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“I want them to see the real us not just what they what they want us to be...”: Cultivating a ‘Literate Language of the Soul’ for Radical Hope

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***"I want them to see the real us not just what they what they want us to be...": Cultivating a
'Literate Language of the Soul' for Radical Hope***

Abstract

In this conceptual essay, I argue that radical hope can be fostered through literacies of timeless learning based on student-created literature in literacy and English language arts classrooms as an endeavor of soul education, allowing teachers and youth to cultivate a *literate language of the soul*. Drawing on tenets of soul education and its interconnections with affect theory and Ubuntu as an African spirituality, I describe how literacy and English language arts teachers working with predominantly Black middle-school youth connected their histories, backgrounds, stories, and understandings while engaging with literature created by their students. I argue that exploring literacies of timeless learning to foster radical hope through cultivating a literate language of the soul can allow educators to look beyond the material level and reach the spirit of the child. Radical hope through literacy/ELA is possible to the degree that teachers and educators commit to cultivating a literate language of the soul.

Keywords: literacy, soul, radical hope, timeless learning, soulful education

***“I want them to see the real us not just what they what they want us to be...”: Cultivating a
‘Literate Language of the Soul’ for Radical Hope***

The recent wave of racial reckoning and its associated backlash, coupled with the effects of a persisting global pandemic, have reiterated calls for a new kind of education via transdisciplinarity that emphasizes literacies which extend beyond the intellect to human sensitivity and the body (see Smith, 2013, 2018a, 2018b). Prevailing national and global turmoil steeped in what appear to be persisting ethical dilemmas have become the norm with which the souls of youth wrestle daily. Amidst this ethical and spiritual turmoil, a long-standing overreliance on the language of the mind (i.e., intellect) in literacy (and education more broadly) has collided with the pressing need for ‘a literate language of the soul’ – a language developed through already-present literacies (Marciano & Watson, 2020) that frees the body to connect to the spiritual nature and its desire for justice, beauty, love and joy (Lancia, 2010). We are at a moment in literacy education when the soul -- “that aspect of the whole self that unites our human and divine nature” (Kates, 2010, p. 1), “the source of our creative imagination and intuition” (Kates, 2010, p. 3) and that which necessitates a spiritual awareness -- longs to disrupt the intellect as the primary determinant of destinies. As Kates (2010) observes, the spiritual level of education includes the cosmic (i.e., individual, community, social and environmental levels) but it is not itself included in the four lower levels of awareness and experience. Cultivating a literate language of the soul, therefore, requires attention to spiritual awareness across all four levels, a goal which can be partially achieved through the enterprise of literacy education, and a process which, in turn, can take place through “timeless learning” (Kates, 2010).

But “it takes courage to live in a soul connected way” (Kates, 2010, p. 1). For youth across the globe in literacy classrooms, grappling with the ethical and spiritual turmoil, such

courage often takes the form of and requires 'radical hope' (Smith, 2018; Smits & Naqvi, 2015; Lear, 2006) – hope that extends beyond a passive response to “culturally devastating” events and instead uses literacies to respond to “conflict, violence, and other forms of offense with courage, practical reasoning, “good judgement,” and a tolerance for danger” (Lear, 2006, p. 133).

In this conceptual essay, I argue that radical hope can be fostered through literacies of timeless learning through creating and exploring literature in literacy and English language arts classrooms as an endeavor of soul education (Kates, 2010; Miller, 2010), allowing teachers and youth to cultivate a 'literate language of the soul'. Drawing on tenets of soul education (Kates, 2010) and its interconnections with affect theory (Boldt & Leander, 2020) and Ubuntu as an African spirituality (Bhengu, 2010), I describe how literacy and English language arts teachers working with predominantly Black middle-school youth connected their histories, backgrounds, stories, and understandings while engaging with literature created by their students. Kates (2010) observes that in education:

When we can speak of spirit and soul within the context of education and perceive these as integral aspects of being human, we will arrive at a transformational threshold in the human journey. This doorway allows more human beings to more readily realise the truth of their interconnectedness. It is the recognition of this holistic worldview that fosters deeper levels of sensitivity, empathy, caring and compassion, and on a practical level, supports us in being more active in promoting social and educational modes that counter injustice and address the true state of human suffering. The realisation of our interconnectedness relieves us of the devastating effects of greed and glamour and moves us to honour the soul in each person. (p. 2)

Exploring literacies of timeless learning to foster radical hope through cultivating a literate language of the soul will allow educators to “look beyond the material level and reach the spirit of the child” (Bhengu, 2010, p. 35).

In the sections that follow, I begin with a discussion of what Kates (2010) describes as “soul talk”, connecting it to affect theory as a basis for literacies and Ubuntu as an African spirituality. Following this, I briefly describe the context from which I draw data excerpts, as well as discuss these excerpts from youth and from teachers of English Language Arts (ELA) teachers working with these middle-school youth, to foster radical hope for cultivating a ‘literate language of the soul’ through timeless learning.

When I refer to soul in this essay, like Kates (2010), I do not align with any specific religion, “religious philosophy or spiritual practice although some of the ideas [presented] are contained in religious and spiritual practices from many world cultures and religions” (p. 2). Instead, I refer to the Soul as “the creative, coherent presence of Spirit and its will” – that which “gives form to the human being, “mediat[ing], co-ordinat[ing], integrat[ing], unif[ying], align[ing] and organi[sing] consciousness and beingness” (Kates, 2010, pp. 5-6). In addition, I differentiate soul from spirit, which represents here “the cosmic energy field in relationship with the creative function of the Soul” (Kates, 2010, p. 6).

“Soul Talk” and Ubuntu as an African Spirituality

Human consciousness in our current moment continues to evolve. We see the shift in the past few years of the pandemic in such global tectonics as what we have labeled The Great Resignation where humanity is tending towards an integration of human consciousness, what Clare Graves and Don Beck (1996) describe as “the spiral of consciousness governing the interrelationship between the personal and social dynamics of change, action and transformation”

(cited in Kates, 2010). In moving towards what they describe as “a second tier level of thinking, which includes new modes of awakening in consciousness represented by the colour memes, yellow (systemic wholeness) and turquoise (holistic),” based on the theory of spiral dynamics, “the personal self is guided by a more integrative spiritual will” (p. 3). Through such integration of the psyche – referred to by Abraham Maslow (1962) as re-sacralisation – humans now begin to pursue even more “holistic modes of perceiving and doing,” understanding “the way the part belongs to the whole and value the truth of our interconnectedness” – ““I am because you are, You are because I am” (cited in Kates, 2010; Bhengu, 2010).

