

**“Poetic License”: Constructing Literary Performing Arts Curriculum  
Within a High-Stakes Educational Environment**

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## Abstract

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Literary Performing Arts (LPA) is an artistic writing strategy, based within traditions of hip-hop and urban youth culture, that infuses writing with performance technique as a way to critique and resist current societal structures while also developing a students’ personal dialogue with their own experiences. Three high school sites within the same urban district were examined to see how LPA curriculum functioned within a high-stakes environment at both school and classroom levels. Qualitative findings indicated that LPA curriculum and its dissemination within each learning space was in fact influenced by this high-stakes environment through external school factors such as: curricular school-wide models, active support from school administration, teacher values, and student population.

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## **Chapter 1:**

### **Introduction**

Student beliefs about education and their investment in succeeding academically are often influenced by their level of interest in the curriculum and the way that curriculum is taught (Fisher, 2005). Weinstein (2009) asserts that a large deterrent for many high school students in engaging with Language Arts curriculum specifically, is school “privileging the more superficial aspects of composition” such as sentence and essay structure, punctuation/spelling, and summarization (p.144). According to Diaz-Greenberg (2003):

Considering the oppressive conditions faced by children of color in the educational system, there is a need to create a more inclusive, less restrictive environment that can foster mutual respect and understanding among all members of the school community. Such an environment should include the students’ language, culture, and home-based experiences as a central part of the curriculum. (p. 87)

In order to promote student engagement specifically within marginalized populations, it is thus crucial to utilize the rich and individual experiences students bring to the classroom in ways that develop a deeper relationship with a more complex Language Arts curriculum.

Literary Performing Arts (LPA) is one emergent strategy that has been utilized as a way to engage students in critical ways, many who were previously unsuccessful in the traditional educational structure, with Language Arts (Wissman, 2010). Based within traditions of hip-hop and urban youth culture, spoken word and poetry slam are artistic forms, which infuse writing with performance technique as a way to critique and resist current societal structures while also developing a students’ personal dialogue with their own experiences (Desai & Marsh, 2005; Camangian, 2008; Fisher, 2005; McLaughlin, 1993; Weinstein, 2009). These performances of original work are often organized as “open mics” where poets informally share their work or

competitions in which works are judged on a scale from 1-10 through multiple rounds. These artistic techniques and structures offer high school students a way to voice opinions in a meaningful manner, build confidence with literacy and public speaking, and develop higher order thinking skills by connecting their writing to larger societal issues, topics, and assigned literature (Desai & Marsh, 2005; Fisher, 2005;). “Crafting a class...with poetry, images, and spoken word”, Wissman (2010) states, “shift[s] focus away from deficits to strengths, from isolated skills, to embodied knowledge” (p. 52).

Despite the potential academic and social benefits elicited from LPA curriculum, the struggle for an instructional space within the classroom and a legitimate “curricular space” in the larger policy environment remains constant. The high-stakes testing environment where schools are held accountable counteracts the use of LPA as an instructional tool due to the curriculum’s focus on developing student strengths outside of the rigid test and content standards. According to Linn (2000), “content areas assessed for a high stakes accountability system receive emphasis while those that are left out languish” (p.12). This exclusion of content from the curriculum occurs as a direct result of the high stakes environment where many instructors feel that student engagement with the curriculum in critical, complex, and personal manners is secondary to retention of the skills and topics found on the state and federal tests, which tend to be “superficial” at best (Weinstein, 2009).

Although there is a very noticeable tension between LPA curriculum and the high-stakes environment described above, attempts to understand this important tension appear to be largely missing from the substantial body of research on LPA instruction. Instead, much research gravitates towards *why* literary performing arts curriculum is important for marginalized students specifically and its potential benefits for student achievement while omitting *how* the curriculum

came to be present or absent in the first place. In order to confront this gap in literature and research, I designed this study to address the LPA-high-stakes tension, by exploring the nature of LPA instruction and curriculum within varied school and district environments, and in response to the pressures of a high stakes accountability system. Additionally, my aim was to expand upon the established research in hopes of better understanding the conditions of an educational environment that promote or inhibit Literary Performing Arts curriculum and, consequently, the type of student engagement experienced by marginalized youth in the Language Arts classroom.

School and district spaces, together, allow for a multilayered analysis, which investigates: how and what students learn in the Language Arts classroom (school space), the context that shapes this learning (district space), and the influence that high-stakes testing and content standards (the larger policy environment) pose at both school and district levels.

