A Teacher’s Reflexive Story of Student Voice Pedagogies: An Autoethnography

by

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A thesis submitted in conformity with the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy
Department of Social Justice Education
University of Toronto

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Abstract

This study is an autoethnography of my experiences with student voice reforms. Ultimately, I am concerned with better understanding the possibilities for student voice as a transformative teaching and learning practice within the context of neoliberal education. The discussion is anchored in two past student voice projects in which I was involved, one as a researcher and one as a facilitator. As method, I revisit these experiences through memory and various artifacts by way of field notes, personal journals, lesson plans, and email correspondences, to unpack embodied voices of difference that frame contemporary epistemological questions of how we come to know and understand our life worlds. More specifically, I am concerned with how teachers take up student voice in their pedagogies, how teachers come to understand themselves and their students in terms of student voice, and how social differences come to contour student voice pedagogies. I query: How do teachers understand student voice? What are the ways in which teachers experience student voice? How does the experience of student voice organize and inscribe teacher ↔ student relationships? And, how are student voice practices shaped, organized, and inscribed through social difference? Grounding this inquiry is poststructural feminist anti-racism as an interwoven discursive orientation and politics for troubling and transforming schooling and education. My analyses address how my presence as an individual
and as a member of socio-historical groups in the student voice initiatives affected the projects’ dynamics. My findings amplify the necessity of time and space for educators to critically reflect on their practices when implementing reforms, time and space that were provided by engaging autoethnography. The study contributes important strategic processes towards realizing the necessary goals of critical reflexive practices in teaching and learning, addressing the question of ‘how’ to do critical reflection through autoethnography.
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I have been surrounded by love and support from many who have made this study possible. As knowledge production is immanently social, the myriad conversations and relationships I have had through the years have shaped the writing in ways that are incommensurable. With this being said, I would like to thank a few people who were particularly pivotal in my process.

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Chapter 1
Introductions

Context and Problem of the Study

What does it mean to situate students’ voices in teachers’ pedagogies? How does engaging a student voice pedagogy (re)articulate teaching and learning? In the following I present a study, organized by way of autoethnography, of student voice as a pedagogical impulse within, through, and against neoliberal contours of contemporary teaching and learning. Revisiting two experiences I had with student voice projects, in this study I trouble the made-to-seem totalizing framework of neoliberalism in education, amplifying the ways in which teachers and students are lured into particular neoliberal performances while they also refuse those performances as hermetically sealed. Thinking and writing through my perspectives and lived experiences as a teacher, student voice facilitator and researcher, then, I situate student voice pedagogies as the acknowledgment and (attempted) disruption of personal, institutional, and social barriers to genuine and transformative inclusion of students’ voices, perspectives, opinions, and experiences, as crucial aspects of teaching and learning. Student voice, as presented in the governing literature, is broadly conceptualized as the intentional invitation and inclusion of the voices and perspectives of students in matters related to their education, as part of particular curricular, pedagogical and reform trends in contemporary Western education (Cook-Sather, 2002; Fielding, 2004a, 2004b, 2006; James, 2007; Kozol, 1991; Oldfather et al., 1999; Robinson & Taylor, 2007; Rudduck & Fielding, 2006; Lodge, 2005). Discourses of student voice found in this body of literature, educational reforms, and practices are often articulated as more than asking students to speak; it is about changing the imperial cultures and structures of our schools (Cook-Sather, 2002; Fielding, 2004a, 2004b, 2006; Kozol, 1991;), which is what initially drew
me to take up and theorize student voice as a practice in my classrooms. Cook-Sather (2002) articulates student voice as such:

To move toward more fully authorizing the perspectives of students is not simply to include them in existing conversations within existing power structures. Authorizing student perspectives means ensuring that there are legitimate and valued spaces within which students can speak, re-tuning our ears so that we can hear what they say, and redirecting our actions in response to what we hear. The twin challenges of authorizing student perspectives are (a) changing the structures in our minds that have rendered us disinclined to elicit and attend to student voices and (b) changing the structures in educational relationships and institutions that have supported and have been supported by this disinclination. (p. 4)

I focus on student voice projects that explicitly locate themselves as “student voice” within this study. In other words, while there are many approaches to education that engage students’/youths’ voices—for example, anti-racism education and critical pedagogy—I am making a distinction between these and projects that articulate themselves as “student voice” within the literature and particular reform efforts.

More specifically, I am interested in understanding the experiences of student voice reforms and how educators take up student voice in their pedagogies. I am interested in how educators come to understand themselves and their students in terms of student voice, and I am particularly concerned with how social differences come to contour student voice pedagogies.

To contextualize this study, I draw out three interwoven sites of interest in relation to this project—neoliberalism, “reform fatigue” or how teachers experience implementing reform, and (imagined) teacher identities—in an effort to understand some of the broader forces informing
this contemporary inclination towards student voice in education. In other words, I engage the ways neoliberalism, reform fatigue, and teacher identity present possibilities and limitations for what can be imagined in student voice pedagogies.

In this first chapter, *Introductions*, I begin to share my process through this study and the ways in which these concepts and concerns inform the remaining chapters. I first articulate the broader context and problem of the study by engaging these concepts of neoliberalism, educational reform, and teacher identity. Continuing with the context of the study, I move on to briefly situate student voice. I then locate how I came into this project both through time and through subject location, and after introducing the remaining organization of the study, I attend to the pedagogical implications of the project. Next I will briefly address the purpose of the study and the research questions. The remainder of this section discusses the broader socio-historical context in which student voice and this study emerge.

**Purpose of the study and research questions.**

In a broad sense, by thinking through my lived experiences as an entry point to engage the experiences of a particular educational reform—student voice—the purpose of this study is to understand the ways in which teachers take up educational reforms, particularly those that represent transformative possibilities in their iteration. Student voice, for example, is often presented in the literature as a method to disrupt the banking model of education (Freire, 1970). More specifically, my intention is to provide a space for critical reflexivity of my teacher practices, and open the door for dialogic engagement with educational reforms in relation to the socio-historical configurations of schooling and education, the emotionality of educational reform implementation processes, and the possibilities and limitations for different bodies in
different spaces to “succeed”\(^1\) in enfolding transformative educational reforms into their practices. One of my desires for this work is that this study will encourage pedagogical thoughtfulness (van Manen, 1997) not only for myself, the researcher, but also for those who may feel alienated, stuck behind a closed door, in their existing teaching practices during this epoch of educational reform and disembodied neoliberalism. Guiding the purpose of this study are the following research questions:

- How do teachers understand student voice?
- What are the ways in which teachers experience student voice?
- How does the experience of student voice organize and inscribe teacher/student relationships?
- How are student voice practices shaped, organized, and inscribed through social difference?

**Neoliberalism and education reform: Thinking through my experiences as a secondary teacher.**

In conjunction with the evermore increasing neoliberal framework that has shaped our institutions and social relationships since the 1980s (Davies & Bansel, 2007; Gallagher & Fusco, 2006; Gallagher & Lortie, 2005; Giroux, 2008; Harvey, 2005; McMahon & Portelli, 2012), education in the English speaking Western world has undergone significant and ongoing externally-imposed reforms (Ball, 2003; Day, 2002; Day & Smethem, 2009; Goodson, 2001; Hargreaves, 2005; Lasky, 2004; Lingard & Mills, 2000). These reforms are increasingly written through business frameworks by non-educators and are permeated with rewards and punishments for districts, schools, administrators, teachers and students who either “meet” externally imposed “standards” or don’t (Ball, 2003; Darling-Hammond, 2010; Day, 2002; Day & Smethens, 2009;)

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\(^1\) Throughout the document, I engage the use of scare quotes frequently to amplify the contested nature of the concept.
Essed & Goldberg, 2002; Spring, 2006). You are rewarded if you are able to become recognizable in relation to the ever-shifting, yet consistently ethno-culturally centric, measurable confines of these reforms. When I was undergoing my teacher training, I was taught to engage this thing of a “Teaching Point” to frame my lessons. In both my lesson plans and on the chalk/white board in front of the class, I was instructed to write a short statement (and it had to be written as a statement!) that would capture what the students would be doing in that lesson.

One day I was in the English Language Arts (ELA) office when a veteran teacher came in and proclaimed that she had been written up after an official observation, because she did not have a teaching point on the board. Instead, falling back on the previously imposed curricular model, she had written a question that would frame the lesson; she did not have “TP: . . .” written in bold—instead there was a question mark on the board! She was told that she would have to talk with the English department’s Assistant Principal to learn how to write “proper” lesson plans, lesson plans that engage the teaching point rather than ask a question. According to this teacher, she did not receive any other feedback on her lesson. My classroom shared a wall with hers and I knew the rapport she had with the students. I was certain that her lesson went well and that her students were engaged and learning; however, because she did not present her lesson engaging the “correct” language, she was disciplined, and a punitive note was put in her file.

I am interested in how the grammar of these reforms are taken up to shape, and in the instance narrated above, limit what is possible in the classroom, narrowly confining what teaching and learning look like. I am interested in how these reforms are framed as deregulation while the grittiness of implementation—the contradictions, struggles, anxieties, uncertainties—are left to the teachers (Apple, 2000; Ball, 2003; Hargreaves, 2005; Larner, 2000; Lasky, 2004; Niesz, 2006). I query how teachers must be(come) the “enterprising subject” (Ball, 2003; Bragg, 2007; Essed & Goldberg, 2002; Gallagher & Fusco, 2006; Giroux, 2008; Harvey, 2005) called
upon by disembodied neoliberal logics framing the reforms in order to be made recognizable. As Essed & Goldberg (2002) importantly articulate, “Those who do not fit the productivity profile along the lines of gender, race, first-third world situatedness, or educated-illiterate are likely to be marginalized . . .” (p. 1075). Even as discourses of meritocracy and excellence prevail through neoliberal imperatives, particular bodies who have historically been tangentialized by way of race, class, gender, ability, sexuality and religion are always already excluded from acknowledgement, through universalizing narratives of progress and “pulling oneself up by the bootstraps”. Neoliberalism in education erases these racialized and embodied experiences.

Thinking about my experiences as a secondary teacher, I reflect on how we (as teachers) protect ourselves from sanctions brought by “incompetence” by closing the doors to our classrooms, ensuring that our anxieties do not seep out through the cracks in a moment of inattention. We “confidently” engage the next trend in curriculum and pedagogy and quietly try to “make it work” for the various youth in our classrooms. We have conversations about “best practices” and “what works” (Ball, 2003; Darling-Hammond, 2010; Day & Smethen, 2009). We learn to talk about how successful we are, rarely admitting to our colleagues that we are struggling, that we are afraid we are not “doing it right” (Ball, 2003); we certainly take caution in articulating the pernicious effects of the entrenched racism within education at large and the particulars of the reforms imposed upon us. In this study, I am thinking through what this produces, what are the possibilities and limitations for teaching and learning within these conditions? Twenty-five years ago, Madeline Grumet (1989) wrote of conditions of alienation and how they limit teachers’ capacities for influencing the broader culture(s) of schooling and education: “Alienated from the bureaucracy of schools, defended against administrators, competitive with colleagues, the teacher who does her best work behind the classroom door is trapped in privatized and isolated labor” (p. 15, emphasis added). I ask, then, how do we do (are
we doing) teaching and learning alternatively in an epoch of technicized universalism, accountability and commodification (Darling-Hammond, 2010; Davies & Bansel, 2007; Gallagher & Lortie, 2005; Gallagher & Fusco, 2006; Giroux, 2008; Hursh, 2001, 2007; Larner, 2000)? In other words, how do we de-buttress the imperial, standardizing, neoliberal classifications of teaching and learning through our pedagogical decisions? What are the ways in which we can address the thorny histories of colonialism and global capitalist modernity within our practices, contained by the ways contemporary education serves, regulates and privileges individualized, private market interests?

**Teacher identities and the impossible profession.**

Another pressure or stressor in the lives of teachers with which I am concerned is the question of teacher identity in the public and educational policy and reform imaginaries. Ball (2003) discusses the ways in which educational reforms not only change what goes on in classrooms, but also changes who “the teacher” is and can be (see also, Gallagher & Fusco, 2006). This imagined teacher identity is often replete with a disavowal of embodiment, of experiences of race, class, gender, ability, sexuality and religion, while purporting some universal norm as coded through White, masculinist, heterosexual, able-bodied Judeo-Christian values. These traces of cultural expectations of who “the teacher” is continue to inform teachers’ possible identities, at times placing a tremendous amount of pressure on teachers (particularly if the teacher does not fit within the imagined universalized identity). Britzman (2003) writes,

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“Cultural myths offer a set of ideal images that are taken up as measures for thought, affect, and practice” (p. 30) and “the identity of a teacher becomes overpopulated with cultural myths” (p. 29). As part of this study I engage the ways in which these cultural myths, which Britzman identifies as, “everything depends upon the teacher, teachers are self made, and teachers are experts” (p. 7) are now brushed up alongside the disembodied neoliberal requirement of the “enterprising subject” (Ball, 2003; Bragg, 2007; Gallagher & Fusco, 2006; Giroux, 2008; Harvey, 2005) in which the teacher is expected to be self-regulating and independent. Combined, these images of the teacher “situate the teacher’s individuality as the problem and proffer a static solution of authority, control, mastery, and certainty as the proper position. They seem to explain competency as the absence of conflict” (Britzman, 2003, p. 7). I query how I, and other teachers, have lived and experienced this imperative towards “progress” as seamless, unified and without conflict or contradiction? I suggest that these discursive imperatives and cultural myths of dominant education along with “reform fatigue” (Lingard & Mills, 2000) contribute to the stress and alienation expressed increasingly throughout the teacher profession in neoliberal times (Metlife, 2012; Jackson, McDermott, Simmons, & McDermott, forthcoming).

**Fissures of/in the enfolding of transformative reforms into neoliberal logics.**

One of the many contradictions within the disembodied neoliberal conditions of schooling and education with which I am particularly concerned are the ways in which discourses of anti-racism and social justice seemingly abound (Ahmed, 2006a; Mohanty, 2003; see also Collins, 2000; Dei, 2008a; Steinberg, 2010). As Davies and Bansel (2007) note, however, we are faced with the difficult task of disentangling discourses that have been enfolded into the neoliberal
discourse towards its own ends (p. 257). Sara Ahmed (2006), for example, unpacks how official anti-racism policies, particularly in educational institutions, work to simultaneously name and erase the politics of anti-racism to the point of making them impossibilities, a phenomenon that she calls non-performativity.

However, in the neoliberal co-optation of particular concepts, I hold on to the belief that there may yet be spaces for genuine educational re-forms, reforms that engage the possibilities of differently engaged relationships (read: non-hegemonic) between students and teachers. This promise of transforming our racialized, oppressive, marginalizing schooling and education legacies is what initially drew my attention to student voice as a particular educational reform. Students historically marginalized by various socially inscribed “differences”—race, class, gender, sexuality, religion, language, and ableism—have been excluded from classroom discourses, curriculum and pedagogical practices, for example, that speak to their lived experiences, particularly through the standardization and universalism of neoliberal education (Freire, 1985; Freire, 1970; Jackson, et al., forthcoming; Ladson-Billings, 2000; Steinberg, 2012a). The way I read and interpreted student voice offers a space to disrupt this disacknowledgment of tangentialized students’ lived experiences and pedagogical articulations. However, student voice is but one of a plethora of contemporary reforms with which teachers are confronted, as noted above. Lingard & Mills (2000) comment on this overload of reform and teachers’ responses to it:

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3 I take up the form ‘disacknowledgement’ rather than ‘unacknowledgement’ to amplify the active process of refusing to acknowledge something, whereas I believe that when something is said to be ‘unacknowledged’ the person or institution is distanced from the process. In other words, if something is ‘unacknowledged’ it could suggest an innocence on the part of the person who has unacknowledged it.
We now have a situation where reform or change fatigue is commonly reported by those working in schools, as well as deep cynicism and skepticism amongst many teachers working within government educational systems regarding structural reforms. Little of this structural reform has directly affected student learning in relation to both desired social and academic outcomes (p. 99; see also Hargreaves, 2005; Hursh, 2007; Jackson et al., forthcoming).

Not only has the onslaught of imposed reforms shaped teacher subjectivities such that to admit struggles, fears, and anxieties is to admit failure and ineptitude rather than learning and growth (Ball, 2003) (and thus risk losing one’s job), but it has also exhausted us and made us weary of further reforms. So I ask, what can be done? How do we nurture the courage to take risks, to try something different, to believe that change is possible? How do we trouble the call to be implementation agents rather than creative professionals?

In this project I offer to bridge this lacuna as a point of departure by way of an autoethnographic study (Chang, 2008; Ellis, 2004; Ellis & Bochner, 2000; Reed-Danahay, 1997; Simmons, 2012) of student voice projects that amplify the moments, bodies, experiences, memories, and desires that haunt the attempted totalization of the neoliberal framework. In the research, I consider my lived experiences as a teacher/facilitator and researcher of several student voice projects, to better understand my experiences, feelings, and thoughts when attempting to implement something different—different in that it seeks transformation—in pedagogical sites. Regardless of my desires for student voice work to be transformative, what I found as I read the sample literature and experienced the two student voice projects, was that in many ways there is no single articulation of student voice practices. Simultaneously, the practices and the literature are rife with tensions and contradictions, some of which I would argue have to do with the aforementioned pressures that come to shape the student voice experience. (It is this suggestion that I ultimately engage in my three analysis chapters, as I weave through my first research
question: How do educators understand student voice?). That being said, in the next section I introduce some of the foundations of student voice, recognizing, of course, that foundations are contingent, ever shifting in relation to context, bodies, histories, geo-temporalities, and desires (Butler, 1992).

**Situating Student Voice**

Student voice, as a recently popularized field in schooling and education, has many iterations. At the irreducible moment, most who engage student voice (in the academy, in policy, as teachers and students, as communities) are working from the idea that in some capacity students’ voices ought to be heard in the broader educational conversations, as they are the ones who experience the pedagogical and policy decisions that are made (Cook-Sather, 2002; Fielding, 2004a, 2006; James, 2007; Kozol, 1991; Lodge, 2005; Oldfather et al., 1999; Robinson & Taylor, 2007; Rudduck & Fielding, 2006). Issues of student voice—such as how they are heard, what they are asked to/allowed to speak on, what the purposes of asking the students to speak are—stretch the gamut of theoretical, philosophical, and ideological purposes of schooling and education more generally speaking.

The inconsistencies, tensions and, in many ways, what I felt was the fraudulent and over-simplified branding of so many student voice projects in the literature, is a theme to which I found myself returning as I moved through the research and writing of this study. Inasmuch, however, the student voice literature has significantly informed my research, my frameworks, my desires and expectations of doing this work. But, what is this work? What is this thing of “student voice” as discussed in the literature? Briefly here, as I go into more detail in Chapter 3,
when I review the literature on student voice, many have located the recent trend in what is now called “student voice” with the 1989 United Nations Convention on the Rights of Children (UNCRC) (Cook-Sather, 2006; Cruddas, 2001; James, 2007; Kirby, 2001; Robinson & Taylor, 2007) which calls for the rights of children to have a voice in matters that specifically affect them (UNCRC, 1989; Cruddas, 2001; James, 2007; Kirby, 2001; Robinson & Taylor, 2007), schooling and education being notably included therein. Those who take up various student voice initiatives believe that students have a unique perspective on their experiences of school, and as such ought to be seriously consulted about educational matters ranging from policy and pedagogy to available programs and spaces within schools. So the story goes: official national policies are written (specifically, in England, Cook-Sather, 2006; Rudduck & Fielding, 2006); and educational and pedagogical reforms are drafted and/or aligned with calls for student voice (see, for example, Writing Workshop Models – Lensmire, 1998; Cook-Sather, 2006). Impulses for student voice also recall John Dewey’s work in the beginning of the 20th century, with his calls for democratic education (Cook-Sather, 2002; Giroux, 1986).

By the 1990s, “student voice” has far reaching implications (Cook-Sather, 2002; 2006; Lensmire, 1998; Mitra, 2004), yet there is little consensus as to what this thing of student voice is. James (2007) amplifies the ambiguities and contradictions related to the articulation of student voice in relation to the UNCRC: “if the practitioners felt this would not be in the children’s best interests, then children’s voices were effectively silenced, despite the practitioner’s explicit commitment to child-centered practice” (p. 267). This presents one problematic, that those who author the daily goings-on of schools can claim student voice advocacy while re-entrenching the hierarchical power dynamics of conventional schooling and education (see also Arnot & Reay, 2007; Bragg, 2007; Ellsworth, 1992; Orner, 1992;). There are at least two other concerns prominent in student voice literature: the perils of popularity, in that,
there is concern that student voice has become an empty term, “a zeitgeist” (Rudduck, 2006, quoted in Robinson & Taylor, 2007, p. 6), “a buzzword” (Silva, 2001, p. 95), a “fad” (Fielding, 2004a; Rudduck & Fielding, 2006); and that student voice can undermine the training and experience of teachers who are already too-often positioned as the targets for educational reform debates (Darling-Hammond, 2010; Fielding, 2001a; Kincheloe, McLaren & Steinberg, 2012).

It has now come to a point that, while there may be agreement that student voice is a key part of schooling and education, the particulars of the ways student voice is constructed, understood, worked with, and invoked, are extremely varied (Bragg, 2007; Cook-Sather, 2006; Fielding, 2004a). Some of the broad problematizations of student voice include: a homogenization of students, that there is one student voice; that student voice reconstitutes the limited and limiting roles students can play in education; student voice can be used as a disciplinary method of control, surveillance and management of both students and teachers; there are necessary questions of which students are heard, or made hearable, in other words, there is the propensity to re-hierarchize within the group “students” as well as an active dismissal of things and bodies we do not want to hear; and silence is undermined and devalued (see, for example, Arnot & Reay, 2007; Bragg, 2001, 2007; Cook-Sather, 2006; Fielding, 2001a, 2004a, 2004b; Orner, 1992). These concerns bring me to question, how do we guard against the enfolding of student voice possibilities into the disembodied neoliberal frameworks of instrumentality and technicism that overpopulate contemporary schooling and education? It seems as though these instrumental possibilities, however, are part of what makes for the particular focus on student voice within contemporary educational reforms. For example, some of the purposes of student voice point towards improved student outcomes and improved student learning (see, for example, Cook-Sather, 2006; Dahl, 1995; Fielding, 2006; Mitra, 2004), which may be achieved through possibilities of student engagement and inclusive education (Bulluck &
Wikeley, 2001; Cook-Sather, 2002; Cruddas, 2001; Fielding, 2001b; McMahon & Portelli, 2012), and the improvement of teacher practices by hearing what students have to say (Cook-Sather, 2002; Dahl, 1995; Heshius, 1995; Lincoln, 1995). (I address some of my struggles with these hegemonic articulations of student voice and the ways in which I am complicit in perpetuating these neoliberal goals in Chapter 6, Finding Voice.) However, some of the more transformative goals of student voice work include a redistribution of power (Cook-Sather, 2002, 2006; Kozol, 1991; Orner, 1992) and critical thinking and democratic participation (Cook-Sather, 2002; Fielding, 2001a, 2001b). Along with this brief contextualization of student voice, I will outline below some of the particular forms student voice work can take as discussed in the literature. It ought to be noted that these are fluid, overlapping, and contradictory categories with various levels of participation possible in each, ranging from students as sources of information to students as active participants in change efforts and co-creators of knowledge (Cook-Sather, 2006; Fielding, 2004a; Lodge, 2005; Oldfather et al., 1999; Raymond, 2001; Whitehead & Clough, 2004).

- **Students as reform participants**: This can take several different forms including student governments, students as participants in professional development, and students as participants in curriculum development. While participation may be limited to filling out surveys, the idea is for students’ voices to be heard in the design and implementation of particular reform efforts (see Mitra, 2001; Silva, 2001).

- **Students as co-researchers**: Students, in this form of student voice, work with researchers who ultimately design the research questions, while the students help in later phases of data collection and sometimes analysis (Cook-Sather, 2006; Fielding, 2004a; Oldfather et al., 1999)

- **Students as researchers**: Within this model of student voice work, students are trained in the methods of research, and are the ones who design the research questions and methods for issues that matter to them; often this is done with adults as supporters (Bragg, 2007;
I ought to mention the discomfort I felt each time I sat down to write about what student voice is; both because there is no singular articulation and due to my general unease at defining concepts (including theoretical frameworks which I address in Chapter 2, as I feel it tends to pin them down, losing complexities and limiting possibilities for thinking otherwise, see also Kelly, 2004, p. 1). How will I be able to think otherwise to understand the complexities of lived life after I have already framed a way of thinking about it (see also, Britzman, 2003; Davies, 2000, 2003; Gallagher, 2007, p. 59; Lather, 1991; Steinberg, 2012b; Weedon, 1987)? Working through this process of articulating how student voice is understood as I read the literature and participated in the two student voice projects became a critical piece to the study. In the next section I introduce how I came into the study, how I understand my position in relation to research in general and student voice in particular.

**Researcher Introductions: Orientations in/to Student Voice**

*Site introductions: Coming to this study.*

While I noted that the research questions are guiding the purpose of the study, there are other, interwoven aspects that have shaped this study: researcher location, discursive framework, and methodology. Before I move on to the latter two, I will discuss briefly what brings me to this study. In some ways I have been engaging the question of student voice for many years, although admittedly it was not until the second year in my Ph.D. program that I became aware of the particular discursive field of student voice in education. During my years teaching high school English language arts (ELA), I was wittingly and unwittingly seeking spaces for students’
voices to be heard. My ELA colleagues and I would often have discussions about teaching “proper English” to our students who identified as Black, African American, Latin@ and Caribbean. With a background in sociology and cultural studies, I was a most adamant proponent of the belief that some universal “proper English” is an impossibility—that instead we engage different articulations depending on the particularities of the space and the bodies inhabiting that space. I wanted my students to understand the concept of “code switching”, of being able to read their space and have the tools to engage according to the often-unarticulated rules, or codes, of that space. This was, at least, the way I framed it with the particular understandings I had at the time.

My experiences as a White teacher in an “urban” school in Brooklyn, NY, concretized for me the structural inequalities shaping the possibilities and limitations of marginalized students’ futures. I felt a desire for a more thorough understanding of the socio-historical contexts of these structures, and this drove me to pursue my Ph.D. After a year of course work, I was invited to participate in a project that has since informed much of my work. A United States based educational professional development organization, Teaching Learning Collaborative (TLC), was starting to work with student voice, and they wanted a team of researchers—myself, another Ph.D. student, and professors at several different Universities—to consider the ways in which their student voice intervention influenced student learning. As soon as I was invited I

\[4\] I engage the ‘@’ to represent both the masculinized (Latino) and feminized (Latina) forms of the identity.

\[5\] I engage the concept of urban in quotes here to signify the multiple and contradictory interpretations it has. This being said, I also engage the term here to note both the geographical location of the school as well as the particular bodies present in the school. In other words, while the term has been muddled, there is also a prevailing interpretation conjured in the academic and public imaginary when it is engaged (see, for example, Jackson et al., forthcoming; Milner, 2012)

\[6\] All names have been changed.
was hooked; with my course work having been completed, I spent the next few months reading and researching as much as I could about this thing of student voice.

The research was conducted at another “urban” school, this time a middle school, in Newark, NJ; again the students identified as Black, African American, Caribbean and Latin@. The other members of the research team also identified as Black and African American. I began to search the literature for conversations specifically addressing the ways in which social differences in general, and race in particular, informed student voice work. I also wanted to engage these questions with the research team, yet felt uncertain about how to bring them up as the only White body. I was left wanting. I began to feel frustrated that what I was witnessing, both in the research and in the literature, was a reproduction of status quo relations where Whiteness was the standard, normative articulation expected of the students. Eventually, I had the opportunity to facilitate a student voice project of my design, this time at a community center in downtown Montreal, in a community that historically identified as Afro-Caribbean-Canadian, and with families who had recently immigrated, before the latest influx of gentrifying bodies into the neighborhood.

The aspect of my partnership with the community organization, Wycliffe St. Albans (WSA), on which I focused my attention in this study, was a month-long Participatory Action Research (PAR) project I facilitated with a group of 6 Black, Caribbean, and Muslim identifying grade 9 and 10 female students. In this research, we studied the high school retention rates in the community. It was this experience in particular that spurred me to think through the ways in which we are drawn into the hegemonic (read: recognizable) performances of teaching and learning. Throughout and after the PAR, I was haunted by questions of agency and resistance, of
counter-hegemonic teaching and learning relations, of the affects\(^7\) of doing school differently. I could not get away from these concerns, and I devoted my attention to thinking through these moments in this study, as I am convinced that others besides me may benefit from a critically reflexive engagement with student voice work.

**Personal introductions: Subject location.**

It is these experiences that have shaped my desire to pursue this study—through autoethnography as method—of the ways in which teachers experience student voice as a reform to incorporate in their practices. More specifically, it is through my location as a White, feminized, heterosexual, enabled middle-class body that I come to locate myself in the political project of this work, because questioning how we come to know, understand and interpret students’ voices is a political project that is mediated through socio-historically informed relationships. In locating myself in this work, I want to engage substantively the ways in which my social and discursive positionings influence the interpretations, representations and relationships within and throughout the projects, as well as keep a focus on the ways in which the project, and myself, become complicit in the very systems I am attempting to trouble. While this location of the self contains the possibilities for political change as encouraged through anti-racism and feminist practices, I want to guard against a confessional approach such as that against which Andrea Smith (2013) warns: “these rituals often [substitute] confession for political movement-building” (para. 1). The dangers of a confessional approach to work seeking

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\(^7\) I engage “affects” here to suggest the emotional effects of doing school differently. Chapter 7 discusses how I conceptualize affect in this study more thoroughly.
to be critically reflexive is one of the perils in engaging an autoethnography that I attempted to keep at the forefront when (re)presenting this study: for whom am I making my vulnerabilities known? Who might benefit from the writing and reading of this work? I only mention these concerns here briefly; I write more about the possibilities and limitations of autoethnography as method in Chapter 4.

When introducing the different student voice projects in which I was engaged, I began to hint at the ways in which the relation of bodies, specifically my White body in a space embodied by tangentialized youth, influenced what could be said and heard. This relates directly to the ways in which I interpreted my experiences, how I read spaces, what was shared and what was covered up in the relationships with the other researchers and the facilitator during the research in the United States with TLC. Simultaneously, working with a group of marginalized youth in the community center, youth with whom I had a peripheral relationship, created anxieties and uncertainties about both the material I chose to present and how I chose to pedagogically engage that material. Furthermore, how did my presence influence what the youth were able to say? And when things were said, how did my presence shape the affective responses to the comments? I will provide an example, again from the research with TLC. There was a moment during which students discussed civil rights, brainstorming people and concepts associated with the movement. As the room became relatively quiet, a student stated “cracker”—a term historically engaged as a nomenclature for White enslavers who “cracked” the whip on enslaved bodies. Some students halted and I could feel the weight of their energies pressing on me, leaving an impression. I could feel the eyes of my colleagues as they avoided looking in my direction. In many ways it was the most “visible” I had been during my time with the research team at this site. If I was not present, would there have been a halt? What might the affective responses have been if I was not there? There is no way of knowing how this encounter might
have been handled had my body not been present as the only White body, but in this moment, the facilitator “addressed” the comment by way of abruptly ending the brainstorming practice. This was not an isolated incident in which racialized articulations were present in the classroom; however, I share it to amplify the ways in which the bodies present influence what is said and done in pedagogical and research sites; engaging moments like these more thoroughly is a part of the politics of my autoethnographic study.

In another instance during the research with the youth at WSA, I was challenged, perhaps even tested, by the youth who were participating. We were discussing a text that we read, “Makes me mad: Stereotypes of young urban womyn of color” (Rios-Moore, et al., 2004) in preparation for our research, and Jasmin⁸ asked whether or not there are stereotypes of White people. I had previously had race conversations with some of the youth participants in other settings, in which I was asked if I was okay talking about “these things”—these things being everyday experiences of the youth in the public spaces of downtown Montreal. I reassured them that I was comfortable having conversations about race. Several of the youth also knew that my partner is Black Trinidadian. When discussing what stereotypes exist of White people, some of the comments were: “White women marry Black men. . .White people can’t jump. . .White people can’t dance” (WSA journal entry July 4, 2012). There was a notable tremor in the room, and frankly I could feel my cheeks heat up being confronted with the tense (heteronormative) history between White and Black women in relation to Black men (see, for example hooks, 1992). When Nyasha said “White women marry Black men”, the subsequent comments were half-heartedly uttered before Imani asked if there could be stereotypes that were positive. Once

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⁸ Throughout the dissertation, all names used are psudeonyms.
again, the presence of bodies—the presence of my body—influenced the conversations, the desires, and the affects of the space.

All of this brings up questions of what it means to do anti-racism work as a White body. What are the possibilities and limitations of engaging anti-racism as a White body in pedagogical spaces shaped through marginalized bodies and experiences? How does my subject location, in relation to the students, come to structure what can be said and heard? How can I hear the voices and experiences of the students I have worked with without consuming their narratives or tending towards voyeurism? How can trust be built between the students and me within the socio-historical contexts that shape schooling and education, when I ask them to engage this thing of student voice? What voicings are made recognizable? What does it mean to position myself as an ally to those who are marginalized, and simultaneously to tell my own story? And how do I interpret and represent those voices, particularly through a narrative of autoethnography? In other words, how does my subject location come to shape the interpretations of students’ voices? Along with questions of responsibility in interpretation and representation of my experiences, how do I attend to the ways in which I am implicated and simultaneously complicit with historical formations of power and privilege as they come to reside within contemporary institutions (in particular, education, both at the secondary level in my role as a teacher, and at the graduate level in my role as a researcher) and everyday sociocultural politics? These are some of the questions with which I wrestled as I pursued this research in relation to my location to this work. They are woven throughout the following chapters, as I wrote through the anxieties and ambivalences they produced.
Chapter Introductions: On Writing and the Organization of the Study

As an autoethnography that tries to capture the anxieties and ambivalences, the tensions and contradictions of student voice, and the discontinuities that mirror lived experience, there is a purposefulness to writing the chapters in different “voices”, at times engaging a more conventional distanced researcher pen (see, for example, the literature review in Chapter 3), and at other times presenting a more journalistic form of writing (Chapter 8, in particular, engages the journalistic style). In bringing these fragmentary voicings together to form one (readable) text, I present a bricolage (Kincheloe, McLaren, & Steinberg, 2012; Steinberg, 2012b), a pastiche that draws on the tensions and contradictions of lived life rather than trying to smooth them out. The writing takes on an elliptical form as well; I come back to particular moments in the research in different ways in several chapters. As the remembering and narrating of experience is mediated by our present framework, goals, contexts, and mood, for example, in several chapters there are descriptions of the two ethnographic storyworlds (as I call the articulations of my experiences with TLC and WSA in my methodology chapter), which simultaneously overlap and provide a different perspective on the experiences. By this approach, the writing style itself becomes a critical part of the representation and understandings of the study; the writing style amplifies the contradictory subject locations I took up as I worked through framing what I did in the student voice experiences. It is through this method of writing autoethnographically that I simultaneously constitute the experiences and leave room for multiple readings. It is my hope that knowledge and understanding become framed, represented, and felt as a disjunctive temporality, in ways that allow us to imagine our selves, our experiences, and our future becomings as unbounded by, however still in relation to, hegemonic linear trajectories that overdetermine teaching and learning generally. In this way moving away from the desire for the learner, in this case myself as the researcher, to move from some state of
not understanding, into a measurable position and articulation of understanding, progressing smoothly from one end of the spectrum to the next.

Chapter 2 picks up on this conversation of what counts as knowledge. In this chapter, I fashion a theoretical framework focused on understanding where knowledge resides, through questions of pedagogy as a process of coming “to know”. I do several things in this chapter in an effort to shape and support the analysis that follows. I name and mark the discursive orientations that I engaged throughout the project, what I call poststructuralist feminist anti-racism, first articulating briefly how each orientation directs my attention in the work. As this is an autoethnographic study, part of the work I do in this chapter is to amplify the productive tensions within, throughout, and against the problematically individuated orientations, contextualizing the ways in which they came into being through historical conversations. This section challenges me to consider why I feel drawn to think through poststructural feminism, and how does this position my work in relation to future jobs in the academy (which tends towards a particular neoliberal concern)? What draws me into the poststructural articulation? Is it because of the attention it might get in the academy, since anti-racism is a more marginalized, significantly less trendy articulation relegated to the status of special interests (see, for example, Ahmed, 1998; Weheliye, 2014)? How do I make sense of the histories and relations between the poststructural movement and anti-racism practice?

I position my theoretical framework as Chapter 2 in the dissertation, due to the pivotal role it plays in shaping the study from the process of conceptualizing the study through the writing. It also orients the reader to my politics in this work. I place it up front in the dissertation to amplify where I stand in relation to the experiences I had, the questions I ask of those
experiences, and how I came to interpret and articulate those experiences in the rest of the dissertation (see also, Kelly, 2004, p. 1).

As an autoethnography, this study simultaneously captures the process of coming into the study as my dissertation work, as well as the (re)thinking of the experiences I had with TLC, WSA, and readings of the sample literature on student voice. This being said, I spend some time in the second chapter working through the struggles of crafting a discursive orientation for the work. Instead of presuming a closed framework, I engage the slipperiness of the notion theoretical framework.

Reading the literature set up particular expectations for how student voice could be enacted, while my discursive orientations and emerging student voice experiences framed my interpretations of the literature. In Chapter 3, then, I come to frame the conversations from a sample of literature on student voice. I struggled to make sense of the “what” of student voice, to name what it is, as I present an interpretation of how student voice is taken up in the prevailing academic conversations. In framing this chapter I ask the following questions: What are the historical roots of contemporary student voice initiatives? What is the setting of contemporary schooling and education that makes for the emergence of student voice work? How do we come to recognize student voice; what forms might it take in order to fall under the rubric of student voice?

Chapter 4 speaks to my methodological approach. I offer the reader a context of how the study was conducted by situating autoethnography as method within the politics of the discursive orientations of post-structural feminist anti-racism, as discussed in Chapter 2. In this chapter I ask what it might mean to conduct an autoethnography of student voice experiences. What possibilities and limitations does centering the researcher in the research have for
understanding and re-conceptualizing teaching and learning? Continuing to consider the productive tensions of juxtaposing poststructural feminism and anti-racism as orientations to the study, I query autoethnographic disruptions to the conventional research process. As a study guided by autoethnography, the typical “order” of the research is rearranged, in that the research questions were crafted after the experiences I engage in thinking through those questions. In this way memory becomes a key site for data; however,

When we try to remember or reflect on our own experiences, what “comes back” to us is not what “actually” happened to us. Rather, what returns to mind and body are ghostly traces of what we manage to ignore and forget yet again because of the very way we have structured the questions we ask about our experiences (Ellsworth, 1997, p. 65).

Just as I amplify the slipperiness of theoretical frameworks in Chapter 2, I engage autoethnography as a method to challenge hermetically sealed conventional social science research that suggests we can ever capture some Truth of experience. This being said, as I present in the chapter, the elliptical process through which this study was conducted retained a systematicity. I share the details of how I came to recognize what data was in relation to the research questions; I also locate content analysis as a method engaged to analyze the data once identified. In other words, Chapter 3 situates the “what” and “how” of this autoethnographic study.

Literature that is published under the rubric of student voice proved to be one of the crucial data sources for the study. As I noted earlier, there was a dialogic relationship between the literature, my discursive orientations, and the student voice experiences, each space spurring particular expectations and desires for the work. After I situate the “what” of student voice, through the myriad articulations framed by geography, politics, discursive underpinnings, and
pedagogical approaches in Chapter 3, in Chapter 5 I discuss critical historical engagements with student voice as organized and inscribed within schooling and education. My intention here is to note implications for teaching and learning. Chapter 5, then, questions the transformative possibilities of student voice by attending to complexities within the practice(s) of student voice. In this chapter I query what it takes to (learn to) listen, and what the workings of power are within student voice projects. By asking these questions, I orient the reader to conversations about identity as complex and contradictory, and how through a poststructural feminist anti-racism notion of subjectivity, we must ask what it means to listen to fragmented, at times contradictory, and situated voicings (see also, Kelly, 2004, p. 5). How do power relations produce possible subject locations within student voice?

Chapter 6 picks up on some of the themes floating in and around Chapter 5—listening, recognizability, subjectivity and power—as I think through my experiences. In this chapter, I consider the ways in which student voice pedagogies are institutionally mediated, drawing from the articulations and subjectivities made available through both my pedagogies and those of Gloria, the facilitator of TLC Student Voices, in relation to the participatory action research I conducted at WSA. In many ways, this chapter is intended to provide a broader frame through which to engage the following two discussion chapters, in which I take a closer look at specific moments in the two student voice projects. In Chapter 6, then, I work through what I found to be an all-too-easy slip into locating student voice wholly within a neoliberal agenda that contradicted my imagined possibilities for transformative teaching and learning. By asking what voicings were made recognizable, I consider the neoliberal and institutionally mediated pedagogies in each student voice project.
As I have stated, this autoethnography provided a space for me to revisit the experiences and concerns I had for student voice work in ways that amplified the limits of neoliberal discourses. In other words, the study allowed for me to see what the neoliberal framework of hegemonic teaching and learning misses, what it cannot contain. This impossibility of totalizing experiences within neoliberalism is what I address in Chapters 7 and 8. In Chapter 7, I consider the role of affect in pedagogical encounters, once again asking what voicings it produces. As there is an incommensurability of affect, I suggest that through affective literacies students can be lured into particular neoliberal performances; however, they also embody counter affects, which circulate in different intensities based on the relation of bodies and space. The examples I share show the ways in which the students work with, in, through, and against the neoliberal offerings of hegemonic teaching and learning.

In the final discussion chapter, I continue to pursue the fissures in the neoliberal capturing of teaching and learning, this time by orienting my attention to a detailed focus of my pedagogy during the participatory action research in Wycliffe St. Albans. By thinking through desire as an analytic in this chapter, I offer what I am calling a vulnerable pedagogy, a pedagogy that revisits itself (in this case several years after the pedagogical encounters) to witness the ruptures and acknowledge the impossibilities of teaching. This chapter comes back to many of the themes presented earlier in the study, by connecting my desire to “do” student voice successfully and recognizably to the production and performance of writing social science research as a pedagogical moment. I suggest in this chapter that in these moments of extensive reflexivity in our writing and teaching practices, we may be able to witness the transformative possibilities of student voice work.
In the final chapter of the dissertation, I frame the discussion through disorientation as a theme to articulate the process of coming to and through this study. I share how autoethnography provided space and time to disorient myself to the experiences, as well as to the research process, in ways that proved to be productive in re-orienting my pedagogical understandings of the possibilities and limitations of student voice work. For me, focusing on the moments of discomfort, the ruptures, the fissures, sitting in those moments without attempting to smooth them out, fix them, or come up with some “solution” presented the transformative possibilities of student voice and autoethnography for teaching and learning.

**Educational Importance: Reflexivity and the Possibilities and Limitations of the Study**

What are the implications of this work, the study, the writing, the reading? My goal is to invite a different reading by way of a different writing, engaging the narrative turn in social science research (Ellis & Bochner, 2000; Kincheloe, 1997). By unmasking the contradictions in the project I am proposing, I query how it is that the project itself becomes complicit in the very systems it purports to disrupt, and how might I work with that tension. How do I honour the voices of marginalized students in an autoethnographic narrative focused on my experiences as a White feminized teacher and researcher? How do I resist imposing my desires onto the interpretation of the data and the reading of the narrative, while also making those politics explicit? My goal, through an autoethnographic narration, is to trace the structures that shape our imagined teacher identities in education, to unmask the affective attachments we have to these prescribed and over-populated identities (see Britzman, 2003), as well as the affects of disrupting those attachments (McDermott, 2014). How does affect organize and inscribe student
voice pedagogies oriented through anti-racism education, and what might this uncover about contemporary understandings and workings of race? In amplifying the emotional effects of teaching and learning and research, in working with the contradictory desires for transformation while attaching ourselves to particular hegemonic stances, in making explicit my struggles as a pedagogue, I hope to complicate the over-simplification and technicization of the complex relationships that constitute education. My goal is to provide a space to continue to build and support communities of subversive educators. “The teacher’s voice is these conflicts: institutional imperatives and constraints, curricular pressures, and the social, historical, personal, and economic contexts of learning” (Britzman, 2003, p. 19). It is through this voice that I hope to uncover the ways schools are organized around these conflicts, as well as consider ways to do schooling differently.