Integration of the psyche can be achieved only to the degree of recognition of the soul – that is, a remembering. James Hillman (1997) explains that “The Soul is the source of our creative imagination and intuition” – “the essential, innate image of self that calls us into being much like the acorn holding the potential to become an oak” such that “each person bears a uniqueness that asks to be lived and that is already present before it can be lived” (p. 6). This perspective positions the soul as the “source of our calling, the spiritual energy shaping our character” such that “reconnecting with the soul’s guidance and calling is not a process or a development, but an awakening, a form of remembering” (cited in Kates, 2010, p. 3; see also Hillman, 1997). Individuals who “hear the call of the soul ... begin to grow into the shape of [their] original essence” referred to by Thomas Moore (2000) as the “original Self” (cited in Kates, 2010, p. x). Thus, the soul’s calling functions as a journey in a continuous spiral where the higher self is constantly in communication with the ego to obtain the wisdom and guidance of the soul. It is this constant communication which shifts and expands as we grow older, “shift[ing] our locus of perception away from our separate ego self towards the soul” and allowing us to

“cultivate the holistic perspective of the authentic Self and more readily engage feelings of justice, empathy, altruism and caring” (Kates, 2010).

Teachers and educators who are awakening acknowledge and make provisions in teaching for the soul of the learner, allowing it to find its place in the process of learning and teaching. They teach for soul in education where:

... soul in education is described as timeless learning, it is education for wholeness, for compassion for happiness for discovering one’s personal values and meaning and for practicing various forms of creativity, for practicing ethics and creating forms of deep communication and communion that include transpersonal, intrapersonal, interspecies and perinatal forms of knowing that open us to the transcendent dimensions of being. (Kates, 2010, p. 6)

By this it means that the soul in education allows learners to develop happiness through constantly cultivating mutually beneficial relating patterns based on a constantly evolving understanding of self and of the other where the self is as important as the other and the other is as important of the self (Kates, 2010; see also Smith, 2022 on transraciolinguistics).

Even so, “To study the way is to study the self. To study the self is to forget the self. To forget the self is to be actualised by all beings” (Dogen, 1985, p. 70). In other words, understanding of the self in soul education does not mean focus on the self, or for that matter, the “Other”. As Mills (2010) describes it, we remove the focus on the “Other”, remove the focus on the self and focus instead on the “relating between us, which requires continuous adjustment, because all things are all-ways changing” because this is what is “most crucial for the continuous happiness of each and all” (p. 27). This allows first for a focus on harmony in “the between of the Other and [self]”, which is “cumulative, extending out from each of us to our community, our

culture, our nation, our entire earth" – love. It allows secondly for a Place for Love – emptiness and thirdly, for a safeguarding of that place -- practicing those qualities that we firstly co-create for harmony (Mills, 2010).

Such is Ubuntu -- "the cosmic principle of harmony" -- also known as Botho, Vhuthu, Utu, Humanness, Ma'at and Menswaardigheid (Bheng, 2010). And hence the Zulu saying, "umuntu ngumuntu ngabantu" -- "I am because you are, You are because I am" (Bheng, 2010, p. 32). Soul education emphasizes the fact that "every person is a social being who can realise his/her being and existence in the company of, and in interaction with, other human beings" meaning that "a [person's soul] gets actualised in interaction with other people" (Bheng, 2010, p. 32). Through soul education that channels Ubuntu, the soul receives the key life message: "You are a divine being" (Mills, 2010, p. 36) and this allows for its remembering, for its relating between self and the Other to continuously and constantly become the original Self – where happiness lives. As Bheng (2010) states, drawing on Ubuntu philosophy:

When the spiritual layer of mind gives the sense of oneness beyond limitations, the individual begins to feel unlimited kindness, compassion, love and inspiration for all of life. Educational methods that include the spiritual will carry the students to the highest levels of the soul by observing every current of the mind beyond mere academic logic. (p. 36).

Soul education positions every learner as an "innate creator" (Kates, 2010, p. 117) given the inherent and innate capacity of each child and individual to create (see William Blake, 1987).

Kates (2010) states:

This Innate Creator is the animating centre of the imagination. At the root of the word, imagination, is the word "magic". We can view our Innate Creator as the Inner Magician,

as the magical, unbounded self, the source of our wonder, our awe, the source of our questions. As young children, we imagined, played and found endless ways to express our wonder. Once re-discovered, our Innate Creator's childlike voice encourages us to create with pleasure and to wholeheartedly nourish ourselves, and others through our creative contributions. The Innate Creator speaks through poesis, which is the power of the human spirit to do, to invent. Moved by poesis, we revel in communicating discoveries, visions, ideas and insights. (p. 117).

Through this process, the "higher Self, the transpersonal "I" – that is, the transpersonal dimension of consciousness ... described as our timeless self (i.e., the soul) -- attempts to influence the lower self, the personal "I" towards integration" (Kates, 2010, pp. 116-117) of the psyche and thus, learners learn how to remember and to hear the call of the soul through relating between the self and others.

A Practical Approach to "Soul Education" and the Enterprise of Literacy

Literacy scholars who position affect theory as a basis for examining literate practice (e.g., Boldt & Leander, 2020) offer that "possible meanings of reading or experiences of reading must be considered not as inherent to internal experiences of reading but as composed and recomposed in sets of affective relations" (p. 1). In doing so, they are aligned with the notion of '*relating between*' (Mills, 2010), discussed earlier, which is tantamount to a remembering of the soul and to a dislocation of emphasis from neither the individual nor the other. The possibilities invoked by such dislocation create opportunities for the soul to emerge, to remember what it is meant to do and to live fully and joyfully in the world.

In this essay, I extend such efforts in literacy based on affect theory by demonstrating how timeless learning relies on literacies that are *holistic, connected, embodied, soulful*,

transformative, reflects 'flow', participatory, non-dualistic, immeasurable, and mysterious, allowing these to be developed through processes such as letting go, attention, contemplation, and compassion for soul education (Miller, 2010). Miller (2010) observes:

Most of us have had the experience of the timeless moment. We feel we are in unbounded space. It is in timeless moments when powerful learning occurs ... In timeless learning, our experience becomes much more immediate. We are not thinking of the past or the future. (Miller, 2010, pp. 13-14)

The **holistic** integrative characteristic of timeless learning connects emotions, body, soul and spirit and recognizes the interdependence among these elements. One such example is seen when an individual suddenly has an insight or idea that quickens the heartbeat that in turn, influences the body's rhythms. With such an approach, elements such as physical and intellectual are part of an "indivisible whole" (Ghandi, 1980). The **connected** characteristic represents connection to self, to others, to earth, and to the cosmos. It highlights the importance of development of understanding of the self (i.e., integration of higher and lower self), understanding of the other (relating between) for developing and sustaining communion and community, understanding of the earth and how it nourishes and supports us in the world as well as understanding of how we are connected to the mysteries of the universe in the cosmos. The **embodied** element of timeless learning speaks to the integration of the psyche manifested interpersonally and intrapersonally becoming the lived experience – living that which is learned. One such example can be seen in Mahatma Ghandi and Martin Luther King – they both embodied their teachings, functioning as living indicators of what it meant to be engaged in protest and action that was nonviolent. The **soulful** characteristic, deviating from the current focus on accountability in education, refers to

opportunities for “[connecting] with [the] soul ... [that] can give the student a deeper awareness of his or her place in the larger scheme of things” (Miller, 2010, p. 15).

