Reading and Writing Culture:

Illuminating Power Structures in a Social Reading of Student Narratives

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Background

As a daughter and granddaughter of immigrants, I experienced how the American school system's promotion of a standard language can be an avenue resulting in cultural assimilation. From my own story and research on multicultural education, a need to focus on student narratives arose. Multiple studies have shown the importance of personal, family, and cultural narratives to the psychological well-being of adolescents and their developing self-concept (Duke, Lazarus, & Fivush, 2008). However, schools often require students to censor the narratives they share in class in order to be accepted in its academic context. Ladson-Billings (1992) terms supporters of this approach "assimilationists" (p. 382).

Unlike an assimilatory model, pedagogical styles that value multiculturalism as an educational asset embrace "students' home and community culture" as part of the content of school (Ladson-Billings, 1992, p. 382). From Ladson-Billings' (1992) Culturally Relevant Pedagogy came a movement of multicultural theorists. An overview of the pedagogical styles most relevant to this paper is outlined in Table 1.

Table 1: Multicultural Pedagogies

Culturally Relevant Pedagogy	"a pedagogy that empowers students intellectually socially, emotionally, and politically by using cultural reference to impart knowledge, skills, and attitudes" (Ladson-Billings, 1992, p. 382)
Culturally Responsive Pedagogy	"education that is culturally grounded, empowers students and makes learning easier because there is congruence between their home culture' perspectives and experience and the curriculum content taught in schools" (Gay, 1997, p. 156)
Culturally Sustaining Pedagogy	"to perpetuate and foster – to sustain – linguistic, literate, and cultural pluralism as part of the democratic project of school" (Paris, 2012, p. 93)
Socially Just Pedagogy	"equitable access to learning" and social justice through student participation (Ford, 2013, p. 372)

A common trend among each of these authors is the non-deficit view of students' home cultures (Ladson-Billing, 1992; Gay, 1997; Paris, 2012; Ford, 2013). Especially in the context of English education, this requires teachers to also value home literacies, whether or not they fit into the traditional academic mold. Adopting Paris's (2012) culturally sustaining pedagogy, culturally pluralistic teachers should find a way for students to use and practice home literacies, including non-dominant dialects.

Beyond sustaining home cultures, Ernest Morrell's (2005) notion of Critical English Education calls for the socially just pedagogies that Ford (2013) described. Morrell's 2005) definition defined literacy around helping students develop the skills to "deconstruct dominant texts," "create their own critical texts that can be used in the fight for social justice," and "call upon everyday language and literacy practices….to make connections with academic literacies and toward empowered identity development and social transformation" (p. 313). This makes school relevant to students' lives by valuing student experiences and developing their agency to create. However, as Kirkland (2011) showed, these culturally sustaining and socially just practices come into conflict with the larger education system when a standards-based approach is instituted, as legislation is often culturally and socially insensitive to pluralistic teaching methods.

Literacy Stigmas and the Common Core

With the recent issue of the Common Core State Standards (CCSS), many teachers may feel pressured to focus on dominant English mechanics and expunge language habits that do not fit the dialect of standardized tests. One again, this views students' home languages as a deficit to their learning; however, studies have shown that students who excel in code-switching and interethnic communication do so with a strong demand in both their home language and the

dominant English of standardized testing (Wheeler & Swords, 2006; Paris, 2009; Liu, 2010).

Even language blending and hybrid languages, like Spanglish, have yielded positive impacts on

student literacy. Fitting within Paris's (2012) culturally sustaining pedagogy and Ford's (2013)

culturally just pedagogy, Martinez (2010) showed that students' use of Spanglish was not due to

lack of dominant American English abilities, but instead showed a greater command for elements

of literacy such as beings able to "(1) shift voices for different audiences, and (2) communicate

subtle nuances of meaning" (p. 125). By acknowledging these traits as well as other evidence of

grammatical knowledge and competence, Martinez (2010) disproved the view that hybrid

language practices are a way students' cover-up or supplement insufficient language

understanding.

　　　　With this in mind, it becomes clear that an incorporation of home literacies into the

classroom creates a "broader social, cultural, historical, and political contexts" in the way

educators and researchers view language difference (Martinez, 2013). In relation to the

classroom, this information develops the argument that practice of home languages, including an

acceptance of language blending and incorporation of code-switching, can actually help

strengthen students' multiple literacies, including those that will be assessed on standardized

tests.

