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Snap, Chat, and Write: Black Students' Perceptions of Literacy and Responses to Critical Consciousness Promotion

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This dissertation, SNAP, CHAT, AND WRITE: BLACK STUDENTS' PERCEPTIONS OF LITERACY AND RESPONSES TO CRITICAL CONSCIOUSNESS PROMOTION, by GLENDA CHISHOLM, was prepared under the direction of the candidate's Dissertation Advisory Committee. It is accepted by the committee members in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree, Doctor of Philosophy, in the College of Education and Human Development, Georgia State University.

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SNAP, CHAT, AND WRITE: BLACK STUDENTS' PERCEPTIONS OF LITERACY AND RESPONSES TO CRITICAL CONSCIOUSNESS PROMOTION

by

GLENDA DENISE CHISHOLM

Under the Direction of Dr. Michelle Zoss and Dr. Gholnecsar Muhammad

ABSTRACT

The field of youth participatory action research is growing (Caraballo et. al, 2017). This investigation builds upon the growing field of participatory action research with middle and high school students. Specifically, I explored how six Black youth in an out-of-school enrichment program perceived literacy and responded to a program promoting critical consciousness. Students engaged in action research projects using photovoice (Williams, et al., 2020; Wang & Burris, 1996) to examine their experiences in schools. I worked as a teacher and researcher during my study using critical literacy theory (Freire, 1996) to guide my planning and teaching. The data I collected included lesson plans, brainstorming notes, photos, student work samples, and interview data. I analyzed the data using grounded theory (Charmaz, 2007). Students perceived literacy as the expansion of knowledge and skills, self-expression, and joy. and responded to the project with greater confidence, demonstrating civic agency and leadership, recommended centering Blackness in their schools and being critical of the impacts of COVID. After the study, I suggest four literacy practices that could be beneficial, particularly for Black youth taught both in and outside of school spaces for their identity and social consciousness development. These literacy practices for teachers include starting with a Black history that

predates slavery, taking and implementing curricular input from youth, building autonomy in literacy projects for young people, and providing students with opportunities to study and research their communities.

INDEX WORDS: Black students, literacy perceptions, participatory action research, critical consciousness, and grounded theory

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GLENDA D. CHISHOLM

A Dissertation

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in

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Georgia State University

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2023

DEDICATION

I would like to dedicate this dissertation to my students who worked diligently as a part of this project. You are brilliant. I also would like to dedicate this to my son and other Black children, present and future.

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Now to Him who can do exceedingly abundantly above all that we ask or think, according to the power that works in us, to Him who has kept and carried me when I was weary, my God, thank you. I have been sustained by You over the past eight years that I have spent working to get to and through this document.

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To King, my dog and first baby, thank you for letting me know when I was being productive and not. You stayed in the office with me when I was writing and walked around the block when I needed a break.

Finally, I would like to thank Level Up and my students at Level Up for embracing me and this project. Mr. Green, Ms. Gayle, Ms. Ebony, and Ms. Mya, thank you for providing all the support a teacher could ask for. Last but certainly not least, my students, Ella, John, Julian, Marley, Quinn, and Yara, thank you for agreeing to do participatory action research with me and for your thoughtful participation. You are the future, and the future is yours.

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CHAPTER 1

Introduction

I come from a tradition of activism, although growing up, I did not see it that way. As I reflect on my adolescence, I recall instances where my family members fought for change in our community, worked to inspire others to think critically about their situations, and acted in response to a need. I can recall, between the ages of 8-13, spending weekends with my cousin, Toot and my Auntie Gwen who were designated to foster children in emergencies. My Auntie had decided to be an emergency foster parent because there was a need for Black families to foster children in Detroit and because there was a need for people who were also willing to take in these children late in the evening or before daylight in the morning. I also remember hearing stories of my Uncle June protesting, organizing unions, or speaking out against injustices toward union workers as illustrated in Figure 1.1.

Figure 1.1

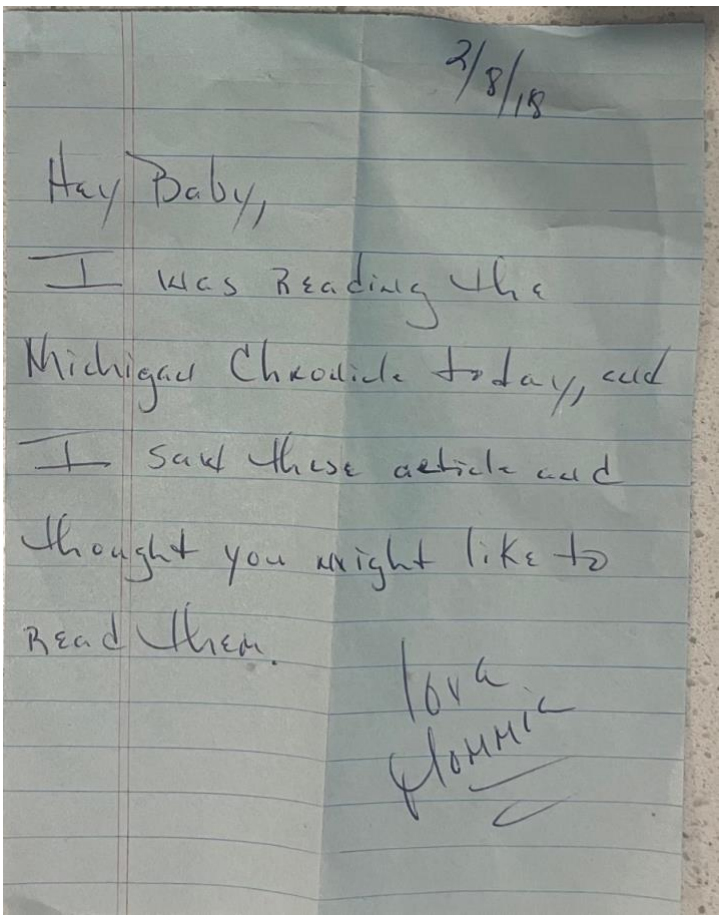
Uncle June (center) Protesting with National Action Network (NAN) Circa 2015

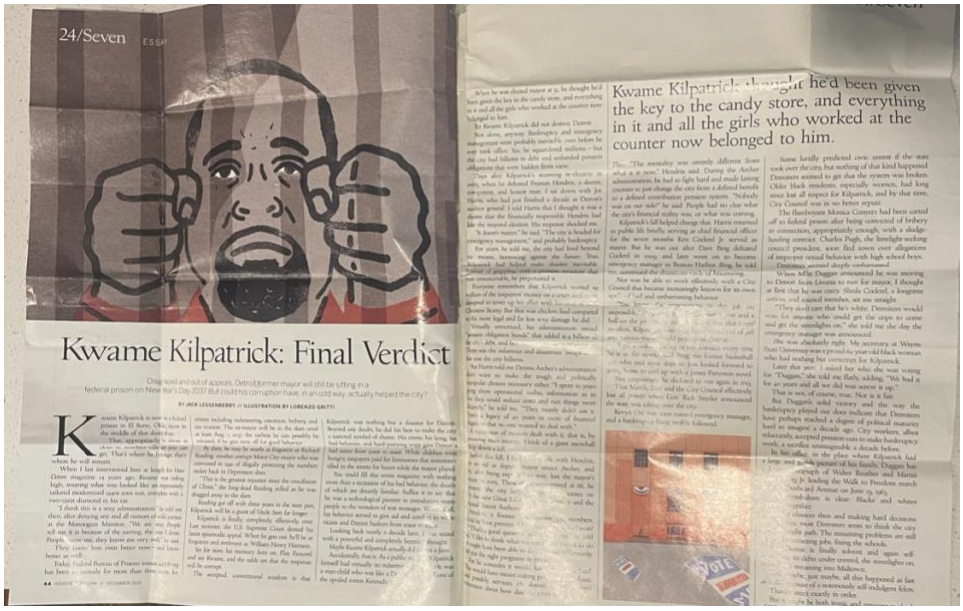
As a child, I did not characterize my family's love for the community as activism because it seemed that my family's decision to support others was always something that we just "did"—it felt natural and organic to living. However, to this day, stories of my family's call to serve permeate the rooms where our family gathers to share stories of love, and what it means to build strong families and communities. In addition to hearing stories of my family's work, I have also worked alongside them to extend love and perform community outreach. During my undergraduate years in college, I worked for my cousin's organization, *God's Gifted Sisters,* to help her prepare food and toiletries for people in our community suffering from housing insecurity.

In addition to seeing and participating in activism that happened throughout my family, I read articles with my mother on issues she thought were pertinent to share with me about the Black community. She often sent me articles from newspapers such as the *Detroit News, Detroit Free Press, The Michigan Chronicle,* and other periodicals she picked up and read in her spare time. As I grew, she suggested articles from the paper I should read which often discussed Detroit, Black womanhood, Black history, and politics. My mother lived in Detroit her entire life so when I moved to Lansing, Michigan for college and Atlanta, Georgia for my career, she continued to mail articles to me. Each time the newspaper articles came with handwritten notes that were folded down to the size of an envelope for me to read as seen below in Figure 1.2.

Figure 1.2

Mom's Letter and Newspaper Clipping





Note. This letter and article were not mailed together. My mother sent the letter in February of 2018 and the article on the bottom is from a December 2016 edition of *Hour Detroit Magazine*.

I recycled many of the newspaper articles sent to me by my mother, but some stories continue to resonate with me. One that I have shared with other family members digitally is, "The Way it Was- Housewives' League of 1932" (Bulanda, 2017). This article was interesting to me at the time because the way housewives are portrayed on popular television shows such as *The Real Housewives of Atlanta, New York, Potomac, Orange County*, etc., is much different from the work of the Housewives' League of Detroit. This organization was developed to encourage other African-American housewives to patronize Black businesses. It lasted sixty years, ending in the 1990s (see Figure 1.3).

Figure 1.3

Housewives' League of Detroit Article in the Detroit Hour Magazine.

The Way It Was

The Way It Was – Housewives' League of Detroit, 1932

Housewives's League of Detroit, 1932
By **George Bulanda** - March 8, 2017

Facebook Twitter

1932 The name "Housewives' League of Detroit" may conjure up quaint images of genteel tea parties, leisurely bridge games, and gossipy luncheons, or it might sound to others like a racy contemporary reality show. In truth, the role of this organization, founded in 1930, couldn't have been more distant from either assumption. The group was composed of activist African-American housewives, whose simple but steadfast resolve was to promote the patronage of black-owned businesses and, as a result, the employment of more African-Americans, which was particularly vital after the 1929 stock market crash. The Housewives also encouraged shopping at white-owned companies that didn't discriminate against blacks in their hiring practices. "Don't buy where you can't work" was their mantra. Another slogan, according to a 1949 calendar directory, was "Buy, Boost, Build." The Housewives' League of Detroit was founded by Fannie Peck, wife of the Rev. William Peck, pastor of Bethel African Methodist Episcopal Church. He also started the Booker T. Washington Trade Association, the inspiration for the Housewives' group. According to a 1948 Michigan Chronicle article, Fannie started the organization at her home with 50 prospective members. She soon stirred up interest in other U.S. cities, which formed their own chapters. In 1933, a national committee was formed, the National Housewives' League of America, Inc., which elected Fannie as its first president. Still, the germ of the economically empowering idea was planted in Detroit and grew from here. Pictured are four members of the Detroit group in the early 1930s. A more egalitarian and embracing hiring climate, together with an aging membership, spelled the end of the Housewives' organization in the mid-'90s, but by then their mark had been stamped.

When I would talk on the phone with my mom after she knew I received the envelope, she would ask me many questions. Among the questions I could almost always expect her to ask these

questions: “Did you read the article yet?”; “What did you think about it”; and “Did you know about her/him/them/it already?”. My mom loved to read about the Black community and the issues surrounding it. She was intentional about including me in larger conversations with her through the articles she shared with me. From the newspapers and conversations about the Black community, my mother sparked a love in me for reading and sharing issues concerning the Black community with others. Being engaged in the Black community and critical analysis became normal to me because of my experiences working with my family and sharing stories, activism, and literature about our community. Therefore, it only seemed natural to carry that love, that community outreach, and that passion for community uplift and knowledge into my classroom as a teacher. I did not know how my upbringing would influence how I continued to uplift my community, but I soon found out that I would want to embolden teachers and students to change unfavorable conditions in the work and schooling experiences.

During my first year of teaching, I taught at an elementary school in one of the top 5 largest counties in my state. I remember our days being long and exhausting—we rarely had time to eat or plan our lessons. Daily, we would have meetings during our hour for planning or would be charged with keeping select students during lunch, which at the time, was a school-wide initiative that focused on intervening with negative behaviors. New to the classroom, this situation perplexed me, and I remember asking my peers— the veteran teachers on my team, “How am I supposed to be effective if I can’t plan?” They responded that I would have to be creative with how I got things done.

Because my family had always been innovative and solution-oriented, when I received this response, I immediately reached out to my family for advice. Overwhelmed, I called my Uncle June and explained the situation and the obstacles I faced to ask him for advice on what I

should do. He told me, “You’re going to have to organize baby girl.” His words struck me and made me think that this was something that my grandma had instilled in us, and I knew that I would need to act in response to my problem. When I returned to work, I began asking teachers around the building questions including how they felt about their lack of planning and lunch hours. After surveying my peers, I reflected on their wish for things to be changed and decided to ask them if they would join me in organizing and demanding that the administration make changes. Surprisingly, I was able to convince a few of my colleagues to join my cause. However, for many teachers at my school, the idea of confronting the administration felt uncomfortable. One teacher even said, “I’m cool with YOU saying something.” Despite this level of discomfort, I heard the desire for a new plan from enough people to know that we needed to unite for change.

During my initial act of organizing, a small group of teachers from different grade levels and I discussed ideas, we planned to go back to our respective grade levels to address the issues and then come back together. I shared my concerns with my team and my grade-level chair said, “I hear you. Let me see what I can do.” About a month into our pursuit, I was attending another team meeting when my grade level chair informed our team that as a group, we needed to produce a schedule to rotate responsibility for keeping students during lunch. I want to be clear this was not a victory, but it would at least give everyone more time to eat. This was the first time that I understood that there was power in our united voices, and that felt much like a form of activism because I could sense the spirit of the work. The energy that I experienced in that moment was like the feeling I had when I heard stories of my family’s outreach, or what I felt when I worked alongside them. It felt like the seeds that my family had planted all along the way, were blossoming through that small act that seemed like it would make a great change.

Later in my career as a teacher in an after-school program called Level Up (pseudonym), I was asked to teach reading and writing to 6-8th grade students. As an elementary teacher, I was trained to teach across the four curricular areas of math, science, social studies, and reading. Although I had taught reading subjects at the elementary level, this would be my first experience teaching reading and writing to middle school students. During my first sessions with the students, I worked to learn about them. Although we discussed literacy concepts and I also asked students to share how the learned in school, what they did outside of school, and I checked in with my students' social and emotional well-being. During this and future check-ins, students often shared how they were feeling about school and what they would do differently if allowed to change their experiences. These conversations about their schooling paired with my family history, including the engagements of literacy with my mother, became instrumental in the development of my dissertation study on youth perceptions of literacy and how students might respond when I facilitated a critical literacy project to promote an understanding of activism in their social worlds. In other words, the students were instrumental in the development of this project where we would work to transform their schools using critical literacy practices.

Literacy as a Verb and Platform for Activism

For this study, I drew from the National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE) Standing Committee on Global Citizenship's definition of literacy and Freire's (1996) definition of critical consciousness to make a connection to social action in literacy learning spaces. The National Council of Teachers of English's definition discusses literacy as actions through which our social worlds are created. Amber Peterson (2020), a member of the NCTE Standing Committee on Global Citizenship, argues that "Literacy is the way that we interact with the world around us, how we shape it and are shaped by it. It is how we communicate with others via

reading and writing, but also by speaking, listening, and creating" (para. 10). Freire defines critical consciousness as the ability to understand social and political contradictions that foster oppression and the commitment to taking action to eliminate oppression/oppressive structures (Freire, 1996). Taken together, both NCTE and Freire offer literacy as a powerful tool for understanding the world and using that knowledge to eradicate oppression in society. For this project, one where I wished to promote student activism, I worked with students to deepen their critical consciousness by using text and activities to highlight the oppression of Black people and youth in education and the ways that Black communities have worked for democracy and freedom.

Black communities have a history of advancing literacy as a platform for social change., Septima Clark's development of citizenship schools offers an example of literacy as a platform for activism through her citizenship workshops where she promoted literacy practices as methods for impacting community changes (Clark & Brown, 1986). Recognizing the inherent connection between literacy and political empowerment, Clark dedicated herself to instructing individuals not only in fundamental literacy skills but also in imparting knowledge about their rights and responsibilities as United States citizens, along with providing guidance on completing voter registration forms. Like her work, the youth of the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee promoted literacy in community schools as a method of political change in their communities in the state of Mississippi during Freedom Summer in 1964 (Hale, 2011). In an agitational response to Mississippi's segregated and unequal public education system, the summer project organized 41 Freedom schools across the state of Mississippi which were attended by over 3000 young Black students. Beyond conventional subjects like math and reading, the curriculum encompassed essential teachings on Black history, principles of the Civil Rights Movement, and

leadership skills. Students were equipped with both intellectual and practical tools to sustain the fight for justice beyond their departure from Freedom School. Each of these examples demonstrates that Black communities were reading, discussing, and analyzing texts in pursuit of a better society. Their literacy practices were all part of a larger idea of acting to change the status quo through equity and justice and thus using literacy as a verb and platform for activism.

Cultivating critical consciousness in literacy classrooms creates opportunities for students to also develop agency (Ginwright, 2007). *Agency* is the strategic making and remaking of selves, identities, activities, relationships, tools and resources, and histories as embedded in relations of power (Moje & Lewis, 2007, p. 18). According to Garcia and colleagues (2015), agency also promotes civic actions towards social change within schools and communities. My goals for students working on this project were to remake their identities by deepening their connection to their Black histories and the resources available to them in their schools. During this study, I designed experiences for students to read texts, listen to one another, share their feelings and ideas, write narratives, create photo projects, and analyze their social worlds to promote agency. I asked the youth to create images that critically documented their social worlds as evidence of appreciation or a need for social change. Using their images and narratives youth then created a list of statements detailing what students deserved to share with their school communities. Engaging in literacy practices akin to those demonstrated by our ancestors, we recognize literacy not merely as a skill but as a dynamic verb and a powerful platform for instigating meaningful social action.

State standards for learning literacy miss opportunities for connecting text and literacy practice to students' social worlds (Brauer, 2019). Therefore, I addressed that need in this dissertation. To explain the importance of connecting literacy to students and their world, I first

present the need for expanded notions of literacy through a critical literacy pedagogical plan that fosters students' identity and critical consciousness. Critical literacy challenges readers to deconstruct the text, their sociopolitical, and sociohistorical worlds. The use of critical literacy offers critical consciousness, a theory for fostering critical thought using language. In the next sections of this chapter, I problematize the need for critical literacy and identity programs in learning spaces for Black youth. I problematize the need for critical literacy and identity to frame the purpose of my research study.

Problem Statement

Since Black people were enslaved in the U.S., literacy has been used as a barrier to participation in American society (Perry et. al, 2003). Today, Black students and other students of Color continue to experience limited literacy opportunities in cultivating their identities and critical consciousness (Morrell, 2006). This is problematic because scholars have demonstrated brilliance among Black youth when they learn in ways that value their culture and identities. Akua (2012) argued for an Afrocentric approach to educating Black youth. Akua emphasizes that Black youths' history is the starting point for their learning, which moves students toward their potential. Akua's work was proceeded by Ladson-Billings's (1995) study of exceptional teachers of Black students, which similarly suggested culturally relevant pedagogy. Ladson-Billings determined that exceptional teachers of Black students have three main components: they teach students to be culturally competent, ensure students learn and experience academic success, and teachers cultivate students' critical consciousness.

Studies detailing methods for fostering success with Black youth in literacy are consistent with Ladson-Billings' conceptualization of culturally relevant pedagogy (Marciano & Warren, 2019; Moje et. al, 2017; Tatum, 2013). These studies list identity, culture, and development of

consciousness as key ingredients for student learning. Though these studies and other exemplars exist, teaching methods, materials, and practices lacking culture and identity in literacy classrooms persist (Muhammad 2020). Curriculum standards for literacy are Eurocentric. The US is culturally diverse, yet diversity is not widely reflected in models for literacy learning (deJong, 2011). The model of literacy that is valued in the United States' educational system values literacy as autonomous skills, not as related to one's culture or identity (Street, 2003). This means that the way that literacy is taught nationally values literacy as skills. From this perspective, teaching practices do not account for students' context or culture which does not value Black and other minoritized youth.

According to the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) on the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP), Black youth in grades 4 and 8 have consistently performed at the 40th percentile on national literacy assessments (NAEP, 2019). Sixty percent of students in grades 4 and 8 who are not Black performed at a higher level. Because statistics for Black youth continue to lack growth despite scholarship stating that Black youth are capable of performing otherwise, it begs the question, why? deJong (2011) notes that the way that youth of diverse backgrounds are taught does not value the multiple identities that youth bring into literacy classrooms. Black youths' limited access to programs promoting identity and critical consciousness despite scholarship highlighting approaches for academic success with Black youth indicates a need for a change in the way that literacy is defined and the methods by which it is taught. In the following section, I continue to problematize how literacy is taught to Black youth using historical lessons on literacy and activism in the Black community as well as research studies.

First, I elaborate on the need for expanded notions of literacy. Then, I discuss the need for identity and critical consciousness in literacy education. Throughout this dissertation, I use the terms youth, adolescents, young people, students, co-researchers, and learners interchangeably. In all instances, I am referring to youth who are students in middle grades, high school, and college. However, I specifically note when I am discussing college-aged youth.

The Need for Expanded Notions of Literacy

Traditional approaches to literacy have emphasized rote skills for standardized testing which have isolated literacy practices such as reading, writing, and creating; Traditional approaches have not accounted for other literacies Black youth possess (Wynter-Hoyte & Boutte, 2018). For example, Black youth enact several literacy practices outside of school to learn and play such as singing and dancing in church. These enactments may serve as tools for learning in educational settings (Wynter-Hoyte & Boutte, 2018). In other words, out-of-school literacy practices might facilitate a dynamic and interactive approach to knowledge acquisition. Street (2003) explains that traditional approaches to literacy learning ascribe to neutrality and that a traditional Western conception of literacy assigns value to outcomes such as standardized tests and isolated skills. This means that traditional approaches omit students' social and political context when teaching literacy skills practices. Teaching literacy while attending to students' culture, context, and identity expands students' opportunities to learn while connecting to their identities. Scholars, pedagogues, and community activists in educational settings with Black and other minoritized youth have explicated the importance of shifting our perspectives for teaching and learning to use critical pedagogy and practices. Critical pedagogues teach standards in ways that authentically integrate the lives of the youth being taught by supporting literacy learning in ways that promote equity, liberation, and societal analysis process (Cammarota & Fine, 2008;

Crisco, 2009; Freire, 1996; Parker, 2022). In this study, I designed lessons to connect literacy practices such as writing, reading, and creating photographs to a goal of action and community change.

Pertinent to this study is the work of scholars who have highlighted approaches to teaching Black youth and scholars working with adolescents promoting social action or civic engagement through literacy (Akua, 2012, Graff, 2013; Green, 2013; Haddix et. al, 2017; Hilliard, 2003; King & Swartz, 2015). These scholars of Black youth education and adolescent literacy include within their definitions of literacy concepts that move beyond traditional notions of literacy such as reading, writing, listening, and speaking by also centering students' identity and cultivating consciousness. In this study, I address the need for expanded notions in literacy by working with youth to cultivate their literacy skills through practices such as reading, writing, listening, speaking, creating, questioning, and examining power and oppression in texts and society and transforming communities.

The Need for Identity in Literacy Education

The term identity comprises three definitions: the definition you have given yourself, others' definition of who you are, and definitions that align with who you want to be (Muhammad, 2020). Literacy learning spaces have the potential to be sites where students shape and reshape ideas about their identity, the identity of others, and the ways they have been defined by others historically. As cultural and linguistic diversity is rapidly increasing in the United States and there is a need for a literacy curriculum that is responsive to students' identities; DeJong (2011) suggests imposing policies acknowledging the identities of students of Color to account for all students in a learning space. Research-based pedagogical methods promoting academic success with Black youth supports the need to center students' identity in teaching and

learning (Akua, 2012; Drame & Irby, 2016; Hilliard, 2003; Paris, 2012), especially for adolescents (Lewis & Jones, 2009). As a result, youth participants who are a part of this study focus on racial identity since literacy classrooms have the potential to be spaces where students grapple with ideas of identity through texts and discussions. Classroom experiences that facilitate thoughtful analysis of identity provide youth with links to connect their personal beliefs and experiences to their identities as well as the identities of others (Haddix et al., 2017; Lewis & Jones, 2009). In addition, experiences learning where social and cultural identity is central also may help youth increase their awareness of social and political contexts shaping identity (Haddix et. al, 2017). Ultimately, bringing together society with identity also contributes to the development of students' critical consciousness – a concept I discuss further in the next section. First, I continue the discussion of identity and joy.

According to Dunn and Love (2020), anti-racist approaches to English Language Arts teaching and learning are not complete without joy. They note that pain and trauma are only part of the pedagogy for a learner. Fisher (2009), whose work documents how Black youth engage in literacy practices throughout history, noted that literacy experiences accounting for Black youths' racial identity provided youth with a sense of pride. She noted that students' pride was instrumental in helping them understand the importance of gaining knowledge and sharing what they learned with their communities. James Brown also sang about the pride and joy of being a Black person even through racial oppression in his song, *Say It Loud – I'm Black and I'm Proud*. Emphasizing joy as an integral aspect of the Black experience, we celebrate the resilience and vibrancy that comes from embracing moments of happiness within the context of diverse narratives.

Yet, hegemony persists in policies across different school districts (deMarrias and LeCompte 1999). By centering students' identities, we actively counter the political hegemonic structures that currently dominate teaching policies and practices, fostering an inclusive educational environment that empowers diverse perspectives and experiences. Acknowledging racial identity is paramount for Black youth to build historical knowledge about Black people, and the work of their ancestors, and connect their ancestors' work to their lives today (King & Swartz, 2015; Ladson-Billings, 1995; Perry, Steele & Hilliard, 2003). Students in this study made a connection to the Black youth who historically. They studied Black students who saw a need for change within their educational settings and then acted to create change.

The Need for Critical Consciousness in Literacy Education

In addition to expanding the definition of literacy to include identity, scholars whose work centers on Black youth argue for more comprehensive curricula, one that includes consciousness. For example, Muhammad (2018) argued that Black youths' experiences in literacy education lack identity development, history, and critical consciousness. The absence of critical consciousness discussed by Muhammad is echoed by Akua and Stephens (2006) who emphasized teaching Black youth culture, character, consciousness, and commitment through knowledge about their racial history and identity. deMarrias and LeCompte (1999) suggest hegemony as the primary reason that consciousness might need to be fostered in youth today, contending that hegemony is passed down to marginalized groups in highly attended public facilities to maintain the status quo. As a result, literacy classrooms at schools are in a unique position to pass on the central beliefs of society and they are also uniquely positioned to teach youth to be critically conscious.

I have described Freire's contribution to my dissertation on critical consciousness. However, before Freire's (1996) formal conceptualization of critical consciousness, Black Mississippians and allies saw a social and political contradiction and committed to acting against their oppression. Black Mississippians believed that schools did not teach students what they needed to know to exercise and demonstrate political power. Consequently, Black youth in SNCC organized a conscious raising, literacy program to cultivate knowledge and foster political engagement with Freedom Schools. Emery et al. (2010) wrote,

> From the beginning, the Freedom Schools interpreted the teaching of skills as a political act. The failure of the Mississippi public schools to teach skills maintained racial boundaries and reinforced students' sense of their inferiority. To challenge the power structure, the students needed to read, write, and master basic math (para 26).

Freedom Schools had a goal of eliminating racial barriers to societal participation, so students attending Freedom Schools learned about the laws impacting their lives, voting, elections, and disproportionality between the Black and white residents of Mississippi and across the United States. According to Hale (2011), "The Freedom schools were to form the basis of statewide student action" (p. 331). In addition to reading and writing, students and teachers also acted out real-life events, and finally, they did work in the community. Students practiced scenarios and participated in political activities such as writing, protests, and canvassing communities for voter registration drives. They wanted to transform society. Freedom schools worked to liberate their students through the intentional building of their social and political knowledge. The work of Freedom Schools is important because youth were provided opportunities to grapple with what they were experiencing in their daily lives. Opportunities to develop critical consciousness can support the liberation of Black youth. Critical consciousness development has the potential to

sensitize youth to asymmetrical power relations between dominant and non-dominant groups in society and provides tools for acting when they face discrimination at institutions, like schools, or in larger society. Youth being able to recognize and act was one of the primary goals of this study.

The shift from literacy as skills to critical literacy where identity and critical consciousness are cultivated are two expanded notions of literacy that have been used to promote learning and achievement among Black and adolescent students (Morrell, 2006). Historical and contemporary examples of raising critical consciousness with Black youth have been demonstrated to educate, validate, and empower Black youth; It also promoted greater academic success (Emery et al., 2010; Ladson-Billings, 1994). One well-known historical example of harming Black youth was the desegregation of schools. Beauboeuf-Lafontant (1999) noted that Black schools were good before segregation. She noted, that the good of such schools extended beyond teaching literacy and numeracy and depended on the ability of teachers to engage students in a psychological process of seeing themselves as deserving of a first-class citizenship" (p. 710). Her review of retrospective research studies such as ethnographies and personal accounts of segregated schools demonstrated that Black students and families valued what she terms politically relevant teaching. Politically relevant teaching fostered students' understanding of their sociopolitical contexts as a method for liberation. Beauboeuf-Lafontant (1999) surmised that "good" teachers understood oppressive barriers for Black youth and they understood the role of education in liberation, so they created opportunities for students to take part in changing their communities.

Critical literacy scholars who have worked with Black youth suggest that educators wishing to promote more than traditional ideas of literacy such as reading and writing should

teach in ways that center youths' identity, social, and political contexts (Fisher, 2009; Morrell, 2008a; Parker, 2022). Vygotsky (1962) notes a foundation for learning and development is social and cultural interaction. As a result, learning that is meaningful to one's social or cultural identity aids with understanding more abstract concepts. Therefore, expanding notions of literacy to include identity and critical consciousness is both foundational to and beneficial for Black, and all youths', academic success.

Although research has shown that expanded notions of literacy through critical consciousness development are significant, pedagogical approaches using critical literacy are not explicitly observed in school policy or practice (Parker, 2022). The absence of approaches centering on identity and critical consciousness to teaching Black youth also contrasts the histories of Black intellectual traditions (Biondi, 2012; Bynum, 2013; McHenry & Heath, 1994; Wynter-Hoyte & Boutte, 2018). According to Levine (2004) and Perry et. al (2003) literacy is most often tied to freedom in the Black community and has a long tradition together. As a result of Black experiences in the tradition of freedom and literacy, scholarship continues to address the need for critical literacy opportunities for Black and other minoritized youth (Ginwright, 2007; Green, 2013). Therefore, in this dissertation, I address the need for expanded notions of literacy by facilitating literacy opportunities through programming designed to cultivate Black youths' identity and critical consciousness.

Purpose

In response to the need for literacy learning that honors student identity and promotes critical consciousness. I created a space for Black middle and high school students to engage in literacy practices that would promote literacy as a tool for school and community change or literacy practices for critical consciousness. The purpose of this qualitative action research study

was to understand how Black students (ages 12-18) attending a summer and afterschool enrichment program perceived literacy practices in a space promoting critical consciousness, where I defined perceptions as ideas, beliefs, and understandings. In addition, I conducted this study to understand students' responses to the program curriculum where my goal was to heighten students' awareness of sociohistorical and sociopolitical factors impacting the lives of Black youth and their education. Specifically, I hoped that by demonstrating ways that the Black community responded to inequities in their educational experiences, students in the study would also be conscious of and potentially take action to make changes in their schools and communities. In this study, I utilized a participatory action research methodology to investigate students' perceptions of literacy and their responses to the program promoting critical consciousness. Student voice is missing from policy and therefore is needed as policies for teaching and learning take shape across the nation (Teixeira & Gardner, 2017). Students' perceptions and responses are urgent subjects of study. Therefore, I centered the following research questions to perform my analysis:

1. What perceptions do Black students have about literacy after taking part in a youth participatory action research project promoting critical consciousness?
2. How do Black youth respond to a youth participatory action research project that promotes critical consciousness?

Understanding how Black youth perceive literacy and respond during the promotion of critical consciousness contributes to a growing field of scholarship on the need for literacy spaces to support youth of Color in developing their identity and critical consciousness (Gutiérrez, 2008). At times like these, where Black lives have been undervalued and Black Lives

Matter protests continue across the United States, Black youth deserve spaces where their voices are honored and cultivated.

Theoretical Framework

The foundation for this study, critical literacy, consists of ideas situated within the critical theoretical perspective. Although foundations of the critical literacy date back almost a century through the founding of critical theory (Crotty, 1998), pedagogical practices employing critical literacy continue to be relevant today as disproportional achievement rates of Black youth persist and are consistent with policy initiatives mandating inequitable educational practices (Buras, 2013). National assessments such as the National Educational Assessment Program (NAEP) continue to report Black youth achieving at disproportionate rates in comparison to their peers. The disproportional achievement has remained relatively stagnant in literacy since the NAEP was first administered 30 years ago. Before the COVID-19 pandemic, NAEP (2019) data reported that 45% of 4th grade and 34% of 8th grade students as proficient in reading across the United States. Most recent NAEP (2022) data reported that 33% of 4th-grade and 31% of 8th-grade students are proficient in reading across the United States. Comparatively, 2022 scores by race report Black students in grades 4 and 8 scored 17% and 16% proficient in reading, respectively. A deficit perspective might posit that Black students are not proficient in literacy in comparison to their peers or that they lack intellectual ability. However, an asset-based perspective focuses on the strengths of students and that perspective might question if the systems in place are failing students instead (Muhammad, 2019). Yet resistance to harmful societal structures has deep roots in the Black education tradition. Literacy has always been related to freedom in acts of educational resistance. Most prominently, Citizenship Schools, born out of Highlander Folk Schools, have always approached education with an explicit focus on

political action and their refusal to be complicit with the status quo (Emery et al. 1964/2015). Black people have refused to accept legal oppression and marginalization and created spaces for community members who took their daily experiences as a basis for learning and changing oppressive circumstances. In this study, I used principles of critical literacy to guide my pedagogical choices.

Tenets of Critical Literacy Theory

Vasquez et al. (2019) synthesized an argument across literature on critical literacy and suggested there are 10 key aspects of critical literacy. Four of the 10 aspects of critical literacy are closely tied to the work of my dissertation study, including:

- Students learn best when what they are learning has importance in their lives.
- Critical literacy involves making sense of the sociopolitical systems through which we live our lives and questioning these systems.
- Critical literacy practices can be transformative.
- Text design and production, which are essential to critical literacy work, can provide opportunities for transformation. (pp. 306-307)

With these tenets in mind, critical literacy offers an educational alternative to schooling. Schooling serves to assimilate, produce a labor force, and reproduce the status quo. Critical literacy on the other hand liberates and promotes critical consciousness and democracy.

In *Pedagogy of the Oppressed,* Paulo Freire (1996) describes the "banking concept of education" as traditional pedagogy "in which the scope of action allowed to the students extends only as far as receiving, filing and storing the deposits" (p. 53). This means that students do not take an active role in their learning instead they are not creators of knowledge. Instead, they receive only the knowledge passed on to them by the teacher. Levine (2004) details a similar

outlook on education as described by Berniece Robinson, a Citizenship Schools teacher, who discussed the Highlander teaching philosophy. She says, "a program must emerge from the people not brought to them," while further describing it as "the percolator effect rather than the drip technique" (p. 405). This means that the students create the need to learn concepts by sharing what they need to know and then working with the teacher to learn those concepts. Both Freire's concept of banking and Robinson's concept of drip education are synonymous with transmissive models of learning. Contemporary policy initiatives are also compatible with transmissive models in teaching, which do not emphasize culture, and do not cultivate learners' critical consciousness. This research aligns with Robinson's percolator effect and counters transmissive models that have been implemented with Black people over a century. I provide space for youth to develop their competencies in literacy through the lens of a camera and dialogue. Many attributes of critical theory are also present in Citizenship Schools and Freire's approach to teaching literacy that I include in this work. Namely, learning is directly linked to collective organizing for racial justice, using literacy to strengthen the political power of those who have been oppressed, and an interactive pedagogy to teaching and learning that draws from students' day-to-day lived experiences.

This study has two foci in literacy—identity and critical consciousness for Black youth for literacy instruction. Here, I do not include space as a part of the theoretical framework, instead, I return to this concept in the literature review when discussing the importance of outside-school instruction that promotes identity and critical consciousness. I draw from aspects of critical literacy to design and drive my research study. Within my work, I examine the responses of Black youth ages 12-18 to a curriculum centering Black student activism and using pedagogy aiming to promote critical consciousness and social action. To accomplish this goal, I

needed to review bodies of literature that were central to my research questions including definitions of literacy, out-of-school literacies, youth perceptions of literacy, out-of-school literacy spaces, and youth participatory action research in chapter two. In the following section, I provide a list of terms and definitions used throughout the study.

Definitions

activist literacy- Persuasive uses of literacy in pursuit of access, democratic participation, and change. (Crisco, 2009)

adolescent- youth; between the ages of 10-18; students in middle and high school

agency – strategic making and remaking of selves, identities, activities, relationships, tools and resources, and histories as embedded in relations of power (Moje & Lewis, 2007, p. 18)

Black participatory action research – "a strand of participatory action research (PAR) where (a) the primary parties responsible for carrying out research in Black communities self-identify as Black, (b) Black perspectives are purposefully centered and White perspectives deliberately de-centered, (c) marginalized voices from within the African Diaspora are uplifted for Black empowerment, healing, and liberation, and (d) the normative underpinnings of PR are suspect and subject to cultural and political critique" (Drame & Irby, 2016, p. 6)

co-researcher – refers to the youth taking part in the study as participants.

criticality – learning to understand power and equity through reading, writing, listening, thinking, and speaking to enact anti-oppression (Muhammad, 2020)

critical consciousness – the ability to understand social and political contradictions that foster oppression and the commitment to taking action to eliminate oppression/oppressive structures (Freire, 1996)

critical literacy – A way of being and knowing related to texts, students, and sociopolitical systems. Texts are critically and continuously analyzed. They are not neutral and are socially constructed. The way we read text is not neutral. Students design and produce texts. They also think of ways to reconstruct texts in ways to convey messages more equitably. Students' prior knowledge determines how the curriculum is built. Learning relates to students' lives. To transform society, students make sense of the sociopolitical systems in which they live. (Vasquez et. al, 2019)

literacy practices for critical consciousness – reading, writing, listening, speaking, creating, communicating, questioning, or any practice involving text with the examination of power, equity, or oppression in society.

text – anything that provides meaning and can be read or understood (Muhammad, 2020)

youth participatory action research – "A systematic approach for engaging young people in transformational resistance, educational praxis, and critical epistemologies" (Cammarota & Fine, 2008, p. 9).

victorious consciousness – the awareness that all attitudes and behaviors are achievable; a will that overpowers any obstacles and restores one's strength (Asante,1988).

Summary

At the start of this chapter, I discussed growing up in a family who worked in many different areas of need in our community and my work in education which both have influenced my study with youth using literacy to act for social change. I outlined areas of need for Black adolescent students in their literacy educational experiences including expanded literacy definitions to include identity and critical consciousness since Black youths' schooling has left

them lacking. Because of this lack of opportunity, Black youth are often missing key links that have traditionally been a catalyst to literacy learning and civic participation in the Black community. I also outlined critical literacy theory as a frame for the methods I used to determine curriculum materials and pedagogical practices during this study.

Chapter 2

Literature Review

Given the problems of literacy pedagogies for Black youth, teaching practices should change so that Black students have opportunities for educational experiences that are historically grounded within Black communities. Black people's relationship with literacy in the United States is tenuous but triumphant. Since enslavement, Black citizens in the U.S. have experienced barriers to literacy such as prohibiting enslaved people from learning to read or write. Still, Black people have continued to use literacy to overcome such barriers in society (Fisher, 2009; Perry et al., 2003). Today, public school curricula, including states like where this study took place, continue to reproduce harmful social structures that limit Black youths' experiences in literacy despite scholarship discussing beneficial approaches to teaching and learning. For example, one requirement listed for middle school youth within a southeastern state, dictates that students need to "demonstrate command of the conventions of Standard English grammar and usage when writing or speaking" (Georgia Standards of Excellence, 2023). The language of the learning objective privileges one way of speaking English, even capitalizing "Standard English" and fails to honor the many different varieties of English that exist in the southeastern region of the United States. Implications of this study show the value of teaching youth critically and the necessity of fostering critical consciousness in Black youth. This study also underscores the importance of students' perceptions of literacy and advocates for policy that values the lives of youth learning as experts in the lived experiences. In the next section, I will outline my methods of reviewing related research.

Methods of Literature Review

For this review, I gathered literature highlighting practices and approaches to literacy with adolescent youth. Core search terms included *youth* (or adolescents or young people or teens or young adults) and *literacies* and *activism*. These terms and synonyms were searched together. I also searched "out-of-school literacy", "critical consciousness development", and "identity development". Within my query, on Black youth, I searched using the terms *Black, youth, literacy, and activism* to understand the connections that teachers have made between Black youth and literacy as a form of activism. Just as in my initial search, I used similar descriptors for each word. For example, articles may have used terms such as *African American, of Color,* or *minority,* instead of Black. The literature I examined can be found in books, journals, and dissertations. Each article I examined was peer-reviewed because peer-reviewed work increases the likelihood that scholarship is high quality and seeks to advance the field of education. Also, I found several primary source documents to support my arguments and synthesis. I found it interesting to connect the literacy practices of Black youth today to those found historically among Black communities. I searched several databases, including Google Scholar, Jstor, ERIC, Galileo Georgia State University Library, and the civil rights collections at the University of Southern Mississippi to locate historical texts. Using the ERIC database, an initial search of these terms generated nearly 85,000 pieces of literature, which included books and peer-reviewed articles. In one example, my search yielded articles about Trans and Chinese youth activism. To narrow the literature, I conducted an advanced search limiting my terms to the abstract. By limiting my search terms to matches found in the abstract, I was able to the number of articles that used my search terms in other parts of the paper from appearing in my query, which may not have been closely tied to my research inquiry. My advanced search was

important to eliminate articles that did not specifically focus on my search terms. When I limited terms to the abstract, the search yielded just under 1,100 peer-reviewed articles from which I narrowed my focus by reviewing the articles. From this point, I began to read the articles and abstracts to determine if the article should be added to my review. I chose articles that helped me to understand perceptions of literacy and promote critical consciousness with youth, especially Black youth.

In the following section, I review the relevant literature. I also demonstrate how each body of literature is connected to the success of Black youth who have historically used literacy for social change. Specifically, my examples highlight how youth have used literacy and education to bring attention to inequities and act toward change. By exploring these bodies of literature this review highlights how educators can promote positive perceptions of literacy and honor Black youths' identities and histories by using approaches to literacy that seek to transform communities and society. I begin this review with the background on activism and literacy in Black Communities then by discussing the autonomous and ideological models of literacy to understand the way that literacy has been perceived by scholars and the ways it has been conceptualized in educational policy.