The **transformative** element sees the individual experience profound change with the circumstances being unpredictable and the nature of change being monumental or incremental. Some have experienced profound transformation through physical acts such as walking and others through oppressive acts such as suffering. The act of *flow* Csikszentmihalyi (1997) in timeless learning sees “a person becomes fully immersed in an experience” which might be gardening, listening to music, writing, playing an instrument, etc. (Miller, 2010, p. 16). As Csikszentmihalyi (1997) observes, with flow, “Self-consciousness disappears, yet one feels stronger than usual. The sense of time is distorted: hours seem to pass by in minutes” (p. 31 cited in Miller, 2010). The **participatory** component in timeliness learning reflects individuals participating together as co-creators of knowledge in intrapersonal, transpersonal and interpersonal relationships, even in the most difficult circumstances, emphasizing the mutually *relating between* (Mills, 2010) critical for harmony, and love. The **non-dualistic** characteristic of timeless learning positions the knower and the known as one through contemplation where what one reflects on, one merges with to become. This characteristic melts barriers between self and the world – the world becomes one and one becomes the world signifying the opportunity for compassion and humanness via Ubuntu -- I am because you are, You are because I am. Naturally dualisms occur and it is part of the process of timeless learning to move back and forth between negotiating barriers between self and the world (i.e., dualism) and oneness between self and the world (i.e., non-dualism). **Mystery** in timeless learning allows for “unexplainable and mysterious [elements] to timeless learning that can leave us with a sense of awe and wonder” (Miller, 2010, p. 17). Such acknowledgement can be crucial for developing a sense of humility

which as Miller (2010) observes can 'be often lacking in professors, teachers and academics' (p. 17). As Miller (2010) notes:

A professor who admits to not knowing is looking for trouble; this runs counter to what is expected of academia. Yet when we encounter this quality how refreshing it can be.

Wisdom can arise from recognizing the mystery. (p. 17)

And as Abraham Heschel (1972) noted:

A return to reverence is the first prerequisite for a revival of wisdom... Wisdom comes from awe rather than from shrewdness. It is evoked not in moments of calculation but in moments of being in rapport with the mystery of reality. The greatest insights happen to us in moments of awe. (p. 72)

Immeasurability in timeless learning reflects the de-emphasis needed on measurement, accountability and testing as well as "conventional research methodologies" that have long been established and used to a desire to instead assess learning through a reflection on life through techniques such as "journal writing, narrative and autobiography" and through "techniques such as imagery, art and 'integral inquiry' (Miller, 2010, p. 17).

Soul educators who seek to cultivate such characteristics in literacy and English language arts teaching through literature are well positioned to do so through four primary processes highlighted by Miller (2010) as developing attention, letting go, contemplation and compassion, caring and loving-kindness (p. 18). **Developing attention** as a practice in literacy teaching can be done "through meditation and mindfulness activities, which simply require [all] to be present in the moment" (Miller, 2010, p. 18). Timeless learning also requires **letting go** so that we are present but let go of the past in order to remain in the present, allowing for immediacy and power in learning. It can be developed also, through compassion and caring where "compassion means

suffering or being with others” allowing for a forgetting of the self and an entering into participatory co-creation, knowledge generating and mutually relating between (Mills, 2010). As Nel Noddings (1992) has observed, **caring** can be made provision for through opportunities to nurture plants and animals. And **contemplation**, which allows for one to become one with that being observed, is a key practice for fostering timeless learning. According to Miller (2010), schools are not set up in ways that place learners in constant contemplation of the subject in the real world. Yet, children often become the objects they see, developing much learning about the world in this way, which means that drama, visualization and integrated studies are crucial to facilitate timeliness learning (Miller, 2010).

Cultivating timeless learning that is holistic, connected, embodied, soulful, transformative, reflects ‘flow’, participatory, non-dualistic, immeasurable, and mysterious for soul education through letting go, attention, contemplation, and compassion for soul education are critical if learners in our current world are to experience radical hope (Smits & Naqvi, 2015). As Janice Dolley states (2010), in describing the conundrum faced by her young daughter:

My own youngest daughter cried herself to sleep for three weeks after entering secondary school saying, “Mummy, the teachers don’t see me; they just want to open my head and stuff facts in.” She knew that her inner feelings and perceptions were just as important as her intellectual understanding but that “the teachers don’t know anything”—nothing, that is, that she felt really mattered. (p. xi)

I too have felt, and continue to feel, the urgency for children and youth in my interactions with them in middle-school English language arts and literacy classrooms where the enterprise of literacy seemed so much more crucial to them than life itself, causing them to wonder what teachers wanted from them and why they were present in classrooms (see Smith, 2018a, 2019).

In literacy and English language arts classrooms, there is an opportunity for soul education through timeless learning to help students develop radical hope that is so necessary as they cultivate a remembering of the soul in an era that remains focused on accountability. In the section that follows, I describe briefly the context within which I worked with middle-school youth and from which I draw data for discussion in this conceptual essay, and then, present excerpts from this context that reflect elements of timeless learning leveraged by students and fostered by teachers to help students *remember* the literate languages of their souls.

"They'll Write Till the Day They Die": Creating and Exploring Literature that Foregrounds the Soul

The data excerpts and activities from which I draw to reflect timeless learning in this conceptual article are derived from interviews with students, a focus group with teachers, and student and classroom artifacts emerging as part of a research-practice partnership during my time spent weekly in a middle-school over the course of two years (2015-2017) (see Smith, 2018a, 2020 for descriptions of the full context of this activity). The first year was spent developing and implementing activities to inculcate and instill a love for a wide range of literature as well as support literacy instruction in classrooms. The second year was spent developing and implementing a love for writing in and exploring mentor texts in a wide range of genres to enable students to envision themselves as authors of literature. In this school, which I will refer to here as Radical Hope Academy (pseudonym), I worked with literacy and English language arts teachers of predominantly Black middle-school youth to connect their histories, backgrounds, stories, and understandings to the literature created by the students in the middle-school classroom (see Smith, 2018a for details about the broader context of this study).

Here, in this essay, I use the excerpts from these data to illustrate how creating and exploring student-created literature through literacies of timeless learning that are holistic, connected, embodied, soulful, transformative, reflects ‘flow’, participatory, non-dualistic, immeasurable, and mysterious foreground the soul and can be developed through processes such as letting go, attention, contemplation, and compassion by teachers of literacy and English language arts. Below, in Table 1 are data excerpts from the afore-mentioned study that reflect an overview of the various elements of timeless learning visible in the activities of the teachers, as they supported students in and across their classrooms and the schools. The table is set up to differentiate students’ creation of literature from the exploration of this literature. It is also set up to illustrate when teachers reflected these elements versus when students did so during the partnership. Reference is made in Table 1 to corresponding Figures 1-7 which appear below.

The four middle-school teachers whose excerpts I draw from here are Raina, Lee, Saida and Fran (all pseudonyms). Three of the teachers were white and one – Mr. Lee -- was Asian-American. The seven middle-school students – Ashanti, Barack, Devante, Jessica, Jorge, Kanye, Ra’Jaria -- whose data I draw from here, were a subset of the population with whom these teachers worked. This subset was predominantly Black and included Hispanic and White students. A literacy coach worked closely with teachers, students and with me throughout the process of implementation of the research-practice partnership.