- At the school level, I focus on what students have the opportunity to learn through teacher instruction and curriculum within the high school ELA classroom. Taking into account the role instruction has in facilitating this process, my purpose is to better understand the high-stakes environment and the type of education the student receives as a result of instructional practice within that environment.
- At the district level, I explore the distinct conditions of a school district and, subsequently, the high schools within it that utilize Literary Performing Arts curriculum. Based upon district and school-level organizational research, these conditions may include but are not limited to: decentralized or centralized district management systems, level of principal and teacher autonomy, context of professional development at district and school levels, the culture and context of Language Arts departments in high schools, principal/administrative support of

alternative curriculums (i.e. development of “untested” skills), and demographics of student population (Ouchi, 2006).

My questions concerning these potential influences on LPA curriculum, as enacted in high school classrooms, are as follows:

1. *Within a high-stakes policy environment, what district and school conditions encourage or inhibit the use of literary performing arts in high school English Language Arts classrooms?*
  - a. In what ways, if at all, has the district created or hindered financial, curricular, or professional supports for LPA?
  - b. What support systems for LPA, if any, exist in the school setting? In what ways do these systems relate to district-level systems?
2. *In the classrooms and schools, which do support literary performing arts, in what ways (if at all) does the high-stakes environment affect how literary performing arts is taught in Language Arts instruction?*
  - a. How, if at all, does the high-stakes environment shape the school and classroom culture?
  - b. Within this environment, how do teachers’ values, backgrounds, and priorities affect the presence or form that LPA takes in Language Arts teaching?

## **Chapter 2:**

### **Framing Ideas and Informing Literatures: Literary Performing Arts**

#### **In the Urban School Curriculum and Policy Environment**

The lack of academic achievement and social mobility of marginalized urban youth continues to plague the U.S. public education system. As stated previously, the body of research regarding Literary Performing Arts is predominantly oriented toward instructional strategies (i.e., the “how to”) and the potential benefits that literary performing arts may elicit for marginalized students in becoming critical thinkers and active participants in their communities. A more broad-based way of framing my study marries ideas about literary performing arts (and literacy teaching in general) in the urban setting with other literature concerning the possible consequences of high-stakes policy environments for instructional practice and, by extension, this particular form of instructional practice. Based on these literatures, I construct a conceptual framework that allows me to focus on the research questions at hand.

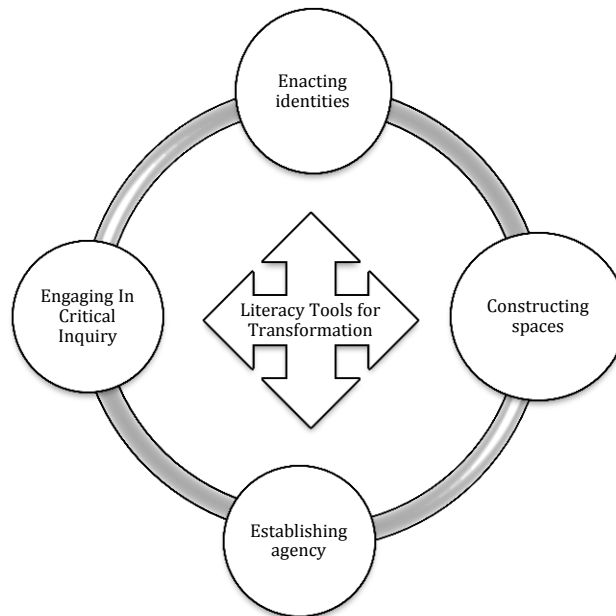
#### **Understanding What Literary Performing Arts Teaches,**

#### **And How, in Urban Settings**

The literacy tool framework for urban education put forth by Beach, Campano, Edmiston, and Borgmann (2010) [figure 1.0] demonstrates the various instructional goals of literary performing arts within an urban setting and provides a structure in which to examine and synthesize the related literature. Although not all literature speaks to the urban environment, much of the sentiment embedded within the framework resonates throughout this research and thus, remains applicable. Figure 1.0 demonstrates how elements within this framework are

inherently connected through the literacy tools that shape them while remaining separate entities themselves.