Questions of how to transform schools within the conditions of capitalism, colonialism, and neoliberalism are paramount for students, teachers, and communities working towards social justice. I believe it is important to continue to build critical communities to push against and expand the bureaucratic borders of individual competitiveness, league tables, and heightened surveillance of teaching and learning that urge teachers to work in isolation, behind closed doors. It is my hope, therefore, through this research, to disrupt the taken-for-granted colonial systems of education as enacted through disembodied neoliberal reforms. I am suggesting the possibilities of re-contouring epistemologies as embedded through student voice. These alternative epistemologies could help to (re)shape teacher ↔ student relations, curricula, pedagogy, and, more broadly, reform, and can work to undo systemic forms of standardized ways of knowing. In my experiences teaching at the high school level and as a teaching assistant at the graduate level, I have witnessed confusion, frustration, uncertainties, longings and the will to re-shape teaching and learning alternatively to the contemporary institutional imperatives.
Through narrating my experiences autoethnographically, I invite the reader to “bear wit(h)ness” (Fine in Gallagher, 2007, p. 30) to my desires, attachments, negotiations, struggles, vulnerabilities and pedagogical reflections. I invite the reader to open the door and peer past the borders of individualized experiences.

More specifically, it is my hope that this research will contribute to, and perhaps expand the conversation, around what it means for White teachers to engage an anti-racism politics, and how this might inform teacher ↔ student relations broadly and student voice pedagogies more specifically. The research makes room for a critical reflexivity on the part of the practitioner and the researcher, and brings these two positions into conversation with each other through the methodological approach of autoethnography. Simultaneously, and importantly, the research unabashedly works with a pedagogy of hope (Freire, 2004; hooks, 2003) within a particularly confining time in teaching and learning; a pedagogy of hope that dares to imagine a different now, particularly for historically tangentialized students, within the configurations of neoliberal management. When I suggest that we need to dare to imagine a different now, I am amplifying that we ought not wait for some idyllic or utopian future; rather we need to focus on substantively addressing issues of oppression within our classrooms in the present moment.

This focus on the now, however, speaks to one of the limitations of this study. As I have outlined, and as I address in more detail in Chapter 4, the study was oriented by way of autoethnography as method, and as such the reflexivity presented in the discussions occurred well after I experienced the two student voice projects. I recognize that this framing of time is particularly linear, and I am interested in considering the ways in which time and experience can also be framed elliptically; however, there is something to be said for the fact that the critical reflexivity this study brought to the student voice experiences was not “in time” to be able to
affect those student voice projects. In other words, while the reflexivity that was so crucial to this study offers the possibility for transforming future student voice projects, it was too late to affect change in the experiences under study. Simultaneously, a pedagogy of hope allows teachers to work with the cracks in the logic of neoliberalism for transformative possibilities. In the next chapter, I situate the theoretical framework that orients the study and implications for education.
In this chapter I craft student voice pedagogies by way of a poststructural feminist anti-racism orientation that engages affect, desire, counter-narratives, embodied histories, and uncertainty of knowledge. Part of what I intend in this chapter is to critically engage this thing of “theory”. I take up theory as embodied and rooted in human relations constituted through difference. Rather than assuming that any one theory can encapsulate human experience and difference, I bring multiple perspectives, by way of bricolage (Kincheloe, McLaren, & Steinberg, 2012, Steinberg, 2012b), to understand the relationship between the is and the ought in student voice pedagogies (Kelly, 2004, p. 1). As a bricoleur, I juxtapose different genres and paradigms to signal the flux and heterogeneity in pedagogical encounters, in an effort to understand human relations as embodied through different grammars of resistance, agency, and power.

I begin by fashioning how poststructural feminist anti-racism is conceptualized in the study, including a discussion that locates what each of the frameworks brings to the study. This was a personal challenge, as I recognize that others engage in a fused or blended poststructural feminist anti-racism (see, for example, Ahmed, 1998, 2000, 2004, 2006a, 2006b; Kelly, 2004; Kumashiro, 2002a, 2002b). Admittedly, I found this chapter rather difficult to craft, in that I was haunted by discomforts in bringing what I perceived as these individuated frameworks together in the study, with the felt pressures of presenting a totalizing theoretical framework (Kelly, 2004, p. 1): what are my goals in engaging poststructural feminism alongside anti-racism? How does that “better” the study? What makes me so uncomfortable with the frameworks? What are the (academic) politics in identifying myself as poststructural feminist and anti-racist? After a
discussion of these theoretical ambivalences, I engage the question of student voice pedagogy, challenging myself to articulate how I imagine pedagogy through the lens(es) of poststructural feminist anti-racism. In this way, I intend to orient for the reader my expectations, desires, goals, and imaginings for the study (Kelly, 2004, p.1).

**Framing Orientations: Why Pedagogy?**

The student participants have been charged with designing a lesson plan on the civil rights movement that they will teach their peers (in 6th, 7th, and 8th grade classrooms). The students are divided into three teams, each with a teacher who teaches the grade level/class in which they will teach their lessons, to help facilitate the lesson planning. This is our second site visit, and most of the students involved have already participated in teaching a lesson during our first site visit; however, the previous lessons were taught in elementary classrooms. There is some apprehension among the students for the lessons now being planned, as they are going into the 6th, 7th, and 8th grade classrooms. The teachers smirk at each other when the students voice their concerns that their peers are disrespectful, and they would not be able to control the classes the same way they did with the younger students.

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9 The second part of this title, “Why Pedagogy?” is a reference to David Lusted’s (1986) article of the same title, Why Pedagogy?”

10 I find it both interesting and disconcerting that the students recognize and articulate “control” as a prominent aspect of teachers’ work. This makes me think of Deborah Britzman’s (2003) discussion of the difficulties of imagining teaching and learning differently than this model of control and management, discourses that are so normalized that in teacher education courses one of the biggest questions relates to “how do I control the students?” (see for example, Steinberg, 2012). When you consider the broader context of control of youth who need to mature into some disciplined adult performative in general, and the extreme management of marginalized youth (see, Fendler, 1998), this concern of the students about their ability to control their peers suggests significant need for transforming not only ourselves and our beliefs, but also the broader socio-historical contexts of teaching and learning, a critical aspect of poststructural feminist anti-racism, as I will address in this chapter.
Prior to the lesson planning time, Gloria, the Teaching and Learning Collaborative facilitator, handed each student and teacher a stapled packet of all the TLC teaching strategies, many of which have now been taught to the students, as well as the short text on civil rights that the students will engage for their lesson. In his booming voice, the lone white male teacher, Mr. Fine, gathers the students he is working with and suggests that they vote on what strategies to use for each part of the lesson. TLC’s lesson planning model, based on “how the brain works”, breaks each lesson into three sections: priming, or preparing the students to learn; processing, or the teaching and learning of the material; and retention, or holding on to/retaining the learning.

As he sets each pair off to work on their part of the lesson, Mr. Fine says something that catches my attention: “When you are in your partnerships, if you want to change the strategy to go with this text, you can, although I don’t know how you would do that with this text.”

As a researcher, I took note of this comment and jotted down some initial thoughts in my field notes: “I think this speaks a lot about how Mr. Fine lesson plans for his own classes. . .if we pay attention to the ways in which the lessons are organized between the three groups, we might get a sense of how the teachers present teach and plan” (TLC Fieldnotes, March 8, 2011). This moment has stayed with me; I felt unsettled. Teaching is more than randomly selecting strategies to plug into lessons, isn’t it? What do I do as a teacher? How do I understand and engage pedagogy? In this chapter, I address these questions that have admittedly haunted my career as an educator and an education researcher: what is pedagogy? What is my pedagogy? What are the boundaries of/for pedagogy? Why pedagogy?

11 The preceding narrative was crafted from reading my TLC Journal and fieldnotes, March 8, 2011.
While my focus in this chapter is on discursive orientations, I want to reclaim pedagogy away from technicist, strategy-oriented discussions that potentially lead to the kind of pedagogical encounter described above. Instead, I want to (re)orient pedagogy as a dynamic of desired and imagined teacher subjectivity, embodied histories, the pull of institutional imperatives (i.e. official curriculums), teacher→student relationships, and personal orientations to teaching and learning. Just shy of 30 years ago, David Lusted (1986) wrote a provocative piece that I believe remains relevant today. In Why Pedagogy, Lusted asks why anyone should be interested in pedagogy in the first place, and notes the significant under-theorizing of pedagogy as a concept even within the field of education (pp. 2-3). He is worth quoting at length here:

Why is pedagogy important? It is important since, as a concept, it draws attention to the **process** through which knowledge is produced. Pedagogy addresses the “how” questions involved not only in the transmission or reproduction of knowledge but also in its production. Indeed, it enables us to question the validity of separating these activities so easily by asking under what conditions and through what means we “come to know”. How one teaches is therefore of central interest but, through the prism of pedagogy, it becomes inseparable from what is being taught and crucially how one learns. (Lusted, 1986, pp. 2-3, emphasis in original)

One of the points that I make in this chapter is that part of the reason pedagogy is under-theorized is due to the orientation it has been given in conventional educational discourse, that of the strategies teachers *use* to *impart* knowledge. Once something has been over-coded with meaning, it becomes difficult to think otherwise. This brings me to a second concept framing what is to come in this chapter: orientations. A key feature of critical academic labor is the naming and marking of one’s theoretical framework: to articulate from what position one is
designing and interpreting her study becomes necessary for those who, like myself, wish to undo the problematic suggestion that we, as researchers, can be objective, distanced, disembodied observers of some reality “out there” (see also, Kelly, 2004, p. 10). However, in positioning ourselves and our work through one particular orientation, we must also attend to the partiality of our point of view. “Orientations shape not only how we inhabit space, but how we apprehend this world of shared inhabitance, as well as ‘who’ or ‘what’ we direct our energy and attention toward” (Ahmed, 2006b, p. 3). Orientations speak to how we find ourselves in space; what direction we turn towards will open or close possibilities for interpretation and understanding. “The concept of ‘orientations’ allows us to expose how life gets directed in some ways rather than others, through the very requirement that we follow what is already given to us” (Ahmed, 2006b, p. 21).

In this chapter, then, I amplify the particular orientations to the work that have brought me to design and write the study in the ways presented here. I come to name my orientation as poststructural feminist anti-racism, and while it might be overly complicating the work by attempting to bring together three frameworks made to be discreet—poststructuralism, feminism, and anti-racism—I want to focus more on the ways in which these discursive positions are historically located in dialogue, rather than assuming them to be autonomous. Similarly, as Kelly (2004) states, “…caution needs to be taken in any wholesale adoption of specific theoretical frameworks since frameworks of analysis produce discourses that then become part of a wider academic contestation and production of truth effects” (p. 1). The first part of the chapter, then, works through what I am naming poststructural feminist anti-racism, both in articulating the “what” of the orientation, as well as asserting some ambivalences I have with the project of bringing these frameworks together. The second part of the chapter focuses on theorizing student voice pedagogies from the orientation of poststructural feminist anti-racism.
A Case for Poststructural Feminist Anti-Racism

Rosenberg (2004) writes “…theory can help us think about the world differently and that the work of this thinking can be invaluable to putting into place and sustaining broader changes” (p. 36; see also Ahmed, 1998; Kelly, 2004; Kincheloe, McLaren, & Steinberg, 2012; Steinberg, 2012b). I began my Ph.D. studies with particular interests and concerns that have since, through engaging in particular theoretical frameworks, been rethought. Thus, my research is animated by broader conversations that have helped me to “think about the world differently” and have sustained hopefulness in the pursuit of change along my Ph.D. journey. My orientation in/to this work, including the questions that frame it and the way I read the relationship between my location and those with whom I worked, ought to be contextualized within these broader conversations, what I am calling poststructural feminist anti-racism. Poststructural feminism and anti-racism both open spaces for counter-hegemonic storying (Davies, 2000; Dei, 1993; Dei & McDermott, 2014; McDermott, 2014; Schick, 2010; Steinberg, 2012b; Weedon, 1987). Both urge us to challenge and unlearn the “schooling as usual” (Davies, 2000) discourses (such as the discourse of control mentioned above) that shape both contemporary educational spaces as well as historical relations; simultaneously, both present possibilities for being differently in the world (Britzman, 2003; Collins, 2000; Davies, 2000; Dei & McDermott, 2014; King, 2003; McDermott, 2014; St. Pierre, 2000). The following quotation articulates my impulse for counter-storying:

The truth about stories is that that’s all we are. The Nigerian storyteller Ben Okri says that “In a fractured age, when cynicism is god, here is a possible heresy: we live by stories, we also live in them. One way or another we are living the stories planted in us early on or along the way, or we are also living the stories we planted – knowingly or unknowingly – in ourselves. We live stories that either
give our lives meaning or negate it with meaninglessness. *If we change the stories we live by, quite possibly we change our lives.*” (quoted in King, 2003, p. 153, emphasis added)

With this in mind, it is my intention to narrate an autoethnographic counter-story of teacher experiences of student voice reforms, oriented by way of a poststructural feminist anti-racism. I amplify the concept that identity is inscribed in systems of power; so what does it mean to write back to, to challenge, to disrupt the stable, coherent, universalized, humanist image of the teacher identity? What might this mean for transformative education? What might it mean for student voice reforms? What might it mean for daring to imagine a different now for marginalized youth? Engaging this research through the discourses of poststructural feminism and anti-racism is unabashedly ‘action-oriented’ towards naming, marking, disrupting and transforming contemporary power relations. It is forthright in naming systemic inequalities and the workings of social difference in pedagogical relationships, in providing spaces to engage how we come to know ourselves through the inscription of particular identity categories (Ahmed, 1998, 2006b; Brah, 1996; Calliste & Dei, 2000; Collins, 2000; Davies, 2003; Dei, 1993; Dei, 2000; Dei & McDermott, 2014; Dei & Simmons, 2010; Gilroy, 2005; Goldberg, 2009; Lather, 1991, 2000; McCaskell, 2010; McDermott, 2014; Pollock, 2008; Rosenberg, 2004; Schick, 2010; St. Pierre, 2000; St. Pierre & Pillow, 2000; Weedon, 1997). In other words, anti-racism resists the individualizing propensities of disembodied neoliberal education that dehistoricize socio-cultural relationships and depoliticize difference. To animate the particular forms of anti-racism and poststructural feminism that have informed my work, I quote two theorists who have had influential roles in shaping my discursive orientations. George Dei (2000) writes that anti-racism is:
an *action-oriented* educational strategy for institutional, systemic *change* to address racism and interlocking systems of social oppression. It is a critical discourse of race and racism in society that challenges the continuance of racializing social groups for differential and unequal treatment. Anti-racism explicitly names the issues of race and social difference as issues of power and equity rather than as matters of cultural and ethnic variety. (p. 27, emphasis added)

Chris Weedon (1987) writes of poststructural feminism in the following way:

Feminist poststructuralist criticism can show how power is exercised through discourse, including fictive discourse, how oppression works and where and how *resistance* might be possible. Poststructuralism, most particularly in its deconstructive forms, stresses the *non-fixity* and constant deferral of meaning. As a text-based theory, deconstruction is not interested in the implications of this for the reading subject beyond the primary assumption that this subject is *not full, unitary or in control of meaning*. . . . Subjectivity is of key importance in the social processes and practices through which forms of class, race and gender power are exercised. We have to assume subjectivity in order to make sense of society and ourselves. *The question is what modes of subjectivity are open to us and what they imply in political terms.* (pp. 167-168, emphasis added)

What is made to be common sense in particular discourses, for example, in the prevailing student voice discourse? What about what is assumed to be pedagogy? And of what are these productive? In the dominant discourses of schooling and education, what are the possible roles/identities/subject locations for teachers and students? How might we be able to imagine otherwise? What is produced through discourses of student voice in conventional education reform? Poststructural feminism might begin with a deconstruction of the available discourses, to understand how they make available different positions within relations of power. However, it
recognizes that those discourses are not totalizing; there are always already contradictions and alternatives circulating in and around those discourses if we are willing to seek them out, name them, and ask what they are doing. In the words of Deborah Britzman (2003), “Poststructuralist theories raise critical concerns about what it is that structures meaning, practices, and bodies, about why certain practices become intelligible, valorized, or deemed as traditions while other practices become discounted, impossible, or unimaginable” (p. 245). Anti-racism might offer stories and experiences of those who have been historically silenced as a method to disrupt the made-to-be stable and coherent narrative that structures schooling and education. So, I must ask, what are the conditions that make possible the “inclusion” of and focus on student voice in contemporary educational reform? Within student voice practices, what voicings are made intelligible and how do we recognize these voices as informed through the racialized configurations of schooling and education? What are the ways in which, in other words, the structures and meanings of race shape who can speak about what, when, with what interest/influence, and how is this represented (see, for example, Bakhtin, 1981; Bourdieu, 1991)? After briefly describing some of my hesitations, anxieties and ambivalences in coming to name the theoretical framework, the following sections address the discursive concepts that further shaped the study.

**Theoretical ambivalences.**

Before engaging how these conversations orient my research more specifically, I want to caution against conflating the made-to-be distinct academic groupings (Brah, 1996; Dei & Simmons, 2010; Rosenberg, 2004; Weheliye, 2014; Young, 2004/1990) through my articulation of a poststructural feminist anti-racism. Simultaneously, I want to speak to the relationality of these
conversations. In other words, I want to speak to the interwoven histories of these orientations. Anti-racism in many ways has roots in feminism (Gilroy, 2005), and poststructuralism is informed by anti-racism and anti-colonialism (Brah, 1996; Weheliye, 2014; Young, 1990; see also Collins, 2000). While this is an oversimplification that risks essentializing the conversations, I amplify the historical contingencies because too often in the academy they are presented as discrete moments rather than ongoing conversations (not to mention that it is the convergences, as well as the divergences, amongst and between these orientations that I am particularly drawn to) (see also Butler, 1992, p. 5).

My work is also informed by conversations that problematize these particular stances: anti-racism theorists and activists have engaged conversations about the ways in which some feminisms have reified the dominant racialized possibilities for different bodies (see, for example, Bannerji, 1987; Brah, 1996; Davis, 1981; hooks, 1994; James & Sharpley-Whiting, 2000; Lorde, 1984; Mohanty, 2003; Moraga & Anzaldua, 1981; Ng, Staton & Scane, 1995). Feminists have noted the ways in which some anti-racisms speak for race through a masculinist perspective (Brah, 1996; Davis, 1981; hooks, 1994; James & Sharpley-Whiting, 2000; Moraga & Anzaldua, 1981), and both feminists and anti-racists have problematized the troubling of a humanist subject found in poststructuralism, just as those who were historically silenced began to voice themselves into being (Brah, 1996; Collins, 2000; Dei & McDermott, 2014; Spivak, 1990; Weedon, 1987), as well as problematizing the dangers of relativism into which poststructuralism can too easily slip (Collins, 2000; Dei & McDermott, 2014; Steinberg, 2010, 2012b). Part of the politics of the “anti” risks locating the discourse in such a way as if it is always already in response to something—racism (Gilroy, 2005; Pollock, 2008)—and simultaneously it is an unabashed position of coming to name and mark racialized realities that shape the material and spiritual conditions of social relations (Brah, 1996; Dei, 1996, 2008; Dei
While there is a materiality to race, and the fabric of society is woven out of inequality, oppression, and racism, those who problematize anti-racism as always in response to something fear that anti-racism becomes bound by the logics which it opposes, rather than being a generative philosophy; those who take up anti-racism as action-oriented would say that it has significant generative possibilities. Poststructural feminism grounded in anti-racism politics offers, for me, a space to imagine race relations otherwise, to refuse to have our possibilities contained in the hegemonic subjectivities made available through dominant discourses, by amplifying the contradictions, slippages, and attachments of those available discourses, and proposing other possible discourses to engage (Collins, 2000; Davies, 2000; St. Pierre, 2000; Weedon, 1987; Weheliye, 2014). It is through these conversations that I come to locate my discursive orientation as a poststructural feminist anti-racism. What I mean by this is that I want to engage anti-racism politics through a poststructural feminist framework, for as Davies (2000; see also Britzman, 2003; Steinberg, 2012b; St. Pierre, 2000) notes, poststructuralism asks different questions about how we come to be positioned in discourses—what do those discourses do? What does race do in the discourses of student voice and teacher identity? What do those discourses do with race?

Broadly, anti-racism emerged in and through resistance movements against colonial practices, while feminism emerged as an alternative mode of engagement to patriarchal relations, and poststructuralism pushed back on the universalizing tendencies of Enlightenment humanist ideologies that were challenged through the particularities of the epoch commonly named post World War II (Collins, 2000; Davies, 2000; Steinberg, 2012b; St. Pierre & Pillow, 2000; Weheliye, 2014). The troubling of Western humanist thought and subjectivity, therefore, ought to be located in each of these conversations, as well as marked as a key thread bringing
these positions into conversation with each other. Weheliye (2014), in particular, notes how those who took up the questioning of Western universal “man” from a situated position, such as from an anti-racism or Black feminist framework, were often marginalized in the academy as speaking to localized, specific situations, and therefore not adequately “theoretical” or transposable. The French intellectuals such as Foucault and Lyotard, for example, articulate in ways that are more readily recognized as “theory”, and therefore poststructuralism becomes a “neutral” site to engage questions of knowledge production and subjectivity (Weheliye, 2014, p. 6-9). As Weheliye (2014) writes, poststructural discourses are positioned as “uncontaminated by and prior to reductive or essentialist political identities such as race and gender. Supposing that analyses of race and racism are inherently essentialist. . .” (p. 7). I have come to juxtapose these orientations to engage the productive tensions and contradictory desires that mirror lived experiences. With these conversations in mind, I present three groups of concepts that were critical in shaping the study: 1) race, subjectivity, and schooling, 2) voice, narrative, and multicentricity as agency and resistance and 3) power, discourse, and representation.

**Race, subjectivity and schooling.**

Race has long been noted as a social construct (see, Omi & Winant, 1993); however, it both historically and continually shapes material and emotional possibilities for different bodies (see also Fanon, 1967; Saldanha, 2006). In this light, George Dei (1996, 2005) articulates the saliency of race as one principle of anti-racism. The saliency of race as a concept addresses the ways in which race comes to inform how bodies can be read within the constellation of identitarian hierarchies instigated and perpetuated through discourses of colonialism and modernity. Concomitantly, these contexts of colonialism and modernity, which espouse the
world to be knowable through scientific discourses, such as the disembodied neoliberalism that contemporary education engages and proliferates, (re)contour race relations within schooling and education. Historically, conventional education has silenced the voices and experiences of most (particularly marginalized) students in the form of Eurocentric epistemological and pedagogical employments in public schooling (Freire, 1985, 1970; Ladson-Billings, 2000; Steinberg, 2012a). The question becomes, how do we make room for these different articulations to be voiced and heard? Who do we understand our students and ourselves to be in relation to the racialized configurations of schooling and education? What does it mean, then, as a White body, to take up a position of ally? What are the ways in which strategically engaging my privileged subjectivity may work to reify the (non)hearability of those very voices I seek to ally myself with (see Fine, 1994, p. 80; also Mohanty, 1990, 2003; Smith, 2013; Srivistava, 2005)? Simultaneously, what kinds of voicings are called upon through my curricular and pedagogical decisions, and how do I read these through the complexities of shifting subjectivities that are unstable, contradictory and disjointed, while also attending to the solidarity and cultural memories of voice and experience through time (Dei, 1996; Dillard, 2012; Mohanty, 1993; Smith, 2013)?

Voice, narrative and multicentricity as agency and resistance.

Working with student voice as a possible site of educational critique and transformation, I ask, how does coming to voice become a project of decolonization (hooks, 1994; Weheliye, 2002)? hooks (1994) and Freire (1970) amplify the ways in which voice can at once be resistance—through speaking oneself into being and recognition (moving the individual from an object position to a subject position)—and simultaneously a self-empowering practice. Dei (1999,
2005) notes the epistemic saliency of marginalized voices in anti-racism work. Voice, then, can become a counter-narrative, bringing in experiences that de-center the Euro-Enlightenment epistemological hegemony in conventional schooling and education. By engaging students’ voices in the classroom, particularly marginalized students’ voices, we disrupt the seeming coherency of the identity and experiences of “student”, and we engage in a multicentricity (where there are multiple centers) of knowing that disrupts the Eurocentric, scientific, measurability of conventional education. Dei et al (2000) describe multicentricity as creating a plural centre within educational discourse and praxis that emphasizes diverse epistemologies as core curricular content. It represents an attempt to rethink, re-strategize and reconstruct education as a pluralist project which decentres the canonical texts of Eurocentric traditions as being the primary source of knowledge in schools and society (p. 172).

In other words, multicentricity challenges the standardizing imperatives of curriculum and pedagogy, while also inviting a thorough engagement with the contradictory desires we live as teachers and students. Relatedly, we ought not avoid critically engaging the “authenticity” of students’ voices. In other words, we must attend to the ways in which (marginalized) students’ voices and desires are informed, mediated, and shaped through the very discourses we hope to unhinge (see, for example, James, 2008; Lensmire, 1998; McDermott, 2013; Oldfather, et al., 1999; O’Loughlin, 1995; see also Chapters 7 and 8 for a further discussion of this point). This leads me to ask: what becomes possible, desirable, imaginable to say? How is this informed by the relations of bodies, histories, memories and expectations within the student voice sites? Bourdieu (1991) writes through questions of language use and hierarchies of power, asking who can say what, to whom, and with what possible responses?
Voice as a concept is amplified in both poststructural feminisms and anti-racism, albeit with convergent and divergent trajectories. Poststructural feminists, particularly in the writing of student voice, want to trouble the propensity to locate voice as unquestionably unified and “authentic” (see, for example, Arnot & Reay, 2007; Bragg, 2007; Britzman, 2003; Cook-Sather, 2002; Orner, 1992). While anti-racists want to work with voice as an articulation of agency, experience, and cultural memory (Dei, 2005; hooks, 1994; Mohanty, 1993; Wahab, 2005), both note the ways in which inviting multiple voicings into the classroom opens a space for polyvocality and multicentricity. In other words, there is always already a disruption to the conventional banking model of education (in Freire’s, 1970 articulation) when multiple voices are invited to speak, particularly when those are voices of historically marginalized bodies. In this study, I take up authenticity to be socially constructed, located and mediated through various relations. The related questions that I ask in the study are: how do we work with the simultaneity of troubling authenticity of voice and experience and honoring the historical memories, agency, resistance and solidarity through particular voicings? What is the relationship of voice to history, social difference, and experience?

**Power, discourse and representation.**

Related to Bourdieu’s (1991) question about who can say what to whom and with what effects, I also want to engage the ways in which others are represented in the circulating narratives. In other words, I want to consider the thorny questions of power, discourse and representation within student voice. As already noted above, this requires a reflexive interrogation of the possibilities of reifying dominant representations through the telling of my narrative. How do I challenge a depoliticization of difference (Dei, 2014; Dei & McDermott, 2014;) as part of the
disembodied neoliberal imperative through discourses of progress embedded in the “post”: for example, post-colonial, post-racial? This dominant, universalizing narrative (re)centers dominant voices and ideologies. What I hope to do in the study is to unpack the ways in which this dominant narrative, through the discourses of neoliberalism, education reform, and (possible) teacher identity, structures meanings of experience through representation; in particular I want to consider the ways in which social differences are (re)organized and (re)inscribed through the discourse of student voice. Simultaneously, in the study I address questions of subversive pedagogies as a possible site of critical inclusivity within schooling and education, through voice as representation (Dei, et al., 2000).

I am confronted with particular methodological questions in relation to these concepts and the proposed study: What does it mean to center my voice and experiences in a project focused on the voices of students? How do I come to represent the voices of students and others with whom I was involved during the various projects, since in some instances those individuals can no longer be contacted to “validate” my interpretations? These are just some of the emerging questions to which I attended as I came into the methodological aspects of the work. In Chapter 4, I will discuss more thoroughly what I intended to do by way of an autoethnographic study. In the rest of this chapter on discursive orientations, I return to a consideration of pedagogy, with the previous conversations regarding poststructural feminist anti-racism as a backdrop, by way of theorizing the constraints on pedagogy, what shapes or contours our pedagogical encounters (desire, affect, institutional imperatives, embodied histories, overpopulated teacher identities) (Gannon, 2009, p. 70). In other words, I consider the dynamic materialities of student voice pedagogies.
Student Voice and Anti-oppressive Pedagogy: Against Repetition

“Ev-er-y …” the facilitator begins, “voice counts” the student participants join in with energy; at this point they are used to hearing this refrain from the facilitator of TLC Student Voices. From the perspective of the research team, we are thrilled at how the students have taken up the language of TLC and “made it their own”. I can sense that the students feel a particular pride in the continual affirmation of their participation in the professional development. But when I leave the research site and take notes for myself about the experience, I am discomforted—how is this pedagogy? What possibilities and limitations does this pedagogy produce for the students, for teaching and learning, for the teacher? This seems to be more about repetition. I guess I can work with the possibilities of “giving access to the culture of power”12 as I remember from my teaching days, but how can this bring about change? How do we make change in the system rather than change continuing to be located in those students who are made to be marginalized. (TLC Journal, March 10, 2011)

Returning to those scribblings after one of the site visits with TLC Student Voices, I am doubly discomforted because I am not sure that I can as yet articulate what it is that I am seeking. I am reminded of Smith’s (2013) point that, “There is no simple anti-oppression formula that we can follow; we are in a constant state of trial and error and radical experimentation” (“Alternatives to Self-Reflection,” para. 2); see also Dei, 1996; Kumashiro, 2002b, p. 86; Puar, 2007).

12 While in my teacher preparation program, I was assigned to read Lisa Delpit’s (1988) article, *The silenced dialogue: Power and pedagogy in educating other people’s children*, and her discussion has stayed with me. One of the points that Delpit (1988) makes in this article is that teachers who teach marginalized students have a responsibility to make the cultural codes or rules of mainstream, dominant society explicit. She suggests that by understanding these codes and how they work, students can more effectively ‘code switch’ and thereby ‘succeed’ within the parameters of Eurocentric, middle-class, masculinist schooling and education.
Rather than seeking a formula, part of this process of “trial and error and radical experimentation” consists of working through, and articulating my (shifting) position(s) in relation to a concept that has haunted my teaching and educational research career: pedagogy. It was already August and I did not have a teaching position as yet. In a huge conference room in the Marriott in downtown Brooklyn, I walked through the rows of tables set up for on the spot interviews, with my folder filled with CVs, to search for schools hiring secondary English Language Arts (ELA) teachers. I had already been asked if I would be willing to teach science. I was told that it was relatively common in the New York City Department of Education to have teachers teaching outside of their content area due to the difficulty in retaining enough teachers for all the students; actually, once I was hired for an ELA position, I also wound up teaching Environmental Science and Global Studies (a grade 9 social studies course).

Close to the end of the job fair, exhausted and anxious about not having gotten a job, I sit across from an assistant principal and department head of a middle school in Queens, NY. The assistant principal asked me: “Describe your pedagogy”. I was stumped; I had some “answers”—that all students’ experiences should be valued in the classroom, that all students should be engaged in the classroom (so as to manage discipline\(^\text{13}\))—but I realized that I was not sure what this thing called pedagogy really was! Even today, I find myself drawn to pedagogy as a concept, and yet feel intense anxiety when someone asks me what it is. When working with

\(^{13}\) Shirley Steinber (2010a) notes, “Pre-service teacher education students often become obsessed with ways to ‘manage’ the classroom, maintain order, and discipline students. Rare is an equal obsession with ways to engage students, excite them, and provoke thinking and learning... As our students enter teaching, many claim that their primary concern is how to control the classroom...the assumption is that students must be controlled, implying that without this control, the class would not be a success” (p. xi). The language of management, control, reducing chaos, even though it was engaged by way of seemingly critical pedagogical encounters that are focused on student engagement, for example, underpinned much of the conversations in the teacher education courses I had taken. Bronwyn Davies (2009) similarly addresses how discourses and desires for control out of the (potential) chaos of the classroom are what make for a good teacher.
the young ladies at WSA, time stood still as they asked me what pedagogy was while we read pieces of an academic article (I speak about this moment more in Chapter 6, “Finding Voice”); in writing my thesis proposal I was asked, “what do you mean by student voice pedagogies”? This section of my discursive orientations chapter reflects upon some of these moments, considering how I came to understand what student voice is through my experiences, embodied history, as well as the poststructural feminist anti-racism orientations. I consider race and knowledge production, or race performatives within student voice, the role of affect in counter-narratives and unlearning, and embodied histories and imagined teacher identities.

Repetition, normative truth claims and the maintenance of oppressive social relations.

At the time of my research with TLC Student Voices, I had not yet read Kevin Kumashiro’s work, which has since allowed me to return to those experiences, in particular the repetition of “every voice counts”, meaning that the voices, in the particulars of this student voice initiative, could literally be “counted”. Every student was asked the same question, provided a “speaking frame” and asked to fill in the blanks as we went around the room “allowing” each student to “answer”. Kumashiro writes about the ways in which repetition in schooling and education—the ways in which doing school as usual—can be understood as a form of oppression.

One reason that a desire for social change can coincide with a resistance to social change is that some educational practices, perspectives, social relations, and identities remain unquestioned. In fact, people often consider some practices and relations to be part of what schools and society are supposed to be, and fail to

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14 A speaking frame is a scaffolding tool in which the teacher or facilitator provides a sentence in which the students are asked to fill in certain words or phrases that have been left blank with their ‘own thoughts’. For example, the facilitator would put the following up on the board and the students were required to answer using the particular wording: ‘My name is _______ and something I’m good at is _______.’
recognize how the repetition of such practices and relations – how having to experience them again and again – can help to maintain the oppressive status quo of schools and society. (Kumashiro, 2002b, p. 68)

Deborah Britzman (2003) addresses this point through her critical articulation of the cultural myths that overpopulate conceptions of what it means to be a teacher or a student, what it means to teach and learn, and Sara Ahmed (2006b) brings our attention to the ways in which the production of oppression comes to be normatized and thereby unquestioned:

We might note here that the labor of such repetition disappears through labor: if we work hard at something, then it seems “effortless”. . . . It is important that we think not only about what is repeated, but also how the repetition of actions takes us in certain directions: we are also orientating ourselves toward some objects more than others, including not only physical objects. . . .but also objects of thought, feeling, and judgment, as well as objects in the sense of aims, aspirations, and objectives. (Ahmed, 2006b, p. 56, author’s emphasis)

Reading this has helped me to re-orient myself, and my understandings, around the experiences I had with student voice. While the example above is about literally repeating a phrase, “every voice counts”, there are other ways in which this concept of repetition comes to frame what is understood as “teaching and learning”. In Chapter 6, I articulate this question of repetition by way of a concept of recognizability within student voice projects. What voices are elicited? How are they heard? What are the possibilities and limitations for recognizing other voicings within our pedagogies? In Chapter 8, through desire as an analytic, I consider the ways in which I found it difficult to get out of a teaching-as-usual role in my pedagogical practices.

Here, I want to consider the ways in which repetition presents itself as a viable, desirable—even if unarticulated—pedagogy within student voice practices. While in some ways student voice may have moved away from banking models of education, in that it seeks to elicit
the voices of students within the teaching and learning context in various ways (as discussed in the introduction), and through institutional imperatives, which come to inform teacher and student desires, students are still expected to repeat “facts” back to us in various ways—through the continued framing of knowledge as quantifiable, we (teachers) are asked to measure how much students (don’t) know, standardizing what counts as knowledge. Within this framework, there is little room for uncertainty, for the not-as-yet-known to be engaged in our classrooms, either by teachers or students. Furthermore, there is little room for alternative knowledges and ways of being to be recognized within the teaching and learning relationship. In fact, part of how we, as teachers, are assessed is by our ability to “recognizably” lesson plan. In most curriculum design models we are asked to organize lessons to lead us somewhere “knowable” and “measurable” by stating our learning objectives up front (although this may be named variously depending on the curricular model being engaged). Returning to the Ahmed (2006b, p. 56) quote above, I am interested in the ways in which “the repetition of actions takes us in certain directions” or reproduces certain (oppressive) tendencies within schooling and education. The orientations we take towards our lesson planning, an aspect of pedagogy, allows for us to go in some directions with our students rather than others. Simultaneously, what are the paradoxes in claiming to “plan” for the not-yet known? For knowledge to be measurable, it must also be recognizable; for knowledge to be recognizable, it must fit into or repeat what is “already known”. The lines that we follow:

are both created by being followed and are followed by being created. The lines that direct us, as lines of thought as well as lines of motion, are in this way performative: they depend on the repetition of norms and conventions, of routes and paths taken, but they are also created as an effect of this repetition. (Ahmed, 2006b, p. 16)
What are the lines that student voice pedagogies follow and, in effect, come to produce?

In the very thought that in the repetitions we (re)produce particular possibilities for being, certain deterministic theories of reproduction in education collapse; they become leaky and cannot contain all the bodies and experiences within schooling and education. To avoid and disrupt these reproductive tendencies leading to reification of oppressive social relations, we ought to continually question the most taken-for-granted aspects of our work. In this way, this study and the writing of my dissertation have become a critical part of my emerging pedagogy towards anti-oppression: “the starting-point of critical elaboration is the consciousness of what one really is, and is ‘knowing thyself’ as a product of the historical processes to date which has deposited in you an infinity of traces without leaving an inventory”15 (Gramsci, 1971, p. 324).

We ought to take the time to articulate the assumptions that lead us in particular directions instead of others; however, this is difficult work as it can come to disrupt who we imagine ourselves to be (Schick, 2010). Our imagined identities, as well as our views of our students’ identities (two more aspects of our pedagogies) are thoroughly tied to the broader normative truth claims, and so to question those commonsense articulations also means to question who we are within the specific relations of the classroom. Kevin Kumashiro (2002a) notes the ways in which citational practices, the repetition of commonsense stories, leads to associations of particular identity characteristics with particular bodies: “people often associate certain identities with certain attributes because over time these associations have been repeated and thus naturalized” (p. 52). The myriad ways in which we come to know the self relate to the body as a discursive production constituted through histories, cultural memories, and particular

15 I want to thank Marlon Simmons for bringing my attention to this passage.
classificatory systems, reified through particular performatives; to come to question these positions disrupts our sense of self. Through the Enlightenment epistemological classificatory systems, bodies have been allotted particular places within social relations, maintaining the superiority of some and the inferiority of Others. Simultaneously, there is an insidious trepidation of anything that is messy, that does not fit within the classificatory systems; everyone must have their place in social space (see, for example, Ahmed, 2002; 2000; Gilroy, 2005; Oliver, 2004). Solomon, Portelli, Daniel & Campbell (2005) and Schick & St. Denis (2003) speak to the push-back, resistance, and dis-acknowledging practices of (predominantly White) teacher candidates in learning about oppression and questioning the way things (naturally) are. Through various techniques (calling upon discourses of meritocracy, for example), these teacher candidates reify the dominant narrative and (continue to) shore up boundaries for who belongs where under what conditions:

In this sense, the white man’s sense of himself as good and civilized is defined against the black body, which he abjects as evil and animal. This abjection follows the logic of shoring up borders as a defense against ambiguity. (Oliver, 2004, p. 54)

In other words, we engage myriad ways of protecting our imagined identities, repeating dominant (read: colonial, neoliberal) narratives and thereby reproducing oppressive structures and practices in teaching (see also Kumashiro, 2002b, p. 68).

In some ways, I am suggesting that this is why the need for change has come to be located in the Other rather than in the broader social structures shaping the contours of our relations within the classroom: the Other needs to meet the neoliberal market needs in order to be recognized as worthy of particular social relations. How, then, does student voice pedagogy conceptualize, imagine, and engage difference? Chandra Mohanty (2003) writes,
The challenge of race resides in a fundamental reconceptualization of our categories of analysis so that differences can be historically specified and understood as part of larger political processes and systems. The central issue, then, is not one of merely “acknowledging” difference; rather, the most difficult question concerns the kind of difference that is acknowledged and engaged. (p. 193; for key discussions on how difference, specifically race, is historically conceptualized, see Fanon, 1967; Gannon, 2009; Hall, 1996; Memmi, 1965/1991; Saldanha, 2006).

Difference is frequently understood as something the Other has (Ahmed, 2002, 2004; Bignall, 2009), and this quality of “haveness” makes possible the quantifying and hierarchizing of differences (allowing for someone to state, “I am less different than you” through calling on hegemonic fantasies of discrete identities) (Puar, 2007; Smith, 2006, 2013). Differences in this framework are stagnant, they are framed through deficit articulations. To be different becomes abnormal, in need of civilizing, in need of surveillance and management. We are urged, through dominant discourses of difference, to take up these discrete identities. Even when we articulate them through intersectional paradigms they remain discrete, pushing some to articulate through assemblages rather than intersectionality (see Puar, 2007; Weheliye, 2014). Interestingly, the etymological root of identity comes from “sameness”, or to liken ourselves through particular attributes. Difference, as constituted through humanist discourses of us/them, shapes the contours of belonging and recognizability. Complicating all of this, Quintenales states that we are too often complicit in “seeing radical differences where they don’t exist and not understanding them when they are critical” (quoted in Bambara, 1983, p. vii).

Without overly determining the possibilities for student voice pedagogy, there are ways in which asking Others to voice themselves is productive of a particular surveillance and management of difference. In one sense we must keep difference close by; we must know
difference intimately in order to manage differences successfully (see Ahmed, 2000, 2006b, p. 5; Gilroy, 2005; Mohanty, 2003, pp. 209-210; Moraga, 1983, p. 32; Puar, 2007, p. 25). In another sense, through repetition and institutional imperatives, the voices that are elicited and made recognizable in student voice risk becoming examples of mimicry, where we attempt to bring difference into sameness as another form of racial management. “Colonial mimicry is the desire for a reformed, recognizable Other, as a subject of difference that is almost the same, but not quite” (Bhabha, 1994, p. 86). Student voice, then, has been taken up as a pedagogical tool for racial management within neoliberal frameworks. As teachers in conventional schooling and education, we become implicated in this racial management through regulatory practices. In particular, in order to keep our jobs, we must aid students in coming into particular normatized—repetitious, recognizable—articulations through the various measurement techniques (high stakes standardized tests being the most prominent and explicitly imposed pressure) that implore us to repeat the same knowledge and ways of being—of being student and teacher, of being racial others, of being recognizably gendered, for example. That which is messy, that which challenges the tightly bounded knowledge regimes, risks becoming located as eccentric at best, and more likely problematic (read: in need of discipline).

What are the ways in which articulating through quotidian classroom moments, that shape and are shaped by difference, might allow us to decode and uncover these historical traces, the “cryptic inventory” (Gramsci, 1971) in our pedagogies? How do we make room for the not yet known, and allow for crisis and change when confronted by external pressures and internal desires to repeat certain practices?

Unfortunately, what happens in classrooms often is not crisis and change, but rather repetition and comfort for both student and teacher, as when students understand difference in commonsense ways or when teachers strive to develop in
students knowledges and practices that mirror their own. (Kumashiro, 2002a, p. 64; see also Ellsworth, 1997)

In the next section, I suggest that through engaging affect as a critical aspect of our pedagogy, we might be able to differently understand, pursue and engage in counter-narrativization and unlearning.