Creating Literature through Timeless Learning for Soulful Education. The teachers who were part of the research-practice partnership worked closely with me to support students’ creation of literature that was authentic and tied to their interests as well as personal lives through timeless learning for soulful education (Kates, 2010; Miller, 2010) even while they worked to meet district expectations of them for student performance. Examples of timeless

Smith: "I want them to see the real us not just what they what they want

learning elements reflected and the corresponding literacies corresponding to these elements is reflected in Table 1.

Table 1. Timeless Learning Elements or Practices and Corresponding Indicators in Literacy/ELA

Timeless Learning	Corresponding Indicators from ELA/Literacy Middle-School Classrooms
Creating Literature	
<i>Teachers</i>	
<i>Holistic</i>	I believe we give worth to what we do. "I feel like this side of town is the forgotten school" said it more than once. "The forgotten school," but this year kids have reason above that was the motto from the beginning. We're going to rise above and kind of explain that a little bit. And the writing piece, I think that's an area that we rose above our child's esteem excelled our require excelled this year and our band excelled, our sports team excelled. <u>So</u> it's just the feeling of success is being noted within each of the areas that they think we are growing. [Fran]
<i>Participatory</i>	Yeah. I just think that they're looking at other students' work and their own work, help them to analyze [the literature they have created] more than just actually putting things on paper and just saying, "Ok, I'm finished." Looking back at it <u>critically, because</u> they're not used to actually going through and actually analyzing. They've done it with, like, well-known authors writing that are already accomplished. But to take it down to the student level [of their own creations and examine the literature of their peers], they did <u>pretty eloquently</u> for their age and for a bunch of 7th grade students they didn't say, "Ok this is a piece of crap." They're like, "Well, it's missing a hook, oh, it doesn't have a good idea, or it's not very unique." And for them to use that kind of language with literature I think was <u>really helpful</u> . [Raina]
<i>Timeless</i>	This year I feel like the success that we had was ... you <u>actually had</u> 25 to 30 minutes of silent writing where kids were engaged in their writing and there were so many fewer -- "I don't know what to write. I don't know how to start. Where my idea is, how do I brainstorm, what are these questions" -- that the kids used to prolong the inevitable that, " We <u>actually have</u> to write?" A big success was just their motivation to write and then produce something of value not just produce, "[Mr. Lee], how much do I have to write?" [Lee]
<i>Soulful</i>	We love it when they have a voice, when they're expressing from within themselves whether you can feel the anger, whether you can feel the peace that they have about the topic that they're given. And to me that was something that we've made progress with this year was your literature needs to have a voice. Make it where that interesting start with the hook, where there's somebody is going to want to read this. If we don't start out correctly, if we don't start out with some sort of hook, quotation, or question, then they are probably not going to want to read what you wrote. That for me is valuable. (<u>So</u> audience too.) Yes, your audience. How to make them interested. [Fran]
	Sometimes we would tell them, like, I would tell them (-- you know -- I have athletes), so I would tell [Mr. Lee's] kids ... I would say "I read your essay today," or you know I would send my kids to Mr. <u>Lee</u> and I would say, "Hey, go ask Mr. Lee to read that, that is really good." And some of the kids that you sent to Mr. Lee, they are like "really?" You know they don't think they're writers of

	<p>real literature and now that they know <u>that</u> [they are thinking], "Oh my gosh, the pre-AP teacher [Mr. Lee] is going to read it and I'm the only one that got to go over there and talk to him". [Just] Beautiful! [Saida]</p> <p>And one of the funniest things that had happened more than once, after we did one of those student-created literature pieces -- after we did the gallery one [where community professionals and other members and professors came to view the produced literature from Texas Tech], one of my students saw a pretty well written essay, and he was showing others how to begin putting their names on [since they often didn't] as he showed others, "Look at my essay, look at my essay, oh God, I wrote his essay". Well, it wasn't his, but he saw some things that made it familiar to him and he felt lucky to get a chance to grab it and say, "God, this is my essay." [Fran]</p> <p>We created a culture in our classroom of love, and we created a culture in our classroom that every child is valued for something. And when they knew that we valued them they took that into whatever activity they did. And we would find something, I don't want to use the word "correct" but I use the word correct -- correct in every piece of a child's writing from our [least motivated] kid to our [most-motivated] kid and for them to know that, "Oh, I did something right this time, I did something right this time." That boosted their confidence in anything that we did but in writing <u>literature in particular, because</u> this is so abstract to them. But it just boosted their confidence. And <u>so</u> each time we would find something either in a very small group, whole group or whatever. But we always found something like, "Oh, that was a great example", or "That was a great idea", or "Oh my gosh look this person's hook." This is like amazing <u>day</u> and you just see them light up. And <u>so</u> knowing that they are valued in some way made a big difference for our kids. [Saida]</p>
	<p>Giving kids the confidence that they could write with content was my primary focus. It wasn't the usage of the grammar that was being focused on in the beginning. Because that's what frankly most our kids struggle with -- the content. But they have so many great ideas, they just need have courage to put them down. [Lee]</p>
Contemplative	<p>I have one more. When we pulled certain kids essays out, and they were different every time, like that was a different kid every time -- the look on their face when they figured out or they knew that we had used their essay in somebody else's class. Oh, they'll write till the day they die now. They thought, you know, that we thought the world of them. So now they think the world of themselves and became intrinsic at that point versus "Oh my teacher just thinks that I'm OK". We turned it on for them. [Saida]</p>
Students	
Holistic	<p>We don't feel like we should change [our creations] for them, but we feel like <u>helping ourselves and it will benefit us in the future.</u> [Ashanti]</p> <p>I think they too much focus on what they try to make the school, what they trying to make the school a better represent. I think that they focus on too much that, and not too much on how we feel. [Barack]</p>

