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Culture and Curriculum Collide: the Case of Spoken Word in the Classroom

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Culture and curriculum collide: The case of spoken word in the classroom

by

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A thesis submitted to the graduate faculty
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

MASTER OF SCIENCE

Major: Education

Program of Study Committee:
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Iowa State University
Ames, Iowa
2013

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION:

EJ, his name having been called, stood up from his chair and walked toward the front of the room, where I had created a makeshift stage with a microphone stand. As he walked toward the “stage” I began to chant and cheer with the rest of the students. I started the chant, “Okay you guys, let’s give EJ some L!” As I said the letter ‘L’, I signed it with my hands, and the rest of the students repeated “L!” and signed the letter as well. “Let’s give him some O!” I cheered, signing an ‘O’ with my hands. The students joined me and signed the letter ‘O’ as well. We continued this until we had completely spelled the word “Love.” Everyone was yelling “Eeeeeee!” and cheering when EJ finally made it to the stage.

EJ stood on the stage. The students were talking amongst themselves. I did not quiet them, for they would do this on their own. EJ waited for the room to quiet and adjusted the unplugged mic to his height, really acting as though he were truly in a poetry café. The chatter continued, and EJ waited. Corey stood up and said, “Ay! Respect the mic!” and a hush fell over the classroom. EJ cleared his throat and began his poem, “A response to the Big Bad Wolf. Bully bully go away, come again some other day, we regular pigs, I mean kids, we just want to play,” he said. As EJ began his poem, I surveyed the room. He had everyone’s attention. Today we’d read The Three Little Pigs and the Big Bad Wolf and they had been asked to write summaries of the story. EJ, of course, had decided to write a spoken word piece. At the end of his poem students snapped, some clapped, and some cheered. EJ walked off the stage smiling. One
wouldn’t know it by the way EJ walked off the stage with such confidence, but he had started out the summer quiet and shy, but today, he owned the room.

The summer of my sophomore year at Spelman College I worked as a Servant Leader Intern for the Children’s Defense Fund Freedom Schools. As a servant leader intern, I spent my summer teaching ten students who were in grades 3-5. As a servant leader intern, we were able to set up our classrooms with any theme we so chose. I set up my classroom as poetry café. At one end of the classroom there was a makeshift stage, with a mic stand and a microphone. The middle of the classroom had desks, and there was a “creation station” on the other side of the classroom with art supplies. On the walls I taped up pictures of Jill Scott, Langston Hughes, Maya Angelou, Nikki Giovanni, and other artists. Hanging from the ceiling were various quotes from those artists. Taped on the door of the classroom was a sign shaped like a microphone that read “Welcome to the CDF Poetry Café.”

The Children’s Defense Fund Freedom Schools focused on an intensive summer reading curriculum. The students read each day and completed activities surrounding the books they read. Each activity was designed to help them creatively summarize the books. Some of the activities included partner role playing, artwork to summarize the book, or writing a poem for a summary. Each activity required them to report back to the class. In my classroom, to complete these activities, my students had to move to the poetry café. They entered the stage, and the other students cheered them on to make the student on the stage feel comfortable. Each day the students in my class walked up to the mic, and took the stage. The students could have the mic, and when someone had the mic,
no one else could speak or interrupt, not even me as the facilitator. The students had authority, and I encouraged them to express themselves. They were free, and some of them voiced that they never felt this way in “regular school.” My class became a close knit community immediately. It only took a few days for them to sit with each other at lunch, play together outside, sit together during morning activities, and stick up for each other outside of the classroom.

The other servant leader interns took notice of how cooperative my students were, and they asked me what I was doing with my students. At the time that I was questioned about the success of my classroom, I could not pinpoint what I had done. Now, after conducting the research that I have surrounding spoken word, I believe that the spoken word atmosphere I created made the difference in my classroom. I was able to see firsthand, students from very different backgrounds reach each other on that stage. I saw them share their personal stories. I saw the poetry they wrote leap off the page on that stage. I have seen firsthand the impact that spoken word can have in education. It is this experience that has sparked my research interest in spoken word in the classroom.
CHAPTER 2

CULTURAL COLLISION: A HISTORY

Roll Call, Present and Still Absent

Class has begun,
Take your seats,
She called to the class,
As she began to take roll,
And as she called our names,
I took my seat,
And thought…
This was never meant for me
This classroom
These seats
Never quite meant for me
The books don’t have any brown skinned girls
Books and lessons don’t reflect the real world
History isn’t my story
No this was never built for me
Better built against me
Built on me
No room for Linda Brown’s
Or los que hablan español
Or those who don’t practice Christianity

No this was never created for me

English doesn’t reflect me

The language in the classroom doesn’t respect me

More like forgets me

No this was never molded for me

The mathematics is against me

Because where I come from 1 + 1 can easily equal 3

The math doesn’t reflect reality

The statistics are against me

No this was never constructed for me

The scientific reasoning

Has no logic for me

Murphy’s Law has become Martial Law

No this was never designed for me

Never intended for me

This classroom

These seats

Never quite meant for me

-Nicole Fraise
Never Meant for Me: Cultural Collision/Deculturalization in the Classroom

The above poem reflects the experience of many students in American classrooms. The history of schools in the United States is filled with cultural collision that is the curriculum often is in direct contrast to the culture of students in the classroom. In many cases, schools simply ignore the various cultures of their students and employ an “all-American” centered curriculum. Students are “expected to check their cultures at the school or classroom door and learn according to the norms of European Americans” (Brown, 2007, p. 61). Some researchers have come to understand this process as “deculturalization.”

Joel Spring (2010) believes that this process of deculturalization has always been present in our schools. Spring defines deculturalization as “the educational process of destroying a people’s culture and replacing it with a new culture” (p. 8). A historical analysis of the education of various cultures within the United States demonstrates a legacy of deculturalization. Schools within the US have employed various educational methods of deculturalization, such as:

1. Segregation and isolation
2. Forced change of language
3. Curriculum content that reflects culture of dominant group
4. Textbooks that reflect culture of dominant group
5. Denial of cultural and religious expression by dominated groups
6. Use of teachers from dominant groups (Spring, 2010, p. 106).
This process of deculturalization can be seen in the educational history of Native Americans, African Americans, Asian Americans, and Hispanic/Latino Americans in U.S. schools.

