhood, in particular, their family and friends. Sedgwick (2000) explores the connection between scientific thinking and poetry in developing the cognitive skills of students, where both require purposeful and painstaking examination of phenomenon. He emphasizes how poetry develops the mental ability to systematically search for options as students learn the techniques of rhyme, alliteration, assonance. The *Light of Death* is a striking example of how many of the youth utilized metaphor ("Downtown Newark's big businesses grin down from giant buildings looking at people") and alliteration ("The busy, buzzing, battering of Newark's top businesses banging on the sides of the bald headed people walking on the dirty boardwalk"), towards a stinging social critique of the conditions they encounter in their everyday lives.

[1] The student work presented in this dissertation appears as I received it. I did not edit it for grammar nor content.

The Light of Death
The busy, buzzing, battering of Newark's top businesses banging on the sides of the bald headed people walking on the dirty boardwalk.
The crazy people going on rampages shooting people in the head for no reason then taking people hostage then committing suicide
The light of death.
Newark's big businesses grin down giant buildings looking at people who are less fortunate than they are.
Why should the police or Sharpe James go looking for homeless people when they never know where a body might turn up? Will they be able to identify the body? I think not.
The light of death
That's what Newark is all about-
The light of death.

The children brought their out of school experience into the classroom, not just through the content and activities of the project, but also in the language itself, for example, in the form of signification. Signification is described by Carol Lee (2000) as "an oral genre of communication within the African American Vernacular English (AAVE) speech community" (p. 193) and "a linguistic tool that directs behavior and organizes the user's cognitive representation of the external environment" (p.194). Geneva Smitherman (1977) outlines the characteristics of signification:

> Indirection, circumlocution; metaphorical-imagistic (but images rooted in the everyday, real world); humorous; ironic; rhythmic fluency and sound; teachy but not preachy; directed at persons or persons usually present in the situational context (siggers do not talk behind yo back); punning; play on words; introduction of the semantically or logically unexpected. (p.121)

Smitherman describes the act of signification as "talking negatively about somebody through stunning and clever verbal put downs" (p.82). Examples of signification were found throughout the student poems. In the poem below entitled *Outside!,* for example

the student writes: "They smells like a Deli with spoiled jelly." This formulation utilizes many of the features discussed by Smitherman, including humor, put-downs, metaphorical-images, and rhythmic fluency.

> Outside!
> Around here
> People drink beer
> It's crazy and I really do care
> Every time I look at the light
> All I picture is two people trying to fight
> But they won't hurt me
> Even if they use all their might
> It looks like the fences love to dance and shout
> But you don't know what they are about
> It's like a rose with a sprout.
> Why is the sky frowning at me? What did I do?
> What can it be?
> Kids these days
> Goes outside smelly
> They smells like a Deli
> With spoiled jelly
> Sometimes people go outside and they stink
> bet they don't watch their show Pretty in Pink
> My brothers and sisters can't go outside
> and I won't let the streets take their pride
> I hate the streets
> But I love sweets

Carol Lee (2000) emphasizes that signifying is an out of school discourse that involves higher order thinking (such as irony, satire, and metaphor) and has great potential to serve as a bridge to literacy skills in the classroom. Lee focuses specifically on irony and the ways in which teachers can bring African- American children's out of school discourse into the classroom to develop their skills of literary analysis.

As I analyzed the pilot data poems at the utterance level, I found multiple uses of metaphor by the children. Within the pilot data, which consisted of work by 19 children, there were 25 examples of metaphor used to express emotion. There were 21 examples

of metaphor utilized to make a critique or recognition of social injustice. Through the pilot study it became clear to me that metaphor was a salient tool for the students, worthy of further investigation as part of this dissertation.

Metaphor as a Tool for Social Consciousness

The role of metaphor as a cognitive tool has been documented by researchers and philosophers for centuries. Metaphor, according to Aristotle, allows us to express new insights through utilizing the element of surprise. Metaphor is not merely a comparison of two objects, but allows communication of things that cannot be literally expressed (Winner 1982) as well as to describe phenomenon in a way that other linguistic devices cannot (Fainsilber & Ortony, 1987).

For the cognitive linguists, metaphor serves as a bridge between already acquired knowledge and new knowledge. Lakoff and Johnson (1980) define the "conceptual metaphor" as a form of abstract reasoning mediating the "source domain," what is already known, and the "conceptual domain," the acquisition of new knowledge. Metaphor therefore plays an active role in the construction of new knowledge and the movement from the concrete to more abstract knowledge.

Metaphor has been found to be useful in incorporating ordinary life experiences into one's identity (Luborsky, 1987) and to bind the past and the future (Fernandez, 1991). In a study of the use of metaphor after discovering infertility, Becker (1994) corroborated the finding that metaphors are used to make sense of disruptions in life as people attempt to make the unfathomable concrete and to create continuity in the face of change (Becker, p.384). She also found that people used metaphor to reconnect themselves to social and cultural order after a disruption (p.404).

Influenced by Vygotsky, a number of researchers have looked at the use of metaphor as a cultural tool- as a means by which cultural models are elaborated (Quinn and Holland, 1987) and as a mediating device supporting the cognitive organization of cultural knowledge (Holland & Valsiner, 1988). Peter Jones (2001) discusses metaphor as a tool to explore underlying social relationships or to mask them. Metaphor in this way acts as a tool to frame and structure meaning, but can also assist in the development of new meanings.

Metaphor is significant as a cross-modal mediating device that lies at the intersection of social, emotional, cultural, cognitive aspects of development and learning. One of the main goals of this dissertation is to gain insight into the use of metaphor as an instrument in the process of social consciousness (defined as an interconnected three fold process including: a conscious awareness and critical understanding of the socio-historical context; a sense of self as an agentive being situated and constituted in this context; and a sense of social responsibility).

Within the pilot data, the students employed metaphor in their poetry and photography. Many of the metaphors with the poetry involved Newark. For example in the poem, *The Light of Death*, the student writes, "That's what Newark is all about-The light of death." This metaphor constructs Newark as dual or contradictory in nature, encompassing light and death. Addressing dualities, as well as the use of metaphor to discuss Newark, was common across the pilot data, and became a point of interest for the dissertation.

Meaning-Making and the Concept of "Newark"

Upon analyzing the pilot data I was struck by the frequency of the use of the word

"Newark" by the children. The repetition of the word "Newark" seemed to act as yet another tool used by students to go beyond describing their immediate surroundings towards a more systematic understanding of the abstract aspects of the social- historical context. Newark is the city in which they live, and students grappled with the complexity of what that means.

Vygotsky (1987) discusses at length the role of word meaning in the development of knowledge. It is my argument that similar to the way a young child names an object as she constructs its meaning (Vygotsky, 1987) – so to does naming of Newark assist the students to construe meanings of Newark, making an abstract concept (the city in which they live) more concrete. I found this to be the case in my Master's thesis where politically active youth named the forces working at the city level (the mayor, the city's name, etc.) while non-politically active youth did not when describing the problems facing their community (Ammentorp, 2001). The students in the pilot study also spoke with an agentive voice as they problem solved issues relevant to their community. Based on this aspect of the pilot study, I became interested in the implications for social engagement and civic learning for my dissertation.

In the year I collected data for the dissertation the children wrote narratives (in addition to the poetry and photography) around the topic "Where I live." The narratives provided a space for the students to construct their meanings of Newark and an opportunity for me to analyze this aspect of their work.

A number of scholars note the relationship between meaning, narrative and social consciousness. Narratives construct meaning (Bruner, 1990) and are a powerful medium through which people reflect on their circumstances, their individual and cultural history

deriving deeper meaning and understanding of the world. Geneva Smitherman (1977) emphasizes that narrative sequencing (like metaphor) is significant as a mode of discourse in Black American culture:

> If the story is in response to a real-life situation , the "story –teller" comes on with a dramatic narration, rather then a succinct tight response…Black English speakers will render their general, abstract observations about life, love and people in the form of a concrete narrative. (p.147)

Colette Daiute (2000) emphasizes that "inviting young to narrate in particular ways involves them in social reflection that might otherwise go unexplored." This is not a passive reflection, however, narratives can act as a medium for the development of social consciousness (Daiute, 2004; Solis, 2004).

As the students participate in meaningful class discussions and write about the issues facing Newark, they are entering in the public civic discourse. In their everyday experience they have encountered multiple meanings or "genres" of Newark (Newark as synonymous with "ghetto" for example). Daiute (1993) clarifies the Bakhtinian concept of genres: "According to Bakhtin, oral genres, like written genres, have particular thematic contents, styles, and structures that take form in the context of cultural groups" (p.403). An aspect of social consciousness is mastering the language of these genres and situating these genres in relation to themselves and other groups. Within this dissertation, therefore, I review the "genres" of Newark in the public imagination and explore the students' awareness, expression, appropriation, and countering of these genres of Newark within their narratives.

The pilot study was essential in forming my dissertation. As an introduction to

the project it served as a source from which to ground my research questions firmly in the work of the students. The pilot study emphasized the importance of exploring the social historical context of the project as well as the day to day practices within my dissertation.

CHAPTER FIVE

OPERATIONALIZING THE CONCEPT OF SOCIAL CONSCIOUSNESS: DEVELOPING THE RESEARCH QUESTIONS

My conceptualization of social consciousness changed and developed through the course of this dissertation project. The outcome of this project is the production of an enriched concept of social consciousness. Based on my theoretical framework and the analysis of the pilot and dissertation data, I developed the concept of social consciousness as a process involving: 1) a conscious awareness of the socio-historical context; 2) an understanding of one's own experience as situated in place and over time; and 3) a sense of social responsibility for change.

The *Where I Live* curriculum acted as a foundation for the theoretical model of social consciousness. Although the model and the definition of social consciousness is the outcome of this project, I present it here to orient the reader. This chapter situates the research questions within the framework of this model while considering the socio-historical context of the WIL project itself.

Analyzing the Context of the Project

Figure 1 (below and also on page 2) is a reminder of the multilayeredness of the socio- historical context of the project. The organization of this dissertation can be understood as beginning at the outermost circle and traveling inward.

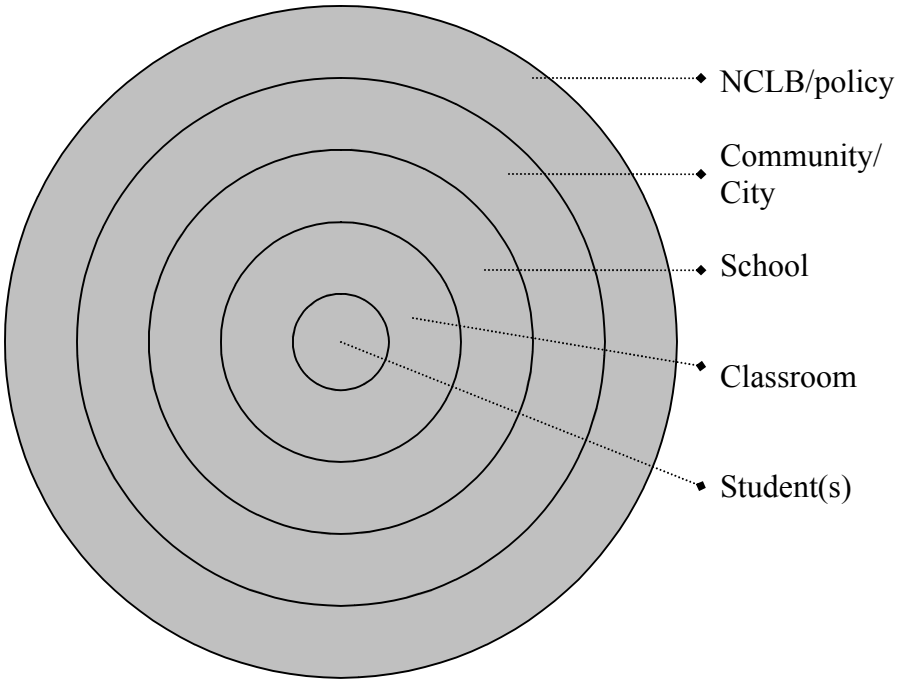

Figure 1 (repeated): Diagram depicting the socio-historical context of the project

The literature review examined the educational context of NCLB and argued instead for Education for Social Consciousness. Given NCLB's negative effect on curriculum and teacher retention, particularly in high poverty school districts, the first research question asks: What is it about the school culture that enables this project to occur and makes this teacher stay? What, if any, are the effects on NCLB on this project?

Research Question 2, then, considers the ways in which the school culture animates the project and focuses on the curriculum project itself, its history and development and the teacher's goals. In reality the interrelationships between the multiple contexts are not as clearly demarcated as in Figure 1. Human existence is a dynamic interactive process with overlaps, gaps and bridges extending over time and place. The nature and process of these interconnections are therefore the concern of the second research question, in particular, how the project bridges the "gap" between school and home/ community experiences.

While situating the classroom project within its context, I am simultaneously analyzing students' discussion of themselves as embedded within their socio-historical context. A central goal is to analyze ways in which participation in the activities of this multimodal school project enabled students to consider their "everyday" experience in relation to the city and the society in which they live.

Exploring "What Is": Conscious Awareness of the Socio-Historical Context

The concept of social consciousness includes a conscious awareness of the socio-historical context. Research question two, in particular, examines how the classroom activities and curriculum materials are organized and structured to bring the students' everyday experience into the classroom for study and discussion. The third research question, then, focuses on the student work: the "everyday" topics ("what is") the students bring into the classroom through their discussions and the mediational devices of photography, poetry and narrative. Figure 2 outlines the aspects of their experience explored within their work.

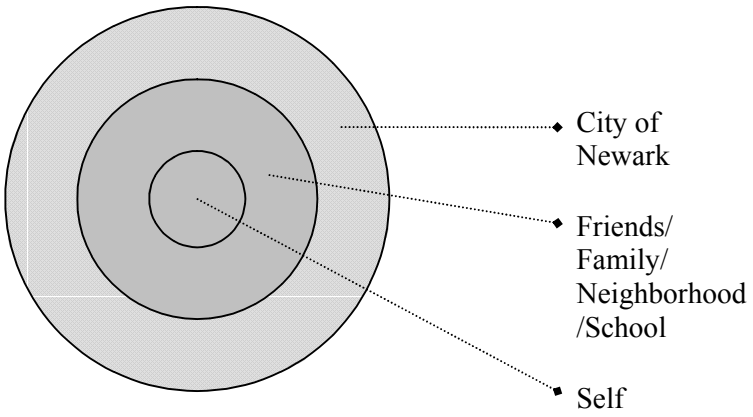

Figure 2. "What is": Realms of student experience focused on in this study

As students discuss their experience of their "immediate" neighborhood, they are often simultaneously expressing their concept of the city of Newark. In the pilot study, I was struck by the repetition of the word "Newark." The fourth research question analyzes the students' conceptualization of Newark. In addition conducting frequency counts of the use of the word "Newark," I examine the ways students talk about Newark. I review archival data for the "genres" of Newark in the public discourse and then explore the students' expression, appropriation, and countering of these popular social constructions of Newark.

Situating Oneself in Place and Time: Imagining "What Was" and "What Could Be"

Figure 2 portrays the "horizontal" construction of social consciousness, in that it does not fully address the aspect of time and change integral to my concept of social consciousness. Figure 3, therefore, overlaps three Figure 2 diagrams: one representing "what is" (present) and adding two more identical figures (with concentric circles representing self, neighborhood and the city of Newark) representing "what was" (the past) and "what could be" (the future). This allows for a model that captures the socio-historical underpinnings of social consciousness while illustrating the dynamic concept of time, and continuity through change. Furthermore, in this model each area of knowledge informs the other: the knowledge of "what is" and "what was" forms the base for imaging "what could be."

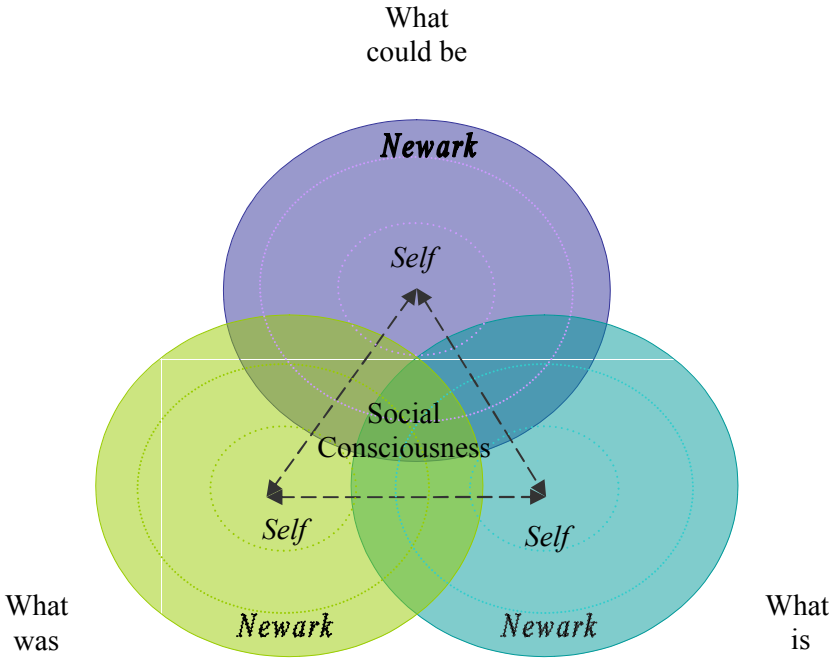

Figure 3. Theoretical model depicting social consciousness as awareness of self as situated in time and place.

Within Figure 3, the "what was" represents the historical dimension of the individual's personal and cultural experience as well as that of their neighborhood and the city. Research Question 2, in particular, explores the ways in which the curriculum project involves a historical perspective through curriculum materials and the teacher's knowledge. Research question 5 includes an analysis of student work for historical references (personal, cultural, and the city of Newark).

The "what could be" realm reflects the hypothetical critical thinking of the students. This aspect of the theoretical model is considered in Research Question 5,

which examines the students' work for discussions pertaining to their individual future as well as the future of the city as they imagined solutions to current problems.

Creating Cohesion: Self, Social Responsibility and Metaphor

Through the initial coding of the data for general topics/ themes, I found that the students did not just describe "what is," they reflected on the underlying causes of the problems and discussed the reasons why the problems should be solved. As discussed in the literature review, thinking in concepts involves going beyond the surface for underlying systematic connections (Vygotsky, 1998) and mediational devices act as important tools in this process.

As illustrated in Figure 3, the realms of "what is," "what was," and "what could be" are not separate entities but are joined with a triangle in the center of each figure- representing the "self." The students' sense of self is the fundamental link in the process of social consciousness. Self-knowledge is integral to social consciousness, that is, the awareness of oneself as embedded in a historical place and time, and as an active participant in society with a sense of social responsibility. It is here that experiences (as reflected in the model itself) are synthesized and coherence over time and place is created. The students' connection to their community and their sense of social responsibility is analyzed in Research Question 5.

In the pilot data, the students often discussed where they live in dualities. Research Questions 4 & 5 investigate the ways in which students express a sense of duality, conflict or contradiction about their context as simultaneously positive and negative. The analysis of the student work therefore involved exploring the ways, through the multimodal tools of the curriculum, the students' contextualized their

experience over time and place and created a sense of cohesion between their immediate experience and their socio-historical context. I focus on the use of metaphor as a cross modal (visual, textual, oral) culturally relevant mediational device in this process.

This section outlined the model of social consciousness and elucidated the theoretical foundations of the research questions within this framework. The next chapter explains the nuts and bolts of the analytical process.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

Research Question 1

What is the school culture that enables this project to occur and makes this teacher stay? What, if any, are the effects on NCLB on this project?

Research Question 2

How does the school culture animate the project? What is the history of the project? What are the teacher's goals for the project? How does this multimedia curriculum project bridge the gap between home and school culture through collaborative classroom activities, discussions and the use of language? What is the role of the teacher in this process? What do the students think about the project and the teacher?

Research Question 3

How does this multimedia curriculum project facilitate the student's conscious awareness of their everyday out of school experience? What topics do the children photograph, discuss and write about?

Research Question 4

How do the students conceptualize Newark? What are the major genres of Newark in the social imagination? How do the students appropriate and counter these genres in their work? How do students express their sense of self to the city of Newark? What is the role of metaphor in this process?

Research Question 5

How do the students use the mediational devices of the curriculum, in particular metaphor, as they confront the problems in their community and city? What reasons for change, what causes do they consider? What solutions do they imagine? How do they express a sense of social responsibility? How do they connect their sense of self to the socio-historical context?

CHAPTER SIX

METHOD

I adopt an explicitly qualitative approach in an effort to gain an understanding of the richness and complexity of the project within its socio-historical context and to develop the theoretical model of social consciousness. Multiple data sources were necessary in an attempt to illustrate this multifaceted and dynamic picture, as well as to triangulate the findings. Table 1 clarifies the context areas each research question seeks to investigate and the corresponding data sources.

For example, Research Questions 1 & 2 utilize ethnographic methods, the collection of archival data, field notes, review of curriculum materials, classroom observations and the teacher interview to explore the day to day activities of the project and the school context. Research Questions 3, 4 & 5 draw principally on student work in addition to classroom observations and field notes, and the interview with the teacher. Research question 4 also examines archival data: newspapers and the internet to gain insight into the multiple genres of Newark.

Table 1: *Research Questions, Data Sources and Context Areas*

	Data Sources	**Context/area**
Research Question 1 What is the school culture that enables this project to occur and makes this teacher stay? What, if any, are the effects on NCLB on this project?	Archival data: School website N J D of E website Teacher interview Observation/field notes Student work	Policy/NCLB School City Classroom Student
Research Question 2 How does the school culture animate the project? What is the history of the project? What are the teacher's goals for the project? How does this multimedia curriculum project bridge the gap between home and school culture through collaborative classroom activities, discussions and the use of language? What is the role of the teacher in this process? What do the students think about the project and the teacher?	Document review: Curriculum materials Sample assignments Quizzes Class books Teacher interview Observation/field notes Student work	Community Classroom Student
Research Question 3 How does this multimedia curriculum project facilitate the student's conscious awareness of their everyday out of school experience? What topics do the children photograph, discuss and write about?	Teacher interview Observation/field notes Student work	City Classroom Student
Research Question 4 How do the students conceptualize Newark? What are the major genres of Newark in the social imagination? How do the students appropriate and counter these genres in their writings? How do they connect their sense of self to the city of Newark? What is the role of metaphor in this process?	Archival data Newark city website Newspapers/books Observation/field notes Student work	City Classroom Student
Research Question 5 How do the students use the mediational devices of the curriculum, in particular metaphor, as they confront the problems in their community and city? What reasons for change, what causes do they consider? What solutions do they imagine? How do they express a sense of social responsibility? How do they connect their sense of self to the socio-historical context?	Teacher interview Observation/field notes Student work	City Classroom Student

Data Sources

Archival data RQ1,5

RQ1 - To gain insight into the school culture, I downloaded information about the school from their website. The website also contained samples of student work and statements regarding this project by students. Statistical information about the school was also downloaded from the NJ Department of Education, in particular the NJ School Report Card and the NCLB data.