	<p>I feel like, [they're] trying to be like every other school, everybody else, because we go to [Radical Hope Academy]. They try to be like, they <u>doing</u> too much trying to be like the other school. And it's not even working. [Devante]</p>
	<p>They're trying to focus on us, [they're] trying focus on what they want <u>make</u> this school represent, not what we want. [Jorge]</p>
	<p>And that's not what's what we really want because we are kids. What I'm saying like, we should have some rights of our own lives. I don't know how to explain it. [Ashanti]</p>
<i>Caring</i>	<p>Mr. Lee, he [doesn't] really care [about how we speak]. He just [cares] about the proper stuff people think but he [doesn't] really care how we talk... <u>He actually.. he like, he connects to us.</u> Oh, I feel like that Mr. Lee connected to us. [Ra'Jaria]</p>
	<p>Students engaged with teachers and with me in literacy gardening while creating poetic pieces about the gardening process and products, fostering their nurturing and care. [Figures 1& 2]</p>
<i>Connected</i>	<p>Well, whenever you write, you got to like <u>write</u>, how you should write normally. You don't write like, you just don't put anything on the page, you need to take your time and think. Because if anyone could be reading it and we don't know who's reading. It could be the president, could be anyone and you want them to think that you're not dumb or anything, you want them to see that you have a talent. [Devante]</p>
	<p><u>I care. because</u> I think everybody is not dumb. It's just like the choice that you make will <u>put you in a path that what people think about you.</u> [Ashanti]</p>
	<p>Whenever people are writing, I like how people write in their own way because everyone's different and like you could get someone from all the way across the world with the different, like with their own thing, and then it comes here and then we started learning it and then more it's like rare, just say it. <u>So</u> they can express it like on the paper and we're able to see like how they speak from wherever they are. [Ashanti]</p>
<i>Soulful</i>	<p>I'm not Black and I hate when people, I hate when people say that Black people aren't smart. I'm always going to stand up for that because not everyone is dumb. Everyone can be smart. Everyone can be stupid. It doesn't matter what color you are. I think that you should just do what you want [in your writing] Because it's you yourself, you choose what you want to do. [Jessica]</p>
	<p>[What] I feel is that we should write how we talk, because instead of trying to impress other people we should be like... Instead of being somebody else, we should be, we should be us. Because that's us. Instead of writing how other people want us to write, we should write how we want to write. Yeah, they make us seem like they want us to be dumb. Then [we] will not be ourselves. [Barack]</p>
	<p>Yeah, I do still change how I create my writing. Because they say we're not <u>gonna</u> make a good grade or whatever. So, I'm like I'm going to do what they told us to do. But I'm still [feeling] the way I still feel like. [Ra'Jaria]</p>
	<p>Like, we should do like what we want to do [with what we create] so, cause what we want to do is probably better to do. Cause they told us to do <u>something</u> but we really don't like, we don't want to do it, so we <u>gonna</u> try to be lazy [and] we did. [Devante]</p>

	Students began to see the self as an author of literature and produce creations that shocked themselves and teachers despite refusing to write more than a few sentences at the beginning of the project. [Figures 3 & 4]
Flow	My teacher let me use music, like he knows I write better with music. [Barack]
	Yes, [Ms. Saida] she let us use music. It makes me think. I don't know how to get to the details [but] once I get my music on, I will. When I use music, I concentrate more and if you look at some of my writing pieces -- the ones I didn't use the music and the ones I did, the ones I did use music is better than ones I didn't. Because I have more detail, more reasons, and it's just better. We're all here 'cause I'm focus on one thing. [Devante]
	We are more focus. Like people just talking like, you are not really paying attention, cause you listening [to] your music. [Ashanti]
	When you're going with your music and get you writing. It has like a rhythm with you. It goes backward and forth. You can see it's like the [reading] and [writing]. It's not [making you] confuse. [Ra'Jaria]
	They make writing [funnier] for us. They make it like colorful, because whenever you're writing it's just black and white. And with us, they'll give us highlighters make it more pop out so we can see it a lot [better] when we're reading it and it helps us just like see it [better]. [Devante] [Figure 5]
Participatory	Oh, I like sharing my ideas and taking it in, like, I compare my writing into theirs and see what we both need help with. [Devante]
	[My favorite part of creating literature with someone] is like, mines <u>is</u> disagreeing, because when we both share ideas and we don't really agree with each other, we can have a conversation and talk about which one would fit best with our writing or what we're talking about. [Barack]
	I'll say [my favorite part of creating literature with someone] is hearing others' opinions and then sharing my opinion, because like even if we have different <u>opinions</u> we can see how we can make my opinion and their opinions work together to make to collaborate on. That's like when we, I don't know how to put them in words. Their opinions and mines. [Ashanti]
	I like to argue with everyone. Like if we're writing a story, we're talking back and forth. Like right now we're writing a story in our reading class for kindergarten and urban. And me and my friend, now we're arguing about what should be in our story, what shouldn't. And I think that is probably one of the funniest parts, because then it makes us <u>have to go back</u> and look at some more things. So that we can get along with it. [Ra'Jaria]
	Like he said about the urban thing. My partner [Vince], we [are creating] a book and we go like back and forth, and he tries to tell me that this is what should go there. But, like, we go back and forth about how we should write it and put a thought, like put it down on the book for it can make more sense. And try to figure out how the books [should] end and start. [Kanye]
	Well, meet up in the middle, I don't think we should just get everything our way and that you get everything. But I think like. We should kind of have some things that we like to do. [The teachers] should take our opinion in consideration. I want them to see real us not just what they what they want us to be. [Kanye]
	[Figures 6 & 7]

Headin

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	[Figures 6 & 7]

Exploring Student-Created Literature	
<i>Teachers</i>	
<i>Holistic</i>	<p>I think [it is important] for [the students] to recognize that how they speak isn't wrong, it is just part of the bigger fabric of language in English. So even I think the literature would be <u>really powerful</u> to find out how different phrases are spoken within the different cultures that all speak English across the world. For <u>example</u> we just finished in my class read about crime which contains a dialect they get as we were reading together and read it aloud. They just like [the dialect because] it comes naturally to them. But I also wanted to read with them, just either in small group or at a level that. And this would hit <u>really well</u> is the key -- where it's a Caribbean accent. Where some of the racial tensions are there but he's not <u>African-American</u>. He's very Caribbean. And he's very different but he is also similar. And <u>so</u> for them to recognize that and see that, they have to understand that. I think it was eye opening for them to see that. [Lee]</p>
<i>Connected</i>	<p>I guess because our kids are very visual and auditory. Some videos of people speaking in different dialects with different vernaculars and saying, "Do you understand what they're saying. Why don't you understand what they're saying? They're speaking English they're just not speaking our kind of English. Our specific kind." [Raina]</p> <p>I think in showing kids that English can be spoken in different manners. I think for our kids specifically, because for our population will be very impactful to show somebody who is Black from the Caribbean, somebody who is Black from India, somebody who is Black from Central Africa and South Africa. Because race plays such a big part of the <u>kids</u> lives whether it's overt or whether it's more <u>more</u> hidden. For them to just see that. Because I'm going to tell you, like them, a <u>number of</u> my kids when they see somethin Heading 2 e someone speaking differently if they're white. [So] they are just <u>gonna</u> go, "this is how white people speak" and to their detriment, many times they're not open minded enough based on where they are, obviously majority is white. But they'll just brush it off and believe that's how all white people speak. But for them to visually see, like [Monica] was saying, visually see or hear or read how Black people speak differently English differently all over the world. That's a big part. [Lee]</p> <p>Hispanic culture we have here. It tends to start speaking the vernacular of this side of town more southern than they would if they were on the east side of town. [Fran]</p> <p>I think we <u>have to</u> look at their capabilities, intellect. I mean with Mr. Lee working with really [more motivated] kids, it is interesting to see the same facts in my classroom brought forth a different fruit. You might say that they were able to see, "OK that's a good essay". And then they would just go on as far as the specifics of the piece of literature they created, what makes this a good essay. Teaching them other elements than, "Well it's long" [was important]. It was important that they saw "Oh it says something, it actually has good reason". You know it justifies what you're saying. ... The desire to read even the piece of</p>