**Affect, counter-narratizing, and unlearning within student voice pedagogies.**

But of course it was too late. For once a story is told, it cannot be called back. Once told, it is loose in the world. . . . So you have to be careful with the stories you tell. And you have to watch out for the stories you are told. (King, 2003, p. 10)

This study has challenged me to balance the recognition of repetition and recognizability, while also paying attention to the lines of flight, where experiences and stories refuse to be contained within the dominant narrative (see, for example, Tuck, 2009, p. 414). In the previous section I focused more on the drive and inclination towards repetition within our pedagogical work, and I open this section with a quote from Thomas King about the power of stories—once they are told they cannot be taken back. However, I want to engage in the ways in which these universalized stories cannot contain lived experiences. In my research, writing, and in my pedagogy, I want to question what is made to be common sense through deliberate and ongoing pursuance of counter-narratives. Chandra Mohanty (1990) provokes us to focus our attention on our pedagogy: “Uncovering and reclaiming subjugated knowledges is one way to lay claim to alternate histories. But these knowledges need to be understood and defined *pedagogically*, as questions of strategy and practice as well as of scholarship”. She goes on to write, “This issue of
subjectivity represents a realization of the fact that who we are, how we act, what we think, and what stories we tell become more intelligible within an epistemological framework that begins by recognizing existing hegemonic stories” (p. 185). As noted above, I suggest that poststructural feminist anti-racism, as a pedagogical platform for this study, offers such spaces to name and mark the circulating stories that shape the contours of classroom encounters. In this section, I focus on the need to ground our pedagogies in affect as an additional aspect of counter-narrativizing. With a focus on affect, we can disrupt the centuries-old entrenched and commonsense approach to splitting the mind and the body through the use of imposed binary classifications that have epistemologically come to shape our social relations since Hegel and imperialism (see, also McDermott, 2014). In regards to this, Kelly Oliver (2004) states

...affects are not purely mental phenomena or epiphenomena but, rather, energetic forces that link the mind and the body in ways that challenge any presumptions of a neat separation between mind and body, psyche and soma, subject and object, self and other, black and white. (Oliver, 2004, p. 46)

Albrect-Crane (2005) writes,

While identity formation needs to be addressed, as the past 25 years of political/theoretical activism have shown, so does affective production. It might be promising to explore ways to approach teaching through a more non-polarizing ethos by considering the affective component of learning – specifically the movements of fear, anxiety, anger, frustration, boredom or apathy in a classroom. (p. 498)

What I am interested in here are the ways in which tending to affect as a pedagogical orientation could re-orient the racialization of classroom space. As Sara Ahmed (2006b) writes, “orientations involve the racialization of space” (p. 23); if we shift our focus, change the direction in which we orient our pedagogies, might we also be able to shift how we and our
students extend into, through, with, and against the classroom space? If we change how we take up spaces, could this also change the contours of the space (see, Ahmed, 2006b)? Classroom space, through repetition, has become familiar to us; much like race or gender, it has become “overburdened with meanings that work on an unconscious level” (Britzman, 2003, p. 234). Classroom space has become familiarly “Whitenized” through the instrumentalization of schools for historical and ongoing colonization, shaping the contours of who belongs where (see Ahmed, 2006b, p. 111; Ringrose, 2007, p. 325; Willinsky, 1999, p. 2-3). Yet, even that which is made to be familiar is a construction:

This familiarity is not, then, “in” the world as that which is already given. The familiar is an effect of inhabitance; we are not simply in the familiar, but rather the familiar is shaped by actions that reach out toward objects that are already within reach. Even when things are already within reach, we still have to reach for those things for them to be reached. (Ahmed, 2006b, p. 7)

In other words, if what seems familiar is actively produced, then it is not fully determined. Schick (2000; 2010), Schick & St. Denis (2003), Smith (2013), Solomon, Portelli, Daniel & Campbell, (2005), each speak to particular techniques and practices that are engaged in constructing and securing White spaces and White racial identities: for example, the individualization of racism (Mohanty, 2003; Schick, 2010; Schick & St. Denis, 2003; Solomon et al., 2005); relatedly, discourses of safe spaces (Ellsworth, 1992; Smith, 2013); discourses of meritocracy (Britzman, 2003; Schick, 2000; Schick & St. Denis, 2003; Solomon et al.); general dishistoricization (Smith, 2013); and heteropatriarchy (Schick, 2000).

Due in part to the tremendous and ongoing effort involved in constructing these spaces, I have argued elsewhere that affect is always already present in classroom encounters. When we decide to disrupt these spaces of comfort and familiarity, such as with the intentionality of
counter-narrativizing, we witness a particular unleashing of affect that takes significant energy to continually dismiss (McDermott, 2014). Affects circulate within these spaces in ways that are uncontrollable, so what does it mean to focus on affect as a pedagogical orientation? What does attending to what affect does (Ahmed, 2004) in classroom sites, and what we do with affect in our pedagogies (McDermott, 2014), look like? Unfortunately for those who too often within the teaching profession seek “quick fixes” or “recipes” to address whatever issue is at hand, the work of anti-oppression cannot be pinned down; we need context specificity. Chapter 7 is crafted around theorizing affect within the context specificity of a particular moment in TLC student voice. However, I would still like to suggest here that we can reorient our pedagogies by tending to affect. Zembylas (2003) writes how this can be a form of resistance to the dominant narratives even “while much of the teaching experience is deeply imbued with normalizing power…” (p. 108). Affect may be a site that exemplifies the refusal to be contained within universalizing and normalizing narratives of conventional education.

One cannot predict affect; it is wild and profuse. If we are to orient our pedagogies towards affect in our classrooms, we, then, would necessarily have to move away from teaching-as-usual: we would necessarily have to shift from conventional conceptions of knowledge as stable and work with the uncertainty and unpredictability that is teaching and learning (Ellsworth, 1997). In other words, if we re-orient ourselves in the classroom space to focus on what affect does in the space, we will have to let go of the idea that we can plan material that will be effectively delivered by the teacher and likewise effectively received by the student.

Most often, teachers address students in ways engineered precisely to eliminate, minimize, or contain the messy social, historical, and unconscious stuff that might confuse ‘getting’ an educational text. . . . For a curriculum or pedagogy to “work,” some classroom moments – and ideally all of them – have to result in a
fit between what’s being taught and the student’s understanding. (Ellsworth, 1997, p. 45; see also Davies, 2009; Lather, 1991)

The way in which schooling is organized around knowledge as rationalistic, transferrable and measurable, harkening back to the Enlightenment narratives that continue to shape our conceptions of knowledge, misses the uncertainties and spaces between knowledge, whether it’s content knowledge, knowledge of who our students are and what they need, or knowledge of what we know and are able to transmit successfully.

Patti Lather (1991) reminds us that we cannot, no matter how much we may try, control how knowledge is engaged. Yet we often enter the teaching profession with desires for some stable knowledge and stable teacher identity (see Britzman, 2003). We enter our classrooms with embodied histories and imagined identities shaped by the overpopulated myths, tied to the circulating dominant educational narratives. While affect as has been noted by some (see Boler, 1999; Dei, 1993; Ringrose, 2007; Schick, 2010, 2000; Schick & St. Denis, 2003; Solomon et al., 2005) can be specifically stirred up when we question these knowledge systems and identities, we need to remain flexible if we are to attend to affect and find different ways to “listen” to the goings-on in our classrooms. How do we attune our pedagogies to affect, to counter-narrativizing, to voice as enacted and performed rather than pre-existing relations of power within pedagogical encounters? How do we uncover the ways in which voices are made recognizable, and what shapes which articulations are available to whom (Arnot, 2006; Bakhtin, 1981; McClelland & Fine, 2008)? What counts as knowledge within our pedagogical encounters? I suggest in this study that we attend to what points in our pedagogies prove to be (re)silencing of particular articulations, that we consider honestly what we are unwilling or unable to hear within our pedagogies. For me, this work requires that we critically engage our pedagogies by questioning that which is normatized through our extended experiences in
education, shaping what teaching and learning look like, as well as through the contemporary policy and public discourses about what teaching and learning ought to look like.

**By Way of Concluding**

My intention in writing this chapter and placing it at the beginning of the dissertation is to orient the reader to the theoretical framework that pointed me in some directions, and not others, in the writing of the rest of the study. Working with a number of classificatory systems—Whiteness and gender, for example—I speak to how they come into particular pedagogical relationships through flux rather than a sum totality. One of my ongoing concerns in this study relates to pedagogy, and what this thing of student voice pedagogy might be. I suggest that pedagogues ought to consider what shapes our pedagogies, of what our pedagogies may be productive in terms of possible subject locations for ourselves, teachers, and the students, and what counts as knowledge. In this chapter I am more interested in suggesting that pedagogues bring attention to what orients their pedagogies. I do this by way of thinking through questions of pedagogy as oriented by poststructural feminist anti-racism. This orientation, as I suggest in the preceding chapter, shapes my “pedagogical thoughtfulness” (van Manen, 1997) in relation to the student voice projects I experienced (Kelly, 2004, p. 1). Throughout the rest of the study I engage pedagogy as it comes to be stitched through the discussions in this chapter as well as affect, desire, epistemological frameworks, race performatives, embodied histories, uncertainty, and repetition.

The next chapter takes up a sample of literature published under the rubric of student voice. In my discussion of the literature, I address the “what” of student voice, speaking to how
student voice is popularly conceived in English-speaking Western education. While this chapter may read as rather distanced, a position which I believe poststructural feminist anti-racism comes to challenge as an impossible myth of conventional social science research, the ways in which I came to read, interpret, and organize the literature were deeply sutured through the orientations presented in Chapter 2.
Chapter 3
Contours of Student Voice: A Review of the Literature

Anxieties Produced in Reading the Literature

In many ways, as already alluded to, reading about student voice as a field set up many expectations, desires, longings, anxieties, and frustrations for me. As I participated in the research with the Teaching and Learning Collaborative in Newark, NJ, I read as much literature on student voice as I could, and I attempted to make sense of what I read in relation to the research on TLC’s student voice project. I offer this context to amplify the ways the research in which I was participating shaped my expectations and desires from the literature, as well as the ways in which the literature informed my interpretations of the student voice project. The particularities of this context also leave me with more questions than anything else (Steinberg, 2012b). What are the possibilities and limitations of capturing student voice work into academically publishable pieces? What is the work being done in producing a field by writing and publishing under the rubric “student voice”? Simultaneously, what is missed in the studying and writing of/on student voice that may obfuscate the potentialities of the work? How does student voice converge and diverge from other fields such as student-centered and/or culturally relevant pedagogies, Writing Workshop, and critical pedagogy (Cook-Sather, 2006; Fielding, 2006; Lensesmire, 1998)? How does the naming, categorizing, and classifying of (seemingly) different pedagogical approaches limit the work of educators and the possibilities for education? How might writing about student voice work maintain the divide between theory and practice? What I interpreted in the literature, the grand transformative possibilities of student voice, was not necessarily what I experienced with either TLC or Wycliffe St. Albans (WSA), and this
concerned me, and made me wonder if I was doing student voice “right”. Tricia Niesz (2006) speaks to some of my concerns when she writes, “My fieldwork experiences surprised me because, in offering examples of critical pedagogy in action, they contradicted much of the critical ethnographic literature that framed my research” (p. 335). Niesz expresses the disjuncture between the neatly packed theoretical writings of conventional academe and the lived experiences of these practices. In the analyses chapters that follow (Chapters 6, 7, and 8), I attempt to more closely mirror the contradictions and tensions of my experiences with student voice. Before I get to the analyses chapters, however, in the current chapter I work through articulating “what” this thing of student voice is as presented in a sample of literature. Once again, to orient the reader to my work in relation to the governing body of literature, I begin the chapter by noting where and how my work diverges from this literature.

**Divergences from/with/in/throughout the Literature**

While I gleaned key ideas from reading the sample of student voice literature, my readings and interpretations of the literature suggested to me that I was looking for something else; I longed for the “gritty materialities” (Apple 2000; see also, Niesz, 2006) of the design and enfolded of student voice projects into our curricula and pedagogies to be articulated from the perspective of the teacher/facilitator. I found the “how-tos”, “best practices” and “what works” strategies of writing up research to be dangerously deceiving. The amplification of the problematics within a particular reform left me to question whether I should even pursue a project asking: where *can* transformation occur when we seem to break things apart only to put them together again in the same way they were found? In this way my research diverges from the literature: I amplify, through an autoethnographic vulnerability (Ellis, 2004; Ellis & Bochner, 2000; Reed-Danahay,
1997), the hesitancies, concerns, and uncertainties of pursuing transformative practices in educational spaces.

Through my particular discursive framework, poststructural feminist anti-racism, my work also branches off from the literature in two ways: firstly, through a focus on the ways in which student voice is demarcated by social difference. Secondly, and in relation to the first, through a consideration of the ways in which student voice can be conceptualized as resisting dominant paradigms of schooling and education; in other words, how students’ voices may be read as, and may inform us on, the complex ways in which resisting hegemonic schooling practices may be enacted. Considering the ways in which socio-historically informed relations of social difference shape who can be heard in what ways under what conditions contributes to the necessity of addressing the contradictions, (im)possibilities, and overall tensions of reform implementation processes. Finally, by focusing on affect (Chapter 7) and desire (Chapter 8) as analytics, I offer discussions for understanding student voice from alternative perspectives to those presented in the prevailing literature on student voice.

**Orientations in/to the Discussion**

In this literature review, due in part to my own struggles in articulating a tightly bounded definition of student voice, I hope to complicate the notions of student voice, to question the discourses in an effort to come to understand what they do. In writing through the literature, it is my hope to create more questions and considerations for educational researchers and pedagogues within schooling and education, rather than to produce some finite understanding of “ideal” student voice work. It is my belief that in engaging in potentially transformative work I must
continually question and reflect on where I am, how I have gotten there, where I am going, and at what rate (James, 1992, p. 364). In this section, I speak to the particular lenses through which I came to read and present the literature on student voice.

As noted above, in this chapter I take an intentionally “distanced” position—while recognizing that in writing, my interpretations and framings organize the presentation of others’ work. In the discussion chapters I address how my reading of the literature constructed particular expectations for/with/in/against the student voice projects. In Chapter 6, I address the way I had hoped to put student voice to work to change power relations, without critically considering the ways in which voice is shaped through power relations. In other words, one of the reasons I felt frustrated or let down in the student voice projects was because I wanted student voice to do something, as I interpreted the literature to suggest that student voice was a practice that could bring about transformation in classrooms and schools. After working through Chapter 6, I came to recognize that locating student voice as capable of shifting power relations is a misunderstanding of the relationship between voice and power that misses the ways in which power relations shape what is possible to voice, as well as what is made recognizable within the dynamics of the student→teacher relationship. In Chapter 7, I consider another layer of complexity that is not offered in the literature: the circulating affects that come to shape possible voicings. Finally, in Chapter 8, I speak to the ways in which I read the literature as presenting neatly packaged student voice projects, only to find the messiness, uncertainties and contradictions within the student voice work I facilitated at WSA. In what follows, I situate my

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16 I want to thank Marlon Simmons for drawing my attention to this text.
readings of a selection of student voice literature, and I return to these discussions in the analysis chapters.

Much of the scholarship concerning social science research engages in a step-by-step rhythmic approach to writing through logical subtitles, and through the confines of writing, I find that I, too, have been compelled to organize, thematize, and categorize the literature. However, the material, as presented in each section and subtitle, is difficult to compartmentalize, as it is co-constitutive. As a result, there are questions that are posed in one section and then further discussed in another section with, in, and through a different framing. As I am less interested with providing fixed “answers”, I engage the literature through questions. I believe this disrupts the rhythmic approach to hegemonic social science writing and works to keep knowledge open and fluid. This being said, I organize the following literature review on student voice as follows: I come to conceptualize student voice by working through a historicization of the concept, the theoretical and discursive underpinnings that inform the work, the landscape of schooling and education, and the methodological and pedagogical implications for, with and through student voice work. In the Chapter 5, I discuss the literature again as I seek to explore relationships in schooling and education in relation to student voice practices, by considering the implications for identity and the workings of power as embodied through difference.

**Conceptualizing and Contextualizing Student Voice**

I remember vividly waiting in the line the last day of third grade, anticipating who my fourth grade teacher was going to be. We lined up alphabetically and as we got to our teacher, Mrs. Michos; she whispered in our ear who we would have the following year. For some this created
anxiety, because it was how you found out if you were going to be repeating third grade. I couldn’t wait to find out. Since my last name starts with M, I was somewhere in the middle of the line, watching the students ahead of me alphabetically walk past the threshold between third grade and what lay beyond, and feeling comforted that there were students after me who had to wait longer. Finally, my turn came. Mrs. Michos leaned down to my 9 year-old height and whispered “Mrs. St. Pierre”. A grin spread across my face as I walked out of third grade and into summer. I was happy because Mrs. St. Pierre had been my kindergarten teacher; I loved Mrs. St. Pierre. My mother was happy because I was placed in the “Whole Language” class. As an educator herself, my mother had strong opinions about the pedagogical approaches teachers ascribed to, and she was a proponent of the Whole Language movement. In the early 1990s, Whole Language was certainly popular, but it was also extremely controversial, frequently being pitted against/in opposition to more phonics-based literacy approaches. Even within my elementary school, some teachers worked from a phonics approach while, luckily for me, Mrs. St. Pierre worked with a Whole Language curriculum.

Years later I, myself, became an English teacher, and while this experience remains influential in my own pedagogical approaches to literacy, many different approaches and theories have come and gone in the larger conversations of schooling and education. I made connections between the Whole Language approaches that I encountered and the Reading and Writing Workshop models I was taught to work with in my own English classroom. The Workshop model was the most recent manifestation of “the best way” to approach literacy teaching and learning, as it was explained to my cohort of initial teachers. I now find myself, after being invited to work as a part of a research team, researching another trend in schooling and education: student voice.
I mention the various pedagogical trends that have come to shape my schooling and educational experiences, not only to locate myself, but also because it causes me to ask why so many reform efforts are present in schooling and education for a short period of time, only to be left as a trend of the past while new initiatives take their place. I have come to think that in many ways, the reforms are not situated in the socio-historical context of schooling and education, and for this I have worked through a thematically organized literature review of the conversations around student voice in schooling and education.

How do we come to recognize student voice? Though there are many examples in the literature, as well as in practice, there are almost as many understandings of the goals, theoretical and discursive underpinnings, as there are limitations and possibilities of student voice work. In other words, the term student voice comes to encapsulate many varied and contradictory initiatives in the theory, the policy, and the physical, psychological and spiritual spaces of schools and classrooms. What follows situates student voice in the larger conversation of schooling and education. It presents a historicization, some of the theoretical and discursive underpinnings, and the various conceptualizations of student voice work. In contextualizing student voice work, I ask: What are the ways in which we come to recognize student voice work? What theories, ideologies and discourses inform the discussions and implementations of student voice work? How does student voice fit into the landscape of schooling and education? What understandings of the role of schooling and education in society come to inform the particularities of student voice work? In asking these questions, I also query, who is the imagined human subject in student voice work? What are the student subject locations, or who is the imagined student and what are the teacher subject locations; who is the imagined teacher? Finally, in doing this work, how do theorists and practitioners approach it both methodologically and pedagogically, and what implications does this have for the goals of student voice work?
Historicizing student voice.

In an effort to understand the ways in which student voice is presently conceptualized, I will begin by considering some of the historical moments that inform how student voice initiatives are taken up presently. In this, I must amplify that the work and the literature that I am writing through are predominantly located in English speaking contexts, particularly in Canada, the United States, Britain and Australia. While there are examples of publications speaking to student voice initiatives in other locations (see Prieto, 2001), I find that they are informed by the discussions in the above-mentioned spaces. Much of the governing literature takes a particular Anglo-European discourse that de-races schooling and education (Dei, 2008b).

As my experiences, both as a primary and secondary student and as a Secondary English Language Arts teacher have been located in the United States, readers will find more detailed and personal analyses of the present conditions and policies in United States education in this review. As my professional experience in schooling and education is located in the secondary classroom, the discussions presented are predominantly located in secondary classrooms, with some located in primary schools (see, for example, Dahl, 1995; Oldfather et al., 1999) and even in university (see, Bragg, 2001; 2007; Orner, 1992). Similarly, I must amplify that while some have come to theorize and implement student voice work in their practices through reflexivity—a thorough reconsideration and retheorizing of previous experiences (see for example, Bragg, 2007)—many have come to use the term partly due to its present faddism (for a discussion on the perils of this popularity, see Fielding, 2004a, p. 295-296; Rudduck and Fielding, 2006; Silva, 2001, p. 95). I address this popularity, particularly at the primary and secondary levels, in what follows. Finally, while there is much overlap with discussions of student-centeredness, student engagement, and student participation; I limit the discussions to the literature and practices that
specifically identify as student voice and/or student/pupil consultation (which is more commonly found in the British literature). Nonetheless, in an effort to contextualize the possibilities and limitations, I will now situate student voice historically. In other words, I will consider the conditions that make the present student voice discussions, with all their variance, possible.

Calls for student voice in schooling and education are not new to this millennium. In fact, there have been different periods in which student voice initiatives have presented themselves, as well as periods of push-back where students’ voices were (and in many cases today, still are) violently silenced. In other words, while there is a history of discussing the inclusion of students’ voices in various ways in schooling and education, there has been a myriad of, sometimes conflicting, understandings of such initiatives. (It is worth noting here that through these discussions, there are also varied interpretations about “voice”: who and what voice represents, and how voice is materialized within these initiatives, a discussion that I take up later in this chapter as well as in Chapters 5 and 6.) Many writers have come to locate the recent push for student voice in schooling and education with the 1989 United Nations’ Convention on the Rights of Children (UNCRC) (Bragg & Manchester, 2012; Cook-Sather, 2006; Cruddas, 2001; James, 2007; Kirby, 2001; Robinson & Taylor, 2007), specifically articles 12, 13 and 23\(^\text{17}\) (Cruddas, 2001; James, 2007). The UNCRC speaks to the rights of children to

\(^{17}\) *Article 12 reads:* “1. States Parties shall assure the child who is capable of forming his or her own views the right to express those views freely in all matters affecting the child, the views of the child being given due weight in accordance with the age and maturity of the child; 2. For this purpose, the child shall in particular be provided the opportunity to be heard in any judicial and administrative proceedings affecting the child, either directly, or through a representative or an appropriate body, in a manner consistent with the procedural rules of national law.”

*Article 13 reads:* “1. The child should have the right to freedom of expression; this right shall include freedom to seek, receive and impart information and ideas of all kinds, regardless of frontiers, either orally, in writing or in print, in the form of art, or through any other media of the child’s choice; 2. The exercise of this right may be subject to certain restrictions, but these shall only be such as are provided by law and are necessary: (a) For respect of the rights or reputations of others; or (b) For the protection of national security or of public order (ordre public), or of public health or morals.”
express themselves on issues that affect them (UNCRC, 1989; Cruddas, 2001; James, 2007; Kirby, 2001; Robinson & Taylor, 2007). This document immediately sparked national frameworks in England around student voice: England’s Department of Education and Skills (DfES) and the Office for Standards in Education (OfSTED) (Cook-Sather, 2006, p. 371). James (2007), however, amplifies the ambiguity in the articulation of these rights by writing, “if the practitioners felt this would not be in children’s best interests, then children’s voices were effectively silenced, despite the practitioners’ explicit commitment to child-centered practice” (p. 267). James (2007) also suggests that with the UNCRC as a symbol of the modern nation-state, with its commitment to values that underpin global, Eurocentric modernity—democracy, freedom and rights—the ambiguity is necessary as part of controlling who participates fully in accessing and claiming their rights. This led some to suggest that student voice has merely become a “buzzword” (Silva, 2001, p. 95) a “fad” (Fielding, 2004a; Rudduck & Fielding, 2006), or a “zeitgeist” (Rudduck, 2006 quoted in Robinson & Taylor, 2007, p. 6).

While the UNCRC influenced specific national policies and organizations in England, as an effort to claim this status as a modern nation-state by writing it into policy, it supplemented a long history of “rights” talk in the United States, stemming back to Thomas Jefferson and the right to free public education. Horace Mann and the implementation of the Common School in the 1800s, spoke to rights for particular—White, privileged, made-to-be normatized—bodies in the nation-state. More recent discussions of equal access to education follow along the lines of

_Article 23 reads_: “1. States Parties recognize that a mentally or physically disabled child should enjoy a full and decent life, in conditions which ensure dignity, promote self-reliance and facilitate the child’s active participation in the community. […]” (United Nations _Convention on the Rights of the Child:_ http://www2.ohchr.org/english/law/crc.htm)
race (see the *Brown vs. Board of Education* legislation of 1954 which desegregated schools), gender (see Title IX legislation), class (addressed through the Elementary and Secondary Education Act, first signed into being in 1965 and subsequently reauthorized most recently in 2010), and ability (see the Education for All Handicapped Children Act of 1975) (Cook-Sather, 2006, p. 371). In fact, in the 1960s and 1970s, during the Civil Rights epoch in the United States, forms of student voice presented themselves as a civil right (see Fielding, 2006, p. 299; Lincoln, 1995, p. 88; Mitra, 2004, p. 652) only to be silenced again in the 1970s within the particular contours of schooling and education and the political landscape of the time (Mitra, 2004, p. 652).

Along with the theme of rights found in many periods of student voice work, the notion of democracy presents itself. While in many ways linked to rights, it has enough presence in its own conversations to warrant comment on it as a separate theme. Rudduck and Fielding (2006) trace discussions of democracy, community and voice back to three particular schools established in the 1890s, 1920s and 1940s:

What the schools appear to have in common was a founding headteacher who was passionately committed to democratic possibilities – to the idea of the school as a community where students share in its governance, to student autonomy and, importantly, to making spaces where students could develop their own identities and interests (p. 221, emphasis added).

Part of the discussion around student voice and democracy speaks to the particular skills necessary for democratic participation (Lincoln, 1995, p. 89), such as dialogue and critical thinking. (For a more detailed discussion of democracy and student voice, see the section “Discursive Underpinnings: On Democracy” later in this chapter.)
Within these various epochs in which student voice presented itself, most writing, whether referring specifically to the UNCRC or amplifying rights and democracy, note the late 1980s and early 1990s as the starting point for the more recent conversations of student voice in schooling and education (Cook-Sather, 2002, 2006; Lensmire, 1998; Mitra, 2004). In the 1980s, the calls for voice presented themselves in Writing Workshop models (Cook-Sather, 2006; Lensmire, 1998) and the theorization and work of Critical Pedagogy (Cook-Sather, 2006; Lensmire, 1998), influenced by theorists like Paolo Freire, and which called to situate the student in her learning as well as make connections to larger social injustices. By the 2000s, however, while student voice became a prominent topic for politicians, educators, and educational researchers, the goals came to shift from the rights of children and democracy to a view of students as clients (Robinson & Taylor, 2007, p. 5) (see below for a more in-depth discussion of the “imagined student subject” in relation to student voice initiatives) and a focus on “outcomes” (Bragg, 2007; Mitra, 2004, p. 652). In the historicizing of student voice initiatives, specific discussions of the ways in which race, power, and privilege shape schooling and education reforms is relatively limited; instead the literature comes to locate students or youth as a homogenous group that is othered and marginalized on the whole.

In more general terms, the trends in student voice discussions speak to the shifting conceptualizations of youth. Cook-Sather (2002) reminds us that since the industrial revolution in the 19th century, schools have been a way to control youth (p. 4). Even with the UNCRC, early questions like “What would happen if we treated the student as someone whose opinion mattered?” (Fullan, 1991, p. 170) and Jonathan Kozol’s (1991) admission that “the voices of children have been missing from the whole discussion [of educational reform]” (p. 5) continue to haunt educational research and practice.
**Discursive underpinnings of student voice.**

In this section, I consider some of the values, theories, ideologies and discourses that shape the various conceptions of student voice work. There are many more ways to frame the various underpinnings, and in what follows I have chosen to work with the orientations presented in the literature. In other words, I do not consider all the possible discursive locations, focusing instead on what is present explicitly in these conversations on a selection of the governing literature about student voice. Similarly, I do not presume to provide a detailed description of the various theoretical underpinnings, choosing to present a brief consideration of some aspects as they relate to student voice work. In other words, I do not work through each theoretical stance thoroughly, as that would entail a separate literature review for each.

Fielding (2001b) presents the very different ways in which student voice work may be understood, considering the purposes of the work and how one comes to understand what student voice is:

> What are we to make of it all? Are we witnessing the emergence of something genuinely new, exciting and emancipatory that builds on rich traditions of democratic renewal and transformation? Are we, as Jean Rudduck and Julia Flutter (Rudduck & Flutter, 2000) have recently asked via the beautifully crafted phrase of Maxine Greene, “carving a new order of experience?” Or are we presiding over the further entrenchment of existing assumptions and intentions using student or pupil voice as an additional mechanism of control. (Fielding, 2001b, p. 100)

In this quote, Fielding (2001b) addresses two of the possibilities for understanding student voice work. This next section will consider the various theoretical and discursive frames that come to
shape the diversity of student voice work. In another article, Fielding (2004a) amplifies that a limited amount of the literature on student voice work actually considers the theoretical underpinnings of their assumptions that lead to the “advocacy and emerging realities of student voice in school and community renewal” (pp. 295-296). He goes further to suggest that without an understanding of the theoretical and discursive frames shaping student voice work, one risks the possibilities of student voice work being reduced to lip-service (Fielding, 2004a, pp. 295-296; see also, McMahon & Portelli, 2004; Robinson & Taylor, 2007) and leads to asking pragmatic questions of, “‘how to do it ['student voice']’ rather than a reflexive review of ‘why we might want to do it’” (Rudduck & Fielding, 2006, p. 219).

The particular theoretical and discursive frameworks that we may work within come to shape our understandings of the human condition, and in particular, who the imagined student and teacher are, regardless of whether or not the particular frame informing initiatives is acknowledged. One of my concerns during the research with Teaching and Learning Collaborative relates to my uncertainty of Gloria, the TLC facilitator’s, explicit consideration and understanding of how she framed the student voice project, and thereby what was produced from the student voice experiences. Not locating the theoretical frame and underpinning values is a common stance of dominant knowledge—as informed by Enlightenment humanism—in its call for Truth, universality, and neutrality. For a more thorough discussion on humanist/enlightenment subjecthood and alternative ways of understanding and locating subjectivity, see Chapter 5.

On Voice: Some of the complexities in the theoretical and discursive underpinnings of student voice work are amplified by the cacophony of understandings of voice. In the literature focused on student voice, voice comes to be located as “agency … and a means of becoming”
“self-expression” (Lensmire, 1998; see also, Oldfather et al., 1999, p. 290), individualized, representing autonomy and freedom (Cook-Sather, 2006, p. 382; see also, Cammarota & Fine, 2008b), “mere verbalization” (O’Loughlin, 1995, p. 110) or authenticity (Cook-Sather, 2006; Fielding, 2004a, p. 299; O’Loughlin, 1995, p. 110). Other authors locate voice as participation (Lensmire, 1998), or part of social cultural narratives (Arnot & Reay, 2007; Bakhtin, 1981; Cook-Sather, 2006; Giroux, 1986; O’Loughlin, 1995). Voice is presented in the literature as an entity that can be “given” (Fielding, 2004a, p. 299), or something that is multiple and located, always in process (Cook-Sather, 2006; see also Arnot & Reay, 2007; Bragg, 2007).

On Democracy: A significant section of the literature on student voice speaks explicitly about the democratic possibilities of such work (relating specifically to the UNCRC), such as dialogue, active participation, belonging and citizenship, rights, freedom, liberty and sovereignty; however, even here “democracy” is a contested term, and some come to trouble the calls for democratic reforms (see, for example, Arnot & Reay, 2007; Cook-Sather, 2006; Giroux, 1986; James, 2007).

Key debates governing the field of democracy within the context of schooling and education, as Portelli & Solomon (2001) note, concern education for democracy and democracy in education (see also, Kelly, 2004, p. 16). Education for democracy, while it could include democratic processes in schooling and education, does not necessitate those relations, and can lend itself to an authoritarian top-down, banking approach (Freire, 1970) to knowledge production/dissemination. Democracy in education, alternatively, comes to embody equitable relations, and lends itself more to critical thinking, asking how do we come to know knowledge, and where does knowledge reside?
Similar questions of whether calls for democracy speak to education for democracy and/or democracy in education present themselves in the student voice literature (see for example, Fielding, 2001a, 2004a, 2006; Prieto, 2001). In what ways is student voice work oriented around preparing students to participate in democracy “out there”, and in what ways is student voice work organized as a form of democracy in itself? Even in asking the second part of the question, we need to consider what form of democracy student voice might take. Some argue that student voice “needs to be supported by institutional forms and patterns of governance which themselves embody the educational values and purposes of inclusion, capability and active citizenship” (Ranson, 2000, p. 270; see also Prieto, 2001; Cahill et al., 2008; Cammarota & Fine, 2008b). However, others remind us that schools are not following in the Deweyian model of democratic education, but rather are “mere extensions of the logic of capital” (Giroux, 1986, p. 49; see also Arnot & Reay, 2007, p. 311), with a focus on the market and outcomes. Locating schools as reproductive sites of instrumentality rather than spheres for democracy, Cook-Sather (2006) urges us that “democracy should be premised on change, not just reproduction”, and she warns that “Because schools are set up on premises of prediction, control, and management, anything that challenges those premises is hard to accomplish within formal educational contexts” (p. 381; see also, Dei, 1996, p. 32). Lincoln (1995) adds that if what democracy requires—“active participation and critical thinking skills”—our schools are not presently prepared for or organized around inculcating those experiences for students (p. 89). Whitehead & Clough (2004) agree that there needs to be dramatic shifts in the dominant organization of schooling and education, away from merely including students’ voices to more democratic relations where students come to be seen as co-constructors of knowledge (p. 215). Core to this differently conceptualized understanding of students as participants in knowledge production are four aspects, as amplified by Robinson & Taylor (2007): dialogue, participation,
naming and marking of unequal power relations, and the necessity to work towards transforming those relations (p. 8), all of which come to speak of particular conceptualizations of student voice work.

Arnot & Reay (2007) warn against student voice initiatives being positioned as a panacea for educational and societal reform of the materialist relations that organize schooling and education and reproduce inequities in society. They call for student voice work to be connected to larger projects of transformation of societal governance structures (p. 311; see also, Dei, 1996, p. 32; Fielding, 2004a). “[S]uch ‘voice’-led initiatives could easily be used to imply social transformation when none is delivered. The tragedy of democratically inspired pedagogies is likely to be their lack of consequence in being able to challenge classification structures” (Arnot & Reay, 2007, p. 323). Even with the limitations and problematics of student voice work, Cook-Sather (2006) reminds us that to ignore students’ voices, to leave their voices out of conversations of educational reform, is a violation of their rights (p. 372).

Liberal Perspective: The assumed understandings that pervade calls for student voice, which unquestioningly come to argue for student voice in relation to democracy and purport to undo the rigidly hierarchical nature of schooling and education, are frequently located within the liberal perspective, also marked by progressive or student centered approaches (Giroux, 1986, p. 55). Deeply entrenched in Enlightenment philosophy and humanist subjecthood (see Chapter 5 for a discussion on the Enlightenment subject), the liberal perspective centers individualism, specifically the uniqueness of each individual, fragmenting the individual from social forces (Bragg, 2007, p. 344; Giroux, 1986, p. 55; Lensmire, 1998, p. 264;). It speaks to an authentic voice that has always been there, hiding on the margins waiting to be found (Lensmire, 1998; Bragg, 2007, p.344) and, once found, allowing the individual to take responsibility for her own
learning as an active participant. The liberal perspective assumes the human subject to be “stable, coherent, unitary, and autonomous” (Lensmire, 1998, p. 264) and works from a developmental theory where (linear) progress is natural (Giroux, 1986); progressing from the past to the future inevitably means improvement, and progressing from (conceptions of) childhood into (conceptions of) adulthood also assumes improvement (James, 2007; see also Fendler, 1998). It is in the middle years of transition from childhood into adulthood, the teenage years, with which liberals struggle to work (Cruddas, 2001), and it is in these years that liberal notions of student voice are most promoted. It is through these logics that discourses of empowering youth against the “bad social institutions threatening the development and integrity of the unique individual” (Lensmire, 1998, p. 264) through student voice work come to present themselves; “there is a ‘redemptive’ language here (cf. Popkewitz, 1998)—student voice will help students become better citizens and more active learners, and schools to become better places” (Bragg, 2007, p. 344).

Constructivism: Within the liberal framework, constructivism comes to shape understandings of knowledge production, how we come to knowledge, and where knowledge resides. Constructivists locate students as active creators of knowledge (Cook-Sather, 2002, p. 5), pushing back against banking models of teaching and learning (Freire, 1970). As creators of knowledge out of their own experiences, constructivists center students in schooling and education typically by invoking writing processes, whole language, hands-on learning, and student voice approaches (O’Loughlin, 1995, p. 109). Even while centering students through these approaches, teachers are said to benefit and improve their practice by listening to the voices of students (Cook-Sather, 2002; Commeyras, 1995; Dahl, 1995; Heshius, 1995; Lincoln, 1995). It has been argued, however, that, “liberal-constructivist pedagogies are based on a middle-class construction of the child as autonomous, self-regulating, and naturally capable of self-directed
learning, given the proper environment” (O’Loughlin, 1995, p. 110). In this conceptualization, power and privilege, and socio-historic processes are not recognized or considered (Giroux, 1986, p. 56). Giroux goes so far as to say, “Within this pedagogical practice, student voice is reduced to the immediacy of its performance, existing as something to be measured, administered, registered, and controlled” (pp. 51-52).

Critical Pedagogies: Critical pedagogies inform student voice theorizing and approaches in and through centering processes of domination and inequitable power relations in the structuring of both society and education (Cook-Sather, 2002, p. 5), particularly focusing on those who are marginalized within these relations (Lincoln, 1995, p. 92; Orner, 1992, p. 83). Rather than imagining the individuality of our subjecthood, critical pedagogy works with conceptions of a social self, one that is both privileged and constrained in and through social processes (Giroux, 1986; Lensmire, 1998, p. 267). The work of critical pedagogy seeks to empower students to come to understand the various ways in which they are dominated: as youth silenced in conventional schooling and education in general, as well as those who are marginalized in and through race, class, gender, sexuality, and disability (Orner, 1992, p. 83), in an effort to come to redistribute power more equitably (Cook-Sather, 2002, p. 6). In the space of the classroom, Giroux (1986) urges that critical pedagogy comes to inform and amplify “the ways in which language, ideology, history, and experience come together to produce, define, and constrain particular forms of teacher-student practice” (p. 50), and student voice initiatives grounded in critical pedagogy come to disrupt the assumed roles of teacher and student by including the voices, histories, and experiences of students within the confines of the classroom. According to theorists like Bakhtin (1981) and Freire (1970), dialogue comes to be centered in the classroom, where teachers have as much to learn from students as students have to learn from teachers (Giroux, 1986, p. 58).
Poststructuralist: With all the possibilities presented in and through critical pedagogic approaches that name inequitable power relations, Orner (1992) asks, whose interests are furthered in their calls for student voice (p. 86)? This question frames how poststructuralists enter the conversation of student voice, how poststructuralism engages the underlying assumptions in both liberal and critical pedagogic approaches to student voice. Bragg (2007) frames the particular assumptions that inform calls for student voice work in both liberal and critical pedagogic approaches through a Foucauldian perspective, answering Orner’s aforementioned question that it is the schools themselves that come to benefit most from student voice initiatives:

It is held to be “obvious”, for example, that young people are in search of happiness and meaning, that they need to feel in control and involved, that individual responsibility is personally empowering and desirable, that people should be active not passive and are more likely to be creative and enthusiastic if they are subjectively implicated in their work and “own” it. These managers imagine a pre-existing “will to participate” in students, which they believe [student voice] reflects rather than constructs. In turn, students’ subjectivity, once developed in “happier” directions, will serve the self-interests of the school and ensure organizational success. (Bragg, 2007, p. 348, emphasis added)

Bragg (2007) goes on to ask, what happens to those who do not wish to participate (see also Bragg & Manchester, 2012; Silva, 2001, p. 95)? How does this come to re-inform notions of deviance and the problematic student? Relating to the re-signification of the problematic student, with the assumption that, as active knowledge producers, students come to take responsibility for their learning, Bragg (2007) amplifies that what is not said by those who work with liberal and critical pedagogic approaches is that the students are implicitly asked to take responsibility for their failure as well (p. 356). In amplifying the impossibility for this “authentic
voice” taking responsibility, poststructural frames urge educators to recognize how the presence of power in the classroom frames what is sayable and doable (Arnot & Reay, 2007; Bragg & Manchester, 2012; Cook-Sather, 2002, p. 6; Orner, 1992, p. 81; Silva, 2001; see also Chapter 6). Similarly, the presence of student voice works to obfuscate resistance; by not participating, or not participating according to the normative rules of participation, one comes to be “rendered senseless” (Bragg, 2007, p. 354).

**Landscape of Schooling and Education and The Presence of Student Voice**

It is my belief that knowledge is political, not neutral, and as I noted in Chapter 2, I find that locating the work one does theoretically, philosophically, ideologically and historically has the potential to disrupt the dominant paradigms that suggest one can be an objective observer of lived experiences. When the research is not located, it risks becoming “empty and superficial, catch-phrase or slogan” (McMahon & Portelli, 2004, p. 60; see also Kelly, 2004). With the present popularity of student voice work, I urge a thoughtful consideration of the theoretical and discursive underpinnings that guide the work.

In this way, the potential for the work to remain connected to the larger structures of schooling and education, and the possibilities for transformation of the inequities and marginalization of particular bodies in schooling and education present themselves. It is not only the theoretical and discursive framings of student voice, in isolation, that inform the student voice movement, it is also the particular landscape, which dialogically comes to shape what is made sayable in the discourses of schooling and education and who is made hearable, that shapes the possibilities for student voice work (I take up these concepts again in Chapter 6). As the
previous section presents, and as Mimi Orner (1992) suggests, “it is clear that why students are being asked to talk, and what they are being asked to talk about, varies along with the social, political, economic and cultural commitments of an array of research and teaching agendas” (p. 76). In this section I come to unpack some aspects of the landscape of schooling and education as they come to dialogue with the goals of student voice work. By “landscape”, I mean a focus on the current configurations that frame the everyday experiences of schooling and education as imbedded in institutional practices, curricula, pedagogy, and epistemological frameworks.

What student voice initiatives imply is that students’ voices are not heard in the present configurations of schooling and education. As amplified in the quote below, the organization of schooling and education comes to be shaped through adult frameworks:

Since the advent of formal education in the United States, both the educational system and that system’s every reform have been premised on adults’ notions of how education should be conceptualized and practiced. There is something fundamentally amiss about building an entire system without consulting at any point those it is ostensibly designed to serve. . . .The call to authorize student perspectives is a call to count students among those who have the knowledge and the position to shape what counts as education, to reconfigure power dynamics and discourse practices within which students can embrace “the political potential of speaking out on their own behalf” (Lewis, 1993, p. 44). (Cook-Sather, 2002, p. 3)

O’Loughlin (1995) references a study conducted by Goodlad (1984) to expand upon this point, stating that “teachers in elementary and secondary schools nationwide monopolize the conversation 95 and 99 percent of the time respectively” (O’Loughlin, 1995, p. 108). This
section asks what the goals of student voice work are as they fit in the overall landscape of contemporary schooling and education. While, as the above quote suggests, there has been a long history of silencing and/or ignoring students’ voices in education, what are the ways in which policy makers, educators, parents, communities and students are being “convinced” that we should all come to hear the voices of students? In other words, what are the conditions, goals and logics that have come to support the various student voice initiatives? Many examples, in both the literature and in practice, speak to the particular neoliberal skills that being given space to have a voice elicits: choice, autonomy, individual responsibility, leadership, (Cook-Sather, 2006, p. 382); problem solving and relationship building (Mitra, 2004); a developed sense of agency and decision-making (Mitra, 2004; Ranson, 2000, p. 270). Oftentimes the skills garnered and the overall goals of student voice work align themselves with the particular neoliberal trends towards marketization and managerialism, locating students as clients and consumers present in education (Cook-Sather, 2006, p. 382; Fielding, 2001a, p. 108; Robinson & Taylor, 2007), even while the said focus of the efforts claims to be on “reform” (Mitra, 2004). In other words, claims of pursuing student voice work to reform schooling and education often reproduce the very same neoliberal atmosphere that comes to create the historical uneven distribution of success for particular students. Again, a more thorough analysis of the workings of race in this moment is needed in the governing literature on student voice work.

Regardless of the particulars of the theoretical and discursive underpinnings of the various student voice efforts, most, in some way, claim to transform schools from their historical hierarchical, all-knowing, and often paternalistic positions by including the voices of students. How those voices come to be included, and to what effect, are not necessarily the focus of this section; instead, I want to ask how those who hold power are being “convinced” to support student voice initiatives when those initiatives claim to want to disrupt that power and transform
the historical colonial relationships in schooling and education. By colonial, I refer to foreign as well as local imposition; as Dei (2006) notes, colonial “…refers to anything imposed and dominating rather than that which is simply foreign and alien” (p. 3).

One argument for student voice comes to be positioned in relation to the present limitations of spaces for students’ voices to be heard (Cook-Sather, 2006, p. 366; Gunter & Thomson, 2007, p. 186; Rudduck & Fielding, 2006, p. 225) and that despite the proliferation of reform efforts in education, schools have changed less than the students who populate them (Rudduck & Demetriou, 2003, p. 275). Schooling and education seems to be organized around the assumption that adults know best (Cook-Sather, 2002, p. 3; Cruddas, 2001, p. 63; Whitehead & Clough, 2004, p. 215) and tend to follow the logic of childhood development which locates children as incompetent, in need of guidance from adults who have matured into competence (James, 2007, p. 266; see also Rudduck & Demetriou, 2003, p. 281). This paternalistic relationship is not limited to the teacher-student relationship, but speaks to the hierarchical organizing of schooling and education that simultaneously comes to silence teachers, who are often targeted for faults in schooling and education through reform efforts (Fielding, 2004a; Gunter & Thomson 2007, p. 186; Kincheloe, McLaren & Steinberg, 2012; Robinson & Taylor, 2007, p. 7). The climate that is fostered in this mode lacks trust, produces managerialism (Gunter & Thomson, 2007, p. 186), and shifts many aspects of education to maintaining order and control rather than the fashioning of knowledge (Giroux, 1986, p. 51-52).

