Before I began teaching high school English in South Los Angeles, I did not know the extent to which youth of color in urban communities were underserved and disenfranchised. After seven years, I have witnessed a crisis in urban youth culture. Too many young people continue to use violence as a means for solving their problems, internalize their resentment of familial and social conditions that are unjust, and uncritically consume and reproduce dispositions that value what they have and how they look (external), over what they think and how they feel (internal). The realities of these struggles for my students made sitting in professional development sessions difficult because there we were trained to emphasize “state-approved” standardized curriculums which foreground academic content and assessment tools that overlooked the material conditions and needs of our students. In an effort to transform my English teaching I sought to develop pedagogy that would be responsive to the confusion and anger I saw in my students. I did this by drawing from the very text that was most relevant to them, their lived experiences. Transformative education, in this case, meant increasing students’ level of academic engagement and achievement, and critically shifting students’ perceptions about themselves and the world around them.

When I was a student in the Los Angeles public schools, I experienced irrelevant classroom curriculum and poorly trained, impersonal teachers. These learning conditions were major contributors to my own sense of academic marginalization that ultimately resulted in my dropping out of high school. A full generation later, I was seeing the same substandard state of urban schooling and similar self-defeating responses from students. The resulting academic failure of many students has spawned increasing questions about whether there might be a “school to prison pipeline” facing many urban youth (Christle, Jovilette, & Nelson, 2005; Wald & Losen, 2003). Recognizing the consequences of unengaging curriculum and pedagogy from my own school experiences, and my fortune in having avoided the school to prison pipeline, I set out to become the type of teacher I wished I had when I was in high school.

By writing about my use of critical pedagogy, I hope to contribute to the growing body of work that challenges the deficit-thinking perspective that views the realities and struggles of urban youth as apart from, if not irrelevant to, a rigorous academic program (see Solórzano & Yosso, 2004). I adhere to the research that suggests teachers should draw from their students’ rich funds of prior knowledge to increase academic engagement (Moll, Amanti, Neff, & Gonzalez, 1992). Teaching at a predominantly Black (70%) and Latino (30%) high school with a statewide rank in the lowest percentile, I came into the 2004 to 2005 school year drawing from social theory to create a critical and culturally relevant English composition curriculum to mediate the frustrations youth were having in their communities.
Teaching Their Word and Their World

By identifying the needs of learners as relative to their social contexts, Freire and Macedo (1987) frame literacy as a correlating practice of “reading the word and the world.” They argue that young people first learn to decipher the universe around them before accessing and developing the language to describe it. To effectively develop the literacy capacity of our students, Freire and Macedo state, “I have always insisted that words used in organizing a literacy program come from what I call the ‘word universe’ of people who are learning, expressing their actual language, their anxieties, fears, demands, and dreams…” (p. 35). In other words, to effectively engage youth in the process of literacy development, teachers must scaffold student learning from the contexts from which their youth draw their notions of reality. Recognizing the agency of teachers to accomplish this task, Freire and Mecedo claim:

Educators have to invent and create methods in which they maximize the limited space for change that is available to them. They need to use their students’ cultural universe as points of departure, enabling students to recognize themselves as possessing a specific and important cultural identity…[this] requires respect and legitimation of students’ discourses… which are different but never inferior. (p. 127)

In essence, Freire and Macedo remind us that our literacy teaching practices must remain dynamic, culturally relevant, and responsive to the destabilizing social conditions that undermine a critical democracy. The role of a critical literacy teacher is to help students become socially conscious of how they construct their realities. Thus, the critical literacy teacher must facilitate a learning space that allows students to reknow what they think they already know.

Taking Freire and Macedo at their word, I found it necessary to develop in my students a set of active communication skills and literacy practices to help prepare them for transcending and transforming the struggles they experience in their everyday lives. Instead of overlooking the interrelated conditions that shaped my students’ worldviews, I developed curricular units that were inclusive of both school content and students’ lived experiences. The course reported on here was one semester in length and was divided into four curriculum units, following the format of the school district’s pacing plan: narrative, expository, research, and persuasive. For each unit, students adhered to the following three steps:

1. Choose a topic drawing from their lived experience to interrogate an immediate condition that shaped many of the lives of local youth.
2. Write an essay that analyzes that condition as it relates to them personally, but also as it relates to the interests of their community.
3. Prepare and deliver a speech based on their essay that shares the analysis with the class.