　　　　Furthermore, aiding students in sustaining home literacies embodies the multicultural

pedagogies that help teachers engage students that have historically been marginalized in the

American academic system, especially since the adoption of standards-based approaches

(Kirkland, 2011). I argue that, even in a Common Core Curriculum, there is place for students to

freely express themselves using authentic discourse. Narrative writing, especially memoirs,

gives opportunity for self-expression and the telling or retelling of cultural stories that may stem

from personal experience, family traditions, or community cultures. Psychological research on personal and family narratives has even found that students psychosocial well-being benefits from being able "to organize and integrate memories of their past experiences into a life narrative, allowing for self-continuity and a more complex sense of self" (Bohanek, Marin, Fivush, & Duke, 2006, p. 41). Additionally, for those who still feel the dominating pressure of other standards, Calkins, Ehrenworth, and Lehman (2012) claimed, in their book *Pathways to the Common Core*, that narratives "are an essential component in almost every other kind of writing," and that student growth naturally progress from a proficiency in narrative to a command of informative, gradually scaffolding the skills of argumentative writing (p. 113). Not only does this argue for the teaching of narrative writing to young children, but also for its continued practice in the secondary English classroom.

This study explored narrative writing in the CCSS as an opportunity to incorporate pluralistic teaching methods into the standards-driven climate of contemporary education. This is neither an endorsement for nor an argument against the CCSS. Rather, this research explored narrative writing as a way to make the current climate of school more pluralistic and culturally conscious. To do so, recognition of the weaknesses in current standards-based approaches had to be made.

Research Objective

Combining my personal struggle to sustain my practice and understanding of my own home culture and the knowledge I gained about culturally conscious pedagogical theories, the standards-based movement became continuously more problematic to the ways I thought about my future classroom. In an attempt to incorporate home cultures and follow the pedagogical models of researchers like Paris (2011) and Ford (2013), I turned to memoir writing as a possible

solution. As memoir falls under the narrative writing standards, incorporating this type of writing combines both a development skills identified in the CCSS and allows an outlet for personal expression. The following questions focus on the social and cultural implications of narrative writing in a classroom context.

    1. How are student identities reflected in their memoirs?

    2. How can student memoirs be read as social texts that reflect their worlds view and identities?

    3. How can the use of student narrative be used as a culturally sustaining practice?

    4. How can the use of student narratives be used as a culturally just practice?

By seeking answers to these questions, this research aims to find a place for both narrative writing and students home cultures within a secondary English classroom.

Methodology

By using Anna Sumida's (2000) post-structural interpretation framework, I analyzed students' narratives in order to learn about elements of that student's culture, focused specifically around power structures related to gender, socioeconomic status, and race.

Methodological Framework

In Sumida's (2000) article, "Reading a Child's Writing as a Social Text," she adopted post-structural literary theory in order to develop a socially relevant understanding of students' fiction. Sumida (2000) explained that post-structural theory argues, "the meaning of a literary text is indeterminate and there is no simple or unproblematic way to make sense of the meaning of a novel or poem," so multiple perspectives are necessary for a complex and reliable interpretation of a text (Sumida, 2000, p. 309). In this study, I took this notion one step further and examined students' narratives as a form of self-definition. With this view, I also adopted

Carino's (1992) argument that "from a poststructuralist perspective on language,… definition is always already tenuous, for to define is to symbolize, to create, to be in language" (37). Under this framework, student writing is a symbolic representation of themselves and, therefore, is an opportunity for them to create and exist in language. Combining this perspective with Sumida's (2000) method of multi-perspective literary analysis allowed for a more complete reading of student narratives that aimed to develop a deeper sense of understanding students' cultural identities.

In order to follow Sumida's model of multiple interpretations of student writing, I made mimicked her use of post-structural "aporia." A concept derived from Derrida (1976), aporia is an aspect of literary deconstruction criticism that calls for further examination of points within a text that show contradiction, ambiguity, of complexity in relation to their meaning. Applying this concept allowed Sumida (2000) to point out the various worldviews that were reflected in her student's writing, including worldviews related to class, gender, geography, culture, and family structure. This research showed how reading through different interpretive lenses can yield different points of aporia and conflict, thus altering the interpreted meaning of a text.