Background on Literacy and Activism in Black Communities

Using literacy toward this end and as a form of activism among Black communities has been happening since Black people were forcibly removed from their African countries and brought to the United States (U.S.). Activism can take many forms including taking action to attain a specific result. Examples date back to the 18th century with writers such as Lucille Terry Prince (1733-1821), Olaudah Equiano (1745-1797), and Phillis Wheatly (1753-1784). Lucille Prince Terry is documented as the first Black author published in the United States making her

the first known author of African American literature. Prince also demonstrated the power of her pen and voice when she argued and won a case opposing neighbors who destroyed their property and crops (My Poetic Side, n.d.). Olaudah Equiano and Phillis Wheatly were both enslaved however are both). Wheatley's (1773) *Poems on Various Subjects, Religion, and Morals*, made her a household name and a well-known poet of her time. Wheatly's contemporary, Olaudah Equiano, also a writer, composed written pieces that were in opposition to slavery. Equiano's social and political disposition inspired him to form a group called, *The Sons of Africa*, which was composed of Africans living in Britain whose goal was to abolish slavery. Equiano was a scholar and an activist. Prince, Equiano, and Wheatley's eloquence, opposition, and fame were all a result of their literacy skills. The very opposition to this society's view of literacy skills made them activists.

Examples of literacy and activism can also be found in the 19th century after slavery was abolished. Black people moved from the South to the North and formed groups or organized to fight Black codes and Jim Crow. Green's (2022) review of literature on Black people's political participation and activism after emancipation demonstrates that Black people continued to imagine and create their realities by defining who they were and finding ways to support one another. One way Green (2022) discusses Black people being able to recreate their realities is by staying informed through a Black newspaper, called *The Hub. The Hub* was an important media outlet for keeping the Black community informed. A newspaper serving as a media outlet for Black people's political movement is another example of the historical tie of literacy to activism.

Later in the 20th century, it was Fannie Lou Hamer (1964) whose words, "I'm sick and tired of being sick and tired," represented the reaction to injustices experienced by Black people

across the United States, namely the southern United States in the 1960s. Hamer was a Mississippian and civil rights activist. During her lifetime, she was forcibly sterilized, lost her job for trying to register to vote, and was denied the right to vote. It was common for Black Mississippians to be subject to constant law-sanctioned terror (Hale 2011). Hamer and other Mississippians learned about the political system so that they could register to vote, however, Black Mississippians were not protected from acts of intimidation and violence under the law, which is why Hamer was forcibly sterilized and lost her job.

Lack of protection and unfair treatment of Black people in the southern United States led to several acts of resistance. Among the acts of resistance was a voting registration campaign and political initiative in 1964, Freedom Summer that combined literacy learning with activism. Black people from their teens to senior citizens took part in the program developing their literacy and political consciousness. The goal was to help the community register by providing voting education and encouraging Black citizens to vote for candidates who represented their interests. Freedom Summer was widely participated in across the state of Mississippi and the initiative was organized by The Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC), a group that was mostly made up of college students from North Carolina. This collaboration involved people across generations but was led by youth. Under youth leadership, Freedom Schools helped to increase the number of Black registered voters and elected officials in Mississippi, and it also cultivated the next generation of leaders.

Activism Among Black Youth

Activism has been essential to the progress of Black people in the United States and abroad and Black youth have been active participants in the advancement of the Black community. The protests of Black youth were often direct-action campaigns to end racial

injustices plaguing their communities. Direct action was a hands-on, overt attempt to influence change (Bynum, 2013). Bynum (2013) contends that direct action is part of Black youths' legacy when fighting for social change which differs from approaches such as litigation, an approach used by Black adults to fight racial discrimination and injustice. On 200 campuses across the United States, Black college students organized a series of protests in the freedom struggle (Biondi, 2012). Freedom struggles was a term used to describe campaigns implemented, generally by Black people and their allies, for fair and equal treatment across educational institutions and public facilities. While much of history on Black youth activism focuses on the role of college students in freedom struggles high school students also played a vital role in the progress of the United States as a nation through activism. Much like their college-aged contemporaries, Black high school students demonstrated their work and activism. College-aged students wrote demands of their college administration, bringing literacy and activism together. High school youth also wrote demands. Examples of Black youth activism can be found in cities across the U.S. including New York, York, Boston, Detroit, Atlanta, and several other cities. In 1969, high school youth in New York City wrote a list of demands to their local school district. The following is the conclusion to their list of demands,

> We are sure that you, the Black Community, will recognize the long overdue changes that [our] demands call for. We grew tired of waiting for you adults to really wake up and understand what we have been trying to tell you all these years. Those "so-called" schools you were rushing us off to every morning represented to us cruel prisons where we were sentenced to serve our time without a hope of parole. (Fisher, 2009, p. Appendix B)

The word “demand" is quite purposeful. Youths were not merely asking for or requesting better educational conditions, but the word “demands” suggests the urgency they sought to convey (Muhammad, 2020). One of the youths’ demands was for “complete examination of all books and educational supplies and materials used by the schools to their adequacy and relevance of materials and instruction” (Fisher, 2009, p. 151), were quite ahead of their time as researchers did not coin the term *culturally relevant teaching* until 25 years later (Ladson-Billings, 1994).

Youth penned their demands in opposition to the adverse impacts of school integration. Disproportionate racial representation, unfair treatment, and a Eurocentric curriculum were on the list of youths’ demands around their educative experiences. In Boston, between 1968 and 1971, Black student activists emphasized the need for Black teachers, counselors, and administrators when they stated, “white teachers, administrators, social workers, counselors, and others …cannot relate to us as human beings nor as first-class citizens and certainly not our beautiful Black heritage” (Bundy, 2017, p. 278). This statement implies that Black students felt more comfortable in the presence of Black school professionals. This statement also aligns with the work of Brown (2016). Brown discussed the “hidden injuries” of integration and highlighted firing of Black teachers impacted Black students. Throughout the process of integration, Black students began to experience disproportional rates of punishment, racial insults, and schools’ unwillingness to allow Black youth to participate in all clubs and organizations. In another example, students in Pennsylvania who also wrote demands began with, “We, the Black students at William Penn High School…dedicate ourselves to the purpose of ensuring a well-rounded curriculum for the students of William Penn” (Wright, 2003, p. 157). Students went on to make demands for hiring Black staff, creating Black history courses, recognition in school societies, and no discrimination in school plays. Rury and Hill (2013) contend that in these examples,

Black youths' approach to ending racial injustice was different, perhaps even radical, in comparison to the work of adults who preferred litigation. Still, Black youth employed critical and school literacies to read the world and write about their experiences.

The way that Black youth integrated literacy and activism provided examples of the ways that Black youth today could learn literacy practices, but it is not reflected in the standard state curriculum. According to Walker (2003), the rise of militancy in the Black community witnessed by Black youth created conditions for Black high school student activism. Hence the demands made by Black youth in their schools cannot be fully understood or assessed without considering the larger sociopolitical context that created the need for and the students' responses. These youth learned practices associated with activism and leveraged their literacy practices as activists to gain equal rights in the U.S. Youth have protested voting rights, education inequities, and human rights in the past and continue to protest these and other issues, such as climate injustice, today. In the following section, I discuss how literacy has been conceptualized in the curricula across the U.S.

Autonomous and Ideological Models of Literacy

In this section, I review autonomous and ideological models (or perceptions) of literacy. I also discuss how these models have influenced policy both in the past and today.

The Autonomous Model of Literacy

Scribner (1984) writes, "[d]efinitions of literacy shape our perceptions of individuals who fall on either side of the standard (what a "literate" or "nonliterate" is like) and thus greatly affect both the substance and style of education programs" (p. 6). The way a wealthy or powerful nation defines literacy impacts the way we teach and learn. Street (1984) theorizes two models of literacy: autonomous and ideological. By his definition, autonomous means "neutral, "universal,"

or an ability that, once taught, has results that come only from the properties of the medium is autonomous. Similarly, Unrau and Alvermann (2013) define the autonomous model concisely as "a view that assumes a universal set of reading and writing skills for decoding and encoding printed text" (p. 74). This means that a specific set of concepts and skills aimed at teaching learners to read and write can be universally applied to all learners and promote the same results. By believing that there is a universal set of neutral reading skills, the autonomous model of literacy ignores context and culture and provides a narrow definition of what it means to be literate. Further, the autonomous model suggests that mastery of reading and writing skills will improve a person's life. This idea ignores barriers in society. As a result, teaching Black urban youth may require an approach that will account for the barriers that Black people experience in society or an ideological approach to literacy. We also know this model of literacy is problematic as it can name Black children as illiterate. However, all people carry literacy. People learn literacy through social interactions (Vygotsky, 1972). Yet not all people have access to the same literacy practices and opportunities (Perry et. al, 2003). This next model provides an overview of the ideological approach, which can be used to address the lack of opportunity and access to literacy.

The Ideological Model of Literacy

In contrast to the autonomous model of literacy that has dominated the educational landscape, the ideological model of literacy accounts for social and cultural contexts (Street, 2003). In this model, literacy is not universal, neutral, or context-free, instead, it is a response to one's context. The ideological model has been described as culturally sensitive because it is concerned with the ways people use reading and writing and how the ways they use it are rooted

in their identity and knowledge. According to the National Council of Teachers of English's (NCTE) definition of literacy in a digital age, literacy:

> has always been a collection of communicative and sociocultural practices shared among communities. As society and technology change, so does literacy. The world demands that a literate person possess and intentionally apply a wide range of skills, competencies, and dispositions. These literacies are interconnected, dynamic, and malleable. As in the past, they are inextricably linked with histories, narratives, life possibilities, and social trajectories of all individuals and groups (NCTE, 2019).

The excerpt from the NCTE's series on 21st Century Literacies, Assessment, Curriculum, Diversity, and Literacy aligns closely with the ideological model of literacy by describing literacy as sociocultural practices linked to the histories of all individuals and groups. Also in contrast to the autonomous model is research on sociocultural and sociohistorical theories of learning that have taken place over the past several decades (Fisher, 2009; González, Moll, & Amanti, 2005; Heath, 1983; Vygotsky, 1962). Street (2006) argues that suggesting that literacy can be given neutrally and then its' social' effects can only be felt after is not valid, meaning that it is not enough to share how to use a skill or share knowledge about a concept and expect that a student performs. This research is significant in demonstrating that literacy is negotiated, relational, and contextual. This alternative ushers in the idea that literacy is not a singular notion and that there are multiple skills and processes that individuals and communities use to navigate society and consider literacy as more than processes and skills.

Autonomous and Ideological Models in Policy and Practice

Policy influenced by the autonomous model has contributed to standard-driven instruction, standardized assessments, and accountability (Burns, 2012; King, 2013). These

educational policy discourses are notable in several key legislative transitions: *A Nation at Risk*, (National Commission on Educational Excellence, 1983), the Education Summit in Charlottesville North Carolina in 1989, and the Massachusetts Education Reform Act in 1993. Recent decades have been marked with legislation such as the No Child Left Behind Act (2001) and the Common Core State Standards Initiative (2009). All of these initiatives and legislative actions continued to align with the autonomous model of literacy (Botzakis et al., 2014). The programs align with the autonomous model because of their emphasis on a standardized set of skills and assessments for students with different needs. Schools and districts that align with ideological models have added classes and programs that teach students the histories of their racial group using state standards. Legislation, such as Georgia's Student's First Bill, is in opposition to courses and programs centering on a specific racial group. This and similar legislation across the nation continue to be a political debate and programs such as Mexican-American Studies and African-American Studies have been dismantled by several states including Georgia, Florida, South Carolina, Texas, Idaho, Iowa, and Utah. According to the Common Core State Standards Initiative (2021), students must learn based on standards that "are designed to ensure students are prepared for today's entry-level careers, freshman-level college courses, and workforce training programs" (para 2). Entry into careers, college, and the workforce is not sufficient for youth today. A standards-based education may prepare students to be college ready but as a critical educator, I believe, it should also prepare students to participate in society. According to the American Historical Association (2021), who wrote a statement opposing "divisive concepts legislation aiming to prohibit or impede students learning around race, "cannot erase "concepts" or history; it can, however, diminish educators' ability to help students address facts in an honest and open environment capable of nourishing intellectual

exploration" (para 2). Policymakers continue to decide what and to some extent how students should learn without the voices of educators and students. The statement quoted here is part of a collective effort between the American Historical Association and the National Council for Teachers of English in support of anti-racist teaching as a collective effort and promote critical literacy across subjects, including literacy, to prepare students to take active roles in their communities.

History provides context for students and promotes a more in-depth understanding of society today. Learning literacy practice by developing critical consciousness prepares students to be active citizens taking part in a rapidly changing diverse society. (Cueto & Corapi, 2019; de los Rios, 2017; Morrell & Scherff, 2015). Considering how complex and nuanced students' educational needs are, the ideological model of literacy better suits their needs, especially those of Black youth. They have a shared history impact that has the potential to impact all Black lives. In the next section, I discuss adolescent literacies, where I further explore the idea of identity and social context in literacy.

Adolescent Literacies and Black Youth

In this section, I describe the methods used for my literature review on *adolescent literacies* to understand the theories and practices of scholars doing literacy with adolescents. Adolescent literacies include literacy practices students engage in while in and outside of school. Such practices might include analysis of social media comment threads or writing narratives for images students create. To prepare for this literature review, I examined the current arguments made about the teaching and learning of adolescents and prepubescent children to understand the work that is currently prevalent within the field. One argument within the literature on adolescent youth was teaching and learning with adolescents differs from prepubescent youth because

adolescents' age and experiences enable them to be more critical and self-reflective than they were as elementary-aged children (Brown & Knowles, 2007). Next, I also reviewed literature that discussed literacy learning in *out-of-school spaces* or literacy learning spaces outside of school hours with Black youth. I reviewed the literature on learning spaces to understand the similarities and differences that exist between traditional schooling and places outside of school where literacy learning occurs. Finally, I reviewed *participatory action research with youth* (a method of research and pedagogy that promotes critical consciousness and positive community change) and literacy to learn about approaches researchers have used to teach literacy practices to youth during action research projects.

A common finding in models of literacy, adolescent literacies, and youth participatory action research was that scholars recommended instruction that honors youth identity and promotes developing youths' critical consciousness. Adolescent youth show greater interest and success when literacy learning is inclusive of their identities and promotes criticality (Haddix et al., 2017; Lewis & Jones, 2009). This is important because in my work I facilitated experiences in literacy that aimed to promote positive perceptions of literacy. Much of literacy pedagogy in traditional school settings is focused on standardized testing and leaves little room for instruction centered on the varying life experiences that youth bring to the classroom (Morrell, 2006). During this investigation the methodology students use centers on their daily lived experiences.

Second, I found that youths' out-of-school literacy experiences, such as those in afterschool programs offer opportunities for youth to develop identity and critical consciousness when they are not under the same pressures or influence of schools, such as standards, and state funding. Giraldo-García and Galletta (2015) demonstrate that even when university researchers attempt to cultivate youths' critical consciousness during the school day, traditional schooling

practices interfere. Finally, I found that participatory approaches to research methods, such as photovoice, facilitate youths' development of critical consciousness and inherently reflect the identities of youth taking part in projects (Cahill, Rios Moore, & Threatts, 2008; de los Rios, 2017; Zenkov et al., 2017). Together, these bodies of literature support the need to create non-traditional experiences using critical pedagogy to support Black youth in literacy development. At the end of this chapter, I propose a critical literacy project both for and with Black youth in middle and high school. Below, I discuss the results of my review in greater detail.

Adolescents undoubtedly engage in literacy practices in their homes and communities that are not the same as the literacy practices they are asked to show proficiency in at school (Kinloch, Burkhard, & Penn, 2017). In addition, youth demonstrate fluency in other forms of visual and technological literacies that educators also fail to draw upon in schools. Adolescents' in and out-of-school literacy experiences suggest a disconnect between what students practice in their daily lives and what is taught at school and educators wanting to teach students differently would benefit from seeking methods of teaching that are not singular or monolithic, for instruction (Heath, 1983; Janks, 2010; Perry, 2003; Tatum, 2013). This means that teachers should teach in ways that are relevant and responsive to youths' lived experiences (Ladson-Billings, 1994; Paris, 2012).

Literacy scholars today and in the past have called for educators to broaden their definitions of literacy to include students' ways of speaking and writing as well as analysis of current issues impacting students' lives (Heath, 1983; Scribner & Cole, 1978; Tatum, 2013). Today, the response to this call should be a literacy curriculum that is inclusive of identity, critical consciousness, and technologies used by adolescents. Below I review the literature on adolescent literacies to understand theories and practices for working with adolescent youth

when centering their identities and promoting critical consciousness. I begin with a broad discussion on identity and critical consciousness in adolescents' literacies and end by specifically discussing Black adolescents' literacies.

Identity in Adolescent Literacy

Schools have the power to have a great impact on the literacies of adolescents. Therefore, youth could benefit from experiences in literacy reconceptualized to include identity in every lesson if educators are to be responsive to the needs of all youth in their classrooms (Muhammad, 2020). As it stands, youths' experiences in literacy classrooms today focus greatly on standards-based instruction which emphasizes skills and knowledge (Morrell, 2006; Muhammad, 2018). Youth do not have opportunities in school to learn histories that provide a fuller picture of social realities as they relate to oppression (Fisher, 2008; hooks, 2010) and youth can benefit from literacy instruction that is framed in their identity (deJong, 2011). According to Muhammad (2020), identity is who we are, who others say we are, and who we desire to be. This means that identity is fluid, and a person does not always have control over the way they are identified.

As spaces for deep and critical thinking, literacy classrooms are places where literacy educators can help youth critically explore their intersectional identities in school (Haddix et al., 2017). While literacy classrooms can be a space for youth to grapple with ideas of self, they may also grapple with local and global communities (Lewis & Jones, 2009). In *Inquiry-Based English Instruction*, Beach and Myers (2001) note that texts related to student identities "helped students to inquire into what made life important, how their social lives made sense, and what might be different in their relationships and identities" (p. 12). Connecting text in these ways led to increased discourse and more students attempting writing activities. Student interest and

engagement are important ideas in adolescent literacy since often students are marked by deficit narratives that label them as struggling, at-risk, or unmotivated. Using identity can help motivate youth by making lessons relevant and relatable to their lives. Black youth in middle and high schools need literacy experiences that are critical and reflective of their identities.

Recently, Black students across the United States shared experiences with hashtags like #BlackatOakHill, #BlackatGoldenSierra, or #BlackatPalmValley on Instagram. Black youth are joined by Black teachers and alumni, who each anonymously share experiences of racism in their schools. Stories are shared in print format and enclosed by beautifully designed boxes in school colors. Students share experiences by discussing what it means to be Black in white-dominated private schools. The writers recall accounts of teachers ignoring racial slurs they heard towards Black students, teachers calling students of light and darker hues of Black skin racist names such as pale-face and darkie, and even counselors telling Black youth their college choices were out of reach (Downey, 2020; O'Kane & Wilson, 2020). Although many of the written accounts are based on the Black experience in private schools, I demonstrate the need for literacy practices centering identities of Black youth and other youth of Color in school settings.

Students in traditional school settings have also organically found a way to share their experiences with racism utilizing a combination of new literacies and traditional literacies. Youth in Katy, Texas have organized protests and programs bringing awareness to racism (Zaveri, 2020). Zaveri (2020) documents youth from different schools working together remotely by using collaborative platforms such as Google Docs to plan a series that showcased racism to help others better understand the harms associated with racism. Students in Katy, Texas who began the Katy4Justice movement are also an example of what is missing in schools and how youth can

use spaces outside of school to cultivate their literacy skills, identity, and critical consciousness, an idea I explore more in the following section.

Critical Consciousness and Adolescent Literacy

In my review of studies, identity, and critical consciousness were usually paired. Critical consciousness is the ability to notice and understand social and political contradictions and take action to change them. I previously demonstrated an excerpt from Black high school students' written demands. Demand writing also took place on high school and college campuses during the 1960s and continues to be a notable example of identity and consciousness while young people also engage in literacy activities. Scholars have noted the work of youth on college campuses in direct action campaigns, which include written demands, in research articles and books (Biondi, 2012; Bynum, 2013). Young people have continued this tradition by creating critical awareness through written communication as representative of their non-traditional and traditional literacy skills. Although authors note the work of youth on college campuses more often, it is also important to note that Black youth in high schools across the nation also wrote demands, and staged walkouts, and protests during the Civil Rights movement (Bundy, 2017; Waugh, 2012). There is evidence that middle grades and high school youth continue using their pens and literacies to spark activism for social change (Jocson, 2006; Muhammad, 2012; Stovall, 2006). For example, Jocson (2006) discusses how poetry can be a tool for advancing writing instruction and how writing for social change helps students to feel like empowered citizens, Examples from research with adolescents illustrate that youth have critical opinions about their educational experiences (Zenkov et al., 2017). This dissertation study brings literacy practices and educational activism together using a participatory research methodology.

In my experience teaching middle-grade youth, I have learned that youth share their views when they are asked and more frequently when they are not. For example, (Brown & Knowles, 2007) lists twenty descriptors of middle grades students. Among them, they state that early adolescents "take social issues very seriously" and "they care passionately about the world" (p. 2). Quite often, I found literature discussing social action literacies (de los Rios, 2017; Moje, 1999), activist literacies (Crisco, 2009; Graff, 2013; Humphrey, 2013), and agitation literacies (Muhammad, 2019), which all emphasize the reading, writing and critically analyzing text but do not always lead to social action. In one example Crisco (2009) gives her first-year writing students a community action project where students discuss their desire to have a better community, but they prefer to be quiet and allow others to do the work of bettering the community. My interest in middle and high school grade voices led me to inquire about what ways I may be able to facilitate middle and high school students' use of literacy for social change. *How would youth respond when space was provided for them to voice or pen their concerns?* Therefore, in this study, I sought to understand how a literacy project using participatory action research methods shaped Black adolescent youths' perceptions of literacy and how youth responded to a program promoting critical consciousness. Promoting critical consciousness is not a traditional part of school curriculum, as a result, youth have turned to out-of-school literacy spaces for them to have fuller experiences in learning. I discuss out-of-school spaces further in the next section.

Out-of-School Literacy Spaces and Black Youth

Out-of-school literacy spaces are places or locations usually outside of school and outside of school hours where literacy learning occurs. In my review, I have found these spaces to also be affirming and academically challenging for Black youth. Several studies have examined how

Black youth read and write in places other than schools (Kirkland & Hull, 2010; Kirshner, 2015; Wynter-Hoyte & Boutte, 2018). Studies have also cited tensions with school practices and policies that have made engagement with critical conscious work challenging in schools (Bertrand et al., 2017; Giraldo-García & Galletta, 2015). In this section, I share two short vignettes to provide historical examples of the Black community teaching/learning literacy in their own spaces for social action in out-of-school spaces. I provide information about after-school programs for Black youth. Finally, I end by talking about resistance spaces and how resistance spaces use literacy in after-school programs for Black youth.

Black Out of School Literacy Learning Spaces

Voting and political education were important to the progress of the Black community, but the dominant curriculum did not include opportunities for students to grapple with ideas of ways to mobilize and fight against oppression. Many times, the result has been educational opportunities created by Black people outside of public schools. My first story is about citizenship schools (founded in 1957). Citizenship Schools were an extension of Highlander Folk Schools (founded in 1932). Their beliefs and practices remind them that community members have vast knowledge about their communities and that community concerns should be used to teach social concepts, political concepts, and literacy skills. Beginning with Septima Clark, citizenship schools were community-developed and run educational programs designed to increase Black adults' literacy skill proficiencies and raise their consciousness (Hall et al., 2010). Citizenship Schools looked for people willing to learn to teach reading to their community members. Based on voting laws of the state, teachers would be responsible for teaching students how to perform certain tasks including signing their names in cursive, reading about, and answering questions about election laws, or helping Black citizens learn ways to object to poll

taxes. Potential instructors did not need to have a high school or college education, only a willingness to learn how to advance students' literacy knowledge and promote social activism through voting. Bernice Robinson, a hairdresser from Sea Islands, South Carolina, was the first teacher at a citizenship school, where she reminded students that she did not consider herself a teacher and hoped that she and the students could learn things from one another. Although citizenship schools were not known widely, scholars and activists note that the growth of citizenship schools across the southern United States is responsible for many people joining the movement, cultivating grassroots leaders, and increasing Black voter turnout and participation in other civic activities (Levine, 2004). Space to learn liberation strategies has been vital for moving from unconsciousness to critical consciousness, and social action. Liberation strategies such as singing to travel towards freedom on the underground railroad to learning to recite the United States Constitution to gain voting rights are examples of liberation strategies connected to literacy skills and further emphasize the need for spaces where Black youth can develop their literacy practices. The next example was also a voting initiative called Freedom Summer across the state of Mississippi; however, this initiative was run by youth.

Freedom Summer and the Mississippi Freedom Schools were the catalysts for statewide activism through voter education during the summer of 1964. Mississippi Freedom Schools are another example in the lineage of Highlander Folk Schools. Educators teaching in Mississippi Freedom Schools developed curriculum and implemented pedagogical practices for Black youth and adults in Mississippi to enhance their literacy skills using Black heritage, and critical consciousness, and promote community activism through voting and voter registration (Hale, 2011). Black churches were also known for gatherings to plan, mobilize, and strategize. Today churches continue to enhance youths' literacies. Wynter-Hoyte and Boutte (2018) observed

middle-class Black youth in ministries to learn about their in-school and out-of-school literacy practices. Wynter-Hoyte and Boutte (2018) found that unlike in schools, in churches, youth contribute to the learning process in dual roles as teachers and learners, ministry leaders make room for youths' African American Vernacular English without judgment and church ministry leaders also cultivate leadership skills among the students participating. This is an example of how an out-of-school learning space offers greater validation to Black youth. Black students consistently demonstrate their power and potential when instruction moves beyond whiteboard, desks, and pencils to methods that present a fuller representation of their histories and engages them in their communities (Kinloch et al., 2017). Marginalized students are less likely to see materials that reflect their lived experiences. Monolithic and dominant approaches to teaching and learning are problematic for students because they hinder their abilities to perform academically and develop their identities. The above examples are demonstrative of literacy education that promotes not literacy learning tailored to the lives of the young people.

Before *Brown vs. Board of Education* in 1954 and desegregation, Black youth learned in community schools and were taught by community teachers who were also Black. Black teachers infused concepts and skills with identity, culture, society, and politics (Beauboeuf-Lafontant, 1999). Desegregation displaced many Black teachers and bussed Black students to schools outside their neighborhoods, Black youth ended up in classrooms with White teachers who did not affirm their identities or without classrooms to attend as in the case of Virginia students (Waugh, 2012). Often communities would work to counter the harm of school ideologies that miseducated Black youth by placing them within the history of white America as opposed to centralizing Blacks in their own experiences or discussing Black people's lives before slavery. One example is the Uhuru Sasa Shule, a Black-owned and operated community school founded

in New York following desegregation. Teachers held night classes to teach students information not covered in the traditional curriculum. Uhuru Sasa was committed to re-educating Black youth and their families. The vision of the school was to develop identity, academic skills, and Black consciousness among youth, with hopes that those learners would pass down that knowledge to their subsequent generations. The curriculum was youth-centered and grounded in Blackness. Some of the lessons they learned were self-reliance, self-determination, and critical analysis of current society (Fisher, 2009). Centering students in the curriculum and teaching them to be self-sustaining heightened students' social awareness. Elders and knowledgeable adults in the Black community dedicated to teaching youth about the history, culture, and inequities Black people endured, helped students design a blueprint for organizing campaigns where they called out social injustices and demanded changes for a more just society. This matters because it is one of many examples of out-of-school spaces created for the Black youth to connect learning with their racial identity and be critical of society.

The primary focus of many scholars' works on out-of-school literacies focuses on space and time. Hull and Schultz (2001) argue against creating a binary between literacy practice in schools and places outside of schools. Still, I create a distinction between in-school and out-of-school to highlight schools as unique social institutions. Out-of-school literacy spaces are those spaces where youth take part in literacy learning and practices outside of the school. I draw attention to spaces that can be viewed as an act of resistance because of inequitable educational practices. Learning that ignores identity and critical consciousness in traditional schools is an example of educational inequity and is the impetus for scholars calling for educators to create literacy spaces that specifically address the needs of marginalized youth. Out-of-school spaces integrate youths' daily lives with literacy learning and provide content skills and knowledge in ways that affirm

youths' identities. Examples of these literacy learning spaces are community literacy spaces (Fisher, 2009), youth writing programs (Muhammad, 2012), and third space (Gutiérrez, 2008). In community literacy spaces, Fisher (2009) discusses coffee shops, bookstores, and after-school learning spaces where Black people come together to read and write poetry and discuss their experiences of being Black. These spaces were multigenerational spaces for dialogue, teaching, learning, and writing about issues pressing to the community. Each out-of-school literacy space offers the opportunity for educators to employ methods of teaching that are intentional yet allow room for the needs of those in the room to guide learning needs over time. Students' identities are at the center and shape curriculum and learning experiences. Morrell (2006) contends that youth of Color are not provided with opportunities to develop critical consciousness, and therefore these spaces provide youth opportunities to develop their sociopolitical orientations, print reading/writing skills, and cultural identity.

One exemplary space of resistance created for Black youth was Freedom Schools in Mississippi. *Freedom Schools* was a project coordinated by the youth of the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC), which brought together Mississippians and liberal Northern students who shared the goals of social justice and equality. Specifically, Freedom Summer's goal was to register as many Black voters as possible to change the political atmosphere of Mississippi. Youth in Freedom schools produced newspapers and pamphlets and educated voters about their rights by canvassing from door to door. Student work and text reflected their racial identities (University of Southern Mississippi 1964). Freedom School teachers believed that assisting students to articulate the contradictions they witnessed and experienced naturally followed the understanding of dominant narratives and was and preceded social action for change (Hale, 2011). For example, students attending The Freedom School learned about laws'

construction, enactment, and the disproportional impact on the daily lives of White and Black people in Mississippi and across the US. As an out-of-school literacy space, Freedom Schools demonstrated Black youth using traditional concepts of literacy while also cultivating critical consciousness. The work of Freedom Schools demonstrates literacy education that is developed in response to students' culture and identity. This kind of education would aid in the maintenance of activism and cultivate the next generation of leaders, which I will discuss further in subsequent sections.

After-school programs are out-of-school spaces contributing to the well-being of the Black community by caring for our youth. A. Brown, Outley, and Pinckney (2018) discuss afterschool activities as leisure activities because youth voluntarily take part in these activities. Historically Black youth used their leisure time after school to engage in political activities (A. Brown et al., 2018). Today, Black youth taking part in afterschool programs are more often engaging in sociopolitical development as a part of their daily activities. Some programs have specific goals for Black youth attending these programs to take part in a curriculum that is specifically written to promote activism, sociopolitical development, and social change (Strobel, Osberg, & McLaughlin, 2006). The goals of afterschool programs for Black youth are not different from the work I planned to do in this investigation. It is confirmation that this work belongs in an after-school setting.

Resistance Spaces

Spaces of resistance are reflective of students' identity, and counter-hegemonic narratives that are taught through school-based standards. Resistance spaces are more challenging to accomplish in traditional classrooms (Giraldo-García & Galletta, 2015; Green, 2013). These spaces celebrate youths' identities are inclusive and equitable and less likely to occur in schools.

Spaces of resistance, where identity and critical consciousness development occurred, Resistance spaces take place in classrooms that consistently work to counter the idea that schools assimilate, produce a labor force, reproduce the status quo, and instead teach to liberate, promote criticality, and democratize society. “Educators who take an inquiry stance transcend a system of binaries through their willingness to question and to open space for youth to question” (Cueto & Corapi, 2019, p. 38). In a study occurring both in school and at a local university, Giraldo-García and Galletta (2015) note that adolescents were more agentive when researching at the university. During an observation occurring within school hours, a researcher noted “critical analysis needed at this moment will not be accessed […] Our time is limited [...] The space for critical engagement is not available to us” (p. 93). In other words, curriculum guidelines set schedules of and prescribed standardized testing material advanced by school systems hinder the progress of many projects I reviewed. Only two studies in my review happened in a traditional school setting (Bertrand, Durand & Gonzalez, 2017; Clark & Seider, 2017). Most studies took place in after-school programs, during the summer, or with a community organization.

Examples of out-of-school spaces as acts of resistance exist today in the work of teachers, scholars, and youth who continue to use literacy to create spaces as an act of resistance. Fisher (2009) and Muhammad (2012) study spaces occupied by youth in the Black community. They find that youth are eager to dialogue, write, and perform their thoughts on sociopolitical topics. In her discussion on migrant students, Gutiérrez (2008) writes,

> Learning is supported and expanded in the language and embodied practices of the institute’s *lived* curriculum—a curriculum that fuses social, critical, and sociocultural theory with the local, the historical, the present, and the future of migrant communities. In this rich ecology, the learning of new concepts and skills, as well as the development

of a collective identity, is facilitated through a range of language, reading, writing, and performative practices (p. 153).

Each suggests that cultivating a space for youth to think critically about themselves and their world means that educators working with the youth should understand and honor the youths' identity in literacy learning. Students are tasked with thinking critically about themselves and their worlds, but the curriculum is not fully designed until facilitators begin learning about their students. The idea that curriculum is organic and not pre-designed is one characteristic that makes out-of-school spaces different from traditional schooling. Although spaces are organic, they are not created with intentionality. Intentional text choice, discussion topics, and writing tasks are integral components of creating a unique experience for the students involved.

Summary

Before this study, reading literature on Black youth activism and taking literacy courses inspired me to investigate how I could prepare students in activist traditions, and discover what forms of literacy were best for cultivating activism. I responded to my curiosity by investigating youths' perceptions of literature and the ways they responded when I implemented a literacy with youth that encouraged activism.

Scholars have introduced many pedagogical strategies to rectify literacy practices used to teach Black adolescent youth. The methods of teaching that these scholars have employed have demonstrated that there is no secret unlocking Black students' intellectual brilliance (Ladson-Billings, 1995; Gay, 2002; Paris, 2012). Pedagogical approaches that counter mainstream Eurocentric approaches to education are needed to account for what is lacking in the literacy curriculum and, therefore, classrooms today. Although research has been conducted to validate

the need for these different approaches to pedagogy, below, I emphasize four reasons for my research.

First, the development of adolescents' criticality and identity mainly takes place in areas where people are marginalized and in communities that are resource-deprived. Researchers note that critical consciousness and identity are cultivated through specific pedagogical moves that draw attention to text and theory, which focus on power and oppression (Morrell, 2006; Cammarota & Fine, 2008). Second, this work contributes to the literature on literacy outcomes using participatory action research with middle grades and high school-aged youth. Twelve (12) of the 15 participatory studies I reviewed, implemented with Black youth, have been conducted in high school settings. Third, an investigation with middle and high school youth will contribute to the growing body of literature on PAR studies with Black youth by adding greater nuance through the voice of middle-grade youth. Lastly, literacy outcomes among Black adolescent youth are important because, in middle grades, students begin to understand their academic strengths and weaknesses, and youth also develop their identities during this time.

Chapter 3

Methodology

In Chapter Two, I provided literature that evaluated the autonomous and ideological models of literacy, adolescent literacy, youth perceptions of literacy, and out-of-school learning spaces. In my review of the literature, it was significant to identify these areas of study to provide more clarity and understanding of the field and to frame my study. Within the review, I also discussed research focusing on investigating Black youths' perceptions of literacy and their responses to literacy opportunities that promoted critical consciousness. Because research is a systematic method for collecting information, my research practices follow methods that are intentional, ethical, and justifiable. According to Crotty (1998/2003), a researcher's data collection and analysis procedures need to be justified by research questions and the researcher's theoretical perspective to provide the examination or inquiry with "stability and direction" (p. 2). Therefore, in this chapter, I describe my methodology. I begin by discussing participatory action research (PAR) and Black participatory action research, the methodology guiding the decisions I made during the project, and the framework I conceptualized for using PAR with Black youth. Next, I describe the research context, setting, and participants, as well as my pedagogical plan. Afterward, I describe the methods I used for data collection. Lastly, in the final section of this chapter, I explain my approach to data analysis using grounded theory (Charmaz, 2007).

Participatory Action Research with Youth

Youth participatory action research is a method of critical inquiry that seeks to change oppressive societal conditions through collaborative efforts of youth and adults who identify areas of injustice in their communities and then act to change them (Cammarota & Fine, 2008; Morrell, 2012; Kirshner, 2015). Recently, YPAR has become a popular methodology for

engaging youth in critical literacy research (Caraballo et al., 2017). In this upcoming section, I discuss ways that youth and adult facilitators have benefitted and been challenged when using the PAR methodology. In subsequent sections, I discuss the need for PAR with Black youth.

Youth Participatory Action Research: Epistemology, Academic Benefits, and Challenges

Youth participatory action research (YPAR) honors the knowledge of the youth involved; It positions all individuals working on the project as experts, creators of knowledge, and learners (Scorza et. al, 2017). That means that, in addition to adult teachers, youth are also experts, teachers, and researchers. Positioning youth as experts differs from traditional applications of pedagogy in literacy classrooms where students are merely recipients of knowledge (Burke & Hadley, 2018). Students taking part in projects contribute to the learning goals, methods used for research, and communicating research results to their communities. Cahill and colleagues (2008) note the organic nature of PAR as different from traditional schooling practices, while Rubin, Ayala, and Zaal (2017) described YPAR as being epistemologically at odds with traditional schooling. Participatory action research challenges students to critically examine their social and political context and interrogate their personal experiences by creating and recreating their social realities. The methodology is context-specific and formative. As a critical approach to researching, knowledge does not reside with a credentialed expert, it emerges from a community of people with a shared idea for equity and justice. Fine (2008) asserts that "PAR is not a method, but it is a radical challenge to traditional epistemology" (p. 215). Her work and that of other scholars insist that PAR challenges whose knowledge matters and who creates knowledge, a postpositivist approach to research.

Students who have engaged in PAR studies have benefitted academically and hoped their work would benefit their communities (Hope et al., 2015; Kornbluh et al., 2015; Morrell, 2008).

Youth have experienced academic success in the form of insightful discourses, increased likelihood to continue education following high school, improvement in literacy practices (such as reading, writing, speaking, and listening), and civic development (Breny & McMorrow, 2021; Crisco, 2009; Cueto and Corai, 2019). In one example youth researchers examined their experiences in schools and surveyed then proposed an Educational Bill of Rights (Duncan-Andrade & Morrell, 2008). Youth interviewed attendees of the Democratic National Convention, where policymakers were convening in their state of California. Based on an assessment of the needs of their school community and other information they gathered from interviewees, students determined the need to reshape their educational experiences. The opportunity to do surveys and interviews to inform their work provided youth with opportunities to cultivate their literacy skills and deepen their engagement with their community.

Though using PAR projects has shown a positive impact on youth – becoming more skilled in their abilities to deconstruct written and environmental text and re-present text, providing solutions for a more just society or educational community (Hope, Skoog & Jagers, 2014), using literacy practices (Duncan-Andrade & Morrell, 2008), becoming politically engaged (Diemer & Blustein, 2006) – tensions are common. Time, fostering critical consciousness, and whether transformation occurs have been cited as areas of promise. I discuss each, respectively.

This dissertation study was a six-month project. The time projects take may vary because participatory action research is a recursive process. Steps such as plan, do, study, and act, are iterative. The process is repeated over time by making changes and adjustments, which are responses to what is needed in the research process, which in turn is a response to research questions and community needs. The time needed for youth and adults to plan, implement, and

evaluate projects while learning to work in spaces that seek to be non-hierarchal and collaborative may also take several iterative cycles of research (Rubin, Ayala & Zaal, 2017). Youth view adults as experts and need time to unlearn this and other non-hierarchical ideas, which are guiding principles of PAR methodology (Bautista, Bertrand, Morrell, Scorza & Matthews, 2013). Learning to navigate a non-hierarchal space takes time and has presented tensions in school settings. School schedules and demands have conflicted PAR projects (Grace & Langhout, 2014; Kohfeldt, Chhun, Grace & Langhout, 2011; Kornbluh, Ozer, Allen, & Kirshner, 2015; Ozer, Newlan, Douglas, Hubbard; 2013; Sanchez, 2009); School schedules are often not conducive to the need for uninterrupted time youth require for engagement in youth participatory action research. Adherence to school schedules might be one reason YPAR studies take place in after-school programs, during the summer, or with community organizations. Also, curriculum guidelines and set school schedules of prescribed material advanced by school systems in preparation for standardized state assessments hinder the progress of YPAR projects. Students and spaces that are not accustomed to the characteristics of YPAR need opportunities to learn critical methods for doing research and that takes time.

Next, since the core idea of critical consciousness is not often promoted in learning settings, researchers have acknowledged tensions in the time it takes to cultivate critical consciousness with youth before carrying out projects (Bertrand, Durand & Gonzalez, 2017). Critical consciousness is an essential element of PAR projects that is not the focus of state learning standards, thus posing an opportunity for growth for facilitators wishing to use YPAR as a method in schools with their students (Giraldo-Garcia & Gallette, 2015). As a result, settings have the potential to place limitations on the trajectory of YPAR projects (Burke, Greene, & Mckenna, 2017; Sanchez, 2009; Zaal & Terry, 2013). This dissertation took place in an out-of-

school setting, Level Up because the program offered flexibility in scheduling and teaching autonomy.

Finally, students participating in PAR projects have transformed individually, however, PAR projects may not have a great impact on community or societal transformation. Youth projects do not always urge leaders to act (Bertrand & Lozenski, 2021). Because of this potential result, it is important to prepare participants psychologically for different outcomes (Strack et al., 2004). This means that although the plan is to change communities, youth might need to think about many possibilities for outcomes to their action plan so that they can have more solutions for moving forward. Defining goals and outcomes is a part of planning and evaluating during the iterative practice of PAR. It is important to evaluate the accomplishments and work that still needs to be completed as a part of the critical analysis of PAR.

Why Study Youth Participatory Action Research with Black Students?

Students within Black communities identifying issues and acting to create change for their communities is part of the African-American tradition. One historical example of literacy and activism that resembles PAR, as we used it in this study, is writing demands. One such example can be found in, the subsequent chapter in Figure 4.11, *An Appeal for Human Rights* (Pope, 1960). Lists of demands provided a visual representation of Black students' intellectual analysis of contradictions between policy and society as they experienced it and using literacy as a conduit for social change. Since Black youth have historically been critical of society and had a sense of identity, my study had to address these two qualities with youth today by cultivating critical consciousness and action orientation. Investigating how Black youth perceived learning in spaces where they dreamed dreams of freedom provided information on what students valued for cultivating critical consciousness through education and activism.

Critical Consciousness Cultivation. Freire's (1996) *conscientização* or critical consciousness is a literacy practice that draws from cultural context. Critical consciousness is an awareness of social, political, and historical elements that shape positions of privilege while at the same time marginalizing those without power. To develop critical consciousness, learning is based on students' lived experiences to understand and challenge the power impacting their lives. In this project, youth photographed images to discuss the current context concerning their daily experiences. Dialogue about the images challenged power. Social justice is what scholars seek to understand and do in these research projects with youth developing critical consciousness (Vasquez, Janks & Comber, 2019). Developing critical consciousness was essential in this study. Students explored ideas that impacted their lives and Black students historically and today. In this project, the youth did research by first exploring issues that affected them as a community of learners. Critical consciousness work with youth is important because it can provide an argument for information to be included in the out-of-school curriculum.

Action-Orientation. Critical pedagogy projects are varied; still, they are aligned within the critical tradition (Ginwright, Noguera, and Cammarota, 2006). Critical inquiry is a *praxis-oriented* way of doing scholarship. Praxis is a cycle of research theory being implemented into practices followed by reflection. According to Freire (1996), "This pedagogy makes oppression and its causes objects of reflections by the oppressed and from that reflection will come to their necessary engagement in the struggle for their liberation…this pedagogy will be made and remade" (p. 30). Reflective practices are necessary throughout a PAR project, including lesson planning and development. In other words, while PAR facilitators can have specific plans for literacy instruction, they should also be prepared to make changes to their plans in response to the needs of students and the context in which the study is occurring. Within this dissertation

study, the students and I reflected on previous learning and goals as a precursor for moving our research processes forward.