Some have named the present climate as being coopted into the neoliberal organization of spaces in and through power and authority, corporatization and privatization of schooling and education (Bragg, 2007, p. 343; Robinson & Taylor, 2007, p. 6; Rudduck & Fielding, 2006, p. 226). Values that have come to be valorized in this neoliberal framing of schooling and

Bulluck & Wikeley (2001) share that in this climate, even when student voice initiatives are present, students have come to see learning as a task to be completed, rather than a process that comes to inform all aspects of our lives (p. 67). Part of the difficulty in students coming to see the relationships between what is taught in school and their lives outside of school is the way in which schools are organized around the fragmentation of “disciplines”. Spaces in schooling and education have come to be compartmentalized through “teacher-space” and “student-space” (Fielding, 2006, p. 312), as well as by subject, grade level, and skill level. Knowledge—as informed by the Enlightenment logics—has come to be understood as something that is external to us, and as a result schools teach about knowledge in isolation, as facts, teaching about democracy in a hierarchically authoritarian and managerially way that contradicts the values of democracy itself (Rudduck & Fielding, 2006, p. 222-223).

Within these particular configurations, student voice comes to be something that is measurable and administratable (Giroux, 1986, p. 52; James, 2007, p. 265); it speaks to students “having a say” within the particular contours of schooling and education more than it does about transforming those conditions (Macbeath, 2006, p. 195). Educators, who are bombarded with the ever-changing reform efforts, come to seek prescriptive solutions, rather than ask why they might decide to engage in a particular reform effort. The fear—as part of the lack of trust in the paternalist managerialism—of not doing what they are told in a recognizable way, comes to
outweigh pedagogical implications (Rudduck & Fielding, 2006, p. 219). Reforms come to be understood, then, as stipulative and “quick fixes” which then influence some to listen to the voices of students that are more readily hearable, the voices that align with the middle-class values and ways of being that represent the norm in schooling and education (Bragg, 2001, p. 73).

Within these organizing values of contemporary schooling and education, what are some of the goals of student voice possibilities? Some, as mentioned, hope for transformation of these particular conditions; however, it is skills and goals that seem to be in alignment with the neoliberal agenda that present convincing arguments to policy makers. Arguments suggest that if the students are made-to-be active in their schooling experience, rather than passive repositories of others’ agendas, there will be improvements in student outcomes, academics, and learning resulting in school marketability in a climate of school choice (Mitra, 2004, p. 651). Students, when given the opportunity to voice their experiences, will learn the skills of “teamwork, communication, enterprise, and reflexivity” which enhance the marketability of the schools, as well as the students, both competing in the market economy (Bragg, 2007, p. 352).

When students are given a voice, they will take ownership for their learning. They will regulate themselves and take responsibility for their learning (Cook-Sather, 2002, p. 10; Mitra, 2004, p. 653), which may then lead to reengaging students who have been disengaged in and through schooling and education (Mitra, 2004, p. 653). This in turn improves classroom management (Macbeath et al., 2001, p. 78), because disengaged students “disrupt the flow of the classroom”. Simultaneously, bringing students’ voices into schooling and education may serve as an accountability tool, as a way to manage teachers and reduce unprofessional behavior (Mitra, 2009, p. 1837).
Student voice has also been considered as part of teacher training, in that teacher candidates have been asked to dialogue with students about what they should consider pedagogically when they have their own classrooms (Heshusius, 1995; Mitra, 2009, p. 1837). In some instances, this asks the students to be responsible for the effective training of initial teachers. Finally, student voice, as discussed in the literature, comes to play a critical role in youth development (Mitra, 2004, p. 654; Mitra, 2009, p. 1837) from subordinate subject location of childhood into adulthood (James, 2007, p. 266; see also, Rudduck & Demetriou, 2003, p. 281).

Bragg (2007) reminds us that,

“Student voice” is now taking a more central role in educational policy, guidance and thinking. As it does so, however, it becomes less clear how to interpret it: it can perhaps no longer be seen as a radical gesture that will necessarily challenge educational hierarchies”. (p. 343)

However, it is important to consider the possibilities for transformation. For student voice to be successful in its transformative possibilities, it cannot be fragmented from larger social transformations (Arnot & Reay, 2007, p. 311; Fielding, 2004a). As Giroux (1986) reminds us, schools have acted as agents of social and cultural control (p. 57) in that they perform the gatekeeper role for the larger social organization of bodies (see also Dei, 1996; O’Loughlin, 1995). It has been noted that reform is unsustainable without support from societal structures (Arnot & Reay, 2007; Lincoln, 1995, p. 90) such as intermediary organizations—organizations that partner with schools—which can provide four aspects of support: “vision, leadership, funding, and knowledge sharing” (Mitra, 2009, p. 1855). While this suggests a need to be supported from outside the school, when that external support is not present, the possibility for oases of success exists (Jackson & McDermott, 2012) if the leaders in the school come to work
in what Gunter and Thomson (2007) noted: “courageous forms of leadership that fearlessly promote the importance of student ownership and student voice in respect to learning” (Smyth, 2006, p. 282 quoted in Gunter & Thomson, 2007, p. 187). In relation to these conversations, Cook-Sather (2002) suggests that in pursuing student voice work, sustained dialogue about the nature and role of schooling and education is necessary (p. 11). There also needs to be sustained dialogue about the purposes of the student voice initiative. As Rudduck & Fielding (2006) warn, students may begin to feel student voice fatigue if they are continually asked to speak with no recognizable change in the areas to which they are speaking (p. 221; see also Macbeath et al., 2001, p. 80). As a way to guard against this student voice fatigue, those involved, particularly the adults, have to “believe in their hearts” the importance of student voice work; in particular they have to work actively against the “comfort of the status quo” (Fielding, 2001b, p. 104-105).

Suggested questions to ask throughout the student voice work involve what is the culture of the school (Miron & Lauria, 1998, p. 209; Rudduck & Fielding, 2006, p. 219), and what spaces are opened for genuine dialogue between teachers and students? (Fielding, 2001a, p. 106; Fielding, 2004a, p. 309; Fielding, 2006, p. 311). Who or what might feel at risk in implementing student voice work? (Rudduck & Fielding, 2006, p. 220). What students are being heard and who is listening? (Bragg, 2001; Rudduck & Fielding, 2006, p. 228; Silva, 2001, p. 98)? Urquhart (2001) urges that those voices that are least likely to be heard may be the most important to listen to (p. 83), and Bragg (2007) reminds us that with this rapid popularization we may be tempted to listen to those voices that support our assumptions. She asks that we challenge the immediacy of “results” and recognize the work as a process, by allowing voices to challenge and disrupt our assumptions (p. 73; see also Arnot & Reay, 2007, p. 323; Bragg, 2001, p. 70; Cook-Sather, 2002, p. 12; Fielding 2004a, p. 303; Whitehead & Clough, 2004).
Methodological and Pedagogical Implications of Student Voice for Schooling and Education

There I was, the only student in a room full of teachers awaiting the next interview to start with a candidate for principal of my elementary school. A few weeks before, I overheard my mother, an educator in a different district, and her best friend—my godmother, who I call Aunt—a teacher in my school district, talking about the candidates for principal of my elementary school. I waltzed right in, incensed that no students would be on the hiring committee. “If they are going to be hiring my principal, how come they haven’t asked me what I want?” I am not sure whether I thought that this question would make any difference; in fact, part of me wonders if I worried about intruding on an “adult conversation” between my mother and my aunt. Either way, my Aunt had a conversation with the hiring committee and they agreed to let me participate in the interview process. How much influence did I ultimately have on the final decision? What role did I play? Was I simply a token representation of student voice? Would those who were on the hiring committee have considered my involvement as student voice? What about the applicants being interviewed? How did my presence come to inform the applicants about the kind of school to which they were applying?

As I have been reading, writing, and researching student voice, I have come to reflexively engage the previous story. In fact, I had forgotten about this story until my mother reminded me in a conversation about my work and how I came to be interested in this topic. The narrative presented both informs my research as well as is informed by the work I am presently doing with student voice. As the questions that I bring to the end of the above narrative suggest, I may or may not have been participating in an official student voice initiative; however, the narrative and the questions bring me to a consideration of the methodological and pedagogical implications of
student voice work that I see as constitutive. While I acknowledge that they are located
differently—methodology in research and pedagogy in education—I work with them together
because of my own identifications as both an educational researcher and an educator. Gallagher
& Wessels (2011) name this “metho-pedagogy”.

This last section of the chapter asks what variable forms student voice work may take.
How and what are the ways we come to recognize voice as student voice? How do the
underlying assumptions, the theoretical and discursive underpinnings, as well as the landscape of
schooling and education, come to inform the particularities of student voice initiatives? The
particular methods we employ, the pedagogical approaches with which we work, the questions
that we ask, shape the student voice work and its possibilities and limitations (Arnot & Reay,
2007, p. 318; see also Chapter 6). This section seeks to explore some of those methods,
approaches and questions.

Arnot & Reay (2007) amplify the problematics of “elicited talk”, in that what is said is
bounded by not only the questions that are asked, but also by the relations of power in the space
of the classroom (p. 319) which shape the boundaries of what is hearable (Bragg, 2007; see also
Chapter 6). It is for these reasons that this section presents key questions to consider in the
organizing of student voice work, as well as the literature that presents findings of student voice
work.

What form or shape will the student voice work take? There are, as already mentioned,
many different manifestations of student voice in schooling and education. These range from
efforts that look to student voices as data, to efforts that locate the students in more active roles
as researchers, presenting issues as well as possible changes to address those issues. Fielding
(2001b) warns against the former location of students as sources of data rather than active
participants in a changing field (see also, Raymond, 2001). This instrumental undertaking of students as data considers student voice efforts for adult purposes (Fielding, 2006, p. 306); what children say comes to be translated by adults in regards to adults’ understandings of what is “normal” and “acceptable” (James, 2007, p. 267). Specifically, there are several things to consider in preparing student voice work: *who will be included, how will they be included, and on what are they being asked to speak?* Often, who is included is framed by the questions being asked. For example, one school wanted to create improved learning spaces in which fewer students failed. As a part of this initiative, although the question came from the adults for a particular purpose, those involved in framing the research (the adults) thought it best to speak with students who had failed in an effort to mitigate some of the barriers as presented by those students (Mitra, 2001, p. 91; see also Fine, 1991). This is an example, however, of students as data; other examples of students as data include working with student opinion surveys and questionnaires (Fielding, 2004a, p. 307). The key aspects of students as data are found when the adults consider a question, ask the students (in some manner) for their thoughts, then come to analyze and interpret the responses through their own lenses for their own purposes. Fielding (2001b) warns, “[i]f one imposes a frame that is inquisitorial or exploitative or if students are required to speak the public language of the school, then the possibility of gaining access to what is distinctive about certain kinds of student perspectives is immediately compromised” (p. 102). Cook-Sather (2002) asks researchers and pedagogues to strive to “make sense of the young people’s world within their own [the students’] analytical frameworks” (p. 5; see also, James, 2007). As Mitra (2004) demonstrated through her research, when students and teachers analyzed focus group data together, they frequently found that the adults misinterpreted the data from the students’ perspectives (p. 662).
In the model in which students are located as co-researchers, adults pose the initial questions, while the students participate in the collection of data and meaning making (Fielding, 2004a, p. 307; Oldfather et al., 1999). Some examples of this form of research include Mitra’s (2001; 2004) study that brought students into professional development and curriculum discussions with the teachers and staff of their school. In this way, the students shared their thoughts on particular curricular reforms and helped to reshape the direction of the curricular shifts. The participating students acted as a go between and shared with other students in their classes the new curricular directions. In a six-year study, which followed middle school students into high school (Oldfather et al., 1999), the initial phase started by locating the students more as data to find out what motivates them in literacy. The second phase of the study came to involve the students in the interpretation of the data and found, similar to Mitra (2004), the students’ reading of the data was quite different than the adults’ reading of the same data.

The third phase of the Oldfather et al., (1999) research located the students as researchers. Another form of student voice work, then, brings students in as the researchers themselves. This has been described as “research for education rather than research about education” (Oldfather et al., 1999, p. 292, original emphasis). This location of students in the research process requires that students are taught the skills of research and then proceed to create research questions from their own experiences in schooling and education, as well as collect and analyze the data (Cahill et al., 2008; Fielding, 2004a; Fine, 1991; Kirby, 2001, p. 76; Oldfather et al., 1999).

Efforts such as these speak to the methodological and pedagogical question of: What skills, knowledge, and support are needed for participation in student voice work (see for example, Fielding, 2001a, p. 104)? Some have conceptualized this framing of the research as
Participatory Action Research or Student Action Research. In both instances the overall goal is to uncover issues of power and domination in students’ lives through the research as a way to transform possible futures (Cahill et al., 2008; Cammarota & Fine, 2008b). In the creation of a shared language between teachers and students (Fielding, 2001, p. 102, 104; Giroux, 1986, p. 59; MacBeath et al., 2001, p. 81; Raymond, 2001, p. 5), language represents one way in which students come to access the culture of power (Delpit, 1988; see also, Jackson, 2011, p. 118).

While there may be many possibilities with student voice work, schooling and education remains controlled by adults, and as a result particular issues or topics on which students are asked to speak are more prevalent than others, such as behavioral issues, motivation in learning, and engagement. Only recently are students being asked to speak on issues around teaching and learning (see for example, Arnot, McIntyre, Peddar & Reay, 2004; Fielding, 2001a; Jackson, 2011, p. 118; MacBeath et al., 2001; Mitra, 2001, 2004, 2009). Giving up control and authority on specific issues related to teaching and learning has been slow. Teachers have arrived at a place in the landscape of schooling and education where they must defend their salaries by speaking to the rigorous training they undertook to become certified educators; some perceive that to let students speak with authority about what teachers are trained to do undermines teachers’ claims to professionalism and demands for respect in the public imaginary.

What follows are some questions to consider when thinking about the pedagogical and methodological implications of student voice work. Some of the questions come from my reading of, and dialoging with, particular texts, and in those instances I note the text from which the question emerged. In some instances these questions are considered in other sections of the paper, but they are in no way asked with the intention of providing a final answer. How do we come to understand data through student voice? “What data would best reveal the learner’s
perspective” (Dahl, 1995, p. 125)? Who is being asked to speak, under what conditions, and who is listening (Silva, 2001)? How do we come to include voices that have been historically silenced? What considerations are made for protecting those who participate (Kirby, 2001, p. 75)? What are the ways in which we engage the voices? What will be done with what is said once students are invited to speak (Robinson & Taylor, 2007, p. 14)? What are the effects of the discourse and the particularities of the student voice work? What implicit contract or agreements are underlying the student voice work and those who participate in it? How does that speak to those who don’t want to or choose not to participate (Bragg, 2001; Silva, 2001)?

In this chapter, I took broad strokes in locating student voice historically, in the discursive and theoretical framings, the landscape of schooling and education, and I asked questions about the methodological and pedagogical implications for the work. The following chapter on methodology bridges the discussions in the prevailing literature on student voice with my discursive orientations. By orienting my work through poststructural feminist anti-racism, which asks us to question and trouble how taken-for-granted structures, attitudes, beliefs, and values of teaching and learning are framed in conventional schooling and education, I am particularly concerned with the processes and affects of counter-narrativizing. In this, I am not only concerned with counter-narrativizing teaching and learning, but also research and writing. The following chapter on autoethnography as a methodological impulse\(^\text{18}\) for the study discusses the ways in which bringing the self into the center of a research agenda re-orientes the researcher away from the colonizing tendencies of “speaking for Others” (Alcoff, 1991-1992). While I am concerned with presenting autoethnography as some pristine site that once and for all addresses

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\(^{18}\) I intend the phrase ‘methodological impulse’ to speak to the impetus, motivation, and force that drew me into autoethnography as a methodology, rather than to suggest an unreflectivity in choosing a methodological approach. By marking the moment as an impulse, I signal the affective domain of engaging autoethnography in this study.
the imperial histories of research, Avtar Brah (1996) among others (see for example, Ahmed, 1998, p. 134-141; Berry & Warren, 2009; Dei, 2005; Ellis, Adams, & Bochner, 2011; Fusco, 2008; Ruiz-Junco & Vidal-Ortiz, 2011) notes the disruptive potentialities of engaging the self theoretically and methodologically:

The autobiographical mode is useful here as a disruptive device that reveals my narrative as an interpretive retelling, vulnerable to challenge from other interpretations as the vagaries of self-representations of an individual. But the credibility of this narrative of political moments and events is dependent far less upon the scribbling of an “individual”; the “individual” narrator does not unfold but is produced in the process of narration. Rather, the deeply invested self that speaks the events relies heavily upon the hope that its version will resonate with the meaning constructed by my various “imagined communities”. My individual narration is meaningful primarily as a collective memory. (p. 10; original emphasis)

In the next chapter I discuss how I conceptualized autoethnography in this study, as well as some of the method’s limitations, before I set the stage for how autoethnography as a methodological impulse shaped what counted as data and analysis in this study.
Chapter 4
Critical Autoethnography and Student Voice Pedagogies: A Story of Methodology

Disquieting Stories: On Reading and Writing Practices

I remember coming to write my thesis proposal; feelings of hesitancy crept in and impeded the writing. How will the writing of the work in advance shape the contours of where the work might go, what the work might (be able to) do (Britzman, 2003; Davies, 2003; Fusco, 2008; Lather, 2008)? How will I be able to think otherwise, to understand the complexities of lived life after having already framed a way of thinking about it (Britzman, 2003; Davies, 2000, 2003; Gallagher, 2007, p. 59; Lather, 2001; Steinberg, 2012; Weedon, 1987)? What about deciding where to draw the lines of the various “parts” of the dissertation when they are permeable and leaky rather than steadfast and stable (Fusco, 2008)? As a result, I approached any writing I was able to do with caution. Weiss (1998) reminds us that the writer may not have control over the readers’ interpretations of her work, and Berry and Warren (2009) proclaim, “A reader who ‘chickens out’ [of her responsibility] is not a writer’s problem” (p. 602). I believe that writers are responsible for their work, even if they may have never imagined all the ways the work would be engaged; this is a great burden for the critical writer who hopes to guard her work from re-constituting colonial relations in contemporary educational experiences, and requires a mindfulness of our articulations.

Questions of writing and representation are a critical aspect of our methodologies, although they are too often pushed to the sideline of the methodological discussions. As Britzman (2000, p. 27) states in relation to ethnography, we are taken up with getting to know
the -ethno, the culture of a group, and spend too little time with the -graphy, the politics of writing; in writing this chapter I am reminded of these concerns. Caroline Fusco (2008) writes:

If we acknowledge that we are both the producers and products of discourses and texts, then we will rarely fail to recognize that who we are, what we can be, what we can study and how we can write about what we study are both enabled and constrained by the disciplinary technologies of the scholarly system of research production (p. 178).

In coming to recognize what is enabled and what is constrained in the writing of a dissertation, I am compelled to find subtle ways to disrupt social science conventions by way of an autoethnographic story (see, for example, Change, 2008; Ellis, 2004; Ellis & Bochner, 2000; Ruiz-Junco & Vidal-Ortiz, 2011). The concept of stories allows one to reconceptualize the realist claims to truth and reality embedded in positivist ethnographic research, and allows us to engage how “Our interpretations may or may not necessarily be an accurate reflection of what our subjects said” or did (Dei, 2005, p. 7; see also Britzman, 2003; Davies, 2000, 2003; de Freitas, 2003; Ellis 2004; Ellis & Bochner; Kincheloe, 1997; Fusco, 2008; Gallagher, 2007, 2008; Richardson, 2000; Ruiz-Junco & Ortiz-Vidal, 2011; Steinberg, 2012b; Wahab, 2005; Walkerdine, 1997). Stories call for a different kind of engagement from the reader, one that seeks multiple interpretations rather than some universal truth of culture or experience (de Freitas, 2003; Ellis, 2004; Ellis & Bochner, 2000; Kincheloe, 1997; Ruiz-Junco & Ortiz-Vidal, 2011). In writing through stories, I hope to shift conventional expectations of reading social science research (I say more about this below). I orient this chapter, therefore, through a method of story: in the first section I offer the context of the story, what I am calling the story worlds in which I share another articulation of the settings for the two sites—Teaching and Learning Collaborative (TLC) and Wycliffe St. Albans (WSA)—engaged through this autoethnography. I
then tell a story of methodology in which I connect autoethnography to my discursive framework, as well as describe my anxieties and ambivalences regarding the research methodology. Finally I tell a story of data analysis in which I return to the setting of the story, or the story worlds, and share how I came to name, mark, analyze and interpret this particular data. By engaging in this writing as a partial story, I want to tell a possible reading of the research rather than some Truth of the experiences (Britzman, 2003; Davies, 2003; Scott, 1992).

Autoethnographic Storyworlds

Learning to teach, teaching to learn: the story of teaching and learning collaborative student voices.

I always feel a burst of energy as the beginning of a school year rolls around, and the lull of summer begins to wane. During my Ph.D. journey, the beginning of the school year coincided with the birth of my two children. Ida and Leo were both born in September, increasing the joy and anticipation that comes at that time of year for me. Being either a student or a teacher for most of my life, I find I often have to clarify when I say “next year”, meaning the next school year rather than the next calendar year. I think it is for these reasons, the circulating affects that come with the promises of a “new year”, a “fresh start”, that fall is my favorite season. In the bustle of starting my second year as a Ph.D. student, September 2010 proved to be a pivotal time. I have completed my required coursework and hope to buckle down into my dissertation research. I feel ungrounded, so I register for more classes to try to stay in the conversations and see where my research might go. On September 29, 2010, I receive an email that opens the space that I need: “The Teaching and Learning Collaborative would love to have an evaluation done of its impact in schools”. The email reads:
We are looking to collect data that indicate to what extent the beliefs and practices promulgated by TLC are taking hold in the school districts in which we work. More specifically, we want outside evaluators to research a particular intervention we are working on with a school in Newark, [New Jersey] called TLC Student Voices. (Personal Email Communication with TLC Director, September 29, 2010)

The email goes on to invite me to be a part of a research team, including another Ph.D. student from a different university and her doctoral supervisor. At the time, I was not aware that student voice was a particular discursive site, but I was immediately drawn to the idea as I imagined it. Over the course of a year and a half, the team and I delved into this research, and I began reading existing literature on student voice as a field.

While my relationship with the organization began before this email, this was the most involved I was with them, and as a result I was simultaneously learning about this field of student voice and what it is that the organization does. I was at once excited and concerned about the work that they do: as a National organization that partners with school districts across the United States, oftentimes through local and federal educational improvement money, among the many possibilities their work offers, the organization’s work necessarily co-opts itself to the neoliberal requirements of educational reform. Simultaneously, with their focus on marginalized students, particularly in “urban” schools, they provide critical means for the students to be able to “achieve” according to the standards of public education in the United States. Through sustained professional development ranging anywhere from a few months to several-year partnerships with individual schools and districts, the organization focuses on

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19 I engage scare quotes here to amplify the multiple meanings “urban” takes up within educational discourse—from geographic location to the economic and racialized identities of the student population—as well as to suggest my discomfort with the term as a code word for race, while simultaneously distancing itself from critical conversations about race. However, “urban” is the language engaged by TLC to identify the schools and districts with whom they partner.
leadership and instructional practices that will both support teachers as well as build on students’ strengths.

While they have a repertoire of evidence-based strategies, they consider their work with the schools as partnerships because they tailor the program to each individual site, depending on what the teachers and administrators (and in some cases the students) believe they need for their school. The school in which I was to evaluate the effectiveness of the TLC Student Voices program was on the verge of ending a five-year partnership with TLC in the spring of 2011. This year, again meaning school year rather than calendar year, the mentor from TLC and the teachers from the school decided to invite students into the professional development sessions to learn lesson planning and specific teaching strategies alongside a selection of their teachers, a process they were couching under student voice.

As a research team, the initial research question guiding the collection of data was, “What are the impacts on student learning when students are trained as teachers?” We coordinated three, 2-day site visits in which we took field notes as participant observers, captured some events through video which we later transcribed, and designed and administered a student survey from which we organized two focus groups and a freewriting activity\(^2\) for the students. We also sat down with the facilitator from TLC, both before and after each site visit, to discuss and give input into what was planned and to debrief what went well and what needed more focus. Notes were taken in these meetings and shared with the broader team, consisting of

\(^2\) A freewrite is a teaching strategy that asks students to write whatever comes to their mind in relation to a particular concept. The idea is to get the students writing rather than worrying about what “the answer” is. This strategy is engaged to generate ideas as well as to encourage students to believe that they have something to say. I would argue that it is also a strategy to help students on the high-stakes standardized tests when they feel they do not know how to respond, because as we would tell our ELA students, if you have something written down you will likely earn partial points rather than no points.
the three researchers, the TLC facilitator, as well as the executive officer from TLC who invited us to conduct the research. Throughout the year and a half, we communicated regularly by way of email and conference calls, and all data and analyses were shared between the entire team. I remember feeling increasingly anxious about how I was beginning to conceptualize student voice and what I experienced throughout the research. Feeling uncomfortable that within the confines of the research goals and the politics of the members of the team, whenever I tried to test the waters and voice my thoughts, I was gently reminded of the purposes of the research—which did not include consideration of the ways in which the pedagogical approaches of TLC could be modified based on the informal articulations of the students’ voices (this discomfort led to the analysis I provide in Chapter 7).

**Story of Wycliffe St. Alban’s community center: student voice, community collaboration and high school retention.**

Apprehensive about whether I was ready to do the work I had planned compounded my pregnancy sickness as the first face-to-face meeting with Wycliffe St. Alban’s Community Center (WSA) came to pass on January 16, 2012. On a bitter Montreal morning I geared up for the meeting. Hoping that I would not get sick, I carried my water, pretzels and a granola bar; still early in the pregnancy I was not prepared to begin telling anyone, besides my partner and parents who already knew, that I was pregnant. After just over a year of thinking through the literature on student voice in relation to my experiences during the collection and initial analyses of data with TLC, I felt an ever-growing impulse to enfold another student voice project into my experiences, this time one for which I could take the lead designing and implementing. I thought if I could take the lead on a student voice project I could perhaps better understand some
of the struggles and limitations of the TLC Student Voices project, as well as challenge my emerging anti-racism pedagogy.

As I had an on-again, off-again relationship with WSA, a community organization serving a historically disinvested neighborhood in downtown Montreal, I was aware that they often seek partnerships, new programs to offer the youth, as well as assistance in evaluating the programs they already have in place (something I had done for them a few years earlier under a different executive director). This year they were focused on addressing community involvement issues, as well as improving high school graduation rates for youth who participated in their programs. I offered a series of processes that I could facilitate through student voice to address these two foci, and received enthusiasm and support from the executive director, the programs committee, and the two youth coordinators and facilitators of the high school programs. (For a description of my proposed approach to the concerns of WSA, see Appendix A.)

Over the course of the next seven months, I attempted to get to know the current organization and structure of WSA, to build relationships with some of the youth who participate in the various programs, and to design and implement several different manifestations of student voice. Thinking through my anti-racism praxis, I presented the project as being necessarily collaborative; I believed that it was critical to work in partnership with the executive director and the two youth coordinators, particularly because they knew the students and the programs in ways that I could not in the limited time frame, but also because it seemed contradictory to me to suggest that the organization re-tune their ears to the voices of the youth and simultaneously disavow their own voices and perceptions.
Since I promised to provide some insights to the leadership of WSA, I kept thorough field notes on all the interactions, which starting in February were once a week in various high school programs, and included an organized focus group comprised of youth, several meetings with the youth coordinators and the programs committee, as well as one meeting with the Community Outreach Committee. I remember being worried about getting the youth to speak to me at all, and the youth coordinators suggested that in the beginning I come to the homework help program, and when they had their communal dinner, I could sit down and chat casually with the youth. In time, the youth were used to seeing me there. Eventually, to get into some more in-depth conversations about some of the themes I picked up on from the dinnertime conversations, we (the youth coordinators and myself) organized a focus group. In the process, I communicated with the leadership by providing reports and sharing some initial findings at meetings.

I became increasingly more distraught as I tried again and again to provide a platform for the youths’ voices to be heard and taken seriously, not only because I believe this is a critical aspect of student voice, but also because that is what I had genuinely promised the youth: that if they took time to open up to me, their thoughts could prove to be pivotal in making changes they identified as necessary and desirable within WSA. Student voice became messier than I had imagined after reading the existing literature and even after my experiences with TLC. Finally, after being approached by the youth coordinators, I was invited to conduct a summer internship for some of the youth. For this internship, I was asked to focus on research; some of the youth had expressed interest in working with troubled youth in various capacities that we identified. All required an understanding of research methods. My last month with WSA was spent facilitating a participatory action research internship in which the goal was for the six youth to
earn their internship hours, learn about research methods, and identify and research issues in their community.

These two stories provide the experiences I think through in this research. Before getting into more specifics about the data and the methods of analysis, I narrate a story of autoethnography, as it comes to relate specifically to my theoretical framework and the concept of student voice.

**Autoethnography: Embodiment and Counter-Storying as Qualities of the Research Process**

As I am drawn to student voice for transformative possibilities, even while I struggle with the neoliberal co-optations that create sensations of movement while standing still (Dei, 2008b), I am drawn to autoethnography for its propensity to (re)embody the research process, for its promise of destabilizing the disembodied epistemological regimes of social science research (see, for example, Chang, 2008; Ruiz-Junco & Vidal-Ortiz, 2011). In other words, I am drawn to autoethnography through my particular discursive orientations towards decolonization. I think, for example, of the urgings from poststructural feminist anti-racism to decolonize the research process itself, to question what historically constitutes “legitimate” research and whose interests that serves (Calliste & Dei, 2000; Dei, 2005; Ellis, Adams, & Bochner, 2011; Ruiz-Junco & Vidal-Ortiz, 2011; Smith, 1999; Steinberg, 2012b; Trinh, 1989; Wahab, 2005). Both poststructural feminist and anti-racism research implore us to view our research subjects (and from a pedagogical point of view, our students) as knowing bodies who theorize their lived experiences and do not need us to come in and impose a theory (or a voice) on their lives (Britzman, 2003; Calliste & Dei, 2000; Davies, 2003; Dei, 2005; Fusco, 2008; Smith, 1999;
Steinberg 2012a/b; Wahab, 2005; Walkerdine, 1997). Calliste & Dei (2000) engage Dorothy Smith’s work to think about what they call “anti-racist feminism”, articulating it as follows:

Smith describes the need for disrupting an objectifying process of theorizing the “subject” by resisting the superimposition of external theoretical frames describing or explaining behavior and instead viewing the “knowing subject” as located in a lived world in which both theory and practice go on, in which theory is itself a practice. . . . (p. 12).

I intend to engage in this “resistance” to “canonical forms of doing and writing research [that] are advocating a White, masculine, heterosexual, middle/upper-classed, Christian, able-bodied perspective” (Ellis, Adams & Bochner, 2011, para. 4), by way of an autoethnographic narrative that “accommodates subjectivity, emotionality, and the researcher’s influence on research, rather than hiding from these matters or assuming they don’t exist” (Ellis, Adams, & Bochner, 2011, para. 3; see also Dei, 2005; Fusco, 2008; Ruiz-Junco & Vidal-Ortiz, 2008; Wahab, 2005; Walkerdine, 1997). Engaging poststructural feminist anti-racism along with a belief in the transformative possibilities of student voice work, it is imperative that I trouble my location in systems of power and privilege by way of race (White) and social position (teacher/facilitator and researcher), for example, and autoethnography offers a space for me to explicitly focus on these aspects of the study. It is critical that I consider the ways in which these locations inform the possibilities and limitations of this study, as well as student voice work more broadly.

Conventional or canonical social science research within positivist paradigms, however, offers impossible spaces of neutrality, objectivity, and disembodied scholarship and activism (see for example, Britzman, 2000, 2003; Dei & Simmons, 2010; Davies, 2003; Fusco, 2008; Gallagher, 2008, 2011, Kincheloe, McLaren & Steinberg, 2012; Lather, 1991, 2000; McDermott & Madan, 2012; Ruiz-Junco & Vidal-Ortiz, 2011; Simmons, 2012; Steinberg, 2012b;
Walkerdine, 1997), and through a poststructural feminist anti-racism, I want to critically engage who gets to be a subject within these practices and discourses (Dei, 2005; Dei & Simmons, 2010; St. Pierre, 2000, p. 503; Wahab, 2005). Valerie Walkerdine (1997) writes,

I will suggest that it is an impossible task to avoid the place of the subjective in research, and that, instead of making futile attempts to avoid something which cannot be avoided, we should think more carefully about how to utilize our subjectivity as a feature of the research process (p. 59, emphasis added).

This question of how to engage subjectivity within social science research has brought me to autoethnography as a methodological impulse. Admittedly, researchers have critically engaged the impossibility of objectivity in multiple ways just within the rubric of (critical) ethnography alone (see, for example, Britzman, 2000, 2003; Davies, 2003; Dei & Simmons, 2010; Gallagher, 2007, 2008; Kincheloe, McLaren & Steinberg, 2012; Steinberg, 2012b; Walkerdine, 1997); autoethnography offers one such space to engage systematically and substantively the researcher subjectivity in relation to research (Chang, 2008; Ellis, Adams, & Bochner, 2011; Ellis, 2004; Ellis & Bochner, 2000; Ruiz-Junco & Vidal-Ortiz, 2011; Simmons, 2012). Through autoethnography, I think particularly of embodiment of the research process and writing, and in this I think of my White poststructural feminist anti-racism self to understand the broader socio-cultural configurations of student voice reforms. However, I must caution that in situating aspects of my subject location, I want to resist the humanist impulse to offer a unified, coherent, non-contradictory, self-knowing and articulating subject (see for example, de Freitas & Patton, 2009; Gannon, 2006), a subject which both poststructural feminist and anti-racism discourses resist (see for example, Brah, 1996; Calliste & Dei, 2000; Collins, 2000; Davies, 2000, 2003; Dei, 2005; Dei & Simmons, 2010; hooks, 1993; Mohanty, 2003; St. Pierre, 2000; Walkerdine, 1987). This is one of the possible limitations of engaging an
autoethnographic approach that attempts to situate the subjectivity of the researcher within the research process. I will address this more after I briefly outline how I conceptualize autoethnography.

Autoethnography, although itself a contested terrain (see Anderson, 2006; Denzin, 2006; de Freitas & Paton, 2009; Ellis, 2006), presents cultural self-analysis where one “interpret[s] life experiences from a cultural perspective” (Chang, 2008, p. 140; see also Ellis, 2004; Ellis & Bochner; Ellis, Adams & Bochner, 2011; Fusco, 2008; Jones, 2005; Reed-Danahay, 1997; Ruiz-Junco & Vidal-Ortiz, 2011; Simmons, 2012). In other words, autoethnography analyzes the auto—the self—in relation to the ethnographic cultural representations: “Autoethnography is an approach to research and writing that seeks to describe and systematically analyze (graphy) personal experience (auto) in order to understand cultural experience (ethno)” (Ellis, Adams, & Bochner, 2011, para.1). Enfolding the embodied researcher in the research process in this way offers a critical distancing from positivist paradigms, and through that distancing makes room to witness the ways canonical stories shape our social relationships (Britzman, 2003; Davies, 2003; Dei, 2005; Ellis, 2004; Ellis, Adams & Bochner, 2011; Ellis & Bochner, 2000; Fusco, 2008; Kincheloe, McLaren, & Steinberg, 2012; Ruiz-Junco & Vidal-Ortiz, 2011; Scheurich & Young, 1997; Steinberg, 2012b; Walkerdine, 1997). Simultaneously, in writing through personal experience, “It makes it possible to ground an approach to pedagogy in what she has known and experienced without requiring her to impose her experience upon the students” (Grumet, 1989, p. 15, emphasis added) or the readers. In other words, through the poststructural feminist antiracism politics of this study, I engage autoethnography as “not only a process of exposing or naming the master’s structures and strategies as they construct frames for viewing and naming difference, but also a viewing and suggesting of resistance and transformative possibilities beyond the frame” (Calliste & Dei, 2000, p. 12-13). Importantly, by inviting the reader in to my
story, I hope to guard against imposing my experiences on the reader and rather encourage, through its narrative qualities, a thinking through of her (the reader’s) own experiences (Ellis, 2004; Ellis & Bochner, 2000; Walkerdine, 1997).

I am concerned, however, with suggesting that narrative qualities of the work may obfuscate some methodological considerations when one chooses to research student voice. The methodological challenges in focusing on student voice as a method include questions of elicitation, interpretation, and representation. What possible voicings are elicited or made available to students by way of the power relations in the pedagogical site (see, for example, Chapter 6)? Cook-Sather (2002) notes “. . . even when they [student voice facilitators] made every effort to collaborate fully with students, issues of power and authority remained complicated” (p. 8; see also, Oldfather et al., 1999). Voice, from the perspective of poststructural feminist anti-racism, is simultaneously fluid, shifting and authentic, representing agency and resistance, and there are many forces shaping what can possibly be articulated and what is hearable: desires, affect, institutional imperatives, socio-historical conditions, and pedagogical relationships for example (see Chapters 6, 7, & 8). How, then, do we come to interpret students’ voices? Questions of interpretation are further complicated by the notion that researchers (and teachers) are always already interpreting students’ voices from within their own analytic frameworks. Our interpretation of the voices of students is also informed by how we understand what it means to listen: “Listening does not always mean doing exactly what we are told, but it does mean being open to the possibility of revision, both of thought and action. At a minimum it means being willing to negotiate” (Cook-Sather, 2002, p. 8). That being said, crucial considerations exist of what is included and what is left out in our representation of students’ voices after we have elicited and interpreted them. Fielding (2004) notes that the inclusion of direct quotes in research lends itself to the possibility of an uncritical “credibility”
which one finds in conventional social science research. This distances the researcher from her interpretive role in representing particular quotes and not others. He argues for “the central place of language in processes of control. Here the language of the researcher is often used either to redescribe or reshape the language of the researched” (Fielding, 2004, p. 298). For a more thorough discussion of student voice as a method, see Chapter 5.

Autoethnography supports, and is supported by, poststructural feminist anti-racism with another level of counter-storying: it unmasks the taken-for-granted ways research is conducted. It addresses questions of voice and power; through its form it can challenge the promises of coherent, unified, and totalizing narratives, and it has the propensity to resist impositional tendencies. Still there are concerns, concerns with which I have struggled in my desire to engage my research autoethnographically: how do I address the all-too easy slip into self-indulgence (Ellis, 2004; Ellis & Bochner, 2000; Fusco, 2008; Ruiz-Junco & Vidal-Ortiz, 2011)? How do I represent the self; how do I engage in the “I” without being drawn into the humanist, unified, non-contradictory “I” and simultaneously tell a “readable” narrative (de Freitas & Paton, 2009; Fusco, 2008; Gannon, 2006; Rose, 2009)? What does it mean to centre myself both as a White body and as a teacher in practices focused on transformative possibilities for marginalized youth in student voice work? How do I work with memory or hindsight (Britzman, 2003; Chang, 2008; Ellis, 2004; Simmons, 2012)? I am particularly concerned with, in relation to my discursive orientation, the quandary of engaging my White self as method to disrupt the racialized hegemonic mechanisms of schooling and education. How do I address this duplicity within, throughout, and against the unfolding of the study? In other words, what does it mean to engage Whiteness and critical femininism to disrupt colonial and imperializing polities?
A Story of Autoethnography: Anxieties, Ambivalences and Vulnerabilities

These uncertainties about what might be produced in writing this autoethnography—these concerns, I argue, are critical pieces of the story of autoethnography that I propose ought to be told alongside the autoethnographic story of how a teacher experiences student voice reform. What I am suggesting is that, by writing autoethnographically, my hope is to simultaneously reflexively engage the teacher, researcher, and writer practices that mediate and constitute knowledge produced about student voice. Once again, engaging the politics of poststructural feminist anti-racism to disrupt the hegemonic discourses of research, I am drawn to engage the subversive potential of autoethnography, as well as the ways in which this particular method becomes complicit in sustaining the very patriarchal, racist structures I hope to dismantle, as they disquietly rub up against my concerns about the neoliberal co-optations of student voice and autoethnography (see Dei, 2005, for a discussion of the anti-racism motivation to name and mark our complicities in the very systems we hope to disrupt). These anxieties are paramount to the work for me; making them a part of the narrative involves opening myself up to vulnerabilities, particularly when the conventional format of the thesis is written in such a way as to mask those vulnerabilities, to present the material through conclusions and certainties.

Returning to Caroline Fusco’s (2008) articulation, I want to critically engage the ways in which “what we can study, and how we can write about what we study are both enabled and constrained by the disciplinary technologies of the scholarly system of research production” (p. 178).

As a form of ethnography, autoethnography is about the “how” of the research as well as the “how” of the writing and representation:
Writing ethnography as a practice of narration is not about capturing the real already out there. It is about constructing particular versions of truth, questioning how regimes of truth become neutralized as knowledge, and thus pushing the sensibilities of readers in new directions (Britzman, 2003, p. 252; 2000; see also Davies, 2003; Ellis, 2004; Ellis & Bochner, 2000; Ruiz-Junco & Vidal-Ortiz, 2011; Walkerdine, 1997).

As Simmons (2012) contributes, “Writing through autoethnography means writing through deep concerns, deep emotions of pain, suffering, melancholy, loss, rage, anger, joy, happiness, disappointment and sorrow” (2012, p. 29; see also Chang, 2008; Dei & Simmons, 2010; hooks, 1995). This is the stuff of autoethnography that challenges the conventional, positivist, hegemonic social science norms.

In telling personal stories, one invites the reader into our multiple levels of consciousness, affect and spiritual sense of self. The narratives call for a different kind of reading, one that refuses some concrete facts of what it means to experience student voice reform, but rather a reading that invites the reader to bear witness to the events as they are represented moment by moment, contradictions and all. It is my hope that through reading my story others might “feel validated and/or better able to cope with or want to change [their] circumstances” (Ellis, Adams, & Bochner, 2011, para. 27, see also Britzman, 2003; Kincheloe, 1997; Walkerdine, 1997). Contemporary schooling has been replete with ongoing educational reform for improving student outcomes and restructuring schools; student voice has become situated to various degrees within this conversation as both a method and an item on a checklist to measure school improvement. For this reason it has been experienced as an obligation rather than a transformative act (Rudduck & Fielding, 2006, p. 228), thus driving many conversations around student voice to focus on “how-tos” rather than engaging in questions of why we might want to practice student voice pedagogy and what that pedagogy might produce. In confronting,
articulating, and exposing my experiences and struggles with student voice autoethnographically, I hope to encourage others to critically address their practices and work towards transforming education away from neoliberal market needs.

**A Story of Data and Data Analysis**

My impulse towards autoethnography, while grounded in poststructural feminist anti-racism, is also drawn from my experiences of reading the literature on student voice in relation to the research with TLC and the student voice initiatives at WSA. As I discussed in the literature review (Chapter 3), I found it difficult to make sense of the coherent narratives told in the literature in relation to what I experienced on the ground in the student voice projects. Autoethnography may take many different forms; for the purpose of this research, I engaged personal narratives of student voice experience as they related to the existing research (Chang, 2008; Ellis, Adams, Bochner, 2011). The two sites of student voice experience from which I draw for this dialogue with the existing research are TLC and WSA, introduced briefly at the beginning of this chapter as the story worlds of the research. In other words, this study of the ways in which teachers experience student voice projects is an autoethnography that draws on memory and content analysis of past experiences.

Specifically, the documents from which I draw consist of: the sample literature published under the rubric of student voice, field notes taken during both the TLC and WSA experiences, transcripts from video footage with TLC and focus group recordings with WSA, teaching artifacts including lesson plans and materials, as well as student submitted materials from both TLC and WSA, email exchanges in both projects, memos and journals written during and after
each experience, and reports and initial analyses submitted to various stake-holders in both TLC and WSA.