RQ4- To gain a sense of the major genres of Newark, I researched books, articles, and websites about Newark- including Newark City website, and The Star Ledger (the local paper).

Review of curriculum materials RQ2

Throughout the course of the project, the teacher gave me sample curriculum materials such as assignments, quizzes and the poetry and photography that the children studied as part of the curriculum. Reviewing of the curriculum materials in relation to student work gave further insight into their learning process.

Teacher interview RQ 1,2,3,4,5

In addition to numerous informal discussions with the teacher, I conducted one ninety minute semi-structured interview. Within the interview, she elaborated on her perspective of social/historical and political context of the project, the school culture, the history of the project and how it has evolved as well as her goals for the students. She reflected on the challenges she faces as a teacher and the effectiveness of her strategies for handling such challenges, as well as what she learns from the students' through the project. Some sample questions include:

1. What do you hope the students learn from the project? Why photography? Why poetry?
2. What has been the feedback from parents regarding this project? At what level do parents become involved?
3. What have you learned about he student's lives through the project, how does this knowledge effect how you teach them?
4. What does your activism bring to the project?
5. Have you seen differences in their literacy skills?
6. What are some challenges you anticipate and have already experienced?

The interview questions served as a guide, as other questions emerged from the discussion. The interview was tape-recorded and the full interview was transcribed.

Observations/fieldnotes. - RQ 1,2,3,4,5

Beginning in 02/04 with the start of the photography unit, I observed the classes at least one to two times per week. The entire sixth grade is broken up into four sections of writing classes with about 12-15 students each, all of which participate in the photo literacy project with the same teacher. To ensure the observation all of the sections, I varied observation times. Field notes were written during and after each visit and a number of classes were tape recorded. I visited each class in the regular classroom and in the darkroom, which was located across the hall from the classroom. I accompanied the classes on a neighborhood walk, and a field trip to a photography exhibit at the Newark Museum. I also attended a parent teacher night, where the teacher introduced and explained the project, as well as the culminating exhibit/poetry reading where children presented their work to their families.

Student work- RQ 1,2,3,4,5

I received student work (for those I received written consent) in two forms. First, the teacher gave me photocopies of a few in-class assignments she collected. Second, at the end of the school year, I received a CD_ROM with the students' saved computer work downloaded onto it. This data included the photography, poetry and narratives associated with the "Where I Live" project, and, in addition, work from throughout the school year.

I also downloaded student work from the school's public website. Within the school website, there is a section dedicated to the project. This webpage was created by a person from the district along with two or three students from the class. The teacher was not directly involved in the project, she only submitted materials that were asked of her.

As part of the WIL curriculum, the students developed a final photograph with a corresponding poem and narrative essay, however, I did not receive all three assignments for all of the students. Appendix A outlines the sources and type of work received for each student. Discourse analysis was conducted on 24 poems, 28 narrative essays, and 25 photographs that were the final product of the "Where I Live" curriculum.

Participants: The School, the Teacher, the Students

This study focuses on a sixth grade literacy project in a low income school district Newark, New Jersey. The elementary school is classified as "In Need of Improvement" according to NCLB. According to the NJ Department of Education School Report card (2004-2005) the student body was 96% African American, 3% Hispanic and less then 1% White. English was the first language for one hundred percent of the school. The percentage of students with IEP (Individualized Education Program)

was very high at 29.7%. The Student Mobility Rate (Percentage of students who enrolled and left during the school year) of 34.4% gives a sense of the transient nature of the student's lives as compared to the state average of 12%. The amount of students getting free or reduced lunch was 83%.

Consent forms were received for 23 (22 African –American; 1 "Puerto Rican, German, French Canadian, Irish, Cherokee Indian, and Italian" as declared in his narrative) students across four classrooms of the same writing teacher. One of the students lived in another city, so although I received consent for her work, I did not include it in the study.

The teacher was a 30 year old white woman who has many of the characteristics of new teachers who tend to leave the field. She graduated college with a major in political science and was prepared through the "alternate route": taking night classes in education while teaching in the Newark school system. Although she lived in Newark for about two years, she is not from Newark.

Entry into the Field

In April 2003 I attended the photography and poetry exhibit at the school. This was a public event and they distributed the packets of the student work that became the basis of my pilot study. It was an inspirational event. The children read their poems, their photography hung around the room and food was served.

I then analyzed the work for the pilot study. That fall, after meeting with the principal and receiving IRB approval and approval from the district, I started my entry into the field. The class was about to get cameras and begin taking pictures. The teacher sent the consent forms home with the students. I attended a parent night where the

teacher explained the project and showed parents the darkroom. I introduced myself to parents that night and received a number of consent forms. I began observing the classes about twice a week. The teacher introduced me to the class and I spoke about how I was studying the curriculum of the class. During my visits to the class and the darkroom I sat in the back of the class and observed and took notes. I had brief conversations with the teacher and I interacted with the students if they approached me, but for the most part I did not participate in an active way. I went on one field trip to the Newark Museum with the class and also for two walks around the neighborhood. Finally, I attended the end of year cumulative event, where the students showcased their photography and recited their poetry to their parents.

Analysis Process

This is a case study with multiple samplings and analyses within and across participants. Since meaning making is understood as collaborative process within the Cultural Historical Activity Theory (CHAT) approach and the language-use of an individual cannot be separated from the social nature of the discourse (Bakhtin, 1986), my unit of analysis and the presentation of the data is the students' work as a group. Narrative analysis is conducted within this dissertation because "its interpretive tools are designed to examine phenomena, issues and people's lives holistically (Daiute, pxi, 2004).

A grounded theory approach (Strauss and Corbin, 1994) allowed for codes to emerge from the data. ATLASti software was utilized to code the narratives and poetry. This helped systematize the coding process and enabled me to analyze connections between the codes. Table 2 outlines the types of analysis (thematic analysis, content

analysis, and frequency counts) conducted on the multiple data sources. The codebook used for the project can be found in Appendix B.

Table 2: *Coding Analysis*

Coding Analysis	**Data Source**
Thematic	Teacher Interview Archival –Genres of Newark Photography- General topics Student writings- Descriptive Topics – Problems, positive aspects, school Duality Problem solving codes- reasons change/cause/solution
Content analysis	Student Writings Unity and varience with adult genres of Newark Self- As part of solution/problem Positioning – as citizen, child, etc. Change Metaphor
Frequency counts	WIL Poetry/WIL Narratives The word "Newark" Photo topics Problem Solving codes

Thematic Analysis

I analyzed the teacher interview for general themes, for instance, statements related to teacher retention (RQ 2). Archival data such as the city website, local papers, and the internet was reviewed to gain a sense of the genres of Newark (RQ4). Photographs were analyzed for their general topics (RQ3).

I conducted thematic analysis on the WIL poetry and narratives, in particular the ways the students describe "what is." The process of coding involved an initial review of student work for themes or patterns across the writings, for example, abandoned houses,

cars, garbage, gangs, etc. The patterns found then served as basis for further coding. I then coded all of the WIL poems and narratives for those topics. I grounded the topics into the broader categories of "positive aspects" and "problems," based on how the students characterized the topic. These themes found in the student work were triangulated with field notes, observation notes and the teacher interview. Most of the topics fit into one of the two groups– if there was a question, I placed the topic under miscellaneous (for example, the "loud" code, a few described the loudness of their environment as a good thing, another as a problem). I also coded for discussions of "school" to gain a sense of how the students felt about the teacher, the project and to gain their perspective on the school culture (RQ 1, 2).

Duality: The duality code marked instances where students expressed a sense of their self, context or situation as being simultaneously positive and negative (ex. *Newark is two sides of a mask, Newark is both wonderful and horrible).*

Problem solving codes is an umbrella term that includes the three codes: *attribution of cause, reasons to solve problems,* and *responsibility for solutions.* These codes examine students' higher order thinking skills (reasoning skills, critical thinking, problem solving and imagination) as they go beyond describing social issues about "what is" and consider "what could be" (Research question 5). Similar to the other codes, these codes were grounded in an initial review of the student data, as were the subcodes. The *attribution of cause* code analyzes the students' positing of why the problems in their communities exist. The *reasons to change* code examines the reasons students gave for changing the community, and who would benefit. This code initially arouse from the data as I was struck by the prevalence of the students discussing the need for change "for the

children." The *responsibility for solutions* code focuses on how the students envision the problems encountered in the community to be solved.

Content Analysis

The students WIL narratives were coded for statements for unity and variance with the genres of Newark, the students' positioning of themselves and their expression of agency within the narrative, and the use of metaphor.

Genres of Newark: Through thematic analysis of archival data and the literature as well as an initial review of the student data, I determined three basic "genres of Newark": Newark as ghetto, Newark as New Ark/ Brick city, Newark as Renaissance city. I then coded the student narratives and poetry for unity/ appropriation and variance/rejection of these genres. Table 3 outlines the genres, with a definition and an example from the student data.

Table 3: *Coding Genres of Newark*

Genres of Newark	**Definition**	**Example**
Ghetto	Equates Newark with poverty, violence, gangs, etc.	*"Have you ever been in Newark N.J? Well, it's not a pleasurable place. Sirens and car crashes are what I hear every day. Catastrophe takes place all around me. Around here there is no chivalry, women have to do things for themselves"*
New Ark	Discusses Newark as unity of the people, culture, ancestors, the struggle, "our people", freedom, home, love, family	*"This is where I live* *Right here, in Newark* *Newark is a place for you and me* *Newark is a place where you could get free"*
Renaissance city	Describes Newark's redevelopment/ revitalization: building of new homes/schools, stores, downtown	*"Newark is going to be a tremendous neighborhood. Abandoned buildings are getting repaired. New stores are getting built up and old ones are torn down"*

Positioning: This code refers to how the writer implicitly and explicitly positions themselves in relation to their social- historical context. I specifically examined themes of artist, child, community member/citizen as these were relevant in understanding the students sense of self. Table 4 gives examples from student work. (RQ4)

Table 4: *Positioning Codes*

Code: Self as…	**Examples from data**
Artist	*"My life is all I have,* *My pencil, my poem, my notebook pad."*
Child	*"I know enough things to figure out that Newark is not a dreadful place to live in but it is an unsafe place for kids like me and younger than me."*
Community member/citizen	*"Everyday when I walk down the street I see a backyard filled with rubbish. Sometimes I prefer to clean that backyard. I stop to consider what is back there. I also start to reflect and it's a part of my community."* *"We are our own community. If one person in the community messes, we all mess up."*

Self as an agent for change: This code focused on the indexicals used by the students to analyze whether they include themselves as part of the solution ("we need to…") or place the responsibility with others ("they should…") within there writings. (RQ5).

Notions of change/time: This code analyzed the ways in which the students discussed time and change in relation to individual people and also to Newark as a city through indexicals such as "then," "now" as well as statements regarding "in the future" or "in the past," or "Newark is changing." (RQ4,5)

Metaphor: The metaphor code analyzes the student's use of metaphor in their writings and the purpose it serves, for example: for expression; for comparison; to develop concepts (conceptual metaphor); to create coherence, etc. (RQ 3,4,5)

Frequency Counts

Frequency counts were charted to display the photo topics across the students (RQ3), as well as to gain insight into the frequency of the word "Newark" (RQ 4) and the problems discussed by the students (RQ 3,5).

Summary

This dissertation explores the curriculum and classroom practices of a multimodal (visual, oral, textual) literacy project that acts as a model of *Education for Social Consciousness*. The first question addresses the social-historical context within which the project exists- in particular the school culture. The second research question investigates the history of the project, the teacher's goals and the ways in which the project bridges the gap between school and community language and practices. The third research questions focuses on the "everyday" themes/topics the students explore ("what is") through the mediums of photography, poetry and narrative. The fourth research question considers the students' construction of the abstract concept of "Newark" and how they use mediational devices, in particular metaphor, to negotiate the contradictory meanings they encounter. Finally, the fifth research question analyzes the ways the students go beyond describing "what is" as they consider underlying causes for the problems in the community, reasons about why change is necessary and imagine possible solutions ("what could be"). This question also examines how the students create cohesion (through the mediational device of metaphor) as they contextualized their experience

over time and place.

The Results chapter is organized around the research questions in order. There are five sections each addressing a research question, starting with Research Question 1, entitled: *Educating in an "Oasis": The School Context and the Teacher* and ending with the section discussing Research Question 5: *Imagination, Agency and Social Responsibility*.

CHAPTER SEVEN
RESULTS

Educating in an "Oasis": The School Context and the Teacher

While working on this project, I simultaneously visited other high poverty elementary schools as part of my position as a professor in a Teacher Education department at a local college. Similar to the trend across the country, these schools were deeply effected by NCLB, with highly regimented curriculum, seemingly unhappy teachers and a real lack of arts education. I began to realize that the teacher, the school and the curriculum at the center of my research were indeed unique and could serve as a model of what is possible. Based on research question one, this section illustrates the school culture within which the teacher, students and curriculum thrives.

I organized this chapter in the form of a narrative. The answering of this research question relies heavily on the interview with the teacher coded and analyzed for general themes regarding testing/NCLB, the administration and the school. The teacher's account is triangulated with multiple data sources: excerpts from the school website, statistics regarding the school from the New Jersey Department of Education website, my own observations and notes from visiting the school. In addition, the student narratives and poetry were analyzed using Atlas ti for references to "school." The goal is to give a sense of the school culture from multiple perspectives: the researcher (myself), the teacher, the students, and the statistical data.

The teacher interview, observations of the school and student writings demonstrate the central role of the administration for the WIL project's success. The principal (Mr. K) began working at the school in 2000, about two years after the teacher

started. Before that, the school was a different place, as the teacher explains in her interview:

"The year Mr. K came to the school was the year I was going to leave. I was going to finish out my certification and move to Brooklyn. I was out, I was done. It was an institution of violence and disorganization and frustration and nobody was happy to be there. And so I was just going to finish out my certification process and leave. And I really didn't even care, I was going – it was so unprofessional, I've always been a professional and it was so unprofessional that I was just going to get my certification and then just be out and not even worry about my two weeks, worry about anything."

Burnt-out after just two years of teaching, Ms. L was ready to leave. Ms. L unsurprisingly encompasses many of the factors that statistically point to high attrition rates: working in a high poverty district, a lack of resources, the lack of a mentor, alternate route preparation, idealism, etc. Luckily for Ms. L and her students, however, a new principal intervened and everything changed. According to the teacher, the Newark Department of Education sent the new principal to her school to fail. Known as one of the worst schools in Newark, Malcolm X School became home to the maverick principal. Instead of failing, however, he came in and transformed the school completely. As the teacher explains, "*I would say he transformed the school, but like any great leader he allows people to participate in the transformation."*

The following themes emerged from the teacher interview as key changes the principal made to transform the physical and social environment of the school:

- Creating a safe and welcoming social and physical environment
- Ongoing emotional and motivational support

- Supporting community through teacher initiatives
- Easing the workload through smaller class size and a reduction in "unnecessary" paperwork

The principal created an environment where the teachers and students felt empowered and supported.

Creating a Safe and Welcoming Space

As discussed earlier, school safety is a major issue for teacher retention. It was a major factor in this particular teacher's reason for wanting to leave under the previous administration. As the teacher discusses in her interview, when Mr. K the new principal came to the school,

"Kids who were 16 and in the eighth grade got transferred out. Our school used to be kind of like a dumping ground of students who were kicked out of other schools because of bringing weapons."

Based on the schools statistics since 2003 (Table 5), it was not the policy of the principal to just to suspend or expel non-cooperative children. The student suspension rate is on average much lower then the state average. I also included data from the closest neighboring school, located about three blocks from the school in the study as well as the sate average in an effort to contextualize the data:

Table 5: *Percentage of students suspended during the school year. Source: 2004-05 and 2005-06 NJ School Report Card*

Year	Malcolm X School	Neighboring school	State Average
2005-06	1.8%	3.0%	4.4%
2004-05	1.5%	3.4%	4.1%
2003-04	2.2%	3.0%	4.5%

According to Table 5, the school's suspension rate is half that of the state average and one third less then the neighboring school.

The culture of the school changed through creating a sense of community and support for families, staff, teachers and students. From observations of the school and corroborated in the teacher's interview, it was clear that the principal, Mr. K, had a very strong presence. He is extremely visible. On most visits to the school I saw him in the hallways talking to students and teachers. He was always accessible and open to talk with me as well. He welcomed students, teachers and visitors with a smile and knows everyone by name. The students recognized his visibility and discussed it in their *Where I Live* narratives:

"My brothers and I walk to school. We are extra careful when we cross the street because sometimes the cars go very fast. When we get to school we see Mr. K and the crossing guard. When I get inside I see the teachers and some students. I think my school and teachers are cool. There is always something to do and places to go."

In my initial visit to the school, I noticed the welcoming physical space. The teacher discussed in her interview that one of the first things the principal did when he arrived was to have the cafeteria painted and made sure little things that make a big difference were fixed, like broken light bulbs. In my position as a teacher educator, I visited numerous urban schools and have been discouraged by physical condition of the school and the coldness of the people and the hallways. However, as can be seen from the photo of the entranceway (Figure 4) taken from the school website, the physical space creates a sense of community and welcoming for the students, and teachers and families.

Figure 4: Photograph of the entranceway of the Malcolm X school.

Ongoing emotional and motivational support

In her interview, the teacher emphasized the support and sense of community she feels at the school. She attributes this to the steps the principal took when he arrived, such as fixing the facilities, but also his general disposition towards the teachers. He supports them emotionally with a lot of motivational talk:

"*Every day on the announcements, it was always like 'thank you for all your hard work and dedication.' He would come in around the school and look in on all the classrooms and say I really appreciate what you're doing, to everybody. So that was just tremendous in and of itself."*

This daily encouragement was an important point for the teacher. Just being told she was appreciated changed her attitude about her work tremendously. This motivational talk was geared towards both the teachers and the students. I noticed this in

my visits to the school, in the motivational posters throughout the hallways, as shown in Figure 5, where it says, *"You never know what you can do until you try."*

Figure 5. Photograph of a hallway display at Malcolm X School.

The photograph (Figure 5) also reflects the vibrant curriculum from other classrooms displayed in the hallways. In my walks through the school, I often saw such displays around various topics, including the history of great African Americans shown above, as well as displays documenting African-American people's contribution to science.

The sense of belonging and pride discussed by the teacher is reiterated by the students themselves. Many of the students wrote about their school in their "Where I Live" essays, as seen in the following statements taken from different students:

"I like living in Newark mostly because of my school. I think that Malcolm X School is the best in Newark."

"The school that my friends and I attend is great. We like it a lot because we go on a lot

of field trips and because we learn a lot of new things everyday."

The positive nature of the school atmosphere for the emotional well-being of students is perhaps best expressed by one student as he writes:

"I go to school in Newark. Everyday after school I go home and I feel accepted for who I am."

It is not only the children who feel accepted for who they are, it was the also the teacher.

Supporting Community through Teacher Initiatives

Mr. K provided not only verbal encouragement, but also physical space and economic support to teacher initiatives. Many of the teacher initiatives were aimed to enhance parent and family participation in the school, as Ms. L discussed in her interview:

"The things that were trying to happen before he came, like people were trying to make the community room happen, people were trying to make the PTA happen, those things have flourished."

The principal assisted in the development of student clubs including the drama club which was a project of interest to the teacher at the center of this study:

"He (the principal) allowed our school to develop the chess club and the drama club and the bike club. The first thing he did was, Sheheeda and I, we were going to start a drama club and he had the lights fixed in the auditorium and had the stage redone."

The drama club was hugely successful in bringing in parents to the school for the production. I attended several of these productions, and found the energy and enthusiasm of the families contagious. These activities were a source of pride for the students as well. A number of the students discuss the extracurricular activities offered at their

school in their "Where I live" essays, for example, as one student exclaimed, "We have lots of activities like basketball, bike club, drama club and debate." One student's essay in particular reflected her consciousness of the underlying meaning and the importance of such programs for not just filling time after school, but creating community and providing positive alternatives:

"There aren't that many positive groups in Newark. Gangs like bloods, Crips and Outlaws are recruiting our young blood. They are the ones turning youth on each other. Some positive groups are right here in Newark. There are clubs like drama, bike, chess and debate. They are recruiting our young blood too. They are the ones bringing families together not ripping families apart."

The school culture created a context where students wanted to be there and so did the teachers. The statistics about faculty mobility give further evidence of the schools high rate of teacher retention. Table 6 compares faculty mobility averages at the state level to that of the school in study (Malcolm X School) and, again, to the closest neighboring school located three blocks away. Given the fact that high poverty schools on average lose over one fifth of their teachers (Ingersoll, 2003) *during* any given school year, these numbers are truly astounding.

Table 6. *Percentage of Faculty who Left During the School Year. Source: 2004-05, 2005- 06 NJ School Report Card.*

Year	Malcolm X School	Neighboring School	State Average
2005-06	2.5%	9.4%	6.7%
2004-05	0.0%	14.6%	7.1%
2003-04	2.2%	Not available	6.9%

While the neighboring school lost 10-15% during the school year, Malcolm X School

lost no one in 2004-05 and just 2% in the other years, far less then even the state average.

Allowing Teachers to "Do What They Do Best"

The principal also eased the teachers' workload. Ms. L spoke about how she had 23 students in her class the first year and that is now down to 16. According to the 2005-06 NJ School Report Card, the average class size at Malcolm X was 13.6, the closest neighboring school had an average of 17.2 and the state 19.2 students per teacher.

Table 7 compares the teacher/student ratio at Malcolm X school, the closest neighboring school, and the state, Malcolm X School has 2- 4 less students per faculty member.

Table 7. *Number of Students per Faculty Member. Source: 2004-05, 2005- 06 NJ School Report Card*

Year	Malcolm X School	Neighboring School	State Average
2005-06	8.4	10.0	11.1
2004-05	7.8	12.4	11.3
2003-04	8.0	12.2	12.0

In addition to class size, the teacher reflected on how the reduction of paperwork affected her morale:

"He had done a number of tremendous things that allowed us to be professionals and one was he totally scaled back on the paperwork. And so we didn't have to worry about unnecessary paperwork anymore."

The teacher expressed the importance of feeling like a "professional" throughout her interview. The principal's expressed conviction that teachers should focus on what they do best (teach children) gave the teacher a sense of agency non-existent under the

previous administration.

NCLB, Testing and the Malcolm X School

When asked in the interview about the impact of No Child Left Behind on her teaching, the teacher expressed that she felt protected by the administration from the testing craze:

"Well, we – we're like an oasis in Newark… Mr. K says, as long as your children are learning, do what you need to do. You know how to make them write. So we're kind of sheltered."