Action can take different forms. Critical thinking itself is action (Vasquez, Janks & Comber, 2019). Thoughtfully reflecting on the role of power on oppressed populations is an effort that counters the status quo. Students in this study created PowerPoint presentations to inform school communities to act in a way that had not yet been imagined. Projects framed in critical inquiry do not follow specific guidelines because they are responsive to the needs of communities (Ibrahim & Steinberg, 2014). Here, it is essential to note that actions for change are varied, and projects do need to follow the same guidelines to be agents of change for marginalized communities. In this study, youth focused on what they loved and wanted to change about schools.

Black Participatory Action Research

Black participatory action research (Drame & Irby, 2016) is a strand of PAR. While traditional participatory action research projects may not require that researchers and participants are Black, Black participatory action research projects intentionally require that all community members involved in the project identify as Black or from the African diaspora. In addition, the focus of the study must be something that the members of the Black community wish to change. Any changes identified or enacted must benefit and uplift marginalized voices within the Black community. In this project, Black youth shared the benefits and challenges of being a student at their school. I am a Black teacher and researcher who facilitated experiences and assisted students in understanding schools. Youth in the project used photovoice. Photovoice is a method of participatory action research where community members photograph images and create narratives detailing the strengths and challenges of their communities with the goal of social

justice in their communities. Participants use photos and narratives as a tool to communicate using visuals and language that would help people in power understand their communities' strengths and concerns.

By employing a PAR methodology with youth during this inquiry I hoped to better understand how Black students perceived literacy and how they responded to critical consciousness development by centering their experiences and knowledge. Each student in the study completed an independent project. Throughout this experience, they also received feedback on their work from their peers and me. During my six-month experience with the students, I facilitated lessons through experiences in and outside of the classroom for their research. Students were also able to come to me for assistance with their writing, reading, speaking, and analysis. In this paper, at times, I discuss students' research as youth participatory action research (YPAR), and other times, I discuss the process of research as participatory action research (PAR) with youth. I want to note that this project was not conceptualized by the students participating. However, because the youth in the study were PAR researchers, their individual and collective decisions influenced either the direction of their projects or the time we spent researching during the project.

Like much of the existing research discussing PAR with youth, the students in this study investigated their schooling experiences. This project was different from other youth participatory action research projects because, in this study, I worked to develop students' critical consciousness by providing texts that were written by and about Black students' experiences in schools. My project allowed students to read from their experiences of Black counterparts by studying Black students' history of challenging systems of power and oppression. To make my research applicable to the youth in my study. In addition to YPAR and

Black participatory action research (BPAR) (Drame and Irby, 2016) conceptualization to further explain my research choices. Black participatory action research is a strand of PAR that has four specific characteristics, distinct from other PAR projects: 1) those conducting the research in the Black community identify as Black; 2) Black perspectives are centered and White perspectives are deliberately decentered; 3) voices of marginalized people of the African diaspora are uplifted for the empowerment, healing, and liberation of Black people; and, 4) the normative underpinnings of PAR are suspect and subject to cultural and political critique.

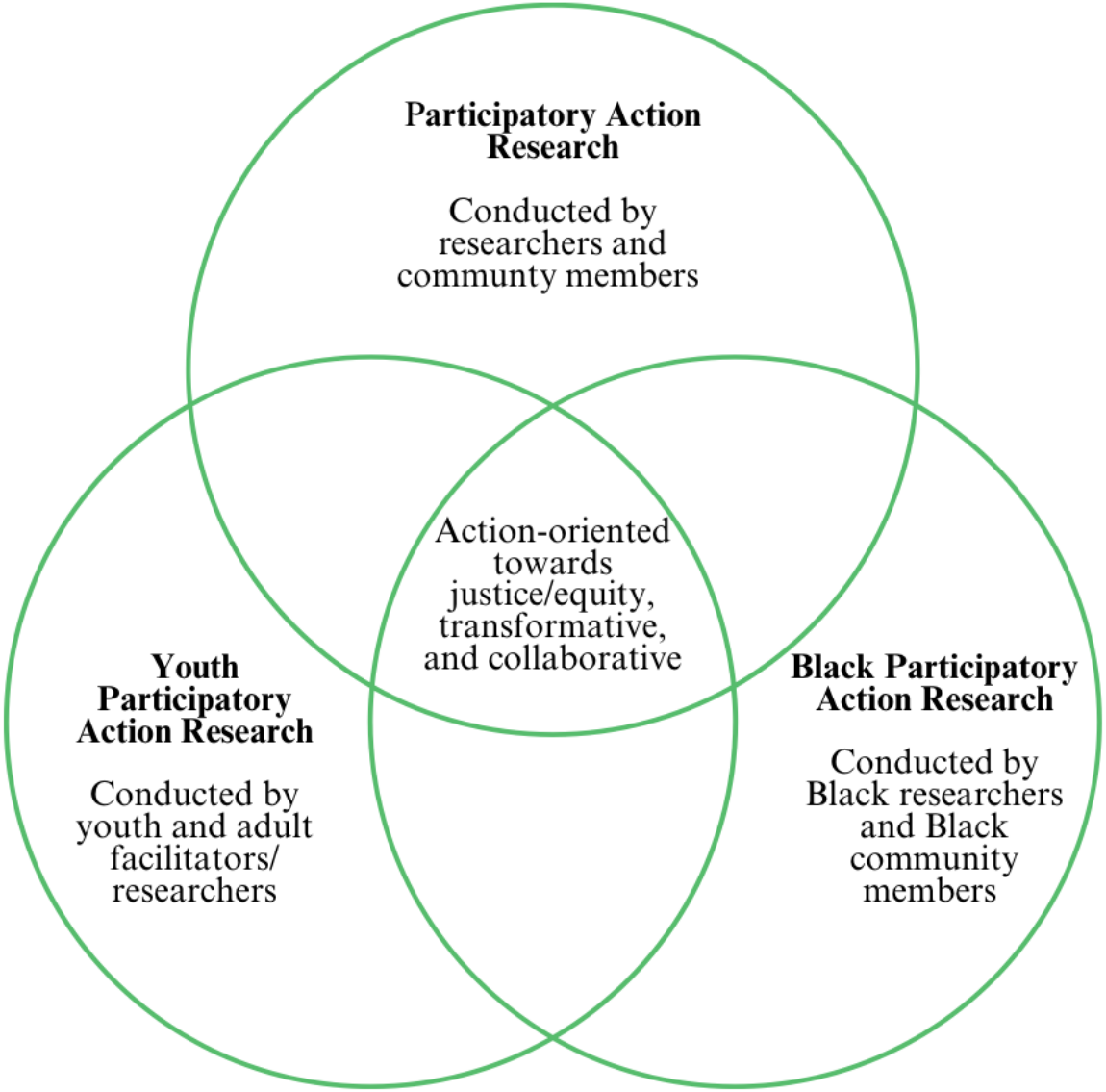
Conceptual Framework: Participatory Research with Black Youth (PAR/YPAR/BPAR)

During this study, I employed two methods. Two of the primary conceptualizations forming my approach were McIntyre's (2000) conceptualization of youth participatory action research (YPAR) and Drame and Irby's (2016) conceptualization of Black participatory action research (BPAR). McIntyre (2000) described YPAR as "1) The collective investigation of a project, 2) the reliance on indigenous knowledge, and 3) the desire to take individual and collective action to deal with the stated problem" (p. 128). In other words, YPAR is one way that youth can work together using research and their experiences to identify problems within their communities and then focus on solutions that create change. What sets YPAR apart from PAR is that YPAR projects help to develop youths' skills and conceptual knowledge using explicit pedagogy (Cammarota & Fine, 2008). Youth in YPAR studies generally range from elementary to college-age. In my study, participants were in middle and high school. Drame and Irby (2016) described BPAR as action research projects done by members of the Black community for the improvement of a shared issue in the Black community. By focusing on Black communities, BPAR places race at the center of the research to empower racially marginalized communities to create change within their communities. I used YPAR and BPAR to guide the decisions I made

designing this study. I designed the lessons in this project to cultivate students' critical consciousness, reading, writing, and listening skills. Together YPAR and BPAR create a multigenerational and collective approach to justice that employs multiple perspectives of Black youth. The youth, in turn, work to address issues of injustice at intersections of their youth identity through plans and actions for social change. PAR also develops literacy practices (Morrell, 2006). The knowledge participants gain during PAR is not passive. Instead, it is meant to initiate action, plans, or ideas for social change.

Figure 3.1

Putting BPAR and YPAR together



During the investigation, I challenged the youth participants to produce images that showed what they loved about school as well as images of things that they wanted to change. Along with images, youth participants also wrote narratives explaining the images they made. I also gathered data to understand their perceptions and responses using semi-structured interviews. The research questions guiding this investigation were:

1. What perceptions do Black students have about literacy after taking part in a youth participatory action research project promoting critical consciousness?
2. How do Black youth respond to a youth participatory action research project that promotes critical consciousness?

To answer these research questions, I investigated as a teacher-researcher. I planned and facilitated lessons then I asked the youths to reflect upon their experiences. Youth reflections provided me insight into youths' perceptions of literacy and informed the direction of the project.

I turn next to the research context and setting and introduce the research participants before going into further detail about the research design. I make this choice so that I can foreground who was involved and where the study happened, which are both vital pieces of participatory action research. Following the discussion of the research design and the cycles of research in this study, I explain my data collection and analysis.

Research Context and Setting

This research was conducted at Level Up (pseudonym) with Black youth attending an afterschool and summer program. Level Up began in 2001 as an after-school program for 15 youth in middle school. As of 2023, the program serves over 500 youth in middle and high school in a large Southeastern metropolitan city. They provide after-school and summer programs for youth in nine schools. I have only experienced working with youth attending six of

the schools. Level Up is a free youth program; it is government-funded and offers year-round support for students and their families in areas of academics, financial literacy, social-emotional skills, and mentoring.

Level Up values Black history and heritage. They have shown this ethos by hiring people within their community and through curriculum choices. In one instance they shifted from a California-based, white female yoga instructor to a locally based Black male, yoga instructor after some staff noted that students might benefit from a local Black yoga instructor. In another instance, one program director created a display in her after-school program space labeled "Black Empowerment Education." The display rotated themes each month, including Black inventors, Black women, and Black entrepreneurs. This display was exhibited at the Level Up main building or headquarters. Valuing Blackness may or may not be the standard of other after-school programs. According to youth.gov 10.2 million youth attended after-school programming in 2014. Level Up students make up 0.005% of the total 10.2 million students across the US attending after-school programs. Therefore, the work that students and I took part in during this program is not generalizable to the hundreds of thousands of spaces and agencies serving Black youth across the US. Level Up was a specific example with certain objectives for their program and youth, though it was government-funded like many after-school programs.

During the summer months of 2021 when the study took place, students from four middle schools and two high schools came together in one building to learn and play. During the fall, winter, and spring months youth attended the after-school programs for Level Up at their respective home schools. Part of the mission of the summer and after-school program is to "break the cycle of generational poverty" by connecting with youth, exploring alternative ways

to learn, and providing opportunities for exposure including the arts, mindfulness, and the sciences.

At the time of this study, 15% of all students in the program had Individual Education Plans (IEPs). This number included 3% that had gifted IEPs and 12% with learning disability IEPs. The remaining 85% of students received traditional education services during the school day. Students ranged in academic abilities. Youth participants in the study were middle and high school with grades ranging from grades 8 to 12 with ages ranging from 13-17. The youth participating in this study attended schools in a racially segregated county, near a major city in Southeastern U.S., King County (pseudonym). According to King County district survey data, participants were categorized as having low socioeconomic status. Each semester Level Up asks the parents to complete a survey to learn more about students and their families. Parent survey results indicated that over 80% of responding families made less than the median state household income each year. These students' race and class are important because it helps to understand why the youth in the study might benefit from programs that address racial and economic disparities.

Background of the Setting

When I began working at Level Up in 2018, their mission was to "level the playing field by breaking the cycle of generational poverty" and their motto was "ready to stand out." Since then, Level Up has moved away from that mission and motto. Their mission now is to "Function as Second Family to students by supporting them academically, and in any way necessary" and their new motto is "Ready to step up." Level Up was started by a local born and raised athlete and his family and they employ both youth and adult staff to run the program. There are program aids (most often high school or college students), program assistants, program managers,

vendors, and teachers. Program aids assist teachers with students in class sessions. Program assistants work closely with the program managers to run the daily functions of the program. Teachers teach language arts, mathematics, or science and vendors have worked with students in yoga, jump rope, dance, identity development, personal care, drug awareness, and sexual health among other topics. As a teacher, the time I spent at Level Up was limited to about 3 hours after school during the traditional school year and 4-6 hours a day in the summer. I did not accept payment during the summer because my work was solely on this dissertation study. I did work for pay in the fall because I was responsible for children and work outside of my dissertation at that time.

The culture of Level Up strived to help students feel less like they were in schools by removing some of the hierarchy associated with calling adults by their last name. Using Miss or Mister before an adult's first name was part of the culture at Level Up. This shift from the more formal use of last names in a traditional school setting was an advantage for using PAR during my study because one of the theories influencing photovoice is feminism (Wang & Burris, 1997). Feminism which aims to dismantle hierarchies (Wang & Burris, 1997). Level Up was practicing removing hierarchy in their out-of-school educational space.

This study extends Wang and Burris' conceptualizations to include a Black feminist perspective (Collins, 2000). Collins' (2000) articulation of Black feminism has four dimensions. Two of those dimensions lived experience as a criterion of meaning and the use of dialogue to assess knowledge claims, are like concepts central to critical approaches such as PAR and photovoice. Similarly, critical approaches to research view participants as experts in their lived experiences and have discussed the importance of dialogue in participants' sense-making process (Vasquez et. al, 2019). However, Black feminism offers two dimensions that allowed me to

extend PAR and photovoice, the ethics of caring and the ethics of personal accountability. The ethic of caring explains my commitment to teaching Black youth Black history. Black feminist researchers are concerned with both the methods of data collection and the data the collect equally (Clemons, 2019). The ethics of personal accountability explains my commitment to iterative cycles in PAR. Dillard (2016) sums up the ethics of caring and personal accountability when she encourages researchers to move away from the traditional notions of research whose goal is to fix some problem and engage in research centering reciprocity between the researcher or teacher and those who are engaged in the research or who are our teachers.

Additionally, Level Up's out-of-school setting was more flexible because it did not mirror the typical curriculum or schedule of schools as institutionalized educational spaces. Thus, the flexibility at Level Up created the opportunity for me as a teacher-researcher to explore alternative ways to teach and learn. As a result, in my lessons, I intentionally incorporated literature featuring Black authors into daily programming goals or reading more fluently and increasing comprehension when reading texts. This meant that daily, I was able to read with the youth participants, facilitate discussions, and encourage reflection through writing in ways that centered on the youths' racial identity.

Before this study, other staff members and I also created a book club. The staff included the director of programs, two program managers, and me, a teacher. We researched, purchased, and read various books. After reading the books we purchased for the students, we engaged in weekly dialogue that helped us to integrate Black history and contemporary issues. Our weekly meeting also helped us to anticipate questions and topics that arose when the students read the books (See Appendix C for Cycle 0 Books). To fund the texts used during this program, Level Up had been awarded grant funding from another large non-profit organization that promoted

literacy skills with only Black males in the program. Some of the books were ordered from this grant to directly target male readers. But, to include all students, Level Up used funding from other donors to order books that would be of interest to a broad range of students. With these texts, staff members, including myself, planned and facilitated book clubs to foster critical literacy experiences amongst youth across the program.

After three months of meeting and vetting books, poems, and book chapters, we had come up with three weeks of curriculum. We planned to implement our curriculum plan and then assess the outcomes using Plan-Do-Study-Act (PDSA), a business strategy that the organization used to assess its professional development curriculum with staff. After *planning* our curriculum, we implemented (*do)* by reaching out to parents and youth to gain information on their interest in enrolling in the program. Youth needed to join willingly; we did not want to require students to be a part of the book club. We gained the interest of 8 youth participants, however, none of them attended our online sessions. As a staff we met to discuss reasons why the youth failed to attend and came up with two reasons 1) we did not move quickly enough to hold the youths' interest in the program we had enthusiastically discussed with them and their parent, and 2) we did not offer incentives.

I continued the work I did with my colleagues on this dissertation project. I have modified the method of implementation to include photovoice. However, the goals of understanding youths' attitudes towards literacy and increasing critical consciousness remained. I also explicitly worked to positively influence youths' attitudes toward literacy by developing a collaborative space. In addition, I recruited and retained youth by offering incentives which included a Georgia State University pen, cup and keychain, protest buttons, three books, and a $100 monetary incentive for each semester they attended. So, when I asked for permission to

conduct my study with any interested youth attending the program, the leadership responded by saying yes because they felt that the project would be "mutually beneficial." Leaders at Level Up were excited that the student's gender was not a qualifier and that my qualifications were that the participants only needed to be enrolled in Level Up's summer or after-school program at the time of the study and identify as Black, African American, or a part of the African diaspora. Using the goals that Level Up had in place along with participatory action research, I designed a study to cultivate youths' critical consciousness and a positive perception of literacy. I detail my plan in the following section.

Research Design

To respond to my research questions, I developed a literacy program that centered on the voices and stories of Black youth. This investigation took place from June 2021 to December 2021, concurrent with the local districts' summer break and fall semesters. Long before this dissertation study began in June 2021, I created plans and implemented lessons using texts about Black youth to develop Black girls' literacy skills and cultivate critical consciousness in the summer of 2018. For this study, I adjusted my texts and lessons to account for the heterogeneous group of Black boys and girls participating in this study, which was the grouping desired by the organization students were attending, Level Up. I discuss texts I used in this study in a subsequent section outlining my pedagogical plan.

I facilitated a photovoice study with middle and high school youth. The principles of Black participatory action research (BPAR) and youth participatory action research (YPAR) aided me in thinking through the pedagogical plan for facilitating participatory research with Black youth. When my investigation began in the summer of 2021 two cycles of PAR took place. Cycle 1 took place from June until July of 2021, lasting five weeks. Cycle 2 occurred in

July 2021 for three weeks. Cycle 3 spanned the fall semester that year, from August until December of 2021. During each research cycle, I planned literacy lessons using historically responsive literacy practices (*1964 Platform of the Mississippi Freedom School Convention*, 1964; Muhammad, 2020) and photovoice methods (Wang & Burris, 1997). The youth took part in the lessons, made pictures, and wrote narratives.

My students used photovoice as a part of their action research. Photovoice typically varies from 4 weeks to 3 months. Wilson et al. (2007) recommended allowing 2-3 months for making and developing photos, rich dialogue, and time for thoughtful writing. Similarly, Peabody (2013) recommended periods greater than 10 weeks to allow time for social action. Other researchers have decided their time frame on whether they answered their research question or achieved their desired outcome. For example, Gordon (2016) conducted two PAR cycles with a teacher who wanted her high school students to engage in more critical dialogue. Although Güzel Yüce and Doğanay (2021) conducted their study at the same time as my dissertation study, the number of cycles and duration is greater than my study. Güzel Yüce and Doğanay conducted research for 32 weeks, with a total of six cycles as a researcher and teacher worked together to plan, implement, and reflect on the process of developing a culture of thinking in an elementary classroom. In PAR, inquiries are complete when the stakeholders in the project agree that the project is concluded during reflection of the process.

Research Participants

During the summer of 2021, students from two high schools and four middle schools shared a building space. Ten students from the summer program took part in Cycle 1 or the summer portion of my study. During the fall, I retained six of the ten students who began in the summer. My participants consisted of three students from high school and three from middle

school. All students in the program self-identified as Black or African American. Four of the participants were female and two were male. Both male participants were in middle school. Although the summer program separated middle and high school students, students and I came together to do our project. During the fall, however, students attended the program at their respective schools. High school students, Quinn, Yara, and Ella each attended Level Up's after-school program in the fall at their high school, Heritage High School. Middle school students, Marley, Julian, and John, each attended the afterschool program at Main Street Middle School.

In the fall of 2021 and across the four middle school sites in the region I served, there were 160 students. In the high schools, there were 68. For this project, I worked with six adolescents. Studies developing critical consciousness among marginalized youth had an average of six students per adult in the study. I aimed for 10 youths to take part in the study to account for attrition. In addition, Williams et al. (2020) recommended 4-8 youths. Low ratios of students to teachers were also recommended in a study involving 122 participants. Youth were placed in groups of 6-10 per facilitator (Wilson, Dasho, Martin, Wallerstein, Wang, & Minkler, 2007). In another group of 30 youths, five doctoral students facilitated the research process (Buck, Cook, Quigley, Prince & Lucas, 2014). In each study, the ratio of adults to youth participants was one adult and 6-10 youth. While I have worked with several of these students over the past years and I could work with large groups, the research was different. Studies demonstrated that delivering content, collecting, and analyzing research data is better managed in smaller groups.

This study took place face-to-face and online in 2021. At the time of my study, June 2021, it had been about a year and a half since the COVID-19 pandemic began. During the times when the study took place in an online setting, it was due to both COVID-19 and students' busy schedules. Also, two students and I were diagnosed with COVID-19 during the study, which

made meeting in person a health risk. For the safety of all participants in the study, during times when a participant or I had COVID, the best option was to take part in the study in an online setting such as Zoom, where we could distance ourselves. Also, five of the six youth participating in the study had other obligations including jobs, practice for sports, and family events. In those cases, the youth opted to meet with me online for interviews or writing assistance, if needed. Next, I introduce each of the participants in the study using data from initial interviews, final interviews, and what I learned about them through working with the youth during the study.

Meet John

I met John during the summer of the study. John participated in program learning for two weeks before getting his consent form signed. Each time I met with participating students he wanted to join even though he did not have his form and I did not turn him down because he showed great interest in the program. Also, since I did not receive his consent until more than a week after the program started. I did not have the opportunity to conduct an initial interview with John at the beginning.

During the time of the study, John was an eighth-grade student. He loved football and basketball. He attended Level Up, played on the basketball team, and ran track during Cycle 3 of the study. He was the youngest in his home where he lived with his mother, father, grandmother, and brother. I had the pleasure of meeting his grandmother when I had an interview with him at the end of our first cycle of research as a group because I conducted it at his home.

Meet Julian

Julian and I had a rapport. Before the study, I had worked with him at Level Up beginning his sixth-grade year in school, during the 2019-2020 school year. Julian was the only

student that I had known from Level Up before the start of the study. When I met Julian, in 2019, he was shy, but he was unafraid to share the mystery and scary stories he had written with the rest of the group. During my initial interview, I learned that Julian's writings were inspired by Stephen King. In the summer of 2021, he still described himself as shy but also as an outgoing person, who likes to tell jokes and tries to make conversation. Julian kept a large joke book of jokes he had written that he shared with me during the last few months of our work on the action research project. He also shared that he joined Snap, Chat, and Write because he thought it would be interesting.

Meet Marley

Marley described herself as a young Black girl who loves to read. She joined the study because she thought it would be interesting to learn about Black people. Marley was outspoken at times she truly believed in an idea. For example, Marley made it clear to the group that she had no interest in having children and she felt that students in her school did not take COVID seriously. Outside of those moments she was soft-spoken. Marley was absent from the program on occasion to travel with her mother to her brother's basketball games. During those trips, she still participated by taking pictures of areas surrounding schools where her brother played to share and compare with the group. Marley was also the granddaughter of an educator who visited her grandmother's school enough times to know exactly where her room was. Her grandmother had recently passed but one of the schools we visited was the school where her grandmother had taught.

Meet Ella

Ella was a senior at Heritage High School. Her temperament was gentle. She was quiet and reserved. It is safe to say that she spoke the least out of the students during group discussions

or when the youth talked amongst themselves. Ella was also different from other high school participants because she had been attending Level Up for three years and was currently attending her fourth. She had been a participant at Level Up her entire high school career. During our initial interview, Ella described herself as an introvert who stays to herself. She also said that it takes time for her to be open and speak because she doesn't like speaking first. Her quietness and reservations to speak were apparent in her interviews when she would sit quietly and take her time to think about questions I had asked. She was so quiet that there were times I would wait for her response for several seconds, then prompt her again and she would say, something like I am thinking about it, I need more time to think, or she would ask me to repeat the question so she could write it down.

Although Ella took time to reveal her emotions and opinions verbally and did not like being the first to speak, she readily shared ideas through the images she made during the project and her narratives. The images she chose to include in the project were made to feature a program called Your Next Level (pseudonym), a mural in her school, and the data wall outside of the main office at her school. Ella's images and narratives conveyed her concerns for the advancement of students via careers and colleges and the way that her school was depicted to others.

After the program, Ella initially said she had not gained anything from her participation in the project. Later during that same interview, I asked Ella to compare her reading and writing experiences in school to the experiences she had in the program, and she told me that the program and approaches to writing we used helped her to become a better writer.

Meet Yara

Yara, a 15-year-old sophomore, began participating in Level Up in the summer of 2021 when this dissertation study began. She had heard about Level Up in middle school but did not join until she was in her second year of high school. Because of the COVID-19 pandemic, Yara attended her first year of high school partially in a virtual setting at Heritage High but was excited to take part in Level Up over the summer because the youths had the opportunity to come together in person. She quickly grew fond of the program and described Level Up as a place where she could be with her friends and a program that offered many opportunities to participate in a lot different of activities. When she told me about herself, she said that she was chill, goofy, just a tad bit laid back, kind, and a sweet person, who was comfortable in her skin. Yara also noted that she has a slight attitude and a tendency to take things to heart.

When we talked about reading and writing, Yara shared that she loved to write but did not like to read. She came to the project wanting to gain more confidence when speaking and to learn more about photography. Before the project, Yara had an interest in photography, but Yara had put her interest in photography to the side to focus on activities that aligned more closely with her other aspirations of becoming a lawyer and joining the military. However, the opportunity to take part in this program caught her attention because it involved the experience of Black people and photography. While participating in the project, she was a part of the Junior Reserve Officers' Training Corps (JROTC). After the New Year, when students wrapped up the projects, she began a program called Upward Bound.

Meet Quinn

Quinn was the only participant in the study who had a suggestion for a pseudonym I should call her in the study. None of the other participants had a preference. Quinn was 17 and

the oldest student participating. The summer of the study was her first time experiencing Level Up. She contributed significantly to conversations among the group of students. I learned quickly that she liked to share. She explained her reason for wanting to share and take part in our initial interview when she said,

> [I joined] because I enjoy talking about Black people. And I also had experience with going to white schools and predominately white schools and Black schools as well. So, I thought this would be a nice opportunity to explain how that was for me. (Interview transcript, June 2021).

During a school visit to her high school, Heritage High, she reflected on her experiences at both a predominately white and predominately Black school and noted that she was happier at her current school because she often saw positive representations of Black people in her school.

For the study, Quinn included two photos she made depicting marijuana use and school overcrowding. During a one-on-one session, Quinn and I spoke about why these pictures were important to her. The narratives she composed to go along with her images initially discussed the need for police and dogs to discourage students from bringing marijuana to school. However, after discussing how the presence of police at her school might make her and other students feel, she chose to write the need for mental health counseling to address marijuana use instead. At the beginning of the study, Quinn described herself as educated, and by the end, she included that she thought of herself as an up-and-coming activist.

Epistemology

Participatory action research (PAR) is framed within the epistemic stance that knowledge is co-constructed. Co-construction of knowledge takes place between community members and researchers or between insiders and outsiders. In PAR the knowledge of both insiders and

outsiders is more complete than one who works alone (Drame and Irby, 2018). Co-construction of knowledge takes place with experiential knowledge of insiders, who are most familiar with the phenomenon, and outsiders, who bring skills, resource access, and cultural capital (Drame and Irby, 2008). In this study, student researchers were most familiar with their schooling experiences. They bring an insider perspective that reflects the experiences of a person attending a middle or high school. My role as a researcher in academia allows me to share an outside perspective, which the youth may not have considered because they are deeply embedded in the cultural phenomenon of schooling they seek to challenge. Thus, by bringing both of our knowledge together, we attempted to address a community issue and potentially impact change.

One historical contribution to PAR is pragmatism (Dewey, 1930), or meaningful learning for practical reasons. Dewey argued that learning involves reflection and action toward improving society. Dewey's beliefs imply that pedagogy is a process that includes dialogue and shared inquiry with other community members to address societal issues such as curriculum goals. Other scholars have pushed beyond Dewey's theory to account for improving society when there were societal barriers due to race (DuBois, 2014). This study addressed Black youth perspectives on literacy and learning. The youth researchers on this project deepened their literacy skills through their work on a project that could directly impact their lives or take part in meaningful learning. It also highlights a community issue due to racial injustice. PAR adds yet another layer. The issue to be addressed and the outcome depends on collective input that will create a change.

This investigation builds from a constructivist epistemology in the research design, data collection, and analysis process. This meant that I planned lessons before working with the youth, however, when I began working with the youth researchers, their input informed the

trajectory of the research design. It also meant that I identified themes, but it was the words, corrections, and confirmation of youth informing the analysis project. This study documented our shared knowledge from a shared concern about our community and provided an analysis that reflects based on the responses of six Black youths doing action research.

Black Participatory Action Research at Level Up

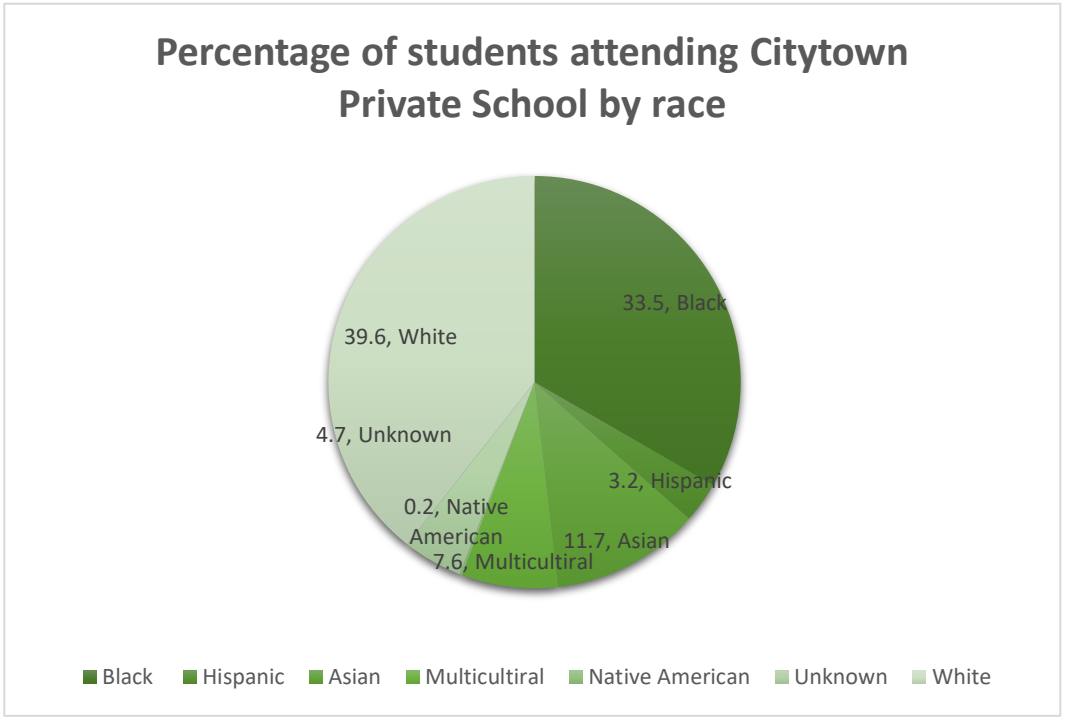
In PAR studies, participants collaborate in identifying a problem with their communities, engage in reflective inquiry, and come up with just solutions to transform their communities (Cammorata & Fine, 2008; Clark& Fournillier, 2012; Fals-Borda & Rahman, 1991). The difference is that PAR studies with youth include young people in these decision-making processes (Cammarota and Fine, 2008). Youth involved in the process may identify problems and develop research plans or solutions. When participants in the study are intentional about involving community members and researchers being Black, this is called Black participatory action research (BPAR). In this project, I combine PAR with youth and BPAR. This study is a Black participatory action research study with youth.

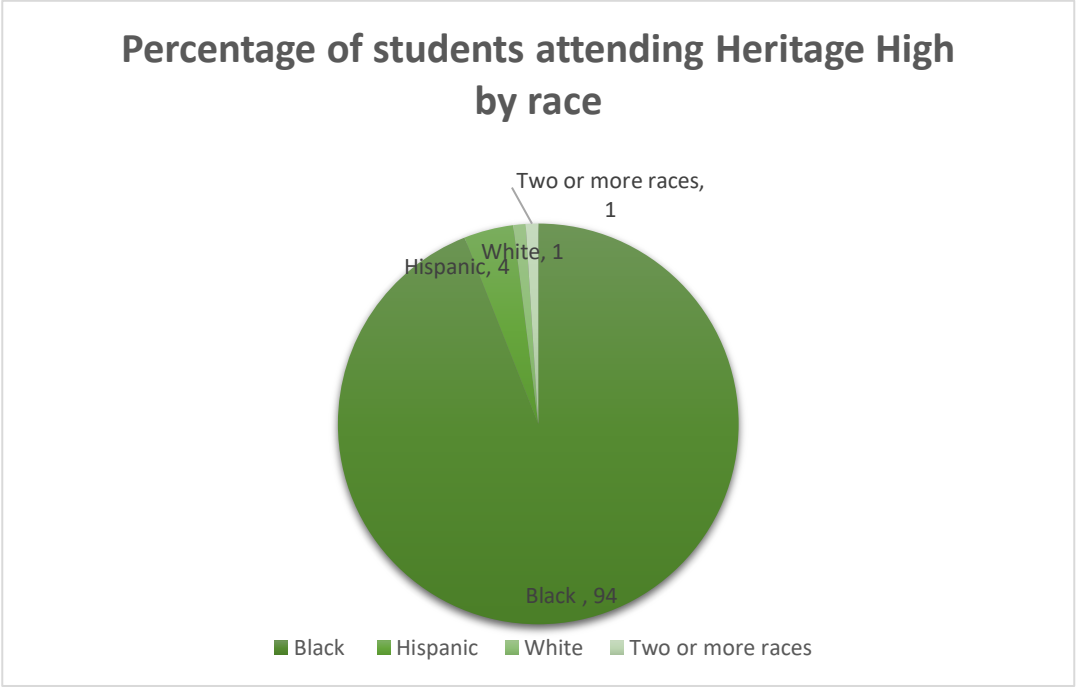
Youth in the study were well versed in their own experiences as Black youth at their schools. However, as researchers, we needed to learn about the way that other Black youth experienced schools. We began by reading historical examples that provided a context for segregation and activism in education. Reading texts aided in building their knowledge topic, a common practice in PAR projects with youth. Duncan-Andrade & Morrell (2008) and Livingstone et al. (2014) read Yosso's (2005) landmark text to assist youth in understanding how they could identify assets that existed in their communities. In this study, we read, watched, observed, questioned, and analyzed several texts detailing the schooling experience of Black youth created by Black authors to help. While continuing to read texts we also visited schools.

School visits added to our existing knowledge and helped students to see schools from a different perspective. This was important since as a member of their school communities, youth may not find the same relevance in their daily occurrence as outsiders. Visiting different schools helped students to analyze ideas that they may overlook at their home schools. In Cahill et al (2008), older youth participants toured their community with a researcher providing a different perspective and discussing the changes that had taken place over time. They state, "Community-based participatory research provided an opportunity for us to look closely at our neighborhood, to question our surroundings (that we had taken for granted)" (p. 90). The experience of visiting their community from an outside perspective helped the researchers to see their community differently. Each of my student collaborators, except one girl, had only attended one school for middle or high school, so they did not have a variety of experiences to compare their current schooling. Students visited different schools within their district and a local private school. Figures 3.2 and 3.3 below are a visual display of school demographics.

Figure 3.2

Citytown Private School and Heritage High School Demographics





These figures depict the vastly different demographics of a private school as compared to their home schools. While students attended schools where youth were mostly Black, private schools were more diverse.

Cycles of Research

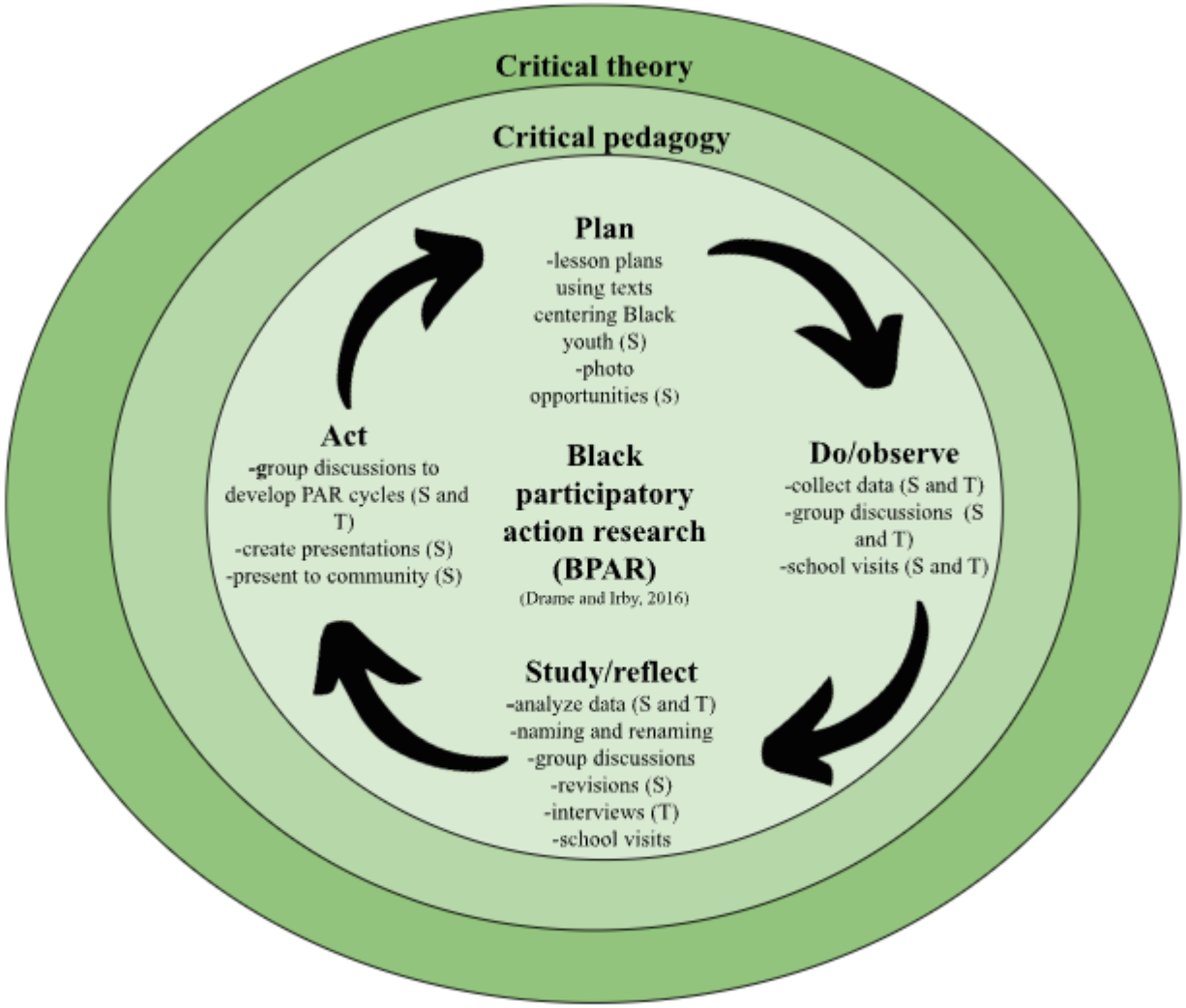
Each cycle, I was intentional about centering Blackness. Because BPAR is participatory action research for, about, and done by Black people I worked to ensure that my Black youth had a more complete representation of our history as they worked to share their perspectives and needs. This research study was done with Black youth who hoped their schools would be transformed to become cleaner and where they would learn a curriculum that reflected their Black histories. Each participant in this research study, including myself, identified as Black, and most had ancestors born in the U.S. However, one of my student collaborators was a first-generation U.S. citizen, whose family immigrated from Gambia. While YPAR includes youth throughout the research process in design, data collection, and analysis the structure of BPAR was more pertinent to my work because it allowed the study to be immersed in Black culture while YPAR created more tensions. For example, the youths did not identify the research question. It was the project for the summer that I had previously decided the students would explore. I more accurately call this research Black Participatory Action Research with youth. The youth participants in the study guided the duration and direction of the research but they did not have input on the original research question or design.

Once I defined my methods and decided to center Black people in the research, I designed, implemented, and co-designed research cycles to study my research questions. Figure 3.3 (adapted from Gordon, 2016) illustrates the cyclical process that took place on three different occasions during the project. The figure also shows that group discussions occur during each

stage in the cycle. Figure 3.3b shows the process as both cyclical and iterative because the youth and I took part in three cycles of PAR. With the exceptions of the initial planning, the youth either took part in discussions as a group where I facilitated, or I was also a participant in the discussion. Group discussions began to cultivate a culture of collaboration as we shared ideas. During the study/reflect and act stages of the cycles, I built opportunities for transformation as students worked to transform their thinking through critical reflection and analysis as well as communities through their photo displays and community presentations.

Figure 3.3a

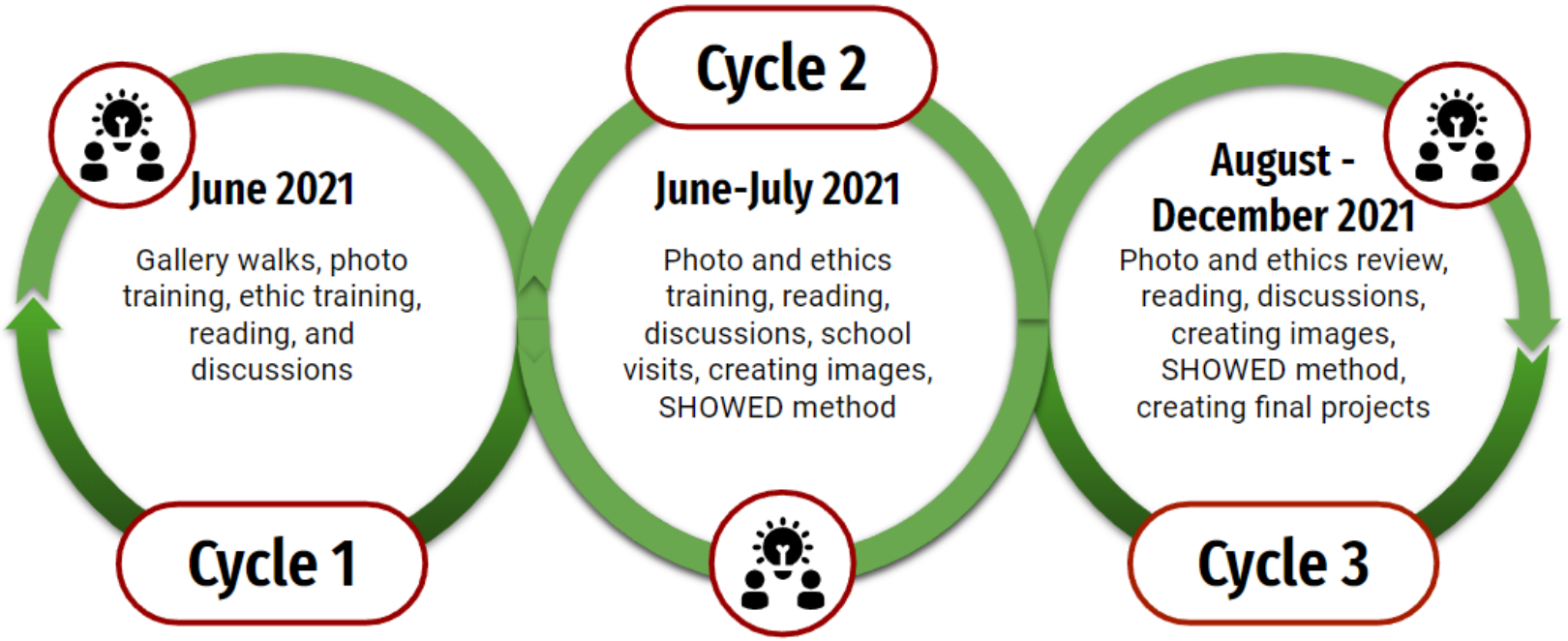
PAR cycle model



Note. Adapted from Gordon (2018). Students (s) and teacher (t) are abbreviated to indicate person actions.