As my research questions—how do teachers understand student voice? What are the ways in which teachers experience student voice? How does the experience of student voice organize and inscribe teacher ↔ student relationships? How are student voice practices shaped, organized, and inscribed through social difference?—emerged out of these experiences, rather than shaping them, I engage memory as a key site of data. Memory, in this way, represents itself through the reading of the various artifacts of the experiences, as well as returning to the existing literature on student voice and memos that I wrote in the process of reviewing these texts. The methodological challenge was with retrieving these memories as they came to be deeply sutured in the personal as data. Autoethnography as method became a porous methodology (Gallagher, 2007, 2008) in that it allowed me to engage this incommensurability of knowledge, this corporeal (in)accessibility of knowledge. I think of how “[A]utoethnography becomes useful when the conditions of knowledge production do not allow for experience to be neatly contained in sociological categories or in social scientific frameworks” (Ruiz-Junco & Vidal-Ortiz, 2011, p. 201) in relation to the ways in which knowledge resides within the body and cultural memory (Dei, 2005; Wahab, 2005), as well as the ways “[a]s members of a community or communities, individuals have multiple rather than single, affinities and allegiances resulting in profound complexities that defy/challenge easy categorizations and designations” (Dei, 2005, p. 15).

Questions of interpretation or analyses of data, therefore, ought to reflect this porosity and incommensurability of data and knowledge. In other words, in the moment of articulating the process of data analysis, I must also draw attention to the problematics of interpretation (Dei,
2005; Fusco, 2008; Lather, 1991; Trinh, 1989), as all interpretation is informed by the researcher position. “What is seeable and hearable (etc.) shifts with the interactional space the researcher inhabits, with the time and purpose of the telling, and with the discursive possibilities available (or brought to conscious awareness) at the time of each telling” (Davies, 2003, p. 144). Eve Tuck (2009) contends, “the implicit theory of change”, or what I would locate as the discursive orientation and politics of the study,

will have implications for the way in which a project unfolds, what we see as the start or end of a project, who is our audience, who is our “us”, how we think things are known, and how others can or need to be convinced. A theory of change helps to operationalize the ethical stance of the project, what are considered data, what constitutes evidence, how a finding is identified, and what is made public and kept private or sacred. . . (p. 413).

In this study, what came to be considered data emerged through an elliptical form: readings would bring up memories, which would orient me towards other readings or particular artifacts from the two student voice experiences. Sometimes, for example, a conversation or reading prompted a memory of my experiences to (re)present itself, and I would often take notes, or write a memo tracing what the memory was, as well as the process of returning to it; for example, the story I shared in Chapter 2 about how reading Kevin Kumashiro (2002b) months after the two experiences had ended provided a language to articulate a particular discomfort I had with TLC. As the reading of Kumashiro (2002b) reminded me of my experiences with TLC, I returned to my field notes, journals and other artifacts from that experience to come to understand it differently. In this way, memories and the various texts that constituted the data were juxtaposed in different ways, offering alternative insights. This method of juxtaposing fashioned a porous data set, one that refused to be hermetically sealed:
Juxtaposition is an attempt to get viewers and readers to make associations across categorical, discursive, historical, and stylistic boundaries. And juxtapositions get interesting (and political) when they provoke associations that were never intended or sanctioned by the interests that construct and require such boundaries in the first place. (Ellsworth, 1997, p. 13)

In a sense, juxtaposing brought a pastiche, a tapestry and a porosity to the data, situating me as a bricoleur (Kincheloe, McLaren, & Steinberg, 2012; Steinberg, 2012b). Bricolage as a methodological approach seeks to bring together various texts—memory, documents, historical contexts, embodiment, and discursive orientations, for example—and have them rub up against each other to read with, through, and against in relation to the politics of the study.

In its hard labors in the domain of complexity, the bricoleur views research methods actively rather than passively, meaning that we actively construct our research methods from the tools at hand rather than passively receiving the “correct”, universally applicable methodologies. (Kincheloe, McLaren, & Steinberg, 2012, p. 21, emphasis added).

For example, a memo might consist of some questions, connections, key concepts or themes that came to me while reading the various documents, as they relate to my student voice experiences. I would often try to make sense of how the piece of text fit with the broader conversations, data analysis questions, and data set for the research. Then, I specifically pulled out themes and (re)organized them in relation to the research questions I am asking. In this way, I come to read with, in, through, and against the various data.
Methodological dilemmas.

Engaging autoethnography and the data in these ways, however, produced much anxiety for me. While I was seeking to disrupt the positivist paradigms of unified, coherent, linear research design, I was confronted with all the uncertainties of articulating the research through a disruptive regime, not least because of the ways in which I have been trained in the linearity, logic, validational requisites of conventional research and knowledge production. Simultaneously, there were other methodological dilemmas\textsuperscript{21} that I faced in working through this study: What are the ethics involved in referencing internal documents to which I was privy from each of the organizations? What about making reference to their websites, yet maintaining their anonymity? What does it mean to work with these documents to which I had access through participation in different projects than the autoethnographic research presented here? In both instances, I made it clear to the organizations that I was pursuing a Ph.D.; in the case of TLC, the project was presented to me and the other graduate student as something that we could possibly engage for my dissertation research, however, at the time, I was interested in the research as a space to learn about student voice rather than a site of data. When speaking with an ethics review liaison from my University about the autoethnographic research I planned to conduct, he confirmed that there is presently no official ethics review required for research that is not engaging human subjects in the future. These ethical dilemmas caused me to avoid including particular discussions in the study as, in the end, I was not comfortable engaging those internal documents or anything directly from the websites for either organization.

\textsuperscript{21} For a key conversation on questions of methodological dilemmas, see Gallagher (2008), a text that supplemented the many critical discussions I had with George Dei throughout my Ph.D. coursework.
Methodological approaches.

As the above section suggests, autoethnography, with its focus on the self, requires thoughtful consideration and systematic organization of the data. In this way autoethnography diverges from other forms of self-narrative such as autobiography. Chang (2008) writes,

> Instead of merely describing what happened in your life, you try to explain how fragments of memories may be strung together to explain your cultural tenets and relationships with others in society. In this sense, autoethnographic data analysis and interpretation distinguish their final product from other self-narrative, autobiographical writings that concentrate on storytelling (p. 126).

The relationship between data collection and data analysis and interpretation in autoethnography allows for a “more organic transition” (Chang, 2008, p. 131) due to the nature of the data; “you enter into a research project with the pre-knowledge of your life. Therefore, you are predisposed to begin connecting data fragments and contextualizing them without having to wait until data collection is advanced” (Chang, 2008, p. 131). This sentiment resonates with my experience in the study presented here. As such, being able to articulate the necessary specifics of data analysis and interpretation became another challenge to the work, as much analysis and interpretation happened before I formally initiated the study. However, reading Chang (2008) several times during the research provided much needed support in generating a coherent discussion of my data analysis. She offers 10 strategies one can engage to systematically analyze and interpret autoethnographic data, many of which echo ethnographic strategies:

1. search for recurring topics, themes, and patterns;
2. look for cultural themes;
3. identify exceptional occurrences;
4. analyze inclusion and omission;
5. connect the present with the past;
6. analyze relationships between self and others;
7. compare yourself with other people’s cases;
8. contextualize broadly;
(9) compare with social science constructs and ideas; and (10) frame with theories
(Chang, 2008, p. 131).

I engage some of these strategies as a way to make sense of what I did with the data to
craft the narrative presented in this study. Chang (2008) notes that recurring themes in the data
suggest something that is important to us. As I reviewed the data holistically, I noticed I often
addressed the emotions involved in doing student voice work, and as a result I wrote an analysis
chapter that considers the affective elements of the work (see Chapter 7). When considering
cultural themes in the data, I probed the culture of teaching, which led to the broader context of
considering what it means to be a teacher and how one performs “teacher”; this frames the study
in Chapter 1. Because the data consisted of various memories and artifacts from two different
student voice experiences, I was able to engage two more strategies outlined by Chang (2008):
analyzing the relationships between myself and others involved in the student voice projects, and
comparing the two experiences. When looking in the data for what it means to be a teacher, for
example, I was able to uncover my imagined teacher identity in relation to how I understood
Gloria’s, the TLC facilitator. Similarly, because I had access to both my field notes as well as
the other researchers’ field notes, transcriptions and coding, I was able to make connections and
see things, as our two perspectives converged and diverged in the meaning making of the student
voice project. While analyzing the data from within the TLC student voices project, I found
engaging in comparisons between the two projects to be helpful in uncovering crucial questions
of pedagogy (see, for example, Chapter 6).

What became evident to me in comparing the two projects was the importance of context
specificity. By asking after the particulars of the socio-historical contours of each site through
which the data was recorded, I was able to connect actions, events, relationships, and
articulations to broader cultural frameworks. These connections helped me make sense of the
incommensurability of student voice practices that I experienced in relation to the governing literature. If I understand voice as fluid and constitutive of our experiences, and if I simultaneously desire voice to be disruptive of hegemonic teaching and learning relationships, how do I account for the seemingly reproductive tendencies of student voice practices? By attending to several social science constructs, I was able to interpret the data in a way that made sense of the complexities of pedagogical relationships without flattening them. The critical concepts that I engaged were voice, affect and desire; each of these concepts framed an analysis chapter in the study (Chapters 6, 7, and 8 respectively).

For the memories and the documents that were included as data in this study, I asked the following questions, some of which I asked as I re-engaged the data for the research, others of which presented themselves as I was moving through the data, causing me to return to previously reviewed data with them in mind. How are student voices being heard and interpreted? How were student voices enacted? How were they managed across situations and contexts? How is power and privilege operationalized in student voice? How do the particular voicings enacted (re)shape historically articulated social differences in schooling and education? I engaged in the analysis of data as “a creative interaction” (Scheurich, 1997, p. 63, quoted in Davies, 2003, p. 147) that was thoroughly dialogical between the data and my positioning and desires for the data. In other words, while questions and themes emerged that I wanted to engage in/with the data as I had conceptualized through the experiences with TLC and WSA and my discursive desires for the research, it also required returning to the data, as well as emerging memos, to articulate the analysis questions. In other words, this was not a linear process in which I imposed themes and questions onto the data; I also simultaneously approached the data with particular orientations and desires.
One of the crucial data sites became the sample of literature on student voice that I began reading when I was invited to participate in the TLC research in Newark, NJ, as previously noted. I entered that literature with my own imagining of what student voice was, and admittedly sought pieces that might approach my expectations and desires for student voice. My initial desires for student voice as a pedagogical imperative spoke to engaging how we come to listen to students’ voices. How do we reorient ourselves to their articulations, spoken and performed? While I believe it is important for students to come into multiple articulations, even hegemonic articulations of teaching and learning, my focus was more on teachers and schools changing their listening than on the students speaking on official school matters. Because of the discrepancies between my desires for student voice and what seemed to be the prevailing discussions in the sample of literature, I found myself writing the literature review in a rather distanced, or disconnected manner, as presented in Chapter 3. In Chapter 5 I return to the literature as a site of data and through interpretation of power and identity, I amplify the discussions in student voice literature that are more aligned with my emerging student voice politics. The following chapter will go into more detail about the particularities of the possibilities and problematics of student voice work. It is my belief that schooling and education is organized through the various relationships within and throughout it; as a result, Chapter 5 comes to center relationships as they speak to identity and as they speak to power.
Chapter 5
Shifting Terrains of Student Voice: Implications for Transformative Teaching and Learning

In Chapter 3, I worked through locating how student voice is conceptualized in the governing literature, and while there are multiple articulations presented by way of historical traces, geographical differences, and theoretical underpinnings shaping the works published under the rubric of student voice, there is also a sample of the literature that critically questions what gets (re)produced in student voice projects. This chapter tends to these discussions, discussions that at once aligned themselves somewhat with my politics, as well as adding to my increasing concerns about the transformative possibilities of student voice projects. In other words, this chapter comes to trouble the location of student voice as a panacea to change teaching and learning, and locates the various socio-historical configurations that contour the possibilities and limitations of student voice work. While I am drawn into these conversations, my study diverges from them by going beneath the surface of the (re)productive qualities of student voice to substantively engage the complexities of student voices and teacher pedagogies through affect and desire as analytics (see, Chapters 7 and 8 respectively).

Teacher→Student Relations, Desire, and Identity in Student Voice

This section asks several questions as they relate to identity formation: 1) What are the ways in which student voice work speaks to relationships between teachers and students in schooling and education? 2) How do students’ voices come to be listened to or heard within the configurations of student voice in schooling and education? While the previous question asks about listening in
a more general sense, considering the acoustics of the school and who is asked to speak, it is
necessary to also consider: 3) How do we come to listen to the varied and contradictory voices
brought into the school by students? In this particular question, I engage questions of
representation: What roles do essentializing and authenticity come to play in student voice work?
4) Finally, and relatedly, what identities or subjectivities do student voice projects produce, and
in what ways do these identities support or disrupt students’ identities outside the confines of the
school or classroom? And, how do we come to resist the imposition of our own politics, desires
and expectations as they speak to who we think the students are (with the risk of essentializing)
and what we think the students need?

(Re)Articulating teacher ↔ student relations.

What are the ways in which student voice work speaks to relationships between teachers and
students in schooling and education? Mitra (2004) suggests that, “[p]erhaps when attempting
change strategies that are as counter-normative as student voice efforts, part of the pathway
toward creating institutional change must first be to transform the persons involved” (p. 682).
Much of the student voice literature suggests there is evidence that relationships between
students and teachers shift when spaces are opened for students’ voices to be heard (Crane, 2001,
p. 54; Cook-Sather, 2002, p. 3, 10; Fielding, 2001, p. 108; Fielding, 2006, p. 311; Heshusius,
Raymond, 2001, p. 61; Robinson & Taylor, 2007, p. 12). Student voice work opens possibilities
for shifting roles of what it means to be a teacher and what it means to be a student; student voice
work opens different possibilities of the self. Even though, as Fielding (2004b) has argued, there
are no spaces in schooling and education where teachers and students meet as equals, some of
the shifting roles as found in the literature speak to students becoming active producers of knowledge (Bragg, 2007, p. 355; Cook-Sather, 2002, p. 10; Lincoln, 1995, p. 89). These shifting roles include students as stakeholders in their learning and co-producers of knowledge in partnership with teachers (Lincoln, 1995, p. 89; Whitehead & Clough, 2004); students gaining a sense of empathy for their teachers through skills like teamwork, communication, metacognition, and reflexivity (Bragg, 2001, p. 352; Cook-Sather, 2002, p. 10; Jackson, 2011, p. 118); location of teachers as learners too, in which the least they have to learn from students is how students learn (Cruddas, 2001, p. 63; Fielding, 2001b, p. 103-104; Raymond, 2001, p. 61); the creation of a shared language between student and teacher (Fielding, 2001b, p. 102, 104; Giroux, 1986, p. 59; MacBeath et al., 2001, p. 81) to address the disparity between teacher and student languages (Raymond, 2001, p. 58), and in this way language comes to provide one way for marginalized students to access the culture of power (Delpit, 1988; see also, Jackson, 2011, p. 118).

Language, in this shared space, comes to be a mediating tool (Oldfather et al., 1999; see also Prieto, 2001, p. 88) and through dialogue, teachers may learn to see/hear their students as they are, rather than as historical narratives and policies make them out to be. “For teachers, tuning in to what students rather than what policy makers say is a professionally re-creative act” (Rudduck & Demetriou, 2003, p. 284). Language also becomes important in that it shapes our experiences and our ability to recognize and articulate those experiences. In creating a shared language teachers, too, must come to have a particular vocabulary and acquire “the expertise to make it accessible to their pupils” (Macbeath et al., 2001, p. 81; see also, Prieto, 2001, p. 89). These shifts happen dialogically. While it is mentioned above that students come to feel empathetic towards the teacher location, teachers, through listening, can come to challenge the underestimations they have of students and recognize, “the ability of children to be shrewd observers, to possess insight and wisdom about what they see and hear, and to possess internal
resources we routinely underestimate” (Lincoln, 1995, p. 89; see also, Macbeath, 2006, p. 195). When knowledge is considered something that is external to us, and when youth are considered in need of development (James, 2007) as the present configurations of schooling and education would have one believe, than these become non-possibilities.

The new ways of knowing, and new knowledge constructed, can lead to a form of what Oldfather. . .calls ‘epistemological empowerment’ (p. 123). Teachers and students alike acquire voice as they explore together the mixed messages that derail teaching and undermine student agency. (Lincoln, 1995, p. 92).

**Hearability in configurations of student voice.**

How do students’ voices come to be listened to or heard within the configurations of student voice in schooling and education? It is through genuine listening that teachers and students may come to understand each other differently (see for example, Heshusius, 1995; Jackson, 2011; Rudduck & Demetriou, 2003, p. 281); however, what does it mean to listen? “In this instance listening is not a biological capacity, but rather an emotional relationship between people that requires trust” (Cahill, 2007, p. 279). Lisa Delpit (1988) explains, “We do not really see through our eyes or hear through our ears, but through our beliefs” (p. 298), and Cook-Sather (2002) states that, “It is our basic beliefs that need to change if we are to learn to listen to students” (p. 10). A reconceptualization of what it means to listen is amplified through the literature (see for example, Cook-Sather, 2006, p. 380); it means listening beyond historical manifestations of child-centeredness. This call to listen beyond child-centered pedagogy comes to produce some resistance from those who work within child-centered spaces (Cook-Sather, 2006, p. 379).

Macbeath (2006) references a 2003 study by Sutherlan in which he found,
the nature of the difficulty faced by some teachers in hearing student voices. The challenge to their own identity after 20 years or more of teaching had been a challenge too far for some staff and student data had been benevolently dismissed (p. 203).

Are adults willing to hear what students have to say if it contradicts their professional experiences? In some cases, the literature warns against the non-performative of listening: “whilst teachers may hear what students say, they do not cross the bridge to listen actively to what they mean” (Fielding, 2001b, p. 103). Listening, rather than being a one-off event, needs to be recognized as an ongoing process (Cook-Sather, 2002, p. 11), one that continually challenges current models of “exam-acceptable voices” (Rudduck & Fielding, 2006, p. 224) and comes to hear the many ways in which students express themselves (Dahl, 1995; Prieto, 2001, p. 88; Robinson & Taylor, 2007, p. 6).

In thinking about learning to listen differently as individuals, how might a listening culture become part and parcel of the climate of the school or classroom? If student voice asks students to speak, then someone must listen (Cook-Sather, 2006, p. 367). Learning to dialogue with the goal of transformation (Ranson, 2000, p. 266) requires recognizing that knowledge is contested rather than value-neutral, and respecting others’ voices (Prieto, 2001, p. 88) as more than just the “sound of speaking. . . but also with their having the power to influence analyses of, decisions about, and practices in schools” (Cook-Sather, 2006, p. 363). In other words, recognizing and respecting voices as active are key aspects of a listening community. In working towards a listening culture, one might ask what are we listening for, and to whom are we listening? In other words, one might consider how we come to listen, as well as the conditions under which listening happens.
Several texts speak to the relationship between listening and finding one’s own voice (Heshusius, 1995; Lincoln, 1995, p. 88; Macbeath, 2006, p. 205). However, the act of listening can take several forms, as Cook-Sather (2006) articulates through the following “listening typology”:

For instance, Holdsworth’s (2000) “student participation ladder” moves from “youth/student voice: speaking out” to “being heard” to “being listened to” to “being listened to seriously and with respect” to “incorporating youth/student views actions taken by others” to “sharing decision-making, implementation of action, and reflection on action with young people” (p. 277).

Fielding’s (2001b) warning adds to this:

too often those in power are listening because through that process they gather more information which can then be used to enhance the process of containment and control (accumulation), or assist in the process of re-describing or reconfiguring students in ways that bind them more securely to the status quo (accommodation), or, indeed, reaffirm the powerful in their superiority and confirm students in their existing lot (appropriation) (see Fielding, 1998). (p. 103)

What we are listening for comes to be shaped dialogically through who we are listening to (Robinson & Taylor, 2007, p. 10). Are we listening to the voices that are most readily made hearable as they come to represent the dominant articulations (see, Chapters 6, 7, and 8)? Rudduck & Demetriou (2003) ask,

If the school claims to be supporting student voice, can students be certain that the familiar dividing practices (Meadmore, 1993) are not still operating? Students will be cynical if, within a framework of promise, attention and respect continue to go to some students in the school—the ones the school values most highly—and not others (p. 278).
Silva (2001) shares her experiences with a group of students who were negotiating what role they were going to take on in attempting to transform the school through student voice. While it was a diverse group of students, as soon as discussions of presenting the group to be acknowledged officially by the school came up, it was the White, middle-class students who assumed leadership roles, as they believed that they would be heard more readily by the administration, and in this way the group came to reproduce that which they were seeking to disrupt (Silva, 2001, p. 96). Bragg (2001) also asked how we come to listen to the voices that contradict our assumed understanding, and she goes on to urge that those are the very voices that need to be listened to (see also, Urquhart, 2001). However, in the climate of measurability and instant, recognizable feedback, often those voices come to be re-silenced (Bragg, 2001). While reconceptualizing listening and moving towards a listening culture are important, there are questions of representation that should also be taken into consideration.

**Listening to/for contradictory voices: essentializing, authenticity, and marginalization.**

How do we listen to the varied and contradictory voices brought into the school by students? In this question I engage questions of representation: What roles do essentializing and authenticity come to play in student voice work? Who is accorded voice and thereby made to be “hearable”, and who is positioned as voiceless within existing power relations in teaching and learning? The previous question considers how one might come to listen in a general sense. This next section queries what it means to listen when we regard the particular students and the various, shifting identities and voices they bring to student voice work. Cook-Sather (2006) presents a typology of listening that, in its presentation, suggests the final model of listening is desired in student
voice work: “listening as a gesture, listening to change adult-driven practices, listening to be guided by students’ ideas of what needs to change” (p. 379); however, this section cautions against an uncritical authentication of students’ voices, and as she also suggests, “Listening does not always mean doing exactly what we are told, but it does mean being open to the possibility of revision, both of thought and action. At a minimum, it means being willing to negotiate” (Cook-Sather, 2002, p. 8). Much of this question speaks to a differently conceptualized human subject, informed through poststructural critiques of the humanist/enlightenment subject often conjured in the problematic student voice literature. Before continuing, I will briefly discuss the differences in the Enlightenment/humanist subject and the poststructural subject. For an example of the subject as conjured in the more problematic student voice literature, Orner (1992) writes,

Those of use who live in capitalist economies are continually beckoned by the consumerism and individualism of our cultural institutions to assert ourselves and stake out our identity—an identity that is singular, fixed and true for all time. We are constantly called upon to locate those aspects of ourselves that are unique, different (but not too different) that make us who we are. (p. 84, emphasis added)

While I am speaking to the differences in the two subjecthoods, I must amplify that the poststructural subject is not meant to be read as in opposition to the humanist subject, nor does it suggest the abandonment of that said subjecthood. Instead, it asks for a complication of an oversimplified understanding of identity, one that speaks rather to the complexities of life.

The humanist/Enlightenment subject suggests a unitary, coherent and stable identity, one in which choices are based on rational thinking. This leads to a normatization of what becomes recognizable performatives, and when someone doesn’t subscribe to that behavior, they need to be disciplined. Anti-racism and poststructural feminism in particular push back on the
universalizing of this subject through Euro-Enlightenment, noting the ways in which it produces Othering, discipline, surveillance and management. The counter-narrativizing of the humanist subject situates the particular positions different bodies are able to take up within broader societal and discursive imperatives, rather than in the individual. An example of how the universalized humanist subject individualizes choice relates to when students decide not to participate in a project meant to better their position (i.e., student voice initiatives); the students are seen as somehow faulty and deficient, therefore in need of remediation (Bragg, 2007). There is no room for alternative understandings of the ways in which the students articulate (through voice and performance) themselves, and thereby the student voice project itself is not questioned. In other words, the individual comes to be amplified in the humanist/Enlightenment thinking through the individual/collective dualism, in that this individual agentive subject, as a rational and coherent being, can make decisions as distinct from societal forces. The poststructuralist perspective suggests that the human subject is necessarily contradictory, fragmented, and always in-process as it comes to be shaped through various and conflicting discourses. The individual can only be what is made possible through societies’ discursive fields; however, particular desires and investments in subjectivities may come to produce the illusion of cohesion. Depending on the desires, as they relate to investments in dominant discourses, the poststructuralist subject may appear rational, but rationality is more a function of the desires and discourses than it is a feature of the poststructural human subject.²²

For those who work with the humanist subject, they may struggle to grasp the complexities of the lived experience. For example, Dahl (1995) writes, “voice reveals the deeper

²² For a more detailed description of the humanist subject and the poststructuralist subject, see Bronwyn Davies (2000, p. 57).
meanings and perspectives of individuals and reflects learners’ personal realities. Voice is distinctive, as individual as a fingerprint” (p. 124). In this she does not acknowledge the boundaries of what can be said in the configurations of schooling and education. When invited to speak, those who seek transformative voicings have found that, “Students rarely suggested radical changes to teaching practice, but followed a broadly ‘progressive’, liberal agenda in asking for greater mutuality, respect and active learning” (Bragg, 2007, p. 351), because they are working within and from the discursive field of dominant schooling and education. O’Loughlin (1995) shares a personal conversation he had with Ira Shor in which they determined that, “we must resist the temptation to glamorize student voices, and recognize that the multiple voices students bring to the classroom, while potentially possessing some elements of resistance and transformation, are likely to be deeply imbued with status quo values” (p. 112; see also, Kelly, 2004, p. 5, 9). Students’ desires to please the teacher by saying what they think is expected of them may outweigh their desire to locate themselves as outside of the “norm”, a conversation that I take up in depth in Chapter 8.

How do we come to the sought after “authenticity” of students’ voices? In other words, how are students’ voices located as “beyond criticism” (James, 2007; Lensmire, 1998, p. 269)? James (2007) again amplifies the discursivity of voice:

However, childhood research is not simply about making children’s own voices heard in this very literal sense by presenting children’s perspectives. It is also about exploring the nature of the “voice” with which the children are attributed, how that voice both shapes and reflects the ways in which childhood is understood, and therefore the discourses within which children find themselves within any society (p. 266).
The inclusion of students’ voices in our classrooms, and the presentation of students’ voices in our writings as some authentic view needs to be troubled. Not only does this position risk a dis-acknowledgment of the various discursive confines, but also, when we present students’ voices as authentic and “beyond criticism”, we are led into dangerous territory where students’ voicing of racist, sexist, or otherwise hateful, oppressive and destructive positions cannot be troubled (Lensmire, 1998; Oldfather et al., 1999, p. 290). Whereas, when we come to locate voice and subjectivity in the social configurations, there is the possibility for disrupting the larger narratives of oppression that shape the experiences for many students. There is a constant relationship between the narratives as presented in various discursive fields, like education or the media, and the voices of students:

. . .the concrete individual does not stand passive before the experiences, languages, histories, stories that confront her, but assimilates and does work on these resources in crafting a self and a voice. In crafting her voice, the individual responds to and transforms the utterances of others in the production of her own speaking and writing. (Lensmire, 1998, p. 280)

This relational and dialogic capacity necessitates a disruption of problematic, harmful, violent speech acts. As Bakhtin (1981) argues, the word is only half our own, and those who work with notions of the authenticity and individuality of voice come to suggest that we have sole ownership over the words we use.

Rather than possessing a single identity or voice, students are constructing multiple perspectives on their emergent identities as a result of their social and cultural experiences as members of racial, ethnic, gender, social class, economic, and sundry other communities, each of which provides its own system of cultural apprenticeship into ways of being in the world. . . . (O’Loughlin, 1995, p. 111)
It is not only the students who are faced with multiple and conflicting identities; teachers are also asked to straddle multiple worlds.

In such a system as teachers in public schools now practice, reporting back to parents, other teachers, and administrators often involves serving two masters: (a) the formal organization master (exemplified by accountability-normed test scores) and (b) the students and parents themselves. In addition teachers deal with the perpetual conflict between teaching as mere transmission and teaching as a subversive, critical thinking-oriented activity. (Lincoln, 1995, p. 91)

To further complicate the ways in which those working from a humanist frame come to discuss voice as individual, unitary, and rational, Robinson & Taylor (2007) suggest that they also take student voice to represent the whole group of students as having one voice (p. 6), in this way essentializing “students” as a fixed, unified unit. Dei (1996) also articulates that “schools themselves construct students in an identity politics by claiming all in their jurisdiction as ‘students’”, which does not address the varied experiences that come to shape students’ identities as raced, gendered, classed, (dis)abled, or sexualized (p. 31). In this disciplinary mode of normalization only particular voices can be heard, those that are made to be acceptable and understandable by these limiting frameworks.

Within this essentializing, there is the concern that some students may speak for others, typically for those who are less “hearable” in the acoustics of the school as it is. Chapter 6 addresses this relationship more thoroughly. As Silva (2001) queries, “Which students are representing the ‘student voice’ of their school? And in the context of reform, can these students who are best served by the current setup of their school possibly serve the interests of students who are least served” (p. 98; see also Bragg, 2001; Rudduck & Fielding, 2006, p. 228)? Connecting this to questions of “authenticity” of voice, and as Spivak (1988) warns, it cannot be
assumed that those who are marginalized “are free to represent their own interests transparently” (Cruddas, 2001, p. 63); however, questions of representation, both within student voice work, as well as in written research reports on student voice, need to be considered. There are dangers in speaking for others (Alcoff, 1991-1992), particularly when it is presented as direct quotes:

> even in the sense of describing what you take to be the case, you may, in effect, be speaking in their place, that is speaking for them. The very language you use in your description is likely to be saturated with values. . . .No descriptive discourse is, or can be, value free (Fielding, 2004a, p. 297; see also James, 2007, p. 264).

As Bhavnani (1990) argues, particularly in research that presents direct quotes from those in marginalized communities,

such research may be given considerable credibility because not only is there the implicit assumption that it is empowering because it is supposed to have ‘given a voice’ for the black residents, but, also the use of direct speech extracts confers an added, and often seen as desirable, dimension of authenticity. (quoted in Fielding, 2004a, p. 299)

Still the question remains, how do we do work for social justice and transformation while recognizing these limitations (see also, Fielding, 2004a, p. 300)? Perhaps we need to work from a different framework, as Cruddas (2001) suggests:

Subject positions therefore operate within a complex system of representations. If we are to understand and explore them, we require a different kind of language than the rationalist, technicist language of the National Curriculum with its discrete subjects (and subjectivities) (p. 65).

Similarly, perhaps we need to find different ways of representing the voices of students in research. Two examples of disrupting traditionally presented research are Oldfather et al. (1999)
and Cahill et al. (2008), in which the research is written and published by the students alongside the researchers.

**Production of identities in student voice.**

What identities or subjectivities do student voice works produce? And in what ways do these identities support or disrupt students’ identities outside the confines of the school or classroom? How do we come to resist the imposition of our own politics, desires and expectations as they speak to who we think the students are (with the risk of essentializing), and what we think the students need?

From my experience as a teacher, many of the ways in which students’ come to be influenced by participation in student voice work may not be readily recognized within the time and space limitations of schooling and education. Often, the roles that students take up in school may be very different than the roles they have outside of school.

Schools, in contrast, often offer less challenge, responsibility and autonomy than they [students] are accustomed to in their lives outside school. . . . Called the Y Generation, they are said to have more money to spend, to have more opportunities for self-expression and the creation of different identities, and to be more influential in family investments. (Rudduck & Demetriou, 2003, p. 275)

When these disparate identities are not recognized, there is the potential that the roles presented for students in school can come to create tension with the identities and relationships students have outside of school:

From the point of view of the school, students’ positive attitudes to school and staff would only be welcomed. However. . . . it also involves a re-orientation of
bonds away from the peer group in ways that can reinforce or create divisions. . .

(Bragg, 2007, p. 351, emphasis added)

As Arnot & Reay (2007) add, “This insight warns voice researchers of the need to distinguish between the social identity shaped within the external fields, and those generated within the classificatory relations of schooling” (p. 317).

As I discuss in Chapter 8, student voice researchers and pedagogues also need to consider the role that their own politics, desires and expectations come to play in shaping the relationships in the classroom. How might (transformative) politics impose particular identities and expectations on students and students’ voices (Bragg, 2001, p. 72; Kirby, 2001, p. 75)? How do the particular foci on encouraging positive attitudes and dispositions towards school disrupt or support relationships and identities with peer groups and home communities (Bragg, 2007, p. 351; Miron & Lauria, 1998, p. 198)? In other words, how do the expectations and desires of the researcher or educator come to shape pedagogies that produce particular identities in student voice work? Bragg (2001) shares an experience she had teaching a course on horror films, in which she entered the class with a particular feminist critique of horror films and realized, many years later, that she had imposed her feminist critique on the evaluation of the students’ work. After running into a student from that class who made a joke about how the class was organized and how the students pushed back, Bragg (2001) shared that “They [the students] read my teaching practices as censure of their tastes, and the low grades I gave them for their essays as dogmatic dismissal of their perspectives” (p. 70). To begin the course another time around, Bragg (2001) read directly from the student comments on the teacher evaluations of the previously mentioned course. She described the process as follows:
In the process, and perhaps with most difficulty, I challenged my own assumption that teachers should or could make students better people, as if there are easy solutions to questions of identity, or as if teaching can offer transcendence. I came to see teaching as a more prosaic activity, yet to appreciate positively the richness of its relational dimensions. (Bragg, 2001, p. 72)

Kirby (2001) amplifies this point, “The participatory researcher working with young researchers demands a further redefinition of their role, where one shares knowledge and facilitates young people’s critical awareness, *but does not impose views and ideology*” (p. 75, emphasis added). Fielding (2004a) further states that to research in this way, through dialogic relationships where there is an exchange of learning between the researcher and the researched, produces the possibility to effect students in more ways than that which was the focus of the research (p. 306).

**Reflections on the Workings of Power in Student Voice Practices**

The previous section spoke to the multitude of identities with which students come to school, and provided discussion around the idea that, even in an effort for liberatory education, we may come to impose our desires and expectations on the students (see Bragg, 2001; Cook-Sather, 2007; Kirby, 2001; Miron & Lauria, 1998). This section deals with the power relations in student voice work. While the student voice initiatives provide some space for dismantling inequitable power relations in the classroom, Cook-Sather (2002) sums up Oldfather’s et al. (1999) realization, “that even when they [teachers] made every effort to collaborate fully with students, issues of power and authority remained complicated” (p. 8), as I noted in Chapter 4. Again, to re-amplify Fielding’s (2004b) point that in the current conditions of schooling and education, even through the relocation of students’ voices in the schooling process, they are still not on “equal” grounds with the teachers and administrators who run the school (see also, Oldfather et
This section asks: 1) What are the ways in which student voice attends to issues of othering and silence(ing)? 2) What are the risks involved in participating in student voice work, and what are the ways in which voices are made recognizable? 3) What role does language, as a form of power, play in informing student voice work? How does language influence relations of power in schooling and education?

**Othering and silence(ing) in student voice.**

In this section I briefly address the question: What are the ways in which student voice attends to issues of othering and silence(ing)? The discussions in Chapters 6, 7, and 8 build on the work presented here. As I suggested earlier, new norms come to present themselves in student voice work. Bragg (2007) elaborates:

> Thus, [student voice] helps establish new—and more demanding—norms of school belonging, where young people are invited to be, not “pupils” (with the connotation that these are passive, done to) but “students” who actively take the initiative, are enterprising, resourceful, flexible and reflexive (p. 355).

Students, when given the space to become active in their learning, are also asked to take responsibility when they do not measure up. This produces questions around “inclusion and exclusion” (Rudduck & Fielding, 2006, p. 220) as well as alienation and privileging (Arnot & Reay, 2007; Bragg, 2007). When sets of norms are established, we must ask “whom or what is problematized or rendered ‘abnormal’” (Bragg, 2007, p. 345) in the process? Normatization comes to be a disciplinary act and, simultaneously, continuously informs who and what is to be valued above others, reconstituting habits of mind that locate particular bodies as always already “abnormal” or “other” (Rudduck & Fielding, 2006, p. 228).
This location of some bodies as “other” serves to produce the marginalization of particular bodies. What is interesting in the student voice literature is that students or youth, as a group, come to be located as marginalized (Bragg, 2007, p. 345; James, 2007; Lincoln, 1995, p. 90; Robinson & Taylor, 2007, p. 11), whereas more frequently marginalization is located in discussions of race, class, gender, sexuality, religion, ethnicity and ability (Oldfather et al., 1999, p. 301). Yet these more common locations of marginalization in society are taken up infrequently in the governing literature of student voice work. One of the ways students come to be located as “other” is through discourses of empowerment (Bragg, 2007, p. 345; Oldfather et al., 1999, p. 290; Orner, 1992, p. 83). It is the lack of power that students are said to have that necessitates student voice interventions (Orner, 1992, p. 83); however, this works with an understanding of power as property, as something that can be given or taken away, rather than recognizing power as immanent and relational (Orner, 1992, p. 82). These discourses of empowerment work through the logic of childhood development in which students do not have anything in them; they are empty vessels, and therefore need to be filled or given power (see for example, Giroux, 1986; James, 2007). While I am problematizing the liberal politics of empowerment, I am not dismissing them entirely. They need to be engaged, since they shape school reform, specifically student voice reforms. What I want to amplify is the ways in which the discourses of empowerment come to “other” students. As Freire (1970) articulated over 40 years ago, any education system that locates students as passive recipients of “official” or “normatized” knowledge is oppressive.

The oppressive framing of traditional schooling and education comes to imbue particular habits of mind that shape and inform the encounters between students and teachers, and it is in these encounters that alienation may be (re)produced or challenged (Robinson & Taylor, 2007, p. 13). Voices can come to be re-silenced, even as they are asked to speak, when they are faced
with “hostile audiences” (Lensmire, 1998, p. 285). However, silence should not be read as passive, as it may also be read as a form of survival in restrictive atmospheres (Miron & Lauria, 1998, p. 201-202). What Silva (2001) urges us to ask is “how and why some students choose to participate” (p. 95). Lensmire (1998) addresses the historical context in which students might choose not to speak: “. . .out of dissent and anger—a silence grown out of a ‘deeply felt rage at those who live their unexamined privilege as entitlement’ (Lewis, 1993, p. 3)” (p. 285). This raises questions around what is the purpose of speaking. If students sense that their speaking bears the burdens of bettering the marketability of the school, or for the benefit of those in positions of power, they may become skeptical. There is also a history of the oppressor seeking the narratives and voices of the oppressed for consumption rather than for change in the power relations that organize the bodies and experiences, and, as Dei (2010a) warns, the burden of changing oppressive relations comes to be placed on the backs of those who are oppressed (see also Collins, 2000; hooks, 1992; Mohanty, 2003; Moraga & Anzaldua, 1983). Orner (1992) asks a series of questions to consider in asking students to speak through student voice initiatives. These questions come to locate some of the “bigger picture” of school relationships; who feels they can speak and who remains silent:

How power relations in the classroom are manifest is crucial. How do the subject positions inhabited by one student connect with the subject positions of everyone else in the room? How do these multiple identities and positions inform who speaks and who listens? Who is comfortable in the room and who is not? Who was insulted and who did the insulting in the hall just before class? It seems impossibly naïve to think that there can be anything like a genuine sharing of voices in the classroom. What does seem possible, on the other hand, is an attempt to recognize the power differentials present and to understand how they impinge upon what is sayable and doable in that specific context. (Orner, 1992, p. 81)
Risks of/in student voice involvement.

What are the risks involved in participating in student voice work, and what are the ways in which voices are made recognizable? Seeking and listening to students’ voices necessitates a challenge to the hierarchical relationship between teacher and student in the first place. Frequently, however, the student who is afforded a voice to be heard represents a recognizable performativity, e.g. a student who the teacher expects and desires—an ideal student—and anything outside this performance is not considered “voice” and in some cases, may be located as disruptive (see Arnot & Reay, 2007, p. 321; see also Chapter 6). As O’Loughlin (1995) writes, “The dominant education system locks firmly in place spectacles that filter out dissonant knowledges and voices” (p. 108). It is in this way that some knowledges and voicings become unrecognizable as “student voice”. What if students say something that counters the intention of the teacher or the lesson? What are the ways in which dissonant knowledges and voices can be made recognizable, hearable, legitimate? Bragg (2001) asks about “our willingness and capacity as adults to come to terms with voices we find it difficult to hear, let alone with any degree of interest, comprehension, or sense of openness to the possibility of learning” (p. 70; see also Johnston & Nicholls, 1995). She later speaks to the power teachers are afforded in naming and legitimizing knowledge through the questions they ask, the responses they elicit, and their assessment of students’ work as representing whether or not learning has occurred (Bragg, 2001, p. 70). This often-unexamined power of the teacher needs to become a space of reflexivity, even for the educator who explicitly seeks to disrupt inequitable power relations. The work of subversion and one’s location as a counter-hegemonic subject is never done once and for all, as some, from a liberal perspective, might suggest. Orner (1992) warns:

Anglo-American feminist and critical pedagogues allegedly understand and never contribute to the racism, ethnocentrism, classism, sexism, and heterosexism and
so on that their students experience. In the final instance, it is the critical or feminist pedagogue who determines if and when students have succeeded in valuing their own language, background and personalities. These paternalistic tendencies in critical and Anglo-American feminist education ultimately replicate racist, classist and sexist forms for students (p. 87).

It is necessary to be present in every moment to come to recognize the way that power, oppression, and privilege are working in that space with the particular bodies and discourses that are present.

O’Loughlin (1995) writes of mimetic teaching, which comes to promote uniformity and limits what is recognizable as learning (p. 109). This is further compounded by standardized tests that seek “the right” answer, as if knowledge is fixed and measurable. So, with the present popularity of standardized testing, as well as using test scores not only to assess students but also teachers, how do we come to disrupt the finite and fixed knowledge regimes through student voice? What are the risks for teachers to subvert the dominant frame? What are the risks for the students to participate in subversive learning with the limitations of what is recognizable as learning and success (see Dei, 2010b)? What knowledges and articulations come to be re-silenced in this epoch of heightened surveillance? In speaking of these macro structures, of the landscape of schooling and education, Lensmire (1998) writes that the evaluative systems come to otherize those who do not fit within the recognized norms. “Given the pervasiveness of evaluation in schools and students’ subordinate positions, the risk of ‘becoming unrecognizable’ is also the risk of not being recognized as a competent, worthy student. Sometimes simply being unconventional is enough” (p. 282). Robinson & Taylor (2007) write that even “Student voice work is normative in asserting that certain outcomes are more desirable than others and in
holding commitments to particular values, beliefs and practices about the purpose of the educative process and the nature of teacher/student relationships” (p. 7).

While there are macro structures in place that create risks in participating in student voice initiatives for both teachers and students, if we decide to take those risks as researchers and pedagogues, there are also micro level influences that locate some students in risky positions. Fielding (2001a) warns that students may not feel willing or able to voice themselves when asked to speak, if they do not feel “discursively at ease” (p. 102). This discursive ease depends on the particulars of the power relations in the classroom. As Orner (1992) writes, “There are times when it is not safe for students to speak: when one student’s socially constructed body language threatens another; when the teacher is not perceived as an ally” (p. 81) or when students “refuse the risk of teacher or peer disapproval in the classroom” (Bragg, 2001, p. 71). It is important to remember that students do not come into classrooms as disembodied and ahistorical. Rather they bring their multiple contradictory identities, successes, struggles and relationships with them.

**Language and power in student voice.**

What role does language, as a form of power, play in informing student voice work? How does language influence the relations of power in schooling and education? If student voice asks students to speak, what language is made recognizable or hearable? How does the researcher or pedagogue understand language—as neutral and impartial, or as embedded in socio-historical contexts (Bakhtin, 1981)? Fielding (2004a) writes, “The key point here is that issues of voice are not circumscribed by verbal or written texts; they are embedded in historically located structures and relations of power” (p. 300). Bakhtin (1981) provides a framework for thinking about
language. He writes, “Language is not a neutral medium that passes freely and easily into the private property of the speaker’s intentions; it is populated—over populated—with the intentions of others” (p. 249); language is social, relational, and political. Even though Bakhtin (1981) asserts that language is not easily passed into the “private property” of the individual who is speaking, he goes on to amplify the ways in which language is an exclusionary force, one in which some bodies can claim it as their property, suggesting the right to exclude:

Not all words for just anyone submit easily to this appropriation, to this seizure and transformation into private property: many words stubbornly resist, others remain alien, sound foreign in the mouths of the one who appropriated them and who now speaks them . . . it is as if they put themselves in quotation marks against the will of the speaker. (Bakhtin, 1981, p. 294)

Even when the rules of language are made explicit and in this way the culture of power may be made accessible (Delpit, 1988), not everyone may be able to voice herself into being. Robinson & Taylor (2007) remind us of Bourdieu’s position that “the structure of language plays an important role in the reproduction of habitus, and that people from different social classes possess different linguistic codes” (p. 11). Rudduck & Fielding (2006) add that discourses “carry implicit messages about membership” (p. 227). However, with the exclusionary practices of language, Oldfather et al. (1999) remind us that “meaning comes into existence when voices (speaking subjects expressing particular perspectives and intentions) come into contact with other voices” (p. 289); in other words, meaning making is dialogic.