The history of deculturalization within schools of the United States began with Native Americans. Native Americans inhabited the land that colonists sought to obtain. Education became a method to obtain this land. Thomas McKenney was appointed the first head of the Office of Indian Affairs (now known as the Bureau of Indian Affairs) in 1824. McKenney created tribal schools with the belief that, “the creation of tribal school systems operated by white missionary teachers would culturally transform Native Americans in one generation” (Spring, 2010, p. 23). It was the hope of the colonists that this process of deculturalization would allow for easy settlement of the land. At the beginning of the 19th century, public education was heavily influenced by religious groups, mainly Protestant denominations. The main goal of these religious groups was “the replacement of Native American culture with the culture of white Anglo-Saxon Protestantism,” and this goal was to be accomplished through education, an education “designed to bring about their cultural and religious conversion” (Spring, 2010, p. 26). According to Spring (2010), the employment of teachers from the dominant group is an educational method of deculturalization (p. 106). Michael Coleman (as cited in Spring, 2010) states that, “these Presbyterians could accept nothing less than the total rejection of the tribal past, and the total transformation of each individual Indian, a cultural destruction and regeneration to be brought about by the Gospel of Jesus Christ” (p. 5-6). These religious groups denied the cultural and religious expression of Native Americans
and tried to replace these expressions with ones that mirrored their own, thus maintaining
the process of deculturalization in the education of Native Americans. In addition to
stripping away their religious beliefs, and cultural practices, education was used to
replace their native tongue with English. Boarding schools were implemented in the latter
part of the 19th century to accomplish full deculturalization of Native Americans. These
boarding schools completely removed Native American children from their homes. By
removing them from their homes, they were disconnected from their culture and religious
practices.

African Americans have also experienced an education of deculturalization within
the United States. Enslaved and brought to the United States as free labor, Africans were
denied an education. Slave owners refused them any schooling, because there was a fear
that “literacy would expose slaves to abolition literature,” which would lead them to seek
liberation (Spring, 2010, p. 43). However after the Civil War, freed slaves sought an
education for their children. The Civil Rights Act of 1866 ensured freed slaves the same
rights as their white counterparts, which included education. However, this education
only, “served to replace African cultures with the dominant American culture” (Spring,
2010, p. 47). One of the major components of the education that Africans in the United
States received was the emphasis on the English language. This forced change of
language by the white Protestant majority is one of the methods of educational
deculturalization (Spring, 2010). The struggle for the education of enslaved Africans
continued because their status of “slave” kept them from many rights. However, after the
breakout of the Civil War and the passing of several new legislatures, such as the
Emancipation Proclamation, the Civil Rights Act of 1866, and the Fourteenth Amendment, enslaved Africans were freed and granted citizenship. With newfound liberation, freed slaves, now African Americans, sought to educate their children. In 1896, *Plessy v. Ferguson* declared that schooling for African Americans be, “separate but equal.” However, the education of African Americans was anything but equal. African Americans realized that separate schooling was resulting in an inferior education for their children. Although faced with this reality, school segregation was widely accepted until the Supreme Court overthrew the *Plessy v. Ferguson* ruling and deemed “separate but equal” schooling unconstitutional. The history of denial of education, and the stripping away of the native tongues of African Americans are examples of deculturalization in their educational history.

Asian Americans have had a similar history to that of Native Americans and African Americans. The history of Asian Americans is filled with laws that collide with their culture, and many of these laws concerned their citizenship. It is important to understand that the public image of Asian Americans, reflected in legislature, directly affected their education and justified the deculturalization process that occurred within the education of Asian Americans. Asians were excluded from citizenship in the Naturalization Act of 1790 (Spring, 2010, p. 70). Their exclusion form citizenship also excluded them from a right to an education. Asians born in the United States were considered to be citizens in the Civil Rights Act of 1866. Citizenship granted Asians the ability to seek an education. However, in 1882 the U.S. banned all Chinese workers from the U.S. with the Chinese Exclusion Law (Spring, 2010, p. 70). With the passing of this
Chinese Americans were portrayed in a negative light, and this was also represented in the classroom. Chinese American students experienced ridicule and discrimination in school solely because of their cultural background. In 1919, a Territorial Government report declared (as cited in Spring, 2010) that “all Americans must be taught to read and write and think in one language,” this prompted the closing of Japanese language schools (p. 80). Henry Kinney, the Territorial Superintendent of Education stated, “the task of the Department of Public Instruction is to weld the large Japanese factor…into an integral part of our American body politic” (Spring, 2010, p. 80). In order to assimilate Chinese Americans and Japanese Americans to the American culture, students were taught in English and English only in the public schools. If students adopted the American language they would better assimilate to the American culture. The important factor was to Americanize them even if it meant to push them through a process of deculturalization. In 1924 Mississippi courts segregated Chinese students from white students (Spring, 2010, p. 77). From 1941-1945 the U.S. government placed Japanese, including native-born citizens, in concentration camps. The Immigration Act of 1965 attempted to end discrimination against Asian Americans. Asian Americans have experienced deculturalization within schools of the United States through denial of education, segregated schooling and English mandated instruction. The term “Asian,” placed upon this group of people, also deculturalizes, as it lumps together various identities under one term. It is important to understand that teachers in public schools held the same attitude toward Asian American students as that that was represented outside the classroom. The
educational history of Asian American students is filled with cultural collision and deculturalization in the public schools.

Hispanic and Latino Americans have also endured the process of deculturalization within their education. As with the Native Americans, the land occupied by Mexicans and Puerto Ricans was vital. After the Mexican-American war, the United States appropriated California, Colorado, New Mexico, Arizona, Utah, and Texas as territory. At the conclusion of the war, the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo granted citizenship to the residents of lands ceded to the US (Spring, 2010, p. 86). Once the land was obtained, educating the people of the land in American culture was crucial. To do so, California passed a law in 1855 that mandated that all school instruction be in English. The school system stripped Mexican Americans of their language in the classroom. A few years later, the Civil Rights Act of 1866 made native born Hispanic and Latino persons citizens. Texas adopted California’s law of English only classrooms in 1870, stripping more Mexican Americans of their language. The Plessy v Ferguson case also affected the education of Mexican and Latino Americans, as “separate but equal” education meant an inferior education for Mexican and Latino students. In 1898 the U.S. conquered Puerto Rico (Spring, 2010, p. 86). Two years later, the U.S. government passed the Foraker Act was passed to Americanize Puerto Rico (Spring, 2010, p. 92). Americanizing Puerto Rico meant English-only classrooms and several Americanization policies. The U.S. government imposed policies that included:

1. Required celebration of US patriotic holidays, such as the Fourth of July, which had not been celebrated prior to conquest.
2. Patriotic exercises designed to create allegiance to the United States, such as pledging allegiance to the US flag and studying important historical figures of U.S. history.