**Figure 1.0**



Beach et. al. (2010) define literacy tools as “any artifact, idea, or process that people use when they read and write or otherwise use language to make meaning” putting equal emphasis on alternative kinds of texts such as performance (14). They maintain that literacy tools are transformative and can be used as a way of supporting the following academic and social arenas for marginalized youth in order to create a more equitable environment: *Engaging in Critical Inquiry*, *Constructing Spaces*, *Establishing Agency*, *Enacting Identities*. Figure 1.0 demonstrates how these arenas relate to each other and the literacy tools themselves.

## Engaging in Critical Inquiry

McLaughlin (1993) puts forth the idea of “power as a dialectic” based within critical pedagogy in order to outline spoken word curriculum as a form of resistance against the dominant educational structure (Desai & Marsh, 2005; McLaughlin, 1993; Clay, 2006).

McLaughlin (1993) contends that while power is often constructed *against* the subordinate group by labeling them as an object within the dominant institutionalized structure, power also has the ability to be imparted *upon* the subordinated by positioning them as “subjects” in which critical reflection and resistance to that dominant structure becomes possible. This transformative idea of power gives teachers the ability to build curriculum around empowering critical voices within the classroom, which involves the validation of student experience and narrative (McLaughlin, 1993). Camangian (2008) further contends that by ignoring instructional frameworks like that of “power as a dialectic” in the classroom, “we tolerate students’ self-defeating ideologies and practices that inhibit the individual and collective growth urban students can undergo in and beyond their communities” (p. 53).

Several studies utilize the idea of “power as a dialectic” to demonstrate how literary performing arts curriculum can be a tool for developing critical inquiry skills and, in turn, elicit positive student transformation.

Through his action research in a South-Central Los Angeles high school Camangian (2008) found that Literary Performing Arts curriculum was much more effective than traditional school curriculum in developing student’s critical analysis skills and elicited an increased level of student engagement as evidence of classroom observation and the writing produced.

Similarly, through the use of interviews and participant observations, Clay (2006) found the use of spoken word and hip-hop to be “an important part of the individual formation of a

political consciousness among youth of color involved in activism, enabling them to address and combat racism and other forms of inequality” (p.105). Additionally, Clay (2006) concluded that spoken word and hip-hop prove to be “a significant tool in organizing other youth for social and political change in their communities” (p. 105). After conducting qualitative research in two youth organizations located in the San Francisco/Bay Area from October 2000 to May 2002, Clay (2006) assessed the way in which hip hop and spoken word had inspired youth to become more active citizens. In reflecting on two interviews, which represent this inspiration, he asserts:

hip-hop was important for them because they were able to write and express, free from judgment, the things that happened in their communities. For them, it served as an outlet and a reaffirmation of their political consciousness...By using hip-hop to highlight such issues, the youth in this study have capitalized on an important cultural medium to raise consciousness, connect with others, and strengthen their understandings about oppression and their everyday lives. (p. 118)

Wissman (2010) found similar results through her study of an Academic Intervention Service (AIS) classroom in rural upstate New York during the 2007-2008 school year.

### **Constructing Spaces**

Teachers and educators play a large part in the construction of artistic and critical spaces for students. Fisher (2005) argues that in order for spoken word and poetry to best be used in the classroom, educators must first understand these techniques not as a teaching strategy but rather as a culture within itself. Using the idea of “Participatory Literacy Communities” (PLCs) as a basis, Fisher (2005) expands upon ways in which critical spaces have potential to emerge within the lives of youth. PLCs are focused around literary activities such as spoken word poetry, open mics, bookstore events, etc. and remain external to formal school and work environments. Fisher (2005) states that, “participants in these communities are not only aware of the importance of

acquiring the language and skills needed for the language of wider communication, but they are also committed to pushing the boundaries of literacy” (p. 118). While PLCs remain outside of the school context, they provide insight to how communities of this manner are ideologically constructed. These ideologies become relevant to the school context as non-profit groups begin to bridge the gap between formal school and external configurations of literacy. Fisher (2005) further contends that in order for educators to effectively accomplish a PLC within school boundaries, they must “critically examine” these communities, “chosen...and supplementary places for learning”, and how they foster cultural identity (117).

During the 2003-2004 school year, Fisher (2005) conducted a qualitative study of two extra-curricular writing programs based in two New York City high schools. Using ethnographic field notes, films of class sessions, and interviews with teachers and students to compile data, Fisher found that many students cited “these writing communities as their impetus for attending school” (127). Additionally, she found that when the teachers incorporated writing into their own lives, the students were more engaged. Thus, Fisher recommends that, “classroom teachers need to cultivate their writing craft as well so they can model writing and take risks side by side with students” (128). This practice will strengthen the ability for a teacher to sustain the artistic and critical space for students.