Questions of the boundedness of language, of what is sayable and what language is encouraged or allowed in student voice work present themselves here. Cruddas (2001) introduces the question presented by feminists: how do we articulate our experiences through masculinist language where there is an “absence of words for certain feelings and ideas” (p. 65).
O’Loughlin (1995) augments this point in relation to student voice initiatives when he suggests that students are asked to take up the language of schooling and education and “give up their own frameworks of meaning” (p. 11). While potentially providing access to the culture of power (Delpit, 1988), this also works to marginalize particular students. In requiring a particular form of communication, much is lost, and “student voices are formed within an oppressive society that privileges the meanings, values, and stories of some over others” (Lensmire, 1998, p. 270).

Returning to Bakhtin, Giroux (1986) writes,

For Bakhtin, the issue of language is explored as part of a politics of struggle and representation, a politics forged in the relations of power pertaining to who decides and legislates the territory on which discourse is to be defined and negotiated (p. 59).

Student voice efforts offer students a space to redefine roles and relationships with teachers, texts, schools, and communities; however, in what ways do these rearticulated relationships truly disrupt inequitable power relations? Heilbrun (1988) writes, “Power is the ability to take one’s place in whatever discourse is essential to action and the right to have one’s part matter” (p. 9, emphasis added). It is the second part of her statement that seems to be the most difficult. Arnot & Reay (2007) suggest that this is part of how those who have power sustain their position:

Key to this analysis is not that voice cannot change power relations, but that shifts in power relations can change “voices”. Power relations which sustain such boundaries, therefore, establish the “voice” of a category and “any attempt to weaken the classification—that is, to reduce the insulation so as to change ‘voice’ (discourse) will provoke the power relationship to re-establish the relations between the categories by restoring the insulation” (Bernstein, 1990, p. 24). (Arnot & Reay, 2007, p. 316-317)
This reading of power, and the ways in which it comes to be sustained, leads me to ask, what, then, are the transformative possibilities of student voice work? How has student voice work come to be located as a non-performative\textsuperscript{23} reform effort? How does this non-performativity reify inequitable power relations in schooling and education? In what ways can we imagine, then, a disruption of the colonial framing of schooling and education?

The remainder of this dissertation attends to these questions as they oriented how I experienced and came to articulate the experiences of student voice. It was through returning to the data and reflecting on my experiences that I became less jaded by what seemed like an impossibility of transformativity through student voice. While I note the ways in which student voice becomes a reproductive tool in neoliberal educational times, I also came to find and attempted to articulate the ways in which neoliberal educational agendas are not totalizing, where there is room for thinking and being otherwise. In the next chapter, I return to the concept of pedagogy that framed my discursive orientations as articulated in Chapter 2. I consider the relational contours of pedagogy and voice, asking what voicings are produced in/with/through/against our pedagogies—a different question than the one I initially set out to ask, which was how voicings may change our pedagogies.

\textsuperscript{23} Here I am thinking through Sara Ahmed’s (2006a) discussion of non-performative speech acts. In her piece she discusses the ways in which her University took to implementing anti-racism policies and in effect made it near impossible to name experiences of racism on the university campus. If a performative speech act is an act that brings about the effects it names (for example the act of saying ‘I now pronounce you man and wife’ (sic) (Butler, 1997), then, as Ahmed suggests, a non-performative speech act, in this case student voice as transformative teaching and learning, does not bring about the effects it names.
Chapter 6
“Finding Voice”: Acoustic Contours of Recognizability, Embodiment and Difference

How are particular voicings made differently accessible in relation to race, gender, class, sexuality and other socially inscribed subjectivities? How do the historical and present colonial techniques and practices of difference come to inscribe recognizability within student voice articulations? In this chapter, I engage these two provocations that have haunted me in this study, by continuing the conversations presented in the previous chapter regarding questions of listening, recognizability, subjectivity and power in student voice. I return to my concerns about the limitations of the student voice project implemented by Teaching and Learning Collaborative (TLC), which informed my decision to attempt to design and facilitate the student voice work at Wycliffe St. Albans (WSA).

In some ways, I was disappointed in the work I was able to carry out with WSA, at times pondering what I could have done differently and at times focusing on how similar limitations were placed on my student voice work, even though it was, as I imagined it, performed with alternate intentions to TLC. TLC’s stated goals are to work with urban schools and districts to find alternative strategies to measure up to the Common Core State Standards. In my mind, as I have stated, their work is to provide a means for marginalized students to meet the neoliberal market needs of contemporary education. I framed my work with WSA as a way for the organization to become less hierarchical, to learn to listen to the youth and the community for whom they worked. It is with significant dismay that I must implicate myself in the very same neoliberal contours in which I found TLC stuck. However, I caution at the outset of this chapter that the neoliberal discourses ought not become totalizing. I want to seek spaces where they are
ruptured, disavowed, and ignored, while simultaneously understanding the work that they do in implicating us in their projects of surveillance, management, entrepreneurship, and disembodied individuality. In this moment I ask: What are the limits of these neoliberal configurations?

My overall intention in this chapter, then, is to speak to the acoustic contours of the two student voice projects, to consider the interplay between three elements relating to the ways students’ voices were heard, or what voicings were produced as recognizable. What made it possible for student voice to present itself at TLC and WSA; what were/are the institutional imperatives that shaped the possibilities for pedagogy? In the two analysis chapters that follow, I address more specifically the relationship between pedagogy and student voices through the analytics of affect and desire. This chapter, then, will consider the ‘pedagogic voice’, as Arnot and Reay (2007) term it, and the “mode of address” in Elizabeth Ellsworth’s articulation, addressing on a broader scale what was made recognizable in the student voice pedagogies.

To say it another way, in this chapter, I take into consideration the context(s) of student voice in relation to the pedagogic voice and the view of the students/youth within each site, WSA and TLC. I weave neoliberalism as a prevailing educational discursive practice in institutional imperatives and pedagogical stances, as a way to understand how they interplay and produce particular imagined, desired, and possible articulations. I intend to read relationally the broad context of neoliberalism, along with the institutional imperatives of each site and particular pedagogical decisions, to ask what voicings were produced (Arnot & Reay, 2007; Bragg & Manchester, 2012; Bragg, 2007). In discussing the disembodied neoliberal context that appeals to student voice projects for school improvement, I do not want to over-code the possibilities for student voice, thus limiting the potential for alternative readings; however, concomitantly, the conditions under which many of us work ought to be named and marked. This section becomes
tricky in that I want to discuss the prevailing neoliberal climate without masking its limits or over-determining our pedagogical practices through a focus on pedagogy. David Lusted (1986) suggests that pedagogy, when substantively theorized beyond teacher practices,

gives substance to the nature of the relations in these models. It refuses any tendency to instrumentalize the relations, to disconnect their interactivity or to give value to one agency over another. . . . Instead, it foregrounds exchange between and over the categories, it recognizes the productivity of the relations, and it renders the parties within them as active, changing and changeable agencies. (p. 3)

Before I continue, I want to address what I mean by several concepts I engage in this chapter, namely acoustics, recognizability, pedagogic voice, and mode of address. I think of acoustics in terms of how the physical and ideological contours and configurations of the spaces of TLC and WSA shape what is amplified, what is muffled, and who/what is silenced in those spaces. Jennifer Kelly (2004) writes, “Schools are physically bounded institutions (walls, desks), possessing distinct hierarchies and social structures and producing specific identities, e.g., student, principal, counselor, classroom teacher” (p. 13). How do the acoustics, then shape what articulations are made recognizable? With the related concept of recognizability then, I think through Bakhtin’s (1981) articulation that certain discourses are more readily appropriated by some bodies than others. Bakhtin, as previously quoted in Chapter 5, states, “Language is not a neutral medium that passes freely and easily into the private property of the speaker’s intentions” (Bakhtin, 1981, p. 249), and he says later that “many [words] stubbornly resist, others remain alien, sound foreign in the mouth of the one who appropriated them and who now speaks them. . . . it is as if they put themselves in quotation marks against the will of the speaker” (p. 294). In other words, with the question of recognizability, I want to engage the a priori assumptions about who can say what to whom, and with what registers. This concept also takes into
consideration the socio-historical inscriptions on bodies and interpretations within student voice pedagogies.

Student voice pedagogies are an important consideration in this study generally, and in this chapter specifically. Much of the literature on student voice considers the ways in which students’ voices might change pedagogic—and by extension—power relations within schooling and education. When I set out to do this work, I too was looking for student voice to bring about the transformative relations for which I hoped. Arnot & Reay (2007) argue that this glosses over questions of what kinds of voicings the student voice projects elicit. Presenting a concept, pedagogic voice, Arnot & Reay (2007) ask about “...the voices created by pedagogies, rather than the voices needed to change pedagogy” (p. 312, authors’ emphasis). What this shift in focus offers is a more thorough understanding of the ways in which our pedagogical stances produce, or make possible, particular student voicings (see also, Bragg, 2007; Bragg & Manchester, 2012). This must be read through Bakhtin’s (1981) consideration of the sociality and heteroglossia of language, of the historical event of speaking. I juxtapose this concept of pedagogic voice with Elizabeth Ellsworth’s (1997) notion, mode of address, a concept from film studies, which she suggests ought to be considered in relation to pedagogical encounters and educative practices. A pedagogical mode of address positions teachers and students in particular imagined relations, as Ellsworth (1997) states “...all curricula and pedagogies invite their users to take up particular positions within relations of knowledge, power, and desire” (p. 2). By engaging mode of address, I ask who student voice pedagogies (and pedagogues) imagine their students to be within networks of socio-historically constituted power relations. This concept returns me to questions of acoustics and recognizability within the student voice projects.
As I move through this chapter, I rub these concepts against one another, to see what tensions present themselves as a part of my reflexive practices in writing and pedagogy, rather than as a way to suggest some resolution to these tensions.

**Neoliberal Educational Reforms and Student Voice**

I am concerned with what voicings are made possible through our pedagogies, as pedagogy comes to be informed through our histories and experiences in education, as well as discursive and institutional forces. My focus in this section is on the broader neoliberal discourses that make possible this “popularity” of student voice (Arnot, 2006; Arnot & Reay, 2007; Bragg & Manchester, 2012; Fielding, 2004a; Robinson & Taylor, 2007; Rudduck & Fielding, 2006; Silva, 2001) in relation to contemporary educational reform. As was mentioned in Chapter 3, student voice has taken hold in many contemporary educational conversations in the UK, Australia, Canada and the United States. The UK provides the most conventional “reform” initiatives by explicitly encoding student voice into educational policy documents (see for example, Arnot & Reay, 2007; Bragg & Manchester, 2012; Cook-Sather, 2006; Fielding, 2004b; Robinson & Taylor, 2007). This being said, I focus on student voice as a reform movement in Canada and the United States, even while there may not be the same level of government documents requiring its use. My argument is that through the neoliberal imperatives of educational reform efforts in the United States and Canada, student voice becomes implicated in the reform policies, and is felt as a way for teachers to measure and prove their dedication to improving their students, their scores on standardized exams, and the desirability or image of their schools.

Let me trace my logic here: even though in Canada and the United States, student voice is not articulated as a specific federal, state, or Provincial mandated reform, through conversations that circulate about student voice, it is often linked to educational reform, improved outcomes...
and other mandates of broader reforms, such as recent reauthorizations of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA): the No Child Left Behind policies, and the subsequent 2010 Race to the Top competition in the United States. As student voice has been “proven”—in other words, it has been located as an “evidence based intervention”—to improve engagement, increase test scores, and foster “democratic citizens”, it has become so closely aligned with “how” to meet these reform goals that I argue that reform pressures on teachers can be said to be similar to the mandated reforms. In fact, in these neoliberal times, we have become the responsible “doers” to obtain the goals set externally. It may be argued that there are few formally mandated reforms dictating how to reach the goals; rather, the teaching profession feels intense pressures and trends to do anything that is “proven” to enable our students, our schools, and even ourselves to measure up. In other words, while there may seem to be less government, through the rhetoric of choice,24 for example, significant pressures exist through governmentality and surveillance (Bragg, 2007; Hursh, 2000; Larner, 2000).

Within these neoliberal conditions, education is presented as in a constant state of crisis. In fact, since the influential (or haunting, depending on your perspective) 1983 report, A Nation At Risk, America’s schools have been said to be failing, falling behind other industrialized nations. This concept of a “risk society” and continual crises that need to be managed, forms one

24 The 2010 Race to the Top (RTT) competition, which was a reauthorization of ESEA, was presented as a competition designed by Arne Duncan the US Secretary of Education. In this competition, states could choose to fill out an application in which they earned up to 500 points based on several different foci. In order to receive federal educational improvement money, states were coerced into “proving” that they had a systematic way of addressing the gaps amplified through disaggregated data collection through the previous and controversial reauthorization of ESEA, No Child Left Behind. Anything that is both measurable and proven to increase test scores (how states, districts, schools, teachers and students are surveilled, or in the language of these government policies, held accountable and assessed) becomes a necessary articulation. In other words, states have a choice to compete for needed funding, and through this choice, are bound to particular articulations to prove themselves “fundable”. This coercion then trickles down to the district, school, and classroom decisions that are made. For a discussion of this form of governmentality and surveillance and how it is engaged to discipline students, teachers, and education through standards, standardization, and accountability see Hursh (2000).
of the underpinnings of neoliberalism. In the United States, for example, the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 (NCLB) capitalized on this fear about the nation’s schools, and through various means (which are outside of the purview of this chapter) addressed remedies for these failing schools. Broadly, it provided ways to measure base-line data to find out who (including, students by demographic, teachers by students’ standardized test scores, and schools and districts by Annual Yearly Progress) was underperforming. The school in Newark, NJ, with which TLC partnered through a federal educational grant, was classified as a “School In Need of Improvement” because of its “failing” scores on its Annual Yearly Progress (AYP) for two consecutive years through the NCLB punitive measures. It is laudable that TLC’s approach to “turning around failing schools” (to engage the language of NCLB and it’s reauthorization through the Race to the Top Competition of 2010), believes that we need to change (teachers’ and administrators’) beliefs about “struggling students”. In fact, this is what drew me to their work in the first place, which I interpreted as addressing a critical question. Before we are able to overturn, transform, and reorganize the system, what can we as teachers do in the most disinvested schools, to encourage greater levels of “success” for our most vulnerable students? In other words, how do we work within the system to also make it work for marginalized students? To me, this represents a political project that could align itself with anti-racism in that it strives to address, at least on some level, the needs of students who are too often discarded, or made disposable by dominant paradigms. (For instance, NCLB pulls funds from schools who are not meeting its biased standards, drawing resources away from schools that, it could be argued, need them the most).

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25 AYP is a school level measurement based primarily on students’ scores on standardized exams, although other factors are included such as percentage of students’ progression from one grade to the next and attendance data)
This impulse to work within the neoliberal configurations, however, shaped the possibilities for student voice. As advertised on the TLC website, the TLC Student Voices approach presents opportunities for students to learn how to become “good” democratic citizens in today’s American democracy. This motivation explicitly aligns itself with the troubling conceptualization of democracy in contemporary contexts: that of voice and choice (Arnot, 2006; Arnot & Reay, 2007, p. 311), and citizenship constituted as consumer/client (Ranson, 2000, p. 273). This returns us to the debates about democracy within student voice efforts as outlined in Chapter 3. Robinson & Taylor (2007), too, link the recent interest in student voice to neoliberal agendas wherein students are viewed as clients, and those who have a right to choice in education: “All of the above developments are clearly illustrative of Jean Rudduck’s (2006) view that there is a current ‘zeitgeist commitment to student voice’ albeit in a contemporary context of ‘concern for client and stakeholder interests’ and the ‘high profiling of issues of rights and entitlements’” (p. 6). Davies and Bansel (2007) also address this neoliberal shift in the “making of democratic citizens” with a focus on increased governability. They contend that neoliberalism successfully appropriated what had been progressive educational agendas—student voice as an example—making learning and teaching more local and challenging teachers’ personal and epistemological authority. David Lusted (1986) contends that this is to do with the political Right’s “clear sense of its pedagogy” and “the need to construct, adapt and translate its rhetoric for different groups at changing moments”, which allows it to “[maintain] its power” (p. 7).

These neoliberal appropriations shifted the focus away from structural inequalities and placed them on the individual (Arnot, 2006; Davies & Bansel, 2007, p. 256; Francis & Hey, 2009).

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26 I name the website an advertisement since it provides information for potential partner districts about the professional development ‘product’ they offer. Obtaining contracts with districts across the United States is how they sustain themselves as an organization, so they need to be active in attracting possible partnerships.
This suggests, then, that the neoliberal effects on students, teachers, and education have been regressive, where schools are used to produce docile subjects who will work for the neoliberal state. While assuming individual choice and responsibility, most troubling is that these conditions are masked under progressive and transformative approaches; individuals are now so focused on performing the “right” subjectivity, of becoming recognizable, that it becomes difficult to recognize the manipulating structures and restraints on their “choices” (Davies & Bansel, 2007).

Within neoliberalism the individual is produced as “the entrepreneur of the self”; flexible, resourceful, and able to remake her/himself to meet the needs of a dynamic, meritocratic global economy. Within this construction, society has a duty only to offer not ensure opportunity. (Francis & Hey, 2008, p. 226, authors’ emphasis)

TLC Student Voices, as advertised on the website, articulates itself as providing students with opportunities to be a part of transforming their underperforming—in many cases “failing”—schools. The responsibility for change, in this neoliberal framework, rests with the students, through their willingness to participate in TLC Student Voices. Within this framework there is an assumed “will to participate” (Bragg, 2007; see also Lusted, 1986) that is beyond question. As long as the opportunity is provided, the organization, the school, and the government can wipe their hands of responsibility. In other words, the students, through this framing of student voice, take personal responsibility for transcending structural inequities and the constraints of ongoing marginalization (Francis & Hey, 2008). In a double move, students are used to transform their schools while the opportunities for them to “voice” themselves work to improve the “image” of the school: “Here neo-liberalism has incorporated the concept of pupil voice to strengthen the commodification of education” (Arnot, 2006, p. 407).
What kinds of voices are imagined as elicitable within these conditions, and what voices are constrained, managed, surveilled, and disciplined? This is a question that I will address more thoroughly in the next section; however, I want to amplify the necessity (as painful as it is for me to locate it as a necessity) of this work in collusion with neoliberal frameworks engaged by TLC. TLC is, quite frankly, doing its job “preparing students to compete in a changed, neo-liberal climate” (Bragg, 2007, p. 353), and it may be argued that it does it well (districts continue to reach out to them to form partnerships, and they are often reported as the cutting edge of contemporary educational reform in Urban schools27). As Bragg continues, “but this does raise questions about how far this middle-class project of the self... goes, who is excluded from it, and the class and gender basis of its appeal” (p. 353). To her points, I would also add the Euro-White colonial project of the self, as it is constitutive of the middle-class overlay of contemporary education (see for example, Bourdieu & Passeron, 2000/1977).

As I have mentioned already, thinking through these conflicting moments of (re)production of an impossible subject position for the marginalized students in TLC’s student voice work, as well as feelings that something has to be done, drove me to find a space to facilitate my own articulation of student voice. However, I was not prepared for the forces into which I would be pulled (if I was ever outside of them) and made complicit, within the very same neoliberal frame I wanted to challenge. By approaching a community center, Wycliffe St. Albans, I thought my chances of being able to work outside conventional educational (read neoliberal) frameworks would be greater than if I were to work with a school. Simultaneously though, I felt I had to position myself as having “expertise” by identifying myself as a certified

27 As noted on their website through quotes from prominent educational theorists as well as media coverage.
and experienced teacher. As I strategically invoked my experience as a high school teacher to validate my proposed partnership with WSA, I imagined how I might present my work to the director and the programs’ committee, the gatekeepers who would allow me in or shut the door to this project. It is with significant discomfort that I write this piece, because it challenges how I want(ed) to imagine myself as a critical, poststructural feminist anti-racism pedagogue.

In two separate documents, prepared for two different meetings with those who would decide whether or not what I wanted to do would meet the needs of Wycliffe St. Albans, I introduced the director and the programs’ committee to “student voice” (see Appendix A for an example of one of the documents). I shared what student voice would “do” for the organization, how WSA would benefit from a student voice initiative. In a section entitled “Why WSA?” I wrote, “WSA’s high school program is unique in its present structure. Through Student Voice commitment, WSA can deepen and expand its influence in the academic successes of its students, as well as strengthen its relationship with the community.” Returning to this “promise” still makes me uncomfortable. It is stated with a determination framed by conventional articulations of “lesson and unit planning”, in which we can know in advance what a particular unit or lesson will do (see, for example, Davies, 2009; Fendler, 1998). The second point I make remains just as unsettling for me:

Student Voice initiatives are making their presence known worldwide, particularly in the United States, England, and Australia. Presently, Ontario and Alberta are the only provinces in Canada that have provincial mandates to include Student Voice initiatives, as well as provincial-wide organizations to support the work. This opens the possibility for WSA to become a frontrunner in educational reform efforts in Quebec. (Student Voice Info Sheet WSA Programs Committee, February 16, 2012, see Appendix A)
Not only does this second point make bold promises, but it presents the work as unique, or new, something that is not already out there, as if it is removed from any sense of broader conversations, and something that can build on a provincial reputation for WSA. So the question becomes, what is the purpose of the student voice work? Who benefits? Again we are faced with neoliberal marketization through student voice.

I found as I was preparing these documents that, for myriad reasons, I struggled to move away from this articulation, which I considered necessary to get my foot in the door. This is not to say that I was intentionally misleading the administration, but rather, I felt I needed more time to come into a different articulation that would still appeal to the needs of WSA. I ended each Student Voice Info Sheet with a description of the “benefits” of student voice work:

**Benefits**

With all the forms of student voice, there are varying degrees to which the students’ voices can be heard. The literature suggests that the more involved students are, the more likely some of the following aspects will emerge:

- **Various skills are built** through student voice work such as teamwork, communication, negotiation, *enterprise*, planning skills, leadership, *democracy*, agency, decision-making, *reflexivity* about learning and the self, and meta-cognition.

- **Community building** – building of relationships, trust and *responsibility to themselves and the community*

- **Youth development** – preparation for life after high school: leadership, decision-making (Student Voice Info Sheet WSA Programs Committee, February 16, 2012, see Appendix A)
I have put particular phrases in italics to amplify the underpinning neoliberal rhetoric I engaged to make my student voice project seem appealing. I tried to keep at the forefront of my Student Voice Info Sheets the question: What would make an institution want to engage student voice?

I find my articulation bound to disembodied neoliberal imperatives of self-actualization and individual responsibility for socio-historical constructs, both of which require a certain de-racination through dehistoricizing contemporary conditions. Students, when given the opportunity for voice, will become self-regulating responsible owners of their learning and their community, as I amplify in the Benefits section above (Cook-Sather, 2002, p. 10; Davies & Bansel, 2007; Mitra, 2004, p. 653). But who or what becomes the beneficiary of this particular articulation of student voice projects? Through student voice efforts as positioned in this way, students are both the inheritors of failing schools, and they are expected to take responsibility for that failure. I find myself bound to the disembodied neoliberal co-optation of student voice as a curricular tool designed to cultivate enterprising student subjects (Arnot, 2006, p. 407; Cook-Sather, 2006, p. 382; Davies & Bansel, 2007; Fielding, 2004b, p. 198; Francis & Hey, 2008, p. 226). Sara Bragg (2007), considering the ways in which these disembodied neoliberal impulses have informed a particular governmentality within student voice, writes:

. . .such projects may be read as attempts to instill norms of individualism, self-reliance and self-management, which resonate with new configurations of power and authority under neo-liberalism, respond to specific debates about school standards, effectiveness and competition, and help construct young people as reflexive “knowledge workers” (p. 343).
She continues later to state, “…autonomisation and responsibilisation are key strategies of neoliberalism, encouraging action on the self, by the self as a means of ensuring individual well-being” (p. 354).

These conditions relationally shape the possibilities and limitations for pedagogy, and together, these circulating neoliberal tendencies and attachments in relation to our pedagogical stances shape the conditions of possibility for student voice. In stating this, however, and as the next two chapters amplify through questions of affect and desire, I am always already looking for the spaces where these boundaries are leaky, where difference refuses to be contained within the stated conditions. In the next section, I address this interplay to consider what voicings were made recognizable within each of the student voice practices.

**Framing Students: Pedagogical Identity Offerings**

Teachers and students are both inheritors and contributors to this neoliberal framework of “failing schools” in both Newark, NJ, and Montreal, QC (although I do not believe that the same language is engaged in both sites to make similar points). Both teachers and students are expected to take responsibility for socio-historical, epistemological, ideological, and material constraints. (I intend this idea to be one reading of the title of this section, in that students are framed for something they did not do. How does that play into the particular identities offered to students by way of student voice pedagogies?) This is one way student voice enters the picture: teachers take up a particular pedagogical tool that is “proven” to improve their students’ performances; students take up ownership and responsibility for their learning outcomes. In both instances, teachers and students take up the neoliberal injunction to prove oneself as a legitimate
being by cultivating enterprising selves. As noted, this model of student voice has been
positioned away from its emancipatory goals towards a technology of school improvement
(Bragg, 2001; Bragg & Manchester, 2012; Fielding, 2001). Engaging in the construction of
student voice and teacher ↔ student relations within this schooling epoch means not only
asking how we are positioned within these interwoven neoliberal discourses (student voice,
conventional schooling and education reform, and neoliberal ideologies more broadly), but also
how the discourses are taken up and rearticulated within local subjects’ work to (re)locate
themselves within shifting, contradictory positions and relations (see, for example, Davies 2003;
I also address this more in Chapter 7 on Desire). In this section I speak to the relation between
the governing discourses and the pedagogies taken up within possibilities for pedagogy and
identity.

As a system, policy and governance frames and sets directions and possibilities
and constraints for students, teachers, and schools, and the relativities and
comparisons between schools and students are also part of the meaning or
significance of what is done in any particular classroom. (Yates, 2009, p. 24)

Within this conversation, I also hint at the long history of acknowledging the different
pedagogical positions taken up by teachers in schools, variously situated by way of race and
class inscriptions of the student population (see for example Anyon, 1997; Finn, 1999; Willis,
1977). In this section, then, I address the relation to the particular socio-historical context of
student voice as it came to shape the pedagogical positions in each site. Of utmost importance is
how students are framed within each pedagogy or, thinking through Ellsworth (1997), who the
pedagogy addresses the students to be.
Pedagogical dilemmas: framing students in WSA.

Below is a journal entry from my participatory action research internship at WSA. I share this journal to amplify the inter-connection and relationality between institutional and structural frameworks and personal decisions. While this entry focuses on the relationship between a teachers’ engagement with a class and student’s ability to do well in that class, I also infer a relationship between the underpinning ideological and epistemological frameworks of schooling and education and a teacher’s pedagogy.

Jasmin reached across the table and dipped a carrot into the ranch dressing, “What’s the difference between institutional and individual again?” We are categorizing quotes from an academic article about why students leave high school without diplomas for our research internship. Jasmin, with her candid and forthcoming personality, has been struggling with making this distinction, and Nyasha, who has tried to explain it to her several times now, changes the conversation. Nyasha is always the most vocal at trying to keep the group on track, and while we decided later that not all experiences can be so neatly classified into one or the other category, she was determined to try to make it work. Maybe she assumed that if it was an assignment given by “a teacher”, it had to work. She shows how the quote on the card she is holding has a phrase that she underlined, “What’s ‘pedagogic relationships’?” she asks. The rest of the girls look up towards me; most of the time I tried to let them sort out their questions amongst themselves, but I decided to engage their query this time. I considered this as a challenge for me to come into an articulation of pedagogy: “It’s the way that teachers interact with the class” I begin, “for instance, do some of your teachers stand at the board and write notes down talking the whole time, while other teachers have you in groups working with your peers?” I wanted to say more, but the students became animated sharing stories of different teachers of theirs. Jasmin finally tells a story of a teacher who always
has a McDonald’s iced coffee, and how she has told some students that they are stupid in front of the whole class, and she’ll just sit there and drink her coffee while the students “work”.

After these stories the girls decided that pedagogic relationships are institutional factors and that the way that teachers treat the students can cause some students to feel uncomfortable and alienated. We discussed what might happen to the students who skip the class that Jasmin was talking about, and the girls determined that it could cause them to fall behind on grades and credits, which might lead to them feeling like they should drop out, so even when we talk about students’ grades it may not be that they are unable to do the work, but that there are other factors involved. This further complicated the distinction between the categories of institutional and individual factors.

(WSA Journal, July 16, 2012)

During the session before the activity described above, I asked the youth participants to share their initial assumptions/understandings of why students drop out: “what are your assumptions about dropping out? Who drops out?” I remember feeling particularly discouraged by their responses, as they seemed to take up the dominant discourses on dropping out that placed the responsibility with the student who decided to leave school early\(^2\) (Dei & Holmes, 1995; Fine,

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\(^2\) In Quebec, the issue of high school retention (as it is termed locally) was circulating through the media as well as particular initiatives taken up by philanthropists in partnerships with the education system (I primarily engaged conversations that were happening within and around the English board in Montreal both as all but one of the youth participants went to English schools and also because of my limited knowledge of French). The following texts serve as examples of the kinds of conversations circulating that the youth participants picked up and made their own through narratives of their own experiences: Gouvernement du Québec, Ministère de l’Éducation (2004). Student Flow from Secondary School to University. [Quebec]: Author.

Ménard, L. J. (2009). Beyond the numbers: A matter of the heart—Shoulders to the wheel: what Quebec can do to reduce the dropout rate.

Action group on student retention and success in Quebec. (2009). Knowledge is power: Toward a Quebec-wide effort to increase student retention.
1991). After journaling about their assumptions, I asked them to share. Asha said dropping out is because of “ignorance, not knowing better” and Imani quipped that “students who drop out are lazy, they don’t care”. In the spirit of the research we were going to do, she posed some questions she would like to ask those who left school without diplomas, “Do you think you made the right choice? How do you plan to build a future without a high school education?” I was struck; I didn’t actually expect that articulation. I, perhaps in too simplistic a manner, imagined that the participants, as members of marginalized communities, would take up more of a critical stance that engaged the problematics of racialization, social structures, and school as an institution (Chapter 8 takes up this struggle as a focal point for analysis). In fact, during the first session, we listened to several songs (KRS-One You Must Learn, Biggie Smalls, Juicy, and Lil’ Wayne Misunderstood) and engaged in just such conversations, pulling out themes from the songs of how stereotypes and hostile educational situations might lead someone to drop out for survival. So, what changed the articulation? Imani acknowledges that she understands how her thoughts contradict the conversations from the first session, but that while she could see what the artists were saying in their songs, it didn’t resonate with her experiences. David Lusted (1986) speaks to this dilemma of critical pedagogy when he shares that students may take up the critical discourses, but this does not change their behavior: “She [Judith Williamson] turned her attention to how students in her own experience could ritually reproduce the knowledge she offered without fundamentally shifting their frames of thought” (p. 9; see also O’Loughlin, 1995). This (re)framing challenges simplified notions of critical pedagogy (see for example, Luke, 1996;
Luke & Gore, 1992; Niesz, 2006), and is something which I take up more in the following two chapters.

How did I frame the students who were participating in the PAR research? What possibilities and limitations did that present for where the research might go? I also wanted to re-consider the role of PAR as an articulation of student voice. Am I a critical pedagogue in this moment? Do I take an active role in trying to change or transform students’ understandings of the social forces involved in pressuring students to drop out, or in the rearticulations of Fine (1991) and Dei & Holmes (1995), the forces pushing students out of school? What would that role look like within the constraints of the project? Thinking through the rupture, this pedagogical halt, that this moment, among others (see Chapter 8) presented to me, I return to how I imagine(d) this thing of student voice in relation to the goals of the project.

When propositioning WSA to allow me into their organization for my own growth, as well as hopefully for their benefit, I struggled to find a way to articulate my belief that for us (those in power, adults, decision makers, dominant bodies) to truly be able to listen to the voices of youth/students, we had to be prepared to change the way we listen and perhaps even change who we imagined ourselves and our students to be (Bragg, 2001; Cahill, 2007; Cook-Sather, 2002, 2006; Delpit, 1988; Fielding, 2001b). Yet I struggled with the articulation of the participants because I believed they ought to be more critical by how I imagined them to be, located through our previous conversations as well as my imagined location for them, and I was uncomfortable with the contradictions. I framed them in a way that worked for my politics and struggled when those politics were confronted with neoliberal articulations of self-actualization and responsibility. I was faced with the ways in which I, too, took up (strategically or not) neoliberal discourses through an anti-oppression, critical pedagogical stance. I was faced with
questions of how knowledge resides in particular bodies, but also particular articulations and performatives, of how knowledge comes to be classified and given currency. In other words, the youths’ articulations about who drops out in many ways turned the mirror back on me. It challenged some ease of a critical pedagogue approaching a classroom of students who are in need of knowing “how things really are”, and me as already “critical” and therefore capable of bringing about transformation in the ways students imagine the world to be. Here I am thinking through conversations within feminism that consider the ways in which the White feminist or the critical pedagogue locate themselves as already having achieved some finite criticality, overlooking the in process-ness of criticality as well as reifying particular relations of power (see for example Collins, 2000; Luke, 1996; Luke & Gore, 1991; Mohanty, 2003; Moraga & Anzaldua, 1983). Simultaneously, I was confronted with unwittingly locating the burden of change and difference on the backs of racialized others (Collins, 2000; hooks, 1991; Mohanty, 2003; Moraga & Anzaldua, 1983). How have I become implicated in the conventional teacher←→student relationship by way of desiring to do things to “passive” students? I thought my impulse towards student voice was situated differently. When I re-consider my hopes for student voice—that we learn to listen differently to those articulations, body movements, circulating affects, particularly those that are outside of or marginal to the classificatory system ordering schooling and education—I am particularly discomforted with these moments of schooling-as-usual.

Pedagogical dilemmas: framing students in TLC.

Gloria, the facilitator of TLC Student Voices, had different goals for her student voice project. In alignment with the broader goals of TLC to make sure that every student can meet the
neoliberal market needs outlined by the Common Core State Standards, her intention was to teach the students the (hegemonic) language of teaching and learning through the discourses engaged by TLC: cognitive science, mediated learning, and meta-cognition. More specifically, Gloria believes that marginalized youth, youth labeled as “urban”, can succeed within the system; they just need to be taught how. Her approach is reminiscent of African American education theorist Lisa Delpit (1988), who argues that the rules of the culture of power need to be explicitly taught to those who may not otherwise have access to them. As an African American identified educator herself and mother of twins, Gloria actively tries to advocate for marginalized youth, including recognizing the need to increase representation in curriculum. We were in the car one morning, driving from the hotel to the middle school, when Gloria shared a story of a book sale at her then 5-year-old children’s school. She approached one of the coordinators of the book sale and offered to help them bring in more books that speak to African American experiences, as well as books that are written by self-identified African American authors. In this moment I interpreted her desire to shift the representational spaces within the dynamics of conventional education rather than to alter them. I understood this moment as an additive politics: if we simply add culturally diverse literature to the current curriculum, that is enough (Dei, 1999, 2008b; Mohanty, 2003).

The student voices project as organized by the broader TLC agenda, and Gloria’s framing of marginalized youth, therefore, was not about transforming or challenging the socio-historical structures shaping the contours of who these marginalized youth may imagine themselves to be, but who the organization imagines the students to be. When students involved in the TLC Student Voices project approached any critical articulation, they were effectively silenced. I previously shared (see Chapter 1) an incident where a student shouted “cracker”, and Gloria shut the conversation down rather than engaging it. As I mentioned earlier, this was not an isolated
moment. There were particular performatives required of the students that compelled a (self-) disciplining or management of race. Gloria, it seemed, wanted to prove that even these students can successfully perform a dominant articulation, so she provided them with “speaking frames” to organize their responses to questions posed to them. A speaking frame is a fill in the blank statement for which the students are asked to engage a pre-ordained phrasing and plug in particular words. Some might claim this to be a scaffolding method, and when considering the goals of this student voice project—to teach the students the language of teaching and learning—it seems to support a particular purpose. The youth involved in the project took up the speaking frames and articulated themselves into the imagined marginalized-turned-dominant articulate selves of the project.

In the next chapter (Chapter 7), I engage in a possible reading of why the students might want to take up and perform the identity offerings presented in the pedagogy of TLC Student Voices, to complicate the slip into an oversimplified interpretation that begins and ends with reproduction. Simultaneously, the reproductive aspects ought not be overlooked. In stating that teachers need to “let the students take the lead,” Gloria ensured that the possible articulations were managed, disciplined, mediated. Youth in general, but marginalized youth in particular, are a group too frequently seen as wild and woolly, in need of discipline and management to come out of their “otherness” into civility (see for example Baker, 1998; Fendler, 1998; Steinberg, 2014). This is operationalized through the normalization of conventional schooling and education, which also, then, produces those marked as deviant others.

As the person on the ground, representing TLC in the partnership with the middle-school, Gloria took up an expert position; she had strategies that were proven to improve the school’s AYP and address their needs, and she imparted those strategies to the teachers and students. Her
practices, in this model, were beyond questioning, which reproduced a particular banking model of education (Freire, 1970) with TLC as the knowers and the school as in need of knowing; they were “failing” because they didn’t have the “correct” knowledge. This forms a particular relationship with the students and teachers in the school that suggests “we have the strategies/tools that you need to make the improvements necessary to bridge the opportunity gap.” Success in this model is framed by mimicry, the taking up of TLC discourses. The research team interpreted the students and teachers, as noted, to be quite successful in this mimicry! The role of language is taken as singular and homogenous, co-opting itself within an authoritarian script. What voices does this make possible? What articulations are recognizable within this framework? Frighteningly, as Bhabha (1994) articulates, “. . . mimicry emerges as one of the most elusive and effective strategies of colonial power and knowledge” (p. 85). He continues, “. . . then colonial mimicry is the desire for a reformed, recognizable Other, as a subject of difference that is almost the same, but not quite” (p. 86, emphasis added).

Through her use of the speaking frame as a scaffolding mechanism, Gloria’s pedagogy projected a tacit distrust of the students’ articulations. She offered an articulation that held the promise of bringing the students up, out of their already easily dismissed interpretations in teaching and learning, all through the undertaking of voice. Through my pedagogical approach, which attempted a “clearing of pedagogical space to make room for discussion, for thinking. . .” (Gallagher, Nteliolgou, & Wessels, 2013, p. 19), we will see how room existed for the students to voice in different registers within the project (see Chapter 8), as opposed to having to articulate differently outside of the student voice space (see Chapter 7).
Pedagogic Voice, Difference and Recognizability: Constituting Student Voice(s)

[T]he aim of the pedagogy was not simply to produce skills or knowledge or competencies, but more broadly to fashion a certain type of person who would fit the world in a certain way. (Yates, 2009, p. 24)

In the previous section, I have shown how who we imagine our students to be is present in our pedagogical mode of address. Who/what is made to be recognizable within student voice is deeply sutured in the interplay between broader neoliberal contours of schooling and education, the specific goals of the student voice projects, who one imagines students to be, and how that shapes and is shaped by pedagogy. In this chapter, I address the ways in which the above constellation of forces, imperatives, affects and desires shaped our (my and Gloria’s) pedagogies, and what voicings were produced as recognizable within those pedagogies. I engage “. . .the dynamic between who students are (and what is involved in affirming that) and what they are being drawn into (and what is important in relation to the knowledge skills, development and opportunities they might gain through schools)” (Yates, 2009, p. 21, author’s emphasis). While student voice initiatives have been promoted as a strategy to engage students who are marginalized and “at risk”, much of the literature on student voice positions students as a unified whole who are, as a singular category, marginalized within society (Fielding, 2004; James, 2007) and who wind up listening to the voices that are more easily recognized (Bragg, 2001, 2007; Fielding, 2001b; Silva, 2001). The work that focuses on marginalized students, while it may be well intentioned, concentrates on changing the conduct of students as individual members of “risky” populations. The voicings offered through student voice pedagogies have been said to
tend toward a middle class, White articulation (Arnot, 2006; Bragg, 2001, 2007; Silva, 2001), in many ways reproducing the unrecognizability of other articulations, of other bodies, and of other experiences. Thinking through this prominent view in the literature, I turn my attention to consider the voicings made possible through the pedagogies of both student voice projects. In the next two analysis chapters, I follow up on these points by engaging affect (Chapter 7) and desire (Chapter 8) as analytics. In both student voice projects with which I was involved, marginalized students were deliberately sought after: through TLC they were believed to be able to modify their articulation/language and take up the hegemonic language of teaching and learning. Through the PAR internship at WSA, I hoped for a different articulation in an effort to make changes to the broader relationships within the organization, only to be confronted with hegemonic articulations.

I had intended in this chapter to amplify what voicings were elicited, what voicings were made recognizable, what voicings were legitimated through the pedagogies in both student voice initiatives. I now want to look ahead to the subsequent two chapters, which trouble a simplified reading of how students take up what is offered to them through the pedagogical voices. In other words, in this discussion I am weary of an over-essentialized reading of the voices present in each site. If teachers and students are inheritors of neoliberal hegemonic schooling and education, as I suggest in the current chapter, we ought to consider the often-unnoticed pull towards reproduction. I will share a passage from Sara Ahmed (2006b) in which she unpacks and theorizes this question of inheritances and reproduction:

In a way, thinking about the politics of “lifelines” helps us to rethink the relationship between inheritance (the lines that we are given as our point of arrival into familial and social space) and reproduction (the demand that we return the gift of the line by extending that line). It is not automatic that we reproduce what we
inherit, or that we always convert our inheritance into possessions. We must pay attention to the pressure to make such conversions. We can recall here the different meanings of the word “pressure”: the social pressure to follow a certain course, to live a certain kind of life, and even to reproduce that life can feel like a physical “press” on the surface of the body, which creates its own impressions. We are pressed into lines, just as lines are the accumulation of such moments of pressure. . . (p. 17, author’s emphasis)

What pressures did we feel as we designed and enacted our student voice pedagogies? What pressures did the students feel as they participated in these spaces, presented as alternative to schooling-as-usual? Embodied histories of what it means to do schooling and education, neoliberal demands and institutional imperatives, left impressions on our bodies that shaped the student voice pedagogies and how the students learned. As this research is within an autoethnography, there are limited means through which I may truly engage a third crucial element of pedagogy as articulated by Lusted (1986), that of “how one learns”. “How one teaches is therefore of central interest but, through the prism of pedagogy, it becomes inseparable from what is being taught and, crucially, how one learns” (p. 3). So, the consideration of pedagogy in this chapter is necessarily partial and incomplete; however, I argue that a complete knowledge of the relationship of teaching and learning is an impossible promise of mainstream articulations of pedagogy (see Ellsworth, 1997). As Britzman (2003) states,

Pedagogy demands and constructs complex social relationships. Through exchange, pedagogy becomes productive, constituting the forms of knowing, the conditions for knowing, and the subjectivities of knowers. Pedagogy points to the agency that joins teaching and learning (p. 54, emphasis added).
In the end, what I am getting at in this discussion is the ways in which “*any* student voice is largely what we make it, that it has no prior existence and it cannot ‘act’ alone, whether to improve education, offer emancipation, or any of the other virtuous aims with which it has been tasked” (Bragg & Manchester, 2012, pp. 145-146). This was, and in many ways still is, a difficult realization for me in working through this study. Perhaps I had put too much pressure on my hopes for the transformative possibilities of student voice work. “Hope is an investment that the ‘lines’ we follow will get us somewhere. When we don’t give up, when we persist, when we are ‘under pressure’ to arrive, to get somewhere, we give ourselves over to the line” (Ahmed, 2006b, p. 18). I was looking for something in student voice, and while this chapter comes to consider the pressures that shape what is possible for student voice, in the next chapter I reflect on the impossibility of some closed and totalizing influence. As I noted above, in the next chapter, I read one of my experiences with TLC through affect as an analytic, bringing to the surface that which is easily (dis)missed through reproductive theories of education.
Chapter 7
Affect Matters: Permutations in Student Voice Encounters

In this chapter, I engage affect as an analytic to revisit two mo(ve)ments in the research with Teaching and Learning Collaborative (TLC). Both take place after the students taught a lesson in a grade 8 classroom and engaged in differently oriented reflexive practices. The first reflection initiated by the students occurred spontaneously, organically, in the hallway (student space); the second was organized by Gloria and took place in the classroom (teacher space) where the student voice work was facilitated. By addressing matters of affect in pedagogical encounters, I suggest that affect matters in reconceptualizing that which at first may appear to be a closed system of neoliberalism within TLC, as I outlined in the previous chapter. In revisiting these moments, we witness the students’ refusal to be consumed by the neoliberal logics and how they work from, with, in, through, and against hegemonic imperatives. At the same time, I engage affect as a site to understand the ways in which neoliberal projects work to draw the students into alignment within their logics through the promise of voice. Affect, as I suggest in this chapter, comes to govern what is possible to voice and speaks to how students are “brought into line” and how they align themselves with neoliberal promises.