	<p>paper that someone at our school wrote, so what do you think about what they wrote. You know getting them excited about, "Oh well yeah. they did OK, or they did great." [Fran]</p>
<i>Non-Dualistic</i>	<p>One of the "aha's for the kids, if you guys remember this was: they would read one essay on one side of the room, and in the group on the other side of the room and they'd read another essay and they say, "Did I already read this essay? I think I've already read this one." And then they recognize that everybody writes very similarly in their classroom but it's the ones that do something a little bit different or have a hook that stands out, or a conclusion, or the examples that are outside the box that make it stand up and go become unique. That was the biggest "aha" for a number of all the 7th grade students. And that was one of those ones where they went, "Oh, I'm going to put a little more substance and make mine stand out from the rest." So that exchange piece was when we [saw] that was a very big light bulb [went off] for all of them. [Lee]</p>
<i>Immeasurable</i>	<p>Honestly for me [working with students] is more about growth with their love for literature and writing than it was about what they could or couldn't do. <u>So</u> for me it's not about the students' overall success it was about their growth. To have a student that could only produce maybe 2 sentences and then start basically whining about how they have nothing else to say, they don't know how to write, they don't know what to say, to they are using everything you taught them and writing an entire paper [and see themselves as an <u>author</u>]. That was, that was the real thing for me. You know. Not just kind of can they write well. It wasn't about that at that point. That was [what the] success was about. [Raina]</p>