At the time of the interview and this study, high stakes testing only occurred in 4th and 8th grade (this was soon to change as NCLB requirements has since made mandatory the yearly testing of students).The teacher recognized that the school is in fact an exception, or as she so vividly describes it, an "oasis."

"Our school has never really focused on testing. We don't, some schools spend the whole year getting prepared for the testing. What we do is we focus on it a couple of months before the test in the eighth grade and also in the fourth grade. But it's certainly not our main thing, like some schools, testing is the main thing."

They do prepare for the test, especially in the weeks leading up to it. At the time the tests given in the 6th grade were not high stakes- though I did note the difference in the attitude of the teacher and the students during testing days, as documented in my field notes:

"The teacher was in a bad mood today, I found her to be uncharacteristically frustrated with the kids. It is testing day- the children were testing all morning this is their first period back maybe that had something to do with it?"

As Figures 6 & 7 indicate, the school's scores are higher than average in the

district. These figures, taken from the New Jersey School Report Card data, compare school, district and State performance on the Grade Eight Proficiency Assessment (GEPA) in Mathematics and Language arts/literacy.

Although the school is not at the state average of 67.7% proficiency, the school's score of 55.7% proficiency is a full 12.7 percentage points above the city average of 43% proficiency in language arts. In Mathematics, the state-wide average is 43.7% proficiency, Malcolm X school was close behind with 39.3%, while the district's average was 25.7%.

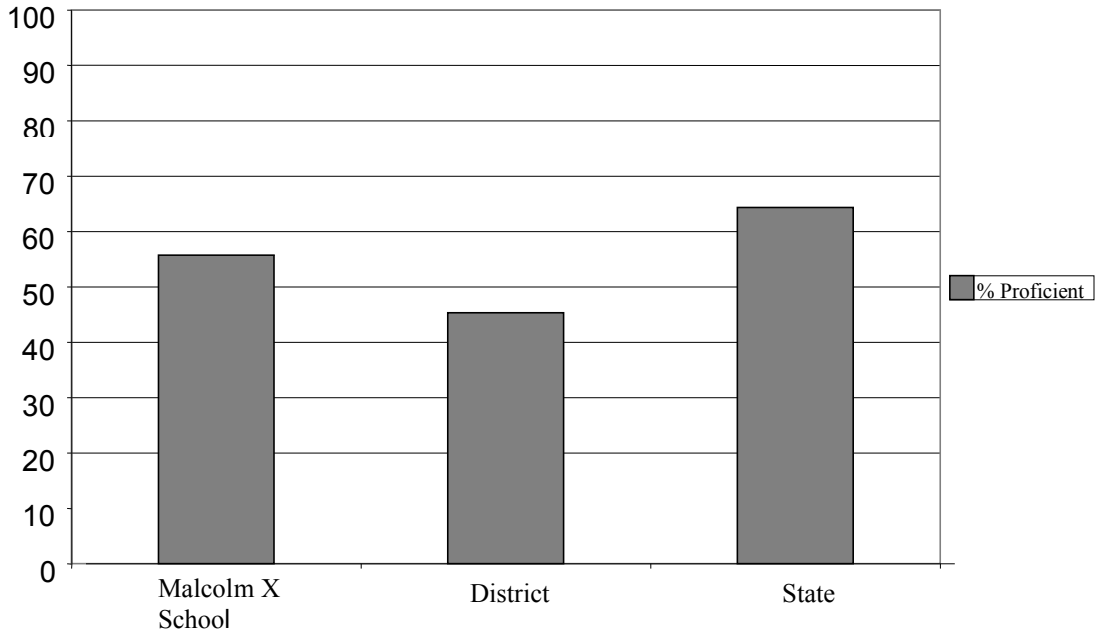

Figure 6. Comparison of Malcolm X School, District and State Grade Eight Proficiency Assessment (GEPA) percentiles: Language Arts and Literacy. Source: 2004-05 NJ School Report Card.

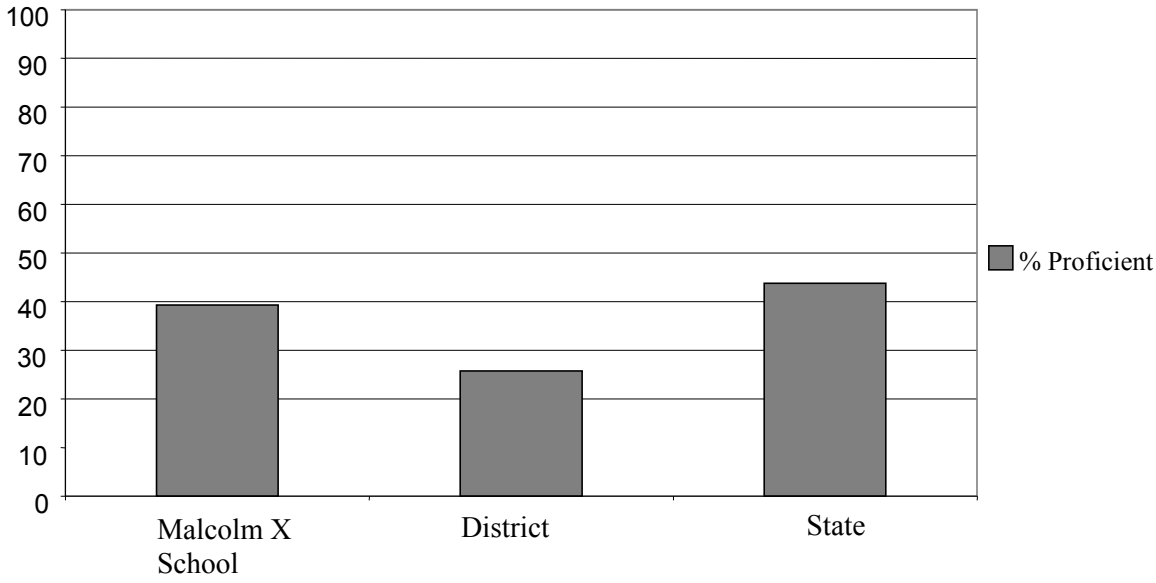

Figure 7. Comparison of Malcolm X School, District and State Grade Eight Proficiency Assessment (GEPA) percentiles: Mathematics. Source: 2004-05 NJ School Report Card

In considering the sixth grade language arts scores (Table 8, below), the grade in which they do the photography project, Malcolm X school scores substantially higher at 52.1% proficiency, almost 25% higher then the neighboring school just a few blocks away, and about 8% higher than the district average.

Table 8. *Comparison of School, District and State New Jersey Assessment of Skills and Knowledge (NJASK6) Language Arts/ Literacy Proficiency Percentiles. Source: 2005-06 NJ School Report Card*

	Proficiency Percentages
Malcolm X School	52.1%
Neighboring School	28.1%
District	44.3%
State of New Jersey	65.8%

These statistics illustrate that the school fared well especially when compared to the district and even to the state, and yet they did not limit their curriculum to mere test preparation. Though it is difficult to ascertain the cause of the school's increased scores across the board, the teacher attributed it to the positive school culture:

"And I think as a result of all that community involvement, as a result of the morale of the teachers, as a result of parent participation and all these things that our scores in ESPA and GEPA have gone up tremendously."

The school also provided catered breakfasts on the morning of the test. This reflected the school administration's understanding of the interconnection of the child's cognitive, physically, social-emotional development. There are also motivational posters throughout the school around testing time with such statements as *"We will beat the GEPA!"* It is not only about the individual passing or failing it is the school taking on the test. The poem below (based on the R. Kelly song), for example, is hung in the hallway of the entrance of the school:

'I BELIEVE I CAN FLY'
MALCOLM X SCHOOL

I BELIEVE I CAN FLY
ADD, SUBTRACT, DIVIDE AND MULTIPLY
I THINK ABOUT IT EVERY DAY AND NIGHT
I READ STORIES AND I WRITE ESSAYS

I BELIEVE I CAN FLY
ADD, SUBTRACT, DIVIDE AND MULTIPLY
I'LL DO MY BEST ON THE A.S.K. ESPA TEST
HARD WORK WILL ALWAYS BRING SUCCESS

I BELIEVE I CAN SOAR
I SEE ME GETTING THAT HIGH ESPA SCORE

MALCOLM X SCHOOL WILL DO OUR BEST
TO FLY HIGH ON THE A.S.K. ESPA TEST

I BELIEVE I CAN FLY
ADD, SUBTRACT, DIVIDE AND MULTIPLY
I THINK ABOUT IT EVERY DAY AND NIGHT
I READ STORIES AND I WRITE ESSAYS

I BELIEVE I CAN SOAR
I SEE ME GETTING THAT HIGH ESPA SCORE
MALCOLM X SCHOOL WILL DO OUR BEST
TO FLY HIGH ON THE A.S.K. ESPA TEST

Summary

Through his actions, such as standing outside in front of the school every morning to greet parents and the children, and his active support of teacher initiatives that involve parents, for example the PTA and the drama club, the principal built a community and a school culture created a space where children, parents and teachers felt a sense of pride and they wanted to be there. Such a culture is necessary to maintain high quality and idealistic educators. The mission of the school gives further insight as to why this project was possible at this school:

> The *Malcolm X School* Community believes that all children can be successful. We endeavor relentlessly, using our resources to develop learners that are:
>
> - highly motivated
> - critical thinkers
> - problem solvers
> - self reliant
> - responsible
> - cooperative
> - productive citizens
> - striving to demonstrate their highest level of achievement

This mission is very different then promising to "create competitors for the global economy." The mission of the school parallels the goals of education for social consciousness. It holds in high esteem higher order thinking skills such as problem

solving and critical thinking skills, while at the same time addressing the social emotional responsibility of education- to develop learners that are self motivated and socially responsible citizens.

The next section travels from the school setting into the classroom elaborating on the project itself – its goals, its history, the role of the teacher and the ways in which the school culture animated the *Where I Live* project.

The "Where I Live" Project: Educating for Social Consciousness

From a Cultural-Historical Activity Theory (CHAT) perspective, learning and beliefs are understood as situated in a socio-historical context. (Wertsch,1991; Vygotsky, 1978) Therefore, to understand learning and social consciousness it is important to study the context in which the learning takes place. Whereas the previous chapter focused on the school culture and NCLB- this chapter (based on Research Question 2) links the school culture to the classroom as I focus on the day to day activities in the classroom, the role of the teacher and the history and development of the *Where I Live* curriculum. This chapter also explores how the activities of the curriculum make learning meaningful through bridging the gap between school and out of school experiences. The aim is to show how the project's activities and materials create a context that facilitated social consciousness. This question draws primarily on ethnographic data: fieldnotes, observations of classroom interactions, the teacher interview, a review of curriculum materials, as well as student work and the school website.

The Teacher, the History and the Goals of the Project

The teacher's passion and joy for her work drew me into the project. She is a dynamic, passionate, caring educator. She loves her students and is driven by a love of people and a deep commitment to social change. She takes her work home with her, literally. For example, about a year after I completed data collection, I received a call from her asking if she could come over for Christmas with her student who lives in a group foster care and has no one with whom to spend the holiday. I also lived in Newark, and he wasn't allowed to leave the city. It was not an easy task. Mr. K (the principal) even got involved and called the agency in order for the boy to be released for the day.

When they arrived for Christmas dinner, the teacher also brought presents for her student to open.

The teacher is the heart of this project and the main reason that it existed. The students' writings reflect their understanding of Ms. L and her love and respect for them:

"We have lots of teachers, but my favorite teachers are Ms. L and Mrs. R. One reason I like them is because they are wonderful teachers and they will never give up on their students. They help you understand problems and help you with them."

Ms. L came into teaching through the alternate route, a program that began in New Jersey where teachers can teach while taking courses at night to get their degree. She is a political activist and like many teachers, has a vibrant personality that makes her the center of attention whenever she walks in the room.

In her interview, Ms. L explained the inspiration of her project came from the *Theater of the Oppressed*, by Augusto Boal (2002). Boal did a similar project as a literacy program with peasants in Brazil. As a poet and photographer, the teacher is dedicated to what she calls the "democratic" aspect of the medium:

"I think photography is the most immediate form of visual art, as opposed to painting, drawing. I think you could do the project with any of these mediums, but it's something where you can capture a moment immediately. And it's also very democratic in that way. That anybody can learn to take a camera and take pictures. Poetry's the same way. I think they're both democratic, accessible forms."

The project began as a photography club, and developed into the literacy curriculum for one fifth grade class and eventually to the entire 6th grade. As the teacher explained in her interview, at first the students just took pictures and she developed them:

"So I started, this is my third year, so in 2001 when I was in a self-contained classroom in fifth grade, when I was teaching fifth grade. They didn't do any of the developing, any of the printing. We had a community photographer come in and we integrated photography into so many aspects of what we were doing at that time. And that was a really great class and that was a really great year. We kind of walked around with the cameras and took pictures and answered that question. And we did essays on that during the project and then the poetry after."

At the end of the first year, the students and teacher held a poetry night and photography exhibit. The high parent turnout and children's enthusiasm made it an extremely rewarding event:

"Eighty percent of them came in with their poems memorized and just read them on the microphone and introduced themselves and read to their parents. And that was an excellent event. I think the parent turnout was probably about 60%. And it was just great and the kids felt really good about themselves and we had the photography up around the cafeteria for about two months."

Considering that, according to the NJ School Report card for Malcolm X School, an average of 34.4% of students leave during the course of the school year 60% turnout is extremely high. The parents are overwhelmingly supportive of the project. In fact, each year many parents make monetary contributions to the project, a testament of their support.

The project has grown through support from the principal and a small grant from Michael Jordan/Nike foundation. A storage closet across the hall from Ms. L's classroom

was transformed into a darkroom, allowing the teacher to integrate the developing of the film into the curriculum and create writing assignments around all aspects of the project: *"So that was the beginning and I started it as influenced, obviously, by Augusto, but also as something that would act as a center for their writing. That the photograph that they would take would be the foundation for their writing after that and that would keep them focused on the project."*

The Year of My Study

By the time I was studying the project in the 2003-2004 school year, it was in its fourth year. The photography project was part of the writing component of the students' sixth grade language arts curriculum. The students took separate classes with other teachers for social studies and reading (as well as math and science). However, all of these subjects are integrated within the *Where I Live* curriculum.

Similar to the Discipline Based Art Education (DBAE) approach (Eisner, 1987/1988) the teacher integrated Art history, Art criticism, Aesthetics, and Art production in the project. The *Where I live* curriculum took this approach further in making the art meaningfully based in the real lives of the students.

The teacher began the project early in the school year by historicizing the struggle for democracy as depicted and expressed through the arts. Art history was not reduced to a history of artists in eternal dialogue with other artists, but instead she presented artists interacting with their own historical context in addition to other artistic trends. Art history in this conception is history mediated by the arts. For example, the class studied Dorothea Lange who is best known for her photographs of the depression and its effect on farmers and agricultural workers. The students were also introduced to the vast artistic

production coinciding with U.S. based and international social movements, including the Civil Rights Movement.

The goal of this historicization was to help students situate themselves and their artistic production in the present social context. In other words, connecting "what was" to "what is." In her interview, the teacher elaborated on the children's need for a more coherent understanding of African American history, which she teaches through the arts: *"They don't understand, for example, that the Civil Rights Movement was different from the abolitionist movement… One thing we study in particular is this book, Freedom, that's an anthology of all documents of everything from slavery and pictures of slaves who wrote slave narratives or contributed to slave narratives to Klan activity to the Barakas and the 60s. So that gives them kind of a timeline."*

The book she describes, *Freedom: A Photographic History of the African American Struggle,* by Manning Marable and Leith Mullings (2002), is kept in the back of the classroom on display for the entire school year. It includes a timeline of African-American history, with photos of slavery, lynchings, segregation, civil right struggles, and great African American leaders like Martin Luther King Jr., Malcolm X, Rosa Parks, Mohammad Ali, the 1968 Olympics, as well as Newark's own Amiri and Amini Baraka.

Students learned about the photographer not only as documenter, but also as an active participant in changing society. As part of the project, the teacher took the students to a photography exhibit at the Newark Museum as well as to the International Center for Photography in New York City. The teacher explained the exhibit they visited on the work of photographer Bruce Davidson:

"The stuff that Bruce Davidson did was really excellent when we went to study at the ICP, because what the curator had brought up was that the people documenting the Civil Rights Movement, the photographers weren't just documenting, but they were protecting the activists. They were protecting them, because there was always white lynch mobs following everywhere, but if you had a camera to record it, then they were less apt to attack you in a violent way."

In addition to studying the photos for historical content and meaning, the students engaged in analytic discussions critiquing the technical aspects of professional documentary photographers, each other's, and their own work.

As the teacher explained, the curriculum meets the required standards through writing assignments and activities based on the photography project:

"So this is something where we learn the actual vocabulary, but then we also learn how to use vocabulary and all the skills, how to read through texts. Some of our objectives, for example, are read instructional texts and measure comprehension. So we do that – when they write, for example, we have a writing prompt that we have to do for expository writing or instructional writing. They're telling people how to make a photograph or how to use the darkroom or anything like that. And it's directly based out of their experience, which makes it – you always think and talk about ideas before you write them and these are things that they're talking about, not necessarily – you know, the writing prompts that the Board had are so ridiculous and stupid."

The students visit the computer lab a few times a week and also used the computer in the classroom. Writing assignments as part of the photography project included answering such questions as *"What is wrong with this picture?"* requiring them

to think critically and apply their knowledge about the content and technical aspects of photography. In the following excerpt taken from a student's work, the writing assignment was *"How to make a photogram":*

"A photogram is something that records an image in black and white. Making a photogram takes hard work. You will need the following items: an enlarger, the developer, the fix and stop bath and photo paper with water too if you want your picture perfect. An enlarger is a machine that uses light to expose an image on photo paper."

The student continued to describe the step by step process of creating a photogram that the class undertook as they learned how to use the equipment in the darkroom. She ended with an analysis of her photogram and she connected it to the art from the museum:

"My picture has a lot of school supplies in it, erasers, sharpeners and my bracelet that has my name on it. The e's on my bracelet don't show up too well but, without e's it still spells my nick-name. I think my picture is great. It reminds me of the zany picture I saw at the museum all the stuff were laid out as if they didn't care and that is where I got my idea. That picture was a role model for me."

The students collaboratively critiqued professional photos (and their own photos) for both formal aspects as well as meaning. One day I observed as the teacher strung numerous photos with mistakes (such as blurriness) across the classroom and the students discussed their errors and the remedies. During their trip to the museum, they stopped by a number of photographs to evaluate the meaning, the feelings the picture evoked as well as to analyze the photo's strengths and weaknesses.

In addition to the process of the activity as the basis for writings, the children learned to plan, organize, write and edit essays and poetry based on their own life

experiences around the inquiry *Where I Live.*

Education for Social Consciousness: Stepping Out into the "Real World"

As part of the project, each student was given a camera. However, before the students take the cameras home, they went out as a class to photograph their neighborhood, to develop their photographic "eye." The act of venturing out into the students' community expanded the physical and psychological space of the classroom.

Ms. L participated in the community through her activism and leisure activities. Out of school, the relationship between teacher and student changed, for example, as I reflected in my field notes after observing a conversation between Ms. L and her student: *"The teacher was upset with a student today. She raised a number of times to student (in front of other students) that she saw the student on city bus and asked why the student pretended she didn't know her- student answered repeatedly- 'oh, I was going to my grandparents.' Ms. L. told the student it hurt her feelings- and I do believe it did deeply."*

The teacher's willingness to engage the children on this level allowed her to teach them about personal interactions and mutual respect and that such respect held them accountable for their actions in and out of school. The fact that the teacher rides on the same city bus is also notable. The teacher draws a connection between her involvement in organizing and living in Newark and her success in the project:

"My third year was when - that was two years ago - my third year was when we were doing The Wiz, which was tremendous. And we were doing the photo project for the first time and I was working on the campaign for Ras Baraka. And that was just great, because I really felt - that was the first time - ironically, the year before I left - that I felt

like a part of Newark. And that was a huge barrier to break down. Usually people move into cities and you make your own community within the first year. And it was two years of not having that. I was really proud of the work that we did on that campaign. And I felt at home going door-to-door in Newark, whereas in the last two campaigns, I didn't live in Newark. And it wasn't just I'm assisting with this campaign, but this was I understand where people are coming from much more than before. I understand what the goals are much more than before. And it was just amazing. That was a really great year."

That year she was immersed in her teaching and in Newark. I attended the production of *The Wiz* that Ms. L and another teacher organized as part of the drama club. Many of the students were from her classes and the parent turnout was incredible.

As she discussed, her work on the Ras Baraka campaign immersed her in the city. Ms. L participated in all aspects of the grassroots campaign. She also documented the campaign through her photography and wrote a paper about it for her graduate class. In discussing this tradition of activist and political thinkers in the hip-hop generation, Kitwana (2002) begins his book with Ras Baraka's campaign.

According to the teacher, the year of her most active participation in Newark marked her best year of teaching. Conversely, the teacher candidly discusses her most difficult school year, the year I am documenting the project:

"So this year I became very distanced from it and very desensitized to it, indifferent to it. And it made the year the most difficult year I had teaching, ever. Because we just weren't communicating. I wasn't communicating with the children. And it's just something you have to really be conscious and aware of all the time."

In her interview she talked about how as a teacher you have to "relearn compassion." She gave the example of a homeless student who she gave a hard time to one day. She discussed how she became frustrated with student's lack of attendance, and like some other teachers, she felt she temporally lost her sense of compassion:

"Some teachers experiencing the same thing I experience are very discipline-oriented. Like, you got to get your shit together, because you're not going to survive otherwise. So you get frustrated. Is it more important that he brings in his homework or is it more important that I react to him in a way that makes this a safe space for him and makes it a place for him to want to be, because he has nowhere else to go."

Ms. L's concern about safe space for the children resonated of the goal of the principal and the school culture in general as discussed in the previous section. Based on my interactions and observations with the teacher, I learned that like many reflective educators, she was overly self-critical and extremely hard on herself, especially in comparison to what is often found in high poverty school districts. For example, in *Ghetto Schooling,* Jean Anyon (1997) observed a Newark school in the same neighborhood whose "lived professional culture… systematically degraded the children" (p. 30). Anyon gives an example of both black and white teachers at the elementary school being verbally abusive with comments such as "If I'd had a gun I'd kill you. You're all hoodlums."(p. 30) said to a class of fifth graders and "You're disgusting. You remind me of children I would see in a jail or something."(p.29) said by teacher to a group of first graders. Anyon commented that due to the treatment of the students by teachers at the school in her study "almost all of the students I interviewed at Marcy school seemed to be in an oppositional stance to their teachers; most were aware they are

in an environment which is hostile and aggressively rejecting of them"(p. 33).