3. Replacing local textbooks and curricula with ones reflecting the way of life in the United States.

4. Attempts to expel teachers and students who engaged in anti-U.S. activities.

5. Attempts to use teachers from the United States as opposed to local teachers.

6. Introduction of organizations, such as the Boy Scouts of America, to promote allegiance to the United States.

7. Attempts to replace Spanish with English as the language of instruction.

(Spring, 2010, p. 101).

These policies maintained a process of deculturalization for Puerto Ricans. While Puerto Ricans were fighting to maintain their culture in the classroom, the US passed laws in 1930 and 1935 that subjected Mexican Americans to segregated schooling. It wasn’t until 1951 that Puerto Rico was able to restore Spanish as the language of instruction in schools (Spring, 2010, p 92-93). The Civil Rights Act of 1964 attempted to end discrimination against Hispanic and Latino Americans.

The Civil Rights Movement and the 1965 Immigration Act changed the atmosphere of the United States, and various cultures began to seek a transformation in the curriculum of the schools. Parents, recognizing their rights, wanted to see their
children represented in the curriculum. Parents were no longer willing to subject their children to the process of deculturalization that schools of the United States had been employing. They wanted the schools to actually mirror the climate of the United States. The United States had transformed into a society of multiple cultures who had fought for their rights, and education was one of those rights. Parents wanted the school system to adopt an educational structure that would include the cultures of all students represented in the classroom. This new urge for a better representation of the cultures present in the United States prompted the rise of leaders such as James A Banks, Christine Sleeter, and Carl Grant as the founders of multicultural education. According to James A. Banks (2010), multicultural education is “an idea stating that all students, regardless of the groups to which they belong, such as those related to gender, ethnicity, race, culture, language, social class, religion, or exceptionality, should experience educational equality in schools” (p. 25). Banks understands that multicultural education is not only an idea or concept, but it is also an educational reform movement, and more importantly it is a process. So where does the United States stand currently in the multicultural education movement?

**Still Not Meant for Me: Culture and Curriculum Continue to Collide**

How far has the United States come after the Civil Rights Movement and the multicultural education reform? The United States has moved forward, realizing that something more than multicultural education is needed in schools. Some researchers have proposed culturally responsive pedagogy, which “makes teaching and learning relevant and responsive to the languages, literacies, and cultural practice of students across
categories of difference and (in)equality” (Paris, 2012, p.93). Culturally responsive teachers understand that culture influences the way that students learn, and they must show an appreciation for the ways in which culture influences their students by reflecting such in the classroom. Teachers use “students’ cultural contributions in transforming their lives and the lives of their families and communities by making education relevant and meaningful” (Williams & Callins, 2007, p. 195). Under this pedagogy, teachers use student’s cultures in the classroom to help them learn. Students excel academically when educators include aspects of their culture in classroom instruction.

Django Paris (2012) believes that educators must move past culturally responsive pedagogy to culturally sustaining pedagogy. Culturally sustaining pedagogy “seeks to perpetuate and foster—to sustain—linguistic, literate, and cultural pluralism as part of the democratic project of schooling” (p. 93). Paris believes it is not enough to make some reference to students’ cultures in the classroom. It is important that educators not only reflect students’ cultures, but that the classroom is set up in a way that students’ cultures are maintained in the curriculum. Educators must teach students that their culture is not only important, but that it is relevant, and it has value.

Even as new culturally sensitive pedagogies began to be introduced, the remnants of cultural collision still remain. In 1981, almost twenty years after the Civil Rights Act, twenty-seven states had active “Official English” laws (Crawford, 2008). In 2007, states across the US debated over an English Only Amendment. That same year, Kansas, Idaho, and Missouri adopted English only legislature. Missouri voted in favor of the amendment stating that, “English shall be the language of all official proceedings in this state”
(Insinna, 2008). It is 2013, and unfortunately the laws still echo the sentiments of 1855. These English only laws are reflected in the schools. Students who are not native English speakers are ushered to English as a Second Language (ESL) classrooms, or English Language Learners (ELL) classrooms. In some cases, students whose first language is not English are placed in remedial classrooms. The school system viewed their language as a deficit that must be overcome. Lu (1998) explains:

When a school reinforces an English-Only policy, it sends a message to all children that minority languages have less value than English as tools of learning. And because the school is a microcosm of society, this message also suggests that those languages are not an integral part of the American society. This message equally deprives mainstream children of the opportunity to experience the cultural diversity in this country, and robs every child of the chance to learn the full potential of human possibilities (para. 9).

There are other policies in public schools that collide with the culture of students. Marc Lamont Hill (2011) states “full range of draconian public policies from anti-baggy pants legislation to civil injunctions against gangs mark a full-fledged war against Black youth” (p. iv). These policies attack the culture of these students, dictating to them the clothes they can and cannot wear. It promotes stereotyping of students by encouraging teachers and administrators to associate their style of dressing as “gang” attire. In addition, “Black students are underrepresented among graduation cohorts and overrepresented in special
education classrooms, suspension rolls, and dropout statistics” (Hill, 2011, p. iv). There is not an issue with this group of students, the issue is in the education system that warrants these types of outcomes.