Smith: "I want them to see the real us not just what they what they want



Figure 1. Developing Nurturing Literacies through Gardening

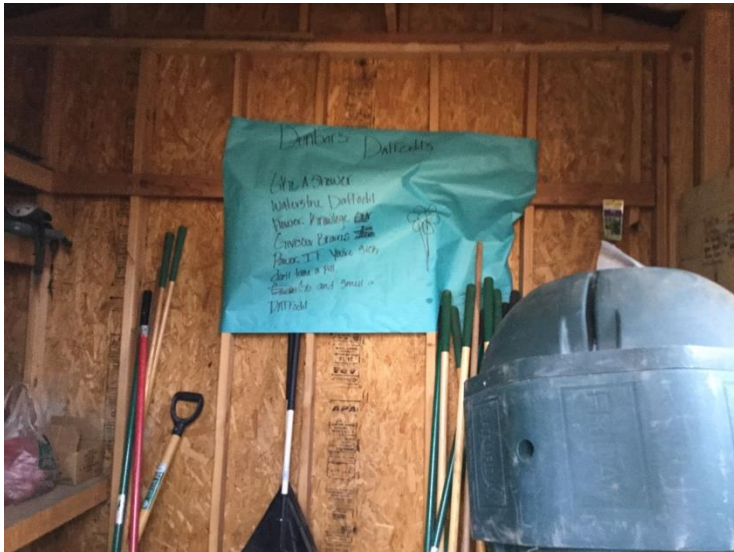


Figure 2. Co-creating a Poem Together based on Gardening

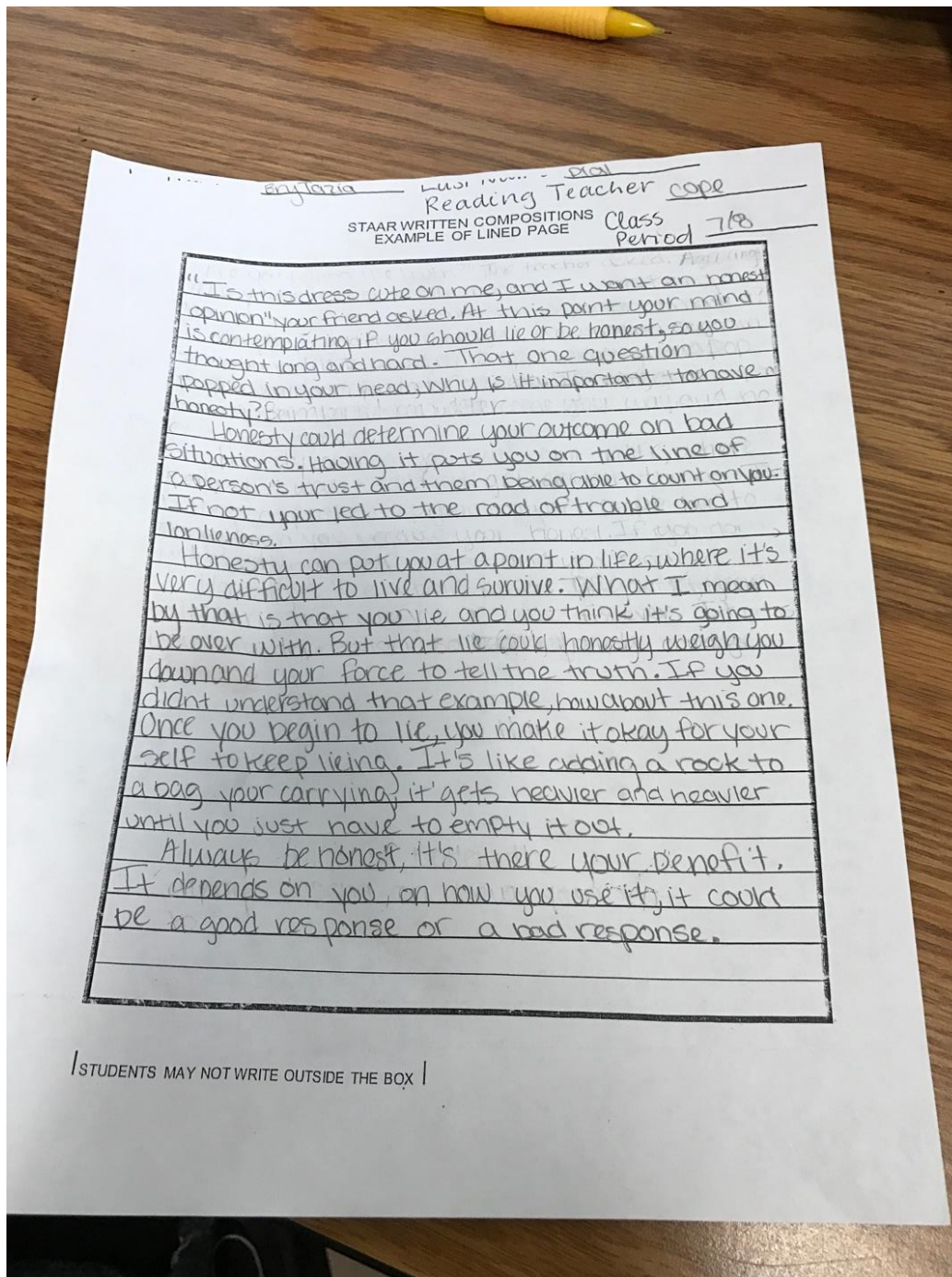


Figure 3. Completing a Draft of a Piece of Non-Fiction Literature

Smith: "I want them to see the real us not just what they what they want

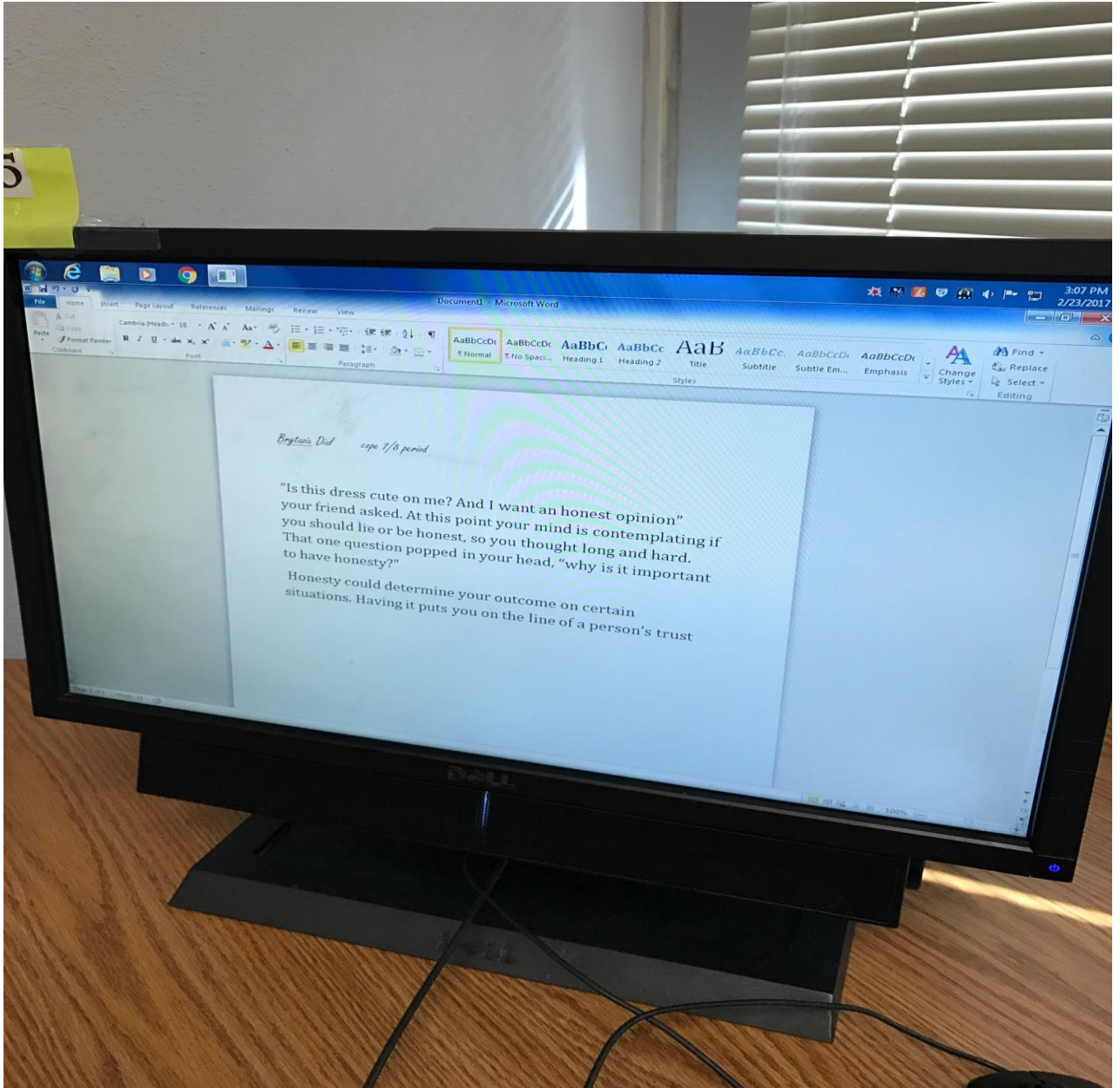


Figure 4. *Remembering the Soul through Envisioning Self as Author in Preparing a Non-Fiction Literature Piece for Publication*

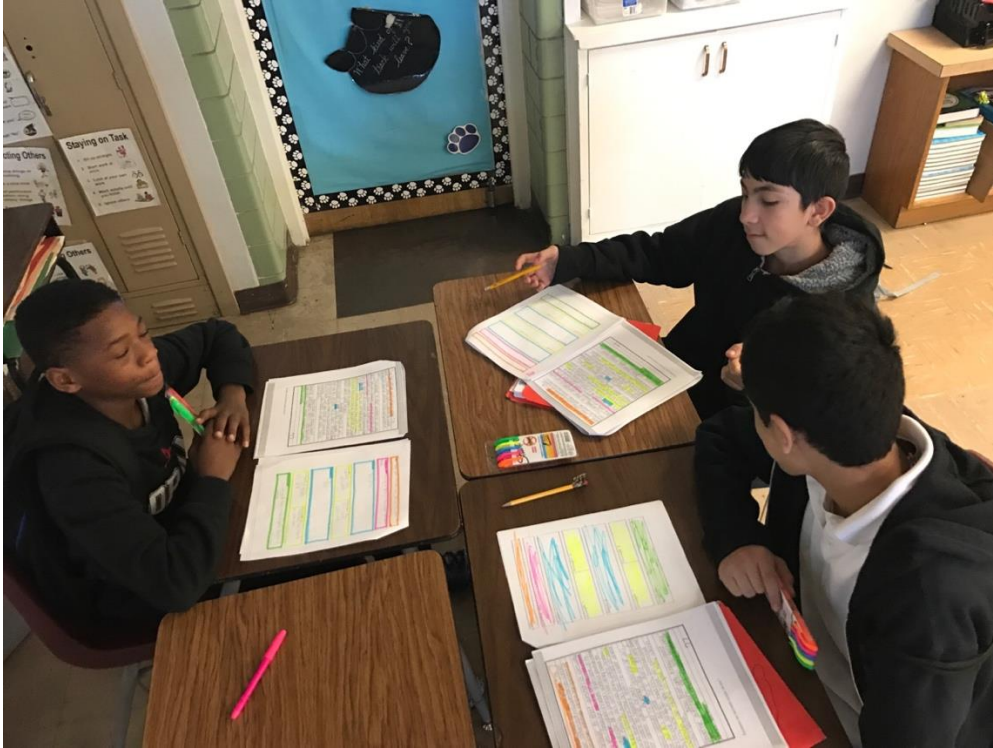


Figure 5. Using “Colorful” Writing for Imagery and Flow in the Creation of Literature