Figure 3.3b

Iterative Cycles of BPAR with youth



Originally, I proposed that this investigation begin and end in the summer of 2021. I expected that I would be able to collect all the data I needed to respond to my research questions during summer camp, for two months beginning in June and ending in July. Although students were not in school, I planned for youth to document their schooling experiences by using evidence from their past and most recent years in school as well as through reflective writing. Naively, I also assumed that we would be granted access to the students' respective schools so that they could create images if needed. I failed to realize that although schools were open, the openness of the school was limited to the front office. Schools were not accessible to researchers who wanted to tour for students to take pictures, especially not over the summer months. This inaccessibility during the school year was likely for the safety and security of the students, not to mention that school in the summer reflected a starkly different image than what youth might depict in the fall or winter. The inability to collect data at schools presented our first challenge. I discuss further how we addressed this challenge in Cycle 2.

Three schools allowed us to tour the inside and outside of their facility and two did not allow us inside but welcomed us to walk the outside grounds of the school. The youth researchers quickly assessed the trajectory of their projects and recommended we continue our work into the fall semester, which was our third and final research cycle. The youth informed me that work from the previous school that wanted to use as evidence from their schooling experience would no longer be possible. It was summer and because the school year had ended, they no longer had access to much of their work inaccessible. They also stressed the importance of documenting their school year when there were teachers and students in the building, and they had to be there daily instead of summer camp. In addition, other students who were transitioning from middle to high school felt it would be of greater value to document their experiences at

their new schools. Youth collaborators said, “It would be better if we could take pictures once we start school again [in the fall]. That way you can know our true experiences.” Thus, our research processes unfolded over six months, consisting of the summer and fall semesters of local school districts. I made amendments to my internal review board application to account for modifications.

At the end of each cycle, the youth researchers and I reflected on our research questions. As each cycle was ending, the group discussed whether they had answered the questions: What are your school's strengths (also what you love about your school)? and What are your school’s challenges (What do you want to change)? The end of the first cycle corresponded with the end of the summer enrichment program. At the end of the summer enrichment program, the youth analyzed the photos they created and concluded that they had not answered their research question. The second PAR cycle ended to ensure students experienced a break before the start of the fall semester. The last cycle took place during the fall school semester of 2021.

It is important to note that both youth and I collected data during my investigation. Collaboration and intentional reduction in hierarchical roles are principles of PAR. As my collaborators’ thought partner, I honored the students' request to continue. I also felt as if there was more work to be done after Cycle 1. After Cycle 2, I felt that I could answer my research questions. However, the youth requested to continue, again, so we continued our work through the fall semester. This is what Freire (1996) calls praxis or taking a practical approach to theory and reflecting on the process before engaging again. The cyclical and iterative nature of PAR and praxis was evident in the way I chose to approach the inquiry and the methods youth used to approach their inquiry. I describe these cycles below and as represented in figures 3.3a and 3.3b above.

BPAR Cycle 0: Before Study Implementation

I refer to the time that it took me to prepare before the study as Cycle 0. At this time, I was not working with students but implementing parts of the plan to facilitate with other staff members at Level Up. Throughout time planning and preparing together, I learned many valuable lessons. Lawson and colleagues (2013) noted that "this process can take years before any data is collected because participants need the time, preparation, and support to learn how to work together and co-design the study" (p. 154). In my case, this meant taking time to learn about Level Up as an organization and the children served there. I began preparing for this study three years before I started working with participants. Before beginning my dissertation, I studied and worked at a community-based after-school and summer program called Level Up (pseudonym). I began collecting data after being a member of the staff for three years. I aligned the work of my dissertation with organizational literacy goals, including dedicating more time to literacy and integrating literature centering Black stories. Reciprocity was important because the organization allowed me to do research that was of significant interest to me. I conducted my study outside of my work hours.

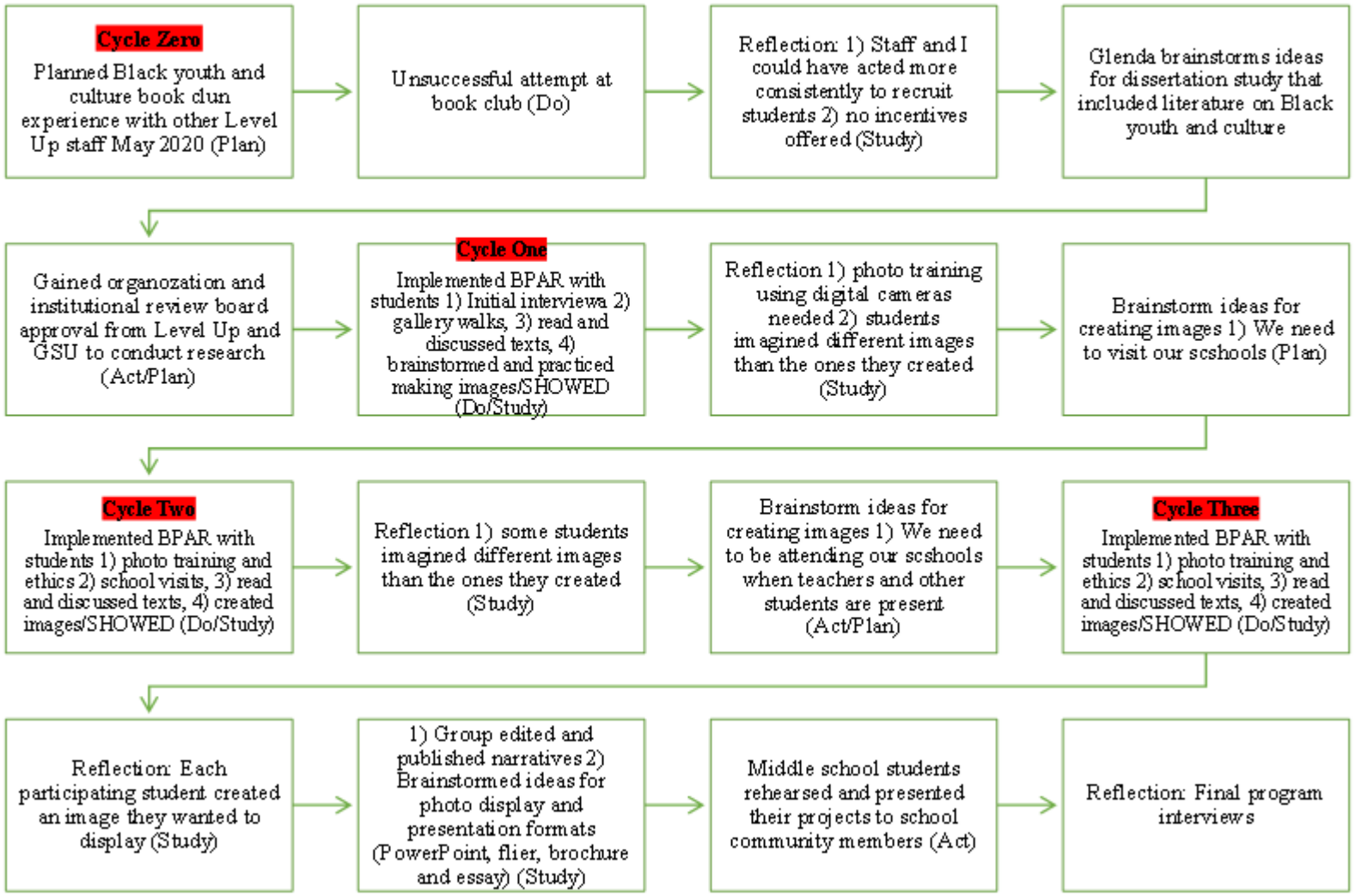
I worked on staff at Level Up as one of the certified teachers at one of four site locations for middle school students from the fall of 2018 through the summer of 2021. Working for the organization from 2018-2021 provided me with numerous opportunities to understand the culture, mission, and vision of Level Up. I also had time to build relationships with staff members and students. I worked with students three days per week and sometimes on weekends. On weekdays, I worked for 3.5 hours each day (from 4:00-7:30 pm), and one weekend a month I attended field trips. Each trip averaged about four hours. The time I had invested in this non-

profit organization led me to believe that I could work together with youth to promote change within our community by training them to be researchers.

I knew the people, culture, and values of Level Up and shared connections with youth and adults. I was an employee, and I was a researcher conducting an inquiry. As an employee and researcher at Level Up, I was not always able to go from one to the other seamlessly. Labaree (2002) notes, "Participant observers cannot be immunized from their respondents, acting like a detached recording instrument that merely synthesizes the data and disseminates the findings" (p. 113). During the study, my role as a participant researcher required me to be a facilitator and thought partner with youth in addition to collecting and analyzing data. Figure 3.4 provides a brief overview of my research design. During each step, I featured plan, do, study, and act. This figure highlights the steps of PAR and provides Level Up with a visual for my program that corresponds to the Plan-Do-Study-Act research design they previously used. It was my way of making the research accessible and meaningful for the organization.

Figure 3.4

Cycles and Processes



Photovoice. After Cycle 0, I brainstormed ideas for this dissertation study and added photovoice methods to facilitate critical consciousness development with students. Wang and Burris (1997) used photovoice, a participatory method, for empowering marginalized people to influence policy or program development using photography and narratives. Wang and Burris's work in photovoice began in public health but has since been used in social work and education. A significant component of the data collection process during photovoice projects is creating images. Youth today often take and post pictures to several social media sites, including *Instagram* and *Snapchat,* making the process of taking pictures and writing ideas about those pictures a normal part of their and many other youths' everyday lives. This participatory approach to research is different from social media posts because it is not on the internet but was viewed by community members who are in some way connected to the issue. Also, photovoice projects may or may not create new knowledge for research and scholarship but may add new perspectives and provide insight into social issues through the insight of the community most impacted (Breny & McMorrow, 2021). In education, youth engaging in `photovoice research typically investigate their local school communities, by examining curriculum, graduation, and drop-out rates (Teixeira & Gardner, 2017; Wang, 2006; Wilson et al., 2007). The youth in this study are examining their experiences in schools.

Photovoice is a participatory method providing communities with the opportunity to change policies that impact their lives using photography (Wang & Burris, 1997). Participants make photos based on a specific topic, discuss the images to make sense of what they see and compose narratives to accompany each image. Photovoice has roots in both feminism and Freirean principles, thus accounting for why projects seek the voices of marginalized people to raise concerns within their communities. Communication via images, written text, and dialogue

in addition to critical consciousness development provides a means for participants to address their concerns while also enhancing their literacy skills (Zenkov et al., 2017). Photovoice projects encourage youth writing (Strack, Magill, & McDonagh, 2004; Williams et al., 2020; Wilson et al., 2007), storytelling and creating narratives (de los Rios, 2017), critical dialogue (Wilson et al., 2007), and dictation for youth who need support in translating their thoughts to print (Williams et al., 2020). Each activity within a photovoice project provides time for youth to process their thinking individually before sharing it with their peers. It is not uncommon for youth to come to projects needing writing support, such as dictating their thoughts or narrative descriptions to a facilitator (Strack et al., 2004; Williams et al., 2020). Furthermore, photovoice projects require critical analysis, which is challenging for younger adolescents but can serve as opportunities for growth in literacy. Educators wishing to bridge youths' social and political realities to their writing may use photovoice as a literacy approach and research method to foster students' identities and promote literacy development (de los Rios, 2017). This project used photovoice as a method because it presented an opportunity to work with youth and influence their feelings and beliefs about literacy. Participatory projects have the potential for young people to develop their literacies and identities, which in turn shape and inform the research process that youth can conduct to address problems they identify in their communities. In addition, youth in my study related to photos as a means for collecting, analyzing, and discussing data.

McIntyre (2000) documented the first study of PAR in education with youth ages 11-13. In McIntyre's landmark study, youth used what she calls "community photography" and the components were like that of photovoice. Participants learned about photography as a social tool. Students in her study also conducted community resource inventories and they took part in large

and small group discussions. The most significant difference I noticed between McIntyre's project and photovoice projects today, is that McIntyre did not conduct a session on ethics in photography. Ethics became a component of the Snap, Chat, and Write project (see Table 3.2). A photographer has power. They have the power to convey meaning through the images they create without anyone else's input, including a person or people in the photograph (Peabody, 2013). As a result, participants and I discussed ethics during the project so that youth understood the power they had as photographers. I shared with students the importance of telling their stories without causing intentional harm. Also, since our research was taking place in places where youth occupy it was important to keep the names and faces of others confidential.

Cycle 1 of Critical Pedagogical Plan and Student Actions

According to Creswell (2014), a theoretical lens will "guide the researchers as to what issues are important to examine and the people who need to be studied" (p. 64). This study was framed in critical theory (Vasquez et. al, 2019). Within this study, I encouraged youth to critically analyze their social world using critical pedagogy because critical pedagogy promotes the use and development of language and literacy by encouraging dialogue where learners name and rename their worlds. Consequently, critical literacy shares these same foundational beliefs to both analyze power and oppression through dialogue and seek to dismantle structures that perpetuate oppression and critically reflect on the process before moving forward or praxis. I took the lessons I learned from Level Up's previous literacy work and the Freedom School prospectus (*1964 Platform of the Mississippi Freedom School Convention*, 1964), to plan and implement lessons for youth in the study. Citizenship School philosophy and Freire's approach to critical literacy provided a framework for the teaching methods I used during this project with students in the middle and high school photovoice group. According to Freire,

> Critical literacy needs to: develop pedagogical practices in which the battle to make sense of one's life reaffirms and furthers the need for teachers and students to recover their voices so they can retell their histories and in so doing 'check and criticize the history [they] are told against the one [they] have lived. (Freire & Macedo, 1987, p. 15)

Thus, critical literacy is a teaching practice where the development of decoding and comprehension skills for reading is accompanied by examination and critique of society and culture with specific attention to ways that oppression operates.

Practitioners using this approach to teaching and learning contextualize history and politics to examine social context using language and cultural artifacts. Freire (1996) illuminated the necessity of the practitioner to possess the pedagogical acuity to engage with the learner and create an atmosphere conducive to critical analysis and reflection. Therefore, one may conclude that pedagogy plays an important role in supporting the learner's critical conscious development. His literacy work has been instrumental in developing liberating instruction and research methods with youth, namely action research and methods such as photovoice. Critical literacy education and participatory projects continue to draw from the foundational work of Freire (Cammarota & Fine, 2008). Furthermore, a teacher also accounts for her plan for facilitating experiences with her students. Learning can emerge from students but as these ideas emerge teachers must have a guide that aligns with their philosophical beliefs on how to approach teaching ideas and concepts. Below I describe the histories, identities, literacies, and liberation as a model for teaching literacy.

Freire (1996) illuminated the necessity of the practitioner to possess the pedagogical acuity to engage with the learner and create an atmosphere conducive to critical analysis and

reflection. Therefore, one may conclude that pedagogy plays an important role in supporting the learner's critical conscious development. His literacy work has been instrumental in developing liberating instruction and research methods with youth, namely action research and methods such as photovoice. For this project, I used Historically responsive literacy (HRL), a framework for planning and implementing lessons practically and draws from sociohistorical and critical theories (Muhammad, 2020).

The lessons I planned and facilitated were based on the foundation of critical literacy (Duncan-Andrade & Morrell, 2008; Fine, 2008; Freire,1996; Hale, 2011; Janks, 2010; Kirshner, 2015, Morrell, 2008a; Muhammad, 2020; University of Southern Mississippi, 1964). I drew ideas from the literature on critical pedagogy, youth-centered apprenticeship, and popular education to tailor literacy lessons to students' identities and histories. This was based on constructivist teaching (Freire, 1982). I also acknowledge that my values and experience influenced this research (Horton, Kohl, & Kohl, 1998). Students learned and created knowledge through dialogue and shared inquiry based on curricula that were built on students' life experiences. The success of the project relied on whether I was able to access students' authentic voices. I often reminded myself to focus on concepts and skills of great interest to the students to allow their voices to emerge during the learning process. The direction and substance of the program needed to have emerged from the people and not be brought to them; This was a basic tenet of the Highlander philosophy (Horton, Kohl & Kohl, 1998). These philosophies assisted me in accessing students' authentic voices and facilitating their learning to think critically. The images that the youth created and the text that the youth read created a dialogue that allowed for the direction of the project to develop more organically.

Muhammad (2020) defines literacy as skill and proficiencies tied to identity, intellectualism, liberation, and power. Using this definition, she outlines the four components of her Historically Responsive Literacy (HRL) framework to include identities, skills, intellectualism, and criticality or critical consciousness to provide a framework for planning literacy learning. The HRL model is situated in culturally relevant and responsive theories and brings decoding and comprehension with an examination of power and historicizing texts using cognitive, critical, and sociocultural theories. The overarching goal I had for students during my lesson was for them to write narratives using images that had the potential to bring about social change using text that would encourage youth to think about power and oppression as it relates to Black youth. I also wanted to affirm their identities. The table below (Table 3.1) provides an example of how I used HRL in my lesson planning and student learning.

Table 3.1

Muhammad's (2020) Framework in Relation to Snap, Chat, and Write

Framework Goal	**Definition**	**Student Task or Product**
Identity	Who we are, who others say we are, and who we desire to be	Reading about Black student activists Creating photos of my school experiences
Skills	Competencies students can perform	Brainstorming with SHOWED chart Writing narratives for my photos Creating and orally presenting photovoice projects
Intellectualism	Knowledge gained or things the students became smarter about	Discussing texts and the history of Black student activism Comparing and contrasting contemporary and historical schools
Criticality	Analysis of power and oppression in their social world	Writing, discussing, and revising photovoice projects based on reading activist texts and school visits

I had hoped that youth would learn more about Black history and become more proficient in using literacy skills since I was intentional in using the HRL framework to plan my lessons. The

goal was to provide students with texts that encouraged thinking and discussion. The principle of naming and renaming social worlds in critical literacy tied in nicely with students' PAR study and offered youth another lens from which they could speak.

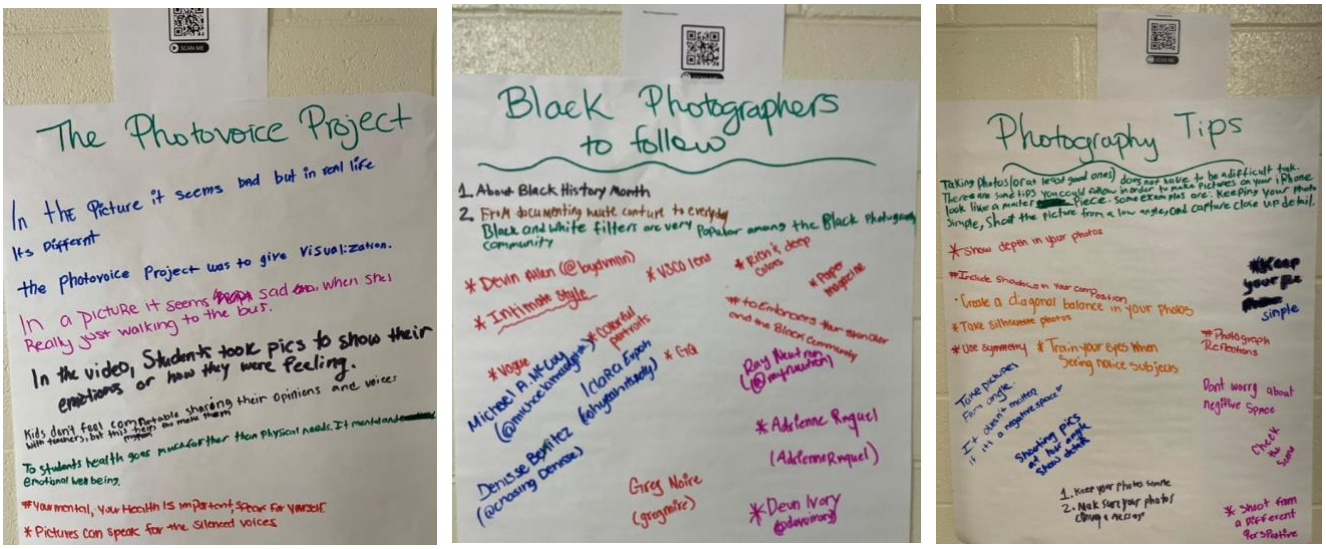
During Cycle 1, I facilitated four lessons with youth, two different gallery walks, reading and analysis of *Young Crusaders* (Franklin, 2021), and photo practice. I began with the gallery walks, which is a strategy that encourages movement, critical thinking, and conversation. The students worked in groups moving through different stations where I posed a QR code with chart paper for them to interact and share knowledge in the process. I have used this method in elementary, out-of-school, and university settings with my students. During the first gallery walk, I provided eight images and short narratives. Each image and narrative highlighted education from a Black historical perspective. I began with evidence of education in Africa, I created a timeline predating slavery and ending in the 1960s. After reading the images and text, the students sat in a group and discussed ideas about the images. The second gallery walk also consisted of images and written text. In the second gallery walk, I shifted the focus from Black education to photography, specifically creative ways to create images or photography tips, Black photographers, taking ethical photos, and a video on students sharing their experiences with a photovoice project. This gallery walk was different from the first because the youth wrote responses to the images and text as they read as seen in figures 3.5 and 3.6 below.

Figure 3.5

Gallery Walk in Progress

Figure 3.6

Examples of Completed Gallery Walk Posters



Note. Left panel lists comments that students made after watching a video on photovoice showing how they perceived photovoice. Middle panel lists names of Black photographers students explored using the QR code above the poster. Right panel lists tips the students learned from a website explaining how to take photos with smart phones.

After our gallery walks, we read and discussed parts of the books *Young Crusaders* (Franklin, 2021) and *Miseducation of the Negro* (Woodson, 1990). From *Young Crusaders* (Franklin, 2021), we read a section from the chapter "Grace Under Pressure" and the chapter "Every Child A Freedom Soldier: Cleveland, Milwaukee, Mississippi", and from *The Miseducation of the Negro* (Woodson, 1990), the group read the chapter titled "How We Missed the Mark". The goal was to build our knowledge of both Black student activism and activists. We read most texts aloud as a group. Students who wanted to read volunteered or I read the texts aloud. The text we read left students with many questions regarding the meanings of words or phrases, and we began to write words and ideas that were challenging to the group when we discussed our reading. Some of the words and ideas students found challenging can be found in Figure 3.7 below. As we read *Young Crusaders* (Franklin, 2021), some words such as segregation, integration, and appease began to interfere with students' understanding of the text they were reading. After we finished reading a paragraph with a word in question, we discussed it and re-read the paragraph to check our understanding. I also used *Reading Revolution: Reconnecting the Roots* (Akua & Stephens, 2006), in which Akua and Stephens (2006) produced over 90 selections on Black historical places and people framed in The Pyramid Paradigm, shown in the document below (figure 3.8). I used this text to highlight Black youth activists such as Claudette Colvin and John Lewis.

Figure 3.7

Vocabulary

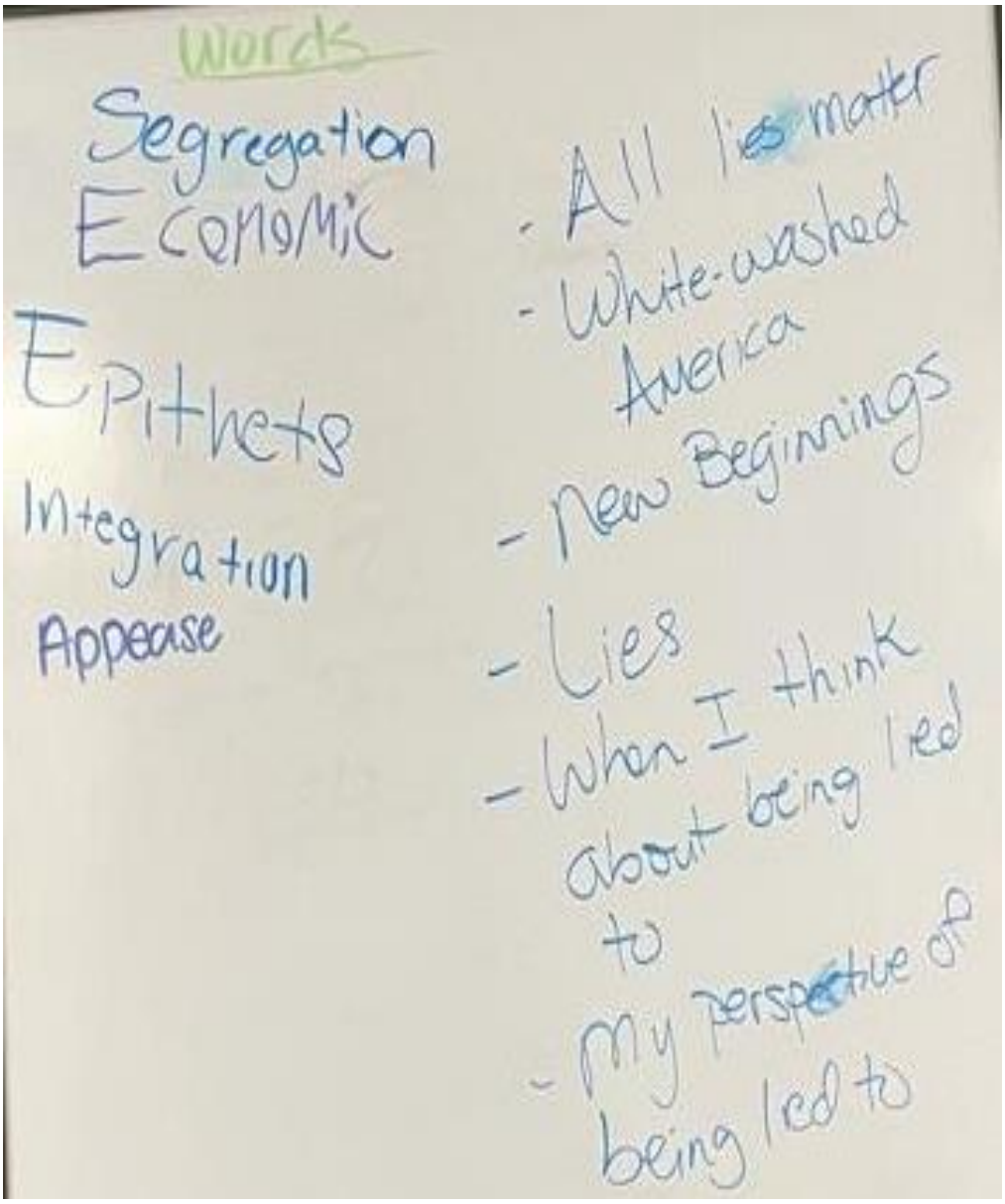
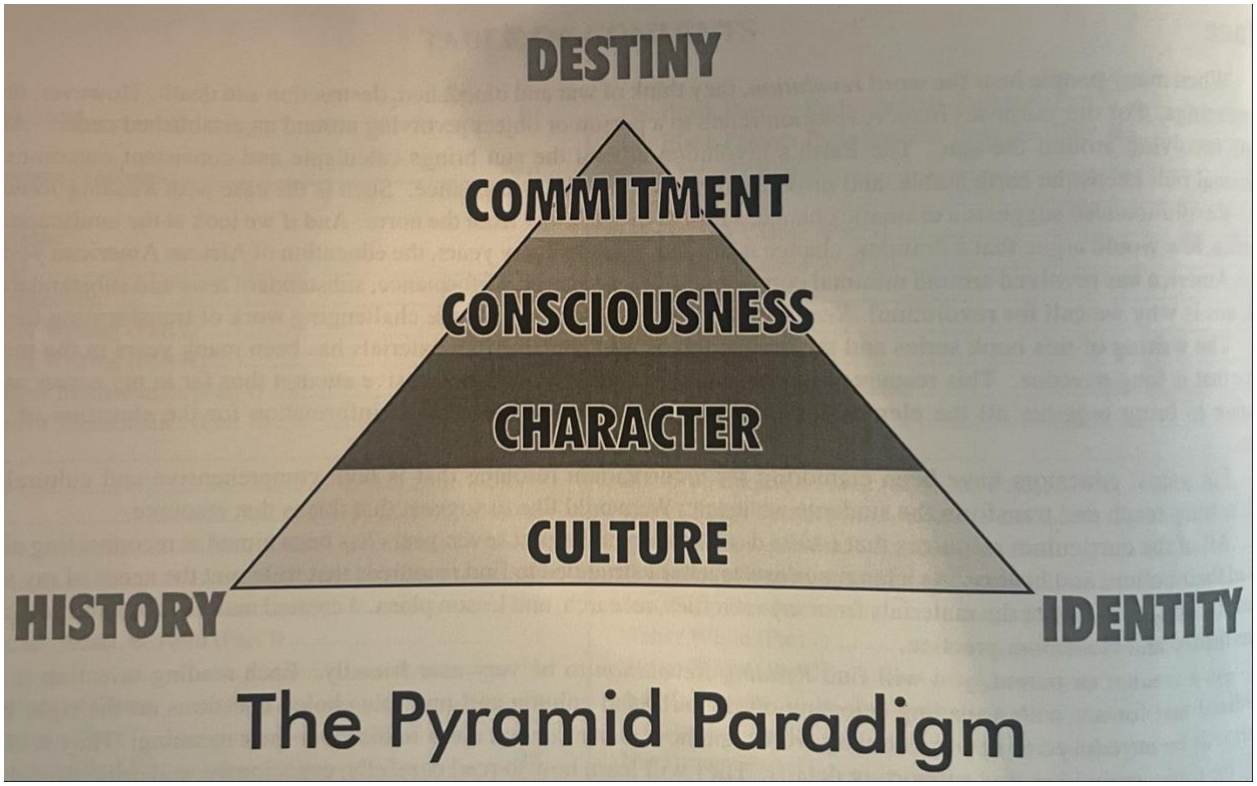


Figure 3.8

The Pyramid Paradigm (Akua and Stephens, 2006)



Akua and Stephens (2006) asserted, "We must educate our children using The Pyramid Paradigm, taking them from history to their identity and ultimately their destiny" (p. iii). The content within the text supports students in building reading comprehension skills, cultural awareness, consciousness, character, and a commitment to the building and development of African communities. Identity is the basis of student learning because. Making a connection to yourself makes learning meaningful. DeJong (2011) calls teaching by accounting for students identities as affirming identities, while Leki et. al (2006) call for research that evaluates innovative pedagogical actions to promote bilingual writing and multiliteracies and challenges issues of equity and opportunity in status quo settings.

The last lesson I facilitated in Cycle 1 was practicing taking photos with digital cameras I purchased for each student with grant funds and using our phones. The youths walked the campus of the summer program and practiced concepts such as leading lines and taking photos from different perspectives. The ideas that youth practiced here came from Gallery Walk 2, under the topic of photography tips. The website gave us great ideas to begin thinking about creative images, however, we needed more guidance in photography. One reason was that some students used phones while others used digital cameras. Although digital cameras were accessible to everyone, and phones were not, youth researchers ended up using phones to create images. I discuss photo training videos in Cycle 2, along with school visits.

Cycle 2: Photovoice Project Facilitation

After the summer session at Level Up ended (Cycle 1), the 10 youths involved in the study continued to meet for an additional three weeks for Cycle 2 of the project, which focused on photovoice. We changed locations from a community church to the headquarters for the summer enrichment program and after-school program. During this cycle, students received photo training, youth researchers and I went on school visits, and the student researchers created images. Photovoice requires students to develop a critical lens using images that they produce (Sutton-Brown, 2014). Students and I thought that visiting their schools before the beginning of the school year would provide the opportunities we needed to create images to depict students' schooling experiences. The students and I then visited several schools. Again, they took pictures. Still, these images were not what the youth imagined when we discussed the images they took.

Cycle 3: Creating, Analyzing, and Sharing Projects

The fall semester or Cycle 3 began in the fall of 2021. This time 6 out of the 10 original youth remained. Now that they were back in school, all middle-grade students and one high

school student, Quinn, decided that they wanted to create images depicting what they loved about school and what they wanted to change while they were in school with their teachers and peers. The youths' decision to continue collecting data for their research projects is another reason why we had a third cycle. The youth researchers and I discussed images and ideas for what they planned to create moving forward. These four youths did not feel that their images and narratives answered the question until they took images in the fall and created narratives for those images.

During the fall semester of 2021, student researchers were back in school and prepared to create images based on their experiences in school. The youths took part in photo training and ethics discussions again. We also developed our intellect by reading more texts. The major difference between this cycle and the previous two cycles was writing demands, which students changed to deserve statements. Students also worked on creating presentations using their images and narratives. When Cycle 3 concluded my youth participants were satisfied with what they had created in response to the questions, What do you love about your school? and What do you want to change?

Photovoice projects typically vary from 4 weeks to 3 months. Wilson et al. (2007) recommended allowing 2-3 months for making and developing photos, rich dialogue, and time for thoughtful writing. Similarly, Peabody (2013) recommended periods greater than 10 weeks to allow time for social action. The duration of these students' photovoice project was 25 weeks or just over six months. Williams et al. (2020) conducted seven sessions over several weeks, which included an introduction to photovoice, framing the project, photovoice ethics, three sessions of photo reflections and discussion, and a school photo exhibition to display the youths' work afterward. My process extended beyond seven weeks. Our group extended the process to include

additional time for areas where we needed further development or to collect additional data, such as photo training, school visits, and time for student researchers to collect data at their schools. The extra time students needed for their photovoice project allowed them opportunities to go back and answer the research questions that they felt they had not yet answered. Table 3.2 provides an overview of the lessons and texts we used during each session across Cycles 1, 2, and 3.

Table 3.2

Cycles of the Photovoice Project

PAR Cycle	Week	Lessons	Focal Texts
One	1	Sharing Our Stories Learning Our Histories	African History of Education (articles) Gallery Walk (websites)
	2	What is photovoice? Framing our research	*Young Crusaders* (chapter)
	3	Safety and Ethics in research Photo training	*Young Crusaders* (chapter)
Two	4-7	Safety and Ethics in research Photo training School Visits Making Photographs SHOWED	Black Excellence Interrupted (article) Black Student Voices (video)
Three	8-11	Safety and Ethics in photo research Photo training review Making Photographs SHOWED	*Reading Revolution* (sections on Claudette Colvin and John Lewis)
	12-18	SHOWED Narrative Drafts	An Appeal for Human Rights (article)
	18-20	Final Drafts and Publishing	Photovoice projects
	21-24	Preparation and Promotion of Photo Exhibition	
	25	Public Presentation and Advocacy	
	25-26	Reflection, Final program interviews	

Photo Training

Photo training took place during cycles one, two, and three. Each time we had different goals. During cycle one, we learned how to operate digital cameras that I purchased using grant funds and we read and discussed texts and went on school visits.

Many students had not experienced taking photographs with digital cameras and I had given each student a digital camera to use if they did not have a phone or if they preferred not to use their phones. A professional photographer provided video training during the second cycle. She specifically discussed focus and light when creating images. I also participated in the photo training and practiced taking photos so that I could assist students as needed.

Figure 3.9

Focus

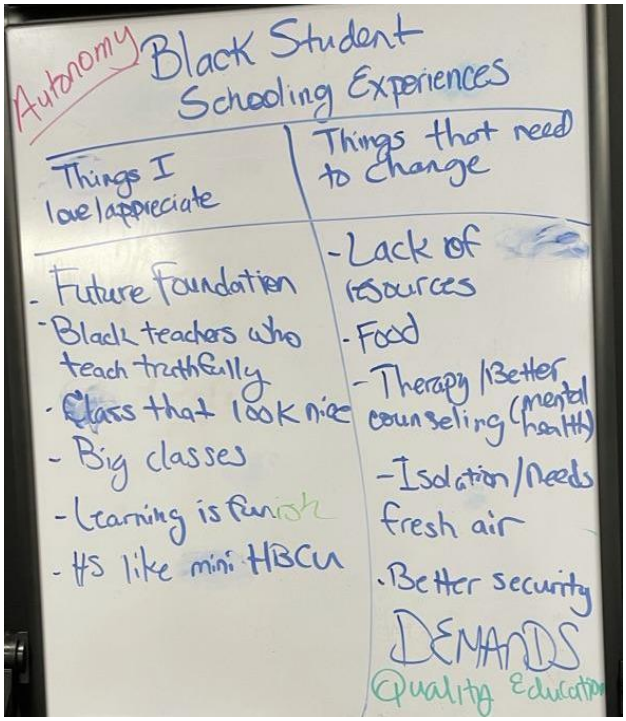
Note: John, a middle school student, created this image during one of our photo training sessions. In the image, you can see that the student is the focus of the picture (the background is slightly blurred). We had just learned a lesson on camera focus and using light.

In addition to creating images, we talked about our responsibilities as researchers creating images. As a group, we discussed ethical photography, including privacy, confidentiality, and power during each photovoice session. The group also brainstormed together during the first session of cycle two, which helped students think about what ideas they wanted to represent and what things or people would best demonstrate their ideas. The youth were able to come up with

ideas for things they loved about school and things they wanted to change. Figure 3.10 highlights ideas such as Black teachers, classes that look nice, and the feeling of their school being like mini Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs). Youth also noted that they would like to change the lack of resources and food, and the need to have therapy.

Figure 3.10

What Students Love and Want to Change



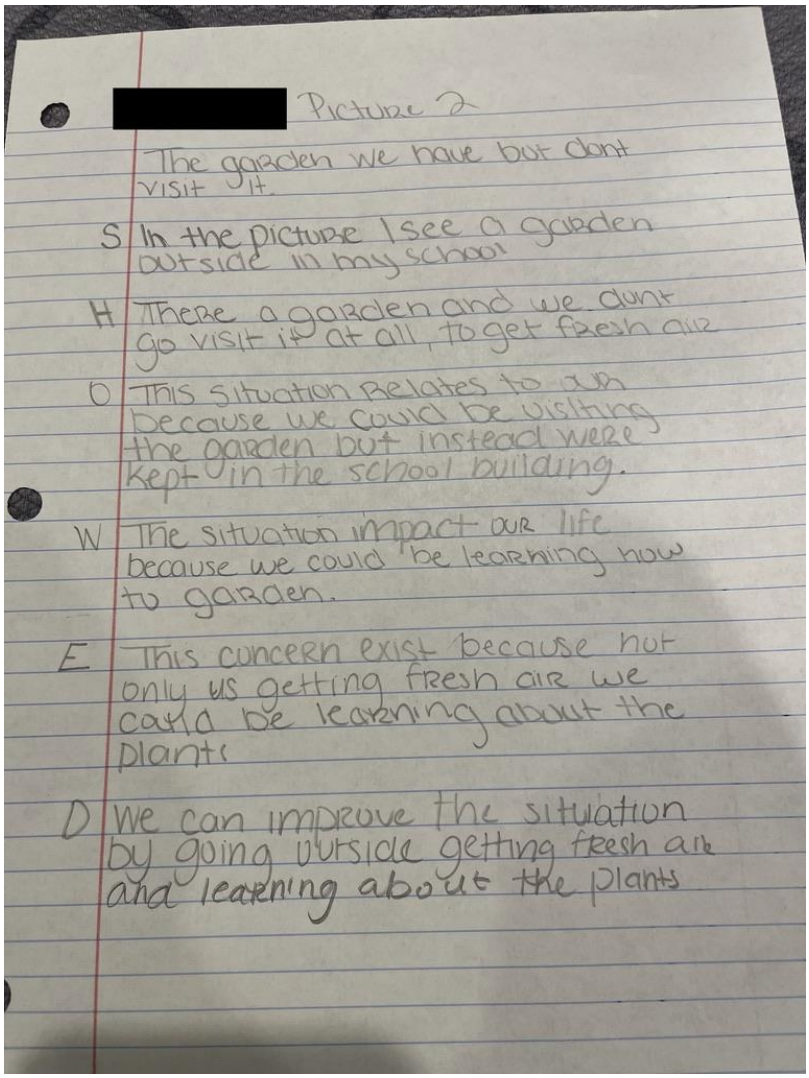
When students brought photos, they completed a SHOWED graphic organizer. The graphic organizer is a tool for analyzing photos during photovoice projects. The chart helps youth organize thoughts they could use in their photo narratives. After using the SHOWED tool, the creator explained their image to the group and then the group shared their perceptions of the images. Writing played a major role in this project. Writing was one of the parts of the projects that I decided on alone. I did not plan to write in collaboration with the youth. Still, youth

discussed writing as a technical skill, something that helped them to discuss themselves, and as a point of pride because they felt their skills had improved. These aspects of writing proved to be interconnected. Though I planned to teach writing using SHOWED, the chart also proved to be helpful with reading.

Each student chose their favorite photos and then completed an organizer of the SHOWED method. After group discussions of the SHOWED method, the group members shared their stories through captions they composed. This process is vital in photovoice because the name of the method suggests images are more powerful when they are accompanied by words. Also, using SHOWED fosters critical thinking and skillful communication that may help develop participants' written and communication skills (Strack, n.d.). Figure 3.11 is a student example of SHOWED for an image that did not make it into their final project. I have also provided the questions in Appendix F.

Figure 3.11

Marley's SHOWED Chart titled "The Garden We Have but Don't Visit"


[redacted] Picture 2

The garden we have but dont visit it.

S In the picture I see a garden outside in my school

H There a garden and we dont go visit it at all, to get fresh air

O This situation relates to us because we could be visiting the garden but instead were kept in the school building.

W The situation impact our life because we could be learning how to garden.

E This concern exist because not only us getting fresh air we could be learning about the plants

D We can improve the situation by going outside getting fresh air and learning about the plants

Table 3.3

Marley's SHOWED Chart, titled "The garden we have but don't visit"

SHOWED Question	Marley's Response
What do we **S**ee?	In the picture, I see a garden outside my school
What is really **H**appening?	There's a garden and we don't go visit it at all, to get fresh air
How does this relate to **O**ur lives?	This situation relates to our lives because we could be visiting the garden but instead, we are kept in the school building.
Why does this concern us?	This situation impacts our lives because we could be learning how to garden.
Why does this concern **E**xist?	This concern exists because not only us getting fresh air but learning about plants
What can we (or I) **D**o to improve the situation?	We can improve this situation by going outside and getting fresh air and learning about the plants.

Marley's example demonstrates the use of the SHOWED tool to analyze images. Although I intentionally planned to use the chart as a tool to write, it was also central in our reading discussions because we often recalled information that we read or discussed as we wrote. Since the texts I used were higher than my participants' grade levels, I read aloud and we discussed words or phrases that students did not understand, we made connections to other texts (self, articles, books, images, and videos). Also, if youths did not make connections when analyzing their pictures, I referred to our shared reading texts to help them make connections.

School Visits

Student participants and I visited a total of five schools to gain insight into students' experiences at schools across the county and local area. Four of the schools were public schools that students in the program attended. One was a private school situated in the local area. During

each visit, participants acted as tour guides providing information about their school. Students also observed their surroundings, asked or answered questions, and created images. These school visits offered students alternative ways of thinking about their schooling experiences much like Cahill et al. (2008) who state, “We did a day-long ‘field trip’ through our neighborhood that created an opportunity for us to look at our surroundings with new eyes—as researchers—analyzing and documenting block by block the environment we usually took for granted” (p. 101). Our school visits and Cahill and coresearchers field trip allowed participants to gain a different perspective that they may not have previously considered.