Some schools in the United States have tried to sustain the culture of Mexican and Mexican American students. The city of Tucson was looking for a way to boost the achievement and lower the drop-out rate of Mexican and Mexican American students. In 1997, Tucson High School introduced the “Hispanic Studies Department” to assist in this endeavor. It was renamed “Mexican-American/Raza Studies in 2002, (Palos, 2011). Though it was titled Mexican-American/Raza Studies, the classes were open to all students. The classes not only provided a space for Mexican and Mexican American students to learn about themselves and to see themselves in the curriculum, but it provided a space for their peers to learn about them as well. One student states, “What they show us and how they teach us, it’s really different from regular classes. It means knowing where you come from, who you are inside” (Palos, 2011). The students in these classes are engaged in critical thought. They are able to push each other to look at situations from various perspectives. Mexican-American/Raza Studies is a perfect example of how multicultural education and culturally sustaining education can be executed well. This program increased high school graduation and college attendance of Latino/a students. Although it would seem that this program would be needed in schools, it was met with a lot of resistance by the Tucson school board. The board met to determine if the Mexican-American/Raza studies program should continue. Students enrolled in Mexican-American/Raza studies gave speeches to the board explaining the
importance of the program and what it meant to them. Some students even invited the members of the board to come sit in on one of their classes. However, not one of the board members attended a Mexican-American/Raza studies class, and in 2010, the State of Arizona (2010) passed amendment HB2281, which banned ethnic studies in public schools. The law states, “A school district or charter school in this state [Arizona] shall not include in its program of instruction any courses or classes that either: 1. Are designed primarily for pupils of a particular ethnic group. 2. Advocate ethnic solidarity instead of the treatment of pupils as individuals” (State of Arizona, 2010, p.1). It seems as though the United States had finally made a progressive step forward with the Mexican-American/Raza studies program in Tucson, but once again culture and curriculum collided. It is clear that schools in the United States have had a history of cultural collision. However, it is also evident that this cultural collision is not history, but a present problem.
CHAPTER 3
SEARCHING FOR A SOLUTION

Spoken Word to Combat Cultural Conflict

The classroom is a place of conflict. Angela Valenzuela (1999) states that “schools are organized formally and informally in ways that fracture students’ cultural and ethnic identities, creating social, linguistic, and cultural divisions among the students and between the students and staff…[T]his practice takes away from the education of these students, who recognize a schooling process that disrespects them and eventually leads to their academic demise” (p. 19). Spoken word poetry in the classroom can be used to repair fractures in students’ cultural and ethnic identities caused by the history and current practice of deculturalization in U.S. public schools. Spoken word can also be used to alleviate some of the cultural collision that occurs in the classroom.

Spoken word has been defined in several ways. Simply defined, it is poetry that is spoken aloud. Shiv Raj Desai and Tyson Marsh (2005) define spoken word as a, “form of poetry that utilizes the strengths of our communities: oral tradition, call-and-response, home languages, storytelling and resistance. Spoken word poetry is usually performed for an audience and must be heard” (p. 71). Spoken word has a relationship with the hip hop movement, which is a sister to rap. All three are intrinsically tied together, however, they are not one in the same. Much of the literature surrounding these topics lumps them all together, and often rap is used synonymously with hip-hop. Low (2011) explains, “the term ‘rap music’ refers to the combination of the DJs rhythm tracks and the emcee’s lyrics. ‘Hip-hop,’ however, is the larger culture of which rap is just one element” (p. 7).
Many clarify that hip-hop, having grown from the Black Panther Movement, is not the same as rap because it is considered socially aware and politically conscious. KRS-One (as cited in Low, 2011) explains, “hip-hop is not just a music, it is an attitude, it is an awareness, it is a way to view the world. So rap music is something we do, but hip-hop is something we live” (p. 7). Spoken word is as old as time. For as long as we have been speaking, spoken word has been around. Spoken word comes from oral traditions. Truthfully, both hip-hop and rap derived from spoken word. Sometimes spoken word combines poetry with music and even dance. It can even be argued that rap is nothing more than poetry set to music. There is a large history that one could delve into concerning hip-hop, rap, and spoken word. However, the purpose of this paper is to isolate spoken word from the two, as my intent is to examine how spoken word can be enacted in the classroom.

There is plenty of literature on hip-hop and rap. In fact, there is considerable literature on “hip-hop based” education and hip-hop pedagogy. Hip-hop is being employed in the classroom in several ways. Petchauer (as cited by Low, 2011) states that hip-hop is being used in education in three ways, “(a) hip-hop based education—studies that use hip-hop, especially rap songs and lyrics, as curricular and pedagogical resources; (b) hip-hop, meaning(s), and identities—studies that focus on how students mobilize these texts and how they intersect with identities; and (c) hip-hop aesthetic forms—studies that conceptualize the way of doing or habits of mind produced by hip-hop practices” (p. 17). Many researchers have examined hip-hop in the classroom (Akom, 2009; Alim, 2007; Clay, 2003; Dimitridias, 2009; Forman, 2001; Hill, 2009; Morrell &
Duncan-Andrade, 2004; Rodriguez, 2009; Stovall, 2006). However, there is a gap in the literature available concerning spoken word in the classroom. Low (2011) examines hip-hop and spoken word in the classroom. Once again, hip-hop and spoken word are paired together rather than separate. Low’s study found that, “the performance poetry course was a success on a number of grounds, including student participation in class discussion [and] in quality and volume of poetry writing” (Low, 2011, p. 19). Though students’ participation and involvement in the class was a success, Low acknowledges that students’ grades could not be directly linked to their curriculum. In an attempt to address the gap in the literature concerning spoken word, I examined Brave New Voices as a sample of youth involved with spoken word. Brave New Voices is a national youth poetry slam competition that has been operating since 1998 (Kass, 2003, p. 222). The youth involved with Brave New Voices were able to share their experiences in the HBO series titled the same as the competition. The television series demonstrated that the youth involved in Brave New Voices have found several opportunities in spoken word: (1) Spoken word allows them to cross borders and speak to others from various cultural backgrounds, (2) Spoken word is an opportunity for them to share their personal narrative or counter-story, (3) Spoken word is an opportunity to promote social change, and (4) Spoken word is the opportunity to save lives. From the themes espoused in the television series I have created three themes for spoken word in the classroom.

I propose that spoken word can be used in the classroom as (1) a form of a counter-story or counter-narrative to make prominent the voices of underrepresented cultures, (2) to border cross, and (3) to promote social justice inside and outside the
classroom. For these reasons, I propose that spoken word can be used as a medium for academic discourse.

**Spoken Word as A Counter-story**

Many of the youth involved with Brave New Voices explained that their poems are their stories. When they are on the stage, they command everyone to hear their story, uninterrupted, uninhibited. For a brief moment, it is about them and they take the audience through their journey. Sharman, the grandmother of one of the poets, in the competition that performs a piece about his battle with Tourette syndrome states, “I was reliving it, retraveling and really fully feeling what that young man has been through” (Lathan et al, 2009). Through his piece, he was able to have others experience his story.