### **Establishing Agency**

Due to the social stigma attached to youth culture, adolescent opinions are often ignored regarding the problems affecting their lives in and out of school contexts (LeCompte, 1993). Alcott (1991/92) contends that, “the practice of privileged persons speaking for or on behalf of less privileged persons has actually resulted (in many cases) in increasing or reinforcing the

oppression of the group spoken for” (p. 7). This often occurs because in an effort to speak about a given group one may inevitably end up speaking *for* them (Alcoff, 1991/92). The predominance of adult presence (i.e. researchers, school faculty, policymakers, etc.) regarding addressing issues of school reform is demonstrative of this process by not only marginalizing the youth voice, but the youth experience as well. Thus, students become effectively disengaged from the social and political arenas, which directly impact their schooling experiences and levels of academic achievement. Naturally, this process of “subtractive voice” adversely affects low-income and minority youth due their already marginalized place within the institutional structure of education (Valenzuela, 1999). In order to address this disassociation with school reform processes and their community at large, youth and most importantly low-income and/or minority youth, must be given the tools to critically develop their voice so they may obtain the agency to speak for themselves (Reyes, 2007).

Camangian (2008) suggests using Literary Performing Arts as a strategy in which to address social stratification as it “opens up spaces for youth to bring their...knowledge into classroom spaces historically marginalized youth have long felt silenced within” (p. 36).

### **Enacting Identities**

Desai & Marsh (2005) argue that spoken word “helps students realize that they are literate and are able/do engage in critical dialogue and action” (p. 72). They further contend that, “this factor becomes extremely vital, when so many students of color in urban schools struggle with what has been termed ‘academic literacy’” (p.72). The struggle experienced by students within school spaces consequently leads to decreased academic motivation and perpetuation of negative learner identities. Using critical pedagogy and critical race theory as frameworks in

which to approach their observations and program structure, Desai and Marsh (2005) describe and recount their experiences working with students on spoken word at a Los Angeles high school. After compiling observations of student behavior and written work, the authors concluded that:

...once we can familiarize ourselves with the struggles our students grapple with internally, both in and outside of school, we can connect with them on a more human, personal level. More importantly, by simply listening to our students and creating a space where they can begin to articulate their thoughts and ideas in written and spoken form, we can further assist them in developing a love for written and spoken word. (p. 85)

### **Potential Consequences of the High-Stakes Environment for Literary Performing Arts**

Literary Performing Arts teaching takes place in a busy and demanding standards-based policy environment. As the educational stakes continue to rise nationwide for both teachers and students, the threat to LPA curriculum and, consequently, the academic/social benefits elicited from that curriculum, grows larger.

The “theory of action” behind content standards and standards-based assessment within the high-stakes reform movement is, according to Rothman (2004), meant to “improve learning by providing guidance to students, parents, and teachers about what students are expected to learn at each level” (p. 96). In order to accomplish this goal of significant student progress however, the “theory of action” further contends that “rigorous expectations for student learning” and corresponding assessments must be in place as well (Rothman, 2004, p. 96). These expectations differ greatly than that of past accountability structures in which norm-referenced assessments (i.e., student to student comparisons) were used to measure student performance (Linn & Herman, 1997; Linn, 2000). Assessments constructed in this manner indicated no set

standard of achievement that all students were required to meet. Herman (2004) discusses how contemporary high-stakes systems have digressed from norm-referenced assessments into more structured forms:

What is particularly new in standards-based assessment reform is being clear not only on the ‘what’ of what is expected (the content standards), but also on ‘how well’ it should be accomplished (the performance standards). pp. 146-147

Through the specification of content standards and desired student performance levels, policymakers in both federal and state systems have made explicit to schools and teachers what they expect to be taught and the level at which students should perform in response. As a result, schools and teachers are held accountable to teach the skills required by content standards and assessments often facing large consequences if these goals are not met. Although school and teacher accountability in this manner can elicit instructional benefits *within* the established structure, the flexibility to utilize alternative curriculums such as LPA (i.e., curriculums *outside* of this required accountability structure) becomes more difficult despite its potential.