In the following discussion, then, I attend to the roiling maelstrom of affects in educational spaces. I propose that affect matters, that affect is a central part of educational experiences that is decentered at best, and more often dis-acknowledged through conventional frameworks of schooling and education. In attending to affect, I show the transformative

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29 I am thinking through Nigel Thrift’s (2004) articulation of “roiling maelstrom” in relation to educational spaces, as he writes, “Cities may be seen as roiling maelstroms of affect” (p. 57). I feel that the phrase encapsulates both the presence of affect in educational spaces as well as what happens when affect is engaged, stirred up.
possibilities for pedagogues and learners to be able to exceed the contours, confines, configurations and boundaries of hegemonic framings of education. In other words, I suggest that recentering affect in one’s pedagogical engagements presents possibilities to do schooling and education differently. Elspeth Probyn writes through Deleuze to address how thinking of affect as an assemblage in educational spaces makes room to “explain that always quirky, always unknowable combination that is the classroom” (Probyn, 2004, p. 37): “You do not know beforehand what a body or a mind can do, in a given encounter, a given arrangement, a given combination” (Deleuze, 1992, quoted in Probyn, 2004, p. 37). What Probyn and Deleuze suggest is that the instrumental framework that has captured and contained—even stagnated—conventional schooling and education misses the very “this-ness” of educational encounters.

Within the instrumental framework of schooling and education, the epistemological, curricular, and pedagogical understandings answer to accountability and a flat conceptualization of equity dehistoricize schooling experiences—if everyone gets the same thing it is equitable, and if we want to pay attention to particular groups’ needs, we are seen as seeking special interests, rather than addressing historical constructs and relationships. The instrumental framework is represented by standardized tests (epistemologically, knowledge is facts that are transferrable from some knower to the learner who doesn’t know but who absorbs and repeats back those facts through assessable means). Curriculum is designed by outside experts, with a final product, which is known in advance, shaping the content and activities to get the learners to that measurable end, which is merely delivered or implemented by teachers (pedagogy30).

30 I hesitate to even call this ‘pedagogy’ since I view pedagogy as much more engaged (see for example, Britzman, 2003; Ellsworth, 1997; hooks, 1994; Lather, 1991) and dynamic than implementation of externally conceptualized materials allows for, however, this is the overdetermined commonsense understanding that orientates pedagogical possibilities in contemporary teaching and learning.
Poststructural feminist anti-racism, as well as Deleuze and Probyn cited above, understand equity as requiring a substantial focus on the socio-historical conditions that contour what is possible for different peoples.

The instrumental mode of education misses the incommensurability of pedagogical relations, and I propose that what is needed is to face and embrace the embodiment of teaching and learning for transformation.

These aspects of classroom life reveal how assemblages of bodies and affects continually create new connections. Every small element matters in these “machinations” (Rose, 1998) of bodies and affects: facial expressions, body movements, use of language, eye contact and other elements that we are not aware of when we teach or learn. (Zembylas, 2007, p. 25, emphasis added)

Poststructural feminist anti-racism education at once points to the societal and structural oppressions in society, and amplifies the importance of centering lived experiences of (particularly marginalized) bodies (see for example, Dei, 2005; Dei & Simmons, 2010; Schick, 2010; Schick & St. Denis, 2003; Wahab, 2005). It is to the latter that I turn in this discussion of embodiment; experiences are lived, they are embodied. I suggest that this question of embodiment could be disruptive to hegemonized Enlightenment narratives of progress, objectivity and individuality. Embodiment, as I present here, is trans-historical, assembled through space and time, and acutely social, while it also has an onto-individual spin. With all the complexity of embodiment, I focus this discussion on affect as embodied in educational spaces:

Affect registers on the body. It is carried by facial expressions, tone of voice, breath and sounds, which do not operate as signs, yet are not mere epiphenomena. And, precisely because affect “affects” bodies, it can be transmitted, and is intimately social (MacLure, 2010, p. 284, quoted in Mulcahy, 2012, p. 12).
As Zembylas (2007) stated above, we may not always be aware of these affective assemblages and what they do in educational spaces. I suggest that attending to affect in our pedagogy can shift the terrain for anti-oppressive, anti-hierarchical social relations. Again, to quote Zembylas (2007), “Recognizing the materiality of the teacher as a ‘body of knowledge,’ . . . is important in understanding how bodies and affect invite performances of teaching and learning as enactments of transformations” (p. 28, emphasis added).

While my research engages student voice projects with a focus on teacher-student relationships, I am interested in the affects of teaching within the multiple contexts of capitalism, colonialism, and neoliberalism. I am interested in how we teach and learn alternatively in an epoch of universalism, accountability and commodification, and how we de-butress the imperial, standardizing, neoliberal classifications of teaching and learning through our pedagogical decisions. As I discussed in Chapter 6, student voice, as a particular movement in contemporary education that seeks to take seriously the voices of students for various goals—to improve standardized test scores, to reshape teacher’s pedagogy, also often with the hopes of improving test scores; to enhance the attractiveness and marketability of a school in a time of school choice, to prepare youth for democratic society, to encourage autonomy and individuality, to transform conventional educational practices, and the list goes on—has the propensity to (re)encode these neoliberal agendas. One of the challenges for educators, when legislative imperatives view achievement in terms of high-stakes test scores, is to find ways for student voice to be understood, recognized, and archived beyond the neoliberal confines. In an effort to engage the non-totalizing possibilities within the neoliberal framework, in this chapter I suggest that we take up what affect does in educational encounters as a method to (re)imagine hegemonic schooling and education. I approach the discussion in this chapter by first situating affect, focusing on how one might come to recognize affect in pedagogical encounters. I then trace the historical location
of affect as a crucial mechanism of colonialism and neoliberalism, and I suggest that in bringing a renewed focus on affect as embodied in our pedagogies, we engage in counter-hegemonic practices. I then engage a particular set of data from the research, the two reflections after the student teaching experience with Teaching Learning Collaborative, to animate a discussion of the relationship between affect and the possibilities for voice and subjectivity to offer a reflection of how affect works in our pedagogical encounters. By (re)turning my attention to affect in student voice I believe possibilities for changing the discourse of student voice beyond closed neoliberal readings are presented.

**Situating Affect in Pedagogical Encounters**

In this section, I locate the way in which I conceptualize “affect”. First, I amplify the ways in which affect is always already present in educational encounters, whether or not there are attempts to contain, manage, discipline or ignore its presence. There is a materiality to affect, shaping what a body can do, how bodies can(not) inhabit spaces comfortably. This speaks to the matter of affect, while both this section and the next speak to how affect matters.

This study, oriented through the politics of poststructural feminist anti-racism, is grounded in a belief, in a hope for transformative teaching and learning. As such, my desires for the student voice projects noted in previous chapters, were towards possible transformative goals. The work of transformation requires movement, and for this reason, I wish to amplify the relations between affect, emotion, and movement before I speak to the ways in which the management of affect has also become the management of particular bodies. Affect is closely related to, although follows a different logic than emotion:
Emotion and affect—if affect is intensity—follow different logics and pertain to different orders. . . Emotion is qualified intensity, the conventional, consensual point of insertion of intensity into semantically and semiotically formed progressions, into narrativizable action-reaction circuits, into function and meaning. (Massumi, 1995, p. 88)

Emotion becomes the social, contextualized capturing consciousness and articulation of affect, and in this way it becomes difficult to separate the two (see also Hemmings, 2005, p. 551; Zembylas, 2007, p. 26). Affect is, beneath the surface, incommensurable, hard to pin down. “Indeed, you cannot read affects, you can only experience them” (O’Sullivan, 2001, p. 26). Due to their interconnection and to the difficulty of pinning down affect, I will address both in this discussion.

To transform necessitates movement, and the word emotion includes this sense of movement. Etymologically, emotion has roots in the Latin word emovere, meaning, “move out, remove, agitate”, and the 16th century French word emotion, meaning “a (social) moving, stirring, agitation” (from the Online Etymology Dictionary, my emphasis). Sara Ahmed (2004) writes,

Emotions are after all moving, even if they do not simply move between us. . . . Of course, emotions are not only about movement, they are also about attachments or about what connects us to this or that. . . Hence movement does not cut the body off from the “where” of its inhabitance, but connects bodies to other bodies: attachment takes place through movement, through being moved by the proximity of others (p. 11).

Relatedly, affect is also about movement, in the “Notes on the Translation and Acknowledgements” of A Thousand Plateaus, Brian Massumi unpacks how Deleuze and Guattari engage affect. “It is a prepersonal intensity corresponding to the passage from one
experiential state of the body to another and implying an augmentation or diminution in that body’s capacity to act” (Massumi, 1987, p. xvii, my emphasis). Affect has been articulated by those who theorize it as an intensity or a force (Massumi, 1995), “pre-linguistic” (Massumi, 1995; Navaro-Yashin, 2009, p. 12; O’Sullivan, 2001). In other words, it is felt before it is signified; affect is “extra-” or “non-discursive” (O’Sullivan, 2001); it is pre-social, prior to and beyond social signification. By this I mean ontological, immanent to the human condition, embodied (Massumi, 1995; O’Sullivan, 2001; Probyn, 2004; Zembylas, 2007), yet because affect can affect others there is a social aspect; affect connects us to the world (Hemmings, 2005; Mulcahy, 2012; O’Sullivan, 2001). Affect is located as being historically and contextually situated (Albrecht-Crane, 2005; Zembylas, 2007;), and importantly for this work, affect is corporeal (Albrecht-Crane, 2005; Boler, 1999; Mulcahy, 2012; Probyn, 2004; Thrift, 2004; Zembylas, 2007) and visceral, unreasonable (Gannon, 2009; Hicky-Moody and Malins, 2007; see also McDermott, 2014, p. 214). Affect is about movement and as such it is (can be) transformative.

As affect is embodied, it also occurs:

through the encounter of smell, sweat, flushes of heat, dilation of pupils, the impulses bodies pick up from each other, the contagions of which we know little, the sense of being touched without having been physically touched, of having seen without having physically seen. . . .(Puar, 2007, p. 190)

Some of the ways in which we read/interpret affect are through facial expressions, energies felt on the skin, body language and movement, tone of voice. Affect cannot be totally contained; it is leaky and in this way makes room to “explain that always quirky always unknowable combination that is the classroom” (Probyn, 2004, p. 37). In Puar’s (2007) articulation,
affect is a physiological and biological phenomenon, signaling why bodily matter matters, what escapes or remains outside of the discursively structured and thus commodity form of emotion, of feeling. . . .[A]ffect as what escapes our attention, as what haunts the representational realm rather than merely infusing it with emotive presence (p. 207, emphasis added).

How then do we discern affect? Cole (2013) suggests that when one enters a space, affect becomes “the atmosphere of the place, which has been produced by the historical and material presence that the institution emits” (p. 96). Affect fills the space through institutional and embodied histories, cultural memories of experiences with the historical institutional relations framing expectations for how to be. Affect also speaks to bodies in or out of place: it is through affect that we feel how much we belong in a space (see, Albrecht-Crane & Slack, 2007, p. 105; see also Ahmed, 2004 for a discussion on the ways in which emotion connects us), which is why the particular spaces of reflection, the hall and the classroom, are important elements in the interpretations of the students. “The classroom dynamic presents a form of affective literacy or literacies. . . .This is because the ways in which communication happens in the classroom demonstrates an affective map of the power flows in that context” (Cole, 2013, p. 94).

I suggest in this chapter that these aspects of affect are read and interpreted by the students, informing their differing articulations in the two post-teaching reflections. Tendencies, ways of being, acquired through repetition, of staying the course, following the lines that are already laid out for us, lure us into recognizability. If we are to seek transformation, we need to name, mark, and resist these forces. In the next section, I address the ways in which affect has historically been engaged as a crucial technology of colonialism, imperialism, neoliberalism, and the disciplining of particular bodies.
Neoliberal Affects and the Management of Race

Affect and emotion have been put to work as vital sites of colonialism, othering and marginalization. Affect is sticky, it sticks to particular bodies and creates communities or allows us to distance ourselves from some Others. As affect is sticky, it can also get stuck, reproducing socio-historical relationships and the possible subject locations made available to be taken up or imagined as recognizable by particular bodies (see Ahmed, 2004; Boler, 1999; Hemmings, 2005). Othered bodies—youth, non-white bodies, females, non-Judeo-Christian believers have all been constituted as irrational, uncivilized, *emotional* through Euro-Enlightenment and colonial discourses that circulate. The affects stuck to these bodies contaminate reason and rationality, both of which play a significant role in determining what “success” is in educational assessment. Hegemonic educational discourses espouse, “learn to control yourself and perhaps you can be(come) civilized and enter Euro-modernity”. When teaching, then, we are drawn into these models of success and recognizability. We embody these disciplinary regimes to show that “our students can learn too”. We learn to find ways to manage and discipline affective tremors in the classroom, particularly when we are teaching marginalized youth.

Neoliberalism in education has (re)coded these methods of management of Others by way of teaching and learning how to perform affect through the production of “the good student”, who is self-controlled, flexible, and enterprising. Students, within the market driven guidelines of neoliberalism, are produced as a marketable commodity. “[U]nder neoliberalism, there has been an intensification in the cultural standardization and organization of feelings and sentiments...” (Ramos-Zayas, 2011, p. 87). In other words, affect becomes epistemological, a knowledge system to which students, in order to be recognized as “the good student” (which is particularly racially and culturally imbued), ought to be capable of understanding and
performing. “The internalization of racial systems, or learning how race operates in particular contexts, requires the suppression of some emotions and the performance or expression of others” (Ramos-Zayas, 2011, p. 87).

I engage an example from the experience with TLC to animate the workings of neoliberal affects, an argument I return to later in the chapter. Gloria’s pedagogy grounded itself on the production of affirmation. After the students completed a task, we (all those in the room, including the researchers) were asked to share affirmations with the group. In this way, the students, in order to belong to the group, were offered a “compulsory happiness” to frame their articulation; there was little room to articulate a critical engagement with the experiences.

It has been noted that contemporary emotional norms in the United States favor “good cheer” . . .or “compulsory happiness” . . .that represents a cooling of emotions and discourage [sic] any emotional intensity by expecting a sociability and exchanged pleasantries as the everyday standard of social interactions in dominant middle class (white) contexts. (Ramos-Zayas, 2011, p. 89; see also Ahmed, 2010; Trainor, 2008)

Historically, those who complain, those who are critical of injustices, are located as creating the problem: anti-racism, in naming the workings of race, is said to make race an issue where it was not. Similarly, feminism, in naming the workings of patriarchy, is said to be creating the problem. We have to subscribe to the liberal myth of progress, to Enlightenment linear timelines that encourage us to believe that we are better off then we were in the past (see, for example, Ahmed, 2000; 2004; Gilroy, 2005; Smith, 1999). We ought to be happy for the promises of democracy, voice, and meritocracy; in relation to this study, the students ought to be happy for being invited into a space of student voice. There is an implicit assumption of a will to participate, and ungratefulness or deficit labeling for those who don’t want to play by the rules
(Ahmed, 2010; Bragg, 2007; Bragg & Manchester, 2012). As I show later in the chapter, however, students found ways to articulate outside of the affective boundaries drawn through Gloria’s affirmation pedagogy and the presence and expectations of the teachers and researchers present in the room affecting the space. As I have already said, affect is leaky; it cannot be contained completely; it seeps out and offers a space to consider the ways in which what is allowed to seep out shapes subjectivity. By engaging affect in this chapter, I intend to counter-narrativize those colonial tracings, to reclaim affect as a productive pedagogical site.

**Affect as a Counter-Hegemonic Epistemology**

Since Enlightenment, and in particular, since the work of Renee Descartes (1985), the mind and the body have been seen as distinct entities, as holding different places and different roles in one’s identity and social relations. This distinction is held in a binary, so that what the mind is the body is not and through time, the mind and the body have become attached to different bodies, different subjectivities, and different possibilities for being. Within universalizing discourses, the body became a site of control through disciplining emotions and affect. The mind, represented by cognition, rationality, and modern man, is where Truth and Knowledge are said to reside. The body, the corporeal, is made to be where danger lies; the body and emotion are represented as irrational and need to be suppressed, contained so they do not tarnish or contaminate reason (see also, Zembylas, 2007, p. 29). The body is where desire resides and desire, therefore the body, must be contained within the promises of neoliberalism. Kelly Oliver (2004) locates this division and hierarchization of the mind and the body as a form of colonialism. “Along with economic imperialism that divides the world into ‘haves’ and ‘have nots’, colonization brings with it affective imperialism that divides the world into the civilized,
those who have control over emotions, and the barbaric, those who don’t” (p. 48). A part of these circulating, universalized discourses works to attach affect to certain bodies as a method of Othering; women, children, racialized, queer, non-Judeo-Christian, socially disabled bodies are said to be more easily moved, obscuring rational judgment (see Ahmed, 2004). As Sara Ahmed (2004) writes,

The association between passion and passivity is instructive. It works as a reminder of how “emotion” has been viewed as “beneath” the faculties of thought and reason. To be emotional is to have one’s judgement affected: it is to be reactive rather than active, dependent rather than autonomous. (p. 3)

This mind/body logic has permeated contemporary education such that,

throughout most of the last two centuries, education has tended to render bodies as hidden and contained . . . suggesting that knowledge acquisition and cognition are essential non-corporeal and rational tasks . . . However, knowledge is not merely something to be “understood”; it is always felt and responded to emotionally and corporeally . . . (Zembylas, 2007, p. 20, author’s emphasis)

In many ways we are educated out of embodiment; we are educated into disembodied objective and objectifying relations with knowledge and each other. We are taught to theorize, not from lived experience, but from an intellectual, systematic, scientific, empirical and measurable way. Interestingly, while much of the work of hegemonic schooling and education focuses on the management, control, and production of the body and affect, they are said to be absent, inconsequential in the educational endeavor. Citing Grosz (1995, p. 33), Wanda Pillow (2000) writes that our bodies have become “sites of humanist prescription, places from which binaries are structured forming polemical categories that define them: ‘inside/outside, subject/object, surface/depth”’ (p. 201). Bodies have become regulated and contained, in attempts “to shy away from the messiness of the corporeal body—the lived experiences” (p. 200).
Through the discursive orientation of poststructural feminist anti-racism, I suggest that bodies matter, that affect matters, that “knowledge resides in the body and cultural memory” (Dei, 2005, p. 8; see also, Dei, 1993; Dei & Simmons, 2010; Wahab, 2005). Wahab (2005) reminds us that many counter-hegemonic epistemologies, including anti-racism education, are “grounded in the discourse of embodied knowledge (politically and historically positioned)” (p. 48). Similarly, Dei et al. (2000) note that affect is a form of knowledge, rather than the other side of the knowledge/emotion binary. So, my project in bringing affect back into focus in this chapter is twofold, to work as a counter-hegemonic epistemology within our pedagogies, as well as to see the ways in which these historical legacies produce a palimpsest, always partially present in our engagement with affect. We ought to attend to these tracings, these hauntings. In the next section, I offer a framework to think about the ethics of engaging affect, in particular relation to these histories.

Anti-Racism and An Ethics of Affect

The importance of affect in the classroom is inadequately considered in scholarship on pedagogy. . . .Scholarship on pedagogy has not explored the significance of affect as a primary element in understanding what happens in the classroom and in relation to the world. . . . This chapter proposes that cultural critics, activists, teachers, and scholars who are interested in progressive politics must find a way to address, both convincingly and rigorously, the struggles people wage in and over the affective plane in the educational arena and beyond. (Albrecht-Crane & Slack, 2007, p. 99-100)
How do we take up this call to convincingly and rigorously engage the importance of affect in our pedagogies without overlaying, or re-coding the hegemonic management of the body, of affect, of *Others*? How do we come to name and mark that which is incommensurable, that which is pre-signification? In the naming and marking of affect, how do we know if that is what others in the space feel? A body of literature speaks to the ways in which affect may be stirred up in counter-hegemonic pedagogies, and the strategies dominant bodies engage that wind up reproducing the status quo while appearing to be “dealing with the issues”. For example, *Everyday Anti-Racism*, edited by Mica Pollock (2008), presents almost 400 pages and 64 chapters that tend to name the difficult conversation that is race. In this, the contributors provide support and practical strategies for educational practitioners to think through in their respective locations. While this tool kit amplifies the necessity for having “courageous conversations” (Singleton & Cyndie, 2008), I find that such conversations wind up re-coding the status quo.

Continuing with the Singleton & Cyndie chapter, they write “Education should keep in mind that interracial conversations about race are always a bit dangerous, as they unleash emotions that we have all learned to bury” (pp. 18-19); however, they go on to make suggestions about safety and comfort for dominant bodies—who are less comfortable and less experienced talking about race (Tatum, 2003/1997)—a reification of White dominance. There are many seemingly mundane tactics engaged by dominant bodies to ensure *their* world is not challenged while appearing to participate in disruptive spaces. Quoting McIntyre, Solomon et al. (2005) present some of these strategies:

How uncomfortable the participants felt dealing with racism and used strategies such as derailing the conversation, evading questions, dismissing counter arguments, withdrawing from the discussion, remaining silent, interrupting speakers and topics and colluding with each other in creating a “culture of
niceness” that made it very difficult to “read the white world”. (McIntyre, 1997, quoted in Solomon et al., 2005, p. 156)

They go on to quote Brodkey to amplify the point that the “... din of common sense ... which cynically denies that difference matters, by dismissing it as superficial or maligning it as divisive” (Brodkey, 1995, quoted in Solomon et al., 2005, p. 157).

While this is a key conversation, what I want to consider in this chapter is what affect does in pedagogical encounters, how the impressions felt by the students mediate available articulations. However, as a pedagogue—particularly in my case as a White, cisgender female working with racially, sexually, economically, and religiously marginalized youth—we ought to know the limits of our capacities to appropriately read the affective tremors in our classrooms, what Cole (2013) calls “affective literacies”. By “appropriately”, I mean that I am less interested in proposing a singular strategy that would make for an “appropriate” reading; in fact, I believe that the correlative between how we may read affect and how someone else might feel is impossible. For one, naming affect comes to constitute affect, but also, affect is located in socio-culturally imbued individuals, and the energies and intensities are felt differently based on the experiences and expectations of that person. However, we can and should consider cultural memories of groups of people who have collective histories and experiences: “While affect may have its own linguistic and cultural logic, it is based on experience of a socially encumbered personhood, not simply a cultural interior-focused ‘self’” (Ramos-Zayas, 2011, p. 88). What does it mean, then, to name affect, or how do we come to read affective signs socio-culturo-historically?

Part of working with affect means recognizing affects, and so I propose taking caution in how we name affect. Affective signs do not present themselves as transparent; they are read
through our own affective experiences as well as through our relationship and understanding of the other bodies we engage with, and may be misinterpreted. Elspeth Probyn writes, “What constitutes an affective response is hugely complex, and is in part the result of an embodied history in which and with which the body reacts” (2004, p. 29). With respect to the embodiment of affect, I struggled to write this paper, as I wanted it to be grounded in the human and in experience; however, I was haunted by this question of naming affect for others. Simultaneously, I want to offer questions of pedagogic responsibility in attending to affect: “. . . we need to ask what type of affective response is appropriate in the classroom context” (Probyn, 2004, pp. 29-30), and how the appropriateness of particular responses shapes what can be voiced and how students are heard. In the next section, I present a discussion of the two post-teaching reflections, to uncover some of the ways in which affect worked in the TLC research.

Possibilities for Voice and Subjectivity Through a Consideration of Affect

Identity is one effect of affect, a capture that proposes what one is by masking its retrospective ordering and thus its ontogenetic dimension—what one was—through the guise of an illusory futurity: what one is and will continue to be. . . . If the ontogenetic dimensions of affect render affect as prior to representation—prior to race, class, gender, sex, nation, even as these categories might be the most pertinent mapping of or reference back to affect itself—how might identity-as-retrospective-ordering amplify rather than inhibit praxes of political organizing? (Puar, 2007, p. 215)
[A]ffect doubly articulates what happens inside the classroom with larger cultural and social struggles, and it does so without reducing those struggles to questions of identity. The vocabulary and concept of affect encourage recognition that bodies don’t always (or necessarily) respond as men, women, young, old, heterosexual, homosexual, teacher, student, and so on. Rather, bodies are individualized by particular affective thresholds and thus enact variable investments in social space. What “happens” in the classroom cannot be understood, therefore, without also taking into account affective investments that exceed the molar coding of institutionalized learning and the coding of bodies as particular molar identities. Paying attention to the affective dimension bursts the seams of the classroom and encourages us to address—more broadly—what Grossberg calls “the affective dimension of belonging, affiliation, and identification”. (Albrecht-Crane & Slack, 2007, p. 105)

I remember being struck by the very different, contradictory articulations the students in the TLC research offered one day as they reflected on the second lesson they taught, this time in a grade 8 classroom rather than the elementary classrooms where they had taught previously. I had my concerns about the way the student teachers were asked to organize their lessons; however, in the research there was little room to express any critical engagement with the curriculum or pedagogy of TLC, as noted earlier. When the student teachers, full of energy running up the stairs to the unused hallway in which the classroom where our group met was located, expressed that they would have taught the lesson differently if they felt there was space for them to creatively design the lesson (as opposed to sticking to the TLC strategies list), I was excited. They were generating key ideas about what to do differently for a more successful and engaging lesson for their peers. When we returned to the classroom, I was astounded that none of those
ideas were voiced and by the ways in which they re-located themselves as “the good student” who performs the proper “good cheer” and thus sidelines critical engagement.

In this section I share what I call soundbites from the data to animate the workings of affect in shaping who the students could be and how they could articulate. There were three teaching teams for this particular lesson, and each researcher went with a different team of student teachers to document the lesson. I went with the team who was to teach their lesson in the grade 8 class which has a school-wide reputation for being disruptive; in fact, they had many privileges taken away from them as a result of their said unruliness. Before the lesson, the students, some of them 8th graders themselves, were apprehensive about their ability to “control” the class, which was the dominant conversation in the focus group prior to the lesson implementation. The teacher who helped the students design their lesson was the same teacher whose class we went into, and after the lesson he stayed behind to take care of some things in the room. As a result, I wound up walking up the stairs with the student teachers, without the presence of any school officials, the other researchers, or Gloria. Without prompting, the students shared feedback on the lesson, joking with each other about how it went, and I took the opportunity to record their reflection. The first soundbite, titled “Impromptu Reflection”, is from this conversation.

There was a marked difference in both the students’ body language and overall energy in this impromptu reflection than in the second reflection, which I call the “organized reflection”. In the organized reflection, the students were asked to use a speaking frame (in which they simply fill in the blanks of a phrase that is prescribed). The students were asked to sit in a circle and share one at a time one thing that went well and one lesson learned; we were back in the classroom with all three participating teachers, Gloria, and the research team, and there was no
room for movement or dialogue. I will go into more details as I unpack how affect shaped what the students could say after we take a quick look at the reflections.

**Impromptu Soundbite**

Darrel: It was a’ight

Mairi: What was a’ight about it?

Darrel: They don’t listen (*His eyes to the floor*)

Shaquil: It was a good experience, it’s just that they didn’t listen. . .Like in a way, it seemed like they liked it, but then, if you think about it, it’s like they didn’t care

Mairi: What makes you say that?

Shaquil: (*Darrel looks at him with his eyebrows raised*) Like, while we was tryin’ to teach, they was like talking, laughing and off task

Later on in the conversation, they thought about what they could have done differently to get the students more involved.

Mairi: So, what could you have done, do you think you could have done something differently?

Shaquil: If I was a teacher, I could call security (*he smiles*)

Jayden: More creative, something more fun . . .

Shaquil: Something they like to do (*he picks up on Jayden’s comments*)

Jayden: Yeah

Mairi: Like what?

Shaquil: Hands on

Darrel: We should have made them do a roast, like, um, Dr. Martin Luther King. Like I think they would cooperate (*his face has eased up and he is looking at the camera and the others now).*

Jayden: Like come up and say what do you like about him and say . . .

Mairi: So that’s a roast? Darrel, that’s a really interesting idea, to do a roast of Dr. Martin Luther King. What kind of ideas might come out of that?

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31 When you roast someone, you “turn the heat on” them and you critically engage the person, you really have to know someone to do a roast. It is typically presented in jokes; you are putting someone on the spot and through jokes you unpack their possibilities and limitations.
Darrel: Cause that’s what they like doing anyway

Shaquil: Yeah, yeah, like hikin’ em’. Like, I think we did what we was supposed to do, it was just on their part that they didn’t do what they was supposed to do.

Mairi: So, what would you like to see happen in the classroom? What would you like to see when your teacher is up there teaching?

Shaquil: Everybody’s participating

Hussain: Yeah, not everybody talking, laughing

Jayden: Everybody paying attention

Shaquil: Everybody focused on the lesson, and not two people falling asleep and laughing

Jayden: Turning around to the person behind them

Mairi: So how do you think you can do that though? Do you have any ideas?

Shaquil: Like, we can’t control nobody

Jayden: Give them something to do with their hands

Shaquil: If you . . . you could be a role model, that’s not somebody’s gonna still listen to what’chu gotta say

Zion: Make the activity fun

Jayden: Like, give them something to do . . . draw a picture or something, make it that their objective is fun

Hussain: You gotta think about what you like to do, or what you have in common with others. So, whatever you want to do, that other people like to do

Mairi: So, when you were planning the lesson, did you think that the students were going to like the lesson?

Shaquil: Yeah

Hussain: Well, if I were to think about it more, I would never do it like that

Mairi: Really, so what would you have done differently now that you’ve had time to think about it?

Shaquil: Change the lesson, add more talking to the lesson for the students because that’s what they wanted to do, they wanted to talk. (Transcript, TLC, March 9, 2011)

In this organic reflection, the student teachers articulated themselves in several registers. Before I show the ways in which the overall affective contours of this reflective space diverged from the organized reflection, I share how even within the broader affective contours there were micro

32 Hiking is another term for critiquing someone, often in the form of sarcastic jokes.
affects circulating, which shaped what the students articulated. The students were well aware of how they were situated in relation to one another; for example, Shaquil is an outspoken, confident student who also takes up the “clown” or “comic relief” and simultaneously “leader” persona, while Darrel often hangs around him as a support figure, infrequently challenging Shaquil’s authority. Since this was a multi-grade group (the students were in grades 6, 7, and 8), some of those dynamics shifted because other members of the group were less aware, or less invested, in those caricatures. When Shaquil tried to trivialize the question about what they thought they could have done differently by stating that if he was a teacher he would have called security, Jayden, who also happened to be a new student in the school, interrupted the direction he tried to take the conversation by offering that they should have had the students do something creative. This opened a space for Darrel to articulate a key suggestion for a specific pedagogical approach grounded in his cultural framework, to roast Dr. Martin Luther King. Picking up on the energy from the other students who refused to let Shaquil dominate and who expressed interest in genuinely reflecting on the experience, Shaquil joined the group in generating ideas for how they could have improved the lesson.

**Organized Soundbite:**

Gloria: Okay, no we’re talking about the highlights and lessons learned. So, what I’m going to do is just ask you, we are going to go around the room . . . one highlight and one lesson learned from today . . . something you think went extremely well and something you think, “I’m sure I could improve on this one thing, if I had to do this all over again, I would do this . . .” and everyone is going to speak because every voice counts (a couple of students say “counts” along with her), so we need to hear everyone’s opinion.

Cheyanne: One highlight is everyone was focused and was paying attention on the teachers and (she looks over to the overhead to see the next part) and the lesson learned was, the bad part, not the bad part . . . one thing I would

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33 In this soundbite, with the exception of the first response, I only include the comments from the students who are presented in the above soundbite so we can hear the difference in responses, rather than including all the responses from students who taught in the other two groups. I include the first student to “answer” the question as it is important for the analysis that follows.
change is maybe if we could organize better (she crosses her arms and raises her shoulders, the end of her sentence she raises her inflection to suggest a question).

Darrel: Ummmm. . . A highlight was, um . . . (he looks over to another student next to him) when everybody was listening and a lesson learned was, um, pay attention.

Shaquil: a’ight, I got this, a highlight was, you could skip me for the highlight and come back, but for the lesson learned is teaching is difficult, so I gotta learn to control myself when I’m in class, and stop acting like I can’t control myself . . . I got it, ah, a highlight was when we first walked in the class everybody was talking, off-task and then, when – who went first? (Hussain said, “Jayden and me”). Yeah and when Hussain and Jayden started to teach they quiet down and show everybody respect.

Hussain: I went, I was, in the class where I taught was, um, how everybody participated in the part that I was doing and they gave me answers, a lesson learned was, I felt how it feel to get, um, I felt how it was to get disrespected and not listened to as a teacher.

Jayden: one highlight was, um, how everybody in the class was participating well, and they was being a little rude, but they wasn’t being outrageous, and one lesson learned was how I understand how, where teachers come from when we being disrespectful and talking and so we gotta give them the same respect that we give people outside in the community and that we would want

Zion: One highlight is everybody is engaged and to what me and Tisha was doing and a lesson learned is teaching is diff . . . we’ll it’s not really difficult cause it’s my second time teaching, so I, I don’t know. (Transcript, TLC, March 9, 2011)

Through the impromptu reflection, the students had lots of ideas about how to make the lesson better, yet they thought they did what they were supposed to do, they thought about what they like and, working with the same topic—Civil Rights—they presented alternative ways to teach the lesson. When they were in the organized reflection, they disciplined themselves and reflected on how they would change their behavior in the classroom because they now “know what it’s like to be disrespected as a teacher”. The students also articulated their sense of being disrespected in the impromptu soundbite, but something, which I suggest has to do with affect, allowed them to go elsewhere, to imagine other possibilities, to take on a different role in terms of critically engaging how teaching is done. It is interesting that the students spent more time considering the specifics of the lesson plan in the impromptu soundbite than when they were specifically asked to consider and reflect on “a lesson learned” from their teaching experiences. What are the ways in which we can locate affect in these variant responses?
I suggest that the students read, interpreted, and responded to the atmosphere, the facial expressions and body language of the facilitator and the teachers who were present. The students made meaning from the space, which was organized and inscribed through bodies, affects, historical relations, and acted accordingly. What is interesting is that the first person, Cheyanne, who responded in the organized reflection said that a lesson learned was to “prepare better”. Darrell, who was the next to respond, brought up the idea that the lesson learned was not about the lesson but rather about how he should learn to control his behavior. The smiles on the facilitator’s and teachers’ faces, and the nodding of their heads in agreement, left an impression on the other students and alerted the subsequent students to respond similarly. They felt that this was the “right thing to say”; they were rewarded for this answer through the affective responses circulating through the room, and they too wanted to feel this reward, to feel like they belonged in the space that for them has been historically marginalizing.

Before everyone returned from their lessons, a student shared her criticism of the lesson, saying that “the students were rude and didn’t listen”; the teacher who was in the room with her during the said lesson made faces and contradicted her reading of the space, finally verbally claiming that that was not what was happening at all. In this way, affective boundaries were drawn, and the desire to be affirmed and recognized as “having gotten it” scripted what could be said, which in turn shaped the possible subject positions for the youth to take up—as self-disciplining and now promising to be better behaved. And yet, the students, when in different spaces configured through different bodies and circulating affects, tried out a range of ways of being and doing “voice” and participation. They adjusted to the affective boundaries and through voicing in different registers, rejected the reading of discovering some singular authentic voice in the space, waiting to be empowered.
All the same, returning to this data after thinking through affect recently, amplifies for me the ways in which affect is always already present, shaping what a body can do in pedagogical encounters. There was a sense of wanting to belong, wanting to be affirmed, which was also structured through affective boundaries and relations in the space, and was markedly different from what I observed in the classrooms. So, while there may have been some limitations to what the students could imagine themselves to be, this still presented a disruptive, alternative possibility to the everyday spaces of their classrooms. Considering the ways in which teaching is conventionally about managing affect and how teachers’ identities are culturally inscribed, the challenge becomes how to break with habits of being, challenging and moving away from those imagined teacher-student relations. In the last part of this discussion, I engage what possibilities might open up if we were to center affect in our alternative pedagogies.

**Moving Encounters: Unhinging Ourselves from Affective Attachments**

What happens in the classroom, its “thisness”, often exceeds what is perceived as the “task at hand” and engulfs teachers and students in spaces of “affect” in ways that matter in the politics of everyday life. (Albrecht-Crane & Slack, 2007, p. 99)

In doing teaching differently, what else might be possible beyond the self-regulating, enterprising subject of neoliberal education? Student voice, engaged through a poststructural feminist anti-racism lens, presents a possible articulation that can re-contour these conventional classroom and pedagogic relationships. This reconfiguration can urge the unlearning of normatized teacher and student roles; it can disrupt attachments to particular subjectivities, and it
can unleash affect. Poststructural feminist anti-racism, as a discursive orientation for this study, is as much about counter-narrativizing conventional school curricula as it is an alternative method of pedagogical engagement. In other words, poststructural feminist anti-racism problematizes the content of official school curricula as well as the mainstream pedagogical approaches to the classroom. If I am to take this position seriously, the roles and relationships in the classroom ought to be reframed; I ought to push back on the neoliberal instrumentality that has us in stuck places in education and recognize the ways in which it is reproductive of inequitable and oppressive relations of power. Yet as teachers, if we are to be measured by these standardizing accountability models, and in some instances (particularly in the United States) our jobs depend on being recognizably successful, how do we unhinge ourselves from teaching-as-usual? Simultaneously, how do we unlearn these habits of being and doing teacher? What are the affects of such (re)imaginings? Poststructural feminist anti-racism asks us to reconsider our roles, which has affective implications for ourselves, and concomitantly, recontours the affective boundaries of our pedagogical sites. How do we work with the unleashing of affect in these spaces of unlearning? Rather than suggest some “answer”, some instrumental “how-to” or “best-practices”, I will leave that as an unbounded question for us to consider in our everyday pedagogical encounters. In the next chapter, I revisit my experiences with Wycliffe St. Albans, in which I attempted to practice a counter-normative pedagogy. I rethink the possibilities and limitations of this pedagogical stance, considering desire as an analytic for understanding what was made sayable in the spatio-relations of Wycliffe St. Albans, a space outside of the schooling institution.
Chapter 8
Retracing Contours of Student Voice, Subjectivity and Desire

In this final discussion chapter, I pick up on many themes articulated throughout the study: recognizability and the socio-historical relations shaping what is sayable and hearable, counter-hegemonic teaching and research, the lure of neoliberal agendas in teaching and learning, and questions of voice and subjectivity. I do this by thinking and writing through desire as an analytic.

When I began thinking through desire in relation to my experiences with student voice, I was preparing a paper for a conference. I had a particularly difficult time framing my discussion for that presentation; it was the first time I had revisited my experiences by way of autoethnography, and I had many concerns about how to present the data. I was in the midst of coming to understand the ways in which my reading and interpretations of the governing sample of literature on student voice shaped my expectations for the work with Wycliffe St. Albans. In particular, preparing for that presentation allowed a space for me to realize that the genre of writing and publishing research requires a confident, linear, logical pen, and this coherent pen set doubts in my practices as I endeavored to “do” student voice.

As I unpacked this discussion, I had a difficult time understanding how the young ladies who participated in the participatory action research summer internship at Wycliffe St. Albans could possibly articulate hegemonic discourses of why students leave school without a diploma. I was also uncomfortable with allowing this reading of the experience to cover over the contradictions in the students’ articulations, partly because I thought I had engaged a counter-normative pedagogy and critical curriculum. By thinking through desire, I was able to once
again amplify the ways in which the neoliberal expectations for teaching and learning miss the
geness of lived life, of social relations, of articulations.

I begin this chapter, then, with a piece that I wrote while struggling to present the
research in a clear and succinct manner for the conference. It was the writing of this piece that
drew my attention to the complexities of narrativizing lived experiences. So, I begin with a brief
meditation on writing practices. I then open the discussion towards a focus on desire, to capture
where the bounded narrative is leaky by providing two examples from the PAR at Wycliffe St.
Albans. I end with a reflection on how the young ladies refused a single unified subjecthood in
subtle ways, if only I could pay attention and could “hear” their contradictions in the din of
limited time and the pressures to produce!

**A Meditation on Narrativizing Experience**

As part of a summer internship through a community organization, I facilitated a group of ninth
and tenth grade youth in a student voice participatory action research project in which they
tackled the issue of high school non-completion. After collectively brainstorming issues that
they identified in their community and schools, the youth decided to research why students leave
school without a diploma. They then thought about what keeps them in school and considered
assumptions they had about students who leave school. From there we read, categorized, and
discussed what a sample of academic literature (Fine, 1991; Ménard, 2009; Rumberger, 2004;
Smyth, 2007) suggests about high school non-completion. Out of these discussions, the youth
designed a research question: What factors contribute to dropping out? Who is responsible for
dropouts? They also designed data collection tools (survey with closed and open ended
questions), collected and analyzed the data (which consisted of the survey, personal journals, and a sample of academic literature). In this process, the youth not only learned about social science research, but they fostered many skills, from reading and writing, to synthesizing and analyzing, to public speaking and teamwork. They acknowledged and challenged their own assumptions, and they explored issues of justice and equity as they experienced them daily. Through this process they came to more critically understand what they, too, initially dismissed as a problem residing in the individuals who make the decision to abandon school. They now see that in many ways schools abandoned these individuals, and that this is a situation in which schools have a key role to play in changing (Dei et al., 1997; Fine, 1991).

Before embarking on the PAR, I doubted whether I would be able to facilitate a student voice project because of the way the literature on student voice work represented the research so seamlessly, so comprehensively (Kinicheloe, 1997). While engaging in this participatory action research, the messiness of social and pedagogical relations confronted me, and I continued to doubt. As I wrote the above narrative representation of the participatory action research, I came to realize the method of writing up research may conceal the gaps, tensions and conflicts within the project, the way that writing can smooth out the bumpiness of lived experiences. I have come to recognize that a tightly sealed narrative, which at once seeks and performs linearity, closure and finitude—reducing complex experiences to a hegemonic representative form—becomes over laden in the capitalistically inscribed project of modernity that centers the narrative of improvement and progress. If we do “x” (include students’ voices) then “y” will happen (students will be invested in their schooling and education, and there will be fewer discipline problems, or teachers and schools will improve—read, be more marketable!) (see, for example, Kincheloe, 1997). As Bronwyn Davies succinctly states in her introduction to Pedagogical Encounters, “To this end, capitalism territorializes teachers”—and I include
researchers here as well—to “work with end driven rationalities that (pre)determine what is possible, what is desirable” (2009, p. 2).

Just as a human-built dam artificially manipulates and impounds water for particular manufactured purposes, dominant educational research representation manipulates the data to have it tell only one of the many possible story lines of the experience. In order to be read as legitimate educational research, the narrative must be made recognizable in a particular way—think about any time submitting a text for publication, or an abstract for a conference, and both the written and unwritten requirements of the representation. In this discussion, I want to try to articulate the many-ness, messiness, and mediated-ness of the participatory action research experience. I want to burst open the points of leakage, where the experience refuses to be captured in a deliberate damming of educational research representation. I want to put my researcher ego on the table and expose the vulnerabilities by reflecting on my pedagogy and attempts for curricular openness. I want to engage where the narrative representation with which I opened this section collapses on itself by addressing some of the many different possible tellings of this experience.