Spoken word provides the opportunity for students normally placed in margins of the classroom to tell their stories in the form of a counter-stories and counter-narratives. Greg Dimitriadis (2009) says, "Narratives provide key instantiations of particular discursive formations and the sense-making apparatuses they enable. Narratives order events and relevant participants in ways that implicate larger meaning-making systems or discourses. These narratives, or stories, are the tool through which we understand ourselves and our relationship to others. They are the 'stuff of culture' both micro and macro" (p. 124). Spoken word employs narratives, which will allow students to understand each other in new ways. Spoken word will support counter-narratives of marginalized students, which will provide a counter perspective to dominant discourses in the classroom. Yosso (2006) states the purposes of counter narratives is to “challenge the perceived wisdom of those at society’s center” and “facilitate transformation in
education” (Yosso, 2006, p. 14-15). Spoken word allows students to find themselves in the curriculum. It allows them to create the curriculum. Zenzele Iseke (2012), states that, “the classroom is transformed into a highly combustible cypher—a ‘counter-hegemonic space,’” (p. 35). Spoken word will dismantle hegemonic discourse. There will be no dominant story. All stories and histories will be viewed as equally valuable. With spoken word, the narratives of all students will be included in the curriculum.

**Spoken Word as a Way to Border Cross**

In 2008, Brave New Voices took place in Washington D.C, and in 2010 it took place in Los Angeles California. Students from all across the United States participated. There were teams from New York City, New York; Fort Lauderdale, Florida; San Francisco, California; Honolulu, Hawaii; Ann Arbor, Michigan; Philadelphia, Pennsylvania; and Santa Fe, New Mexico represented in the competition. Brave New Voices is a spoken word competition that allows youth from all over the country to come together and share their work. Rodriguez (2003) states, “African, Latino, Native American, Asian, and European aesthetic sensibilities are swimming in the same sea we call American culture. In many of these traditions, dance told stories, songs conveyed images, and music was rife with poetry” (p. 210-211). Rodriguez says that spoken word is expanding boundaries in the United States, and this is needed to “expand meaningful discourse in this country” to cross cultural boundaries (p. 211). Brave New Voices is crossing cultural boundaries. Lyz Soto is a mentor of the Hawaii team. Soto states that Brave New Voices “brings kids together that would probably never meet” (Lathan et al, 2009). Spoken word gives them a reason to come together. Jon, a youth from the Fort
Lauderdale team, states that Brave New Voices and spoken word allows these teams to be, “able to come together with all those different people with the common love of poetry” (Lathan et al, 2009). Spoken word is a meet up place for all of these cultures to come together and share about their culture. These youth come together and cross borders with their poetry and allow the audience to step into their lives and into their culture.

Spoken word can be used in the classroom as a way to border cross between students and teachers of different cultural backgrounds. Border crossings requires border thinking. Cynthia L. Bejarano (2005) states that, “border thinking encourages deep reflection into the margins of common knowledge and challenges people to explore uncharted academic discourses and the border perimeters where most people reside and generate thought. It is, after all, in the margins and borders of culture, life experiences, social memory, and history that critical thinking emerges” (p. 21). Border crossing allows for the students at the margins of the classroom to move to the center and contribute. This allows for cross-cultural discussions, which enables student to better understand their peers. Bejarano (2005) also states that by discussing, “the intellectual spaces and lived experiences of those considered to be different or ‘other,’ we can better understand the mosaic of youth cultures that intersect, merge, and create anew the lives and perspectives of youths” (p. 21). Once again this allows all students to be present in the curriculum, which alleviates cultural collision in the classroom.

Spoken Word to Promote Social Justice

The youth involved in Brave New Voices also see spoken word as an opportunity for social change. In the 2010 competition, the Denver team stated in their piece Scores
“poetry at it’s best changes things: changes people, changes laws, changes minds” (Lathan & Simmons, 2010). Many of the youth in their interviews on the show expressed that the goal of their poetry is promote change. Robbie Q. Telfe, a mentor for the Chicago team, says the “topics of these poems are going to be social change and social justice. It’s not arts for arts sake anymore. It’s art that makes you want to get up and light something on fire” (Lathan et al, 2009). Many times the pieces ask the audience to get up and make a change. The Denver team performs a piece titled Little Feet, that talks about the ills of capitalism through a discussion of sweat shops and the families they impact. They ask everyone in the audience to think seriously about where their shoes come from. The audience has been enlightened through their piece. Jeff Kass, a mentor for the Ann Arbor team says, “this is not about competition, this about revolution and evolution” (Lathan et al, 2009). A majority of the teams talk about injustices in their pieces. B. Young, a poet on the NYC team, explains, “I came to spoken word because it’s about making a change” (Lathan et al, 2009). Joshua Bennett, a poet on the Philadelphia team, acknowledges that, “poets were the voice of the struggle […] that’s what I love about spoken word. It brings you the news and current events, but in ways that are very funky and fresh, and like we know the world is hard for black people and women, but when someone puts it in a poem, it’s like what does that mean?” For these youth, spoken word is an opportunity to ask questions and seek solutions.

Spoken word can also be used in the classroom to promote social justice discourse. David Stovall (2006) explains, "poetry allows for issues of race, class, gender and sexuality to be freely questioned and affirmed" (p. 65). Because poetry allows for
discussions about race, class, and gender, spoken word then “becomes the process of 'dropping hard questions into the world' and trying to answer them. For the performer the challenge is to ask hard questions of the audience through performance” (Stovall, 2006, p. 69). Spoken word encourages students to question and criticize the world around them. Spoken word encourages discussions about taboo topics. In addition to encouraging students to examine these topics, spoken word also encourages them to make social changes for the better. Students are able to express the ills they see in society, and then they are able to examine ways to transform society for the better.
CHAPTER 4
THE CURRENT STUDY

To better understand the impact that spoken word has on individuals and the impact that it may have in schools, I interviewed several people who are involved with spoken word. These individuals ranged from the age of 21 to the age of 30. I interviewed 5 women and 1 man. Some of them were persons who attend spoken word shows regularly, while some of them were spoken word artists, and some were even coaches to slam teams. They ranged in geographic origin.