A substantial body of research demonstrates how standards-based reform and high-stakes testing have influenced teacher instruction both in content and practice through increasingly accountable policy reforms. In fact, Herman (2004) states that, “results from nearly every study indicate...that teachers pay attention to what is tested and adapt their curriculum and teaching accordingly” (p. 147). Washington State, the larger context in which my study is focused, is no exception. A study by Stecher, Barron, Chun, and Ross (2000) revealed that not only did teachers alter their classroom curriculum and practice in order to align with the Essential Academic and Learning Requirements (EALRs) set by the state beginning in the 1996-1997 school year, they were highly responsive to test-centered content found on the Washington Assessment of Student Learning (WASL). As a result, educators began to focus their instruction

more frequently on WASL-tested subjects such as English and Math than other less tested subjects within the EALR framework. Additionally, the study found a positive correlation between gains in student test scores and the amount of test preparation activities employed by the teacher further supporting this change in instructional practice (Stecher et al., 2000).

Because high-stakes testing and accountability quantify systems of knowledge and largely discount alternative forms of assessment and comprehension, the rising influence on teacher instruction is paramount. It is important to note that these methods of accountability are not intrinsically negative and do serve a purpose within the educational arena. However, more qualitative means of assessment are also needed (and often ignored) in order to truly assess a “well rounded” education. Hursh (2008) contends that a good education should “contribute to creating a more socially just and inclusive society, one in which citizens contribute to the common good through debate, conversation, and action” (p. 121). This educational perspective, which Labaree (1997) terms “democratic equality”, offers us an alternative educational goal in relation to producing *good citizens* rather than *good workers* (p. 43). Under this definition, the importance of education lies in creating a more thoughtful population that uses knowledge as a tool in which to ignite change, especially within traditionally marginalized communities.

High-stakes accountability systems, however, built upon economic models of development, choose not to frame education in this manner and thus ignore many of the alternative skills (outlined in the previous section) curriculum like literary performing arts can generate outside of determined content standards. As Beach et. al. (2010) assert:

spoken word poetry as a literacy tool...calls for and creates an audience that has an ethical role of witnessing through voicing of one's experience...it is an acknowledgement of what some has lived through and survived...The poet becomes a medium for society's injustices and the audience...affirms its truth value (p. 93).

The type of active listening and affirmation that occurs between the audience (i.e. teacher) and student serves as an example of an assessment type, which lies outside of a high-stakes accountability system but remains integral to promoting the facts of the literacy tool framework described above. Consequently, as standards-based reform continues to increase its presence and raise the stakes with assessment, so too will literary performing arts and education for “democratic equality” be pushed out (Amrein-Beardsley, 2009; Linn, 2000).

As demonstrated by much of the literature outlined in the previous section, however, many ELA teachers and groups of educators have come up with creative ways and found loopholes to maintain the presence of LPA curriculum within their classroom and school communities at large. For example, studies by Low (2010) and Camangian (2008) reveal how one teacher was able to integrate LPA curriculum into his instruction based upon the student’s fourth year standing. Because most of these students had already completed their assessments (i.e., exit exams), the instructors felt less pressure to adhere to the confines of the high-stakes environment for means of improving student scores. Additional research has shown how teachers have used out of school time for LPA based activities such as writing workshops, poetry slams, and open mic events as a strategy of getting around the school administration (Camangian, 2008; Fisher, 2005; Wissman, 2010). What is revealed through these teacher strategies, however, is the dominance high-stakes testing and content standards has over how LPA is taught. In the scenarios described above, teachers used LPA curriculum *after* students had taken their required exams (i.e. senior standing) or avoided the classroom space all together by teaching LPA outside of the formal school context. Neither of these teacher strategies actively confronts the state/district assessment or content standards but instead remain marginal to them.

It is for this reason why understanding the conditions of school and district spaces, which either endorse or hinder LPA curriculum—within a high-stakes policy environment— will further suggest how LPA can become more centralized within ELA teacher practice.

### Conceptual Framework

The following framework addresses the factors at various organizational levels that influence the processes of schooling and more specifically, the “instructional core”, which is defined by the processes of teaching and learning that occur at the classroom level (Elmore, 1996). These factors frame how the “core” is constructed and thus provide a framework in which to orient LPA curriculum within this core.