In order to explore the existence of power structure and struggles in student narrative, four lenses of literary analysis were applied: Reader Response Theory, Feminist Theory, Marxist Theory, and Critical Race Theory. These theories were chosen largely due to the influence of Appleman's (2009) text, *Critical Encounters in High School English: Teaching Literary Theory to Adolescents*. While Appleman's (2009) focus was largely on teaching literary theory, not applying it to a teacher's reading of student writing, her choice of theories is based largely around illuminating the role of cultural ideologies. She argued:

...when we teach the concept of ideology to young people, we are helping them to discern

the system of values and beliefs that help create expectations for individual behavior and

for social norms. Although ideology can be individual, it is generally a social and

political construct, one that subtly shapes society and culture. (Appleman, 2009, p. 2)

Using literary analysis to identify ideological beliefs allowed Appleman (2009) to help her

students question the authority of said ideologies; therefore, literary analysis has the power to

both expose and challenge power structures that ideologies assume, as well as expose readers to

perspectives they may not have considered without the aid of an analytical lens. In short, using

literary theory can help expose both the bias of the text and the bias of the reader.

Just as this is important for students, this research examines the benefits that reading from

different critical perspectives has for teachers. To do so, student memoirs were coded from the

perspectives of four different lenses: reader response theory, feminist theory, Marxist theory, and

critical race theory. The first three theories stem from Appleman's (2009) framework, while the

final theory comes from an extension of her work, *Critical Foundations in Young Adult*

Literature : Challenging Genres by Antero Garcia (2013), and is especially appropriate in terms

of the research sample.

Sample

The sample of this study consisted of nine student papers from high school students in the

Oakland, California area in 2001. All papers were gathered by Dr. Amy Carpenter Ford

throughout her years of teaching in the area. Throughout the research process, Dr. Ford was

available for consultation to provide contextual information about the students and ensuring their

stories were not misrepresented.

All student papers in this sample were written by students of color, with seven papers written by girls and two papers written by boys. With the exception of one paper, all were written in response to a prompt asking about a time they got in trouble. For this assignment, students made use of writing skills like the use of description and dialogue, making these papers apt for linguistic analysis. Furthermore, each paper ended with a lesson learned, allowing for rich analysis of personal and cultural values.

Analytical Lenses

As stated previously, four major literary analysis theories were applied throughout this research: reader response theory, feminist theory, Marxist theory, and critical race theory (CRT). This yielded four rounds of coding, one for each analytical theory. During each round of coding, a theory was applied by searching for points of aporia from that theoretical lens. The process for each of theory is outlines below.

Reader response theory. Reader response theory attempts to interpret meaning from a reader's personal reaction to a text. Contrary to popular belief this is not a free-for-all approach, but, rather, it is a systematic way for individuals to interact with texts based on the text itself, the context in which the test was read, and the reader's identity. Appleman (2009) explained the the "meaning is a result of a kind of negotiation between the authorial intent and reader's response" (p. 37). In her work, Appleman (2009) acknowledged that this is not an objective approach but rather a "culturally determined" one (p. 32). In this study, the reader response lens was used as a basis of comparison. To code from this lens, I coded points of aporia based off my personal reactions to the text. Then, by referring to a list of identity markers I created, as well as the student memoirs, I derived meaning from those negotiations. This approach allowed me to assess personal biases and compare my perspective to the perspective of the other critical lenses.

Feminist theory. In attempt to expose power structure between genders and illuminate cultural ideologies about gender roles, feminist theory was applied to the student memoirs. Instead of aligning this critique with a specific feminist movement, the analysis adopted Appleman's (2009) student-friendly overview of feminism, as it was most apt for coding and related to an actual classroom context. For this round of coding, points of aporia were addressed that included gendered language, social gender relationships, and behaviors of male and female characters in relation to patriarchal hierarchy and gender norms(Appleman, 2009, p. 167).

Marxist theory. Marxist theory was used in this study to examine socioeconomic power structures. The coding process focused on mentions of monetary or material possession, employment, and social mentalities of a Bourgeoisie or Proletariat standard (such as valuing comfort and stability or valuing hard work, etc.) (Appleman, 2009). Furthermore, Appleman (2009) emphasized that Marxist critique "examines the relation of the text to the social reality of that time and place" (p. 146). The appealing part of applying this critique to student memoirs is that is takes into account the social dynamics and culture of the local community, thus accounting for place-based cultural variations.