I did not experience anything within the Malcolm X School indicating such attitudes or behaviors by students or teachers. I heard other teachers yelling at the children as they walked in the hall to make them stand in line or be quiet and there were times when Ms. L was visibly frustrated with the students. However, she always worked from a place of love and her kindness and respect for the students shone through. In these moments I realized that her ability to be self- reflective and to engage the students in this project made her successful even in her most difficult year. I also realized just how challenging teaching can be and the importance of her experience as a teacher-activist for her success.

The photography project enabled Ms. L to maintain her connection to the students and reminded her of their daily out of school experiences. Although she felt she lacked communication at times, the students' writings illustrate the strength of her teaching. Out of 48 statements about "school," the vast majority enthusiastically displayed a true love of learning, for example:

"I go to a grand school and I am proud that I go there, because I learn many new lessons in school, and the teachers they are enjoyable and understanding."

In fact, there were no strong negative comments, only twice was a downside expressed:

"Sometimes going to school is not fun but you are going to need it. Because of the education that you need to put in your head."

"The most astonishing thing about my homeland is the school I go to, Malcolm X School. Occasionally it can get boring but I maintain going because I know it will provide me with an enhanced future. I'm usually more at school than at my own house, so it seems."

The school culture, the teacher's reflective nature and the project's activities created an atmosphere of trust and mutual respect. It is only in such an environment that *Education for Social Consciousness* can occur. Through the curriculum the teacher and students were able to bridge the gap between home and school. This was important for the students and perhaps equally as important, the teacher.

"Rhyming Black": Language and Literacy Experiences

In her interview, the teacher described the novelty of talking about their out of school experiences for the students in her class:

"It's so funny, we were talking about writing, beginning the essay, beginning the essay with quotes. And I said, what is a part of your everyday life that you can quote from? And they're, like, the dictionary? No, and I said, music, music. And they said, yeah, but—"

Class discussions revealed the chasm between the students' home and school life. The following conversation ensued between Ms. L and the class as I was observing on "Poem in your Pocket Day":

> Teacher - *So we will write a poem and put it in our pocket when you see people on the playground or at the bus stop.*
>
> Child - *Home?*
>
> Teacher- *So when see people when it's appropriate- not on line in the hallway- but you can take out your poem and read your poem.*
>
> Child 2- *You trying to get a black brother shot (laughter) you can't go to the bus stop and start reading a poem! (laughter)*

Ms. L then drew on her experience in the community and her own knowledge of Newark as she shifted the discussion to the rich history of poets in Newark, to which a few of the children exclaimed agreement. This example illustrated the teacher's ability to recognize their unique everyday experience and scaffold it with her knowledge of Newark's rich cultural history. Through this process she opened the door for them to think about their own potential to carry on this historical tradition, which is a fundamental part of *Education for Social Consciousness*, the awareness of oneself as an agentive being situated in a socio-historical context.

In my observations and in the children's writings it was clear the language of poetry lent itself to the children's bringing in African American linguistic forms, for example in this poem written by a student:

I'm Going to Beat you up

You came to my town
Threatening to beat me down
In my town
I said no sir you must be crazy
Just for saying that
I'm a crack your back
Then after that I'm a
Break you in half and
Feed you to my pet
And it is a baby calf
Just for saying that I'm
A beat you up and crack your back
Once I'm finished I'm going to
Throw you in the dirt
You are going to be hurt
After that I'm going to dig your grave
then I'll beat you with my huge
Shaquille O'Neal sized boot.

This poem is an example of a "Toast", which according to Smitherman (1977) is a "secular streetified version of narrative sequencing"(p.103) where the hero is "fearless,

defiant, openly rebellious, and full of braggadocio about his masculinity, sexuality, fighting ability and general badness" (p.157). As illustrated in the above example, toasts are narrated in the first person and, according to Smitherman, are an epic folk style and "an urban continuance of the trickster, bad nigguh theme done in poetic form" (p. 157). Smitherman further discusses how black writers in the black consciousness movement, such as Nikki Giovanni use this form in their poetry.

In the classroom discussions poetry was an entryway for the children to express their racial identity, as in the following interaction during a poetry workshop:

Teacher: *So what are you going to write about Faison?*

Student: *Not being well*

Teacher: *Not being well?*

Faison: *I feel sick right now -try to think – all my rhyming is not in sync-not feeling well- tell you how I feel…I was going to talk about rhyming black.*

Teacher: *Alright*

The response of the student is an example of what Smitherman (1977) described as tonal semantics, "the use of voice rhythm and vocal inflection to convey meaning in black communication" (p. 134). It is also interesting to note that the student consciously calls his use of language as "rhyming black."

One day when I observed the class, the students were reading poetry aloud. The teacher had one child read "Mother to Son" by Langston Hughes:

Student1: *This poem is called Mother to son- …he was black Ai'ight (Reads poem to self)--- I can't read this---*
Teacher: *Go ahead some one better do it.*
Student1: *(reads)*
Well, son, I'll tell you:
Life for me ain't been no crystal stair.

It's had tacks in it.
And splinters,
And boards torn up,
And places with no carpet on the floor –
Bare.
But all the time
I'se been a-climbin' on,
And reachin' landin's,
Student2: *(yells out from audience) I do that at my house!*
Teacher: *shhhh*
Student1: *Shut up*
Student2: *No you shut up*
Student1: *You shut up*
Teacher: *Okay this was a bad idea*
Other Students: *No! No! No!!*
Student1: *(continues)*
And turnin' corners,
And sometimes goin' in the dark
Where there ain't been no light.
So boy, don't you turn back.
Don't you set down on the steps
'Cause you finds it's kinder hard.
Don't you fall now –
For I'se still goin', honey
I'se still climbin',
And life for me ain't been no crystal stair.
Teacher and students*: (claps) Woowoowowo!*
Teacher: *Shshshshs. This is a great book- is a great poem from*
Student: *Langston Hughes*
Teacher: *Langston*

As the student began to read the poem, he mentions that the author is black. As in the examples discussed earlier there was often implicit and explicit consciousness of the cultural and racial gap between the teacher and the students in the classroom. The students were aware of their own use of language and when the teacher linguistically crossed the cultural gap, for example, as I observed when the teacher exclaimed *"That poem you wrote about ----was so dope."* The children all laughed and whispered among themselves *"she said dope!"*

Although the class was a writing class, the teacher, a poet herself who often

performed live, appreciated poetry as an oral and written art form. I was struck by the coaching that went along with the reading the poetry out loud. She told them *"walk into the room like it is twenty years from now and you are a famous poet."* She would also tell them to *"speak up, because you are saying something brilliant!"* and *"head up."* Similar to the principal's motivational approach to the teachers and students, Ms. L was teaching on many levels, constantly encouraging the students' self confidence while developing their vocabulary and knowledge of poetic language:

Student: *This poem is called …Ode?*

Teacher: *Ode like a tribute*

Student: *Ode to……Enchanted Light, by Pablo….*

Teacher: *Neruda- everyone say NE--RUUUU --DA*

Students: *Neeeruuuuuda*

Teacher: *Get hands out of your pocket, loud and clear go ahead.*

On this particular day, after the students read poetry out loud, the students then wrote for about ten minutes. The teacher played jazz music in the background and dimmed the lights, which the students clearly enjoyed. At the end of the class a few of the students volunteered to read their poems, one of which was an earlier version of the poem, *Meant for So Much More*, found in the Introduction of this dissertation (pg xi).

As part of their curriculum, students learned techniques for writing of poetry. They studied poetic devices like alliteration, simile, metaphor and rhyme. I am not sure if it is because of her experience with the children or the fact that she is a poet herself or both, but teacher frequently used metaphor in the daily conversation and lessons, for example above when she said:

Teacher: *Who else-raising your hands-will do the next poem? You going to be dramatic?*

Student: *What you mean?*

Teacher: *Are you going to bring light into these words? Are you going to make the words fly off the page?*

She also used metaphor to explain difficult concepts, for example, one day in the darkroom she was trying to explain the way the photo is developed from the negative. Nobody was getting it (including myself). She then used the metaphor of sunglasses screening the light, which seemed to clarify the concept for the students.

The Darkroom Experience

My observations of the darkroom were among the most insightful into the project. The hands-on active learning context of the darkroom stressed the importance of project based activities, in the sense that the children were able to stand up and move around as they learned. The teacher often put music on, she was very conscious of creating a context for learning. Whereas she put on jazz in the classroom as they wrote poetry, in the darkroom she put on hip-hop. In my observations I was struck by how the music opened up and relaxed the atmosphere of the classroom, and made it enjoyable. There were, of course, times she had to lower it or threaten to turn it off because students became a bit rambunctious, however this was not often necessary. In my observations, they just danced in place as they worked, which was relatively surprising given that there was up to fifteen students in a darkroom the size of a large janitor's closet.

The teacher often began the darkroom session with a group discussion around the center table, where she reviewed the steps in the development process so students could

figure out what they had to do next. The students were working at different levels and speeds. The physical environment and the set- up of the equipment and the materials in the darkroom necessitated the students work together (Figure 8 & 9). The teacher encouraged collaboration, the students did not just work parallel to each other or take turns, they assisted each other and gave each other advice. The darkroom activities embodied Vygotsky's Zone of Proximal Development as the more knowledgeable peers assisted the struggling ones.

This atmosphere of support was apparent as the class engaged in analytic discussions collaboratively critiquing each other's work, with the goal of improving the quality of the photographs. For example, when one student left his picture in the stopbath too long, the teacher asked the others to think about what the student did wrong, and how to remedy it in the future. These discussions illustrated the meaningful problem solving and critical thinking skills developed through the activity.

Figure 8. Photograph of the darkroom: The stopbath.

Figure 9. Photograph of the darkroom: Working with negatives.

I was truly amazed by the students' progress in developing the film. The first days in the darkroom, everyone was lost (including myself). There were so many steps in the process entailed in developing film: using the developers, timing the amount of light to let in, and how long to keep in the stopbath, and problem solving how to the remedy errors. In her interview, the teacher emphasized among other skills, the activity taught the children patience and careful attention to the details of the process. As a long term project, it is not instant gratification. The process involves trial and error, with the final photographs taking weeks to complete, and rushing it at any step often requires starting over again.

The project was only possible because of the smaller class size. If there were thirty children rather then sixteen in the class it would never have worked. On a given day two students would usually be stationed at a developer. In addition, towards the end of the

project a number of them came in, enthusiastically, during their lunch or recess or after-school to work on their photos. On the other side of the spectrum, as in any classroom, there were a few who did not finish, students whose attendance was so scattered that they just didn't complete the project.

The Culminating Event: The Photography Exhibit and Poetry Reading

At the end of the school year the teacher and the students, in cooperation with the administration, organized a poetry reading and photography exhibit in the school for parents. I attended the event as well. The photos were hung in the hallway outside the area of the classroom and darkroom. Next to the photos were the children's *Where I live* narrative essay and/or poetry by each student.

The excited children helped set up the catered event. The room itself used to be just a large storage room off the side of the cafeteria, until the administration and teachers transformed it into a jazz café. It looked like a speak-easy, minus the smoke, with small café tables and chairs, dimmed lights, instruments hung on the wall next to and photos of jazz musicians. The large turnout of students, families, and supporters (including, of course, the principal) packed the house. The event reflected the strength of the project, as the community listened with pride to their children's inspirational expressions of hope and determination.

Summary

The project brought the class beyond the classroom walls through: the act of walking through the neighborhood taking pictures; the study and discussion of the pictures and the corresponding issues pertinent to their lives; linguistically through incorporating poetry and narrative; and inviting families to participate in the culminating

event.

The teacher, an expert in photography and poetry, was able to bring these passions into the classroom with the active support of the administration. The teacher's connection to Newark through her activism is especially relevant, since she is an "outsider" to the community in the sense that she did not grow up in Newark and is not African-American. Through the arts and her organizing experience she is able to ground herself in their experience, making learning meaningful (and enjoyable) for the students.

A central part of preparing children to participate in a democratic society is to encourage discussion, debate and collaboration in the classroom. This curriculum made learning meaningful through inviting students to discuss problems and imagine solutions to a variety of issues they face in their daily lives out of school. During my observations, for example, students engaged in group discussions around the danger in their neighborhood: gangs, drugs, car crashes, and wild dogs; and the joy: friends, family, and community. The next chapter concentrates on the analysis of student work: how the students made this project their own, and the out of school experiences they brought into the classroom through the medium of photography, narrative and poetry.

Mediating the "Everyday" through the Arts

The first two research questions and corresponding sections focused principally on the classroom and the school context. This section (based on Research Question 3) considers the ways in which this multimodal literacy curriculum project facilitated students' conscious awareness of their everyday out of school experience ("what is"). Recalling Figure 2, this section focuses in particular on aspects of the middle circle (friends, family, neighborhood) and its interrelation to the inner circle (the "self") as mediated through the photography, poetry and narratives.

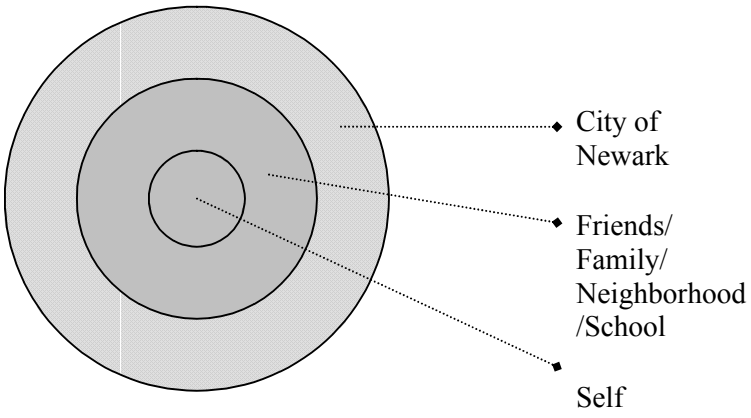

Figure 2 (repeated). "What is": Realms of student experience focused on in this study

The theme of this multimedia project was *Where I Live*, the effectiveness of this inquiry based curriculum lies in its underlying complexity, its relevance and its openness; students can go in many directions based on their own experiences. The students utilized elements of African American Vernacular English (AAVE), such as narrative sequencing, rich storytelling and metaphor to narrate both the joys and problems of their

community, as well as their own internal struggles and triumphs. The photography depicted the problems faced in their community (littering, abandoned houses, vacant lots, etc) explicitly and also metaphorically. The narratives often built upon their conceptual metaphors depicted in their photographs.

"What is": Family, Friends and Community

The students' work emanated with discussions about the greatness of the people in their community: their family, friends and neighbors. Students wrote statements like *"In Newark your family is here"* and *"The people that live around my house are generous and kind. They say hi to me when they see me or speak to me. I know everybody on my street."*

The centrality of peer relationships is not surprising due to the age of the students. The poetry in particular addressed issues of love and friendship. At least three of the girls in the class wrote poems entirely about their friends, for example:

> Where I Live
> I have a best friend
> Where I Live
> Me and her been best friends for a beautiful 12 years
> Where I live
> Friendship is like grass and water
> Where I live
> Friendship is beautiful
> Where I Live
> This the best friendship I ever had in my life
> Where I Live
> Our two lovely names is Christina and Sharmah

Girls were not the only ones emphasizing the importance of the people they love. Two boys wrote their entire poem about their family, for example:

Family

Family is people who care
Family is people who stick by you through thick and thin
Family supports you at hard times.
Family is the closest thing in your life.
My family is my heart.
Family always loves you
Family don't tell your secrets
We argue, we fight we still are family

In the examples above, *"Where I live, friendship is like grass and water"* and "*My family is my heart,"* reflect the use of metaphor by the children to express the intensity of the love the children feel for the people of their community.

The students' narratives often discussed the day to day activities they engage in with their friends: "*Most of my friends live in here. My friends and I do great things in Newark like play basketball, baseball, go to the movies, skating ring, and birthday parties, and even play outside.*" They also discussed the ease with which you can make friends in Newark: *"The reason I like living in Newark is because you can make a lot of friends quicker then you can believe."*

Photographing "What Is"

The teacher taught the students techniques of documentary photography, in particular, taking pictures that tell the viewer a story and thinking critically about the composition of their photographs (lighting, framing, etc.). Overall, Ms. L. allowed the students to photograph whatever represented *Where I Live*. The teacher mentioned to me, however, that she discouraged the students from taking simplistic pictures of just front of their house or of their friends posing because she wanted them to photograph critically and to utilize the techniques they discussed in class. She did not, however, discourage pictures of family members. Interestingly, there were only one or two examples of

photographs that I observed (for which I did not have consent forms) that took pictures of their family or themselves.

On the initial walk through the community she reminded the students to look at the world with a "photographer's eye," meaning they were to apply the knowledge they learned in class from critiquing professional documentary photographers. After going out as a group, the children then took cameras home with them, and were instructed to take about five pictures each. The students then collaboratively reviewed the negative strips to choose the best photograph to develop, based on aesthetics and content. In my observations of this process, I found that students chose their own pictures, but they conferred with the teacher and fellow students. There were a few instances where the teacher steered them towards a particular photo, for example one student took a picture of matchbox cars on his dresser, with a police car crashed into another car, but the final decision was always the student's.

Table 9 gives an overview of the themes of the twenty-five photographs collected as part of this study. There were four photos that overlapped topics, for example a crashed car in a vacant lot or garbage in a vacant lot, these photos were counted in both categories for a total of twenty-nine.

Table 9: *Overview of Objects Photographed by Students*

Object	No. photographs
Abandoned buildings/vacant lots	10
Graffiti	3
Garbage	3
Front of house/driveway	3
Dirty/broken sidewalk or stairs	3
Crashed car	1
Messy room with music player	1
Icicle	1
Mirror	1
Payphone	1
Mailbox	1
Dog behind fence	1

As can be seen in the diversity of topics, the children took pictures of many aspects of their physical environment. A number of the photographic images were metaphorical in nature, in that they represented meanings that may not be apparent on the surface. The narratives were essential for the students to articulate their meanings and for the audience to understand their significance. The photographs acted as a prompt for the student's writings. Appendix C outlines the photo topics with references in their writings.

Problems Addressed by Students

Figure 10 outlines the frequency of issues or problems faced by the community

found across the "Where I Live" writings. It is important to note that this chart could be misleading in that it analyzes the topics across the students' writings, therefore, some students may have discussed topics multiple times within one essay and some not at all.

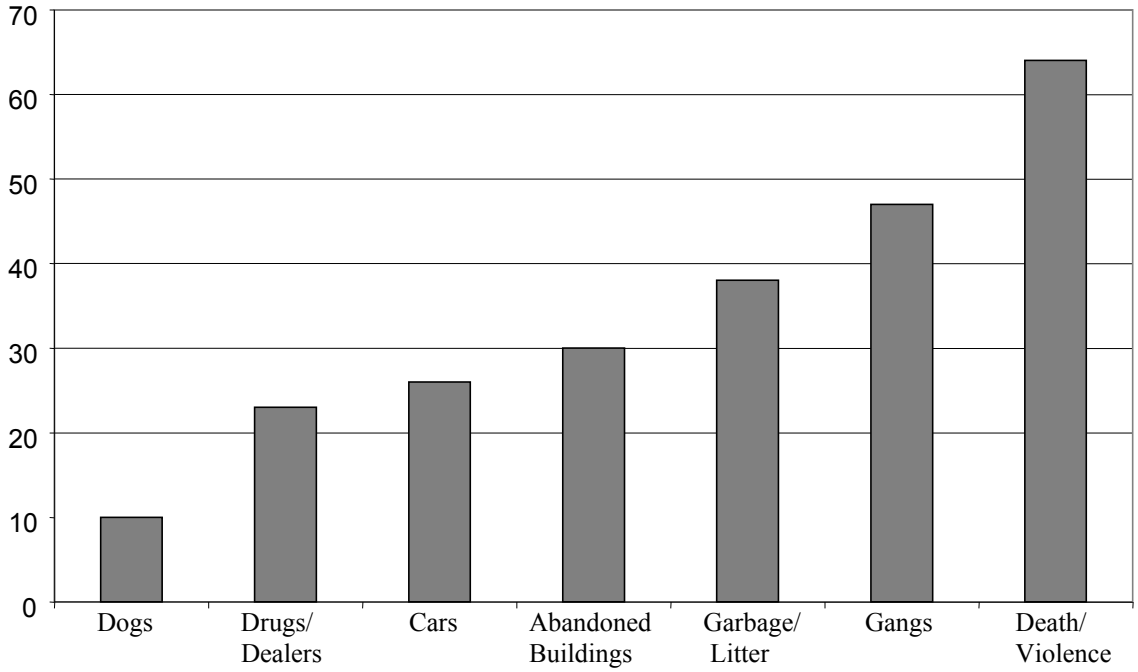

Figure 10: Frequency chart of problems addressed in student writings.

It is not surprising that although they frequently discussed gang violence and drug dealers in their environment, they did not photograph them. Many of the students expressed fear and their strategies for avoiding danger in their writings, for example, *"Where I live is not very nice because people steal thing from each other, kill other and also write on thing that don't belong to them. The main things people do is write on things like someone else home I understand why they do that because someone they know might have died and they want people to remember them so they write their on thing*

most of the times it be thug who be doing that they just write the name of the person." Topics of violence and death were represented in other ways, however, for example, through photos of graffiti and crashed cars.

Figure 11. Student photograph of R.I.P. graffiti

Speeding and stolen cars are a source of fear in the students. The students see first hand the damage cars cause and often discussed them in connection to gang violence: *"Gang members are on the corner. Stolen cars come around once in a while. The gang members hang on the side of my friend's house. There is lots of chaos in and around my environment. Where I live it is terrible because I see a lot of gang members selling drugs right in front of the kids walking down the street."*

Figure 12. Student photograph of a crashed car

"I live in a place where there are gangs. People break into cars and then chase them and some people get injured. Just last month these young men hit this old man in his car in front of the school."

In their narratives, the children utilized metaphor to discuss their experiences of violence, pain and internal struggle. One student drew upon pop culture references of horror films as an analogy to the danger of speeding cars:

"Cars are very dangerous nowadays. They are like Jason Voorhees from Friday the 13th movies, used as killing machines. They use their cars for hit and run and also drive by shootings."

Even photographs of seemingly innocuous objects such as payphones and postboxes represented the fear they experienced in their everyday lives:

Figure 13. Student photograph of a mailbox

"If you live where I live you could get killed when you walk out the door. You could get killed if you're going to the mailbox or going to the store for somebody that is older than you."

In addition to gangs, drug dealers, and speeding cars, the students often discussed the problem of dogs within their community. Vicious dogs lurk behind (loose) fences and tied up in front and back yards and packs of wild stray dogs roam the street. When driving in the area, I have seen these dogs. The teacher confirmed this experience during one of the classes' first neighborhood walk. In my fieldnotes, I described how we came upon a ferocious dog behind a broken fence:

"Along our walk of the neighborhood, we came upon a fence where a pit bull came charging and slammed up at the fence. This caused a bit of commotion as several children jumped into the street and many (including myself) were afraid to walk by because the fence was clearly not that sturdy. Later, as we walked, the teacher and I

discussed the experience of the children and herself of roving packs of dogs in the area surrounding the school."