What follows are a series of excerpts taken from student presentations during these four units in a detracked 12th grade expository composition class. Interviews with students are used toward the end of the chapter to discuss the impact of the pedagogy on student identities. Both the student work and the interviews offer glimpses into a classroom community built with the explicit intent of using literacy to develop knowledge-of-self and critical social consciousness among urban youth. To select the student samples used here, I first sorted students into quartiles using grade point averages to rank their aca-
demic achievement prior to being in my class. Next, I randomly selected class work from two students that appeared in the bottom achievement quartile, students that normally would be categorized as “at risk” and “low achievers.”

Auto-Ethnography Unit: When Students Have a Chance for “Real Talk”

To culminate the narrative unit that began the semester, students shared critical auto-ethnographies, which reflected their development of narratives that examined significant personal experiences in relation to larger cultural phenomenon. Students were expected to write and perform a narrative essay that fulfilled the following three requirements: (1) examined the oppressive effects of society; (2) connected their experiences with other oppressed social groups; and (3) offered a strategy for social change (see Carey-Webb, 2001).

The opportunity for the young people in the class to examine, write, and speak about their lived experiences proved a powerful way to begin the semester. It was particularly engaging for those students whose voices had been marginalized in some of their other classrooms. As one example of this intensified engagement among students, we can look at what happened with Max.1 Max had never fared well in his English classes, but he had chosen to invest himself in this assignment and volunteered to be one of the first students to read his essay. When his turn came to read, he handed me his narrative essay, strolled to the front of the classroom, pulled his long white t-shirt upwards off of his black sweat pants, and rubbed his hands together. The following excerpt is the introduction to the auto-ethnography that he recited, entitled “Our Past, My Present, Our Future”:

To destroy one’s culture is to destroy one’s past, present, and future. And to destroy one’s past, present, and future is to destroy one’s soul. Now my culture is known as the African-American culture. It’s known as the Black. It’s known as the Negro. It’s known as the man who has to depend on another man for survival. The woman that must depend upon welfare. The teenage boy and girl that must depend upon athletics. The infant boy or girl that must depend upon child support. But, I don’t see us as a dependent race. I see us as the mended race. From the almost ended race to the fourteenth amendment race. Ironically, I learned to understand our purpose through being a victim of cultural genocide by committing the worst crime of all, cultural homicide.

Max’s introduction is thick with repetition and parallel structures, which he uses to frame the historical complexity, collective spirit, and immortality of African-American people. He draws from varied African experiences in the United States to point to the struggles and strengths of a devalued and self-determined people. Varying his descriptors from African-American, Black, and Negro subtly captures the multiple ways the group has been publicly defined and denied access to equitable citizenship. Max cites the different ways African peoples have survived their marginalization using both concrete and abstract understandings of their lived experiences. Equally as impressive is the fact that Max performed this introduction from memory, which coupled with his effective use of expressions, gestures, and tones, made for a powerful opening to his presentation. The quality of the writing and the effort Max put forth in preparing for his presentation are both indicative of the power of these personalized kinds of writing assignments to engage young people that are typically silenced in classrooms.

After his powerful introduction, Max went on to tell the class a story from his experiences with Black-on-Black violence in South Los Angeles. He used this assignment to
embrace the opportunity to accept responsibility for participating in self-defeating Black agency. Through this critical self-reflection, he examined how his actions affected his cultural community as a whole, emerging with a narrative of hope:

I felt as if I was empty now. It felt like something just happened where I betrayed my God, I betrayed my beliefs, I betrayed everything. I betrayed my mother. I let down my father. I let down myself. I let down my people.... Our time is now. A new era is in place.... We have finally been given the opportunity to be respected as human beings in this society, on this earth, in this day.... This opportunity shall and will be applied by us, all of us, to one day redeem our ancestors the true compensation that they deserve.

Over the next several days, 28 more students in Max’s class performed their auto-ethnographies. Afterwards, we had a class discussion to allow students to make connections across the various stories in order to construct a collective narrative. The similarities of the students’ experiences were eye opening for many of the students that had shared classrooms with these peers but had never had the opportunity to hear about their lives. This allowed students to see how their individual experiences were not isolated, but part of a phenomenon larger than themselves. The strength of the individual stories, combined with the developing collective narrative of the class, set the tone for even more powerful writing and public speaking as the school year progressed. In Max’s case, his future writing focused on gender-relationships in the school and local youth community, the urgency of Black activism, and the importance of African-American history in the context of a school where it was largely ignored.