Critical race theory. This is the only theory that was applied that did not come from Appleman's (2009) model. Instead, the coding of CRT was adopted from Garcia's (2013) adaption of Appleman's (2009) work. He offered CRT as a solution to his critique of Appleman's lack of non-white perspectives. Considering the student papers analyzed in this study all came from students of color, applying this theory because even more relevant. Before Garcia (2013), Barbara Christian (1987) wrote an essay titled "The Race for Theory," which criticized the one-sided view of literary criticism, a view dominated by "Western philosophers" and "academics" (p. 280-281). The problem Christian (1987) identified in late 1980s academia is

the same problem Garcia (2013) identified in the modern use of literary theory in English classrooms: a lack of critical approached for the reading of authors of color that were created by people of color. Therefore, CRT provides a lens with which to read authors of any racial or ethnic background by challenging a color-blind approach. To code from this perspective, I marked points of aporia that dealt with racial acknowledgement and description (or lack of), supported a social justice viewpoint (in terms of poverty, sexism, and racism), as well as "the intersection of racism and other forms of insubordination" (including oppression and marginalization) (Garcia, 2013, p. 47). Furthermore, it is important to acknowledge that "CRT builds upon scholarship from ethnic, legal, historical, and sociological studies," promoting a transdisciplinary approach to reading literature that acknowledges writing's socially embedded nature (Garcia, 2013, p. 47-48).

Data Analysis

Corresponding to the coding, this chapter presents a frequency chart and a theory-by-theory analysis in order to compare the different interpretations brought about by the four different interpretive lenses used. The frequency chart takes a more quantitative approach to the analysis, while the theory application looks more qualitatively.

Frequency Chart

In an attempt to understand and organize the quantity of data, Table 2 was created. It depicts the number of aporiatic points in each paper in accordance to the different analytic theories that were applied. When looking at this data, it is important to note that, while the numbers give a useful overview of findings, they do not take into account actual interpretations yielded by the individual points of aporia. Likewise, while the numerical data catalogs the individual points of aporia, it does not consider the overall thematic trends or more global

interpretations that resulted from the analysis. There limitations are accounted for later, in the qualitative theory-by theory analysis.

Table 2: Aporiactic Frequency Analysis

	Paper 1	Paper 2	Paper3	Paper4	Paper 5	Paper 6	Paper 7	Paper 8	Paper 9	Total
Title	"Tears from the Grave"	"The first Time in Trouble."	"Shop-Lifting"	"When Air was Taken Away"	"When I got in Trouble"	"My First Encounter with Trouble"	"Unlocked Gate"	"The Five Dollar Toss"	"Not Smart"	N/A
Writer's First Name	Jasmin	Vanessa	Eneisha	Tiana	Daisy	Lakeisha	Priscila	Isaiah	Diego	N/A
Reader Response	25	12	17	17	15	18	30	12	22	**168**
Feminist	25	11	17	10	24	31	19	17	17	**171**
Marxist	21	9	44	7	9	12	16	10	20	**148**
CRT	22	12	25	9	20	24	22	15	17	**166**
Total	**93**	**44**	**103**	**43**	**68**	**85**	**87**	**54**	**76**	**653**

Despite some shortcomings, this frequency chart does allow for a description of the overall sample and allows for the acknowledgment of numerical anomalies. For example, the numbers show that while Marxist criticism had the highest range at 37, there was a clear outlier in Paper 3. Considering that this paper was about the time Eneisha got in trouble for shoplifting, it seems logical that this paper would have the most aporiactic points in that category. On the other hand, Papers 2 and 4 are shown here to have the least points of aporia. While it may be easy to then conclude that those students have less power structures present in their lives, it is important to acknowledge that Paper 2 was the shortest of the samples (Vanessa), and that Paper 4 was the only one to not write about a time she got in trouble (Tiana).

Theory-by-Theory Analysis

Reader response theory. Before I could complete my analysis from the lens of reader response theory (RRT), I first addressed the context of reading and identity markers, in accordance with Appleman's (2009) model. I read all of these papers from the lens of RRT over the span of two days. The majority of papers were on a Saturday, during the last afternoon, between 1:00pm and 6:00pm. Breaks were taken between readings so as to not feel burnt out or begin meshing the stories in my head. The last two papers, Papers 2 and 5, were read next night between 10:00pm and 11:00pm. It is important to note that these paper were read after a four-hour shift working in Central Michigan University's Writing Center. Above, Table 2 shows no major difference between the coding of these papers from the perspective of RRT, so the context was not deemed to be detrimental to the analysis.

Next, as Appleman (2009) suggested, I listed identity markers. These identity markers are not only based on self-concept but also on my role in society and relationships with others. My identity markers included: I am a the daughter and granddaughter of Greek immigrants; I am a heterosexual woman; I am an older sister; I am part of a big family; I am a preservice teacher; I am a writing center consultant; I am bilingual; I grew up in an urban area; I am White; I can pass; I have received a good education; I am a daughter of married parents; I am a waitress; I am engaged; I am in my early 20s; I am a scholarship recipient; I am a researcher. While this may seem like a lot, each of these identity markers pointed differences and similarities between the student writers' experiences and my own experiences, thus producing meaning.