One brave student photographed a dog from the other side of a fence:

Figure 14. Student photograph of a dog

Many students, although they did not photograph dogs, discussed their personal experiences with dogs in their narratives:

"Fear is someone or something you are afraid of. Have you ever feared anything? I feared a dog. When I was coming out of my home to go to the store for my mother, I noticed a huge dog. I became shocked because I never saw a dog that gigantic before. When I first saw it, I looked at the dog strangely. He began to bark, I became terrified... After that I sat on my porch. Suddenly the dog jumped over the fence. The things that were going through my head were, "Is he going to bite me?" The dog suddenly walked to the driveway so I thought he was gone. I opened the fence and started walking…The dog staggered toward me just before my best friend Daniel pushed me out of the way. The dog bit him. I took him to his house and his mother asked what happened. I told her the

dog across the street from my house bit him. She went down to talk to the owner. They got into an argument and my friend yelled stop!"

Students' (with only one or two exceptions) followed their expressions of fear and negative experiences with a narrative of community, family and friends coming to the rescue in the face of danger. The example below is another student's dog story:

"Ahhhhhhhhh!" I yelled as a vicious dog was chasing me. The dog tore off my pant leg and I became more terrified. I had a feeling that I was not going to make it to the next day. But the community saved me. If my father and his friends weren't outside, I would be 6 feet under."

Another vivid example is one girl's recounting of her brush with death:

"Some people in Newark just kill someone to be in a gang. Last summer I almost got shot. My friends and I were playing then we heard something. But we thought it was a firecracker. Then we turned around the bullet was coming my way but my cousin ran and pushed me down. Then we ran in the backyard. The man they were shooting at ran behind us and my little cousin got shot. But she is still alive."

The students' narratives were often lively tales of drama and heroism. Smitherman (1977) discusses this rich story-telling tradition in African American culture:

> The story element is so strong in black communicative dynamics that it pervades general everyday conversation. An ordinary inquiry is likely to elicit an extended narrative response where the abstract point or general message will be couched in concrete story form. The reporting of events is never simply objectively reported, but dramatically acted out and narrated. The Black English speaker thus simultaneously conveys the facts and his or her personal sociopsychological

perspective on the facts. (p. 161)

The use of storytelling in this way was found throughout the students' work. For example, as seen above, abstract ideas such community, unity and protection are grounded in concrete personal stories of escape from gunshots and vicious dogs.

Conveying Personal Experiences of Pain and Triumph

The project acted as an outlet for many of the students to deal with their overwhelming emotions. The teacher discussed the serious issues her children were experiencing in their daily lives and its effect on their schoolwork:

"And so many of the children have suffered from trauma, in terms of losing a loved one, in terms of being in a deli when it's being robbed, in terms of watching straight out violence on the street, people getting shot for their jackets, people getting hit by cars."

In fact, earlier in the school year a child was shot two blocks away from the school for his jacket. According to the teacher, this had a profound effect on the students and they talked and wrote about it a lot.

One student focused her entire narrative on the pain she felt being separated from her father who she lived with until recently. She utilized metaphor to express the deep sadness she felt:

"I wish I could go back to stay with my dad for the summer and the empty space in my body will go away. My mom was kind of happy. If you were me, you would feel the same way. In school sometimes I just want to cry. I get mad at people for that and then I want to fight other people. Sometimes I cry at home, but I try to hold it in I just can't. If anybody got taken away from your parents I am very sorry and I know how you feel."

In her interview, the teacher discussed the role of the photography project in

facilitating a conscious awareness not only of their socio-historical context, but of themselves and their personal problems:

"So, hopefully, when you ask them, like where do you live, what's that about? Maybe initially they'll say I live on this street or I live in this house, this is my family. I have one little girl who's talking about her family a lot. And she took pictures of her family, so that's weighing heavily on her mind. There's obviously - that's where she feels safe, or maybe there's some kind of stress or anxiety there and that'll come out through her writing, but when - some other children write about the gang issues. It can be very broad, it can be very specific. Maybe they don't even understand it yet. So it's just an opportunity for them to really examine that question, but always with – I don't want to just open a wound and let it fester. It's always, well, what are you going to do about it? How are you going to change it? What is your role? What is your agency in changing that?"

The teacher is conscious of the fact that writing about their experiences can be a painful process for the children. She is deeply committed to communicating concepts of hope, overcoming challenge, belief in oneself to the children, themes familiar to many of the students through the church.

The student writings reflected another form of narrative sequencing particular to black communication- preaching and testifyn. To testify, according to Smitherman (1977) is to tell the truth through "story" as in the sermon in the traditional black church, where the preacher uses dramatic renderings to convey a theme. One student's narrative, in particular, reads as an inspirational allegory of struggle and triumph:

"There are many problems people go through but all of our problems will go away. It is

called the healing process. For example when you are running fast, and you fall, you will get a scar. That scar will heal. That's like you and your friend fighting and then you both become friends again. But sometimes it takes longer than you may think, but you have to wait because the time will come…One of my problems was that I didn't know how to ride a bike without training wheels. I was five years old and I was scared to ride a bike because I kept thinking that I was going to fall. My mother would push the back of the bike and hold it, but one time I thought my mother was pushing me but she wasn't. I was riding my bike by myself without any training wheels. All you have to do is believe in your self."

Through the use of the metaphor of a scar healing and the story of learning how to ride a bike, the student encourages the reader to learn from his life experiences. He returns to his theme of struggle and triumph and believe in oneself through the metaphor of a haunted house:

"It seems like I am in the haunted house with all of these struggles, like there's no daylight in this place, trapped in here with no escape. You're by yourself inside this house and you are trying to get out. But you think it is impossible. You hope and believe you will make it out. You fight your way out without any doubt and believe in yourself."

As part of the photography aspect of the project, the student took a picture of an icicle (Figure 15).

Figure 15: Student photograph of an icicle

The cross-modal nature of metaphor allowed the student to develop the meaning of this conceptual metaphor in his narrative:

"Like a frozen icicle, all my problems freeze up, meaning that my problems are here and are not leaving. But sometimes my issues go away. Then the water freezes and it repeats the process again. It's like an icy waterfall. Solid ice that is unbreakable."

Through the project, the students have a forum to confront and discuss their everyday experiences. The teacher scaffolded social consciousness as she guided the students to see their "everyday" surroundings with a critical eye and to tell a story with their picture; similar to the documentary photographers they studied. In this sense, the project and the teacher reached the children where they were at. The multimodal (visual, oral, text) nature of curriculum gave the students a variety of tools to explore their sense of self in relation to their social and physical world.

Co-Constructing the Concept of "Newark"

This section (based on Research Question 4) analyzes the students' concept of Newark- the city in which they live. Within the *Where I live* writings, as in the pilot study, the students used the word "Newark" hundreds of times, with as many as twenty-five times in one essay. Although the teacher never said the essay must be about Newark (the topic was *Where I Live*), out of a total of 28 essays only four did not mention "Newark." Of these four, one was incomplete and two focused their narratives on their internal struggle.

After my initial readings of the narratives I realized the student's discussions of Newark paralleled genres of Newark that I have encountered in literature, newspapers and as a life long resident of New Jersey and a resident of the city for the past seven years. I begin this section with an overview of the genres of Newark expressed in archival data, such as newspapers, literature, the city website and other internet sources. Discourse analysis conducted on the student writings coded for unity and variance with the genres and the use of metaphor as a cognitive tool to negotiate the sometimes conflicting meanings of Newark. To organize this section, I chose to juxtapose the student work with the archival data to draw out the parallels and divergences.

Appropriating Genres of Newark

In his book, *Vicious Modernism: Black Harlem and the Literary Imagination* (1990), James De Jongh discusses the existence of two Harlems within literature: one of a black Mecca, the other of a ghetto. Newark, similar to Harlem, historically has been synonymous with "ghetto" as well as its own version of Black Mecca, "New Ark."

Newark is notorious as a dangerous city. In January 1975, a famous article in

Harper's Magazine ranked the city of Newark as by far the worst city in the country. The article discussed Newark as a city "in desperate need of help." In 1996, Morgan Quinto press ranked Newark as number one most dangerous city. According to the same survey, in 2007, Newark is doing better, it is now ranked the 22nd most dangerous city in the United States overall, out of 371 cities included nationwide.

There are numerous books written about Newark's history. Jean Anyon (1997) discusses the political and economic conditions that led to Newark's crisis in education. The book is aptly named *Ghetto Schooling*. Even within literature, Newark is often sets the scene as ghetto, for example, Philip Roth's (1997) book *American Pastoral,* the main character describes Newark: "[Newark] used to be the city where they manufactured everything, now it's the car theft capital of the world."

In their writings, the students often addressed their recognition of Newark as a city synonymous with crime, in particular car thefts and gangs. As one student writes in her essay:

"Sometimes it shames me to say where I was raised: The Capital of drugs and gang violence, Newark, New Jersey…..You don't even have to go around asking how Newark is, all you have to do is count how many car crashes, sirens, and gun shots you hear and you've got your answer."

The students often attributed negatives view of Newark to outsiders, for example, one student reflected on a conversation he had with someone who lives in Maplewood, a suburb outside Newark. He writes, *"I asked a student of Maplewood High how he sees Newark, 'Newark reflects drag races and gun battles,' he responded."*

In addition to the crime and violence, the physical environment signifies Newark

as tantamount to ghetto. For example in Roth (1997) writes:

"There was a factory where somebody was making something on every side street. Now there's a liquor store on every street — a liquor store, a pizza stand, and a seedy storefront church. Everything else is in ruins or boarded up."

One student's writing reflected an awareness and rejection of the industrial heyday discourse about Newark as she wrote:

"Some people believe that Newark was better off five to fifteen years ago because then we had more factories. Even though we don't have many factories now, we do have some new buildings."

Although this student timeline is a bit off (five to fifteen years is a long time ago for an eleven year old) she is aware of the history of Newark's industry and its potential for change through development and new buildings. The countering of Newark as ghetto with the argument that Newark is undergoing change is indicative of the "Renaissance City" genre put forth by city officials. On the city website, the city historian argues that Newark is a city in flux, and the "ghetto" years were an unfortunate interim for the city, which is back on pace as "Renaissance City." In this retelling, Newark's history is constructed into four chapters: "The first was its Puritan origins; the second, the rise of its industrial and commercial empire; the third, the present century and its roller-coaster ride into modern history; and the fourth, its recent reawakening now being referred to as Newark's "Renaissance." In a newspaper article outlining the history of the "Renaissance City" name, the city historian, Charles E. Cummings (2005) states:

> Although the name "Renaissance" for Newark has appeared previously, it was not until the last decade or two that it has been widely used in the media and by the

> public. Under Mayor Sharpe James' administration, it has almost become a second name for a city undergoing a resurgence that is the envy of many other older northeastern cities.

I found that similar to the city government, many of the students argued that Newark is in the middle of a transition and change – a "Renaissance":

"*Newark is going to be a tremendous neighborhood. Abandoned buildings are getting repaired. New stores are getting built up and old ones are torn down because Newark is trying clean vacant lots."*

According to one child, Newark (as ghetto) will be unrecognizable in the face of change: *"When you see what decent things have been happening to New Jersey people will ride by and ask where is Newark?"* Another student exclaims, *"Another definition for Newark is actually a saying: out with the old and in with the new. This is a perfect description of Newark because just about every day you can witness construction workers building new houses."*

Much of the rhetoric around Renaissance city is centered around the construction and changes in the downtown business district. As the Newark city website proclaims:

> Around the city, rehabilitation and adaptive conversions have taken place at St. Joseph's Plaza, the old Gibraltar Building of the Prudential, and the former Two Guys Department Store. Those conversions continue with the former Macy's and Haynes buildings which are being converted for multiple-tenant retail use. Small business establishments are refacing their facades.

The students picked up on the discourse of the "Renaissance City" genre and often sounded boosters for the city's business and corporations in their writings:

"Newark has parks, Broad Street, and even the famous NJPAC! And don't forget about other buildings such as city hall, banks, and company buildings such as Verizon and MCI."

"This is "The New Newark"…We're improving on the amount of stores we have. By the time I have to go to high school, there will be a new Science High and two to three new Gifted and Talented high schools!"

According to the city historian (Cummings, 2005) the term used by the student "New Newark" (the predecessor to "Renaissance City") was first used in the fifties by Mayor Leo Carlin in an effort to keep the Newark's corporations from moving to the suburbs.

In addition to the business and downtown renovations, the term "Renaissance City" encompasses the corporate cultural and higher educational institutions of the city such as NJPAC and the Newark Museum, as illustrated on the *About Newark* website: "The universities and colleges are expanding and bringing national recognition to the community, and the newly refurbished Newark Museum is proving to be a major cultural asset."

The students also draw on the Newark Museum and universities as examples of Newark's greatness:

"On the other hand, Newark is one of the happening cities. Some people know Newark as an extraordinary place to live. I am one of those people. You always find tremendous places here, like the Newark Museum and Seton Hall. There are very successful people here. Lawyers, teachers, and doctors are some successful people. I think it's safer than New York right now."

The students are not merely repeating what they have heard. They go beyond the corporate boosters central to "Renaissance City" and discuss stores such as the dollar store and Pathmark:

"By my house there are a lot of stores to shop at like the dollar store, the party store, and even Path Mark. The stores have everything you would want buy."

They add their own flair to the discussion, for example as this student discusses Newark's "flavorsome produce:"

"I always think of Newark as one of the greatest cities there is. We have great food and education. We have flavorsome produce like cabbage, collard greens, oranges, grapes and watermelon. Even though some public schools might be better than others; there are excellent private, charter, and Catholic schools all over Newark. Not bad for the biggest city in New Jersey."

Students discussed their activities and places they liked to go with their friends as evidence of the greatness of Newark:

"Newark, New Jersey has a lot of fun places you and some one else to go to. There is Rex Plex, Fun Plex, Branch Brook Park Roller Rink, Movies, and Arcades. In my city I always have something to do. There is The Boys and Girls Club so children don't get into gangs and drugs. They have something to keep them occupied so that they aren't on the streets."

Although these positive aspects of Newark were discussed in the student work, there were no examples (with the exception of a picture of a church I saw one student developing) of these places within their photographs. One reason for this could be that besides the local corner bodega, the stores they speak of were not within walking

distance to their home. Rex Plex, for example, is located two exits away off the NJ Turnpike in the city of Elizabeth. Although they discussed the development and building of new homes in their neighborhood, they did not take pictures of the new homes. Photographs and writing about abandoned and burnt-out houses, however, was prevalent.

Defending Newark

Within the "ghetto" and "Renaissance City" genres, Newark's downfall begins with the Newark riots of 1967. However, the 1967 rebellions also represent a new beginning in the fight against the racism and oppression both in the city and nationally. Newark was home to the Black Arts Movement – Amiri and Amina Baraka still reside in the city. A number of books (see Woodward, 1999) have recently been written outlining this historical tradition, in particular, involving the Barakas, the African Free School and the Black Arts Movement. This resistance movement took place in the streets (the Newark riots/rebellions), in electoral politics and on the cultural front-through the arts. As Geneva Smitherman (2000) explains, for many African Americans, the ghetto represented "home" and a place of authentic blackness. Within this tradition, Newark is recognized as a historic centre for black culture, unity and resistance. Newark, in the midst of the 1967 rebellion hosted a "Black Power Conference" and later a "Black and Puerto Rican Political Convention" which led to the election of Ken Gibson, the first Black mayor of a major Northeastern city. The "New Ark" genre recognizes Newark as a prototype for change

Although students did not talk about "New Ark" per se, the students displayed a deep connection and pride for Newark and its unique culture and themes of home, unity and black pride were recurrent throughout the writings, as in the example where the

student describes the unity of "our people":

"The best thing about Newark is that our people get along with each other. Some of the kids go outside and jump Double-Dutch or play basketball. That's the positive thing that we really have. Some people have boyfriends and girlfriends, which is all right because they get into relationships and they become a large family. That's a sign of loving-kindness."

Another student equates Newark with freedom as he writes:

This is where I live

Right here, in Newark

Newark is a place for you and me

Newark is a place where you could get free

A number of the students expressed a sense of history and tradition in Newark, often rooted in their family's roots in the community:

"I love the city of Newark because that is where I was raised and went to school. I have a lot of family members that were born and raised in Newark."

Newark historically has a rich music with such greats as Sarah Vaughn, Willie the Lion Smith, more recently Naughty by Nature, Queen Latifah, the Fugees all from Newark. As one student writes:

"When most people listen to music here in Newark, the beat, the volume and the harmony of it motivates the citizens…."

Within the Black Arts Movement music and culture is understood as a political space. In discussing this tradition of activist and political thinkers in the hip-hop generation, Kitwana (2002) begins with Newark's own Ras Baraka's campaign for mayor.

Ms. L worked on this campaign in 1994 and two subsequent campaigns, where Ras Baraka ran for City Council in Newark. Ras Baraka, who is Amiri and Amina Baraka's son and is on the Fugees album "The Score":

> I got power, I got family,
> I got Family Business on Avon, on Chancellor, on Prince Street
> on Chadwick, on Stratford on Chancellor on Vailsburg. All of the
> Brick City. That's my family, we gonna settle The SCORE, once
> and for all.

The idea of unity, family and community as a source of social change, power and strength is found throughout the children's writings, for example:

"We need to be united stay together because we're all family. If you trace back your ancestors you'd be flabbergasted as to who or what is in your blood. Newark is my dwelling and I yearn to notice it escalate on an excellence scale. We are all one kin under the same skies."

"Newark can also change its violence. We can change it by protesting and putting up signs saying 'stop the violence now'"

In the literature for his campaign Ras Baraka linked "New Ark" with "Brick City." According to the city historian, "Brick City is one of the newest nicknames for Newark. It seems to have emerged in the past couple decades from younger Newarkers living in the old Newark Housing Authority projects" (Cummings, 2005). Rap artists such as Outsidaz had an album called "the bricks" and Redman has a mix tape called "Live from the bricks 2007" One student in the class named his poem "Brick City:"

Brick City by Taji
I live in a place called Newark
Where there's tragedy and despair
Yet at the same time
Enchantment.
I live in a place where
Brothers and sisters of all kinds
Exterminate, eliminate, and annihilate
One another.
I live where, when someone's living their life
Someone else's life is brutally, aggressively, and
Violently taken.
I live where mortals execute,
Manslaughter, assassinate, and massacre
Each other to be wealthy, rich, successful,
In other words: prosperous.
I live where individuals
Struggle every day to become successful.
I live where living beings
Lives are taken by other living beings
Because the law determines whether
A life form dies or expires
In other words: depart this life.
I live in the real world
In other words: Brick City.

The newly elected mayor of Newark, Cory Booker, created the "Brick City" youth scholarship fund. Booker appropriated "The Bricks" discourse in an effort to overcome his perceived outsider status and create an identity of unity with the people of Newark, as illustrated in this statement from the city website:

> "Newark's people, like the bricks from our Brick City nickname, are strong, resilient, enduring, and when we come together there is nothing we cannot create or achieve….The future is now."

The students are deeply invested in defending the culture of Newark because it represents them and the people they love. They draw on their knowledge of the informal culture of Newark to emphasize their agency in living here:

"If you need a present for mothers day our fathers day just find someone riding around with different kinds of gifts hanging out their car or van. And that's the place I want to live."

"I was born here. Newark is rowdy and loud and that is the way I like it."

"I know enough things to figure out that Newark is not a dreadful place to live in but it is an unsafe place for kids like me and younger than me. I'm still here? Yes, because I have no fear of being raised in Newark."

In the "The Heart of Harlem" (1945) Langston Hughes wrote, "The buildings in Harlem are brick and stone/And the streets are long and wide/But Harlem's much more than these alone/Harlem is what's inside." For the students of the *Where I Live* project, Newark is what's inside.

Negotiating Multiple Meanings of "Newark"

Vygotsky discusses the "inadequate dialectics of the adolescent, the tendency to hone every question into the form of alternatives: either/or." (1998, p. 46) He attributes this to the fairly new development of thinking in concepts and explains that eventually children develop more of a mastery of dialectical thinking. In her interview, Ms. L expressed the dual nature of the children's world:

"Something that you or I may have done in college, gotten a slap on the hand, like people are losing their whole lives to. The majority of children don't live with their parents, they live with aunts or uncles or foster parents. It's just really difficult. So it is, it's a constant conflict, constant duality of good and evil. The more evil it gets, the more beauty you see in people, shining, but…"

The students often wrote of the dualities of Newark. However, they argued

against either/or thinking about Newark and for a more dialectical approach (that things can be both). Most of the student narratives were a working effort to negotiate the duality (for themselves and the reader) that Newark is **both** good and bad. For example, as one student writes,

"Littleton Avenue is a loud ghetto block. But at times people get along and look out for each other. At a certain time in the day it gets quite. The old people who stay home most of the time they look out for the neighborhood. So sometimes it could be good quality living in a neighborhood like this."

The students used metaphor as they grappled with the duality that the community they love is also scary and dangerous:

Where I live
Is a two faced city
Where one half of the mask is terrific
And the other half is shameful and pitiful

The students often positioned the perceived audience within the "Newark as ghetto" genre. Through metaphor the students acknowledged the dangerousness of Newark while emphasizing its positive aspects disregarded in the ghetto genre.

"There is not only horrible things that happen in Newark there is a delightful side too. ***It's just like Ying and Yang you have to have both so it can be balanced.*** *Newark is a really balanced city* ***It's also similar to Star Wars; there is the dark side and the light side.*** *Even though the pandemonium that happens it is a great place to live. Take it from me, in Newark you can find really good friends."*

In trying to make sense of the simultaneously negative and positive aspects of Newark,

some of the children argued that all places are good and bad, including Newark. In the following example, the child draws an analogy between graffiti and Newark to argue that graffiti, like Newark, is not all bad:

"Do you want to know how graffiti reflects on Newark, New Jersey? Newark to me is like a symbol of art, which is exactly what graffiti is. Graffiti is a work of art that many artists do to show devotion or expressions. Some people think it's wrong and some people think it's right, but what most people don't know is it's both wrong and right. Graffiti has many different types of expression such as enchantment, dissatisfaction, and misery. That's exactly why graffiti reflects on Newark, New Jersey because these terminologies are just what Newark is full of. Newark is full of positives and negatives. ....But that's what makes where I live wonderful because nothing is perfect or 100% right. Everything in this world is 50% wrong and 50% right. These are the reasons that graffiti reflects on the community I live in. Graffiti is also comparable to my place of birth because of the creativity."

This student created a conceptual metaphor comparing Newark to graffiti. His corresponding narrative gives insight into his thinking as he struggled with the contradictions implicit to the city in which he was born and raised. The student also offered an alternative conception of graffiti insisting on its categorization as "art."