Smith: "I want them to see the real us not just what they what they want

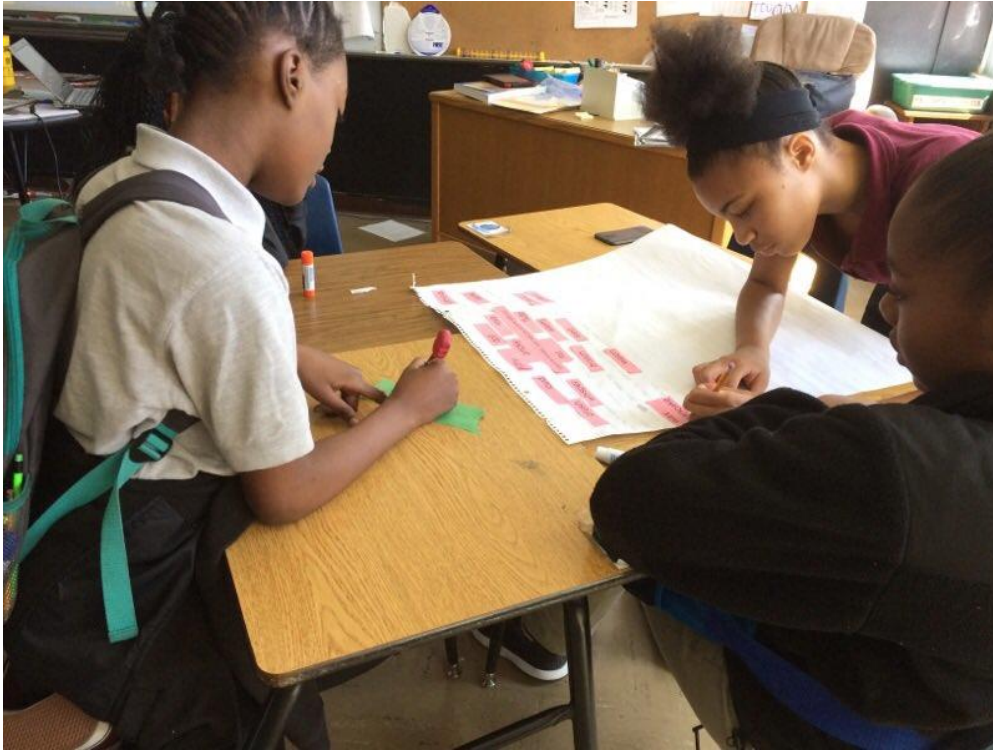


Figure 6. Fostering Participatory Collaborative Creations of Literature by Students



Figure 7. Cultivating Participatory Co-Creations of Knowledge by Students

Exploring student-created literature through timeless learning for soulful education.

The teachers involved in the research-practice partnership worked intentionally to cultivate elements of timeless learning for soulful education (Kates, 2010; Miller, 2010) through exploring student-created literature. Table 1 above illustrates how this process was facilitated in and across classrooms. As shown in the excerpts, allowing students to recognize, through the use of student-created literature, that their personhoods could equally foreground what they believed were ‘dialects’ not allowed in the classroom even as other more formal elements of English and other languages were encountered allowed them to recognize that there was no need to keep the various linguistic parts of their beings fragmented, thereby fostering a *holistic* view of learning. Similarly, using literature to enable them to explore what other individuals who were similar to, yet different from them in certain regards, allowed them to recognize their *connectedness* to the

broader global world. Enabling students to read the literature created by their peers allowed them to see their connectedness also to students in their immediate school and classroom communities and doing this also allowed them to see the similarities existing among some of their ideas and creations, elucidating the *oneness*, that is, non-dualism, that existed among them. As reflected by teachers, having opportunities for students (and teachers) to reflect fostered a sense of *immeasurability* that extended beyond the accountability measures expected by the district of the teachers and myself in the research-practice partnership, causing us to focus more on the growth of the soul of each child.

It's not rocket science! Intersecting elements of timeless learning for soulful education. The teachers and coach as well as other stakeholders with whom I worked throughout the two-year period at Radical Hope Academy did not pursue the elements of timeless learning through their support of students' literacies in an independent fashion. Instead, these components were interdependent and interwoven throughout the fabric of our activities daily and over our time together. For instance, across Year 1 of the project, our foci were: (a) working with each middle-school student at Radical Hope Academy to co-create individual reading plans and goals based on assessment results for independent and instructional reading as part of a Balanced Literacy Guided Reading Launch; (b) implementing publicly visible weekly, quarterly, semester-long and annual reward systems for engagement with and reading of literature of choice to foster intrinsic motivation to read; (c) expanding school library and creating classroom libraries by following guidelines for selecting literature for middle-school students from historically underserved US populations; (d) implementing a school-wide read-aloud initiative involving over 30 accomplished professionals from Texas Tech University and the broader Lubbock community and TTU student athletes; (e) sustaining a professional learning community (PLC)

with teachers, coaches and school administrators; (f) creating opportunities for real-life experiences with the community such as the Texas Tech Athletic Department, National Ranching Heritage Center, Science Spectrum and Omni Theatre, American Wind Power Center, Moody Planetarium, Lubbock Lake Landmark that served as a basis for student-created literature; and (g) holding an end-of-year literacy celebration and book-signing that highlighted local teacher and professor authors from Radical Hope Academy and from the Texas Tech University.

Throughout and across these processes, students recognized their connectedness to individuals in the local school as well as the broader Lubbock and Texas Tech University community. They were capable, through the many discussions held with TTU professionals and athletes during read-alouds, to *holistically* discuss their futures in non-fragmented ways. This in turn allowed students to engage in *soulful* understanding that allowed them to identify where they fit into the broader Lubbock and world community. The gardening process which cultivated their *nurturing* also allowed them to engage in care and to see the oneness existing between themselves and the physical world. The music allowed by teachers in classrooms while they created literature allowed for *flow*. The majority of students began the school year lacking motivation to read. Yet, the year ended with each child eager to and reading books – happily and joyfully books of their choice. Timeless learning through *soulfulness, connectedness, holistic approaches, caring, participatory activities* and *flow* (Kates, 2010; Miller, 2010) allowed the students to engage with soulful education through literacy and English language arts in a way that gave them radical hope. The joy on students' faces and intrinsic intent as they pursue literature is visible in Figure 8.

Smith: "I want them to see the real us not just what they want"



Figure 8. *Engaging in Literacy for its Own Sake through Soulful Education*

Fostering Radical Hope to Cultivate a ‘Literate Language of the Soul’

In this conceptual essay, I began by arguing that the current global landscape requires a rethinking of the dichotomies that have for so long existed between soul and mind in education (Smith, 2013, 2018, 2022). Positioning literacy/ELA as a tool through which to explore and create literature for supporting a bridging of the gaps across the mind and soul, I presented literacies of timeless learning for soulful education as a reasonable approach through which the field of literacy can allow students to develop radical hope as they work actively to redeem themselves from this dichotomy and cultivate ‘a literate language of the soul’. Through this language developed through already-present literacies (Watson, 2020), I argued that the body becomes free to connect to its spiritual nature, to remember the purpose for which the soul exists in the world, and to support the spiritual aspirations of the being in its desire for justice, beauty, love and joy by constantly and continuously focusing on ‘relating between’ (Mills, 2010). Presenting excerpts of data from student creations of literature in middle-school ELA/literacy classrooms, I demonstrated how soulful education through literacies of timeless learning allowed for spiritual awareness to be built into the literacy enterprise in ways that allowed for the individual to connect to self and to others – continuously relating between -- intrapersonally, interpersonally, and transpersonally (Kates, 2010; see also Smith, 2013, 2018a) at the individual, community, social, and environmental levels.

The soul is the wellspring of wellness, wholeness and the quality of compassion needed in this era of re-alignment and possibility. It is, possibly, our only practical tool for transforming the culture of alienation, materialism and greed. If the young are raised in educational settings that ignore the soul—that essential part of the self that guides our

conscience and dreams—we cannot hope to transform violent, joyless unethical ways of living. (Kates, 2010, p. 8)

Radical hope through literacy/ELA is possible to the degree that teachers and educators use literacies of timeless learning to commit to cultivating a literate language of the soul.

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