My personal identity became a complex meaning negotiation strategy. In some ways, I was very similar to the students whose papers I was reading. My identity as an ethnic bilingual student meant I related to instances of non-standard dialect in the home. In particular, the Spanglish in Venessa's memoir reminded me of Greek-English language blending that occurs in

my own home. In terms of deriving meaning, I connected Vanessa's Spanglish practices to the student helping her mother at work. I knew that, when I was younger, I would sometimes go to work with my mother or grandmother, often times to help them communicate. While this may not have been the students' meaning, connecting these two points of aporia through RRT allowed me to see Vanessa's multifaceted family connection and obligation. While a teacher may view school as more important than work, it seemed to me that what Vanessa was really dealing with was balancing school and family

Feminist theory. In applying feminist theory to the reading of student works, it is important to acknowledge that the purpose was not to necessarily to critique the student's masculinity or femininity, but rather to understand what gender power structures existed in the lives of these individual students. That being said, three major trends emerged: the matriarchal home structure and the intersection of gender and age.

Matriarchal home structure. While Western culture tends to favor a patriarchal, male-dominated structure, the feminist analysis of these student narratives showed that homes tended to follow a more matriarchal structure. Of the seven memoirs that included guardians as main characters, five of the papers were dominated by female figures. Furthermore, the two that casted males, the father in both cases, dealt with discipline issues coming from outside of the home. This showed that, in these communities, mothers were central figures, and that strong women were valued. However, the father's role in dealing with trouble out of the home may indicate a conflict between gender constructions in students home communities and dominant American gender constructions.

Intersection of gender and age. Following with the matriarchal home structure, the hybridity of gender norms is an observation made in response to the varying depictions of

masculinity and femininity throughout student texts. For instance, while adult women are viewed as strong, respected, and even intimidating, the lessons the young women shared at the ends of their memoirs were often very submissive, referring to ideas of "control and respect" (Lakeisha), "guilt" (Daisy), and always listening to adults. On the other hand, boys joked more, as seen when Diego says, "I learned a valuable lesson, to be sneakier, just kidding. I learned that you don't have to be a criminal to fit in with the guys." Here, even the lesson is more about his masculine identity than subordination to adults. This contrast shows that age resulted in contrasting gender power structure in these students' lives.

Marxist theory. The social stratification of Marxist theories allows it to highlight power structure of socioeconomic disparity. Specifically, the classification of the bourgeoisie (owners of the means of production) and the proletariat (the working class) is a main element of Marxism (Appleman, 2009). The student memoirs depicted this social dichotomy in their portrayal of working class values in conflict with material possessions, as well as their focus on occupation-based authority.

Hard work v. material possessions. As stated previously, the working class values, particularly one for a strong work ethic were apparent in multiple memoirs. Vanessa's and Isaiah's stories showed that hard work was a family value, adopted intergenerationality. Not only did many of the papers show a value for hard work, but some also depicted this hard work in direct opposition to the possession of material wealth. For instance, Diego reflected:

> If I had the chance to live there, I wouldn't because I would be bored all the time with no one to talk to. Even if I got to keep all that stuff I wouldn't want it. I have been brought up to be a hard worker and not be spoiled.

Here, Diego framed hard work and material possessions as mutually exclusive by showing people with material wealth as spoiled. This shows clear social class distinction that he is very aware of. Furthermore, not only does this show an awareness of economic power structures, but also a prejudice towards those on the other end of the power spectrum.

      Occupational authority. Further showing the distinction between social classes in the existence of occupational power, power derived from a person's job, in the student memoirs. In some cases, like Vanessa and Ms. Carpenter, the occupational power dynamic was accepted and respected. However, in other cases, like with the doctor who told Tiana she could no longer play basketball, the occupational power was eventually challenged. In Eneisha's run in with the security officer, hi occupational authority was reinforced by other, explicitly named power structures, his whiteness and masculinity. While students' experiences show both acceptance and rebellion against occupation power, they do acknowledge its existence, proving its existence in their lives.

      Critical race theory. CRT was created as a way to examine the role of the author's race, as well as the way race is described in the text. Reading these memoirs from a CRT perspective showed a sense of student empowerment that came along with being able to tell their own stories. The CRT reading revealed inversion of traditional literary conventions, an awareness of oppression, and linguistic and cultural hybridity.