Figure 16. Student photograph of graffiti mural

Students used metaphor to investigate the difference between surface appearance and underlying reality. One student, for example, lamented the hard learned fact that people walking down the street aren't always what they seem- finding people you can trust is "like finding a diamond in the rough." This, however, was an exception. Most students made the opposite point: Newark may look "bad" but, beneath the surface it is "good." For example:

"Newark is like a work of art with plenty of artists overflowing in it. If you were to look past the abandoned buildings, you see a work of fine art that someone put masses of time into. You wouldn't really see the boarded windows. Around where I live I see a lot of talent not being used to its full potential."

A few children of the children demanded that the reader come to Newark and confront their fears and/or misconceptions. For example, one student invites the reader with the statement, *"come to Newark don't be afraid,"* while another encourages the reader to seek the truth about Newark, since they may be misinformed:

"But come to Newark yourself, and state <u>YOUR OPINION.</u>

You don't have to listen to other people.

Especially if you don't know if they're telling the truth or not."

Whereas the majority of the students acknowledged the negative aspects of Newark as they defended it, three students overtly rejected the Newark as ghetto discourse, for example:

"When I'm outside playing with my friends we don't hear the sound of stolen cars…Where I live is peaceful. What makes it so peaceful is that there are no stolen cars or any abandoned buildings…That's what makes my community so wonderful and safe for the children because they have many different boys and girls clubs in Newark that kids can attend so they will not be on the streets or not to get in trouble. They have many different places like dance schools, sports, or you can get a job after school so that you will be safe and not have to worry about people hunting you."

Although all of the participating students lived in the same neighborhood, two separate students wrote poetry emphasizing the peace and quiet of where they live:

Where I live, it's nice peaceful and quiet,
You can go on your porch and just feel the breeze.
Because of all the shady trees, the sun won't be in your face,
Because of the way the trees are shaped, they are shaped
A little funny but if you think about it in a good way,
It will keep you in so much shade all day
My block is really fun to me;
My block is where I want to be.
And stay.

Where I live
There's peace and not a sound
All you here are kids playing and birds tweaking.
On the other hand
There's no gangs or aggression.
I go to Malcolm X school

I'm in the sixth grade.
And on my block there are a lot of people
And their kids and my friends.
On my block
My friends and me
Play jump rope and basketball
Or we sit on porch and talk
Or we go to the store.
That's where I live

Summary

The students utilized a number of mediational devices, most notably metaphor, to articulate and negotiate their concept of Newark. Students conceptualized Newark within the context of contradictory and intersecting genres. The establishment or mainstream discourse most clearly articulated by Newark's political class and the national media presents Newark alternately as a crime ridden ghetto, and as "Renaissance City" -- a space of urban renewal. At a more grassroots level is the genre of Newark as a place of unity and community, Newark as "New Ark" or "Brick City." The students are anything but blind to the social problems that coalesce to construct a concept of Newark as ghetto but they resist this designation even as they assent to the profound social problems facing them and their city. Nor do they simply assent to a notion of "Renaissance City." Renaissance City looks to the future while much of the students' work celebrated Newark and it people as they are right now.

Imagination, Agency and Social Responsibility

As depicted in the theoretical model (Figure 3) social consciousness is a process that involves the conscious awareness of oneself as an active participant situated in a socio-historical context and sense of social responsibility for change. This section, based on Research Question 5, focuses on the students' conceptual and abstract thinking as they went beyond describing where the live and considered the underlying causes for social problems, reasoned about why change is necessary, and imagined possible solutions. In particular, I explore where the students locate responsibility for the problems and their solutions (for example within the individual or within structural/institutional forces). I also code the students work to examine whether they include themselves in the solution of the problems.

This section also examines how they created a sense of cohesion over time and place through the mediational device of metaphor (represented in Figure 3 as the dashed triangle).

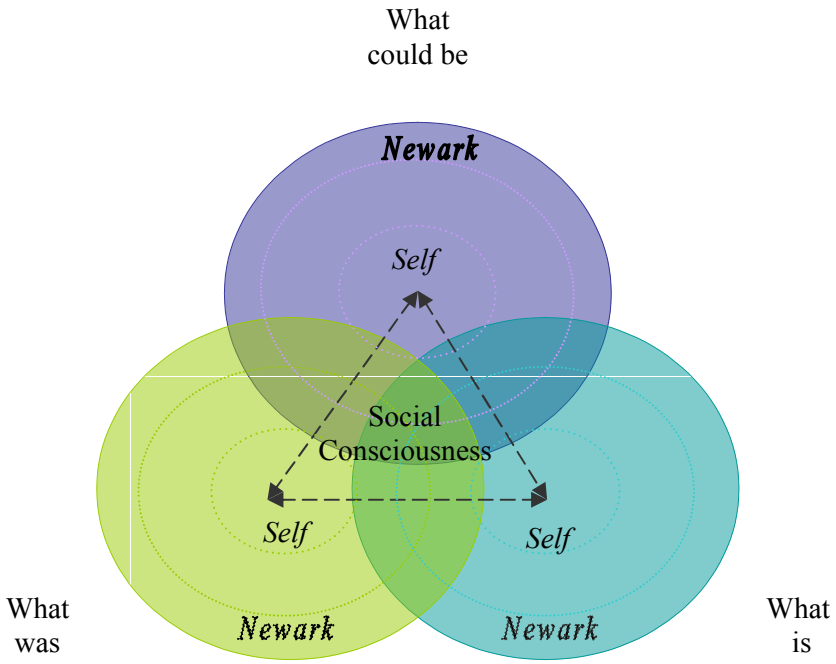

Figure 3 (repeated). Theoretical model depicting social consciousness as awareness of self as situated in time and place.

Thinking Beyond the Surface: Attribution of Cause

In discussing the reasons for the problems faced by their community, the students focused on numerous possible sources: the individual, structural, gangs and teenagers, objects (such as cars), etc. Some children expressed a sense that they just don't know the reasons why these problems exist, while others came to the conclusion that it is "just how it is." Figure 17 depicts frequencies across the student's work. It is important to read the chart carefully as it could be misleading, for example, some children spoke of one cause multiple times in one essay, and others discussed multiple causes within one essay. Based on an initial reading of the narratives, subcodes were created focusing on the

individual, interpersonal/community and structural attributions (and "other"). I originally had the categories of interpersonal and community- as in the solutions code, however, there were no examples of blaming the community as a whole, and it was too difficult to separate interpersonal from individual. For example, if the students talked about "peer pressure" it was coded under "individual" because they discussed the individual choice in not following the peers. The gangs/teenagers category was prominent enough to become its own code.

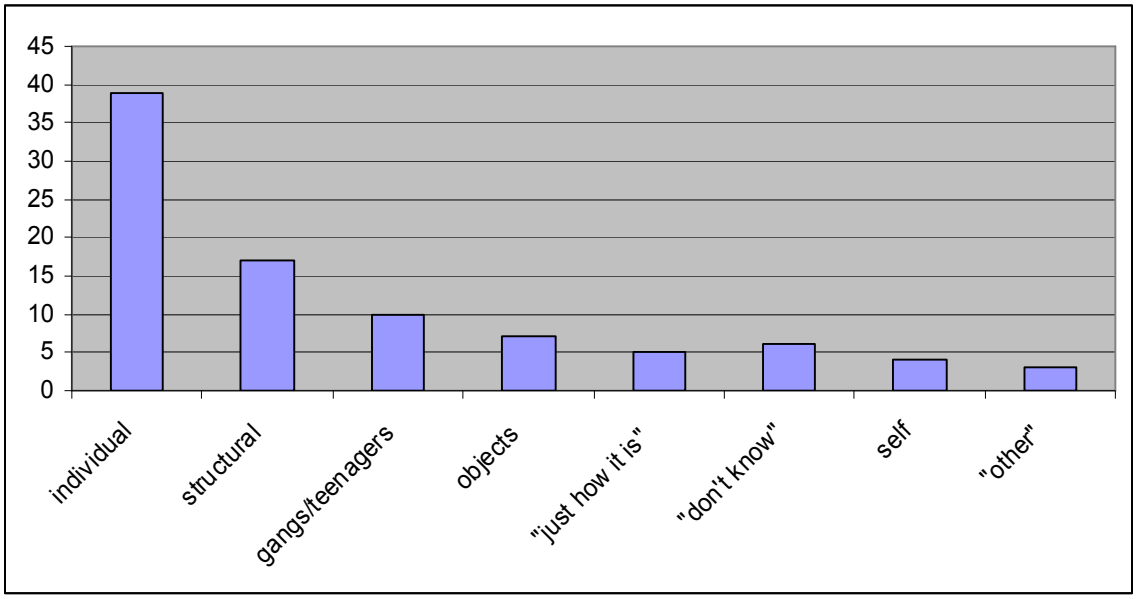

Figure 17: Frequency chart of attributions of cause

As reflected in Figure 17, many students gave "structural/institutional" reasons for the problems, in particular, the lack of jobs, laws or recreation in Newark:

"Some of the gang members end up in this type of violence because there were no activities after school to keep them full of life."

One student took a photo of the public pay phone as part of the project (Figure 18). In his

narrative he discussed the problems in the community and the city's negligence in taking care of public property:

"I don't feel too protected walking because the area has beer cans and bottles all around it... I don't walk anywhere unless I really have to because the streets are very dangerous. I don't use public payphones, or parking meters because around they are polluted. It also smells around the area. Another reason is that it's old and the city hasn't tried to remodel anything.

Figure 18. Student photograph of a payphone

In this example, the photography prompted the student's discussion about his fear of public spaces:

Many people spend lots of money every day on payphones, or meters when it's not even worth it. Some things cost about 50 cents, some are more. If you do spend 50 cents or more to talk on a payphone or run a parking meter that is dirty or probably out of order than you are wasting your money. However where I live machines that cost

money are rarely taken care of."

This last sentence reflects an understanding of inequity, in the awareness that life in his neighborhood was different then elsewhere. This was found throughout the student writings, as they often positioned themselves as an intermediary explaining their neighborhood to outsiders.

Figure 17 illustrates that even more then structural analysis, students looked to individual beliefs and actions as the cause of problems in the community, especially around the issues of gangs, drugs and littering. In discussing the problem of gang violence, the students reflected on the thinking underlying people's actions:

"It's that "can't stop, wont stop" mentality that has most of Newark's teens joining gangs."

The students expressed the peer influence as another reason individuals make "bad" choices:

"When parents and workers take their kids to school they might be irritated because they may find that someone took their car. A person might do this to let people know that they are not punks."

"I think we should rely on helping and encouraging other people because I wouldn't like seeing people go threw all of that mess and trying so hard but just can't hold on. But also some people do them kind of things because of the people that they hang around and are with."

Students also connected the issue of abandoned houses to individual actions, for example, *"When a house or building is abandon it is only because people didn't take care of it"* and *"The reason why the houses are abandoned is because people sell their*

drugs there. It's a problem because people are losing their houses from other people doings."

The teacher emphasized in her interview that the children receive a lot of messages from home regarding the importance of individual choice in an effort to prepare them for the years ahead:

"So when they're in sixth grade, you can hear, when you talk to them about what their parents have been teaching them – like, no, you've got to school and get an education. But once they go through adolescence, are they going to be so committed to those ideas, when they see people in gangs and maybe it's just not safe for them not to join one?… The pressure – right now, my children who are in sixth grade are facing this tremendous peer pressure in terms of gang violence and joining gangs."

The students utilized metaphor to express the internal conflict within the struggle of individual choice and making decisions:

"Problems are like little tiny bugs that make you do terrible things called the 'troublemaker.' On the other side are the bugs that guide you perfectly, called 'rightness.' The troublemaker tells you to do terrible and harsh things. The rightness tells you to do the correct things. So those are the two sides that get you in trouble and the one who keeps you out of trouble. If I had to choose, my side is the rightness.

The teacher's deep concern for the students' future emerged in class discussions and in the interview. One of the days that I observed the class a car crashed into a teacher's car in front of the school and the driver fled the scene. The teacher used this opportunity to emphasize the importance of individual choice, as documented in my fieldnotes:

"Today when I reached the school there was a car crash outside. A stolen car had crashed into a teacher's BMW and the driver ran away. As I reached the classroom, there was great excitement and energy about the accident. It was the beginning of the class period; the children were looking out the windows (though the class windows were facing the wrong direction) and excitedly discussing what happened outside. After the students settled down, a student explained what he saw happened in his previous class and a discussion of stolen cars ensued. The teacher asked, "Why do people steal cars?" One student answered "because they don't have them." The teacher replied "I don't have a car that doesn't mean I steal it." Another responded "gangs" and another said "to show they weren't afraid." Another student kept saying it was his cousin who did it- to which the teacher did not respond."

The teacher's response initially surprised me. I had felt that the students raised answers that could have led to a discussion of "structural" inequities – why people couldn't afford cars; yet the teacher shifted the discussion to a more individual and moral focus. In the interview, I asked her about the particular question of gangs:

LA- *Do you ever have a discussion like why are there gangs? Is that hard to bring in for this age group?*

Teacher- *This year I think it's different. This year, we talked about it and, as soon as I mentioned that, it was like – they were, we need more recreation centers. Or we need to get rid of the – they're consciousness is really high. I never thought about that in sixth grade.*

While attributing their structural analysis to a high consciousness, later in her interview she emphasizes her social responsibility as an educator to have students consider strategies for their problems:

"…But just the abject poverty on the streets and the rampant drugs on the streets. It's really no joke at all. So we have to, I think any responsible educator is going to access those ideas in the classroom, but not come in like I'm going to save you. It's like you have to explain to me what you're going to do. Because I really have no answers. I don't really know that much, it's something that's in your life. So how are you going to address it, what decisions are you going to make, because you're not going to be in sixth grade forever."

The teacher recognized that the children are the experts of their community and understood her role as assisting them to develop tools (cognitive, social and emotional) in order to deal with the challenges they face now and will continue to confront for the foreseeable future. The teacher explained this challenging endeavor:

"The children get punished for their parents being drug addicts. The children get punished for the parents being negligent. The children get punished – and when their parents are really victims of the system, anyway. So it's like this constant – there's no – I mean, there are, but it's not consistent. There aren't these safety nets that are consistent that you always know you'll have someplace to go or you always know that things will be okay, there'll be a solution and these are just the rough times. That's just not there."

The teacher points out that in many of the children's lives the only thing consistent is the inconsistency. She states: *"there's probably a few – I would say like*

10% of the sixth grade class have a good, stable home. And probably 50% have homes that are really trying to get there. But there are another 50% where there's just chaos."

The curriculum and classroom provides consistency and tools for survival in the form of social consciousness. Students use their critical and abstract thinking skills as they study their socio-historical context and structural inequities. Simultaneously, they are challenged to find their agency in solving the problems.

"What Could Be": Developing Solutions through Imagining Change

"Yeah. I guess to reiterate, once they identify and once they really focus - I don't think they have a time in their life where they sit down and, really, what's bothering you? What's upsetting to you? So maybe once they get that time - maybe they do in church. I know the church in Newark is very active in addressing the community problems. But it's for them to understand their own agency and their own power in transforming their society and changing society. It's not to be, like, oh, this is so awful, isn't this terrible and ugh, because that's very counterproductive."

The above quote from the teacher interview reiterates that the main goal of the project is to equip students with tools for developing strategies and solutions for success in their lives, not to just discuss the problems. Figure 29 outlines the frequency of responses for "responsibility for solutions" code. Before delving into this project, I initially expected/hoped to find that the children looked to structural causes and solutions. What I found, however, was more interesting and complex. All of the narratives that discussed problems also offered solutions. Most of the narratives attribute both cause and solutions to multiple sources. In fact, of the 24 essays (out of a total of 28) where the students offered solutions to problems, only two found the sources of the

solution within the individual alone, the rest of the narratives offered multiple solutions. This didn't seem to portray confusion but instead that the students were confronting the complexity of both the problems and their solutions.

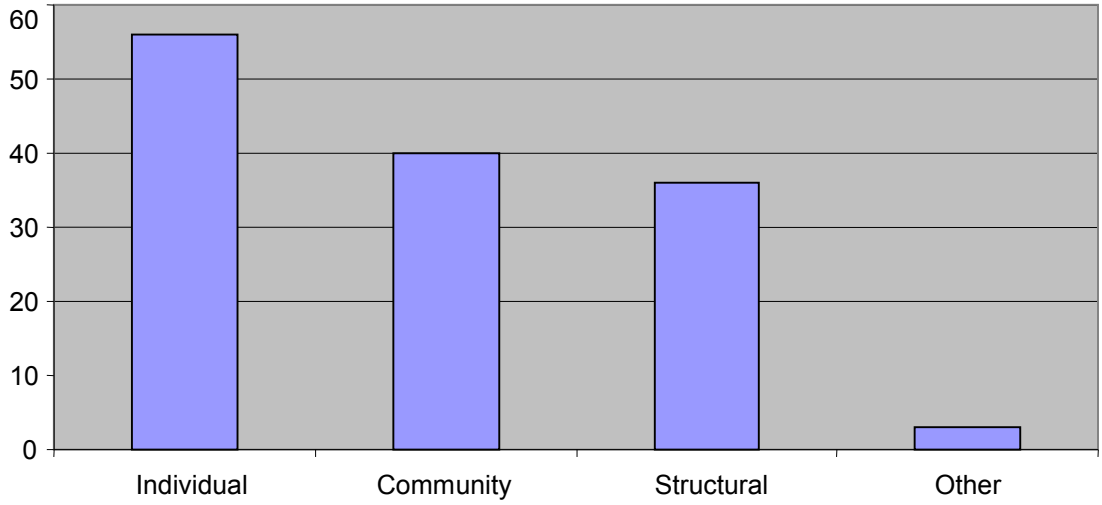

Figure 19. Frequency Chart - Solutions

The results depicted in Figure 19 illustrate that there were numerous examples where students indicated that problems should be solved by individuals. In particular students emphasized the importance of schooling as a way to avoid problems and as a way out:

"*Besides you can be in school achieving your goals most likely to be successful very popular. Or, you can be a failure doing atrociously on the streets and the individual nobody desires to be around. Well I recognize people like that. Somebody I used to know was so first class in school. Subsequently he became addicted to various drugs and wouldn't let go. He went from a someone on the way to a no one within a moment. My father and him go way back starting when they were in grade school.*"

"We can do something about this if we stop all of the violence and killing each other. Stop dropping out of school and just get your full education by gradating from college, so you can have a good job. Most of the people that are drop outs they are the ones who probably get locked up."

At least one student expressed the importance of staying in school in their poetry:

> What I like in the city is that the schools give you a chance
> To do something not zero but do something with your life
> That you have right now, while you are still breathing and
> Your blood is still running warm,
> Take that chance

Not surprisingly, the students experience the pressure to stay in school from home, as one student writes:

"The college I might go to is Rutgers. If I don't go to college I am going to work down town or at my cousin's hair shop. When I get out of high school, I believe my grandmother and the rest of my family will make me go to college. After college I'm going straight for a job."

The children also discussed importance of laws, police and the responsibility of the mayor for addressing problems:

"If there were a law that demands nonviolent behavior, people would not be dying over foolish stuff like getting shot over colors, and getting bit by a dog."

"Mayor Sharpe James needs to get people out here to remodel and clean up the streets and buildings. If you repair the entire street and the sidewalks, the community can be improved. It will improve to walk and drive without stepping and riding on garbage."

The children emphasized the importance of having recreational programs for the youth:

"We can help the city of Newark by having more Restaurants and Café's around the city of Newark. They can drop the abandoned houses and make them to arcades, stores and even movie theaters. Some times there are gangsters all around the stores and they don't have anything to do but stand in front of the stores smoking and drinking."

While the students did not blame the community as a whole for the problems, the students expressed the importance of community involvement in the solution to the problems:

"The citizens of Newark should get together and make a group to clean this city up."

"We need to be united stay together because we're all family."

The Concerned Citizen: The Foundation for Social Change

The WIL project facilitated students' awareness about where they live while encouraging a sense of agency in their future and the future of their city. The teacher, the curriculum and the students navigated the difficult contradiction between structure and agency. Overemphasis on "agency" could easily blend into a conservative discourse of personal responsibility and victim blaming, while a purely structural explanation could be disempowering. Agency requires a sense of social responsibility.

Only a few students expressed themselves as part of the cause of the problems and these were mainly around the issue of littering, perhaps because littering is a problem that they have contributed to, or perhaps because the solution is more tangible:

"We don't observe all the signs on the wall that say "Help Keep Newark Clean". I say "we" because I too have littered in Newark and now when I look out my window I feel

bad I ever littered in Newark."

"What I mean is we litter and everything. We are our own community. If one person in the community messes, we all mess up."

Although only a few of the children felt they contributed to the problem, the students frequently acknowledged that they were part of the solution. Sixteen of the 24 students included themselves as necessary participants in changing society within their narrative, for example:

"Everyday when I walk down the street I see a backyard filled with rubbish. Sometimes I prefer to clean that backyard. I stop to consider what is back there. I also start to reflect and it's a part of my community…. My friend keeps asking me do I want to clean the backyard?"

Figure 20: Student photograph of overflowing garbage

Students also expressed a sense of social responsibility around littering within their poetry, as one student wrote:

I hate when people litter or throw garbage on the street,

It makes me want to clean up and sweep.

In analyzing the reasons the students gave for solving the problems faced by the city, it is clear the central role their family and community play in their lives. Out of 28 narratives, only four did not discuss the reason for changing problems. The students discussed the problems faced by their city and voiced themselves as concerned citizens motivated to change their city for the better. The students expressed many reasons for why the city needs to change, principally for the people who live there, in particular the children, but also for outsiders and to change the image of Newark. Fourteen of the essays expressed multiple reasons within their essay.

The students were concerned with Non-Newark residents (outsiders) views of Newark:

"So if you keep your city or state looking great you will make people want to live here and move from their state to New Jersey."

"When we walk out of our front doors, we hope to see a better image of Newark because most of the other cities wouldn't want to be influenced by this substandard city…. The negative things in Newark need to stop because that isn't helping the people from other towns want to live around here. So we need to stand as one and persuade those people. We need to tell those gangs to stop the violence because we don't want the new citizens to get killed. We should have a pleasant city all over. That way we may perhaps have new friends to hang around."

Through participating in collaborative discussions regarding the issues of the city, the students entered the civic discourse, usually the domain of adults in the community.

Interestingly, from their position as concerned citizens, many students spoke on the need for change for "the children:"

"Little kids are getting snatched up and raped or even mired in a dump. However this would not happen if there wasn't no abandoned houses."