Expository Unit: An Exposé on Gang Life

Another student, Marcus, shared an auto-ethnography that explored the connection between being deprived of one’s father, youth violence, and gang membership in the context of his neighborhood. Marcus’s work in the second unit is a good example of how students were able to build on the personalized elements of the auto-ethnography for their future writing. During the expository writing unit, Marcus conducted a micro-ethnography on his street gang, and wrote about their socially constructed notions of masculinity (see Morrell, 2004, for curricular ideas). His writing challenges the idea that gangs are altogether destructive and delinquent by humanizing gang members and exploring the complexity of the circumstances that lead them to join the gang.

When it came time for Marcus to read his expository piece, he stood with his chest out in the front of class, sporting a navy colored Seattle Mariners hat and a royal blue t-shirt. He delivered a presentation he called “Masculinity in the Hood” using Power Point slides. On one slide, titled “Organized Unity,” he discussed themes of community and culture in the gang, attempting to humanize the young men in his gang as strong and intelligent:

If organized correctly, to White Supremacists, a gang member’s mind-set is a threat. A gang’s physical power is still extremely organized, with determination, but is exercised on the wrong enemy. Their physical power has a lot of potential cuz’ they fight for what they want.... Gangs are also strong because of their unity.... We lose a homie like every other week, but it makes us stronger. That’s what brings us together.... We some soldiers. We some [young men] you don’t come across everyday.... It’s just some direction we need so that, instead, it’s justice that would bring us together....
Marcus also talked the class through the sometimes harmful contradictions of gang life, particularly the pride and the drive for power that inform many of the gang’s activities that can result in violence within community:

Power plays an important role in the hood. Since we don’t have [power] as a community, it is often misused in many ways and results in self-destruction.... The roots of this power can be summed up as pride.... A gang-member’s pride is a very fragile thing; it’s real easy to be hurt.... Like, if you say the wrong thing to us, we’ll go off. That’s just pride. We don’t like to be disrespected...

Marcus concluded his analysis by describing the complex ways young men in the gang construct their collective identity of manhood:

To conclude, when you think of masculinity in the hood, there’s both negative and positive aspects.... As far as I’ve seen in the negative, I seen somebody get shot and die over it. [There’s also a lot of] betrayal, like I showed. And a lot of time [is] wasted.... But there are also positive effects...a lot of [young men] get a sense of identity out of it. You get a sense of who you could become...and what you’re capable of doing. But, people always want to look at how we construct masculinity in the hood as just a negative aspect.... So, basically, it’s both positive and negative, and it’s like now that my knowledge is changing, I’m more interested in using the positive aspects....

Marcus’s presentation was special for its academic adherence, but even more significant because of who the speaker was, the topic, and the context in which he shared this work. Marcus’s open membership and relatively high rank as a younger member in a notorious local street gang marked him as an intimidating young man whose academic history was one of extreme disengagement. The opportunity afforded him by these writing assignments and the open and critical culture of the class, allowed him to use his gang membership to conduct an “insider” study that validated those experiences as worthy of academic discussion. At the same time, critically analyzing his lifestyle and those of his peers challenged him to be critical of the practices of the gang. Marcus’s presentation made for profound levels of organic intellectualism (Gramsci, 1971), as he engaged in study that helped him better understand himself and his social group, without having to denounce that group as altogether evil. The class also benefited from hearing Marcus’s presentation because he helped to present the complexities of a group of people whose behaviors are often reduced in analysis to simple self-destruction. The limits of this chapter do not permit a broader analysis of the work produced in these literature units, but the small samples from Max and Marcus hint at the academic capacity of urban youth when they are permitted and challenged to think critically about their lived experience, and then supported to format their knowledge into genres that fit with the expectations of academic contexts.

Poetry as a Persuasive Literary Device

Part of the final unit on persuasive writing used poetry to tap into the fact that many urban youth find spoken word poetry as a viable outlet to articulate the obstacles presented by their social realities (see Jocson, 2005, for curricular ideas). Students drew from prior writing assignments to create and perform poems reflecting their work over the semester. Since their poems were to be informed by the analytical lens we had been developing, students were expected to offer complex interpretations of their often underexamined
realities. Max had found his stride in the class after the auto-ethnography unit and had emerged as one of the finest speakers in the group. As in the first unit, he volunteered to be one of the first presenters. To begin his reading, he lowered his black Pittsburgh Pirates baseball hat over his face and performed an interpretation of the complex issues facing urban Black communities today:

“We’ve Got a Gun to Our Head”

It’s got a gun to my head
Its fingers are on the trigger
Its words are the bullets that’s breakin me down
I’m tryin’ to figure
If my history is my Teflon
Then why should I bet on the teachings of Uncle Tom’s step-son….