      Inversion of Literary Tradition. While Dr. Ford's guidance confirmed that all papers in this sample were from students of color, not all writers overtly named their race; however, many of the writers did name the whiteness of others. This is an inversion of the way traditional literary texts depict characters of color (Garcia, 2013). By assuming colored race and naming

whiteness it inverts traditional power structures by othering whiteness. The agency this gives

fulfills Ford's (2013) proposed socially just pedagogy by giving students a social voice.

     Awareness of oppression. Not only did the naming of whiteness invert the traditional

literary depictions, but it also showed an awareness of oppression, like when Eneisha described

the security guards as "two white men smiling suspiciously." While Eneisha had done something

wrong, the way she described the men hints that they felt joy in busting Eneisha and her friends.

This may have just been because of their occupations; however, it was the whiteness she named,

placing the emphasis on racial oppression. This view both breaks color blindness mentalities and

shows a social justice conscious.

     Linguistic and cultural hybridity. Beyond the discussion of race, racial and ethnic

markers were apparent throughout the student paper. Particularly, the contrast between the

dialogue in the memoirs and the narrative voice showed a sense of linguistic and cultural

hybridity. Often times, student adopted a more academic dialect in their narration and description

of the events; however, the majority of the students embedded the dialogue of their stories with

community dialects, like Vanessa's use of Spanglish and her subsequent translations. This

showed a level of proficiency in both home dialect and culture, as well as the dominant dialect

and culture. Having command in both allowed students to forge hybrid identities through their

writing.

Conclusions

     At the begin of this research, I worried that it was too subjective or dependent on my own

experiences; however, as I read the students' work, I realized that subjectivity is kind of the

point. Personal stories are not objective; they are dependent on the individual and their

experiences. Likewise, teaching is not objective; it is dependent of the individual teacher as well

as his or her students. The above analysis revealed personal bias I had, as well as ways I would

be able to personally connect to these students. Therefore, adopting an analytical thought process

to student memoirs can be used as a formative assessment practice in order to modify teaching

methods and shape best practices.

Cultural Consciousness

While the individual theories yielded interesting and diverse perspectives, the coding

process also revealed the repeated occurrence of overlapping power structures. This overlap

revealed cultural complexities by illumination cultural ideologies and showing where students'

home cultures came into conflict with dominant American ideologies. This research does not

argue that teachers will have complete understanding of individual students by reading their

memoirs; it acknowledges that teacher-student relationships develop over time. Instead, this

research showed the ability to use memoir writing as a tool that allows students to incorporate

home literacies and develops teachers' cultural consciousness, especially in relation to the power

structures that exist in students' home communities. This consciousness is an important

awareness that teachers need in our increasingly globalized world in order to harbor a pluralistic

classroom environment.

This cultural consciousness can help English teachers overcome the limitations of

standards-based education (Kirkland, 2011) while still helping them to become proficient in the

goals of CCSS. In fact, even having been written before the times of the CCSS, the student

memoirs inarguable met the narrative standards, thus, as Calkins et al. (2012) argued, setting

them up for success in writing other genres. By assigning memoir writing, teachers value student

voices. As a first assignment, this gives the potential to begin the development of teacher-student

relationships. Furthermore, reading student memoirs as a social texts, can function formatively to develop teachers' awareness of the students individual and community values.

A Third Space

Looking at the agency memoir writing created by allowing students to reflect, interpret, and recreate their world, the idea of the classroom as a third space emerged. Related to identity hybridity shown in student writing and the work of Gloria Anzaldua (1999), applying the notion of third space to the classroom allows teachers to create a community that exists between the dominant cultural norms of larger ideologies and students' home communities. For instance, in the case of an English classroom, a third space allows students to practice home cultures, develop academic English skills, and forge their own unique identities. The third space of a classroom values all cultures without creating a hierarchy that subordinates student experience. By developing a safe environment and intercultural understanding, using memoirs to form the creation of a third space classroom actualized the goals of both culturally sustaining and socially just pedagogies; ir respects home cultures and allows students to create and communicate, giving them the tools needed for social advocacy. Without approaching the reading of student memoirs from an analytical perspective, teachers can easily fall into the routine of grade-only readings. While this research does not argue against grading student writing, it does illuminate that ignoring the social implication of student writing, especially memoirs, can limit cultural consciousness and lead to the perpetuation of harmful power structures.

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