One student chose his imagined audience to be parents, reminding them of the importance of keeping their children safe and away from the negative effects of violence on television and in the movies:

"The kids watch gangsta movies like "Scarface" and want to be like him. You can see your kid on the street with a gun saying, "Say hello to my little friend," and that puts you in danger. The kids need to watch good channels like PBSKids or cartoon network, Toonami or Nick to keep them busy from drugs….Keep the kids away from dreadful language. Let the kids watch safe channels. Don't let your child stay out until 9:00 pm at night when you don't know what they're doing. We have to work as a community to insure the children's safety and well-being. If we do this Newark, New Jersey will be a great and safe place to be."

In speaking about changing Newark "for the children" the students emphasized their unique position as experts on children:

"Things like this can happen to children my age. I'm writing this to speak about the violence in Newark. This city is strange; I would like to see it change its behavior. Stray, malicious dogs are not needed within Newark. It should be a safe place for us children to live… Newark is a good town but not so safe. If Newark changes it will be the best city in the world. I am speaking on this for the safety of the innocents. Kids similar to me need to feel secure in our home."

The above example also illustrates the author's recognition of the power of the pen, that his writing has relevance, when he states, "*I'm writing this to speak about the violence in Newark."* Similar to the poets and documentary photographers discussed in the curriculum, the children perceived their work as meaningful. Another child in particular, who was very involved in the project and helped create the website, wrote the following poem:

> Newark
>
> Where I come from so often,
> People you grew up with,
> are lying in a coffin.
> My life is all I have,
> My pencil, my poem, my notebook pad.
> I've made it through the struggle,
> All I need is someone to cuddle.
> Abandoned houses on every block,
> Newark is my home this is all I got.
> If Martin Luther King Jr. were alive,
> I think he'd want to cry.
> To see all these horrible things,
> When a person gets a hold of drugs they cling.
> If Newark were alive and seen herself,
> She'd be around screaming for help.
> So if this is how they want to keep Newark for the rest of their lives,
> I wrote this to make sure my dream for Newark never dies.

This poem illustrates the student's recognition of the role of literacy as a powerful tool for change as well as a consciousness of herself as an artist. I find this to be among the most exciting aspects of the project: the consciousness of themselves as writers, poets, artists, and agents of change.

<u>Newark as Self: Creating Coherence through Metaphor</u>

The students' sense of self was inseparable from that of the city of Newark. One student took a picture of his room. In his narrative he explained how the messy

room, in particular the keyboard, represented his strong sense of self as well as his connection to the people of Newark through music:

Figure 21: Student photograph of their messy room

> *"The keyboard and microphone located on the left of my room shows that I love music. I am inspired and interested with hip-hop and R&B. Instead of cleaning this disgusting room, I would rather listen, sing, or rap with my music. Since I, a talented, smart young man, do not have any other entertainment in my room, I would rather have fun with a little flavor of music. Most people in Newark do like all kinds of music, which reflects on me."*

As his narrative illustrates, the picture of his room prompted reflection on Newark, his sense of self, and his identity with the people of the city.

The students' personal connection to the city generated their feelings of social responsibility, for example as one student writes:

"I would try to change the way we live because it represents how we do things all the

time. If people in our community would just take the time out to pick up things and don't litter then we would have a pleasant place to live. This is where we live and if we don't take excellent care of it then no one will, that's why everyone in the community needs to start taken a stand for once do something about the society."

Consequently, the history and future of the city were intertwined with their own personal history and future. One student's narrative essay title, *"How I see Newark and myself"* reflected this consciousness of herself as part of the city and therefore responsible for it. She concluded her essay with the statement: *"Once you look carefully at Newark you ought to observe yourself within it. Wherever you live reflects you."*

Students used metaphor to create a sense of coherence as they negotiated the dualities of Newark, and also as they connecting themselves to the city of Newark. The students' personal connection to the city of Newark acted as a source of conflict (as well as pride) as one child expressed metaphorically*: "Sometimes the city has a big bomb on it, and it feels like it is going to explode on me."*

Weather and nature-related metaphors were particularly powerful in connecting personal experiences with changes in the larger socio-historical context, creating a sense of coherence within change.

"I live in Newark, New Jersey but I wasn't born here. I was born in Maryland where my grandpa, aunts and uncles, and nephews on my mother's side live. When I turned 3 years old, I moved to New Jersey. When living there, I saw beautiful cars and birds. There the sun would shine among the pretty clouds and you would hear the ice cream truck passing out ice cream and people walking past with their dogs and wow, the wonderful world it is!…As years passed, the clouds darkened into gray and the world looked scary after

September 11, 2001. Where the Twin Towers stood in New York there was a lot of killing. Afghanistan did a attack on the united states and now the united states is trying to get back at Afghanistan it all started at when each father of George Bush and the father of Saddam Hussein where presidents they had battle but they didn't finish so now the sons are battling after the fathers business."

Her metaphor vividly expresses the narrative this student constructed of her life in connection to her changing socio-historical context. The sunshine represents the beauty and innocence of her early childhood with her extended family in Maryland. This peace is replaced with the dark clouds –her life and the world is far more complex as she reaches adolescence in Newark.

The photograph of the icicle (Figure 15) and its corresponding narrative is another example of weather metaphor used to conceptualize the complex process of personal and social transformation:

"Like a frozen icicle, all my problems freeze up, meaning that my problems are here and are not leaving. But sometimes my issues go away. Then the water freezes and it repeats the process again. It's like an icy waterfall. Solid ice that is unbreakable. In the spring and summer, ice melts and it's splendid. In the winter the water freezes up and it's not incredible. It grows into a sub-zero water ball with all the enjoyable things inside. Then summer comes back, and all those conflicts go away and compassion and enthusiasm bursts out of that ball. That is how the course of our struggles works."

The poem in the introduction of this dissertation (p.xii), entitled, Meant for So Much More, eloquently expresses individual and social transformation through metaphor:

We should melt our icy hearts.

We should crack our stony hearts.

We should destroy our black holes.

And bring new hearts

Significantly, students used metaphor to link their individual experience over time with changes in the larger context of Newark. One student, for example, photographed and wrote a narrative expounding on the conceptual metaphor of a mirror as a window into the past and future of Newark which is inseparable from his own:

"The history of Newark that I know about is when I lived on 23rd Street. We had places we could go when we needed help for free. Now everywhere we go you either have to pay in advance or pay on a monthly basis…Do you think Newark will have a better reflection in the future? Yes, drugs will be off the streets of Newark, Yes, I will find my wife; I will teach and raise my child in Newark, and I will be a famous dancer."

Figure 22. Student photograph of a mirror

In addition to connecting his future to the future of Newark, this student vividly expresses his conscious awareness of social inequity as well as his personal commitment

to the city of Newark.

The analysis thus far has been across the student writings. To give a sense of one narrative in its entirety, I will now focus on Stanley.

Newark as a Bundle of Roses: Learning from Stanley

Stanley, a charismatic boy, is similar to many of the children in the community in that he is cared for by his loving grandmother. A bright child with a wonderful sense of humor and a big smile, Stanley took a photograph of a burnt out house (Figure 23).

Figure 23. Stanley's photograph of an abandoned house

The abandoned house provided a starting point within his narrative to consider solutions for a multiplicity of problems in Newark. His example is particularly insightful into the way many of the students began with a concrete object (an abandoned house) experienced in their everyday life and used it to make broader statements about more abstract issues facing his city. In other words, he photographed "what is" as he imagined "what could be." Not surprisingly, he began his narrative with an exciting personal story:

"'Fire!' yelled a neighbor from down the street. I thought my house was on fire, so I ran down the stairs and saw that it was my neighbor's house. All the neighbors were out of the house. Ever since that day I'm still scared that the house next door to me is going to catch on fire again or collapse.

That tragedy was no joke and after that event, my neighbors abandoned that house. It was a shocking incident and I hope that it never happens again. As the days passed, my next-door neighbors decided to move back there. They got some repairmen and the house is now better than ever. Even though my next-door neighbors got the house fixed, I still wouldn't have moved back there because you don't know if that incident is going to happen again."

This last statement illustrates that even through this particular event is over, his fear lingered. Stanley then abstracted from his personal experience to define and outline the problem of abandoned houses in general. He asked the question "What is an abandoned house?" and then positioned himself as an expert on the topic as he answered:

What is an abandoned house? An abandoned house is a house that no one ever buys again because it has been burned down, abandoned by the owner, or collapsed. There are so many abandoned houses in Newark, New Jersey that it doesn't make any sense. Instead of keeping the abandoned houses they should replace them with homeless shelters and recreation centers.

In this statement, he looked to the city for change as indicated by the use of the words "they should." Next, he argued numerous reasons for getting rid of the abandoned houses in the community:

Abandoned houses cause communities to look dreadful. Abandoned houses set

terrible examples for people who are moving because once they see their dream house next door to an abandoned house they'll get freaked out. From my personal observation when my friends come from school, they always run right in their house. Every time they come down the street to my house, they run.

Also abandoned houses are terrifying because you won't know what will happen to it while it's sitting there. It might even collapse because it has been burned down or just sitting they're for years and years. Another reason why abandoned houses are so terrifying is because they're so disgusting. Abandoned houses have tremendous amounts of germs and that's sometimes the reason why people don't buy and fix the abandoned houses up.

Stanley then connected the particular problem of abandoned houses to other problems facing the community, such as homelessness, unemployment, and the lack of recreation He simultaneously offered poetic and imaginative solutions:

Newark should knock down all of the abandoned houses and replace them with homeless shelters because most people live on the street where it's cold and uncomfortable. Many people don't have money to buy food and if they make homeless shelters everyone would be served a delightful breakfast, energized lunch, and a hot steamy dinner. If they don't use the abandoned houses for homeless shelters, people will be dieing everyday because of starvation.

Another alternative for abandoned houses are recreation centers. Recreation centers will provide a place for kids to be after school and on the weekend. It would keep kids off of the street and become a home away from home for kids, teenagers, and adults. It would keep them busy and energized. It would provide jobs for teens and adults also.

Abandoned houses should also be knocked down and used for new houses for people who are moving because if they knock down all of the abandoned houses in Newark and replace them with recreation centers and homeless shelters there won't be any houses for people to live in. The new houses would transform the entire appearance of the neighborhood and would make it look spectacular. Before the abandoned houses looked liked dead flowers but with the new houses, Newark would look like a bundle of roses. The new houses would make the communities and the new owners excited.

For Stanley the problems in Newark and their solutions are interconnected. He does not stop at describing the abandoned houses on his block, but metaphorically conveyed future possibilities*: "Before the abandoned houses looked liked dead flowers but with the new houses, Newark would look like a bundle of roses."*

Although he is clearly engaged, early in his essay the problems of Newark and their solutions are expressed as primarily structural and outside of his personal responsibility, as reflected in his statements "Newark should" and "They should," however he shifts his voice in the last two paragraphs:

"The abandoned houses should also be replaced with cafés. There would be poetry reading from adults and children. On the walls there would be artwork, autographed instruments, and jazz musician posters. Cafés would serve coffee, cappuccino, donuts, cookies, and different type of snacks. The number one item served to the children in the cafés would be smoothies so everyone including the children and the adults would be satisfied. There's no limit to what we can do with these abandoned houses in Newark. We can create parks, arcades, pools, and more…"

The idea of a café with jazz posters is a reference to the café the school created

out of a storage room. The end of year poetry night for the WIL project was set in this room. The room clearly had a strong impact on Stanley as he envisions the potential of having such spaces throughout the city of Newark. He addressed the need for Newark to change – for the people, for the children, and also for those outside of Newark as he wrote:

There's no limit to what we can do with these abandoned houses in Newark. We can create parks, arcades, pools, and more. If we change the appearance of abandoned houses the community might be grateful enough to throw away their garbage can instead of throwing it on ground and would start to make Newark a better place to live. The transformation of the abandoned houses would shock people who live in Malibu because most of them think that Newark is a dangerous place to live. No one really enjoys Newark as of now put if we replace abandoned houses and keep our communities clean everyone would enjoy Newark, New Jersey just as I do.

Summary

The students' writings reflected their abstract and critical thinking skills as they considered the underlying causes, reasons for change and solutions to the problems in their community through the multimodal curriculum. They often looked to multiple causes and solutions for the complex problems of their city. The students' expressed their sense of agency in making change as they positioned themselves as concerned citizens and members of the community. Metaphor, as a cross-modal mediating device, assisted the students to create a sense of coherence as they connected their everyday personal experience to their changing socio-historical context.

CHAPTER EIGHT

DISCUSSION

This dissertation operationalized and developed the theoretical concept of social consciousness by investigating the ways social consciousness is mediated in an educational setting and engaging the concept with a real arts-based multimodal curriculum. My first two research questions and corresponding chapters utilized ethnographic methods to analyze the curriculum project in relation to the classroom practices and school culture, the community, as well as the national educational climate of No Child Left Behind. The remaining research questions focus on the student work. I analyzed multiple samplings within and across participants to elucidate the major themes addressed in their work and to examine the ways that students engaged often contradictory realities and discourses as they constructed meanings of "Newark," the city in which they live. I found metaphor in particular to be a powerful unit of analysis as it was cross-modal (visual, textual, oral) and utilized by the students to create coherence as they organized their experience over time and place.

Mediating Social Consciousness

The exploratory study produced an embryonic concept: Education for Social Consciousness. *Education for Social Consciousness* is what I take to be a Vygotskian based response to pedagogical theories currently competing in convoluted ways within mainstream political debates over education policy: the student centered approaches that originate with Paulo Freire's (1990) critique of the "banking" approach to pedagogy, on the one hand, and on the other the teacher centered approaches that theoretically inform the No Child Left Behind legislation. My findings are highly critical of the pedagogy

imposed by No Child Left Behind legislation but my findings also pose challenges to critical pedagogy.

Freire (1990) offers keen insight and critique of educational practices based in test based knowledge (the "banking" approach) and the importance of education for developing critical consciousness and a sense of agency for change. Freire offers important insights into the liberatory potential of education; however, practical implementation of the theory in real curricula, particularly with elementary aged children, remains unclear. The lack of a clear relation between classroom practice and the theory has forced educators to improvise.

Radical minded (and dogmatic) scholars, like Ronald David Glass (2001) complain that educators have "molded Freire's theory to their own needs" (p.20) and interpreted the theory as a method for transforming classroom practices (i.e. the student centered approach). This is, for Glass, "a kind of domestication of Freire's overall theory and intent" (p.20). Glass draws inspiration from Stanley Aronowitz and quotes him approvingly:

> As Aronowitz (1993) correctly argued in his analysis of this depoliticization of Freire, 'the task of this revolutionary pedagogy is not to foster critical consciousness in order to improve cognitive learning, the student's self-esteem, or even to assist in his aspiration to fulfill his human "potential." It is to the liberation of the oppressed as historical subjects within the framework of revolutionary objectives that Freires's pedagogy is directed (pp.11-12).' (p.20)

Aronowitz, in his attempt to defend the "revolutionary" aspirations of Freire's theory, reveals the one-sided nature of so much of critical pedagogy. Clearly "cognitive

learning," and "self-esteem" are crucial aspects of any liberatory education and reconnecting cognitive development with emancipatory goals is a central concern of what I am calling *Education for Social Consciousness*.

So, while there are many parallels between the educational theories of Vygotsky and Freire, educators within the Vygotskian tradition offer valuable insights into the limitations of critical pedagogy, in particular, critical pedagogy's relentless and one-sided focus on the ideological and oppressive nature of educational institutions obscuring the traditional but crucial functions of education like learning skills and new knowledge (Trueba, 1999; Wardekker, 1995). In other words, education is not only a source of oppression and social reproduction; it is also a gateway to opportunity (Nieto, 1994; Stein, 1971).

Enrique Trueba (1999) argues that given this dual role of education, pedagogical goals cannot be limited to developing critical consciousness. It is necessary to expand beyond critical reflection to include children's academic and developmental needs. He states:

> It is simply not sufficient to recognize the presence of oppression and to criticize schooling, teachers, and social systems. The task is to do this work of critique but also to move towards a realistic approach that links the creation of viable pedagogies to children's empowerment. (p. 593)

There is a rich tradition of research by those influenced by Vygotskian theory utilizing qualitative methods to illuminate classroom practices and literacy curricula within the urban setting that develops critical consciousness and supports the cognitive and emotional skills necessary to actively participate in society (Daiute, 2000; Dyson, 2000;

Gutierrez, Rymes, & Larson, 1995; Lee, 2003; Mahiri & Sablo, 1996; Nieto 1994).

Vygotsky's theory of social consciousness is a radical pedagogy with implications for curriculum content and methodology. My dissertation hopes to contribute to this body of literature by operationalizing the Vygotskian concept of social consciousness. Social consciousness, as I developed it, is a process involving a conscious awareness of the social-historical context, thinking abstractly about time and place and beyond the immediate everyday conditions to understand one's own experience as embedded in a broader system of social relations and a sense of social responsibility for change. This concept of social consciousness is depicted in Figure 3.

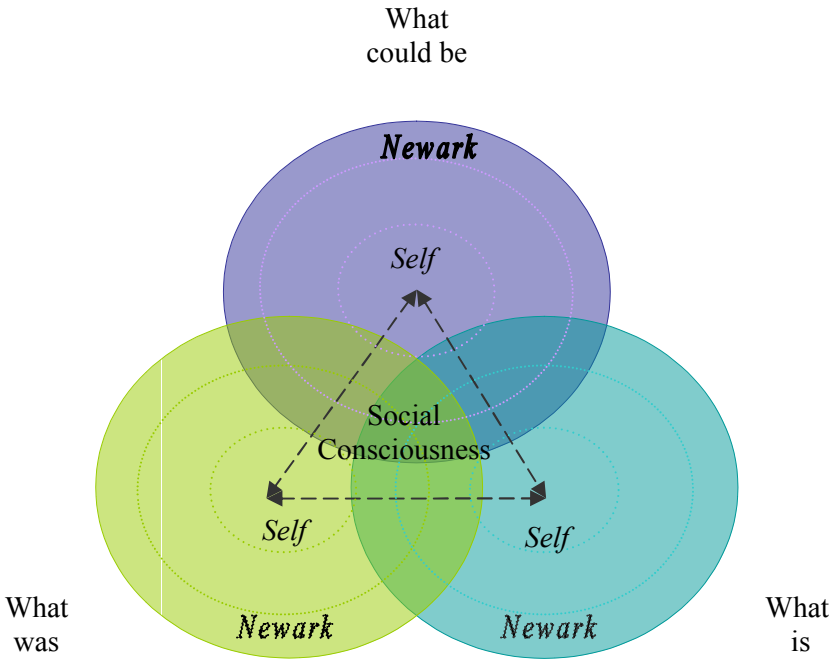

Figure 3 (repeated). Theoretical model depicting social consciousness as awareness of self as situated in time and place.

Social consciousness involves critical reflection and agency, as emphasized by critical pedagogy, but also the analysis of the content of the curriculum, in particular the learning and teaching of cultural tools that mediate experience. Through the qualitative methods of classroom observation, interview, and discourse analysis my dissertation illuminated the ways that the mediational devices (photography, metaphor, language) integral to the multimodal curriculum (visual, textual, oral) acted as catalysts for social consciousness.

I found the process of social consciousness to be full of movement, often contradictory and extremely dynamic. This is similar to Daiute's (2000) conception of social consciousness as "tension around social issues" (p.215) entailing the ability to engage multiple realities. The mediational devices (depicted in Figure 3 as the dotted lines) acted as tools to engage often contradictory realities and discourses. I found metaphor in particular to be a powerful unit of analysis as it was cross-modal (visual, textual, oral) and utilized by the students to create coherence as they organized their experience over time and place.

To make schooling significant, one must go beyond the classroom walls (Moll, 1990). Ms. L took the class beyond the classroom walls in many ways, for example, in the physical activity of walking through the neighborhood and in the nature of the inquiry "Where I live." The topics of gangs, and death and violence were frequent in their writings and class discussions. These topics were depicted in the photos through their physical manifestations: graffiti, crashed cars, abandoned buildings and dogs. The nature of the writing as part of this project was meaningful. Children wrote poetry and narratives about what was important to them and on their minds: their fear and pain, but

also their dreams, friendships and families.

Through the multimodal nature of the project- the writing prompts were meaningful and based in the activities of the class. For example, as the students wrote about "how to develop a photogram" they could draw on the handout the teacher gave them but also their memory of the physical activity of doing it. The visual nature of the photographs has been shown to be a valuable prompt for students who struggled with writing (Daiute, 1992; Ewald, 2001). The students in the WIL curriculum photographed their immediate environment- literally the neighborhood surrounding their home and school. Many of the students directly referenced their photos, other indirectly referencing topics found in other students photos and from class discussions. I found the photos of their neighborhoods often depicted the negative aspects of their environment (abandoned houses, litter, empty lots, dogs, etc). Within their writings, these aspects were explained and usually countered with discussion of the positive aspects of their community (friends, family, community, new houses).

Research has shown the importance of developing literacy curriculum that bridges the cultural gap between community and school language and practices among African Americans (Boykin, 1992; Daiute, 2000; Gutierrez and Stone, 2000; Heath 1989; Ladson-Billings, 1998; Lee, 1993, 2000).

Jabari Mahiri (1997) emphasizes the ways in which the out of school literacy practices of urban African American students can be useful in making literacy learning meaningful in the classroom. He found that the students out of school writing helped them make sense of their lives and the social world, providing them with a partial refuge from their everyday experiences, and were an important aspect of their identity

construction. Mahiri also found that the students did not consider writing "uncool," in fact they were prolific in their out of school writing, the problem was the artificial and irrelevant nature of academic writing. Ms. L. also stressed this point. She noted the difficulty her students had when addressing the writing prompts given to her by the district. In one district prompt, for example, students had to write an essay where they imagine themselves on a hot air balloon ride.

The *Where I Live* curriculum created a safe space for the students to discuss and think about issues that were important to them. Within their narrative and poems, a number of students talked about their traumatic conditions of losing loved ones and the fear they felt on a daily basis. This was not, however, required of the students. Equally as important, the open ended nature of the inquiry allowed for students to also contemplate the joys of their lives and possibilities for the future.

In addition to narratives, the students wrote poetry. Poetry acts as a bridge between school and non-school literacy (Jocson, 2005) and many of Ms. L.'s students considered themselves writers, poets, rappers and singer-songwriters. The students' poems often read like songs and raps, utilizing African American Vernacular English (AAVE) to articulate their ideas. In the student narratives as well they discussed their experiences in storytelling form that is characteristic of the African American vernacular-dramatically and excitingly rendered rich with metaphors, often persuasive with a sermonic tone. Lee (2000) points out that within African–American culture verbal verbosity is encouraged and revered, herein lies untapped potential for teaching literacy:

> An understanding of signifying as a rhetorical stance, an attitude toward language and a means of cultural self-definition is important in assessing the value given to

> signifying as an art form within the African American community. It is precisely because it is highly valued and so widely practiced that signifying has the potential to serve as a bridge to literacy skills within the school environment. (p. 197)

Ms. L respected and encouraged the students' communicative tools and used it as a base to develop their writing skills. She drew on the students' out of school linguistic experiences to teach them academic language forms they will need to succeed in this world. The students used these tools, in particular metaphor, to voice themselves as active participants of the community; and to diachronically and synchronically connect their everyday personal experience to their changing socio-historical context. The role of metaphor as a culturally relevant mediating device and a catalyst for social consciousness is illuminating. Metaphors and analogies are mediating devices that aid the comprehension of abstract processes (Holland & Valsiner, 1988). Within the process of social consciousness, metaphor was utilized by the students to grapple with the abstract and complex meanings of "Newark."