At each school, one student shared information with the group, including locations around the building, favorite classes, and students’ general feelings about their schools. The student who shared information about the school attended classes in that building. Figure 3.12 pictures Ella, Yara, and Quinn leading a high school tour; the girls were discussing where they should take us next. At two of the schools we visited, the principals joined the tour and provided additional insight, such as remodeling projects or their mission or vision for students attending the school. One student in our group, Marley, toured other schools when she was not with us, took images, and shared her experience with the group. Our goal was to see things differently than we usually see in their schools' experiences. Seeing things differently meant noticing social and political contradictions, which was a step in creating images to represent their individual schooling experiences and developing their critical consciousnesses.

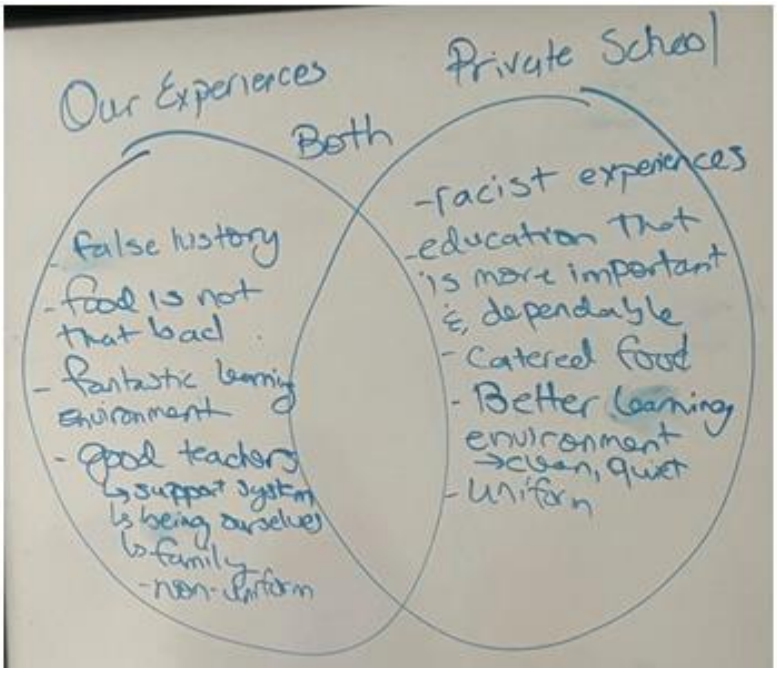
Figure 3.12

High School Students Discussing School Tour

Note. The students' faces and the names of teachers on doors have been blurred to keep school and personnel confidential.

Figure 3.13

Students' Comparisons of Schools After School Visits



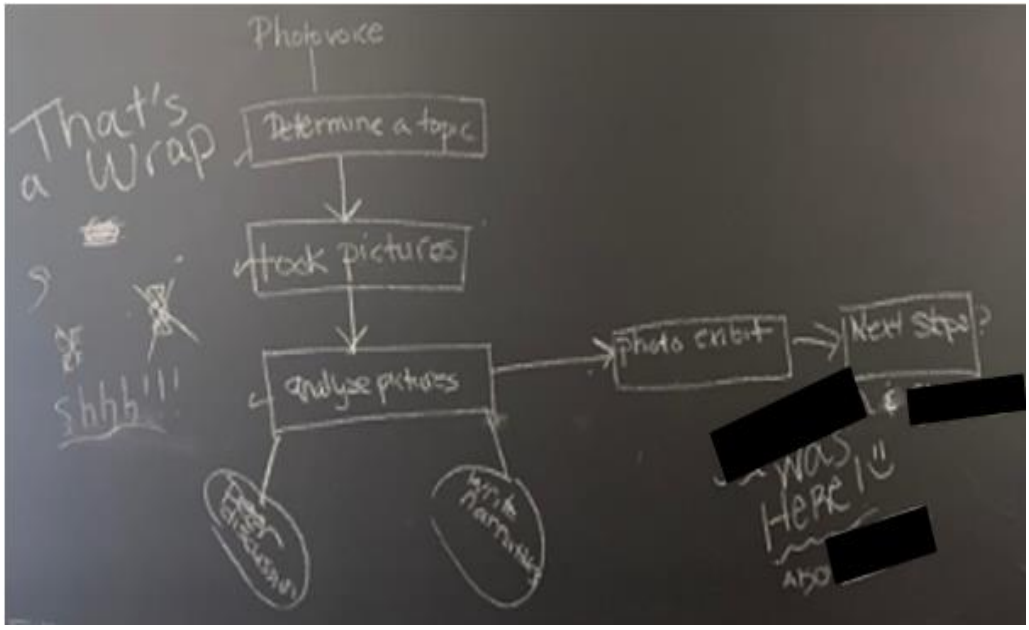
Continued Reading and Reading More Texts

Reading in this study is defined as the ability to decode words fluently and comprehend them. We read and made sense of the text together and independently. Texts we studied during cycle two included chapters from the book, *The Young Crusaders: The Untold Story of the Children and Teenagers Who Galvanized the Civil Rights Movement* (Franklin, 2021), "An Appeal for Human Rights" an essay written by Rosalyn Pope (1960), and "Black Excellence Interrupted an article from an academic journal written by Shaneeka Favors-Welch (2021). We also watched a YouTube Video where Black students shared their perspectives on education and read Instagram pages detailing Black students' experiences at private institutions. Just as in cycle one, the goal was to build our knowledge of Black student activism and Black student activists. I continued reading texts with students through cycle three and often reminded youth about ideas

we talked about in text throughout sessions to help them develop intellectually and as critical thinkers.

Figure 3.14

That's a Wrap



Note. The names of students on the board have been covered to keep students' names confidential. During a group discussion. I created the graphic detailing our photovoice project and students added "That's a wrap", "shhh!!!", and their names.

The students and I discussed their photovoice projects and the progress they had made from cycle one to cycle two. Their topic, what we loved and wanted to change about schools, had been predetermined. In Cycles 1 and 2, students created images. After creating images in Cycle 2, they analyzed their images through peer discussions and writing a narrative. We had not yet done a photo exhibit or decided if there were any other action steps, but we concluded cycle two to take a break and prepare for our photo exhibit during the fall semester. Our cycle two ended after three weeks of photo training, school visits, and reading more texts, we decided again to

continue the project for another cycle. The last cycle began in the fall semester when students began attending school again after the summer break.

This photovoice project seemed to be the focal point of my research but I had to constantly remind myself that I was a teacher-researcher, who also had research questions to investigate. This meant that I also reassessed whether I answered my questions. Did I have enough data to answer and data to support students' perceptions of literacy and their responses to the program? I reflected on my research, preparation, and planning throughout the study to evaluate the answers to my questions. I have made most of these processes visible, but I turn to my first cycle to provide greater methodological clarity. The last section is my explanation of BPAR cycle zero. Figure 3.15 illustrates the pedagogical moves I made during this photovoice project.

Figure 3.15

Step by Step Pedagogical Process

Recruitment

I used convenience and criterion sampling (Merriam, 2009) to recruit participants. Since I worked with the students each day, I had access to them and their parents consistently. Fifteen students volunteered to take part in the study. However, 10 returned consent forms. Students in the program who returned their consent forms were able to take part in the project. Students were included in the study based on the following criteria: (a) students having a desire to take part in Snap, Chat, and Write, (b) self-identified as Black, African American, (c) are in middle school or high school (grades 6-12), (d) want experience reading and writing advanced texts, and (e) enrolled in the after-school program. These criteria were meant to ensure that students wanting to take part in the program had both the opportunity and desire to impact community change.

Immediately following IRB approval and recruitment of the potential participants, I asked the parents and their students to attend an informational meeting to learn more about the research study and to read the consent and assent forms. I explained the forms thoroughly to parents and their youth in-person, online, and over the phone. I informed interested students and parents that I would be happy to answer all inquiries about the research study and offered more time to consider their participation. During the student and parent meetings, I shared the goals of the program, work samples from previous youth, and discussed the kind of work and activities we would complete, and provided youths and parents with my contact information. To protect the rights and welfare of the youth involved in this study, I provided full disclosure of the nature of the activities involved in the study. This included daily messages with an agenda for each parent and student and me encouraging parents and students to ask me questions or share concerns at any time. Lastly, in this study and future work, I maintained the participants' confidentiality. I gave the forms out during the first week of the summer program, June 7-11, 2021. I gave youth

participants and their parents/guardians seven days (one week) to complete and return the consent and assent forms. Each student returned their form in person. Before I knew that I would work on this project for two semesters, I thought my time was limited to 5 weeks. I did not want to delay beginning the program and I did not want youth to miss more than a week learning and working in our photo research group. The program was originally scheduled to end on July 13, 2021. In the end, I allowed one student to turn in his form late because he lost the first one and continued to ask me if he could participate when students participating in the study would leave the rest of the group to work with me.

Compensation

The time that the youth researchers spent working on this research project was invaluable. However, I wanted to provide youth participating in the study with tokens of appreciation for their participation. As a welcome to the program and a thank you for working with me, I provided small Georgia State University (GSU) College of Education and Human Development-sponsored gift items. At the beginning of the program, each youth participant received a bag with materials for the project. Each bag contained a digital camera, a GSU keychain flashlight, a cup, and pen, and a Black Boy Joy or Black Girl Magic button. I secured grants totaling $2500 to purchase books, a Black affirmation button, and digital cameras for the youth. Additionally, I paid youth $100 - $200 for their participation. Youth who attended the summer sessions received $100 for their participation. Youth attending the fall sessions received an additional $100 for their participation. Participatory studies require that participants devote time to take part in the data collection and analysis process. Therefore, the youths involved deserve to be compensated for the time and effort they put into projects (Cahill et al., 2008; Livingstone, Celemencki, & Calixte, 2014; Williams et al., 2020). All six of the students in this

study received a total of $200 for their participation in at least eighty 80% percent of our photo group sessions.

Data Collection

I collected several different pieces of data including semi-structured interviews (Roulston, 2010), documents (Prior, 2014), jot notes, and logs (DeWalt & DeWalt, 2011). I collected the different data to ensure I had the potential to crystallize themes during data analysis. I used several methods of data collection so that I could compare the data during analysis and aid with crystallizing my themes.

Data Sources

Data collection for this investigation consisted of several sources: interview transcripts, documents, field notes, and lesson plans. I collect data for question one, *How do Black youth respond to a photovoice program that promotes critical consciousness,* and question two, *what perceptions do Black youth have about literacy after taking part in a photovoice project*, using interviews and work samples youth have provided from work. I used text messages, emails, discussions, observational field notes, group discussions during photo group sessions, and jottings to crystallize themes from data analysis.

I collected data throughout this investigation, however, most of my data comes from transcripts of semi-structured interviews, where I used open-ended questions that would allow participants' responses to elaborate on their (Roulston, 2010). Semi-structured interviews allowed participants to be co-creators of knowledge, a vital component of participatory action research.

Table 3.4

Data Collection Table

Collection Method	Timeframe	Resulting Data Sources	Purpose
Interviews	June-August 2021	Audio recordings Jot notes Transcripts	To check my understanding of students, work and involve each student in creating knowledge about critically conscious responses and perceptions of literacy during the project
Student Documents	April - August 2021	Curriculum materials Student work (from braining to projects)	To provide and obtain documentation from a variety of sources detailing students' critically conscious responses and perceptions of literacy during the project
Jot notes and log fieldnotes	June-August 2021	Research notes Electronic log	To document my account of students' critically conscious responses and perceptions of literacy during the project
Facilitator Documents (lesson plans, brainstorming, and photos)	June-December 2021	Lesson Plan documents	To document my pedagogical plan for cultivating students' critical consciousness

Semi-Structured Interviews

I collected data using semi-structured interviews (Roulston, 2010). I created open questions about the project before the interviews so that students could respond in various ways. Interviews are a source of data that seeks to understand specific details of a phenomenon (Roulston, 2010). The purpose of a semi-structured interview is to leave questions open for participants to respond from their perspective (See questions in Appendices D and E). I conducted five initial interviews and six final-interviews. One student co-researcher, Johns, was not available for an initial interview. I conducted initial interviews before the start of the program, and the second one took place after the conclusion of the program. The interviews were

semi-structured (Roulston, 2010). Initial interviews lasted between 10 and 25 minutes and post-program interviews lasted between 15 and 55 minutes. I used the initial interview protocol in Appendix D for the first interview and the final interview protocol in Appendix E for the second and final interviews.

Due to the global pandemic (COVID-19), I used Zoom Video Conferencing for both interviews for meeting with students. Using Zoom on electronic devices to record interviews with participants, I also used an additional recording device for backup. Additionally, each one is password protected. Interviews were transcribed following the conclusion of the interview. Member checks followed immediate transcription. I reviewed the transcript with each participant to be sure that I interpreted their thoughts and ideas correctly.

Youth participants were asked to take photos representing things they loved and things they wanted to change about their schools. During the interviews, I used open-ended questions "to understand the participant's, feelings, perceptions, and understandings" about their school experiences and their perceptions of literacy (Roulston, 2010, p. 16). Open-ended questions allow participants to use their own words to describe a phenomenon. Understanding perceptions of literacy from the participants' perspective was important for me to consider when I thought about ways to continue my work with these and future students. The study provides an example of literacy learning using photovoice, a participatory action research method, and explains how youth perceived literacy, thus modeling the use of ideological approaches to literacy.

During interviews with youth, I asked them to describe their experiences in literacy. Most students were not familiar with the term literacy. As a result, I had to explain to several students my definition of literacy when they would respond by asking me "What is literacy?" The youth were not used to researcher jargon, but they did have an idea of what I meant when I rephrased

myself. Questions phrased better such as, “What do you expect to gain from the group?” in the initial interview and “What are some of the skills that you have learned and used during the program?” Also, “What are your reading and writing experiences like in school?”, “If you could change anything about reading and writing, what would it be?”, or “How was this program similar to experiences in school? Additionally, collaborative photo analysis and final presentations helped me to gain insight into youths’ perceptions of literacy.

Student Documents

I collected participants’ work throughout the program. I began collecting student documents during the gallery walk and continued until I received students’ final projects. Students’ work samples highlighted participants’ thoughts and analyses. Work samples include the youth researchers’ SHOWED charts, images, and narratives. I also collected documents from my planning and teaching from the beginning of the project and throughout. Each document offered insight into students' responses to critical consciousness and in some cases the way they perceive literacy.

Jot Notes and Log

While doing research with youth, I was unable to sit and take notes uninterrupted. As a participant observer in the study and an employee at Level Up often other tasks needed to be attended to with greater urgency. Consequently, I wrote jot notes (DeWalt & DeWalt, 2011). Jot notes are short or scratch notes that I wrote in my journal where the primary purpose was to help me to recall or prompt thought about something that happened during research day. I also made notes from the day that seemed important to remember for upcoming days or data analysis. Jot notes allowed me the opportunity to write down my thoughts without requiring me to focus solely on taking notes. I also kept a log (DeWalt & DeWalt, 2011). My log is an electronic

document that provides a short synopsis of events during research in chronological order. The purpose of the log was to be able to keep track of dates and events in a way that would later help me contextualize the work I did in the study.

Facilitator Documents

I also collected my facilitator documentation. My documents included lesson plans, brainstorming notes, and photos. Lesson plans and notes served as guides and outlines for the approach I planned to use when facilitating lessons with the youth. Lesson plans served many roles. They were a plan of action based on what I determined students had already learned and what I needed to teach. They were also a reference. I referred back to what I did and planned to do. I also created images throughout the process to document the pedagogy in action. Just as lesson plans, photos also helped me to reflect on the steps that I had previously taken in fostering students' critical consciousness.

In some instances, I write down ideas based on the day or discussions with the students. In this study, the lesson plans served as a guide for instruction during the process as well as data from which I could reflect during and after the study. Each document aided me in facilitating learning with the students. They helped me to plan and reflect on milestones related to students gaining critical consciousness. In one example, we read texts and stopped to discuss new and unfamiliar vocabulary words (see Figure 3.8). We also compared our experiences (see Figure 3.13). I created a photo of this to remember when I needed it to plan. So the photo helped me to document the process and lesson plan.

Data Analysis

I analyzed interview transcript data and student work samples using constructivist grounded theory (Charmaz, 2006), an inductive method for coding. Constructivist grounded

theory (CGT) is a methodology for coding data through which the researcher remains open to new theories that may emerge during analysis (Glaser &Strauss, 1967; Charmaz, 2006). Inductive reasoning employed by the researcher allows for the possibility of constructing new theories (Charmaz, 2006). It was important to note my approach to research design as my findings emerged. Critical assumptions guided my lesson plans for teaching and action research, a critical methodology so, while I was open to new ideas, I also acknowledged my goal as a teacher was promoting critical consciousness. I designed the lessons I taught for this project using critical literacy. I used initial, focused, axial, and theoretical coding. I determined seven major themes during the coding process. The emerging concepts I determined from my analysis may contribute to theories in youth literacy perceptions and participatory action research with youth.

Initial Coding

Charmaz (2006) also described coding as "the first step in moving beyond concrete statements in the data to making analytic interpretations" (p. 43). I began by coding data in incidents. Incidents in this study refer to ideas in youths' interview responses or work samples. Some responses or samples had multiple ideas. For incidents with multiple ideas, I added a new code when the student changed to a new idea in their response. I coded each incident using "words that reflect action" or gerund phrases (Charmaz, 2006, p. 48). Coding using gerund phrases helped me to refrain from interpreting my data and instead, only naming the action stated by the participant. According to Charmaz, the researcher should "try to see actions in each segment of data rather than applying pre-existing categories to the data" (p. 47). When I finished coding my data, I had 630 gerund phrases. Table 3.5 provides examples that demonstrate how I began coding date using gerund phrases.

Table 3.5

Data Chunk to Gerund Phrase

Student	Date Chunk	Gerund Phrase
Ella	I feel like my participation was okay, but it would have been better for me if like I asked like more questions.	Feeling like asking more questions would have made her participation better
John	Alright, so I kind of learned about writing better like to include more details about what I want for things and what I don't want.	Learning to write better
Julian	How would I describe myself? I am honest. I like to be honest. I like to tell jokes and I love to be outgoing.	Describing self as honest Describing self as liking to tell jokes, Describing self as outgoing
Marley	Not that all schools are the same. Like how we visit schools in the summer. All the schools are not set up. the same and some schools have less than what other schools have.	Describing how schools are not the same
Quinn	I learned that there are many point of views that uh could be spoken on more often. It's not about what I think it's about what other people think. What I'm saying I'm am learning to accept different people's point of views than just mine.	Learning there are many points of view Learning to accept others' points of view
Yara	I've learned things about myself. I'm more interested in how others go through things that is different from what I go through at like different schools and, you know, more interested in the Black community than what I was when I first started.	Learning that she is interested in what others go through Learning that she is interested in the Black community

Note. Some of these data chunks have multiple codes and some did not become a part of the findings because there were not enough examples across the study. Others, such as Julian's were used to write his section under participants.

After initial coding, I began sorting my data. While coding I identified relationships and made connections among the initial codes in a process called constant comparative analysis (Glaser and Straus, 1967). During constant comparative analysis, I compared data to find similarities and differences among incidents across participants, interview responses, and students' work samples. The sorting process called for me to sort data into categories with like ideas. When I compared a new idea to the ones I already grouped, if it fit in with my previously created categories, I added it. If not, I created a new category. I continued this process until I had sifted through all the data. Constant comparative analysis aided me in making connections based on common themes across the data and name relationships. Charmaz (2006) suggested

> breaking the data up into their parts or properties; defining the actions on which they rest; looking for tacit assumptions; explicating implicit actions and meanings; crystallizing the significant of the points; comparing data with data; identifying gaps in the data as flexible strategies to code data. (p. 50)

Figure 3.16 below is an image I took after initial coding. I began organizing data into groups based on similar ideas or axial coding, which I discuss next.

Axial Coding

Straus (1987) described axial coding as building a relationship around an axis of a category. During axial coding, I grouped data by categorizing it into groups with similar ideas. I had ideas about the way that the data could be categorized during initial coding, for those ideas I wrote memos (Charmaz, 2006). The difference between initial and axial coding is that during axial coding I intentionally worked to group the data and solidify themes across my data so that I could assign a definition for each category.

For example, the theme of *perceiving literacy as knowledge expansion and skills* included participants reflecting on their learning or improving in reading, writing, listening, speaking, thinking, and photography. Examples of subcodes (initial codes) for writing were improving skills on transitional words, writing a lot compared to school, writing better, and using writing skills. Examples of subcodes for reading are learning, reading skills, more confident reading than in school, asking as many questions about the reading as I wanted, reading advanced papers, and feeling educated. I arranged these two categories and the others I previously mentioned around the axis or category of knowledge expansion.

After completing initial coding, I printed my list of codes and cut them. I then cut the papers into small strips for each research question. I created the image below while waiting for my car to be serviced. When the technician told me that my car was ready, I was just beginning to study the categories I created, so I created an image to help me recall the work I completed. Figure 3.16 image shows my first round of axial coding. I quickly placed ideas into categories. As I read codes, I placed them with other similar ideas. This second image, Figure 3.17 is an image of the codes after I went back through them, reviewed each group, and organized the codes to make reading them easier.

Figure 3.16

Sorted Codes Created Using Nvivo

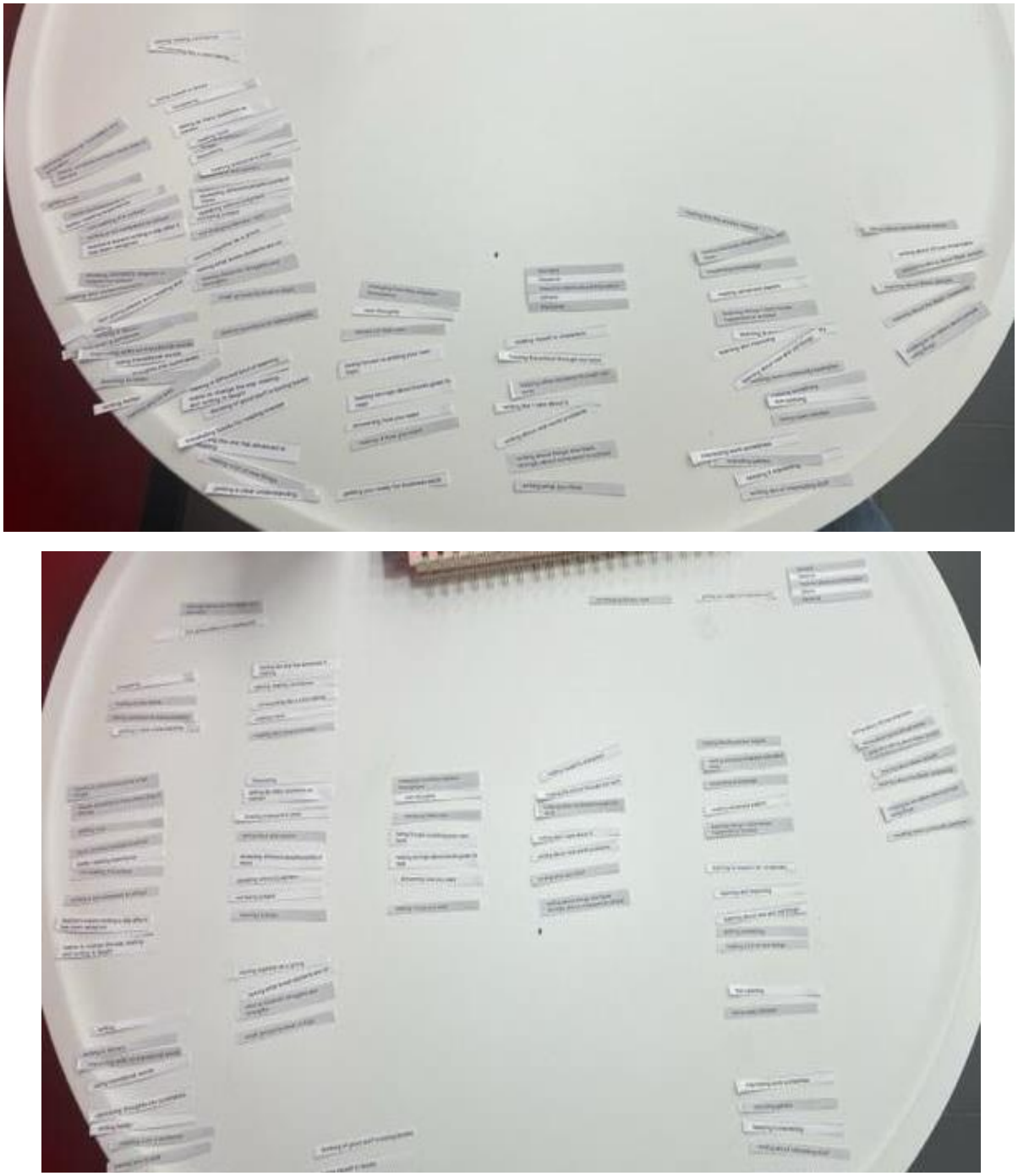
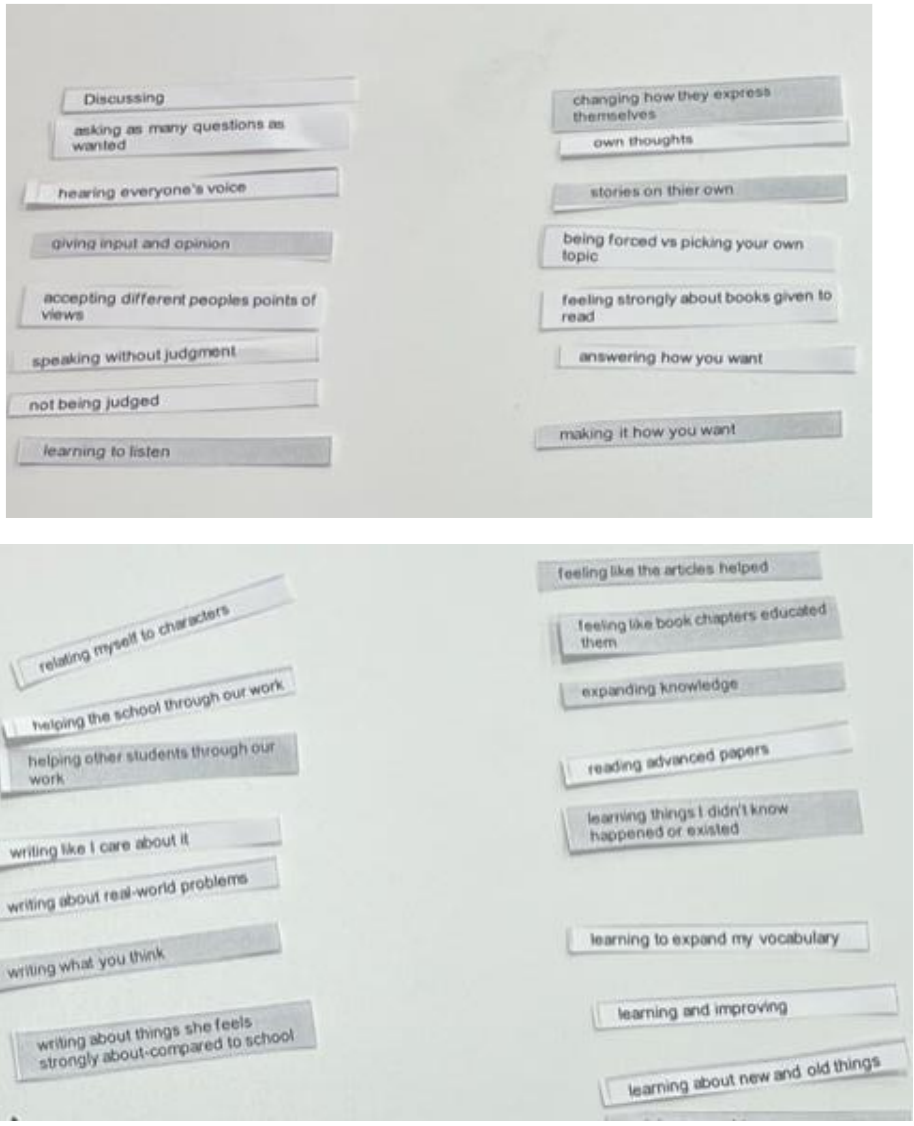


Figure 3.17

Magnified Images of Axial Coding



Note. The image on top reflects data for RQ1. The image on the bottom reflects RQ2.

The last two images are close-ups of two of the categories of data. The codes did not remain stagnant in the same categories. As I moved to theoretical coding and writing up the study, I continued to move data if it did not fit within the previously listed category. According to Charmaz (2006), “The purposes of axial coding are to sort, synthesize, and organize large amounts of data and reassemble them and [bring] data back together again in a coherent whole” (p. 60). During axial coding, I looked for relationships between codes to identify ideas that were central to my research data. I crystallized my analysis with field notes, interviews, lessons, student work, and reflective journal entries.

Emergent Theories

Following axial coding, I began to theorize my results. I connected and defined frequent codes from the categories I developed during axial coding.

Just like other steps during the coding process, theorizing was not linear. As such, there was no way that axial coding could have happened without me evaluating the data. From the time I began coding, I wrote memos. Besides Ella’s final program interview response that said, “I feel like I became a better writer with the SHOWED method. I would use it in the future as well,” I wrote the following memo: “SHOWED Method helped [Ella’s] improve her writing.” My memos were analytical ideas taking place. Ella’s coded excerpt supports the theme of Perceiving literacy as knowledge expansion and skills. Other themes for research questions one

and two are listed in tables 3.6 and 3.7. The table includes each theme, definition, and an example.

Table 3.6

Themes from RQ1: Perceptions of literacy

Theme	Meaning	Example
Perceiving literacy as knowledge expansion and skills	Gaining and learning new skills and understandings about concepts	Alright, so some of the things that I learned is that I kind of learned about writing better like to include more details about what I want for things and what I don't want.
Perceiving literacy as self-expression	Students demonstrating autonomy while learning	I find [the program] very interesting. Like the essays - I felt everybody get a chance to say their own opinions, got to write down what they feel, how they feel about the things that we did. The chapters [we read in Young Crusaders] was very interesting
Perceiving literacy as enjoyable moments or joy	Times when students had fun or experience joy during the program	Well, photovoice is like it's enjoyable. And if I was to describe photovoice, how would I describe it? It's fun. It's enjoyable and it teach you about new things.

Table 3.7

Themes from RQ2: Responses to the program

Theme	Meaning	Example
Responding with growth of confidence	Students expressed an appreciation for the development of their abilities or qualities	My project has definitely helped me to be more confident on what I speak on cause at first, I was still really shy, just was worried about how people were looking at me when it comes to speaking up on like, community stuff. So, when doing this project, it made me feel more confident to speak up on the black community. Definitely.
Responding with agency and eadership	A feeling like one can create change by acting on it, and/or demonstrating leadership qualities	I had a project where you had a partner, and you pick African American person to talk about…I chose Emmett Till, because we talked about it here. When I presented it, [my teacher] was like, oh, this is a good thing to pick because a lot of students in my class didn't know that things that happened to him happened…So, I introduced something new that I learned I knew something new to some other people
Responding by emphasizing the need for Blackness in schools	Reading, writing, and discussing Black people, their contributions, and experiences in society.	I'm saying that more of us needs to be an example for our community, that's what I'm saying, and it's difficult when books are made to have white people stand out and be the person that we look up to, you know? Like I want to be like them, but it's hard to when we don't ever see one of us doing it as well.
Responding by calling attention to the impacts of COVID	Students explaining the negative impacts of COVID	The school wants us to social distance but due to the increasing population it is challenging to do that. This concerns me because even though I am vaccinated I am surrounded by others who could get me sick. One solution might be to add more minutes for transition.

Member Checking

I conducted member checks to verify the trustworthiness of my results using two approaches. First, throughout the research process student researchers and I checked in with one another to talk about photovoice project data collection. Two of our conversations about data collection resulted in going back out to schools to conduct additional research. Determining the need to go back out and conduct additional research is how we determined our Cycles in PAR. Additionally, participants reviewed data and my interpretations of the data as I drafted the findings chapter to this dissertation. After analysis and writing, only Yara and Quinn responded. According to (Charmaz, 2006) member checking allows a researcher to go bac and confirm ideas with participants as well as gather more information needed to answer a research question. I asked students who participated in my study to validate the trustworthiness of my results using two different approaches. My first approach to member checking took place during the data collection period. During interviews, I also asked participants follow-up questions to clarify participants meaning and check my understanding.

Representation of Findings

I was a participant-researcher during the project. Participant observation offered me the opportunity to gather perspectives as both an insider and an outsider (DeWalt & DeWalt, 2011). Since this is a participant-observation project, the findings are presented as close to the participants' original ideas as possible. Youth and I worked together so our voices were presented as a collective. Additionally, photovoice recognizes youth in this study as marginalized people (Sutton-Brown, 2014), therefore, youths' voices are paramount in the findings. To honor youths' voices, I use direct quotes from my dialogue with them and their journals.

Delimitations

This research discussed youths' perceptions of literacy and their responses to a program promoting critical consciousness during a summer and fall enrichment program for middle and high school students in the summer and fall of 2021.

Six students who attended school in the city on the outskirts of a major urban city in the Southeastern US were selected as the study's participants because of convenience. The students selected for this study expressed interest and were Black youth. The researchers asked students to share their perceptions of literacy and the research examined ways they responded to Snap, Chat, and Write, a program promoting critical consciousness.

Participants conducted individual research projects and were compensated for their time. I conducted interviews in the program classrooms, participants' residences, and online via Zoom. I used grounded theory (Charmaz, 2007; Strauss & Corbin, 1994) to make sense of the data.

This study is limited because it takes place in an after-school program. After-school programs have different guidelines than traditional schooling programs, which operate between 8-3 pm. Also, I worked with a small sample of Black youth from a large metropolitan county in the US. Though my results can inform traditional schooling spaces, they cannot be generalized to any traditional or non-traditional schooling space.

CHAPTER 4

Findings

In Chapter 3, I described my methodology for investigating my research questions and how I used grounded theory to analyze youths' perceptions of literacy and responses to a program promoting critical consciousness In Chapter 4, I will discuss my findings and the significant themes that emerged during my analysis.

Seven themes emerged when using grounded theory to perform my analysis. In this chapter, I discuss the three themes I found in response to youths' perceptions of literacy including perceiving literacy as expanding knowledge and skills, perceiving literacy as self-expression, and perceiving literacy as enjoyable moments or joy. I also discuss the four themes I found when analyzing youths' responses to the program including responding with a growth of confidence, responding with agency and leadership, responding by emphasizing the need for Blackness in schools, and responding by sharing the impacts of COVID.

Perceptions of Literacy

In chapter one, I opened by discussing and defining the term literacy and emphasizing the need for expanded notions of literacy. In chapter three I discuss my use of the word literacy with the youth participants in our initial interviews; Most participants needed me to both define and explain the term. In this chapter I explain literacy as perceived by the students and how it emerged in my analysis. In the next three sections, I define literacy as the students perceived it and provide examples. Again, I discuss the following perceptions: Perceiving literacy as knowledge expansion, perceiving literacy as self-expression, and perceiving literacy as enjoyable moments.

Perceiving Literacy as Knowledge Expansion and Skills

During this process, I treated photovoice as a tool for literacy learning. Students were reading, writing, documenting, analyzing, speaking, and creating. When asking students about the photovoice project, I thought of their responses in association with those and other characteristics of literacy. Therefore, when students perceived literacy as knowledge expansion and they described or demonstrated that they learned a new concept that helped them to read, write, document, analyze, speak, or create, I associated the examples with literacy. In addition to learning a new concept, the students also described expansion of knowledge and skills as further developing their proficiency in a skill. Within this study, knowledge expansion and skills included growth in understanding across different topics including creating images, learning a more nuanced history, and improvement in literacy skills. Recall figures 3.4 and 3.15 illustrating the step-by-step approach the youth and I took during teaching and learning throughout the project. In Figures 3.4 and 3.15, I detailed the pedagogical choices I made and how students responded to that pedagogy. The following findings are their perceptions of literacy throughout the learning process.

Julian and Yara both expressed that they learned new concepts throughout the project. During our final program interview, I asked Julian about his learning on the project. When I asked him how photovoice and school were alike, Julian said, “The only thing that’s coming to my mind is you teach us new things. I ain’t know I would learn how to operate a computer. I ain’t know how to improve my reading or writing [before the program]” (Julian, final program interview, December 2021). Julian’s response shows that he learned new things in both school and the program. He also notes that learning new things came as a surprise because he says he did not know that he would learn new things.

Similarly, this is like the response from Yara, who said,

> I would describe photovoice as an informational learning project. Okay, like a project where you can also have fun with but you're learning, you're gaining something from it... your writing skills, your reading skills, your information. Everything that you learn, you're gaining something from this project, not just the… you know… go to school, take a picture, or write an essay about something. It's like how you feel. Or when we read a book, you're really gaining something You're learning new things that a regular school and classes will not teach you. (Final program interview, December 2021)

Yara said that during the project you are gaining. This means that she was learning something new. Yara stated that she learned writing and reading skills, in addition to information. She felt that she learned things that she had not learned in her classes at school. In addition to learning things like operating a computer or gaining writing skills, students also demonstrated the skills they learned about creating images. Creating images was significant in this work because the kind of research youth were doing was photovoice. Images were one of two major components of their work. The other was writing.

Learning to Create Images Differently

In our second session together, we discussed a photography idea called leading lines. Leading lines are lines created by the photographer, who leads the viewer of the image to the subject of the image. Later in the project youth learned about light and focus. Focus is when the photographer adjusts the lens of the camera to provide contrast in the blurriness of the subject of the image and the clarity in which the subject is presented. Adjustments to the focus created images that blurred the identities of people in the image. The students applied the concept of focus to confidentiality when they created images of their peers. My participants and their peers

were school-aged; They are a vulnerable population, so it was important to not show student faces in our images. The first two images below in Figure 4.1 show examples of student-made images with leading lines and the next three images in Figure 4.2 are examples of focus.

Figure 4.1

Leading Lines

Students demonstrated lessons they learned such as leading lines, a concept they read about and practiced at the beginning of our photovoice project during their second gallery walk. The goal of leading lines is to lead the viewer's eye to a certain point in the image with lines in the environment. The images in figure 4.1, taken by the students, demonstrate leading lines. In the image on the left Yara used the lockers as leading lines and brings the viewer's eye to the

boys (from summer) standing in the hall at Heritage High School when we visited. In the image on the right, John used the rain cover and columns to lead the viewer's eyes to the student holding a bottle of sanitizer. John created this image during our second session back together in the fall. Student researchers reviewed the skills we learned. John created this image to show that the school has several bottles of sanitizer because of COVID. The youth researchers practiced taking pictures using leading lines in the summer and continued the practice in the fall. The idea of leading lines does not make it into any of the youths' pictures in their projects, however, the next set of images demonstrates that the youths' knowledge also expanded in the use of focus when creating images when they practiced and when they represented ideas in their final projects.

Figure 4.2

Image Focus

The images in Figure 4.2 right to left, were taken by Yara, John, and Marley respectively. The images on the left and the middle were taken during our second photo training after we viewed

the training videos discussing light and focus. They each show that adjusting the focus is another method for bringing the viewer's eye to the subject of the picture. The last image was taken during the fall semester. Marley wanted to show that students were close during COVID, but she did not want to show the faces of her peers. Although you cannot see students' faces without focus, the subject of the image is the students.

Youth in the study were sure to keep the faces and names of other students and their teachers confidential. Confidentiality in images is notable because youth in the study noticeably kept the identities of their peers and teachers protected. Both teachers and students are vulnerable populations. Many students initially shared that they would like to take pictures of teachers and students that would show their faces or write a narrative using the actual names of people in their schools. However, we discussed ethical photo research in schools during each session, and the youth ended the project by using confidentiality when capturing and choosing images for their projects. Youth participants submitted 24 images in total. Half of the total (12 images) have either no faces or names. Confidentiality was particularly evident in images presented by John, Marley, and Quinn. Student projects can be found in appendices F and G.

In Yara's initial interview, she stated that she wanted to learn more about photography. By creating these images using leading lines and focus the students demonstrated that they learned a new concept and that they could apply that concept to ethical research practices. In the next section, I continue to discuss students' knowledge expansion of history.

Learning Black History

In the methods, I discussed intentionally centering the lives and experiences of Black youth in the texts we read. Using the HRL framework (Muhammad, 2020) required that I honor students' identities. I did so by including texts that reflected Black students' experiences in

schools and by asking the participants in the study to share their experiences with the group. My intentional plans to center the lives and experiences of Black youth had an impact on students, according to the interviews and as represented in students' work. During interviews, the student participants shared that they had learned more about Black history, which means they expanded their knowledge. Students across three interviews commented on their knowledge of Black history growing over the project. Their responses came from varying questions including, Tell me what you know about Black student protests, what you have gained from the project, and tell me how your experiences in the program compared to those in school (See also Appendices D and E). For example, students reflected on how the use of texts helped to expand their knowledge. In the first example, Julian specifically discussed learning more Black history. Expanded. I asked Julian to compare his reading experiences in the program to his experiences in school. Julian responded,

> During photovoice, I got to learn more about Black history. I mean, there are sometimes when the um the ELA teachers talk about [Black History] but it's not always done. Still, I think it's done more here. I learned more. (Julian, final interview, January 2022)

During the project students engaged with text about the Black experience with education beginning in the 17th century until today. As a result, Julian referenced the essays, books, and stories we read about Black history. He asked me about a person we talked about, but who is not widely discussed, Claudette Colvin, in the interview excerpt below.

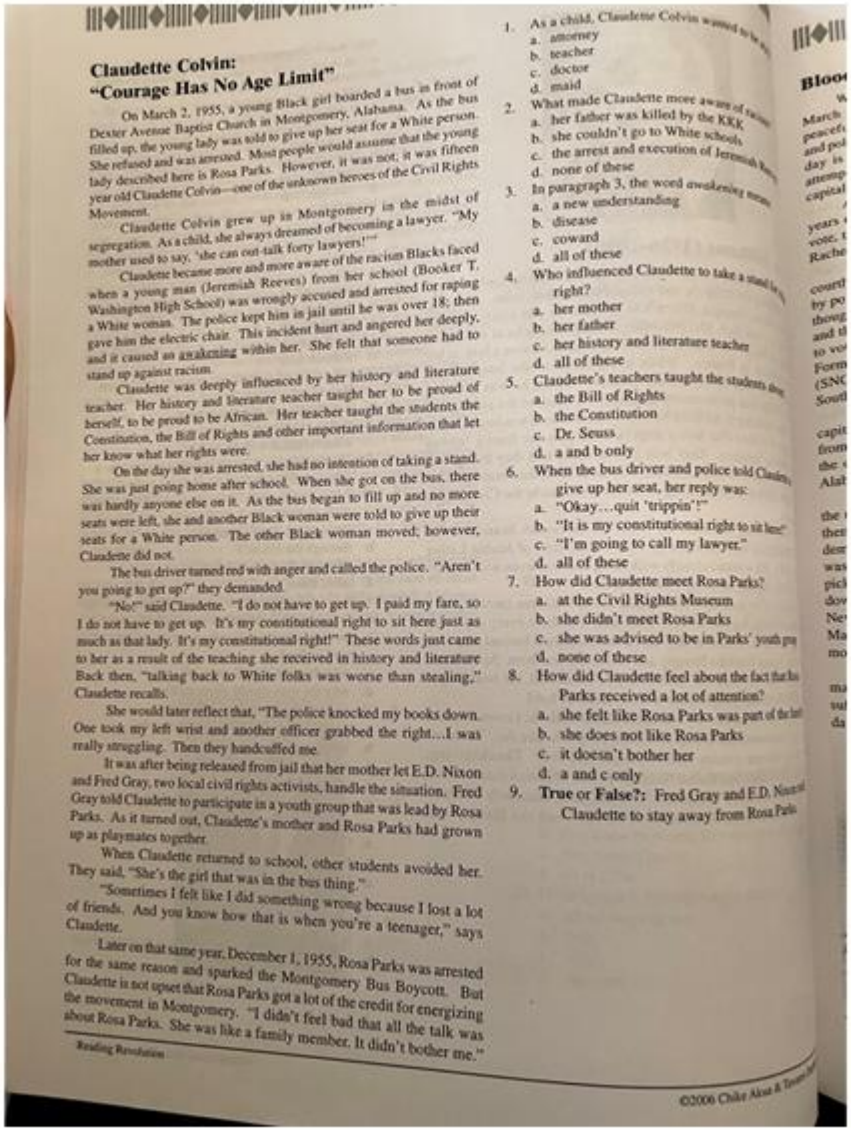
> **Julian:** I got to know more. What was that what was that lady called before? The teenager on the bus?
>
> **Glenda** Claudette Colvin?