The multilayered meaning of “its” in this poem used personification and figure of speech to place accountability for the conditions of violence and inequality on two groups; members of the community that participate in their own self-destruction (“we’ve got a gun to our head”) and the nefarious history of miseducation that has confronted African Americans in schools (“the teachings of Uncle Tom’s step-son”). The main character in Max’s poem was meant to represent African Americans as a group who are threatened by death from two sides: from members of their own community and from Eurocentric descriptions of Black history.

Max used a similar critical sociohistorical critique in this second poem, which he entitled “Historical Property”:

Why can’t we make straight our place?
Stop jokin’ around and make straight our face
So they don’t degrade and delay our race
So they don’t make haste and delay our pace
1492 is when they lied to you
When they tried to sneak by the truth
But it wasn’t just the West Indies
Not just the Caribbean
Cause South Africa was rewired too
Now it’s 2005 and it’s we who do it
The red or the bluest
Who are you shootin’?

Here Max used a number of literary devices (repetition, rhyme, assonance, and consonance) to emphasize key ideas of social responsibility throughout the poem. He connected the colonial domination of people of color (referencing 1492) to modern day street gangs (Bloods [“red”] and Crips [“blue”]) to describe a holocaust-like condition for Black communities in 2005.

A couple of days later, Marcus performed one of his poems. In it, Marcus analyzed the role of psychological violence in the schooling process he experienced in South Los Angeles. “The title of this poem is, Weapons of Mass Destruction,” he said, smirking at me as he began reading:
I'm trapped in this system
That's constructed much like this dope game
LAUSD
Havin' me hooked to their cocaine teaching
And drug paraphernalia textbooks
Cuz' school is the most dangerous place I've been
Where the ones we trust to teach us
Are incarcerating our minds
And demonstrating social reproduction
I return from my blind abduction
With weapons of mass destruction
Blue Chucks, S dome, white T, blue khakis
And a bomb education are my Teflon

The power of this poem was not so much in its form, content, or delivery, but more in the credibility that Marcus had amongst his peers in the class to make this kind of critique of school. His poem expressed a disdain for urban schools and a celebration of street sensibilities. This was important because gangs were often the targets of derision from school officials and Marcus was someone that was no longer perceived as someone with an uncritical allegiance to street life. Thus, the poem becomes a commentary on the relationship between an ineffective school system and the choice to join a street gang. Marcus's peers understood his desire to tell the truth about schools and the potential of young gang members seeking to educate themselves even when that was not expected of them.

Transformed Lives

If we can adapt the academic literacy skills students are expected to learn so that they are relevant to the lives of young people, then we will be more likely to get the classroom engagement that will result in increased achievement. The use of traditional academic writing standards to draw out the personal stories of young people is a strategy that has led many students to shift from participating in self-defeating behaviors into more transformative actions in their lives (Solorzano & Delgado Bernal, 2001). In individual interviews at the end of the semester students described the processes of critical thinking, writing, and speaking in the class as an enjoyable process of self-improvement. They contrasted this to other English classes where they felt that these skills were academic chores. As one example, Max made the following comment during his interview: “When [our class] first started touching into the critical teaching, it was fun because we actually touched into our own lives. Things that really, really affect us.”

The impact that this had on Max’s academic engagement and achievement was extraordinary. Although course grades are clearly subjective measures of academic growth (as are test scores), Table 32.1 clearly reflects a shift in Max’s investment in his English class once he entered our expository composition class. He rarely missed a day, was a stellar

Table 32.1

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Course</th>
<th>Eng 9A</th>
<th>Eng 9B</th>
<th>Eng 10A</th>
<th>Eng 10B</th>
<th>American Literature (11A)</th>
<th>Contemporary Composition (11B)</th>
<th>Expository Composition (12A)</th>
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<tr>
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<td>F</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>Not enrolled</td>
<td>A</td>
</tr>
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</table>
contributor to classroom activities, and completed virtually every assignment with attention to detail and rigor.