The students said the word "Newark" hundreds of times across their work. Similar to the way a young child names an object as she constructs its meaning (Vygotsky, 1987), the naming of "Newark" assisted the students to construe meanings of Newark, making an abstract concept (the city in which they live) more concrete. Garrett A. Duncan (1996) explains: "Naming, or giving critical clarity to one's location within the world may play a crucial role in the experience of Black adolescence" (p. 136).

Through discourse analysis of the children's use of the word "Newark," I

found their writings reflected the genres of Newark expressed in the social imagination, in particular: Newark as Ghetto, Newark as Home/NewArk, and Newark as Renaissance City. From their position in the periphery, the students have heard their city discussed in the media, from teachers, parents, community members and in music and other cultural arenas. This project gave them a space to join the conversation.

In addition to the genres of Newark from the adult world, they also utilized youth genres (Daiute, 1997) in their writings, in the use of rap and hip hop language as well as pop culture references to movies and sports figures. Furthermore the referencing of graffiti and discussing Newark as "the bricks" are examples specific to Newark's youth.

The students draw upon these multiple genres to construct a meaning of Newark that fits with their experiences. The children in the WIL project were dealing with conflicting messages and feelings about Newark and themselves as members of the city. Society and its discourses are full of contradictions and so is the process of trying to make sense of it. The students were struggling with multiple meanings of Newark– not just repeating what they heard. Duncan (1996) eloquently describes the process:

> Our speech, that is all our utterances (including created words), is filled with other's words, varying degrees of other ness, varying degrees of "our- own-ness" These words of others carry with them their own expression, their own evaluative tone, which we assimilate, rework, and reaccentuate. (p.89)

I found complexity in the students thinking as they negotiated the multiple (and often conflicting) genres of Newark as well as the multiplicity of reasons for and solutions to the problems faced by Newark. I found, similar to Daiute's (2000) study of 3rd and 5th

grade African American urban children, that that the students "seemed to address contradictions head-on as they create narratives with details that clash" (p. 215). In the *Where I Live* writings almost every narrative had seemingly contradictory elements in it (with a few notable exceptions). For example, one student wrote in his first paragraph that Newark is great because it has lots of parks, then two paragraphs later in the same essay he writes how he plays in the alleys where he is not allowed and pretends it is a park because there are no parks for him to play in. As Daiute (2000) points out, however, what may be misinterpreted as a lack of structural coherence (i.e., chronological order or a happy ending tying everything together) from an outsider's perspective is actually multiple discourses structured around the child's own experience.

Social Consciousness therefore involved students conceptualizing the multiple and abstract meanings of Newark in relation to their own personal experiences in Newark. This is a complex task and metaphor proved to be a powerful mediational device in the process. Similar to findings with adults (Becker, 1994; Fernandez, 1991; Luborsky, 1987) I found the students used metaphor and analogy to explore contradictions and to create coherence in the narrative of their life. The students utilized metaphor to create a sense of cohesion in numerous ways: within their internal struggle; in the uniting the duality of Newark as both bad and good; and in connecting the city's past, present and future to their own.

Metaphor is a cross-modal mediating device, thereby an important tool in linking oral, textual and visual mediums within this project. In their analysis of multimodal compositions written by students, Hull and Nelson (2005) conclude that the while "different semiotic modes may seem to encode the same content, they are nonetheless

conveyors of qualitatively different kinds of message" and the meaning conveyed to the viewer or listener "transcends what is possible via each mode separately" (p. 251).

A few of the students developed complex conceptual metaphors in their narratives based on the photographs they took, for example, the icicle and the mirror. Vygotsky (1987) explained, "Meaning is constructed through a process of articulating ideas" (p. 6). These examples illustrate the important point that the multimodal nature of the project allowed students to articulate and construct meaning in qualitatively different ways than if the students only wrote narratives or only took photographs.

In the preface to the 2nd edition of the *Handbook of Research on Teaching Literacy through the Communicative Arts* (2006) the editors lament the lack of integration of visual media within education and the lack of a sustained link between classroom and civic learning. Similar to my findings, the editors describe an interconnection between multimedia literacy and the understanding of oneself as socially and historically situated and an agent for change:

> Essential within all means of literacy is their power to remind individuals of their communal membership and of their own past experiences as well as their power to project themselves and their ideas and intentions into the future. Remembering together ensures affirmation of social membership as does joint creative activity, often stimulated by an in- the moment visual and narrative experience. (p. xvi)

Through the activities of taking, developing and discussing their own pictures the students in the WIL curriculum concentrated their attention on what they see everyday. Studying a photograph, for example, of an abandoned house they walk by everyday evokes memories of the fearful things they've seen in and around the

abandoned house (drug dealers, gangs, fires, dogs) as well as the people who love and protect them. Through the multimodal activities of the project, students individually and collaboratively considered and connected "what is" with "what was" and "what could be."

Through the curriculum the students reflected on "what was" both in their personal history as well as social history (as depicted in the documentary photography). Similar to the documentary photographers they studied, the student work was purposeful – they were recorders of the injustice of their own social- historical context. They found themselves and their work to be part of a tradition. They were "standing on the shoulders of giants."

In addition to discussing the history depicted in the photographs Ms. L scaffolded civic learning through giving the students the opportunity to "practice" the democratic process of discussing and imagining solutions ("what could be") to their city's problems, much like a younger child practices adult social roles through their dramatic play. For these children, the writing and activities of the class were tools for learning about the social world.

In her studies of classroom literacy practices within the urban setting, Anne Haas Dyson (1993) found that act of writing to be deeply related to developing a sense of community and democracy in K-3 children: "Children live in contested worlds with social tensions- learning to write is learning to participate in these communities of difference. Writing is an act of social responsibility" (p. 9).

Constance Flanagan and Nakesha Faison (2001) summarize the data on youth civic development and note a lack of research in the area:

> There has been relatively little research of the processes whereby children develop affection for the polity and become engaged citizens. That we know even less about these processes among youth who are members of ethnic minority groups. And what we do know does not engender optimism. (p. 5)

Flanagan and Faison's lack of optimism is based on the research showing increasing mistrust of the government and the low confidence and cynicism that African American and Latino high school youth have toward the state and its institutions. Only the naïve would be surprised by the lack of trust and confidence that Afro-American and Latino youth have towards the state. The question is not: why don't historically-oppressed peoples trust in the institutions that participate in their oppression -- their mistrust is evidently based in experience, reason, and historical lessons. The question is: how do people become engaged despite that history and mistrust.

The students in my study are in elementary school, yet there was an already understandable mistrust of the state and institutions (with the exception of the institution of education). Daiute (2000) discusses the research that indicates that

> Social injustice is an aspect of young people's home preparation for interacting in the world, especially when they come from groups that have faced discrimination (Garcia & Hurtado, 1995; Hill- Collins, 1983; Ward 1996) and when they live in multicultural settings. (p. 225)

Still, the students were very hopeful and offered inventive solutions to the problems in their community, for example: creating recreation centers for the youth, making abandoned buildings into housing, and picking up litter in the streets. The students

emphasized multiple sources of the problems as well as their solutions. Although the students reflected on the structural nature of the problems, they emphasized individual responsibility.

The interrelationship between individual agency and social responsibility is a point of interest in this study. The students' emphasis on the individual could be misinterpreted as "victim blaming" or "less altruistic," similar to a study referred to in Flanagan and Faison (2001):

> American adolescents' theories about inequality also were concordant with their personal and familial values: Those who said poverty, unemployment and homelessness are the fault of individuals (e.g. for failing to work hard) were more committed to materialist values whereas those who focuses on the condition in which poor people live or pointed to the systemic roots of unemployment tended to be more altruistic and reported that compassion was emphasized in their families (Flanagan and Tucker, 1999). (p.10)

The students in my study, however, developed a structural critique but they also had a strong sense of agency and social responsibility. They didn't pose their personal success in opposition to others or as a zero sum game. Instead they linked their personal success to the success of their community and the city in which they live. Their sense of self was social; inextricable from the city and the people of the community.

The School Context and the Role of the Teacher

I came to the project focusing primarily on the students and their work. As my observations and experience in the classroom continued, I unexpectedly learned the importance of the institutional context and of the individual teacher for a successful

curriculum. Ms. L's passion for photography and poetry was the foundation of the curriculum. The administration provided the context for this teacher's success.

The teacher had many of the traits that statistically lead to high attrition (Darling-Hammond, 2004; Harris, Camp & Adkison, 2003; Miech & Elder, 1996). Like many of teachers teaching in low income African American communities, the teacher was not from the same cultural background as the students. Although she was from a working class background, she had not lived the depth of poverty these students experienced. Her preparation through the alternate route did not equip her for the reality of the day to day struggles of teaching in a high poverty district. This teacher would have left in her second year and this project would never have existed without the support of the principal. His leadership, visibility, flexibility and support laid the framework so the teachers and students could flourish. The freedom she had to create this curriculum kept her from being another statistic on teacher attrition. She was able to bring her artistic skills, innovation and passion into the classroom.

The administrative support allowed the teacher to establish independent measures of success. She did not equate success (her own or the students) with high test scores. She cares for her students and wants them to succeed in life. As many of them come from the most trying of conditions, success means developing skills and strategies for personal success- a strong sense of themselves and their own potential, academic success- to do well in school, and also to empower them to envision and make change in their community. According to Pang and Sablan (1995) a barrier to effective instruction by novice teachers in urban districts is the belief that African American students cannot learn. Furthermore, teachers with high efficacy believe all students can learn and that

their role is to create tasks that are motivating. Ms. L. believed in her students just as the principal believed in her, and this made all the difference.

The multimedia nature of the project allowed the teacher to learn of her students' lives in a multiplicity of ways and allowed them to articulate their experience. A skilled teacher must be able to understand her students and adapt the curriculum based on their needs. It would be difficult for her to scaffold the children's learning without a knowledge, understanding, and appreciation of their out of school experience, language, and culture. In addition to the project itself Ms. L.'s organizing experience and activism gave her knowledge of the political and civic life in Newark as well as the historical knowledge of Afro-American Freedom movement. This expertise allowed her to scaffold their knowledge of social change.

The debate between a student-centered vs. teacher-centered approach ultimately misses the point – students find answers when problems are posed clearly and they have the background knowledge to address the issue at hand. In the classroom I studied, for instance, few children had deep cultural or historical knowledge and this information had to be brought to the students by a knowledgeable teacher and her curriculum materials. These are teacher centered moments in the classroom where the teacher is making "deposits," but these teacher-centered moments are based in and followed up with student-centered activities where the newly acquired knowledge can be wrestled with and applied. Without the teacher centered moment the student-centered activities can too often merely pool the limitations of the children. No Child Left Behind, on the other hand, not only attempts to standardize the educational outcomes it also attempts to standardize the teaching process itself which is necessarily a de-skilling of the teachers.

This is exactly the opposite direction necessary in an *Education for Social Consciousness.*

Limitations

There are a number of ways this project could have been strengthened. My relationship with the teacher is one of the project's strengths but could also be considered a weakness due to the fact that she has been a friend for a number of years. We have also worked together in our community activism. On the one hand our relationship may have made it difficult for me to be impartial, but on the other it was our closeness that allowed for the candidness of our discussions.

To broaden my analysis of the school context a number of people could have been surveyed or interviewed: the students, the parents, other teachers, staff, and the principal. The parents in particular would have given a deeper understanding of the children's out of school experiences and the discourses about Newark that they experience at home.

Some type of pre and post assignment or interview with the students particularly regarding their sense of self and their feelings about Newark would have allowed for more definitive remarks about the impact of the curriculum on the students. Finally, my findings could have been considered more definitive with the benefits of intercoder reliability measures.

My dissertation offers as many questions as answers. The theoretical model of social consciousness is the outcome of the study – it was not a theory that was being tested. Future studies within multiple contexts are clearly necessary to see if this model can generalize to other settings and other curriculum.

Implications/Future Directions

This study opens up a number of lines of inquiry that can be built upon in future research organized to develop the theory based practice of *Education for Social Consciousness.* Additional investigation is needed around institutional issues, teacher training and support, classroom practices, curriculum development, and student learning.

Further research studies examining the role of the arts as a mediator of scientific thinking in the classroom context could help bridge the assumed divide between the arts and sciences. Scientific thinking is too often thought of only applicable to physical sciences and mathematics, however as my study indicates, it is also relevant to social sciences. Scientific thinking involves the dialectical process of both analysis and synthesis. It involves the utilization of tools that mediate awareness of underlying systems that connect phenomenon over place and time. Social consciousness involves the conceptual understanding of the systematic nature of social world. As my findings indicate, this process requires abstract thinking skills, innovation, and problem solving – skills that also crucial in many endeavors including the natural sciences. Research investigating the ways these thinking skills can be dialectically reinforced when they are developed in an integrated curriculum that incorporates social sciences, arts, and natural science would be especially helpful. My hypothesis is that the emphasis on "math and science" is counter-productive since the type of thinking required for success in these subjects is also developed in arts and social science curriculums.

Ms. L continues to develop her project incorporating more advanced technology while deepening the relationship with the community at-large. For instance, she now uses digital cameras for the project and includes adult members of the community in the walks

around the neighborhood. She continues to incorporate multimedia technology into the classroom, for example, students have access to the independent news media site *Current* (where users contribute three-to-seven-minute short programs). Her sixth grade students now create their own video documentaries. I plan on doing a follow up study project at her school with the new technology and new principal. Analyzing this student work would give insight to the role of more advanced technology in mediating social consciousness. Case studies of similar projects with other teachers in other schools could develop the theoretical model of *Education for Social Consciousness*.

Education for Social Consciousness understands learning as a process- unlike test based curriculum which often involves moving quickly from topic to topic – speeding through mounds of information in a short time. However, there is not always an outcome at the end of a 45 minute lesson. Knowledge just isn't built like that. The *Where I Live* curriculum is a long term project with long term benefits-- the students first learn in the classroom then take pictures and then develop them. They must be patient and learn to follow though with the steps involved in the process to create a final project. They also must work together, particularly in the dark room- although each have their own photo they work on individually they work together on the equipment.

This leads to the question of creating measures that can evaluate conceptual and process based knowledge. One of the major problems with high stakes testing is that it focuses on short term goals and outcomes. The development of higher order thinking skills is a process with long term outcomes. Further research could develop qualitative and quantitative assessments to evaluate conceptual and innovative teaching and learning practices within a school, for example, by examining student work in science fairs and

arts galleries. Such assessments could include cross institution evaluations by teachers and administrators (which would in turn effect their own educational practices) developing a culture where innovation, creativity and cooperation form the standard of what is considered quality education.

With the standardization of curriculum and teaching methods projects such as *Where I Live* curriculum, unfortunately, are in jeopardy. Even this project, with increasing demands of NCLB is in danger of extinction. Although the students in the Malcolm X School test better then their neighboring schools, they are still not at the 100% proficiency and are deemed "In Need of Improvement." The principal is retiring this year, which leaves the future in question.

Ethnographies of innovative and idealistic teachers in unsupportive environment would complement this research in understanding the barriers such teachers face and their strategies for dealing with these barriers. This would lead to insight for training teachers on how to work within existing structures to create innovative curriculum, as well as possible policy recommendations that could lead to the removal of bureaucratic obstacles to innovation and learning.

Our world is undergoing dramatic and historical changes. With wars waging and economic crisis the norm the challenges that face us are immense. Education is in crisis and the policy proposals that are most common like NCLB do not solve the problems but exacerbate them. A research program that outlines a viable alternative and puts forth real policy proposals and struggles for their practical implementation and further development is crucial if the next generation is to grow capable of meeting potentially catastrophic challenges.

Appendix A

Student Work

Student Number	Source	Photograph	Poem	Narrative
1	consent	X	X	X
2	consent	X	X	X
3	consent		X	X
4	consent	X	X	X
5	consent			
6	consent	X	X	X
7	consent		X	X
8	consent	X	X	X
9	consent	X	X	X
10	consent		X	X
11	consent	X	X	X
12	consent	X	X	X
13	consent		X	X
14	consent	X		X
15	consent		X	X
16	consent		X	X
17	consent	X		X
18	consent	X	X	X
19	consent		X	X
20	consent	X	X	X
21	consent	X	X	X
22	consent		X	X
23	consent			X
24	consent			X
25	website			X
26	website	X	X	X
27	website			X
28	website	X	X	X
29	website			X
30	website	X	X	
31	website		X	
32	website		X	
33	website	X		
34	website	X		
35	website	X		
36	website	X		
37	website	X		
38	website	X		
39	website	X		
40	website	X		

Appendix B

Codebook

I. General themes/topics addressed
- A. Problems/Issues
  - Ex. Gangs, Violence, abandoned houses, garbage/litter, dogs
- B. Positive aspects
  - Ex. Friends, family, community, stores, park
- C. School
- D. Other
- E. Reference to photographs

II. Problem Solving
- A. Attributing cause for the problems
  1. Individual: bad choices, drug addiction, peer pressure
  2. Structural: lack of jobs, lack of recreation, landlords, not enough cops
  3. Gangs/ teenagers
  4. Just how it is
  5. Don't know
  6. Other
- B. Reasons why problems need to be addressed/solved
  1. For the city of Newark/people of Newark- to be the best city, so they don't die, to live in peace and safety
  2. For outsiders- so they will want to come, so their negative opinion change
  3. For the children- to be safe and not afraid
  4. Other
- C. Solutions to problems
  1. Individual
     - Ex. believe in / love self, kindness, care, don't be fearful, be responsible, appreciate what have, don't be lazy/do something with life, make better choices, stay in school, don't litter, clean up garbage, don't do drugs
  2. Interpersonal/ community
     - Ex. Unite with each other and fight/protest/ build community centers/ fix own houses/ clean up as a community/help each other get jobs
  3. Institutional/Structural
     - Ex. New laws, more cops/ arrests, fines, Mayor should do something
  4. Other

III. Newark
- A. Genres:
  1. Newark as "Ghetto"

2. Newark as “Renaissance city”
3. Newark as “New ark”
4. Other

B. Polarities:
   1. None: Newark is only good or only bad
   2. N/A: Does not discuss Newark in this way or at all
   3. Polarities: ex. Newark has two sides but is excellent, Newark both wonderful and horrible

C. In change
   ex. (past) Newark was safe now not
   ex. (future) Newark could be the best city

IV. Self

A. Positioning/Identity
   a. As a kid
   b. As an artist
   c. As a citizen/community member
   d. In relation to Newark

B. In change: Over time/place
   ex. when I was a child; when I grow up

C. Internal conflict/struggle

D. Problem solving/Agency- Indexed with use of “I”, “we”
   a. As part of the solution- *We* can change it by protesting and putting up signs ‘’Saying stop the violence now’
   b. As part of cause of problem- Ex. The cars are the problem. We steal them and crash them. The reason I say we because I am part of this unsafe community. I am no more special than the rest of you.

V. Metaphor

Appendix C

Photos and References

Photo	Possible References in Text
House with broken window	Newark is going to be a tremendous neighborhood. Abandoned buildings are getting repaired
Abandoned houses/ Street	Garbage/ repairing city
Locked bent up chain link fence – behind it is Garbagein an alley b/n houses	Everyday when I walk down the street I see a backyard filled with rubbish. Sometimes I prefer to clean that backyard. I stop to consider what is back there. I also start to reflect and it's a part of my community.
Empty snowy lot with garbage/ junk dumped	We have to be extra careful because we play in the alley way close to my house and on a sidewalk. Were not allowed to play in the vacant lots. There is no park close by so we pretend we're at the park while we play.
Mirror	Do you know what I wonder? I wonder how people see themselves in the mirror. Most people see themselves as overweight or big-boned. Remember this: a mirror makes everything seem one size larger. The mirror is a lie.
Front of house with open door	My brother, my cat and I live with my mom and stepfather. I go to Malcolm X School in Newark. Everyday after school I go home and I feel accepted for who I am. My neighborhood is not spotless, but it is not so dirty either. I like where I live and I bet you do too.
Stairs with cracked sidewalk-	Story about dog-gangs- no direct reference to topic of photo*
Messy room, bed, keyboards and microphone	Do you communicate with someone with a messy room? I have associated with a best friend who had an atrocious room! I am giving advice to everyone so that they can be clean and keep their rooms spotless. The keyboard and microphone located on the left of my room shows that I love music. I am inspired and interested with hip-hop and R&B. Instead of cleaning this disgusting room, I would rather listen, sing, or rap with my music.

Phone locked up	Where I live public phones aren't a good way to communicate because you wouldn't want to have a conversation or walk to where you have to go when the area isn't clean. . I don't use public payphones, or parking meters because around they are polluted. It also smells around the area. Many people spend lots of money every day on payphones, or meters when it's not even worth it. Some things cost about 50 cents, some are more. If you do spend 50 cents or more to talk on a payphone or run a parking meter that is dirty or probably out order than you are wasting your money. However where I live machines are rarely taken care of
Broken down car in snowy lot Behind broken/bent fence	I was born here. Newark is rowdy and loud and that is the way I like it. But where I live is a place where people drive cars and mess them up. Then people go to the store and eat their snacks and when they finish, they throw their wrappers on the ground.
Burnt/abandoned house	What is an abandoned house? An abandoned house is a house that no one ever buys again because it has been burned down, abandoned by the owner, or collapsed. There are so many abandoned houses in Newark, New Jersey that it doesn't make any sense. Instead of keeping the abandoned houses they should replace them with
Trees/lot behind fence	Garbage/trashy surroundings
Mailbox hand/partial person	If you live where I live you could get killed when you walk out the door. You could get killed if you're going to the mailbox or going to the store for somebody that is older than you.
Sidewalk with large shadow- refers to in essay	As you see in my photo, the streets were dirty and full of black snow instead of white snow. Some people are helpful and try to shovel out some of the snow, while penny-pinching, slothful, and upsetting people just pass the tired and helpful people without even asking if
Abandoned house with tree growing between in back	Would you like to know were I live? I live where there are lots of trees with no leaves; where people with everyday struggles live. Houses are abandoned from catching on fire. Trash takes over the
Icicle on a pipe	Like a frozen icicle, all my problems freeze up, meaning that my problems are here and are not leaving. But sometimes my issues go away. Then the water freezes and it repeats the process again. It's like an icy waterfall. Solid ice that is unbreakable.

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