Julian Yes, Claudette COVID. Claudette, that's her name.

Julian acknowledged that his teachers in school teach Black history but that the amount is not the same to him because he learned more during the program. He similarly stated that he felt the text we read was interesting because of the information from the text about Claudette Colvin. Julian's knowledge of the Montgomery Bus Boycott, The Civil Rights Movement, and youth activism was expanded after reading and discussing Colvin. Although Julian replaced Colvin's last name with COVID, he had learned about her and the ways she contributed to the Civil Rights Movement after reading Claudette Colvin: "Courage Has No Age Limit" (see figure 4.3).

Figure 4.3

Claudette Colvin Text



Claudette Colvin:
"Courage Has No Age Limit"

On March 2, 1955, a young Black girl boarded a bus in front of Dexter Avenue Baptist Church in Montgomery, Alabama. As the bus filled up, the young lady was told to give up her seat for a White person. She refused and was arrested. Most people would assume that the young lady described here is Rosa Parks. However, it was not; it was fifteen year old Claudette Colvin—one of the unknown heroes of the Civil Rights Movement.

Claudette Colvin grew up in Montgomery in the midst of segregation. As a child, she always dreamed of becoming a lawyer. "My mother used to say, 'she can out-talk forty lawyers!'"

Claudette became more and more aware of the racism Blacks faced when a young man (Jeremiah Reeves) from her school (Booker T. Washington High School) was wrongly accused and arrested for raping a White woman. The police kept him in jail until he was over 18; then gave him the electric chair. This incident hurt and angered her deeply, and it caused an awakening within her. She felt that someone had to stand up against racism.

Claudette was deeply influenced by her history and literature teacher. Her history and literature teacher taught her to be proud of herself, to be proud to be African. Her teacher taught the students the Constitution, the Bill of Rights and other important information that let her know what her rights were.

On the day she was arrested, she had no intention of taking a stand. She was just going home after school. When she got on the bus, there was hardly anyone else on it. As the bus began to fill up and no more seats were left, she and another Black woman were told to give up their seats for a White person. The other Black woman moved; however, Claudette did not.

The bus driver turned red with anger and called the police. "Aren't you going to get up?" they demanded.

"No!" said Claudette. "I do not have to get up. I paid my fare, so I do not have to get up. It's my constitutional right to sit here just as much as that lady. It's my constitutional right!" These words just came to her as a result of the teaching she received in history and literature Back then, "talking back to White folks was worse than stealing," Claudette recalls.

She would later reflect that, "The police knocked my books down. One took my left wrist and another officer grabbed the right…I was really struggling. Then they handcuffed me.

It was after being released from jail that her mother let E.D. Nixon and Fred Gray, two local civil rights activists, handle the situation. Fred Gray told Claudette to participate in a youth group that was lead by Rosa Parks. As it turned out, Claudette's mother and Rosa Parks had grown up as playmates together.

When Claudette returned to school, other students avoided her. They said, "She's the girl that was in the bus thing."

"Sometimes I felt like I did something wrong because I lost a lot of friends. And you know how that is when you're a teenager," says Claudette.

Later on that same year, December 1, 1955, Rosa Parks was arrested for the same reason and sparked the Montgomery Bus Boycott. But Claudette is not upset that Rosa Parks got a lot of the credit for energizing the movement in Montgomery. "I didn't feel bad that all the talk was about Rosa Parks. She was like a family member. It didn't bother me."

Reading Revolution

1. As a child, Claudette Colvin wanted to be a(n)
   a. attorney
   b. teacher
   c. doctor
   d. maid
2. What made Claudette more aware of racism
   a. her father was killed by the KKK
   b. she couldn't go to White schools
   c. the arrest and execution of Jeremiah Reeves
   d. none of these
3. In paragraph 3, the word awakening means
   a. a new understanding
   b. disease
   c. coward
   d. all of these
4. Who influenced Claudette to take a stand for her right?
   a. her mother
   b. her father
   c. her history and literature teacher
   d. all of these
5. Claudette's teachers taught the students about
   a. the Bill of Rights
   b. the Constitution
   c. Dr. Seuss
   d. a and b only
6. When the bus driver and police told Claudette to give up her seat, her reply was:
   a. "Okay…quit 'trippin'!"
   b. "It is my constitutional right to sit here"
   c. "I'm going to call my lawyer."
   d. all of these
7. How did Claudette meet Rosa Parks?
   a. at the Civil Rights Museum
   b. she didn't meet Rosa Parks
   c. she was advised to be in Parks' youth group
   d. none of these
8. How did Claudette feel about the fact that Rosa Parks received a lot of attention?
   a. she felt like Rosa Parks was part of the fight
   b. she does not like Rosa Parks
   c. it doesn't bother her
   d. a and c only
9. **True** or **False?:** Fred Gray and E.D. Nixon told Claudette to stay away from Rosa Parks

Note. Reading comprehension sheet taken from the *Reading Revolution* (Akua & Stephens, 2006) text.

Marley stated that she also learned more when I asked her to compare her experiences in school to the program. Her response is detailed in this excerpt from our final program interview in December 2021. Marley stated,

> School doesn't teach you, like in social studies, all about African Americans and what they have done. [School] teaches you about what African Americans went through but haven't talked to like how many changes they have made. The program gives us a clear understanding of like, how Black students have changed the way of learning. (Marley final interview, December 2021)

Marley says the program made Black history clear after she said that schools teach you about the African American experience but not what Black people have accomplished and the changes they made. Marley's response demonstrated that her knowledge expanded, like Quinn and Julian's. While Julian explained this knowledge as growing deeper, Marley explained her growth in knowledge as gaining clarity, which is similar to Quinn's eye-opening description. The youth described learning Black history in the program as being "done more [than in schools]," eye-opening, interesting, and clear. Ultimately, they each meant that they knew more about Black history because they participated in Snap, Chat, and Write.

Photovoice is a community-based research method for community change and YPAR is a research method that is also a pedagogy, so I needed to define community. I chose to build a community based on race and schooling experiences and was intentional in promoting identity and critical consciousness when using the HRL framework (Muhammad, 2020) for planning lessons. Underlying students' need to center Black History was the idea that photovoice projects indirectly promoted identity while intentionally promoting criticality. The final subtheme in knowledge expansion was literacy skills.

Literacy Skills

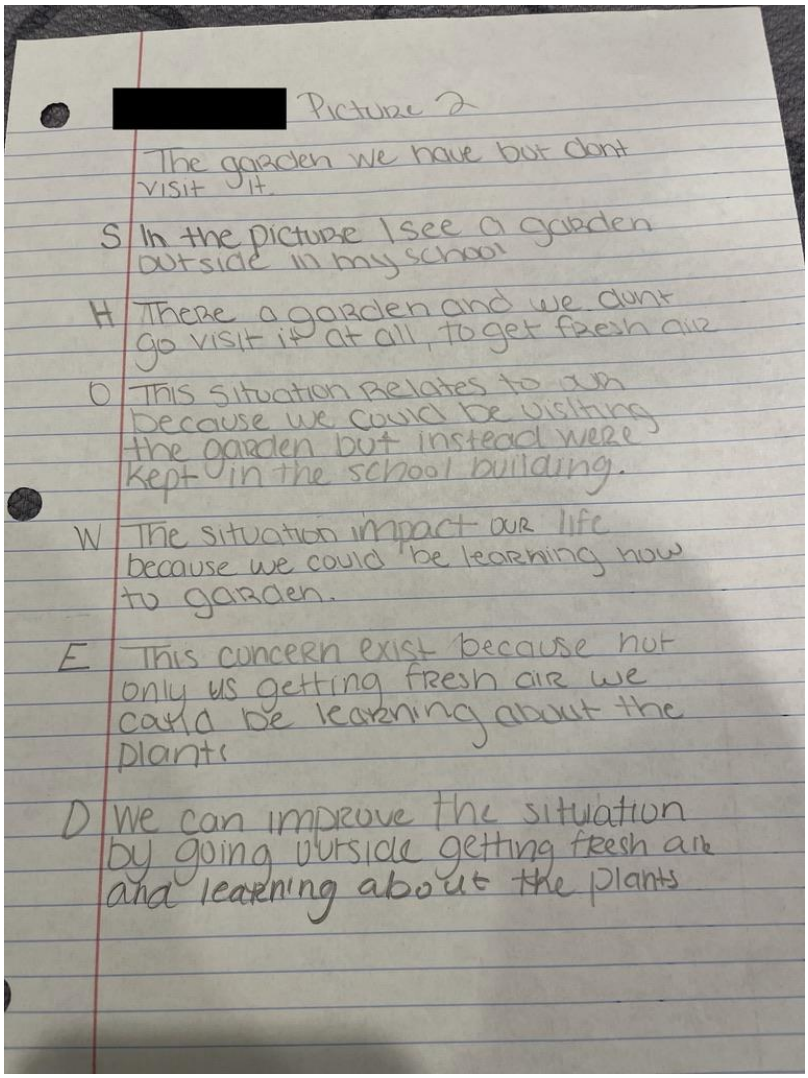
During the program, I created opportunities for youth to read and discuss written and visual texts, visit schools, create images, and compose narratives as intentional methods to expand learning. In the previous section, I discussed how youth reading texts expanded their Black history knowledge; in this section, I demonstrate how student expanded their literacy skills. I provide examples of youth expanding their literacy skills such as reading and research practices. I share three examples in this section. In the first example, Marley explained that the SHOWED chart was a helpful tool when reading text. She used the SHOWED chart, pictured in Figure 4.4, to analyze and make connections to the text. When I asked her to tell me something that she gained from the program, Marley said,

> I use [SHOWED] in ELA. Because it connects with the school. Because it's asking what you have seen and how's it happening. And how does it affect our life and stuff? And that could be helpful when reading a lot. Especially in high school and in middle school. (Marley, final interview, December, 2021)

In this transcript excerpt, Marley shared that the SHOWED chart was helpful to her as a reader. She noted that she now uses the chart in school as a tool for text analysis. Figure 4.4 is an example Marley completed during the project for a picture that she used in her final project, a brochure.

Figure 4.4

Marley's SHOWED Chart titled "The Garden We Have but Don't Visit"



Like Marley, Ella also discussed gaining skills in literacy. Ella reflected by saying,

the narratives taught me how to be a better writer and stuff. It's like the way (if I put my input on it) the way I write and how you wrote it like helped me know what to use next time and what not to use. (Ella, final program interview, December 2021)

Aside from reflecting on our day or about the texts we read, writing in our group primarily focused on youths' photo narratives. Ella mentions narrative writing because we worked one-on-one during a session in November 2021, after she expressed that she wanted her narratives to read like an essay. She was uncomfortable with her photo narratives being separated into different texts, so she and I worked together to make edits to the document. Using my laptop, Ella typed her written narratives with the help of a friend. After she typed what she had written, we read the narratives and talked about what needed to be added or deleted. Pictured below is a screenshot of the work we did during our editing session. The images in Figures 4.5a-c included five narratives that were edited to become an essay.

Figure 4.5a

Ella's Narrative Essay (p.1)

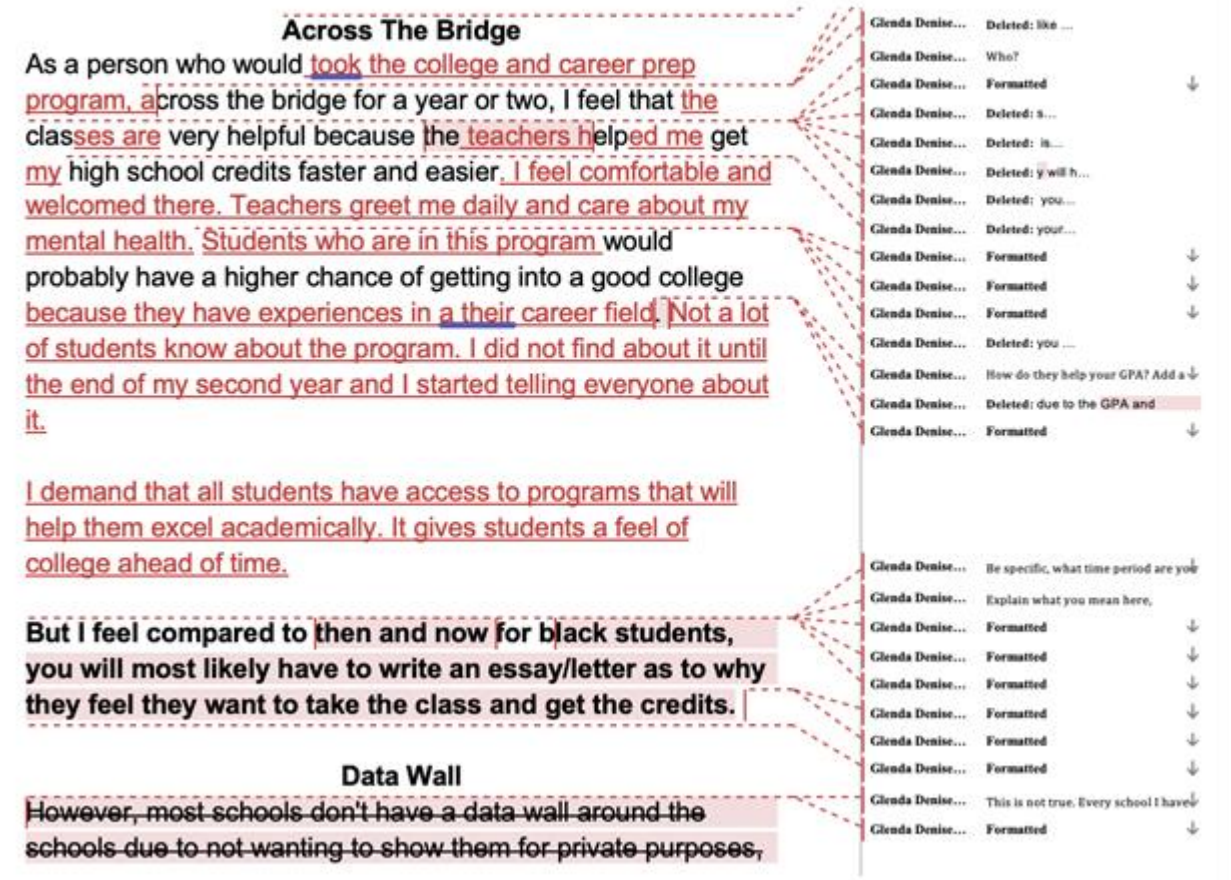


Figure 4.5b

Ella's Narrative Essay (p.2)

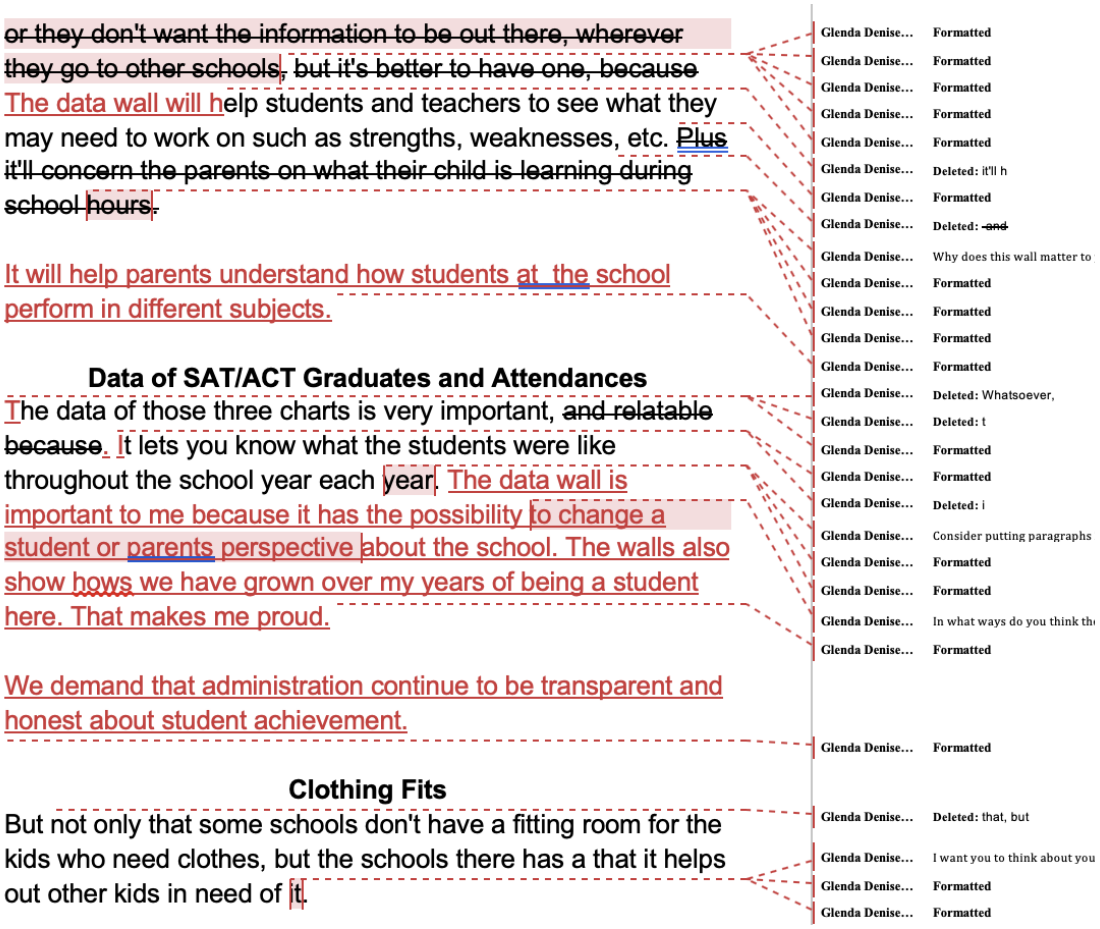
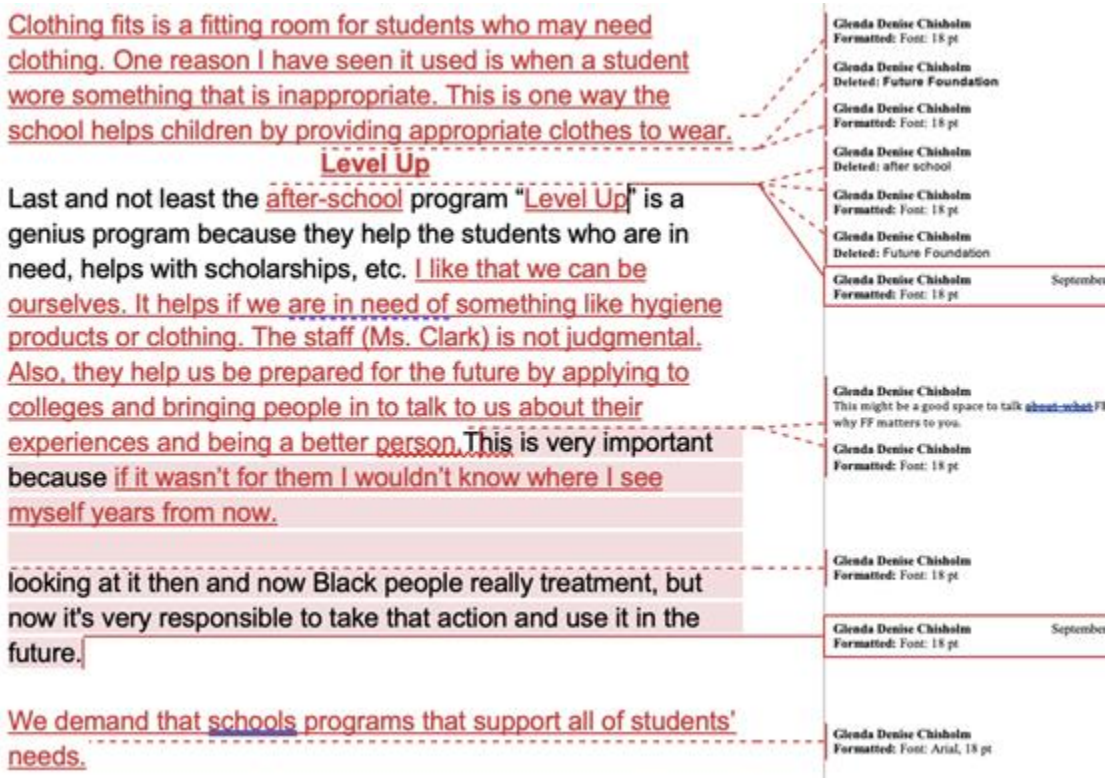


Figure 4.5c

Ella's Narrative Essay (p.3)



In addition to using the SHOWED chart and working through the writing process one-on-one, the students took part in school visits to conduct research. Yara reflected on gaining a new perspective when learning how others do school. She said,

> I'm thankful that I was able to be a part of the group. I'm thankful that I was able to learn and gain something from it and get another experience and get to know everybody and how they work at their schools and how every school works. I'm just thankful for this whole project because it gave me a new perspective on things and not to just judge, and kind of get to know how others do it at their

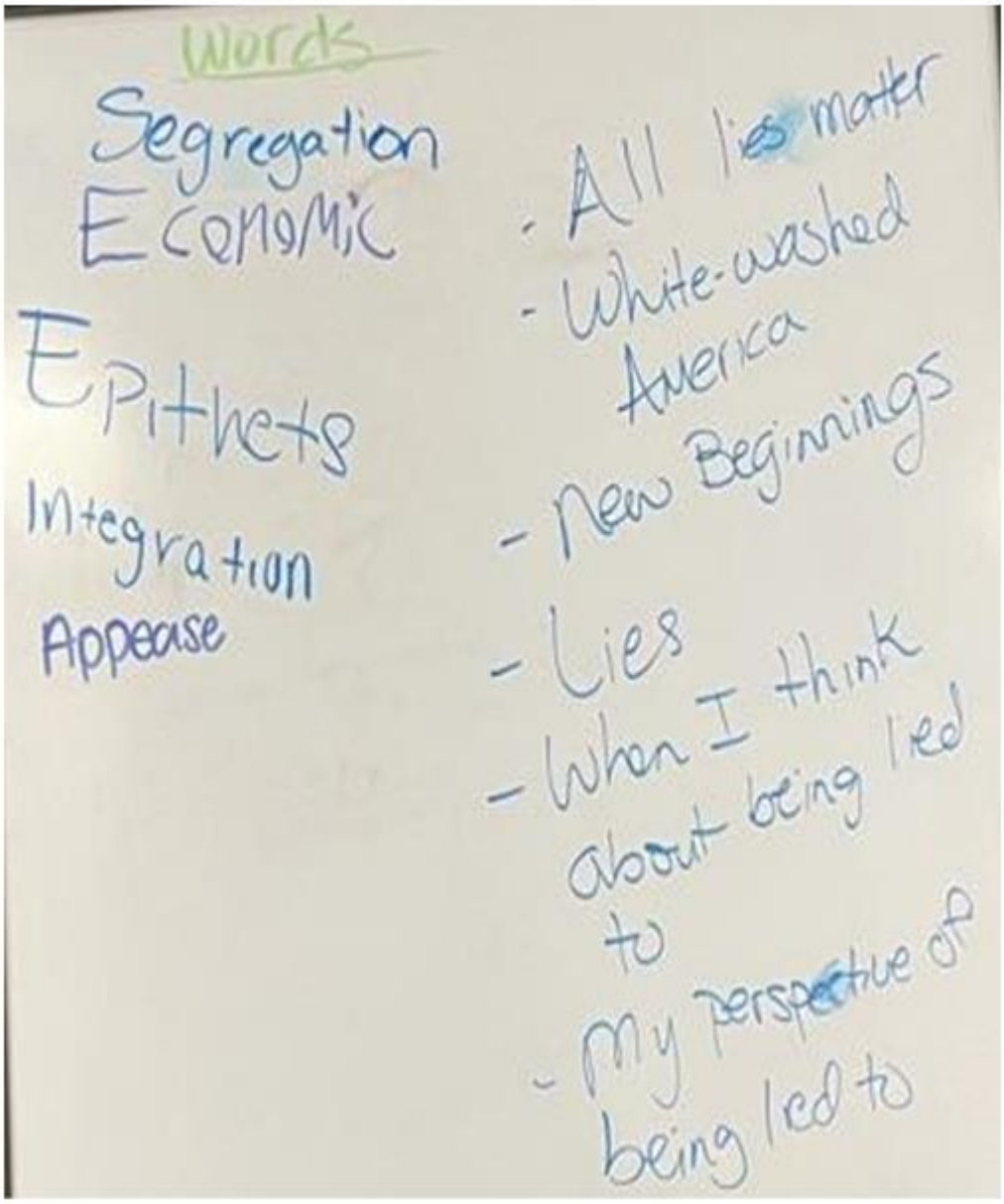
> school and what they do, then for what I do in my school. (Yara, final interview, December 2021)

In this example, Yara shared that the research we engaged in broadened her understanding of schools and students' experiences in schools. She mentioned a new perspective and not judging before she gets to know things. Her new perspective on schools helped to expand her knowledge. Her shift in perspective meant that her critical consciousness expanded or that she was able to see social contradictions by visiting different schools and noting the differences.

Quinn reflected on her learning throughout the process, and she noted that her vocabulary expanded. When I asked her what she gained from the project, she responded,
"I feel like I have learned to expand my vocabulary and to like, just read over a sentence that could be used differently. And I feel like that helps you." Quinn's learning, in part, stemmed from an intentional practice we used when reading. Figure 4.6 shows words that students circled in their texts, and I wrote words on the board that were challenging or confusing from the text. Students added the words to the board as we read, creating a class list. We discussed the meanings briefly during reading and discussed them again in greater detail after reading.

Figure 4.6

Vocabulary



The students' literacy knowledge expanded across the study in reading, writing, critical consciousness, and speaking. The four examples from Marley, Ella, Yara, and Quinn

demonstrated that students expanded their knowledge in literacy and literacy skills specifically for reading, writing, and critical consciousness.

Overall, youths' knowledge grew in many ways throughout the study. They learned new information about creating images and used that knowledge when making images during the study. They also learned more about Black youth activism and activists, and students discussed having more Black history knowledge. Lastly, youths evaluated their previous learning and gained skills in reading, writing, and social analysis. As a pedagogy and a methodology, YPAR places adult facilitators in a position to pass on knowledge to youth involved in projects. Youth have a specific knowledge that they bring to the collective and adults have the role of helping youth develop their critical thinking and critical consciousness. In addition, two components of historically responsive literacy are skills and intellectualism. Youth gained knowledge through reading and writing and became more skilled in those processes because knowledge expansion was part of the methods and pedagogical framework I used during the study. Students valued learning and getting more intelligent during their work on Snap, Chap, and Write. The next theme I discuss for youths' perception of literacy is *self-expression*.

Perceiving Literacy as Self-Expression

Self-expression was feeling like youth have choice, autonomy, and freedom during literacy learning. When I asked students about the texts we read or about their reading or writing experiences, several students made comments about autonomy. They described their learning using phrases such as *got a chance to say their own opinions if you don't want to learn about it, you could always pick another topic*, and wanting to change literacy classes to be places where they can *express themselves*. Youth valued being able to learn to speak and learn to write in ways that they found interesting and valuable. Yara, Marley,

and Ella's three transcript excerpts below explain autonomy while learning literacy. For example, I asked Yara how she felt about the essays, book chapters, and articles that we read throughout the project. She responded by saying,

> I find it very interesting, like the essays. I felt like everybody got a chance to say their own opinions and got to write down what they feel and how they feel about the things that we did. The chapters [we read] were very interesting, especially [Young Crusaders], the one that we first read over the summer, I thought that was very interesting. Most of the things that we did were very interesting to me because I got to learn more. I learned things that I did not know, I found out things I did not know, with the passages and the essays that we read. (Yara, final interview, December 2021)

Yara maintained interest during the program because the students' opinions and feelings were valued. She appreciated opportunities to share her opinions and feelings in writing and during discussions. Marley shared similar feelings when I asked her to tell me a little bit about how writing compared to school versus when we're doing what we were doing on a project, how similar or different? She said,

> Um, with the school, it just forces you to write it and with the program like if you don't want to learn about it, you could always pick another topic. Maybe new choices and not this and needs to be due by this and that. The program gives us time.

Marley valued choices and time. Her response indicated that being able to choose what she wanted to make the focus of her research and work on a timeline that was suitable to her pace of learning was important to her. When I asked Ella: *If you could change the way that*

literacy was taught in schools, would you change the way that reading and writing were taught in schools today? If so, what are the things that you like about the way reading and writing are taught in school right now? She said,

> I would change how [students] express themselves, like how we can express ourselves when writing. So, when we write, we can make those stories in our own words. (Ella, final interview, December 2021)

In the previous section, I discussed that Ella shared the desire to write her narratives as one essay and learn to be a better writer through the writing process based on the direction that she chose for her project. The final draft of her project below is the result of her wanting to share her photos her way.

The pictures and narratives in Figures 4.7 through 4.10 are Ella's final project. It included ideas she wanted to share using images she made and a narrative she composed. I designed this as a photo and writing project for students to find challenges in their communities and create solutions to better their communities. This approach required that there be opportunities for youth to share their opinions, research what they value, and be encouraged to think in ways that were best for their school community (McIntyre, 2000).

Figure 4.7

Across the Bridge

Across The Bridge

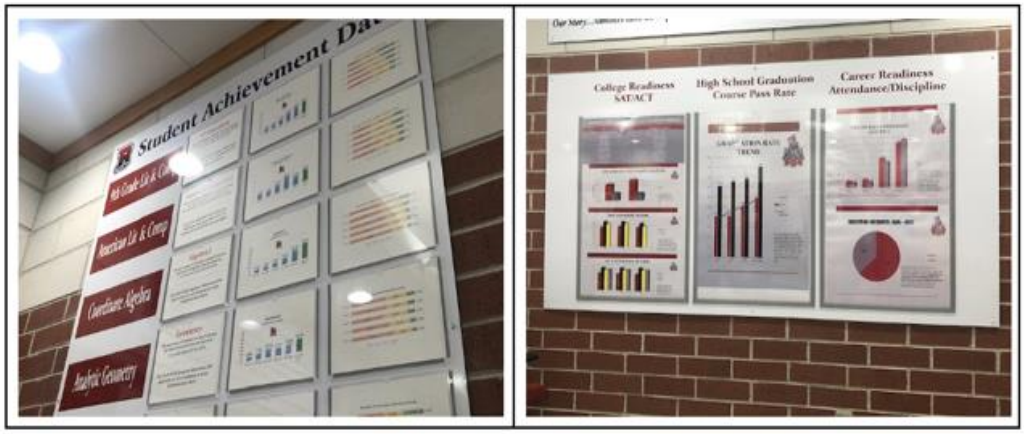
As a person who took the college and career prep program, across the bridge for a year or two, I feel that the classes are very helpful because the teachers helped me get my high school credits faster and easier. I feel comfortable and welcomed there. Teachers greet me daily and care about my mental health. Students who are in this program would probably have a higher chance of getting into a good college because they have experiences in their career field. Not a lot of students know about the program. I did not find about it until the end of my second year and I started telling everyone about it.

We deserve for all students to have access to programs that will help them excel academically. It gives students a feel of college ahead of time.

Figure 4.8

Data Wall

Data Wall/ Data of SAT/ACT Graduates and Attendances



The data wall will help students and teachers to see what they may need to work on such as strengths, weaknesses, etc.
It will help parents understand how students at the school perform in different subjects. The data of those three charts is very important. It lets you know what the students were like throughout the school year each year. The data wall is important to me because it has the possibility to change a student or parents' perspective about the school. The walls also show how we have grown over my years of being a student here. That makes me proud.

We deserve administrators that continue to be transparent and honest about student achievement.

Figure 4.9

Clothing Fits

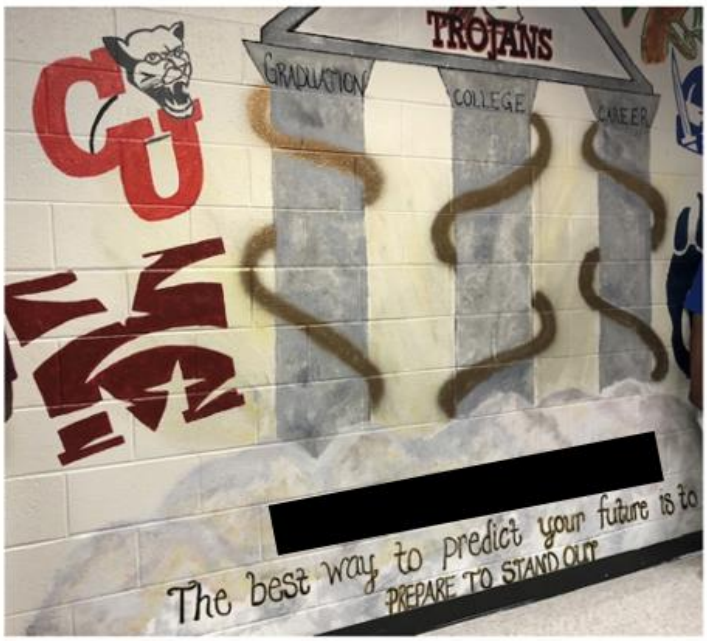
Clothing Fits

But not only that some schools don't have a fitting room for the kids who need clothes, but the schools there has a that it helps out other kids in need of it.

Clothing fits is a fitting room for students who may need clothing. One reason I have seen it used is when a student wore something that is inappropriate. This is one way the school helps children by providing appropriate clothes to wear.

Figure 4.10

Afterschool Program



Last and not least the after-school program [redacted] is a geni program because they help the students who are in need, helps with scholarships, etc. I like that we can be ourselves. It helps if we need something like hygiene products or clothing. The staff (Ms. Clark) is not judgmental. Also, they help us be prepared for the future by applying to colleges and bringing people in to talk to us about their experiences and being a better person. This i very important because if it wasn't for them, I wouldn't know where I see mysel years from now.

Photovoice and other participatory projects require freedom and independence. Valuing and centering student knowledge was vital to adhere to the principles of PAR by honoring their experiences and voices (Kirshner, 2015; Wilson et. al, 2007). Youth valued their freedom in making choices and demonstrated independence across the topics they chose to highlight. The photovoice method encouraged youth to identify things they

wanted to highlight. Students created images based on what they thought was important. In the following section, I discuss students' third and final perception of literacy, literacy as enjoyable moments.

Enjoyable Moments

I learned about enjoyable moments that students experienced in the program during interviews. Students discussed experiencing joy while learning and conducting research for many reasons. Enjoyable moments were defined as instances of fun, joy, sustained interest, and sustained positive feelings as we researched during the project. I put both joy and fun in the section because both were associated with a happy or positive feeling about something within the program. The youth were joyful about the methods I chose to teach while they did their projects. Interviews with Quinn, John, and Yara each have examples in which they discussed joy.

My first example is from a final program interview. I asked Quinn how she felt about her participation in the program, and she said,

> I very much, highly enjoyed this because this is something I'm passionate about and it just keeps me pushing because I learned a lot of stuff, mainly about Black people and it makes it feel good to know that my people are learning and improving as individuals and at a young age as well. I feel like all of us, like everybody and you like are very intelligent and just speaking on this is like, Wow, these people are smart, especially the middle schoolers too. Like, what? I did not expect that, but I overall enjoy it and I will continue it. Definitely. (Quinn, final program interview, December 2021)

Quinn noted that she "highly enjoyed" the program because she had a passion for her work, it pushed her, she learned a lot (mainly about Black people), and it felt good to know that her

people were learning and improving as individuals and at a young age. With similar responses, both Yara and Marley shared that they enjoyed the project because they were learning. Yara said,

> I would describe it as an informational learning project where you can also have fun with but you're learning, you're gaining something from it: Your writing skills, your reading skills, your information, everything that you learn, you're gaining something from this project, not just the, you know, go to school, take a picture, or write an essay about something. It's about how you feel or when you read a book, you're really gaining something, you're learning new things that a regular school and classes will not teach you. (Yara, final program interview, December 2021)

In the quote, Yara explained that fun was a feeling. She described that she had learned and gained. We spent time reading about the experiences of Black youth in schools, discussing, also with capturing our images, and writing was making her smarter, which was fun for her. When I asked Marley if she learned anything about herself during the project, she responded, *Oh, I enjoy learning new things.* Marley did not discuss what she learned that was new. Their student researcher reflections on their experiences in the program confirmed that during the time we worked on the project, they learned about other people's experiences and perspectives, and they noted that learning to be critical and using creative ways to express their learning was a positive experience. Each of the reasons they expressed joy is directly connected to a part of the reading and photovoice process. Youth were learning and enjoyed what they were learning because most learning tasks were directly connected to their interests and identity.

Overall, the youth appreciated that they were learning new information and skills. This last theme to students' perceptions of literacy, *enjoyable moments* brings this section to a close. I

previously discussed expanding knowledge and skills and self-expression. In the next section, I provide the analysis of my second and final research question, how do youth respond to a program promoting critical consciousness?

Responses to a Program Promoting Critical Consciousness

Youth responses to the program included four central themes. I explore each response to the program, respectively and provide examples for each theme. The responses to the program were 1) responding with a growth in confidence, 2) responding with agency and leadership, 3) responding by emphasizing the need for Blackness, and 4) responding critically. In this section, I provide the meaning and several examples of each theme.

Responding with Growth in Confidence

The knowledge that youth felt they gained during Snap, Chat, and Write gave them *confidence*. In the first example I share, John discussed how through his work on the project, he gained confidence. In other words, students possessed self-assurance in their abilities to share and use knowledge and skills in literacy and Black history. Students expressed greater confidence during final program interviews when discussing their writing, reading, thinking, speaking, technology skills, and understanding of power and oppression. As a result, they had greater trust in their abilities to read, write, think, speak about, and analyze text. During our final interview, I asked youth questions like, "What have you gained from this program?", "In what ways did your project help you to be active and change things at your school", and to talk about their experiences during the program. In this section, I detail how participants responded by talking about something that they learned that led them to have greater confidence.

One example began during after-school program time with middle grades as the students prepared to present their work. We discussed presenting our research in front of an audience where their parents, peers, and teachers would be present in addition to camp workers and leaders. John told the group that he was nervous. We were preparing for three weeks before the presentation. We worked at a table in the lunchroom, where the after-school program was held. Together we revised their narratives and practiced how they would present. The narratives were important because the youth researchers had decided that the narrative would be all they needed to say to describe their picture to the group. They did not want to put extra pressure on themselves by writing more information to say to the audience. The narrative was their script. Sharing what they had already written helped youth feel more comfortable sharing their thoughts in front of an audience. Since John was nervous each student agreed to go home and read their narrative out loud and practice over the next two weeks. John went home and practiced alone first, but realized that he needed someone to listen to him, so he asked his brother to listen to him read and recite his narrative. When he returned to camp the following week, he told me that he was still nervous but felt a lot better because he had been practicing. He reflected on this experience in our final interview in the following excerpt:

Glenda: Is there anything that you were expecting to gain from this group, but did not gain?

John: Oh, no.

Glenda: Okay, so then is there anything that you would like to share that you did gain from the group?

John: A little bit of confidence.

Glenda: How so?

John: Because this one time, I was nervous about presenting and stuff. But like I was getting tips on how to gain confidence and stuff like that.

Glenda: Okay. So, when you presented, how did it feel before you presented and after you presented?

John: Before I presented it like it felt like I, I was nervous. And then after I presented, I felt kinda good about myself.

Glenda: Okay, that's good. So, do you feel like if you had to present again? Would you be nervous?

John: Not really, but probably just a little bit.

Glenda: Okay.

John: The more I do it the more I'm gonna gain from it.

Learning and practicing speaking helped John feel more confident. In John's experience writing, practicing, and performing his narrative gave him the confidence to do it again. Even though he admitted he would be a little nervous, overall, he felt good about himself and what he accomplished by speaking to a large group.

Quinn reflected on speaking as well. While John discussed speaking in front of an audience, Quinn discussed speaking up during group discussions that concerned the Black community. I asked, in what ways did your project help you to be active and change things at your school? Quinn responded,

Okay, so my project has helped me to be more confident about what I speak on cause at first, I was still really shy... just was worried about how people were looking at me when it comes to speaking up on like, community stuff because like

> I said, communication is key. Nobody speaks on stuff that affects [Black people]. So when doing this project, it made me feel more confident to speak up on the Black community. Definitely, (Quinn, final program interview, December 2021)

At the beginning of the program, Quinn said she loved reading and writing about Black people; however, she had a desire to learn more about the Black community. According to her response, the information she learned on the project gave her more confidence to move beyond reading and writing to speaking about Black people.

Lastly, Yara also expressed that she was more confident. Her confidence had grown in reading. I asked Yara to talk a little bit about her reading experiences with the program compared to her reading experiences in school. Yara stated,

> My reading experience in the program was that we read about a lot of new things, different things about different cultures, different people. My reading here, I feel like I've advanced more because I've read different books and the books that were given to us, I read them and I kind of feel strongly about what I read. But if I was in school, I wouldn't've, read the books. I wouldn't've read passages I would've been like oh, this is another story do the little essay test and let that be that. And so I kind of feel like I gain a little more confidence in reading now than I would've if I was at school (Yara, final program interview, December 2021).

The texts that I presented to students during the project made Yara more willing to read. Because she was interested in the text, she read and in turn gained more confidence in herself as a reader. She noted that if she had been assigned the same texts we read during Snap, Chat, & Write in school, she would not have read. The difference is that the program presented information differently than she had been learning in school.