### The Influence of State & District on School Culture & Climate

Although the State and districts remain external to the school itself, they play a significant role in shaping school culture and climate. The way in which school administration and teachers respond to those elements will affect the manifestation of culture within the school arena. Often there is a

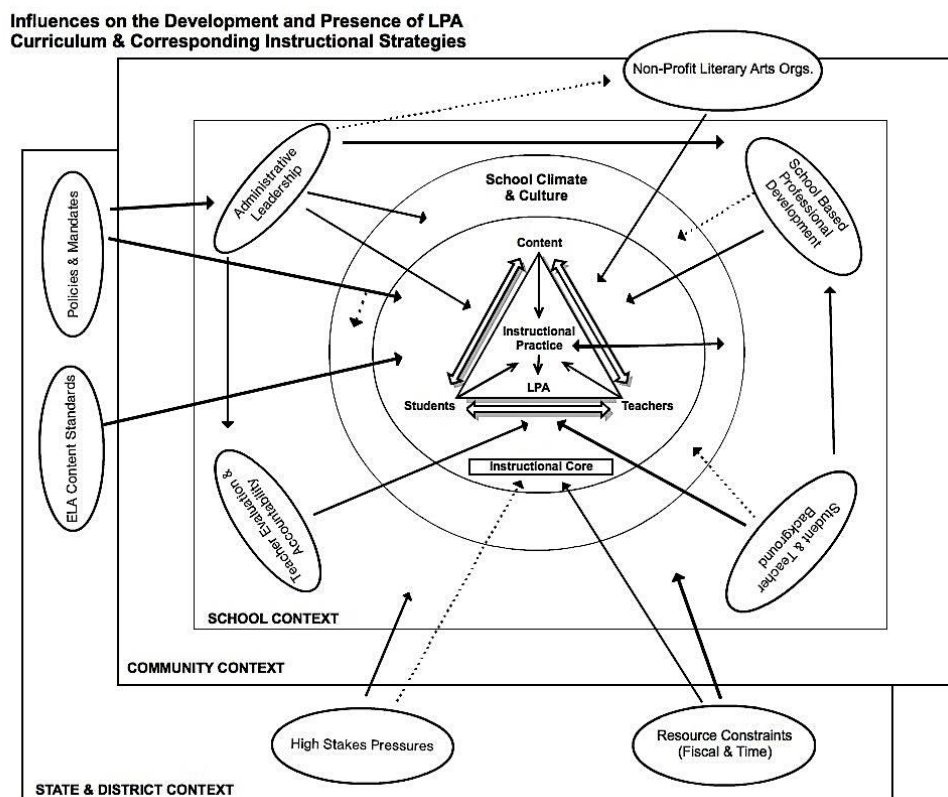


Figure 1.3

noticeable tension or compliance between external and internal school contexts depending on the type of culture a school has fostered. According to Norris (1991) rigid organizational structures often lead to “autopieses”— a routine practice in which culture is constantly fitted to the assumed perception of the organization itself. Thus, rather than *shaping* the culture of schools through shared values and beliefs, schools will adhere to preconceived notions of what the culture “*should be*”, which is often determined by outside State and District forces (Norris, 1991, p. 66). In other words, the practices and values at State and district levels bear great influence on the type of culture and climate a school *hopes* to attain (or maintain), which subsequently permeates the “instructional core” itself. As demonstrated by figure 1.3, State and district contexts accomplish this through policies, mandates, ELA content standards, high stakes pressures/testing, and resource constraints/allocation, which serve as significant avenues of influence within more localized school contexts.

### **Community Context**

Non-profit literary performing arts organizations are integral to understanding how LPA manifests within the school environment due to the organization’s direct involvement at the instructional level. Thus, the manner in which non-profits are utilized and, in turn, how they choose to construct the given LPA curriculum will affect how LPA is represented and received within the classroom. While external to the traditional educational structure (i.e., school, district, and state spaces), non-profits experience many of the same district and state pressures due to their active role within the school space. Examining the extent to which literary non-profits are involved in LPA instruction provides a more holistic understanding of the conditions in which LPA is constructed.

## The School Arena

Influenced by the factors within district, state, and community contexts, the school arena serves as the place in which all external controls are synthesized and subsequently enacted. The manner in which a school responds to these influences, at both administrative and teacher levels, will greatly define the resulting culture and climate and in turn, the instructional core itself (Diamond, 2012; Elmore, 1996). More specifically, this process is defined by the interactions between teachers, principals/administrators, and students regarding: administrative leadership, teacher evaluation & accountability procedures, school based professional development, and student & teacher background. The complex and varied interactions that occur between these facets demonstrate how each school may function differently given the unique process of interaction, which occurs at each individual site.