Study Design and Data Collection

The purpose of this study was to interview adults who are involved in spoken word to understand the spoken word environment. I sent an invitation to persons in the spoken word community, those who recite spoken word, host shows, attend shows, those who are on spoken word/slam teams, coach slam teams, and professional spoken word artists. Within the invitation, I invited potential respondents to pass along the research announcement to those who may qualify for participation in the study as well. This is known as “snowball sampling” (Esterberg, 2002, p. 93-94). This allowed for the participation of additional persons who would otherwise remain invisible in this research area. My research announcement listed my email and phone numbers for participants to contact me. Once I talked with potential participants, and we mutually agreed that their participation met the criteria for the study, each participant signed an Informed Consent form.
Delimitation

The criteria for participation in the study required that respondents be 18 years of age or older. In addition respondents must be involved with the spoken word community. Respondents must either perform spoken word, listen to spoken word in a regular basis, host open mics (shows involving spoken word), host slam functions (spoken word competitions), or coach a spoken word/slam team.

Methodology and Theoretical Framework

This research was set up to be a qualitative study. Kristin G. Esterberg (2002) states that qualitative research tries “to understand social processes in context [...] qualitative researchers try to understand the meaning of social events for those who are involved in them” (p. 2-3). Qualitative research was employed to give a deeper understanding of the participants’ lived experiences with spoken word. This research was grounded in Critical Race Theory, Critical Pedagogy, and Border Pedagogy. Critical theorists believe that society is oppressive in its nature and believe that this oppressive nature can be transformed into liberation. The objective of researchers who engage in Critical Theory is to “emancipate, empower or otherwise make free a particular group of people” (Briodo, 2002, p. 438). Critical Race Theory “tries not only to understand our social situation, but to change it [...] to transform it for the better” (Briodo, 2002, p. 439). The end goal for both Critical Theory and Critical Race Theory is social change through emancipation and liberation. Border pedagogy allows for those in the margins to contribute to dominant discourse.
**Critical Race Theory**

The end goal for Critical Race Theory is social change through emancipation and liberation. Critical Race Theory has 6 tenets:

1. Critical Race Theory recognizes that racism is endemic to American life.
2. Critical Race Theory expresses skepticism toward dominant legal claims of neutrality, objectivity, colorblindness and meritocracy.
3. Critical Race Theory challenges ahistoricism and insists on a contextual/historical perspective of the law…Critical race theorists…adopt a stance that presumes that racism has contributed to all contemporary manifestations of group advantage and disadvantage.
4. Critical Race theory insists on recognition of the experiential knowledge of people of color and our communities of origin in analyzing law and society.
5. Critical Race Theory is interdisciplinary.
6. Critical Race Theory works toward the end of eliminating racial oppression as part of the broader goal of ending all forms of oppression (Dixson & Rousseau, 2005, p.9).

These are the commonly expressed tenets of Critical Race Theory. Yosso (2006) explains how Critical Race Theory applies to education by listening the tenets of CRT in terms of the classroom. They are as follows:

1. **The Intercentricity of Race and Racism:** A CRT in education centralizes race and racism, while also focussing on racisms' intersections with other
forms of subordination, based on gender, class, sexuality, language, culture, immigrant status, phenotype, accent and surname.

2. **The Challenge to Dominant Ideology**: A CRT in education challenges claims that the education system offers objectivity, meritocracy, color-blindness, race neutrality, and equal opportunity […] questions approaches to schooling that pretend to be neutral or standardized while implicitly privileging White, U.S.-born, monolingual, English-speaking students.

3. **The Commitment to Social Justice**: CRT is dedicated to advancing a social justice agenda in schools and society […] CRT views education as a tool to eliminate all forms of subordination and empower oppressed groups—to transform society.

4. **The Centrality of Experiential Knowledge**: CRT finds the experiential knowledge of People of Color legitimate, appropriate, and critical to understanding, analyzing, and teaching about racial subordination.

5. **The Interdisciplinary Perspective**: CRT analyzes racism, classism, sexism, and homophobia from a historical and interdisciplinary perspective. (Yosso, 2006, p. 7-8).

Critical Race Theory emphasizes the use of narratives as a form of counter-story telling. Yosso (2006) states that counter-stories integrate four data sources “(1) empirical research (e.g. findings from surveys, focus group interviews, etc.); (2) existing social science, humanities, legal, or other literature on the topic(s) evidenced in the research; (3) judicial records (court filings, rulings, oral arguments, etc.); and (4) authors’ professional
and personal experiences (p. 11). Counter-stories are used to disrupt dominant discourses. I employ this theory because of the emphasis on narratives and counter-stories. I will used the narratives I gather to help understand how spoken word can and should be used in the classroom.

**Critical Pedagogy**

Critical Pedagogy is “concerned with transforming relations of power which are oppressive and which lead to the oppression of people” (Aliakbari & Faraji, 2011, p. 77). Critical Pedagogy has several goals: (1) a just society in which people have political, economic, and cultural control of their lives, (2) awareness raising and rejection of violation and discrimination against people (3) tries to transform oppressed people and save them from being objects of education to subjects of their own autonomy and emancipation (4) emancipate and educate all people regardless of their gender, class, race, etc., and (5) return the marginalized groups their lost voices and identities (Aliakbaria & Faraji, 2011). Critical pedagogy will empower students and give them their voices back. I am employing this theory to transform power relations in education.

**Border Crossing**

Border crossing theory is rooted in politics of difference. Border crossing theory promotes “border thinking.” Bejarano (2005) says that border thinking encourages “deep reflection into the margins of common knowledge and challenges people to explore uncharted academic discourse and the border perimeters where most people reside and generate thought” (p. 21). Border Crossing Theory allows for academic discourse from the margins of the classroom, allowing for voices that are often silenced to be heard.
**Study Participants**

For the purpose of this study, to ensure confidentiality, all participants are listed by pseudonyms of their own choosing:

Tia: African American, age 23, a Master’s degree student currently living in the Midwest, but originally from the South, has written, performed, and listened to spoken word. Tia attends spoken word shows on a regular and performs often.

Mary: African American, age 24, a Master’s degree student currently living in the Midwest but originally from the South, has written, performed, and listens to spoken word. Mary used to be a member of a spoken word group that performed bi-weekly.

Brandon Xplicit: African American, age 30, from the Midwest, makes a living performing spoken word across the United States, as a professional spoken word artist. Brandon Xplicit also hosts spoken word shows and open mics, as well as facilitating workshops at various middle and high schools across the US.

LC: African American, age 23, currently living in the Midwest but originally from the South, writes poetry but does not perform. She has, however, performed in the past. She currently attends spoken word shows regularly and listens to spoken word often.

Jasmine: African American, age 21, currently living in the South but originally from the Midwest, writes poetry but does not perform, listens to spoken word often and is contact with several professional spoken word artists.