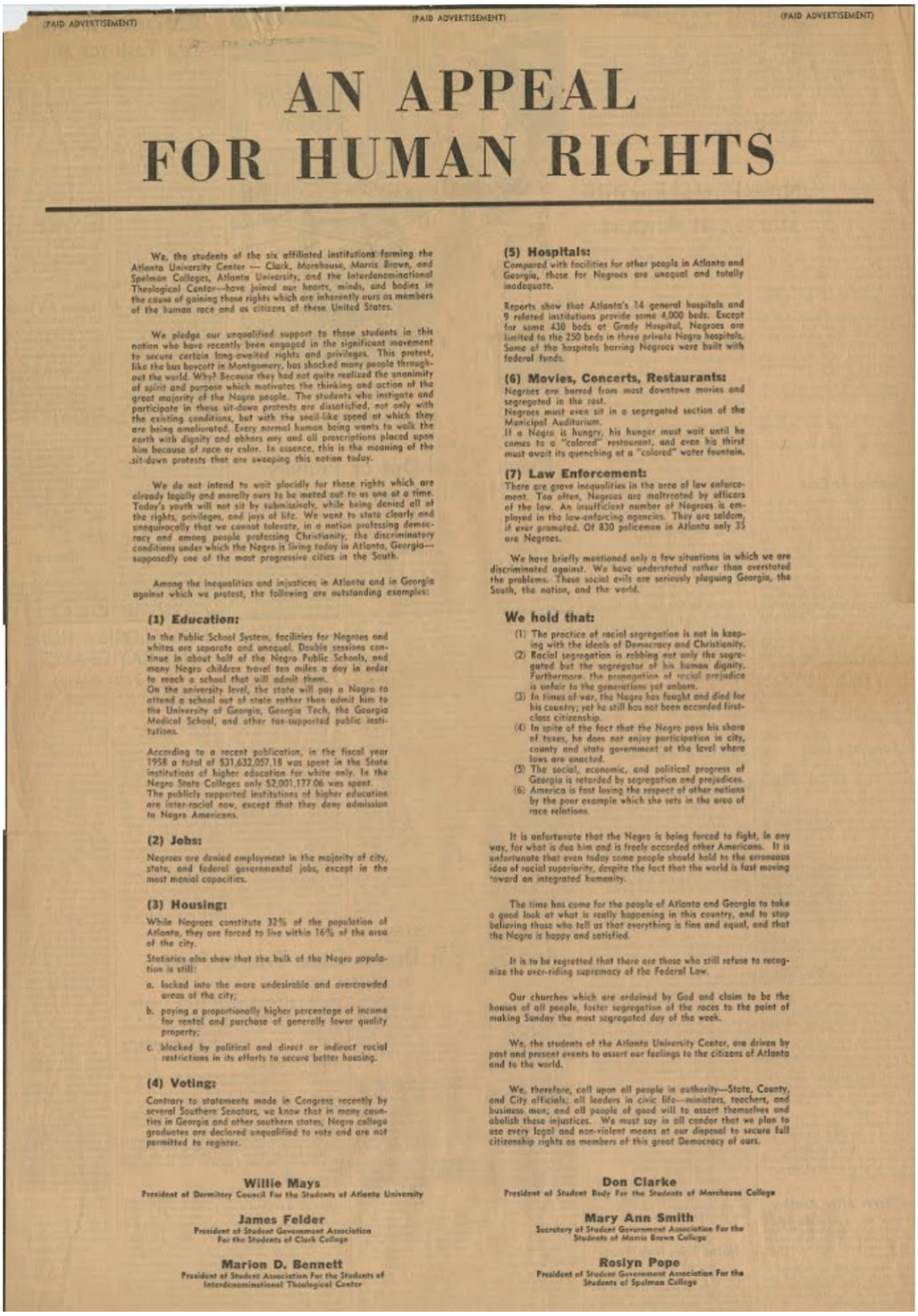
Without me ever mentioning the word confidence in our conversations, youth researchers mentioned confidence because they felt better in reading, writing, listening, and speaking. I wanted youth to know that they had the power to create change in their communities. As a facilitator, this meant helping students to develop in each area target within the HRL framework. Muhammad (2020) does not claim that confidence will be a result of using her framework in teaching and learning, however, the question arises whether their confidence had grown because of the approach they took when learning. Each student discussed that they were feeling confident and comfortable because of what they had been learning. According to student researchers, what and how you learn matters. The confidence youth gained during the project could have also been attributed to why youth researchers changed the idea of writing demands to statements sharing what they deserved. I continue the discussion on students' responses to the program in the next section, *We Deserve*.

Responding with Agency and Leadership

Students demonstrated agency and leadership during the project. Agency meant that students acted in ways that they thought would result in justice for their school communities. Students demonstrated leadership when they provided direction on the actions they planned to take during the project and followed through with their plan of action. Texts we read during the project provided the group with opportunities to discuss the actions youth activists took to bring about social change and the consequences of their actions. For example, during the fall semester of the school year, we read and discussed *An Appeal for Human Rights* (Pope, 1960), in Figure 4.11. The student participants read this document as well as other texts about Black youth activism.

Figure 4.11

An Appeal for Human Rights (Pope, 1960)



(PAID ADVERTISEMENT) (PAID ADVERTISEMENT) (PAID ADVERTISEMENT)

AN APPEAL FOR HUMAN RIGHTS

We, the students of the six affiliated institutions forming the Atlanta University Center — Clark, Morehouse, Morris Brown, and Spelman Colleges, Atlanta University, and the Interdenominational Theological Center—have joined our hearts, minds, and bodies in the cause of gaining those rights which are inherently ours as members of the human race and as citizens of these United States.

We pledge our unqualified support to those students in this nation who have recently been engaged in the significant movement to secure certain long-awaited rights and privileges. This protest, like the bus boycott in Montgomery, has shocked many people throughout the world. Why? Because they had not quite realized the unanimity of spirit and purpose which motivates the thinking and action of the great majority of the Negro people. The students who instigate and participate in these sit-down protests are dissatisfied, not only with the existing conditions, but with the snail-like speed at which they are being ameliorated. Every normal human being wants to walk the earth with dignity and abhors any and all proscriptions placed upon him because of race or color. In essence, this is the meaning of the sit-down protests that are sweeping this nation today.

We do not intend to wait placidly for those rights which are already legally and morally ours to be meted out to us one at a time. Today's youth will not sit by submissively, while being denied all of the rights, privileges, and joys of life. We want to state clearly and unequivocally that we cannot tolerate, in a nation professing democracy and among people professing Christianity, the discriminatory conditions under which the Negro is living today in Atlanta, Georgia—supposedly one of the most progressive cities in the South.

Among the inequalities and injustices in Atlanta and in Georgia against which we protest, the following are outstanding examples:

(1) Education:

In the Public School System, facilities for Negroes and whites are separate and unequal. Double sessions continue in about half of the Negro Public Schools, and many Negro children travel ten miles a day in order to reach a school that will admit them.
On the university level, the state will pay a Negro to attend a school out of state rather than admit him to the University of Georgia, Georgia Tech, the Georgia Medical School, and other tax-supported public institutions.

According to a recent publication, in the fiscal year 1958 a total of $31,632,057.18 was spent in the State institutions of higher education for white only. In the Negro State Colleges only $2,001,177.06 was spent.
The publicly supported institutions of higher education are inter-racial now, except that they deny admission to Negro Americans.

(2) Jobs:

Negroes are denied employment in the majority of city, state, and federal governmental jobs, except in the most menial capacities.

(3) Housing:

While Negroes constitute 32% of the population of Atlanta, they are forced to live within 16% of the area of the city.

Statistics also show that the bulk of the Negro population is still:

a. locked into the more undesirable and overcrowded areas of the city;

b. paying a proportionally higher percentage of income for rental and purchase of generally lower quality property;

c. blocked by political and direct or indirect racial restrictions in its efforts to secure better housing.

(4) Voting:

Contrary to statements made in Congress recently by several Southern Senators, we know that in many counties in Georgia and other southern states, Negro college graduates are declared unqualified to vote and are not permitted to register.

(5) Hospitals:

Compared with facilities for other people in Atlanta and Georgia, those for Negroes are unequal and totally inadequate.

Reports show that Atlanta's 14 general hospitals and 9 related institutions provide some 4,000 beds. Except for some 430 beds at Grady Hospital, Negroes are limited to the 250 beds in three private Negro hospitals. Some of the hospitals barring Negroes were built with federal funds.

(6) Movies, Concerts, Restaurants:

Negroes are barred from most downtown movies and segregated in the rest.
Negroes must even sit in a segregated section of the Municipal Auditorium.
If a Negro is hungry, his hunger must wait until he comes to a "colored" restaurant, and even his thirst must await its quenching at a "colored" water fountain.

(7) Law Enforcement:

There are grave inequalities in the area of law enforcement. Too often, Negroes are maltreated by officers of the law. An insufficient number of Negroes is employed in the law-enforcing agencies. They are seldom, if ever promoted. Of 830 policemen in Atlanta only 35 are Negroes.

We have briefly mentioned only a few situations in which we are discriminated against. We have understated rather than overstated the problems. These social evils are seriously plaguing Georgia, the South, the nation, and the world.

We hold that:

(1) The practice of racial segregation is not in keeping with the ideals of Democracy and Christianity.
(2) Racial segregation is robbing not only the segregated but the segregator of his human dignity. Furthermore, the propagation of racial prejudice is unfair to the generations yet unborn.
(3) In times of war, the Negro has fought and died for his country; yet he still has not been accorded first-class citizenship.
(4) In spite of the fact that the Negro pays his share of taxes, he does not enjoy participation in city, county and state government at the level where laws are enacted.
(5) The social, economic, and political progress of Georgia is retarded by segregation and prejudices.
(6) America is fast losing the respect of other nations by the poor example which she sets in the area of race relations.

It is unfortunate that the Negro is being forced to fight, in any way, for what is due him and is freely accorded other Americans. It is unfortunate that even today some people should hold to the erroneous idea of racial superiority, despite the fact that the world is fast moving toward an integrated humanity.

The time has come for the people of Atlanta and Georgia to take a good look at what is really happening in this country, and to stop believing those who tell us that everything is fine and equal, and that the Negro is happy and satisfied.

It is to be regretted that there are those who still refuse to recognize the over-riding supremacy of the Federal Law.

Our churches which are ordained by God and claim to be the houses of all people, foster segregation of the races to the point of making Sunday the most segregated day of the week.

We, the students of the Atlanta University Center, are driven by past and present events to assert our feelings to the citizens of Atlanta and to the world.

We, therefore, call upon all people in authority—State, County, and City officials; all leaders in civic life—ministers, teachers, and business men; and all people of good will to assert themselves and abolish these injustices. We must say in all candor that we plan to use every legal and non-violent means at our disposal to secure full citizenship rights as members of this great Democracy of ours.

Willie Mays
President of Dormitory Council For the Students of Atlanta University

James Felder
President of Student Government Association For the Students of Clark College

Marion D. Bennett
President of Student Association For the Students of Interdenominational Theological Center

Don Clarke
President of Student Body For the Students of Morehouse College

Mary Ann Smith
Secretary of Student Government Association For the Students of Morris Brown College

Roslyn Pope
President of Student Government Association For the Students of Spelman College

Through discussions about the texts, youth researchers cultivated a deeper understanding of how social change could be created. Also, like the text we read, youth hoped to create change. At the beginning of the study, I asked Quinn, based on all that you've learned, what do you think it means to be an activist? She responded,

> So being an activist is basically to help the blind see. I say that because there is so much more than us, just being slaves and fighting for freedom. I feel like it was more than that. And it is. And these activists are proving that... by giving up these powerful speeches and telling our generation that we're more than just the thugs that the white people see in their eyes. And the activists are basically just showing us how powerful we are, and we have so much potential but not using it in the right way if that makes sense. (Quinn, initial interview, June 2021)

After the study, one of the questions I asked all the youth was, do you consider yourself an activist? Quinn responded by saying,

> Oh, yes, I do. Honestly, I feel like I'm an up-and-coming activist. Right now, I'm just learning everything. You know, putting everything together but I feel like I think at the end I will become a very intelligent Black activist. (Quinn, initial program interview, June, 2021)

When I asked what she wanted to change, she responded,

> I want to change the way that the school system is set up. For example, the weed situation: [You and I] talked and we were thinking about one of the solutions and I automatically thought of having police at the school, but there's been so much going on [with Black people and police brutality]... so much at my school to the point where [calling the police] is set to be normalized in my head, and I feel like

> that's the same thing for other students. And I feel like that's a problem we shouldn't have—to normalize police coming to our school and be made to feel like up-and-coming prisoners in cell number 45. You know? I just feel like it shouldn't have to be that way. And it's sad and I was just happy to have your help. And come up with ideas, promote, the Center for Mental Health assistance, and stuff like that. And definitely want to change that because no student should come to school and feel like they are going to jail after their second period because they got high off of weed. [They might be smoking] because mom and dad are not helping them at home. You know? I just feel like that's putting them in a worse situation than they're already in. Because at the end of the day, whether high or not we are still human beings, and we deserve the same respect that other kids do. You know? (Quinn, final program interview, December 2021)

At the beginning of the study, Quinn talked about "activists showing us how powerful we are" as a comparison between activists and Black youth. By the conclusion of the study, she considered herself an up-and-coming activist and had several ideas for things she wanted to change along with a new understanding that she also must begin to think differently. Her shift from not seeing herself as an activist to feeling that she is an "up and coming activist" was her belief that she can also inspire a generation and be powerful as she described activists in her initial interview.

When I began this study, I had been studying ways that Black youth worked to bring about change in Black communities due to racial inequity. I was particularly interested in the demands youth wrote. The act of writing demands brought literacy practices and activism together. Because I was interested in writing demands, I urged youths participating in this study to write demands as well. The youth researchers agreed that writing statements based on the

changes they wanted to make was powerful, but they did not agree with using the word demand. Instead, they wrote statements about what they deserved. Each student wrote Deserve Statements based on the changes they highlighted through their pictures and narratives. The following statements are the collective thoughts of the six students taking part in the study. Collectively, they wrote,

1. We deserve to see teachers teaching history before hiring them.
2. We deserve school-provided incentives for students who help keep the restrooms clean.
3. We deserve 20 minutes a day for recess.
4. We deserve other connections about Black history.
5. We deserve 6 feet of room if students don’t have a mask on.
6. We deserve teachers that stay on top of putting grades in.
7. We deserve for girls' sports to be acknowledged the same as boys’ sports.
8. We deserve schools that allow programs like Level Up for students who need help, love, and support.
9. We deserve more time to arrive at class due to the capacity of students in the hallways.
10. We deserve a safe center that is a safe space for students abusing drugs, abuse, or mental issues.
11. We deserve teachers who get sensitivity training.
12. We deserve to have access to programs that will help them excel academically. It gives students a feel of college ahead of time.
13. We deserve an administration that continues to be transparent and honest about student achievement.
14. We deserve schools that have programs that support all students’ needs.

During the final interviews, I asked Marley, Quinn, and Ella about their thoughts on changing the statements from demand to deserve. They said,

> I feel like demand is a bit controlling. You're demanding somebody to do something, and demanding is not going to get your way. Well, sometimes it will sometimes it won't... Like, we demand and we deserve is like is just, I don't know. Like I don't want to say it flows, but it flows. (Marley, final program interview, December 2021)

Quinn shared:

> I completely agree with [the change from demand to deserve]. Because even though demand sounds nice and all that extra stuff, demand can go different ways. At the end of the day, you want it. But what I mean by different ways is like, sometimes is it good for you or is it bad for you, type thing, you know? And it's more so like when it comes to deserving, I feel like it's what's needed. And without, like, coming off how can I say...I will say aggressive. When I compare the words, demand sounds more aggressive than deserve. But I agree with the word deserve because it's more subtle, and it gets the point across, and I completely agree with it because I feel like the Black community does deserve a lot more stuff without having to say demand. As much as we want to say demand because we were waiting so long for changes to happen. I feel like we should just start with deserve but at the end of the day, I agree with both words. I just feel like it depends on the setting. But that middle schooler is very intelligent for saying

> that because I did not think about that ever. (Quinn, final program interview, December 2021)

Quinn agreed with the change of the word to deserve from demand. She felt like the word demand left possibilities for outcomes to go many different ways. When I asked Yara if, would she would change her wording to deserve or would she keep it as demand, she said,

> I will say deserve. I will say deserve because I want to, to start, you know, a little slow, you know, I don't want to like come off crazy, right...I wouldn't say crazy, I wouldn't want to come up big on anybody. So, like, I will start with deserve and if I feel like changes are not being made. Then I will start saying demand for sure. (Yara, final interview, December 2021).

Yara also felt that deserve was the best way to start a conversation on what students should be entitled to without question. Still, she noted that she would use demand if she felt that no changes were being made. Last, Ella's thoughts were like Quinn's. Ella also used the word aggressive. She stated, "With demand, it sounds like I guess I wouldn't say aggressive but like it's like force with is a word demand and like deserve is like you're wanting to happen it's like not forced. If that makes sense" (Ella, final interview, December 2021).

The initial idea to change the word from demand to deserve came from John and Julian. When they were writing their demands they were talking and were not comfortable using the word demand. To my surprise, three of the other participants agreed. Yara was the only participant who did not say anything about demands because I interviewed her before I interviewed Julian. When I interviewed Julian, we talked about the change he and John made,

and our discussion prompted me to add a question to the remaining interviews about the change from deserve to demand. The youths had an overall sense of discomfort with the word demand and felt that deserve was a better indicator of the message they wanted to convey. This finding is a significant finding for two reasons. The first reason is that each student wrote statements about what they deserved. Second, youth unanimously agreed that saying what they deserved instead of making demands like student activists have done in the past, was a better fit for sharing with those in power what is acceptable for their educational experiences. The youth researchers demonstrated their critical consciousness with the writing and word change in their Deserve Statements. These statements are essential to explaining that the youth researchers in this study took an actionable step towards changing their school communities. The students discussing what they deserved helped me to better understand how they felt about their experiences in school. They made comparisons between the school and the program; I discuss this further in the next section.

Responding by Emphasizing the Need for Blackness

Student projects were the culmination of the PAR project for students in this study. Student projects shared many of the same ideas including the need for access, Blackness, love, and transparency in school. None of the topics were as prevalent as the need to center Blackness; Each student referred to the importance of Black history in either their initial interview, final interview, or in the pictures they chose as a part of their final projects. During initial interviews, students said that they wanted to learn more about Black people and Black history. Many students decided to participate because they loved themselves and our history. Other youth, like Julian, had grown a desire for other students their age to have access to courses where they would learn Black history. In my first example, a brief excerpt from the transcript of my initial

interview with Ella on June 18, 2021, she and I discussed her expectations of the program. Ella was clear that she had expectations of leaving the program with more knowledge than she entered. She also hoped to learn more about Black history. “She said I expect to know a lot more from what I did when I didn’t know what to do. More of our histories”

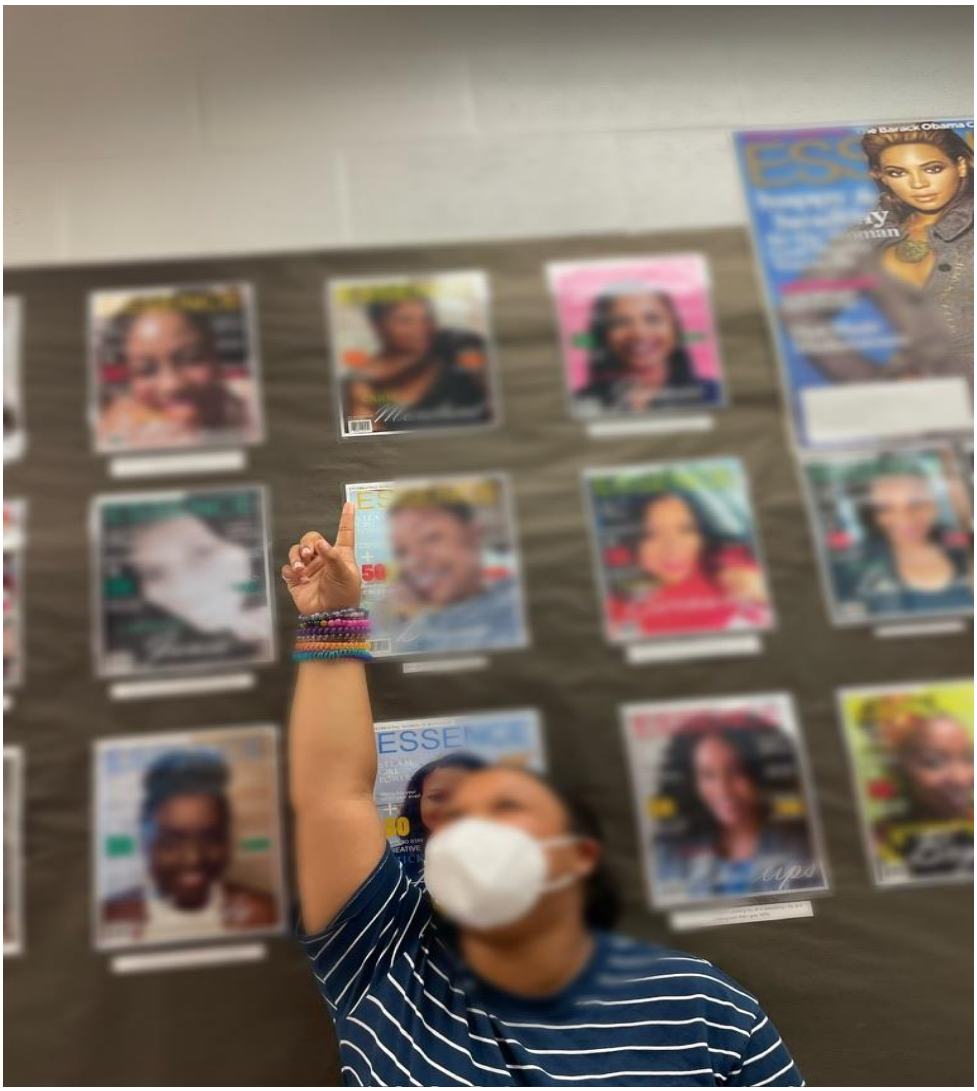
Ella, a high school senior, provided two expectations she had of the group. She wanted to learn more than she already knew, and she wanted to learn more of her history as a Black person. When I asked Marley the same question, she shared similar sentiments with Ella. She also thought it was important to learn about Black people but unlike Ella, she did not explain why she wanted to learn more about Black history. However, when we went on a school visit at Heritage High School, Marley was thrilled to see a wall of photos of Black teachers. The school had created *Essence* magazine covers for each teacher in the building with the title “What is Your Essence?” As Marley created an image of the display, I created an image of her creating the image in Figure 4.12. In the subsequent image, Figure 4.13, she asked me to create an additional image of her pointing to her grandmother, who was among the educators pictured on the wall.

Figure 4.12

Marley Creating an Image

Figure 4.13

Educator in the Family



Quinn had the experience of being taught at a white school. When Quinn talked about a white school, she was referring to a school where the student population was mostly white. At her current school, Heritage High she was excited to share a similar feeling of excitement to seeing Black

teachers and other images of positive Black images. Quinn snapped several pictures of positive Black social media posts and sent them to me via text.

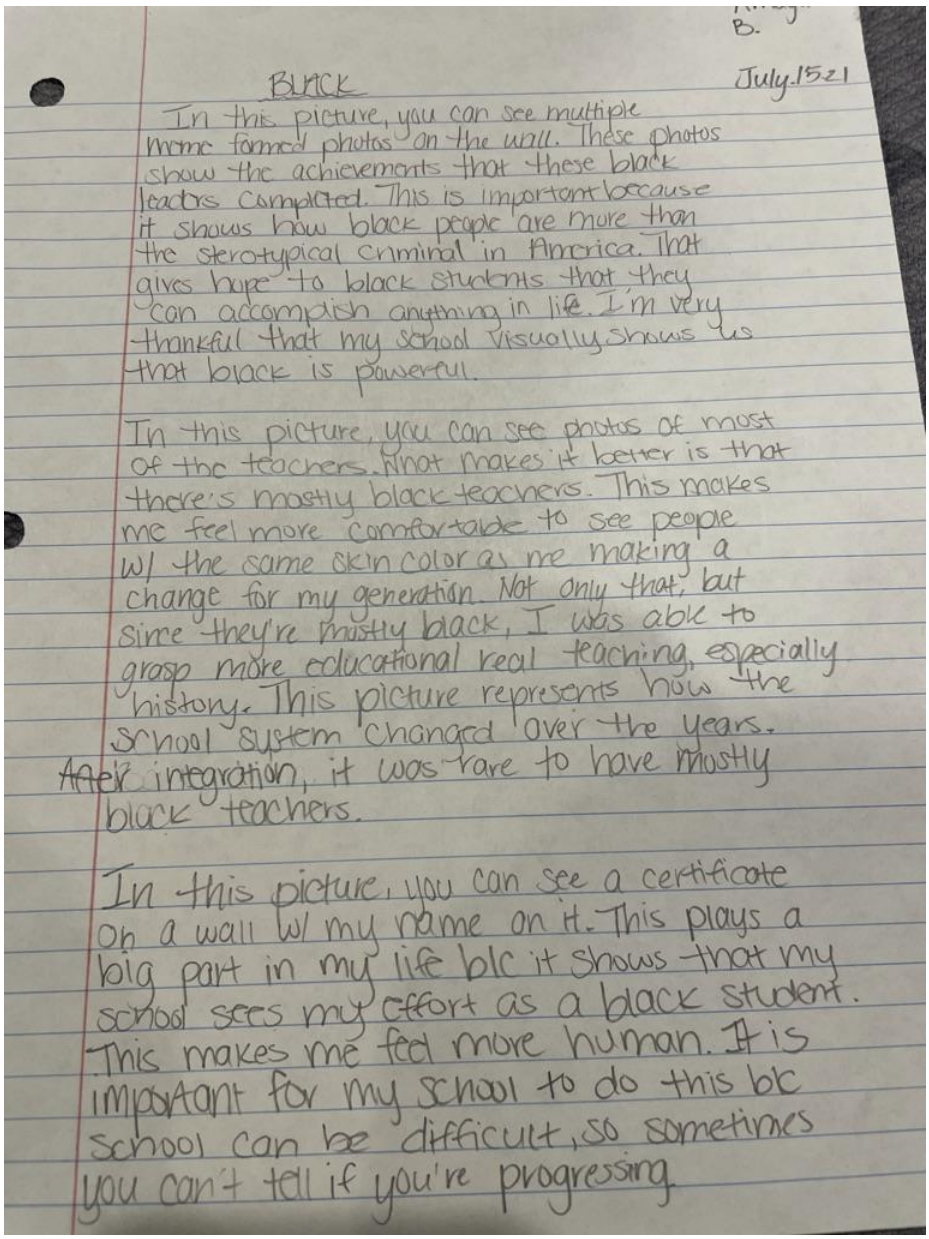
Figure 4.14

Black Meme Wall

During a school visit to Heritage High in July 2021, Quinn made several images. In the message, Quinn shares 17 photos with me. Part of the student's project was to send me images that they wanted to share during group discussion and potentially include in their project. Although Quinn did not include these images in her final product, she did create a narrative when she took the photographs during Cycle 2. One image is featured in Figure 4.14 and her narrative is pictured in Figure 4.15.

Figure 4.15

"Black" Narrative



B.

July 15 21

BLACK

In this picture, you can see multiple meme framed photos on the wall. These photos show the achievements that these black leaders completed. This is important because it shows how black people are more than the stereotypical criminal in America. That gives hope to black students that they can accomplish anything in life. I'm very thankful that my school visually shows us that black is powerful.

In this picture, you can see photos of most of the teachers. What makes it better is that there's mostly black teachers. This makes me feel more comfortable to see people w/ the same skin color as me making a change for my generation. Not only that, but since they're mostly black, I was able to grasp more educational real teaching, especially history. This picture represents how the school system changed over the years. After integration, it was rare to have mostly black teachers.

In this picture, you can see a certificate on a wall w/ my name on it. This plays a big part in my life bc it shows that my school sees my effort as a black student. This makes me feel more human. It is important for my school to do this bc school can be difficult, so sometimes you can't tell if you're progressing.

In the text written by Quinn, she stated that the memes were important to her because they showed the achievements of Black people. She thought that the pictures were a good

representation of Black youth at the school to see that they could accomplish anything. She also wrote about the images from another picture she created, that was like Marley's images with the teachers on *Essence* magazine covers. She appreciated having Black teachers, especially after learning that integration after *Brown v. Board of Education* had left many Black teachers without a job. Black students who integrated schools were often taught by white teachers who did not provide the same care that students had received pre-integration. During our group discussion about the school visit, Quinn explained that she expressed that she appreciated seeing positive images of Black people because it was not common to see images of Black people at her previous, predominately white school. Quinn did not include this narrative or the images in her final presentation, however, it highlights an idea that students answered both questions from their research on what they loved and wanted to change about their schools. Quinn's example tells and shows what she loved about her school.

Like Quinn, Julian showed appreciation for Black people. Julian wanted other Black youth to understand the contributions our ancestors have made. Figure 4.16a is a slide from Julian's final presentation. Figures 4.16b and 4.16c are the images on the slide. Figure 4.16b shows the school library. The last image, 4.16c includes three Black youths (two boys and one girl) in astronaut uniforms with written text that says, "Success is in your hands."

Figure 4.16a

Julian's Presentation Slide

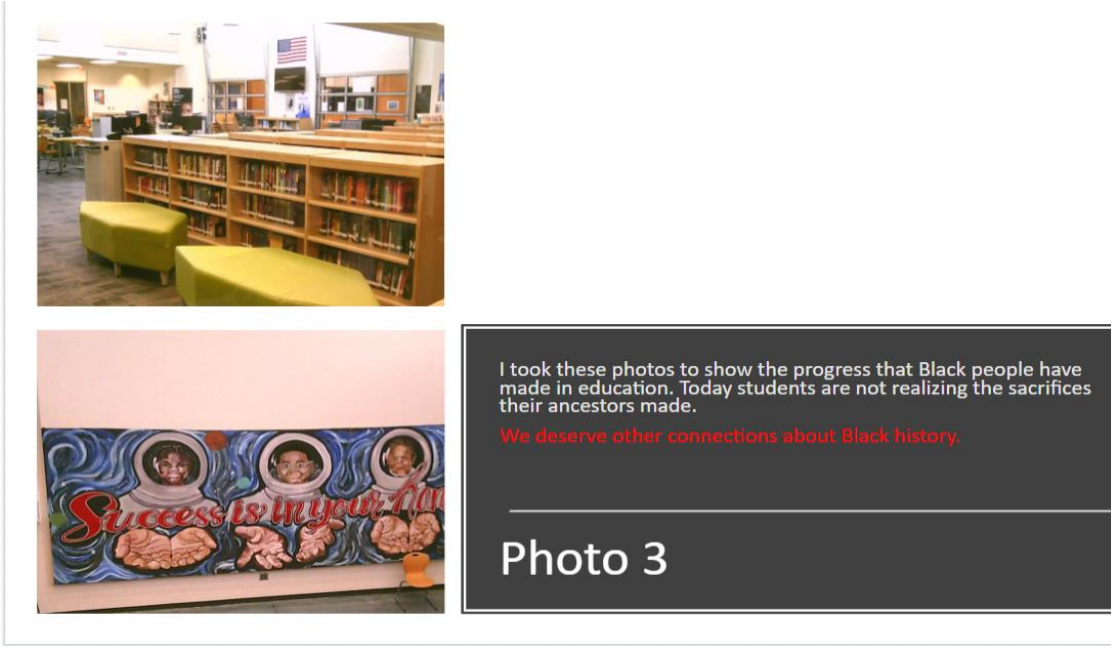
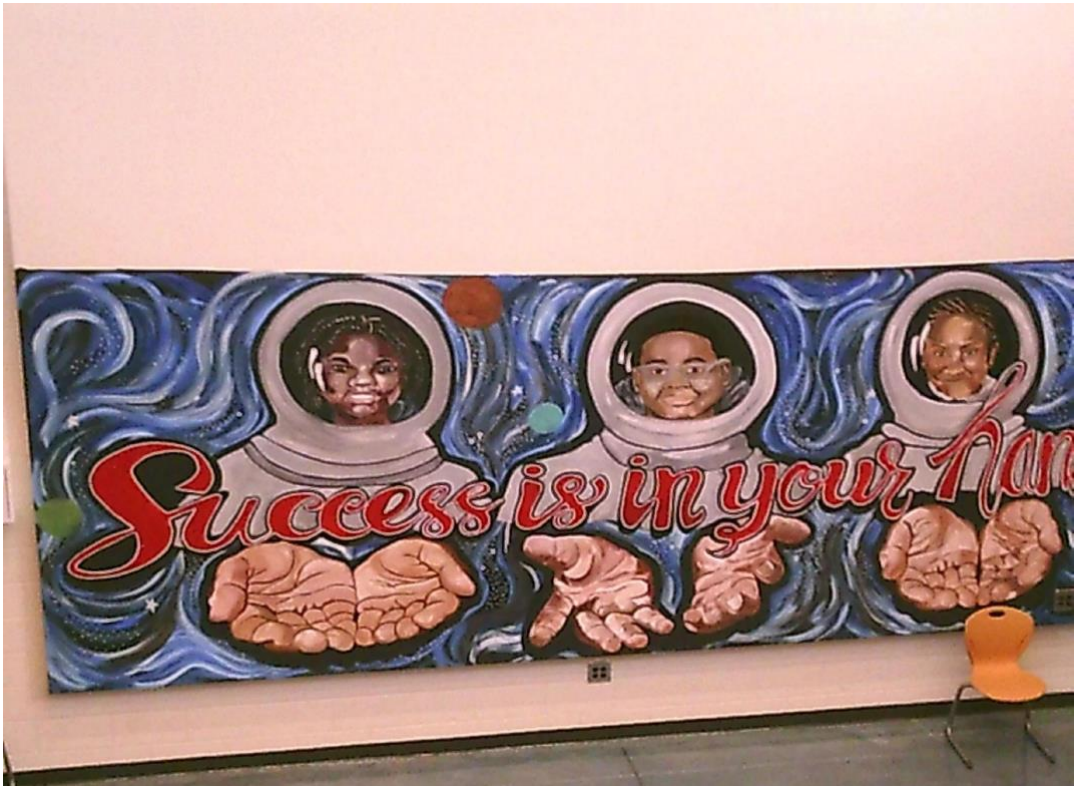


Figure 4.16b

Julian's Photo: School Library

Figure 4.16c

Julian's Photo: Student Astronauts



Julian explained how he sees Blackness in each image. He wrote, "I took these photos to show the progress that Black people have made in education. Today students are not realizing the sacrifices their ancestors made. We deserve other connections about Black history."

During our final interview at the end of the program, I asked Julian to tell me about his photos. He said, "Those were to express how Black people can have gotten better. But now that we can have the proper education and stuff like more technology, we are not taking it seriously." Julian felt that students at his school did not have the knowledge of Black history that he thought they should. He wrote that students would realize the sacrifices that their ancestors made if they had classes in school that taught Black history. In addition, Julian created images of the library

because he thought that the library represented a place for students to learn about their culture since the school did not currently have any Black history course offerings. The image of young people in astronaut suits represented positive changes in education over time.

My last example comes from John. During my final interview with John, part of our conversation included how he thought of school and how he thought of Snap, Chat, and Write. I asked him to tell me about his experiences reading in school compared to his experiences reading during the project. In his response, he discussed the reading level of the texts in the program, Snap, Chat, and Write curriculum content, and learning historical accounts that are more complete. He said,

> Snap, Chat, and Write is kind of more advanced than reading in school because like, you have bigger words. And we talked about protesting and stuff like that…For Snap, Chat, and Write, it gets more in detail about the history, like what's been happening. (John, final interview, January 2022)

John's overall perception of the program was that it was more advanced than what he experienced in school and that he learned a more detailed history. When he said that Snap, Chat, and Write was more advanced, he discussed the vocabulary and topics discussed, and that he was learning more information about historical Black events. He felt that there was a difference between school history and real or detailed history that he was learning while at Snap, Chat, and Write.

For the participants, Blackness was important. Students created images and discussed the importance of Blackness in many ways including, how much their families valued their children knowing Black history (Ella), the school staff (Marley and Quinn), the images they saw at school (Quinn), and in knowing the history for themselves (Julian and John). Youths' interest in Blackness history was a way for me, as a teacher, to use students' interest to cultivate students'

skills in reading and writing and their historical knowledge. Identity development is vital to youth in middle grades and high school (Brown & Knowles, 2007). Both PAR (Cammarota & Fine, 2008) and HRL (Muhammad, 2020) as frameworks for learning and teaching, respectively, emphasize identity and culture. In the next and final section, I discuss my final theme for responses to the project, responding to the impacts of COVID-19.

Responding with Critical Consciousness

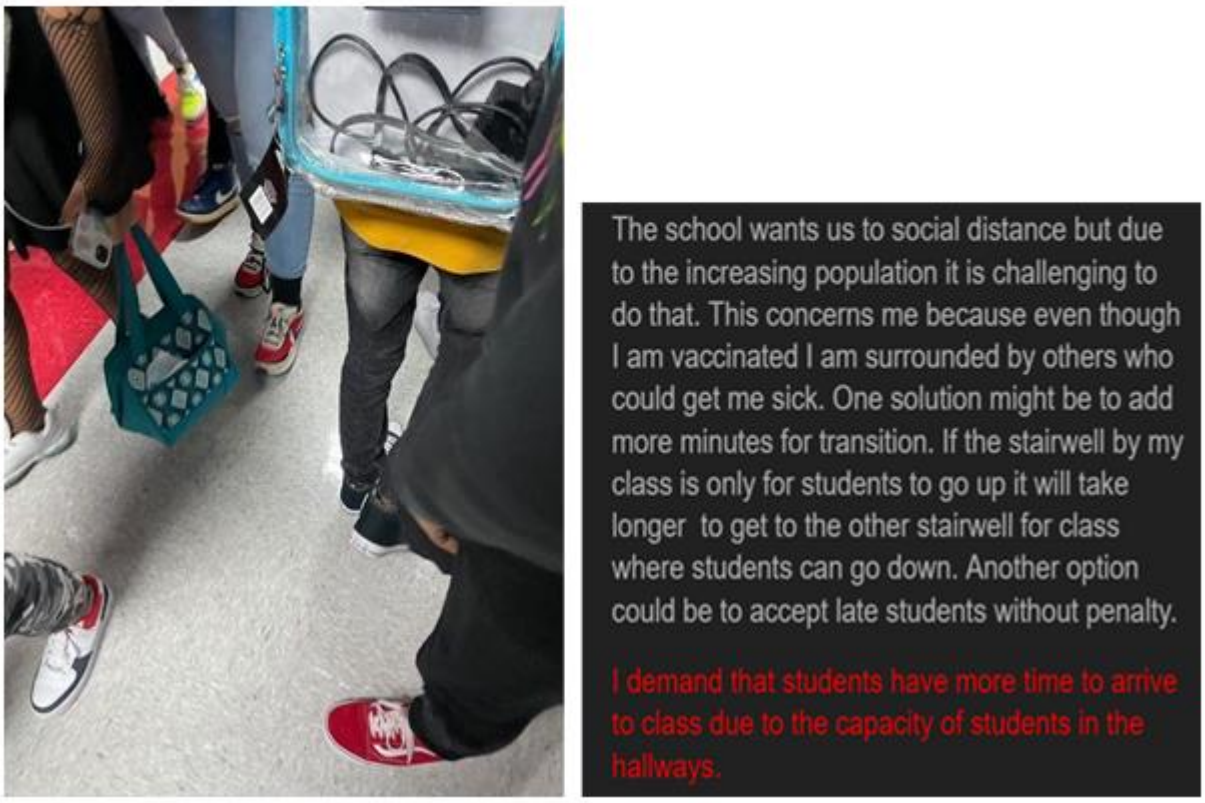
I asked students about their schooling experience. Students responded critically. They analyzed their social and political conditions and detailed what they thought needed to be changed. At the time of this study,-people across the globe were impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic. As a result, youth reflected on their realities by creating images of ways COVID-19 impacted their schooling experiences. Half (three) of the youth in the study discussed COVID in their final projects and interviews. This is connected to critical consciousness because the student researchers saw a social contradiction happening at their schools. Youth articulated ideas sharing what they knew their school needed to provide, but the school operated differently, different in a way that made them feel that COVID impacted their schooling experience negatively. Each student discussing COVID associated the virus with negative feelings. The youths felt that the virus made the transition to and from classes difficult, put them in proximity to other students who were too close, and COVID made the teachers physically and emotionally distant. Quinn, Marley, and Yara, students in middle and high school each made COVID a part of their final project by creating images and writing an accompanying narrative.

Quinn created an image of students standing in the hallway (see Figure 4.17 below). When she wrote the narrative analyzing her image, she wrote about her concerns about getting sick and the way that students transitioned through the hallways. The image Quinn created is a

picture of students in the hallway. To keep students' identities confidential, Quinn took a picture of their feet and wrote an image to go along with her image as pictured in Figure 4.17.

Figure 4.17

Traffic Jam



I revisited the ideas youth represented in their projects during the final interviews. I asked Quinn to tell me about her photos. When she talked about the photo she titled "Traffic Jam" she said,

> So for my photos...one is where students are like cramped up in the hallway where it's really hard to get where you need to go because there are so many book bags all in one picture or like I think it's book bags but I what I'm saying is there

> are just too many people in there and it looks like a club. (Quinn, final interview, December 2021)

In my research journal, I noted that Quinn mentioned that there are no consequences for being late to class, however, she concluded that she "just wanted to be on time for class for once." Through her image, narrative, and interview, Quinn conveyed her negative feelings toward COVID because of a new stairwell and traffic flow policies, overpopulation, risk of infection, and longer travel times—each exacerbated during hallway transitions. Student proximity was not just a concern for Quinn but the idea of being within six feet of people from school was also a concern for Marley.

Marley, who shared similar concerns, took a picture of students "bunched together" in the hallway and on a school bus. She provided two images, one is in Figure 4.18 below, and the third image to the far right, in Figure 4.2 above. In her narrative, she wrote, "Parents send their kids to school to be safe" and further noted, "Students aren't taking [COVID] seriously." Throughout our time together we had conversations about who had control over social distancing with COVID, she would tell me the students. Although I worked to convey a larger systemic issue, she conveyed that the students had control over the issue of social distancing while at school (see full narrative in Figure 4.18 below). Part of her final project narrative on social distance read,

> Even though students don't have the choice to go virtual, I say stay home if you're not going to abide by the rules because that's putting other people in danger and some families can't take the risk to get COVID. People want to be safe and COVID free so please social distance and wear your mask.

When we sat down for our final interview, she stated, "The pictures with the kids bunched together are telling [parents] that your students or their kids aren't safe, that they could catch

COVID, and that's what the county or the state is trying to prevent." Her primary concern was students being close leading to the spread of the virus. Marley felt that all students deserved six feet of space for safety.

Figure 4.18

Social Distance Image and Narrative

Parents send their kids to school to be **safe** but in this **pandemic COVID-19** that's not their intentions. **COVID** is a very serious virus, but students aren't taking it seriously. In the pictures it shows students bunched together, even though we have mask on **COVID** can still spread. Even though students don't have the choice to go virtual I say stay home if you're not going to abide by the rules because that's putting other people in danger and some families can't take the risk to get covid. People want to be safe and COVID free so please social distance and wear your mask.

In contrast to Quinn and Marley, Yara's negative feelings towards COVID did not pertain to the spreading of the virus. Yara noticed that teachers did not want to get close to students for social or academic reasons. Without proximity, she did not feel comfortable asking questions and she was also uncomfortable walking to the teacher's desk because students all sat too close in the classroom. She referred to her teachers from years prior as "another family" but now because of COVID and the need for social distancing, she did not feel the same. Yara created the image 4.19 and wrote the accompanying narrative.

Figure 4.19

Life During COVID

> I chose this picture because before COVID we had a lot of students in our classroom, and we had a lot of things going on we actually had learning going on. We got the learning we need the students, and the teachers would help us teach more and give us the support we need. I only say this because the teachers are our support system, they're like another family so COVID really messed up this school year. (Yara, final program interview, December 2021)

Yara expressed that the virus led to a lack of support from teachers. She explained, "We had a lot of students in our classroom. We had a lot of things going on. We actually had learning going on." She went on by explaining that before COVID teachers helped and

taught students. She felt that teachers supported students before the pandemic, however, "COVID messed things up" because students no longer had the support of teachers academically or socially.

Conclusion

My analysis included seven themes in response to two research questions including student researchers' literacy perceptions (literacy as expansion of knowledge and skills, literacy as self-expression, and literacy as enjoyable moments or joy) and how they responded to the project (responding with a growth in confidence, responding with agency and leadership, and responding with the need to center Blackness and responding with the impacts of COVID). The youth researchers participating in this study worked individually on their projects and collaborated along the way to get feedback on their images and their narratives. They engaged in several discussions about the various texts we read to come to a shared understanding of Black students' experiences in education and how the experiences of those Black youth shaped their activism.

My data suggests that when students are learning they appreciate gaining new knowledge, autonomy, and having a good time while learning. The results, in part, explain why youth in the study were willing to continue engaging in the work for three Cycles taking place over six months. My data also suggests creating a space that centered on youth and the students seeing themselves reflected in the curriculum was integral to their learning and development as scholars and change agents in their communities. Ultimately, critical literacy practices provide learners with a practical way to engage with the world while simultaneously changing it.