In an attempt to re-open the experience in this discussion, I will work with desire as a method. Desire, in its incommensurability, allows for a reading of space as “determined but not fully determined” (Ahmed, 2000) and experience as relational. It allows for the tensions between the known and the not-yet-known, between chaos and order, to be amplified through their messiness (see, for example, Davies & Gannon, 2009). Concerning this incommensurability of

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Outside of the scope of this paper is a discussion on the work of experience as evidence that (re)produces dominant paradigms and the location of experience as transparent and ‘truthful’, for a key paper framing these issues see, Joan Scott’s (1991) The Evidence of Experience. Critical Inquiry, 17(4); see also Britzman (2003).
desire, I query: what are the delimiting terms and conditions of the way desire comes to be tangible and reified? Where does desire reside and what does desire do? What are the perils of desire? How do I come into desire and what are the ways in which desire comes to be attached to particular bodies and objects through historical spatio-temporality? In the words of McClelland & Fine (2008), I hope to position desire in this discussion as “...present but laminated in political and cultural cellophane” (p. 233). While, in their chapter, McClelland & Fine (2008) focus on the presence and expression of women’s and girls’ sexual desires, I engage the image they invoke by suggesting that desire does not “speak for itself”. Rather, desire is embedded in socio-historical forces that make room for some desires to be not only felt, but also recognized, while others are sidelined, dismissed, or ignored: “...to disentangle the meanings that detour desires as they set the conditions for which identities and which voices count” (Britzman, 1992b, p. 253).

As I move into this discussion, I recognize that I am still bounded by the configurations of language and narrative, the way narrativizing experience works to encode, contain and control understandings (Britzman, 2003). What I hope to do is to disrupt the desire to represent the experience as a closed and finite event. Rather than plugging up the leaks, I want to see where they take us. In doing this, I hope to reconstitute the possibilities of this experience, to work with the conceptualization of language as theorized by poststructuralist feminists, that language does not represent some reality out there, but rather is constitutive of that reality: “...the way we speak and write reflects the structures of power in our society. In post-representational theory, language is a productive, constitutive force as opposed to a transparent reflection of some reality captured through conceptual adequation” (Lather, 1991, p. 25; see also, Davies, 2003; Walkerdine, 1997; Weedon, 1987). In telling a different story, one that seeks to capture but not contain the messiness and many-ness of human experience, I ask: what is the role of desire as
method in reconstituting different ways of being in the participatory action research? In what follows, after a brief discussion of desire as an analytic, I amplify two leaks from my above narrativization of the participatory action research: in the first one, Desiring Encounters, I speak to my desire to foster a space and curriculum of openness in relation to the girls’ seeming desires for schooling-as-usual. In the second leak, Tracing Desires and Subjectivity, I seek to disrupt the impositional potential of liberatory research (see for example Bragg, 2001; Cook-Sather, 2007; Kumahsiro, 2002a; Orner, 1992), and I call to make room for complex personhoods.

Thinking Through Desire

One of the promises of student voice work is to help remove barriers for youth to speak and be heard. In this chapter, picking up on conversations in the previous chapters, I challenge myself and other pedagogues to consider the complex and contradictory social relations and personal desires that may produce barriers despite liberatory, counter-hegemonic pedagogies. In other words, in this chapter, I situate desire as both assembled through time and outside ourselves, and as internal and unconscious in an effort to mark the barriers that are hidden from our purview.

In order to convey the complexities of addressing and valuing multiple voices, I want to situate a discussion of desire as method. In this chapter, I amplify the incommensurability of desire, in that I locate the effects of desire. I come to this by way of Deleuze’s and Guattari’s (1987) theorization of desire as an assemblage accumulated through time. As Eve Tuck (2009) writes in Suspending the Damage: A Letter to Communities,

Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattarri (1987) teach us that desire is assembled, crafted over a lifetime through our experiences. For them, this assemblage is the
picking up of distinct bits and pieces that, without loosing their specificity, become integrated into a dynamic whole (p. 418).

In a later essay, *Breaking Up With Deleuze: Desire and Valuing the Irreconcilable*, Eve Tuck (2010) expands on this conceptualization of desire to include a transgenerationality. In other words, desires, for Tuck, are not only assembled through personal experiences, but are inherited through ancestral and socio-historic memories. I work with both the experiential and the transgenerational aspects of desire as contributions to the traces of desire and subjectivity. In other words, I want to work with desires and subjectivities as they come to be shaped by our location in socio-cultural discourses, spaces, and cultural memories. By situating desire as such, I also address the perils of desire, as desire may reify hegemonic orderings of society. This potential for desire to contradict our transformative, critical social justice intentions is part of what astounded me in the participatory action research with WSA.

I want to amplify the relationship between subjectivity and desires, asking: How does subjectivity dialogically come to shape the formation and articulation of desires? How does my particular subjectivity—and desire—shape the possibilities and limitations of the participatory action research experience? Who am I to speak for Others’ desires? For that matter, how do I come to locate desires in myself and in Others?

**Desiring Encounters and the Crafting of a Flexible Pedagogy**

In this section I ask what it means to aspire to a flexible pedagogy and simultaneously work with a political agenda for social transformation. What happens when the youth seem to desire, perform, engage, and invest in dominant subjectivities? To prepare for the participatory action
research internship at Wycliffe St. Albans, I struggled to craft a flexible curriculum and pedagogy—in part because I was not confident in what that might look like—only to be faced with the young women’s articulations for what has over-determined the teaching and learning relationship: over-planned dictation of what we were going to do, with prescribed tasks and finite “answers” or “solutions”. I felt the pressure to conform to this over-coded relationship even while I attempted to be otherwise. Johnston & Nicholls (1995) share a piece of research which speaks to this pressure from the students to be involved in what they have internalized as the way teaching and learning is done, along with their role in the teacher ⇛ student relationship and knowledge production. The research:

. . . describes lower-track high school girls in New Zealand whose words and actions show they believe their role should be to write down and memorize information dispensed by teachers. When teachers try to relate lessons to students’ lives or to elicit student opinions of knowledge, these students resist until teachers deliver lists of facts (p. 95).

In the PAR, I had hoped for the participants to engage in interviews, field observations, and journaling, and organized several activities to prepare them to do that kind of work; but in the end, as I was trying to hold myself accountable to the goal of allowing the students to design the research, I became panicked when they decided to design and conduct surveys instead. I had submitted to their impulse towards quantifiable “answers” to “the problem” of high school retention, and I was uncomfortable with that. However, I was more discomforted by the thought of challenging their decision and imposing my politics onto their research, an issue which I address in the second “leak” in this chapter.

In the following discussion, I situate my pedagogical desires as they relate to the participants’ desires, and consider what was generated in the project by way of amplifying the
lacunae in my pedagogy. I try to capture the contradictions and gaps in my pedagogy as I revisit my desires for the participatory action research in relation to my interpretations of what we did. In order to allow myself a space to transform, I engage this autoethnography as a means to make myself and my pedagogy vulnerable: “Teacher vulnerability then becomes a resource to be opened up, something to be worked with, rather than an experience to be dismissed, shut down or foreclosed. It becomes a strength in a pedagogical encounter” (Pratt, 2009, p. 64). I am suggesting vulnerable pedagogy makes room for the shifts of/in myself necessary for engaging student voice towards transformative teaching and learning. As Cook-Sather (2007) notes,

> In order for a researcher to attend to and respond to the ever-shifting, contextual and relational, and language-and-culture-based nature of students’ identities and voices, she must change herself from one place or condition into another and potentially change completely or transform herself (p. 397).

The work of changing oneself, of making oneself and one’s pedagogy vulnerable, is discomforting and I turned, in this study, to those who encouraged me to do so through their writing (see for example Bragg, 2001; Britzman, 1992b; Ellsworth, 1992). In reflecting on her pedagogical engagement in a course on Horror films, Bragg (2001) exposes her vulnerable pedagogy:

> I presented these academic views as neutral and abstract truth that I wanted students to “discover”. I did not acknowledge (to them or to myself) that they served also to undermine students’ identity claims and thus counter what I experienced as their intimidation of me. Perhaps therefore students had correctly identified my desire for mastery and control in the classroom when they condemned the pedagogic game of discussion as “shit” (p. 71).
While this amplification of vulnerability within my pedagogy is a personal project of bettering myself, it is also a political project to challenge the neoliberal beckoning of secure personhood:

Reduced security means that personal safety/survival becomes a dominant value, and if it can only be secured through unquestioned obedience, then desire flows toward finding out what the latest performance measures are and learning how to perform in terms of them. The newly individualized, vulnerable subject of neoliberalism must avoid risk, and seek out safety and predictability thus taking up as their own desire the perpetuation of the suffocating striations of government . . . (Davies, 2009, p. 4; see also Davies and Bansel, 2007)

To begin, I share something I wrote in my journal while preparing for the PAR internship. I remember having to sit down and journal through my anxieties as I prepared for this work, in an effort to move from stuck places. The journal entry presented here represents one of those times in which I tried to write through some apprehensions going into the PAR internship:

Since last week I have been putting together a plan for the PAR. I have been concerned about it coming across too much like school, in my taking up the conventional teacher role asking the youth to perform conventional students. How do I start without a plan? What does it mean to have an open curriculum and am I capable of pedagogically engaging it? How do I make sure I have enough materials? How do I keep this fluid and open? I have been struggling particularly with questions of content. How do I organize a space so that the students are the ones who decide where we go and what we research, while simultaneously having “the right” materials prepared? (WSA PAR Journal, June 30, 2012)

This journal entry illustrates my struggle with the “determined but not fully determined” space of the pedagogical encounter. How do our extended histories with institutional schooling
come to shape what is imaginable as teaching and learning (Britzman, 2003), often unquestioned and habitual just the way teaching and learning is done, in such ways that make it difficult to do otherwise:

And perhaps this is exactly why schools continue to teach in oppressive ways; perhaps we desire teaching and learning through normalized lenses. . . . Perhaps we desire teaching and learning in ways that affirm and confirm our sense that what we have come to believe is normal or commonsensical in society is really the way things are supposed to be. (Kumashiro, 2002a, p. 57, author’s emphasis)

As the questions I pose at the end of the snippet of the journal entry suggest, I address my desire to have a dynamic curriculum, but I struggle with recognizing what that looks like and how to get there, how to get beyond “. . . ways of thinking and teaching that have otherwise become rigid, solidified, stuck, sloganized” (Ellsworth, 1997, p. 12). Cook-Sather (2006) shares, “Because schools are set up on premises of prediction, control, and management, anything that challenges those premises is hard to accomplish within formal educational contexts” (p. 381; see also, Dei, 1996, p. 32).

As I return to my journal in writing this chapter, I find myself faced with coming to terms with the particular mode in which I was indoctrinated into teacher-hood. As Bronwyn Davies states in her Introduction to Pedagogical Encounters, “Good teaching is often conceived as the successful imposition of a desirable order on an otherwise unbearable chaos—the chaos of multiple bodies, multiple ways of knowing, diverse trajectories, opposing wills which must be brought into line and contained” (2009, p. 1; see also Ellsworth, 1997 p. 45; Lather, 1991; Schick, 2000, p. 97). I was taught (or rather trained or disciplined) to work with the proceduralized model of backwards planning as developed by Wiggins and McTighe (2005) in Understanding By Design. In this framework, creating a unit becomes an exercise in calculated
instrumentality: you begin backwards, as the name suggests—you identify the end product of the unit or lesson, then you consider the materials, lessons and activities that would ensure that “Students Will Be Able To . . .” by the end of the unit or lesson. This model does not leave room for the not-yet-known; it sets out with a conclusion already in mind.

Since modernity, the methods and procedures of schooling had been stipulated by policy, and the outcome was expected to follow. In that model, there was always the theoretical possibility of unexpected results. Now, however . . . the goals and outcomes are being stipulated at the outset and the procedures are being developed post hoc. The “nature” of the educated subject is stipulated in advance, based on objective criteria, usually statistical analysis (Fendler, 1998, p. 57).

I remember panicking when given assignments using backwards design to create a unit for my teaching portfolio during my Masters in Teaching. It seemed too contrived, too manipulated, too over-determined, yet at the time I thought it was a personal inability to grasp the work; I struggled to perform the competency and confidence required by the neoliberal organization of the teachers’ education program. Who was I to know, in advance, exactly where the lessons would take a teacher and 34\textsuperscript{35} students? I was astounded by my cohort’s seeming ability to “know” what “Students will be able to do . . .” without any more experience in the classroom than I had (which, at that point, was minimal). As I have noted previously, questions of pedagogy, and my capacity to perform the “right” pedagogy, have haunted my teaching career, and in writing this autoethnography I have had the chance to reflect on my practices and expectations. Elizabeth Ellsworth (1997) has provided a vocabulary for me to understand some of my hopes and despairs in relation to pedagogy, not the least of which speaks to the

\textsuperscript{35} In NYC public schools during my teaching days, 34 students was the legal cap for secondary classrooms, and teaching in an underserved, marginalized community, my class lists often consisted of 34 students.
“impossibility of predicting in advance what the learning might be” (Gallagher & Wessels, 2011, p. 241).

What saves pedagogy from being completely closed, permanently othering, lifeless, passion killing, and perverse in the sense of already knowing what is best for us . . . is that the pedagogical relation itself is unpredictable, incorrigible, uncontrollable, unmanageable, disobedient. . . . What might we learn from ways of teaching that are predicated, paradoxically on the impossibility of teaching? (Ellsworth, 1997, pp. 8-9)

Interestingly, as I moved into the planning of the participatory action research, where I had the chance to shift into a more fluid and organic organization of the curricular aspects of the project, I was once again faced with hesitations and uncertainties, as the above journal entry illustrates. Traces of these two disparate drives of over-determined planning and openness, pulling me, tearing at me, seeking to claim once and for all where I stand, haunted the desired encounters on the first day of the participatory action research.

I again return to passages from my journal to amplify these desired encounters. This journal entry was written a few hours after the first day of the PAR internship:

It’s the first day. I meet the girls who will be participating in the experience—some of whom I had worked with in other capacities while working with the community organization. I’m nervous, I want them to like me and to like the work we are going to be doing. After some introductions one of the participants, Imani, asks what exactly we are going to be researching. I smile and say that that is part of what we are going to determine in the first two sessions. She retorts, “but what will we be doing?” I say again, that we will decide that together. Seemingly not satisfied, she says, “I don’t get it” and goes about preparing her name tent.
At this point I am recoiling, I want a curricular openness but how do I negotiate with the student desires for something more familiar, something more akin to “schooling-as-usual” (Davies, 2000)? The girls want to know what it is that we will be doing. Perhaps this speaks to their schooling experiences. Perhaps it speaks to my unpreparedness to do this work. Perhaps it has to do with their desire to know that their time will not be wasted. I am sweating (and not only because I am 7 months pregnant and it is 34 degrees, humid and we are in a small room without air conditioning); I am sweating inside, beneath my skin. I wasn’t planning to get to the discussions of what “we” wanted to research until the next session. This week was supposed to set the stage, build community, and get started thinking about what research is. I decide I am going to “go in a different order” of the prepared materials I had perhaps over organized. I don’t want to lose the girls’ interest on the first day, and the research is supposed to be framed by them. What are we to do when we may desire curricular openness and the students seek schooling-as-usual? (WSA PAR Journal, July 4, 2012).

I recall something I read in the student voice literature that echoes this challenge. O’Loughlin (1995) shares a conversation he had with Ira Shor in his piece, “Daring the imagination: Unlocking voices of dissent and possibility in teaching”, where he cautions that, “we must resist the temptation to glamorize student voices, and recognize that the multiple voices students bring to the classroom, while potentially possessing some elements of resistance and transformation, are likely to be deeply imbued with status quo values” (p. 112; see also, Kelly, 2004, p. 5, 9). I wonder, how do I disrupt the embeddedness of “status quo values” while simultaneously not frustrating the girls? How do I craft a flexible pedagogy and simultaneously desire to bring the youth into my politics—not only to get them to question their assumed understandings but to work with them towards a transformation of those
understandings? In the next section, I attempt to address the “multiple voices” of the girls and the limitations of bringing a fixed reading to complex subjectivities.

**Tracing Desires in Relation to Subjectivity**

One of the promises of participatory action research is the transformation of consciousness through a critical investigation of social inequities (see for example, Cammarota & Fine, 2008a). In proposing and preparing the PAR internship, I had desired to cultivate and amplify with the youth critical engagements of their social spaces. When I asked the young women to share why they decided to participate in the PAR internship, Jasmin announced that she already hangs around and discusses social issues with her friends. (Actually, it was encounters with and the witnessing of critical conversations between Jasmin and Nyasha in particular that informed my excitement in having them participate in the internship.) Jasmin continued that since she already has these conversations, she may as well do it and earn her internship hours. The possibility and desire to have a space to talk intrigued her and what I hoped for was to encourage the young women to (continue to) see themselves as researchers and knowledge producers in their quotidian conversations, while simultaneously showing them a more systematic way of researching and discussing these issues through social research.

Through this experience, however, I was faced with a challenge: how do I come to understand what it means to have a critical consciousness? In an effort to try to grasp the traces of desire in this chapter, I present some of my vulnerabilities by locating my anxious seeking of a unified, coherent, stable trajectory; from some pre-critical to a critical consciousness, alongside the youths’ challenge to me to read them in all their complexity rather than try to fix them. And
by “fix” I mean both a “fixing” of something that is broken, as well as a “fixed” position, one that does not move. Again, calling on poststructuralist feminist theorists’ conversations in the early 1990s, I want to heed the warning to critical pedagogues and feminist theorists to recognize where I may impose particular performances in the name of liberation, and simultaneously where I may position myself as having already “gotten there”—to critical consciousness, to liberatedness.

By and large, Anglo-American feminist and critical classrooms are envisioned as egalitarian places where power is dispersed and shared by all. The culture, the school, and even other teachers are named as oppressive. But the “liberatory” teacher is not. By positing only rational, unified beings, fully conscious intentions, and the binarism and mutual exclusivity of the terms “empowerer” and “oppressor”, “liberatory” pedagogues are not prepared to deal with the oppressive moment in their own teaching (Orner, 1992, p. 84; see also, Cook-Sather, 2007; Ellsworth, 1992; Luke & Gore, 1992).

Kevin Kumashiro (2002) writes,

Critical pedagogy needs to move away from saying that students need this or my critical perspective since such an approach merely replaces one (socially hegemonic) framework for seeing the world with another (academically hegemonic) one. Rather than aim for understanding of some critical perspective, antioppressive pedagogy should aim for effect by having students engage with relevant aspects of critical theory and extend its terms of analysis to their own lives, but then critique for what it overlooks or forecloses (p. 49, author’s emphasis; see also Ellsworth, 1992).

Carol Schick (2000) and Deborah Britzman (1992b) offer another approach in support of what Kumashiro suggests:
an appropriate pedagogy is not a matter of disturbing participants’ self-satisfaction or wrenching from them their certain knowledge. Rather, it is those places of uncertainty, dissatisfactions, doubts—where identities are not secure—which are the places where possibilities for exploration and change reside. (Schick, 2000, p. 98)

As Britzman (1992a) reflects,

As I struggled to make sense of which problem students were responding to, I now believe they were responding to the spaces in my own pedagogy, of how to go about the vulnerable work of connecting individual lives to persistent social dilemmas, and of how we learn to tolerate the detours of experience – the times when learning does not mean progress and when curriculum antagonizes the students’ hopes and desires (p. 257).

Confronted with geo-temporal confines, I was anxious to ensure that the girls “successfully” troubled the dominant narrative of high school non-completion, which individualizes and psychologizes reasons for leaving high school without a diploma. This caused me to attempt to impose/read recognizable order onto the process of conscientization (Freire, 1970). Succumbing to the pressures for the research to “do something” recognizable, I did at least three things simultaneously: I predetermined that the girls did not have (enough) critical consciousness (as though it is something that can be had, rather than a process) and that I could cultivate it; I took it upon myself to determine if, when, and how they reached this critical consciousness; and I locked critical conscious subjectivity in a humanist framework—a framework that masks the shifting and contradictory in-processness of identity. Having read Mimi Orner’s (1992) piece prior to the participatory action research, and then revisiting it as I tried to make sense of the experience, I was dismayed to recognize the ways in which I re-coded
hegemonic teaching and learning relationships in the name of counter-normative pedagogy. Two quotes in particular from Orner’s (1992) chapter resonated with these interpretations:

Discourses on student voice are premised on the assumption of a fully conscious, fully speaking, “unique, fixed and coherent” self. These discourses, enmeshed in humanist presuppositions, ignore the shifting identities, unconscious processes, pleasures and desires not only of students, but of teachers, administrators and researchers as well. Discourses on student voice do not adequately recognize that one’s social position, one’s voice, can “at best be tentative and temporary given the changing, often contradictory relations of power at multiple levels of social life – the personal, the institutional, the governmental, the commercial”. (Ellsworth and Selvin, 1986, p. 77, cited in Orner, 1992, p. 79)

In the final instance, it is the critical or feminist pedagogue who determines if and when students have succeeded in valuing their own language, background and personalities. These paternalistic tendencies in critical and Anglo-American feminist education ultimately replicate racist, classist and sexist forms for students. (Orner, 1992, p. 87)

When I returned to the research experience by way of my journals, field notes, artifacts and memory, I was confronted with a reconsideration of my desires and the imposition of those desires onto the girls’ subjectivities. As a White, female, social scientist, educator, graduate student, heterosexual, en-abled body read as middle class, in what ways am I allowed to problematize conventional schooling and education? How is that position read, interpreted, considered differently than if similar thoughts are presented by the marginalized, Caribbean-Canadian, Black, Muslim identifying girls? What I also want to address is the way education has
been socio-historically located as the mode to come into modernity and the human (Fendler, 1998). My subject position—in particular, by way of race, class, education, sexuality, and geo-location—is positioned as closely aligned with and representative of both modernity and the human, so what are the risks for me in coming to trouble the very space that promises modernity for those who “succeed” in it? I suggest that they are quite minimal in relation to the risks for those who are already marginalized in society. Simultaneously, the girls who participated in the research do well in school. I can deduce that they find some enjoyment in organized educational spaces; they even volunteered to spend a month of their summer doing research! Who am I to suggest that the system is oppressive and that they should challenge it, especially when, perhaps for differing reasons, both the girls and I are invested in the promises of conventional schooling and education? What are the ethics in my suggestion that education pushes students—the girls’ peers—out for non-conformity to the disciplinary regime (Dei et al., 1997; Fine, 1991)? What are the possibilities and limitations of coming into the human through conventional schooling and education? And what are the ways in which I am prepared for the possible consequences of my suggestions that the space of schooling and education be problematized? Jennifer Kelly (2004) also shares this interplay between desiring the economic promises of school success and troubling schools for and by marginalized youth when she describes the Black youth who she interviewed for her study Borrowed Identities: “…[T]he group of students interviewed was highly motivated to succeed economically, although they often questioned the ways in which the school organized the curriculum and knowledge production” (p. 17). In chapter 7, I attended to the role affect plays in students reading spaces and determining what to say, when, and how, something that Kelly (2004, p. 17) locates as self-disciplining within regimes of power in relation to her study.
All of this to say, during the research focused on high school non-completion, there were resounding statements of “I think dropouts are just thinking in the moment, and not about the future” (as Najah said); statements that, for me, individualized the decision to leave school, and located the responsibility away from the socio-historical conditions and the cultures of schooling relationships that I wanted to trouble. “These students seem to be caught between the only versions of identity offered by dominant forms of culture: One is either educated or not educated. This selective criterion requires both a dismissal of the self and of cultural politics” (Britzman, 1992b, p. 254). The girls, by dismissing the socio-historical contexts in relation to dropping out, positioned themselves on the side of “educated”. I refused, at the time, to honor their critical self-situating, as I limited the possibilities for reading critical consciousness by requiring a particular engagement of the socio-historical context of high-school non-completion. I imposed a specific method of coming into and performance of critical consciousness. I did not allow room for the in-processness and (strategic) contradiction of critical consciousness and the ways in which the girls had expressed critical readings of their social spaces, as well as how their racialized bodies are read in those spaces. The way in which I imposed this reading onto the bodies of the girls also worked to de-agentize them. I come to this thought by thinking through Valerie Walkerdine (1997), in which she speaks to her struggles growing up in a working class family and neither fitting into the location of Marxist proletarian revolutionary, nor in the location of having been duped by capitalism, false consciousness, and the ways in which these two categories produced a tension for her in coming to terms with her subjective location. In other words, I took up the position that if the girls were invested in conventional schooling and education, they had been misled, rather than allowing for the possibility that they were unwilling to trouble the very space that promises modernity and coming into the human.
I locked the possibilities for a perhaps more thorough discussion around questions of what causes us to be invested in conventional schooling and education, and in this way allow for a critical engagement with the space. I did not honor the girls’ position when I struggled with such issues as how the girls could have such a critical view of the media and the representations of their neighborhood, and simultaneously end up stating that dropping out was an individuals’ bad decision rather than reflecting on societal influences. As Imani proclaimed, “I just can’t see dropping out as anything other than a bad decision because of my upbringing”.

Through this autoethnography I revisited the data and juxtaposed it in ways that allowed for different readings. Juxtaposing the above comments with the girls’ responses to a sample journal entry by another self-identified womyn of color who took part in a different participatory action research project allowed me to rethink my position. I share parts of this passage below as “an example of how a young womyn describing herself manages to convey the difficulty and challenge of being a contradiction. . . of being many things at once” (Rios-Moore et al., 2004), to set the stage for the following discussion.

I am an interesting young womyn who bores herself to delirium. And a comedian who can’t tell a joke. I am a responsible sister and a helpful daughter. I love to be me and yet I am different around others. I am extremely emotional but want to hide my feelings. I have a hard time trusting some and put too much trust into others. . . . I have no communication skills and I am a good listener. I am a good listener who hates to hear people speak. I am a reader who watches way too much TV. I am a good friend and girlfriend but I have few friends and no boyfriend. . . .

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36 This is the chosen spelling of the womyn who participated in the PAR. As they state in the report, Makes Me Mad, it was their way of reclaiming their subjectivity. From, Rios-Moore, I., S. Allen, E. Arenas, J. Contreras, N. Jiang, T. Threatts, & C. Cahill (2004). Makes Me Mad: Stereotypes of Young Urban Womyn of Color. From their website, www.fed-up-honeys.org.
put people in their place and yet others walk all over me. . . Honestly, I am too much to put into words. (Rios-Moore et al., 2004)

In the responses to this passage, the girls challenged me to read them in and through their complexities and seeming contradictions. At first, Jasmin stated, “it was difficult to read because there were so many contradictions. In one sentence she is saying one thing and it’s opposite at the same time”. Then Imani said, “I really liked it. It felt more real, because people aren’t just one thing”, and Najah added that “it seemed like a complex person”. A complex person, a subjectivity shaped through various, and often conflicting, discourses and desires—how can I reread my anxiety in the experience to allow for the possibility of a critical consciousness that is in-process while simultaneously (strategically) invested in conventional schooling and education? Jasmin’s representation of the findings captured the profound liminality of the research and modeled for me a way to work in, through, and against seemingly conflicting desires. Jasmin captured the many-ness and the messiness of the research findings. She was able to synthesize the dynamic, conflicting and circulating processes that the data reflected—from the literature review and journaling of personal experiences to the analysis of the survey. She expressed some other ways of thinking about/imagining why people might drop out in the following poem, which loses something in the written form. Jasmin’s performance reading of her poem to the group brought everyone to their feet, as we applauded her articulation on the last day of the internship 37.

So, I know this teacher,

37 The poem is shared with permission.
But she doesn’t teach.
So she goes around calling me names like I’m some type of meat,
I’m sick of it, like what’s the point,
I come here to learn but all these teachers do is stare and point,
I think I shouldn’t come back
I ain’t learning anyways
They ain’t going to miss me (stoops\textsuperscript{38}) anyways

My boy said I should just forget about it
But I don’t want to be selling things I can get locked up because of it.
If I talk to my principal, she’ll look at me like “oh finally the black boy’s dropping out”
But I don’t know, I just get this feeling like she’s another one who doesn’t care if I drop out

But the timing is wrong
My girl just got pregnant, and yes, I’m the daddy
And with the mom dropping out who’s going to support our family?
Well, not me if I stay
I gotta make money fast, staying in school might help me in the future
And this is what I gotta do a, uh, uh
Hold up, White teacher passing

It past for now, bye, I gotta do the things I just told you
So, bye bye . . .

\textsuperscript{38} A ‘stoops’ is when one sucks their teeth to express annoyance or disapproval. Geo-historically, it is from Trinidad and Tobago, however, it is prevalent among the African American and Caribbean-Canadian communities in which I have lived and taught.
STOP! Hold up, there is always a way

Look to your family for the things you crave

Work at night for your family that you love

Because graduating will give you all the money you deserve

Think twice before leaving because graduating is the beginning of your new future.

**An Education in Conflicting Desires**

In reading/hearing Jasmin’s poem, I can sense the conflict as she tries to come to grips with different (new?) ways of seeing things, while she falls back on “but I gotta finish school. . . because graduating will give you all the money you deserve”. In this poem I hear the many-ness of her voices embedded in and inscribed by multiple and contradictory discourses. In some ways I hear echoes of my own struggles in Jasmin’s voice. How do I work to disrupt the system while still living it—and in many ways benefitting from it? My intentions in this discussion were not to dismiss the hegemonic ordering of educational research representation, but rather to come to ask myself, what are the ways in which experience and the narrativization of experience is always already determined but not fully determined? Perhaps what is necessary in coming into openness is a different kind of reading, both of the experience itself, and of the representation of the experience in language. Perhaps we ought to engage a more humble and vulnerable pedagogy, one that pays attention to the gaps and the contradictions, one that pays attention to the impossibility of teaching (Ellsworth, 1997), one that addresses the ever-shifting, yet socio-historically contingent power-relations in the teaching and learning relationship. Perhaps we should ask ourselves, “Are we sure that our positions of relative power and our own personal and professional interests are not blurring our judgments or shaping our advocacy?” (Fielding, 2004a, p. 303).
In this chapter, I suggest that it is both an acknowledgement of my desires as they speak to “our positions of relative power” as well as a focus on the fissures in my pedagogy that allowed for the possibility for change. “For feminist poststructuralists, it is the gaps and ruptures in practice—the breaks, confusion and contradiction that are always a part of the interplay in teaching—that offer the greatest insight and possibilities for change” (Orner, 1992, p. 84). The space and time that I needed to be able to come into a different reading of the experience, however, came too late for concrete change to be made within the participatory action research project, which presents one of the limitations of autoethnographic research. It has been through revisiting the work, engaging autoethnography as a method that has allowed me to critically reconsider my pedagogy, and it is in telling these stories that I hope will inspire others to spend the time to revisit their experiences and their student ↔ teacher relations—to allow themselves to become disorientated as a method of questioning our assumed understandings of teaching and learning.
Chapter 9
Willing Disorientations: Unsettling Student Voice Possibilities

It is in this mode of disorientation that one might begin to wonder: What does it mean to be orientated? How do we begin to know or feel where we are, or even where we are going; by lining ourselves up with the features of the grounds we inhabit, the sky that surrounds us, or the imaginary lines that cut through maps? How do we know which way to turn to reach our destination? (Ahmed, 2006b, p. 6)

This project has been rife with disorientations; from discomforting disorientations around coming into what it means to do dissertation research, to willing disorientations as a method to understand the complexities of lived life differently. These disorientations presented, for me, pedagogical halts, sometimes making the writing and representation difficult, other times uncovering something I had not previously been able to articulate. As I come to this last chapter, the conclusion, as I attempt to wrap things up, I at once take a sigh of relief and simultaneously hesitate: “Okay, the work has been done, I just need to tie it up . . . yet, have I done what I set out to do? Have I written what I (think I) need to? Will the work deliver on its’ promises to me, the reader, the teaching and learning community, the Ph.D. degree which I am pursuing?” Even as I write “the work has been done” I cringe, how can the work be “done”? If the work is done, does that mean that there is no more work left to do? How does that phrase open or close possibilities for dialogue? Simultaneously, in articulating my concern about “will the work deliver on its’ promises”, how am I slipping (back) into Enlightenment imaginings for teaching, learning, writing, and research that speak to certainties and direct correlations between what is written or taught, and what is read/interpreted or learned.
It is no wonder that I have taken a break between preparing the previous eight chapters and being able to sit down and write the conclusion. That being said, in this last chapter I turn my attention to the future as read through the past; not some finite, linear future that lays ahead of us logically, but rather what possible futures this study might will. With the first part of the title for this chapter, “Willing Disorientations”, I signal my own willingness to work with disorientations while I also suggest a consideration for future implications for this work that may disorientate us from where we are and where we think we are going. Perhaps in that way we may reach a destination we had not set out towards, or in my case, view that destination (completion of the doctorate) differently.

In my application to the Ph.D. program, I had written of my interest in understanding inequities in schooling and education by considering several reform efforts in both Canada and the United States that purport to support marginalized students being accepted into and succeeding in post-secondary schools. While my focus shifted during my tenure in the program, I also find it intriguing to recognize the traces of my previous interests, while perhaps oriented differently, in this study. In the opening paragraph of my Statement of Interest, I wrote:

I have come to believe that the nature of public education in North America today is designed to filter students into different segments of society depending upon their demographic starting points. The idea that schools merely mimic the inequalities in society has become increasingly apparent to me as I have experienced first-hand the enormous gap that exists between the aspirations of the African American, West Indian and Latino high school students I teach in an inner-city school in New York City and the educational opportunities afforded to them. My goal is to continue to work in academia as a professor and researcher to examine the sociological realities and implications of the policy decisions that have spawned today’s educational “savage inequalities,” inequalities that prevent the neediest members of
society from access to higher education and the economic returns associated with holding a degree.

It was only recently, as I transferred files to a different computer, that I returned to my statement of interest. In many ways I was surprised to read what I had written; I was also embarrassed by some of the ways I phrased things. What interested me was how I wound up still focusing my work on educational reforms as they relate to educational inequities, whereas I had previously thought that my dissertation work was completely different from what had gotten me into the program.

The study presented here considers how teachers experience reform, whereas in my Statement of Interest I was framing the work by way of “the impact” of reforms. My dissertation research works to acknowledge the reproduction within schooling and education, uncovering the delimiting terms of reproduction, while my statement of interest leaves little room for anything but repetition of schooling-as-usual. However, the document reminds me of how I was oriented at the beginning of my Ph.D. journey, in painful and humbling, startling and exciting ways. I write about it here to honor those moments; I need to bring the past present in relation to willing a future.

Underpinning my research purpose in this study is the belief that teaching and learning is about relationships mediated through socially inscribed differences as they are lived and experienced through the multiple contexts of capitalism, colonialism, and neoliberalism, as well as our personal and cultural memories, habits and affective attachments of how schooling is done. I am particularly concerned, in this study, with how practices of student voice are framed, understood, and enacted by teachers and students as they negotiate these complex relations in the
classroom. As I came to work with this thing of student voice, several insights emerged. First, student voice has had a relatively recent re-emergence as a distinct discursive field. Second, in this “newly” re-articulated field, students’ voices are said to be missing in the conversations about schooling and education. Third, student voice, therefore, calls to make concerted efforts to have students’ voices heard in these broader conversations about their schooling, since they have a particularly unique view of their experiences. Finally, the recent popularity of student voice can be linked to neoliberal imperatives of school improvement on many levels—by increasing student motivation, cultivating more attachments to school and community for youth, and improving teacher practices to meet the neoliberal market needs.

Even as I write the final chapter of my dissertation I struggle every time I have to write about student voice, because I am faced with my complicity in perpetuating these neoliberal agendas. However, through my theoretical framework, poststructural feminist anti-racism, I have been compelled by student voice in a different direction, that of engaging its transformative possibilities, while simultaneously framing the ways in which student voice can (re)articulate hegemonic schooling and education. While I believe it is critical to have students’ voices included in conversations about policy and reform, my interests are on a more localized level that may prove to offer some transformative possibilities of student voice work. It was, and is my belief, that with or without this category of student voice, students are continually communicating. We need to find ways to listen, better yet, hear what they are “saying”. This takes a lot more than eliciting specific responses, asking the students to formally “speak”; it means, for me, understanding who my students are, as individuals, as family and community members, as parts of local and global cultures, as socio-historically inscribed. I humbly note that my enactment of student voice in the Participatory Action Research with Wycliffe St. Albans missed this; I focused my energies on trying to simulate the cohesiveness of previous student
voice initiatives as presented in the literature. Simultaneously, as I came into understanding more-so than I had before embarking on this project, I understood it is crucial to understand students as partial, as contradictory, and to work with the ways in which all our voices are produced in relation: in relation to the space, in relation to the bodies present, in relation to the dominant codified desires, in relation to histories.

In the study I became concerned with reflecting on what voicings are made possible through our pedagogies as our pedagogies are personally, socially, and institutionally contoured. I considered of what our student voice pedagogies are productive, what possibilities and limitations they open or close. Through autoethnography, I reflected on my experiences in relation to the broader cultural and structural impulses of two student voice projects, to tap into and try to uncover my experiences as I struggled and negotiated the possibilities and limitations of student voice work. Specifically, I considered how autoethnography might open/present possibilities for (re)thinking our teaching positions within this climate of accountability, standardization and technicized teaching and learning. Autoethnography provided time and space for the pedagogical thoughtfulness (van Manen, 1997) I sought, time and space that I felt I did not have while immersed in the student voice projects, or for that matter, when I was teaching in Brooklyn. With the pressures to produce, albeit differently located in each space, it was difficult to find the time for critical reflexivity, to allow myself to remain in moments of discomfort and disorientation; we had to press on. My initial impression was that this impulse to keep moving (while not seeming to get to an alternative destination) was due to my incapacities as a teacher; it was particularly helpful to be able to recognize the internal and external forces keeping us in the same place by way of thinking through affect and desire. Autoethnography allowed me to revisit my experiences with student voice projects, as well as
my pedagogy more generally, in ways that made available more complex readings, readings that unbounded the experiences from the hegemonic hermetically sealed narratives of neoliberalism.

**Willing Futures of Student Voice: Some Provocations**

Schooling and education is haunted by the colonial framework and perpetual calls to “reform” what the media and policy makers, particularly in the United States, call a “failing school system”. As I address in my introduction chapter, as well as in Chapter 3, I locate just three recent “trends” to improve schooling and education that I have experienced through my schooling and education, as a student, a teacher, and an educational researcher: Whole Language, Writing and Reading Workshop, and Student Voice. So where do we go from here? I do not want to give up on student voice work for several reasons. I believe that there are transformative possibilities, but I am also wary of not giving any one method or pedagogical approach enough time to be productive of such transformations. This being said, however, there are some perils in the present popularity of student voice work, as Rudduck & Fielding (2006) warn. I do not intend to suggest that student voice will successfully be able to reframe the colonial relationships that shape present day schooling and education; instead, I want to pose some questions that came out of this study regarding how to mitigate wholesale reproduction of inequities under the guise of reform.

I believe that the work of transgressing dominant and oppressive structures is a process, one that is never finished; it takes determination and support from a community. Part of the work is situating how we came to this point. As Foucault (1982) states, “we need a historical awareness of our present circumstances” (p. 209). What are the socio-historical contexts of
student voice work? How do those contexts shape how we understand knowledge and experiences? What are the values and discursive frameworks that inform the work, and how do they relate to the current configurations of schooling and education and its role in society? With these questions in mind, we need to consider what methodological and pedagogical approaches will be employed, and what questions we will be asking. In the asking of questions, how do we come to listen to the responses of the students? Who is listening and in what ways? Are we willing to listen to all students? How do we listen to the varied, complex, and contradictory identities students bring with them to school? How do we avoid essentializing while also recognizing the sociality of identity formation? How do we come to be present in every moment, to come to recognize the particularities of power, oppression, and privilege within the specificities of the space?

What I have learned through engaging this autoethnography of student voice and pedagogy is that these questions are ongoing, that the work of social justice education, of transformative teaching and learning, is necessarily unfinished work. As teachers, as researchers, we need to be willing to make our pedagogies vulnerable, to consider what is produced in our pedagogical encounters. While this study was conducted too long after the two experiences, TLC and WSA, to affect change in those student voice projects, it has encouraged me to think and be differently in the next pedagogical relations in which I find myself. The challenge is in substantively incorporating the necessary “pedagogical thoughtfulness” (van Manen, 1997), the critical reflexivity that this study encourages in an effort to make change in the present moment.
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Appendix A

Student Voice, High School Retention and Community Involvement: An Info Sheet for Wycliffe St. Albans’ Programs Committee

Prepared By: Mairi McDermott

2.16.2012

What are the issues?

- The high school push-out (popularly known as ‘drop-out’) rate in Quebec, but in particular in x\(^39\) and the surrounding community, is unacceptably high.
- Wycliffe St. Albans already has many programs in place that are quite unique and well regarded; however, there has been expressed concern about limited involvement from members of the community.

What is Student Voice?

- Student Voice starts with the premise that those who experience school daily have some unique insights into what is working and what is not.
- Student Voice has a long history, harkening back to John Dewey at the beginning of the 20\(^{th}\) Century with his calls for Democratic Education. Recently, with the many concerns regarding widespread disengagement of certain populations in the education process, Student Voice initiatives have begun to address the issues in powerful and lasting ways.

Why Wycliffe St. Albans?

- Wycliffe St. Albans’ high school program is unique in its present structure. Through Student Voice commitment WSA can deepen and expand its influence in the academic successes of its students, as well as strengthen its relationship with the community.
- Student Voice initiatives are making their presence known worldwide, particularly in the United States, England and Australia. Presently, Ontario and Alberta are the only provinces in Canada that have provincial mandates to include Student Voice initiatives, as well as provincial-wide organizations to support the work. This opens the possibility for WSA to become a frontrunner in educational reform efforts in Quebec.

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\(^{39}\) I have removed the name of the community to protect the identity of the organization.
How does Student Voice work?

- There are many forms that Student Voice can take, from student government to students as researchers, to students as curriculum co-developers.
- Student Voice work necessitates that whatever form it takes, what the students say is taken seriously. In other words, Student Voice work is action oriented.
- A variety of people can engage in Student Voice work, from teachers, administrators, and researchers, to community organizations.
- Regardless of who is participating, the goal is to find ways to listen deeply* to what students are already saying through their actions and potentially coded articulations, as well as to engage students explicitly in conversations regarding the issues that have been identified.

What might Student Voice look like at Wycliffe St. Albans?

- The work is necessarily a process, since traditionally students are used to having their lives structured for them, as well as since adults in various roles are not used to listening deeply to students.
- Similarly, the work necessitates that it is not over-planned, in that, we cannot approach this work with assumptions about where it might go before we listen deeply to the students.
- The first stage will focus on the new Program Structure involving the high school partnership. The students who currently come to the Homework Help at WSA will be having dinnertime conversations facilitated by Mairi McDermott, Ph. D. student at the University of Toronto. Some of the conversations will likely focus on the following:
  - Getting feedback about what already works, considering the students voluntarily come, they may have some insight into what can attract more students to the program, as well as how to strengthen what is already working.
  - Engaging the students in articulating what activities they might like to see in the Saturday programming, with a focus on team building and leadership. Students will be asked to articulate how they understand team building and what leadership looks like to them.
  - Asking students why they think their parents/guardians are not more involved and what they think might get them more involved in Wycliffe St. Albans.
- There are many possibilities for Student Voice work to grow after this initial stage. Again, where it goes will be related to what the students say. However, some areas where there is potential are:
  - High School Transition Program: The Students who are already in high school could have a key role as ‘trainers’ for the upcoming 9th graders. This will allow students to build their resumes, building on key leadership and problem solving skills, as well as create a space for the upcoming 9th graders to know someone at the high school before they begin.
  - Internship Program: The students can come up with an advertising plan to bring people both from within and outside of the community to come and speak
about their profession/job and the necessary training/schooling. This will also work to address the concern for more community involvement.

What Are Some of The Possibilities for Wycliffe St. Albans Engaging in Student Voice Work?

■ **Various skills are built** through Student Voice work such as teamwork, communication, negotiation, enterprise, planning skills, leadership, democracy, agency, decision-making, reflexivity about learning and the self, and metacognition.

■ **As students become active participants, they begin to feel ownership** for their learning, taking responsibility not only for themselves, but also for the culture of the school and community.

■ **The students gain a sense of belonging** when their voices are heard and respected. There is a correlation between feelings of belonging and improvement in the overall goals of school (i.e., grades, retention). Similarly, the students gain confidence and belief in their self worth when they feel a sense of attachment.

■ **Community building** – building of relationships, trust and responsibility to themselves and the community

■ **Youth development** – preparation for life after high school: leadership, decision-making

*“In this instance listening is not a biological capacity, but rather an emotional relationship between people that requires trust” (Cahill, C. 2007. The Personal Is Political: Developing New Subjectivities Through Participatory Action Research. *Gender, Place, and Culture*, 14(3), pp. 267-292)