Lyric Haiku: African American, age 25, currently living in the South, writes and performs spoken word, and listens to spoken word often. Lyric Haiku previously charted
an all female spoken word group that performed bi-weekly at various events and programs.
CHAPTER 5

FINDINGS

The interviews conducted with the above participants yielded several themes. There were six major themes that emerged from the interviews: (1) Spoken word as a Platform/Academic Discourse/Critical Thought, (2) Spoken word as a Third Space (3) Spoken word as Affirmation, (4) Spoken word as Border Crossing, (5) Spoken word as Counter-stories/Narratives/Lived Experience/Multiple Truths, and (6) Spoken word as Social Change.

Spoken word as a Platform/Academic Discourse/Critical Thought

One major theme that emerged from the interviews was the idea that spoken word could and should be used in the classroom because it promotes critical thought, and it can be used as a platform for many issues. For this reason, I have titled this theme “spoken word as a platform/academic discourse/critical thought.” One participant, Lyric Haiku, expressed that spoken word is malleable, and it can be used as a platform to discuss virtually any topic:

It’s whatever you want to write about. It’s a canvass. It’s a cuss word. It’s profanity. It’s sexuality. It’s…you know, abuse. It’s neglect. It’s all of those feelin’s that we can’t feel in church. It’s all of the feelin’s we can’t feel on the playground. Its all the feelin’s we can’t feel in a labor room when we’re giving birth. Umm, wrapped into one. It’s the Bible. It’s the sky. It’s gay-straight. It’s lesbian. It’s whatever—it’s whatever it is. And that’s why so many people do it, and need it, and want it, and seek it, because as a spoken word artists it’s so vital to society.
Lyric Haiku also went on to express that schools use a banking system, in which teachers deposit knowledge into schools. She explains that this is not a natural way to learn. She expressed that spoken word would be good in the classroom because,

Learning is from your stomach. Learning is from your voice. Learning is learning other people’s voices. Learning is learning to respect another person’s voice. Learning is that your voice isn’t the only voice. Learning is learning that there is no such thing as somebody who is voiceless, because everybody has a voice, so if we learn to shut up a little bit, we can hear another voice. You know, so-or if we learn to challenge, and speak up, then we can get our voices across. So, spoken word, for me, in the classroom, is necessary.

Mary also expressed that spoken word could be a beneficial tool in the classroom. Mary expressed that spoken word allows students to help generate knowledge:

Knowledge is something that is constructed. Nobody knows what is fact…nobody knows what’s-nobody can say what is valuable stuff to know and what’s not, and so through spoken word, I feel like I’m able to contribute to creating knowledge, and to say what I think is important stuff to know.

At some point in the interviews, all six participants expressed that spoken word could be used as a platform to discuss various topics. They also expressed
that spoken word can be used in academic discourse and to promote critical thought.

**Spoken word as a Third Space**

Another theme that presented during the interviews was “space.” Many participants shared that spoken word created a space for them. Some expressed that it created a space for them in the classroom, while others felt that spoken word created a space for them in society at large.

LC simply stated, “spoken word gives you a place.”

Lyric Haiku expressed that as a black female in a male dominated society, she felt that spoken word allowed space for her voice without any limitations,

You know, little black girls don’t have spaces to, you know, be smart alecs, or smart asses, or talk loud. We’re always told to be quiet, sit proper, and be little ladies. And if a boy spoke loud he was called the preacher, or like the next pastor. But there was no space for a little black girl to be loud. And so, as a loud little black girl, spoken word gave me that-that-space.

Mary expressed that a teacher in her high school introduced her to spoken word and it gave her a space that allowed her to fit in at school.

I don’t know if she took the misfits or if we were just drawn to her because we knew she was a little bit..uh, marginalized in the school a bit, and we…congregated together, and we were able to create something the school had never seen before, the county had never seen before, and it was a huge thing.
Spoken word provided a space for Mary and other students like her that were deemed as the “misfits.” Mary also addresses the marginalized, spoken word also provided a space for her marginalized teacher. It proved a space for them to come together, and to fit.

**Spoken Word as Affirmation**

A majority of the participants expressed the positive nature of spoken word. Many of them expressed the praise they received when they performed their spoken word pieces. In addition, they felt that spoken word was affirming, and the environment for spoken word was positive. Mary articulated,

> I think it’s a positive energy and a positive sort of environment […] when you’re at a poetry reading, someone-they all want you to say something, everyone is eager to be moved and is waiting-and even if you mess up it’s okay, because the message is there. You can still have power behind your words even if the delivery isn’t quite there. I think people are expecting something amazing versus expecting you to fail.

Other participants expressed that spoken word affirmed their cultural identity. Some expressed that spoken word affirmed that it was okay for them to simply be themselves and be accepted. All six of the participants expressed that in most cases the environment at an open mic, or poetry café, was welcoming and affirming.

**Spoken word as Border Crossing**

All of the participants expressed that spoken word allows them to connect with people that they otherwise would be unable to reach. LC described it by expressing,
“people are paying attention, they’re connecting, they’re engaging.” For many of the participants, spoken word is an opportunity to let other people into their world. Mary explained:

When you can say something and you connect a whole room of people who might not have anything in common but you can make them see an experience or feel something that they’ve never encountered before, how healing that could be for someone who has gone through that to witness that other people have—even if only for two minutes, have gotten a piece of what that experience was like for them.

Jasmine expressed the same sentiment and explained, “It’s like we’re complete strangers, but everybody is able to connect. Like you can see people connect, they’re able to relate to one another when the artist is speaking.” Spoken word served as a bridge that connects those who would otherwise remain distanced from one another.

**Spoken word as Counter-stories/Narratives/Lived Experience/Multiple Truths**

Many of the participants expressed that spoken word allows them to share their stories or lived experiences. Some also expressed that it allows them to share the stories of others who have been silenced. Many of them expressed that by sharing these stories they are able to demonstrate that there are multiple truths. Mary explains that spoken word is great for sharing one’s experience:

I think it’s an even better mode for storytelling, because the way I see it is, some people when they tell stories it takes them a whole novel, and that’s cool and I have respect for that, but I think there’s something even more
powerful when you can tell a full story and allow someone to experience
so many different emotions in 2-3 minutes, and so…I think that’s a very
powerful vehicle.