One of the most obvious consequences of a program designed to promote critical consciousness is that students will deepen their abilities to critically analyze their worlds and

experiences in the world. The work done, in terms of their projects, by the students was essential to explaining their becoming more critically conscious. Students critically analyzed issues of power when discussing policing and teacher practices. They critically analyzed issues of oppression when they analyzed recess, curriculum practices, and gender. It is essential to name and analyze power and oppression as in PAR. Naming where power and oppression are taking place begins the process of acting for change.

Collectively the themes in this study echo the work of adolescent literacy scholars who lift the need for identity and criticality in learning (Brown & Knowles, 2000). Current legislation across the US banning books and critical race theory further necessitates the need for spaces of freedom and truth. As I discussed in this chapter, youth were not always successful in demonstrating their critical consciousness and their literacy skills had to be developed, however, data suggests these skills take time, practice, and the willingness to continuously engage as a thought partner and collaborative learning or meaning-making. The themes from this study contribute to the ongoing development of understanding of literacy and activism.

CHAPTER 5

Conclusion

In this chapter, I conclude the study. First, I return to my purpose. Next, I revisit my research questions and synthesize the response to each research question based on the findings I presented in chapter four. Thereafter, I conclude the chapter with implications for research, theory, policy, and practice.

Reflecting on the Purpose and Significance of the Study

The purpose of this study was to conduct a participatory action research project with Black youth to examine how they perceived literacy and responded to the project when taking part in acts of literacy to transform their communities. In chapter one, I discussed the need to expand the ways that literacy is conceptualized and taught. In chapter two, I discussed the ways literacy has been conceptualized, examples of Black people's uses of literacy practices for activism, and ways that PAR has contributed to the field of literacy. To complete this study, I created and implemented a curriculum using the historically responsive literacy (HRL) framework (Muhammad 2020), alongside photovoice (Wang and Burris', 1997) for developing identity, critical consciousness, and promoting action.

As presented in my findings, the youth perceived literacy as: 1) knowledge expansion and skills 2) self-expression, and 3) enjoyable moments. I also found how doing participatory action research with youth 1) helped participating students respond by growing more confident 2) demonstrated agency and leadership, 3) Centering Blackness in student learning, and 4) fostered critical consciousnesses. This study contributes to the growing body of literature on PAR with Black youth and research promoting a curriculum that centers their lives and identities.

Findings Related to Literature

To understand students' perceptions of literacy I considered how students demonstrated their beliefs, ideas, understandings, and interpretations of literacy. Students' first perception, of literacy as expansion of knowledge and skills, demonstrated that youth valued learning new concepts and new methods of creating. In this study and other studies, adolescents noted that gaining new skills and knowledge was valuable to their literacy learning (Brown & Begoray, 2017; Fairbanks, 2000; Turner et. al, 2013). For example, middle school students conducted research inquiries that they found meaningful in Fairbank's (2000) study. When they reflected on their experience, students noted that they could have continued their investigation because there was so much information that could be found that was not included in their schoolbooks. In other words, students were beginning to gain new knowledge and they wanted to continue to learn new things. For example, Yara noted that there was a difference between the history she learned in schoolbooks versus the history lessons she learned during the program. Cannella (2008) stated PAR can be engaged as a pedagogy of expansion—expanded social agency, civic activism, and intellectual and academic identities. This expansion seeks to compensate for the constricting environment that young people increasingly experience in their schools. Both this study and Cannella's study support that students appreciate learning new information and gaining more skills because they have a desire to know more.

Students made a connection between what they learned from working on the project to self-expression because they chose their research topics in this study. Turner and colleagues (2013) noted that "when students' lived experiences become the texts for discussion and analysis, students become more engaged and develop literacy skills that connect to other disciplines" (p. 352). During this study, students were researchers of their own schooling experiences. Snap, Chat, and Write, helped students connect the ideas that they were learning in

the texts we read to their lived experiences in school. Similarly, Brown and Begoray (2017) and Fairbanks (2000) also demonstrated that research related to students' lives and interests helped to sustain their attentiveness to learning. Both studies and mine emphasized the importance of youth choosing their topics of study for them to have a greater connection to their learning process. During this dissertation study, I provided an open-ended question for youth to explore. They chose individual project foci, and, in the end, they collectively agreed and wrote statements outlining what they deserved based on their work. Youth expressed themselves by choosing their topics and by writing collectively. Student participants in Brown and Begoray's study (2017) chose their area of research and requested to share what they learned via mainstream media. While youth expressed themselves in different ways, across studies, adolescents expressed that they valued autonomy and self-expression (Fairbanks, 2000; Zoss, Smagorinsky & O'Donnell-Allen, 2007). In the case of this work, students continued their projects over several months and sustained their interest based on their choices for research.

Last, students expressed the need for enjoyable moments by discussing and showing joy in learning spaces. Dunn and Love (2020) discuss the need for joy and liberation in English language arts classes and other scholars continue to echo the need for joy when teaching Black students to resist, love, and survive (Muhammad, 2023). The students' perception of literacy as joy aligned with Muhammad's (2023) updated conceptualization of her historically responsive framework where she has added joy to her previous four pursuits of identity, criticality, skills, and intellect. This dissertation study was done before Muhammad's (2023) text, but it is no coincidence that she discusses *Unearthing Joy* and the students in this study expressed an appreciation for enjoyable moments in their learning. I used Muhammad's (2020) HRL framework. Her work was written as a guide for literacy practice across spaces developed from

the practices of Black peoples' literacies across time. This dissertation study continued the work that has been done by other Black literacy collaboratives historically. In this study, joy was evidenced in students' relationships with one another, during our school visits, throughout our curriculum engagement, and in their growth of confidence. A growth in confidence was one of the ways students responded to the program.

In response to research question two, I first discussed that youth gained more confidence. This finding is like other YPAR studies that report greater confidence in youth because of participating in YPAR projects (Warren and Marciano, 2018; Zaal and Terry, 2013). Student researchers working on PAR projects developed thoughts and ideas for change and they believed that they could use their voices to create positive changes to eliminate inequities (Warren and Marciano, 2018). Students' belief in themselves and the use of their voices exemplify confidence. They also have opportunities to practice literacy with an adult facilitator and their peers. Practicing these skills with one another provided students in this study opportunities to make mistakes and get feedback in an environment that was developed for collaborative work. We supported one another as students learned to be more critical of their social worlds and when engaging in acts of literacy.

I also noted that the youth demonstrated agency and leadership. To be clear, choosing to participate in a project that was not required, when most students in the summer enrichment program chose not to join, was students' first example of leadership. Students also showed agency and leadership when they deviated from my plan to write demand statements and decided to write a list of statements detailing what they deserved instead. My original plan was for students to use the ideas they identified for areas of change and write a demand that also

demonstrated the urgency of students' concerns. However, students chose not to use the word demand. They chose the word deserve.

Next student researchers responded by demonstrating the need to center Blackness. According to deJong (2011), diversity is growing in the United States, but the curriculum is not changing to accommodate the growing cultural identities. Students' responses of wanting more specials (or extracurricular courses) with a focus on Black history and wanting to learn more from the Black perspective (or Black teachers) demonstrated that the need to center Blackness was important in their learning environments. These findings align with Paris' (2012) culturally sustaining practices where students benefit from an ideological approach to literacy learning, emphasizing culture. This finding is one where each student expressed how learning about Black history concepts was important. In their own words, Black history was important for schools to make a part of the curriculum, for students' cultural knowledge, and so that Black youth could be reminded of the work of our ancestors.

The last way students responded was by demonstrating they had developed critical consciousness. I designed this study with a specific focus on literacy to promote critical consciousness. So, it was no surprise that I found several indications of critical consciousness when completing the study analysis. As a reminder, I define critical consciousness as the ability to notice and understand social and political contradictions and take action to change them. Each student demonstrated evidence of critical consciousness in either their project or during the final program interview. Examples include Ella's "Your Next Level" narrative, Quinn's Mental Health Narrative, and Julian's Photo 2 narrative. Each student's example indicated a social or political contradiction. Each student also worked to create projects to present to their schools proposing change. Their photos and narratives illustrate students' ability to understand social and

political contradictions and a desire to change their school communities although students did not change their communities. Both individually and in groups, students created presentations that went beyond noticing social and political contradictions because they took action to change their communities by writing statements to their respective schools detailing what they deserved. Although transformation mostly took place at the individual level with youth becoming more engaged or interested in working towards change in their communities, they believed they possessed the words and abilities to change the school communities. As such, they did show evidence of critical consciousness.

Their response of critical consciousness using literacy practices such as reading, researching, and writing to influence community change also fostered *activist literacies*. Activist literacies are both a socio-political disposition and a set of practices (Crisco, 2009); they also provide a method of critiquing the ways that power, language, and institutions/society are connected after one is prompted to speak or write toward justice (or to process). Teaching PAR using HRL cultivated activist literacies with students. Students Deserve Statements and presentations to their communities served as evidence for enacting activist literacies.

Students were also critical of the impact of COVID-19 on their schooling experiences. The global pandemic had classroom- and school-level impacts. While many articles talk about learning loss during the pandemic (Donnelly & Patrinos, 2021), my co-researcher, Yara, provided insight into the impact of no longer sharing physical space on student learning. There was something dynamic happening at this same time; the youth were building knowledge during the pandemic by engaging in this project. This study is only one instance in a particular out-of-school learning space and is not generalizable to all Black youth or out-of-school learning spaces. Still, these findings provide educators and policymakers insight into an opportunity to

shape learning environments in ways that the students find affirming, which in this case contributed to students' development in literacy.

Implications

This study has implications for a growing body of research, theory, and practice for literacy teachers in school settings and out-of-school programs. Educators wishing to engage students in literacy practices for change might consider the four practices I outline below for teaching and learning. This study also has implications for policymakers, who could use student photo projects and statements of what they deserve to create programs that address the needs of Black youth. For out-of-school programs, this work demonstrates that out-of-school spaces can be invaluable in providing opportunities for students to experience intellectual freedom and creativity.

Research and Theory

Morrell (2006) synthesized youth participatory action research studies and demonstrated PARs' potential to impact youths' academic growth. His work also noted that youth of Color consistently trail their White peers on the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) in the United States. Critical participatory action research projects such as YPAR, are important because they showcase the brilliance of marginalized youth and tell a different story than the scores of standardized assessments. Therefore, further research is needed with youth of Color engaging in acts of literacy through participatory action research.

Additionally, to address the difference in learning outcomes, Morrell (2006) called for researchers to engage in work that informs literacy curriculum and pedagogy. This participatory action research study responds to Morrell's challenge and can be used to inform the way that teachers plan and implement literacy practice opportunities. Future research centering on the use

of PAR to cultivate critical literacy is vital because these studies have the potential to develop approaches for countering narrow and oppressive curricula. Oppressive curricula such as Eurocentric ideas erase the stories of people with rich cultural histories (King & Swartz, 2015). I acknowledge that cultivating spaces for students to develop their identity and critical consciousnesses is challenging, however, my study demonstrated that critical literacy practices benefit Black youth socially and academically.

Participatory action research with youth is influenced by critical pedagogy and sociohistorical perspectives, and it positions youth as knowledge producers who also possess rich cultural knowledge (Fine, 2016). Freire's ideas on critical consciousness are often cited as landmark texts from which PAR was developed. As a result, Freire's ideas laid the foundation for my practice of promoting critical consciousness. I created space for youth to develop artistic expression, reading, writing, speaking, and listening skills, and to deepen their knowledge of history. Friere's (1996) ideas of praxis as I worked to develop critical consciousness, created opportunities for youth and me to be in conversation and for me to authentically situate students' identities within state standards for learning. Mirra and colleagues (2016) note that authentic learning opportunities make learning more meaningful and academically challenging, and student learning was meaningful and academically challenging during this study.

It is important to note that critical consciousness draws from Marxism, which means Freire's conceptualization of critical consciousness focuses on class. For example, Freire (1996) speaks of his students, the oppressed, as peasants, a class term. Also, Freire notes that liberation comes through humanization, which results from the development of critical consciousness. Freire's ideas on consciousness might be troubling from an Afrocentric perspective, which would address race instead of class. I worked to use Black and African concepts but missed an

opportunity to incorporate consciousness from a Black perspective. Key differences between Freire (1996) and Asante (1988) include those on race and humanity.

Asante (1988), notes that liberation is a mindset and people are already fully human (Donatto, 2019), which differs from Freire who sees humanization resulting from the development of critical consciousness. From an Afrocentric perspective, race, class, or consciousness do not determine a person's humanity. In this case, an Afrocentric concept such as victorious consciousness, would have addressed race. *Victorious consciousness* is the awareness that all attitudes and behaviors are achievable. Victory means that you have won, not that you expect to win. Being Afrocentric is victorious. Therefore, when Afrocentrists challenge structures in society they believe that their actions will lead to a more just society.

While critical consciousness provides a framework for thinking about and acting on power and oppression, a keener focus on race might have proved useful for teaching Black youth. My research study addressed Afrocentric perspectives such as centering the stories of Black people but missed the opportunity to foster victorious consciousness. I offer that students' decision to write Deserve Statements might have been because they had not yet developed a victorious consciousness. Students' reservations about making demands and instead stating what they deserved resulted from a power dynamic between the students and the administration. Students did not want to demand things from people they knew, respected, and believed also respected them. Students knew that school leaders had power but to what extent they understood that power is unknown. I make this conclusion because they had not become critical of the structures shaping their schooling experiences within and beyond those people that they saw in their school buildings each day. It is possible that thinking victoriously may not have prompted students to change their wording from demand to deserve. Therefore, further research is needed

to conceptualize youth understandings through a lens of victorious consciousness. Researchers might explore how students respond when fostering victorious consciousness and critical consciousness with Black youth in a future study.

Practice

Furthermore, this study points to four practices that teachers can implement to promote students' critical consciousness, including starting with our story, listening to youth, building autonomy in literacy projects for young people, and providing students with opportunities to study and research their communities. The practices I present were central to the work that students and I completed and are examples of expanded notions of literacy using a Black orientation to promote freedom and dismantle oppression.

These four practices were particularly important for the youth researchers in this study, as each of them expressed the need for Black-centered learning. It is also important to note that the youth in this study lived in a southeastern region of the United States in a state with a robust history for African-American civil rights, particularly driven by Black youth activism. The southern context of Black activism oriented me toward the need to study the sociohistorical context influencing the work of our youth ancestors in schools. The history of our youth ancestors along with PAR methodology reflected the importance of youth voice as well as provided me with a guide to research designed to respond to the needs of our communities. I will detail the four practices next.

First, Asante (1988) and Akua (2012) both note the importance of orienting Black people to their history. If the history that students learn does not predate 1619, when the first ship of enslaved Africans was brought to the United States, it is incomplete. Our story, Black history, begins on the African continent. As a result, the first activity during this project was for students

to do a gallery walk detailing the educational experiences of African people. We began with evidence of education in Africa. I showed students images of tools and writing, as well as reading passages from *The Miseducation of the Negro* (Woodson, 1990) detailing the knowledge and skills African people possessed before the 1600s, on the African continent through the present day. From an Afrocentric perspective, we are central to our stories. Our story must come first so that we are not disoriented and so that we have knowledge of our ancestors before slavery. The educational system in the US is not designed to promote Afrocentric identity and consciousness. The United States' curriculum is Eurocentric. The youth in this study had a greater understanding of the history of their ancestors and their brilliance. It helped youth to better understand the social, cultural, and historical connections from the past to today.

Next, youth are experts in their lived experiences (Cammarota and Fine, 2008, Morrell, 2008, Vasquez, et al, 2019). Research in one's community makes learning meaningful to learners (McIntyre, 2000; Tuck et. al, 2008). Youth see their communities from different perspectives and begin to think about what things are beneficial in their communities, and what things need to change. Also, understanding one's community provides entry to being an active community member. While researching their communities, students also developed academic skills. They became better readers, writers, listeners, speakers, and creatives. Promoting students' identity through their communities and schools has been a common approach to engaging students in learning literacy skills and practices while also deepening their historical and political knowledge and promoting critical consciousness (Kirshner, 2015; Livingstone et. al, 2014; Strack et. al, 2004). In this study, the youth's time as researchers was a six-month study of their school and other schools within their community. Their experiences helped them to compare and draw

conclusions across their range of experiences, which ultimately culminated in a list of statements speaking to the needs they identified for Black youth attending their schools.

Youth and I took part in a for half of a year where youth were part of the decision-making process. Youths' guidance influenced the length of this study and what they learned. We engaged in three cycles of research because the youth needed more time and different opportunities to learn before they could answer their research question. I listened to the youth when we spoke about our project goals and needs. When youth knew I was listening, they demonstrated autonomy. Listening to youth helped me gain a keener awareness of what students needed to learn. Youth using their voices also provided direction to the project. We had a shared responsibility in this work. School communities may potentially benefit by valuing the voices of youth researchers in their schools. Other benefits are that school communities might gain a better understanding of what would help students to have positive experiences at school for student well-being and success. For example, four out of the six student researchers in the study referenced COVID as a barrier to learning. Within a school community, that percentage (66%) of a student body having the same feeling would be worth addressing. Youth are experiencing the world in ways that are different from adults. Their voices provide nuance and clarity to complex issues surrounding their lives.

Finally, the youth in this study benefitted from taking part in research within their community. They gained greater Black history knowledge, learned how other schools within their district operate, and toured a private school in the same county. Students made comments on schooling differences. They stated that they would not have known these differences without having the opportunity to take part in knowledge-building within their communities. Opportunities to study and grapple with one's community from a critical perspective empower

students toward civic agency (Garcia et. al, 2015; Ginwright, 2007). With that knowledge, I approached this work with the belief that I needed to educate youth for liberation. Liberation begins with knowledge of self and the place from which we come. Our work started in our own close and familiar community.

Out-of-School Programs

From students' responses to the program, it is apparent that students reflected each competency of Muhammad's (2020) and Muhammad's (2023) historically responsive literacy frameworks. These results demonstrate that this out-of-school space provided affirmation, joy, and freedom in literacy learning. Therefore, programs educating Black youth in settings outside of school would benefit from providing opportunities for youth to work on participatory action research projects. Participatory action research projects often present constraints in school settings (Burke, Greene, & Mckenna, 2017; Sanchez, 2009; Zaal & Terry, 2013). While Level Up is a federally funded program that still must operate within the parameters of the state, out-of-school sites offer fewer constraints with time and curriculum than school sites. In this study, time allowed me to work alongside the students and value their contributions to the research. The students requested more time twice because they needed to answer their research question – which took six months. The collaborative and critical work demonstrated that promoting literacy skills through meaningful applications to the world has the potential to positively influence youth and communities involved in PAR studies with youth. Spaces where Black youth can dream and act toward a more equitable society are necessary for individuals, institutions, and policy to shift while also fostering learning and joy (Dunn and Love, 2020). At a time when curriculum policy and state standards continue to create learning barriers, it is important to understand learning from the perspectives of students. I was able to learn with the students at Level Up. Level Up

offered an opportunity to integrate Black culture and they encouraged it through the work of the staff and the texts they chose to purchase for youth attending their program. For these reasons, I was able to cultivate a learning environment different than what youth had commonly experienced. Level Up is one of over 100,000 after-school programs so it is important to note that values are different from one program to another. Still, spaces such as Level Up also help to fill the participation gap (Jocson & Rosa, 2015). A participation gap is "unequal access to opportunities, experiences, skills, and knowledge that will prepare youth for full participation in the world of tomorrow". It is also a counter to the scripted curriculum, standards, testing, and accountability movement (p. 372). The work represented in this dissertation demonstrates the necessity of an academic space that values the lives of Black youth – spaces such as those that we created nurturing Black youths' identity and critical consciousnesses. The value of identity and critical consciousness in literacy spaces extends beyond the classroom. Without access to critical literacy opportunities Black youth lose. They lose their identity, freedom, potential connections, and influences in their communities and nation. This dissertation is my response to the current social and political society. I want youth to understand who they are and the needs of their communities. Just as the work of my family, my students and I responded to the call of the work that needed to be done for our community.

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Appendices

Appendix A: *Research Timeline*

Research Activities	**2021**			**2022**		**2023**	
	May	June	June - December	January	February-December	January - September	October
Submit IRB Proposal	X						
Confirm Participants		X					
Pre-Interview		X					
Post Interviews				X			
Data Collection			X				
Data Analysis			X	X	X	X	
Data Dissemination							X

Appendix B: *Recruitment Flier*

SNAP, CHAT, AND WRITE

Snap, Chat, and Write is a course that is a part of a weekly literacy institute for youth in middle school enrolled at Future Foundation. The focus of this year is "Black youth and schools". In the institute, youth will make meaning of their lives as young people and understand what it means to take an active role in creating community change. As a group, they will read texts and take part in a series of discussions and activities that will facilitate their thinking about themselves and their school communities. The goal for our participants is for them to understand what it means to read and write about social change as well as create awareness about critical issues affecting their lives. Youth participating in the course will read rich Black literature to think about their own identities. The instructor is Glenda Chisholm, a doctoral student at Georgia State University. Glenda has extensive experience working with youth in elementary and middle school and college in addition to studying literacy on an advanced level. This is a free program.

Location: Woodland Middle School and Online via Zoom

Beginning date: June 7, 2021

Youth interested must self-identify as Black or African American, be a middle school student and be enrolled at Future Foundation. Questions may be sent to gmason3@gsu.edu. Please come to Future Foundation's summer orientation for further details about the program.

Appendix C: *Cycle 0 Book Club Books for Level Up Book Club*

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Appendix D: *Initial Interview Research Protocol*

Hi, my name is _____. Thank you again for agreeing to be interviewed as we prepare to start the youth participatory action research program. I will ask you some questions. If you don't understand the question, please let me know and I will say it differently. You don't have to answer any question you do not want to. I hope this interview feels more like a conversation and please give me your honest and open responses. As you are talking, I may jot down notes and ask follow-up questions. Do you have any questions before we begin?

First please state your first and last name and your age.

Literacy

1. How would you describe yourself to someone who didn't know you?
2. Why did you decide to participate in the action research group?
3. What is literacy?
4. Would you characterize literacy as important? Why or Why not?
5. What topics do you like you read or write about?
6. Have you ever read or written about community issues? If so, talk about your readings or writings.
7. What do expect to gain from the group?
8. Talk about your reading and writing experiences in school.
9. If you could make some changes to the way literacy is taught to you in school, what would you change?

Youth Participatory Action Research

10. What do you know about action research? Photovoice?
11. What do you know about Black student protests?
12. What do you think it means to be an activist?
13. In what ways (if any) have you noticed students being active in changing things in their communities (define communities locally or broadly if needed)?
14. If there was something that you could change or make better in your school community what would it be? Why?
15. How have you talked about protest movements in your classrooms in the past?
16. Describe your teacher's behavior when you have discussed issues involving people of Color in your classroom.
17. Is there anything else you want to share as you prepare to participate in the photovoice research group?

Appendix E: *Final Interview Research Protocol*

Hi, my name is _____. Thank you again for agreeing to be interviewed as we prepare to start the youth participatory action research program. I will ask you some questions. If you don't understand the question, please let me know and I will say it differently. You don't have to answer any question you do not want to. I hope this interview feels more like a conversation and please give me your honest and open responses. As you are talking, I may jot down notes and ask follow-up questions. Do you have any questions before we begin?

First please state your first and last name and your age.

Literacy

1. Describe yourself as if you were describing yourself to someone who didn't know you.
2. Why did you decide to participate in the action research group?
3. What is literacy?
4. Would you characterize literacy as important? Why or why not?
5. What topics do you like you read or write about?
6. Is there anything you were expecting to gain from the group but did not? Explain.
7. Is there anything you would like to share that you did gain from this group?
8. Talk about your writing experiences in school compared to your writing experiences here.
9. If you could make some changes to the way literacy is taught to you in school, what would you change?

Photovoice

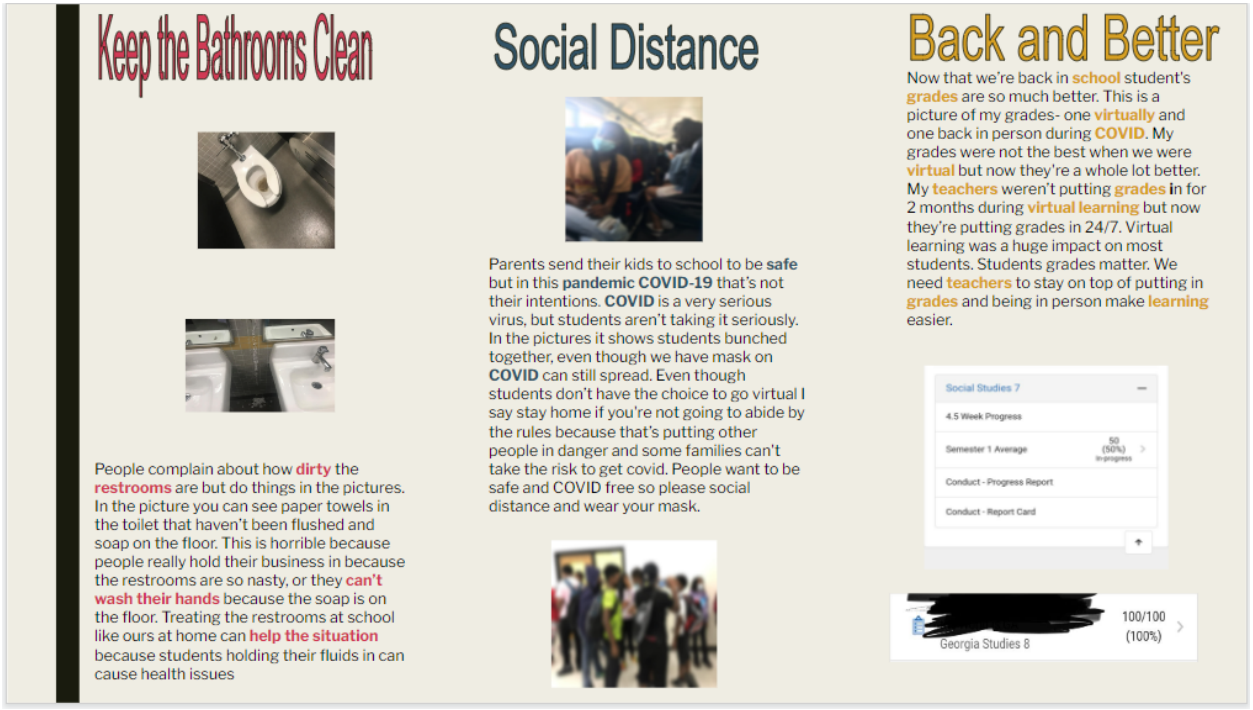
10. What do you know about action research? Photovoice?
11. What do you know about Black student protests?
12. What do you think it means to be an activist?
13. In what ways (if any) have you noticed students being active in changing things in their communities (define communities locally or broadly if needed)?
14. Tell me about the project you did that demonstrated something important to you to change in your community.
15. How have you talked about protest movements in your classrooms in the past?
16. Describe your teacher's behavior when you have discussed issues involving people of Color in your classroom.
17. Is there anything else you want to share as you conclude your photovoice research group?

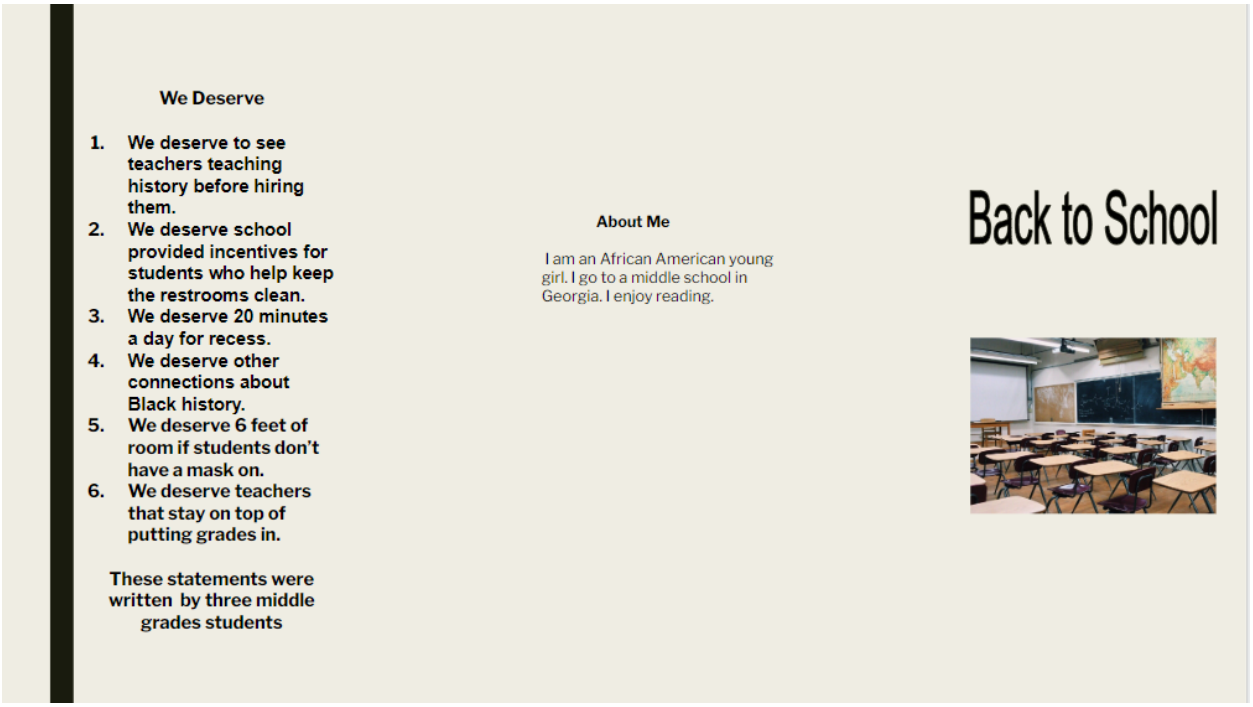
Appendix F: *SHOWED chart*

What do we SEE?
What do we see in the photo?
What is really HAPPENING?
What is actually happening in the photo?
How does this relate to OUR lives?
Does this situation relate to your life? How?
WHY does this concern us?
Is this situation good or bad? Does this impact your life?
Why does this concern EXIST?
Where did this situation come from?
What can we DO to improve the situation?
How can we (or I) improve this situation?

Appendix G: *Student Projects*

Marley's Final Brochure Project





Quinn's Final Presentation Slides

Traffic Jam

The school wants us to social distance but due to the increasing population it is challenging to do that. This concerns me because even though I am vaccinated I am surrounded by others who could get me sick. One solution might be to add more minutes for transition. If the stairwell by my class is only for students to go up it will take longer to get to the other stairwell for class where students can go down. Another option could be to accept late students without penalty.

I demand that students have more time to arrive to class due to the capacity of students in the hallways.

Help People Cope

This is picture of marijauna found on the floor of my school. This concerns me because it can affect people's health in a bad way. It may lead to lung cancer and other health issues. Also, in my community some students are behind in school because they may come to school after using it. This might cause them to be behind on their school work or need to go to summer school. I think there needs to be more awareness about the safe center but I did not know that there was a section in the school for people who were going through mental problems. The safe could help people cope instead of using marijauna.

I demand for that safe center be a safe space for students abusing drugs, abuse or mental issues.

I demand that teachers get sensitivity training

amayab2004@gmail.com

Julian's Final Presentation Slides

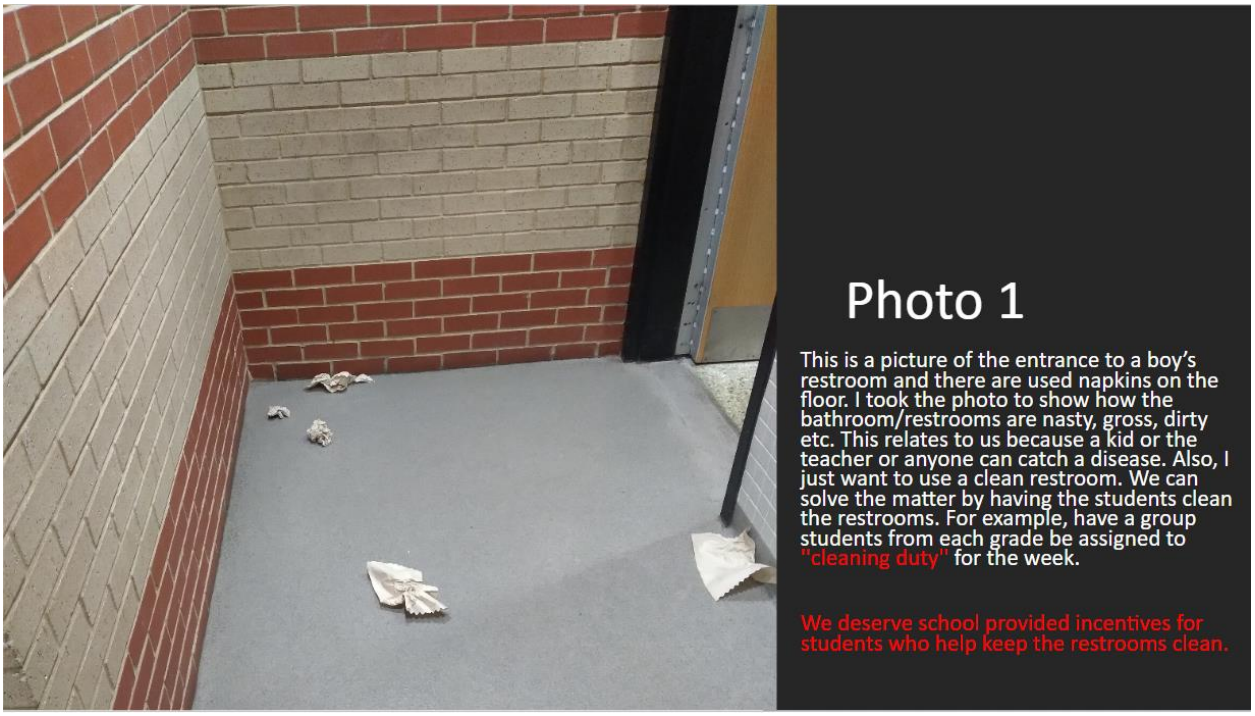


Photo 2

We deserve 20 minutes a day for recess.

I took a photo the cafeteria is closed gates and a photo of the school's outside grounds. The meaning to this photo is that school kind of feels like a prison but not really. It feels this way because the fact that once you enter middle and high school you can't go outside anymore. It's not a day I don't think of swings and slides. It's been 3 years since I been outside. "I was being sarcastic the last sentence" The 2nd reason is how most of the kids swear or use cuss words at school and sometimes fight because of arguments over small things. The problem has been reduced because teachers have been coming up some ideas. For example, we have Fun Friday once a month. They also let us outside to get some fresh air, exercise, and play a little where there's no swings or slides but grass, but it's still fun.

I took these photos to show the progress that Black people have made in education. Today students are not realizing the sacrifices their ancestors made.

We deserve other connections about Black history.

Photo 3

John's Flier


BLEACH
LETS MAKE OUR SCHOOL THE BEST SCHOOL IT CAN BE
THE FLAWLESS CLEANERS
All you have to do sign up and you will be able to clean
BENEFITS
YOU CAN EARN SOME FREE SNACKS
YOU CAN HELP MAKE THE SCHOOL MORE CLEAN AND FANCY

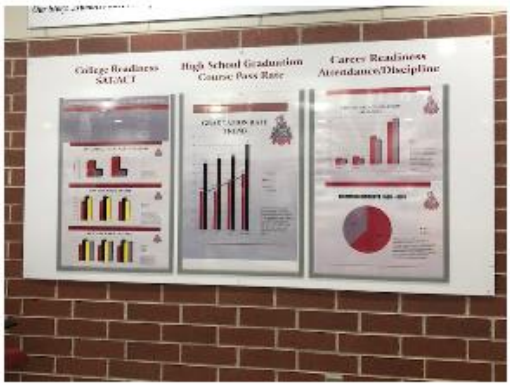
Ella's Final Narratives with Images

Across The Bridge

As a person who would took the college and career prep program, across the bridge for a year or two, I feel that the classes are very helpful because the teachers helped me get my high school credits faster and easier. I feel comfortable and welcomed there. Teachers greet me daily and care about my mental health. Students who are in this program would probably have a higher chance of getting into a good college because they have experiences in their career field. Not a lot of students know about the program. I did not find about it until the end of my second year and I started telling everyone about it.

We deserve for all students to have access to programs that will help them excel academically. It gives students a feel of college ahead of time.

Data Wall/ Data of SAT/ACT Graduates and Attendances



The data wall will help students and teachers to see what they may need to work on such as strengths, weaknesses, etc.
It will help parents understand how students at the school perform in different subjects. The data of those three charts is very important. It lets you know what the students were like throughout the school year each year. The data wall is important to me because it has the possibility to change a student or parents' perspective about the school. The walls also show how we have grown over my years of being a student here. That makes me proud.

We deserve administrators that continue to be transparent and honest about student achievement.

Future Foundation

Last and not least the after-school program "Future Foundation" is a genius program because they help the students who are in need, helps with scholarships, etc. I like that we can be ourselves. It helps if we need something like hygiene products or clothing. The staff (Ms. Clark) is not judgmental. Also, they help us be prepared for the future by applying to colleges and bringing people in to talk to us about their experiences and being a better person. This is very important because if it wasn't for them, I wouldn't know where I see myself years from now.

We deserve programs that support all of students' needs.

Yara's Final Narratives with Images

The Great Fantastic High School

I chose this picture because before "Covid", we had a lot of students in our classroom. We had a lot of things going on. We actually had learning going on. We got the learning we needed. The students and the teachers would help us teach more and give us the support we need. I only say this because the teachers are our support system they're like another family so covid really messed up this school year.

Lady Trojans

The sports at my high school is not the best but we do what we supposed to make it the best. Us students is what make the sports at the school what it is. The teachers push us to do the best and be the best we can be.

Level Up

I chose this picture because it has different schools on the wall, and I want to go to college and this gives me some ideas on what college I might want to go to after high school. I also chose this because Level Up is at the bottom. Even though it's my first year and summer at the program it has taught me a lot of new things and given me positive vibes and a different way of looking at life and they are like a second family.

Note. Yara did not provide a picture for her Level Up narrative.

Appendix H: *Student Assent Form*

Student Permission Form

Georgia State University

Informed Assent

Title: Black Youth Documenting Their Experiences in School

Principal Investigator: Michelle Zoss

Student Principal Investigator: Glenda Chisholm

Purpose

The purpose of the study is to look at the ways you think about your experiences in school. You are being asked to be in this study because you:

- Are a Black youth
- Are between the age of 11-17
- Speak English

Procedures

If you decide to take part, you will be asked to

- allow your photographs and writings that were made as part of the program to be used for research
- participate in audio-recorded group discussions
- participate in three audio-recorded interviews

The first interview will take place before we begin taking photographs. The second interview will take place at the end after you have taken photographs. The interviews will be held at Future Foundation in a private workspace. Each audio-recorded interview will last for about 40 minutes.

Risks

In this study, you will not have any more risks than you would in a normal day of life.

Benefits

This study is not designed to benefit you. By participating in this study, you may learn more about yourself as a photographer and writer.

Compensation

At the beginning of the study, you will receive the following gifts:

- Georgia State University logo gifts
- Button
- Digital Cameras
- Books

At the conclusion of the study, your child will receive financial compensation for participating in at least twelve out of fifteen sessions and one interview for this study in the summer and the fall. There will be two payments. Each payment will be in the form of a $100 gift card.

Voluntary Participation and Withdrawal

You do not have to be in this study, and your parent(s)/legal guardian(s) cannot make you be in it. If you decide to be in the study and change your mind, you have the right to drop out at any time. You may skip questions or stop participating at any time. No one will be mad or upset with you if you decide not to be in the study.

Assent

We will give you a copy of this assent form to keep.

If you are willing to volunteer for this research, please tell Glenda your decision via text message, on the phone, or in person.

_____

Printed Name of Participant

_____

Date

_____ _____

Principal Investigator or Researcher Obtaining Assent Date

Appendix I: *Parent Consent Form*

Parent Permission Form

Georgia State University

Title: Black Youth Documenting Their Experiences in School

Principal Investigator: Gholnecsar Muhammad

Student Principal Investigator: Glenda Chisholm

Introduction and Key Information

- Your child is invited to take part in a research study. It is up to you to decide if you would like your child to take part in the study.
- The purpose of this study is to look at the ways youth think about their experiences in school.
- Your child's role in the study will last 1 hour and 20 minutes.
- Your child's photographs and writings will be collected for research purposes. In addition, your child will participate in two audio-recorded interviews.
- Participating in this study will not expose your child to any more risks than they would experience in a normal day.
- This study is not designed to benefit your child although your child may learn more about themselves.
- Your child is not required to be in the study to participate in the course.

Purpose

The purpose of the study is to look at the ways youth think about their experiences in school. Your child is being asked to be in this study because they:

- Are a Black youth
- Are between the age of 11-17
- Speak English

Procedures

If your child decides to take part, they will be asked to

- allow their photographs and writings that were made as a part of the program to be studied
- participate in two audio-recorded interviews
- allow class discussions to be recorded

The first interview will take place before the group begins taking photographs. The second interview will take place at the end after your child has taken photographs. The interviews will be held at Future Foundation in a private workspace. Each audio-recorded interview will last for about 40 minutes.

Future Research

Researchers will remove information that may identify your child and may use their data for future research. If we do this, we will not ask for any additional parental permission for your child.

Risks

In this study, your child will not have any more risks than you would in a normal day of life. No injury is expected from this study, but if you believe your child has been harmed, contact the research team as soon as possible. Georgia State University and the research team have not set aside funds to compensate for any injury.

Benefits

By participating in this study, your child may learn more about themselves as a photographer and writer. This study may benefit broader society because it may have implications for teaching Black youth and inform curriculum development. However, there may be no direct benefit of participation.

Alternatives

Your child is not required to be in the study. They may still participate in the course.

Compensation

At the beginning of the study, your child will receive the following gifts:

- Georgia State University logo gifts
- Button

At the conclusion of the study, your child will receive financial compensation for participating in at least twelve out of fifteen sessions and one interview for this study. Payment will be in the form of a $100 gift card.

Voluntary Participation and Withdrawal

Your child does not have to be in this study. If you decide for your child to be in the study and change your mind, you have the right for your child to drop out at any time. Your child may skip questions or

stop participating at any time. You may refuse for your child to take part in the study or stop at any time. This will not cause your child to lose any benefits to which he/she is otherwise entitled.

Confidentiality

We will keep your child's records private to the extent allowed by law. The following people and organizations will have access to the information your child provides:

- Dr. G. Muhammad (PI)
- Glenda Chisholm (Student PI)
- GSU Institutional Review Board and Office for Human Research Protection (OHRP)

We will use a number rather than use your child's name on study records. Your child's information will be stored in a locked file in Glenda's work office. The information your child provides will be stored on a password- and firewall-protected computer. This computer is in her work office. When we present or publish the results of this study, we will not use your child's name. We will not use any other information that may identify your child. Any identifying information will be removed from these study records. Your child's audio will be destroyed one (1) year after the study.

Contact Information

Contact Dr. Gholnecsar Muhammad at 404-413-8424 or gmuhammad@gsu.edu

Contact Glenda Chisholm at 313-585-8160 or gmason3@gsu.edu

- If you have questions about the study or your child's part in it
- If you have questions, concerns, or complaints about the study

The IRB at Georgia State University reviews all research that involves human participants. You can contact the IRB if you would like to speak to someone who is not involved directly with the study. You can contact the IRB for questions, concerns, problems, information, input, or questions about your child's rights as a research participant. Contact the IRB at 404-413-3500 or irb@gsu.edu.

Parent permission form

We will give you a copy of this parent permission form to keep.

If you are willing to give permission for your child to volunteer for this research, please sign below.

_____

Printed Name of Child/Participant

_____

Printed Name of Parent

_____ _____

Signature of Parent Date

_____ _____

Principal Investigator or Researcher Obtaining Parent Permission Form Date