Marcus’s improvement in English courses was not as stark, but his growth over time in my classes was impressive. He enrolled in my 11th grade American literature class in the Fall semester. He enrolled quite late in the semester because he had just been released from the California Youth Authority, but he was able to keep up with the work in the class and earned a “C” grade. From there he showed steady improvement, earning a “B” in the second semester of his 11th grade year, and eventually joining Max as one of the top students in the 12th grade expository composition class (see Table 32.2).

This approach to literacy instruction was not just effective with Max and Marcus. In comparison to the rest of the English department, students found much more success in my class. Again, I recognize that the chart below could reflect vastly different grading policies between myself and my colleagues. In some cases this was true, in others it was not. However, what is undeniable is the level of investment students were willing to make in my classes, both in their attendance and in their work ethic. These are the prerequisite conditions for academic success and they go a long way to explaining the disparity in academic achievement seen in Table 32.3.

In Max’s interview, he explained the importance of the value placed on oral communication skills as a primary reason for these higher levels of student engagement in the class:

Speaking…made us closer because some of my classmates and I found out that we were closer to each other than we thought. Speaking about personal problems. And that made us know them, made us understand them better. Made us closer. It was one of the best feelings I ever had. It was the best class I've ever been into.

In communities where many youth rightfully distrust institutions such as schools, it is critical that we use pedagogical strategies that allow students to form personal relationships with each other and with the teacher. In schools and communities where resources are scarce, it is not hard to imagine how students can come to view one another through the eyes of skepticism and prejudice. To disrupt these divisive conditions, we must develop in youth the tools necessary for articulating and listening to the complexity of each other’s humanity, which is often embodied in the way young people perform their personalities and express their interests. In his interview, Marcus makes this very same point:

We were bonding because we all gave each other a chance to humanize ourselves...let us know each other’s stories...after that we looked at each other different. If some-

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Table 32.3

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<th>B's</th>
<th>C's</th>
<th>D's</th>
<th>F's</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>All Eng. Classes (2746 students)</td>
<td>238 9%</td>
<td>549 20%</td>
<td>684 25%</td>
<td>484 17%</td>
<td>791 29%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>My English Class (114 students)</td>
<td>54 45%</td>
<td>34 29%</td>
<td>23 19%</td>
<td>2 1.7%</td>
<td>1 1%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
body look at me like, “oh, he a gang banger.” After I told my narrative I humanized myself. “Oh, he’s more than a gang banger. That [man’s] smart.” You feel me? They stopped looking at me as just a gang banger and start looking at me as a smart Black man, which I always want you to look at me as.

It is important to note that an overemphasis on personal struggles in classroom discussions can potentially isolate students from the larger phenomenon facing marginalized people. This is why it is essential to move students’ analyses from the personal to the interpersonal, and to address cross-cultural and gendered differences. These connections across difference push the parameters of compassion from individual moments of understanding to collective bonds among students that might otherwise see themselves as different from one another. For Marcus, these connections became clear the more he had the opportunity to connect his own condition to that of his classmates:

Latino struggles, you know, the female struggles that was in the classroom and all that, it was still beautiful because a struggle is a struggle. And whether it’s different... when it all boils down to it we’re all struggling.... We all in here struggling. I mean I would rather we all in here struggling, you know, helping each other than half of us struggling, half of us not, and they not helping me to get to where they’re at.

Max also found the commitment of the class to identify collective struggles empowering:

In this class, it was the whole class. We were together. We were forming a bond. We were forming a unity and this unity formed, it just formed, a big fist that could just knock anything down.... It felt like we had power. We felt like we had power and we know that we had power. And I wish that everyone could understand that having this whole unity in the classroom can roll over to the community and just have the community, you know, together and then we could make [change] happen.

To this point, these pedagogical strategies have been discussed for their importance to my students’ curricular engagement and academic achievement. However, they were equally important in the expansion of their interpersonal and cross-cultural relationships. This extension of the range of their relationships came in part as the result of their own identity reformation, which helped them to understand their capacity for critical self-reflection and growth. For instance, Max became more conscious that his actions impact society and that society, including many of its injustices, continue to affect him:

You start opening your mind to all kinds of things. And you start thinking outside the box. You start thinking about other things that you would never, ever think about before.... You start evaluating everything that goes on. You start thinking about, not only am I an African-American young teenage male in this society, period. It’s also me, having a positive or negative effect on this society. Me being oppressed. I never thought I was oppressed.