Lyric Haiku explained for whom she writes:

I recently got really heavy into writing for women. Umm, black women in
particular. Black women who are young mothers who feel silenced and
hushed by a capitalistic society that tells them they should have had their
child at 30 or, you know, waited until they got became a lawyer, or waited
until they got married, or waited to—or waited or waited or waited, because,
you know, of x, y, and z. And what happens when you’re a mother just out
of college and, you know, you didn’t wait? What happens when you got
pregnant in college? What happens when you did have an abortion, and
you don’t talk about it because it’s not talked about? So recently I’ve been
writing a lot for women who have umm experienced that other part of
their womanhood that nobody talks about. […] I’m talk about my reality,
and that might empower someone else to talk about their reality and then
through that we celebrate our realities, not hide them.

Brandon Xplicit explained that the opportunity to share one’s story is especially
important for young people.

But especially for young people, I think, umm being able to share some of
their stories […] it was just the things that they were sharing about, you
know, their experiences-things I’ve never been through, drugs and guns,
and you know, their mom and dad not being there for them. So to hear that, umm can be therapy. So I definitely think, you know, people being able to share their stories.

Mary explained that it is important to hear and value the stories of others if the United States is going to ever improve. She explained,

If American society as a whole is to be more forward thinking and open and really try to accomplish this post racial society then we have to learn things of other cultures, value ways of communication and value ways of learning that are valued in other cultures, as opposed to the tradition system that we’ve learned here.

**Spoken word as Social Change**

Another theme that emerged from the interviews with the participants is the idea of using spoken word to empower and promote change. Mary explained how powerful words can be. She explained, “I can influence people just by what I say and how I say it. And when you think about history, and how people have moved whole societies just off the power of their words.” Her words can be used to promote change. Lyric Haiku explains, “Poets are out there to you know—you know, heal the isms out there—to break stereotypes.” In Lyric Haiku’s opinion, spoken word could be used to combat racism, agism, sexism, and other types of discrimination.

Tia also expressed that she believed spoken word could be used to combat stereotypes and the idea of “normal.” She explained, “I think it [spoken word] would deconstruct a lot of notions about men having to be this way and women having to fit into
these certain boxes. Like I was saying we have to fit in these boxes earlier […] It’ll defy a lot of norms.”

Jasmine explained, “through your words you’re trying to reach the masses.”

Spoken word is a form that can reach many with messages of social change.
CHAPTER 6
DISCUSSION

“I don’t understand all this talk about differences. Each of my little kindergarten students comes to me with the same stuff. It doesn’t matter whether they’re Black, Hispanic, or White, they each have a brain, a body, and a family. They each get the same curriculum. I treat them all alike. And yet, by the end of the year, and as I watch them move up through the grades, the Blacks and Hispanics fall behind and the White kids do better” (Howard, 2006, p. 29). The teacher that expressed this does not understand why although she gives her students the same curriculum their performance is different. She ignores their cultural backgrounds and prescribes them all the same curriculum and hopes for the best. For all of her students to excel they must all be present in the curriculum. The interviews with, Tia, Mary, Brandon Xplicit, LC, and Lyric Haiku demonstrate the various ways that spoken word can be used to help students find themselves in the curriculum. They expressed that spoken word is a platform for academic discourse and critical thought, which makes it easily employed in the classroom. In addition, many of the participants expressed that spoken word created space for them and affirmed their identity. Spoken word applied to the classroom would create a space for all students and create an atmosphere of affirmation. Spoken word allowed them to cross cultural borders. Culture is often a topic that is avoided in the classroom. With spoken word, culture can be explored and affirmed. All of the participants expressed that spoken word allows them to share their stories. Many of the participants use spoken word to promote social change.
Although the research I conducted provided a lot of insight, it does have it’s faults. There are plenty of things that I would have liked to change about this project. In the future, I would like to interview students, who are still currently matriculating through P-12th grade. In addition, my research was mainly concerned with student identities and empowering those identities, however, I would like to do future research on the impact that spoken word curriculum has on literacy, students’ grades, and performance on state tests. I believe a future ethnographic study would be powerful research in this area. Perhaps then, it could be accessed if spoken word curriculum has a correlation to literary and performance in other subject areas. I would have liked to be able to observe a classroom that employs spoken word curriculum. I mainly interviewed women; I would have liked to include more male perspectives. I only interviewed people of color as well, I would have liked to have more perspectives. I would have liked to interview teachers and administrators about how they feel a spoken word curriculum would fair in schools. However, this research was a great starting point.
Educators could use spoken word in the classroom. To understand our students we must first give them the opportunity to speak, to tell us how they come to know and make understanding. Spoken word allows students to have this opportunity. James Kass states, “spoken word is such a great tool for kids. Teenagers are super passionate about their ideas. You know, you never know what they’re thinking until you ask them to really speak, and to speak on their own terms” (Lathan et al, 2009). Spoken word allows students to engage in their education, they are able to contribute to the knowledge making process. As educators we must adopt new ways to teach our students, so that all feel as though they are present in the curriculum. Shaunita Levinson (2012) states that, "to truly embrace an individual's purpose of educating their students, an educator has to be open and armed with the flexibility to engage all students present within their classrooms" (p. 110). The United States comes from an educational history that has attempted to deculturalize students. Spoken word allows all cultures to be present and valuable in the classroom. Levinson (2012) states that “if educators think in terms of teacher-student and student-teacher—that is, a teacher who learns and a learner who teaches—as the basic roles of classroom participation, then the classroom space should create the possibility of progress for all participants” (p. 111). If we change the traditional form of education with spoken word, then we can begin the healing process from the long history of deculturalization in the classroom. Marvin Bell (2003) explains the positive aspect of spoken word when he says:
“Poetry is a great big Yes. Yes to formalists, yes to free verse writers, yes to surrealists, yes to political poets, yes to the poets of wordplay and slippery self-consciousness, yes to the Dadaists, yes to the mystics, yes to the scholar-poets, yes to the punsters, yes to the anti-poetic poets, yes to the prose-poets, yes to the poets who write about a word and to those who write about a people, yes to the poets who write about a blade of grass and to those that write about war” (p. 132).

As Bell states, spoken word is a great big yes. Yes to the histories of all students present in the classroom. Yes to the culture of all students present in the classroom. Yes to open dialogue in the classroom. Yes to valuing all perspectives and voices present in the classroom. Spoken word is a yes to taking steps away from deculturalization. Spoken word is a yes to culturally sustaining education. Spoken word is yes to students for whom the curriculum has often said no.
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