Marcus interpreted this transformative process similarly, but through his own newly constructed reality:

I realized that I was a slave, but I broke those shackles though. I started to look at life critically.... Like, “damn, this [is] crazy. My mind is trapped.... I’m incarcerated
mentally...I've got to break free.” You just basically opened my eyes, you know, just found out who I was, you know, what I'm about. Really.

It would be disingenuous of me to suggest that every one of my students transformed themselves into change agents in their communities. Some simply wanted to join the work force, others chose to pursue college hoping to escape the community. It is safe to say, though, that every student was challenged to think further than they had before, specifically about issues young people were facing in the communities. It can also be said that a good number of students found a voice in themselves like the one Marcus found. He was able to transfer the survival skills he developed as a gang member to finish high school and move on to begin his college education. He realized that it was necessary for him to change his life, but also to become a force for transformative change in his community:

Like I told myself, “I’m not about to get caught up in this [trouble] no more. I’m not going to jail. I’m about to use the game, I’m about to use the system to win the system. You feel me? I’m about to go to school, and I’m going to stay in the hood so I’ma just educate myself. I’ma do this, and I’ma grind here. If I could grind in the hood, then you know for sure I could go to school and grind. Cuz in the hood, it’s harder....

He did not find the transition out of street life easy and he continued to participate in gang related activities after high school. However, he became much more conflicted about his role in the community and slowly reduced his affiliation with his old lifestyle. He maintained a job at a local train yard for a couple of years, passed an African-American history class at a local community college, and continues to work toward fulfilling requirements to attend a California State University. He recently moved out of state in order to recreate a life for himself more suitable for a student, away from the local tensions and temptations of his past. We have maintained a friendship and mentored relationship and continue to dialogue about his potential to use those street informed leadership qualities to benefit, instead of compromise, the good of his community.

Max took the semester and summer after our class to retake courses he had failed earlier in high school. Impressed by the quality of his growth, leadership, and academic work in my class, a local California State University accepted him through special admissions. Max has since received his high school diploma and enrolled in a four-year university where he currently holds a 3.0 cumulative grade point average.

Conclusion

Significant modifications were made to the ideology of the course content in order to deal with the social and economic urgencies facing my students. In spite of these changes, the course fulfilled writing and oral convention components for both the 11th and 12th grade California English-language Arts Content Standards. It is important that educators know that they can modify the content of their lessons to reflect the needs of their students and still meet the standards they are expected to teach. There is value in meeting the standards, but the more significant learning outcomes appear when our pedagogy allows students to connect to one another by sharing their familiar struggles. In the case of the class discussed here, this was particularly important because many of the students had no relationship with one another before the class, and some even had antagonistic relationships before the class. As Max noted, the class became a family that modeled for students ways to interact better with one another in their own communities.

When we do not normalize critically relevant pedagogies, we effectively sanction self-
defeating ideologies and practices that inhibit individual and collective growth among our students. The process toward self-actualization often begins by articulating the anger and frustration that traps whole communities in vicious cycles of self-destruction. Thus, with pedagogical approaches such as these, we must be willing to embrace the discomfort that may arise when listening to urban youth articulate their interpretations of reality. The willingness on our part to move through these uncomfortable spaces with our students, allows them to develop the analytical and academic skills to better navigate the unjust social conditions they must face. This class taught me that there is a double value to this approach to teaching; it allows young people to develop the academic literacy skills necessary to maneuver through the schooling system, while also arming them with the critical literacy to transform their lives and the lives of others in the community.

Notes
1. “Real talk” is an urban interpretation for terms more simply stated as “honestly” or “to tell you the truth.” It is used in the title to privilege honest examinations of local urban phenomenon oftentimes ignored in formal academic contexts. In other words, this article attempts to argue for the inclusion of urban youths’ community realities inside of schools that do otherwise.
2. Pseudonyms are used for students.
3. Referred to as an “‘S’ Dome,” the Mariners’ logo signifies a local street gang. Though this uniform serves as an unintended visual aid for his presentation, the student is consistently wearing a combination of blue and a corresponding hat as everyday attire. This goes against school sanctioned uniform policies intended to prevent students from open gang affiliated proclamations, but monitoring this is not my priority so long as students participate in intellectual engagement.
4. Referenced repeatedly, “Teflon” is street slang alluding to firearms or bullet-proof vests, sometimes used when describing the need to deflect or deny some sort of attack.

References