The manner in which school players (e.g. teachers, principals/administrators, students) interact with the established organizing principles (i.e., organizational conditions and organizational learning & integrating processes) will shape the educational landscape in which they reside. Although climate and culture are influenced by almost identical processes and management systems, they remain distinct in nature (Hoy, 1990). Thus, rather than understanding them as one whole, we should conceptualize culture and climate as two individual structures that *bear influence* on each other while maintaining separate associative characteristics.

***School climate.*** Hoy (1990) defines the organizational climate of a school as “ the relatively enduring quality of the school environment that is experienced by participants, affects their behavior, and is based on their collective perceptions of behavior in schools” (p. 152).

The *technical* level addresses the basic exercises of a school in which the “teaching-learning process” occurs. The managerial level remains within the school context but is more concerned with the overall operation of the school. The principal is placed at this level and is in charge of facilitating, developing, and bringing together the teaching and learning processes occurring in each classroom. Lastly, the institutional level connects the school context with the external environment or community. Community organization, parent, district, and state systems are among the actors found within this level. Players at technical and managerial levels will often try and mediate the demands of those at the institutional level for means of producing a more supportive climate in which to function.

***School culture.*** Erickson (1987) discusses the nature of school culture in relation to, “the invention and diffusions of new cultural patterns within a single generation, for reasons of oppositional display and resistance” (p. 22). This idea of constructing culture in response to opposing ideological perspectives reveals the tension that arises when traditional structures of power enter a more pluralistic arena.

This definition of culture helps to explain the complex school arena and the cultural dynamics that shape it. More specifically, Erickson speaks to the type culture, which most aligns with alternative curriculums such as LPA. According to Jongsma (1991), “Teaching critical literacy requires a rethinking of the social character of literacies in communities, classrooms, and societies, and of larger political issues of power and control” (p. 519). Thus critical literacy aims to address the normative structures of perception for means of better understanding patterns of oppression within local, national, and global contexts. Because this type of curriculum actively confronts traditional forms of pedagogy, a school culture established in response to an

increasingly fluid value system will more likely utilize, and be exposed to, LPA as an instructional method.

### **Instructional Core**

One of the critical pieces this study aims to address is how external contexts will inherently affect a school's ability to remain flexible in nature and maintain the presence of LPA. The classroom level, at which direct instructional intervention occurs, is essential in assessing how this flexibility is maintained. According to City et. al. (2009), the instructional core helps to identify the *actual processes* of instruction by focusing on students, teachers, and the dissemination of curricular content between these two parties. City et. al. (2009) further maintain that facets remaining outside of the instructional core (i.e. teachers, students, and content) "can only affect student learning and performance by somehow influencing what goes on *inside* the core" (p. 24). Thus, the presence of LPA curriculum and how it is taught, while mitigated by external factors, will ultimately be determined by the interplay between teachers and students.

### **Chapter 3:**

#### **Methodology & Research Design**

Qualitative methods allow for an in-depth and concentrated analysis of a given research context and the phenomena that emerge. Due to the nature of my research questions, which seek “to understand and describe social phenomena from perspectives of participants”, I chose to employ a qualitative approach to inquiry within an interpretivist paradigm, as the basis for my study (Glesne, 2011, p. 17).

Using a “collective case” study model specifically, I examined a mid-sized urban school district, where literary performing arts curriculum was present within at least three of the high schools and assessed the factors that not only promoted the use of LPA, but in what manner and to what extent (Stake, as cited in Glesne, 2011). A collective case study model was used to frame this research because the study was bound by a school district and investigated several “cases” (i.e., high schools) in which thematic conclusions and patterns were then drawn from the data. Additionally, a collective case study allowed for considering variable conditions at each district high school, specifically regarding literary performing arts curriculum and thus produced a richer account of school/district conditions in relation to LPA and the high-stakes environment.

#### **Setting and Participants**

The study took place at over the course of three months at three different high schools within a large Washington State school district, which for the purposes of this study was called Woodrow Unified School District. Within this district, 39% of all K-12 public school students qualify for free or reduced priced lunch and 24% are English Language Learners [ELLs] (SPS, 2011). According to the National Center for Education Statistics [NCES] (2011) the district

enrolled 5,497 students in 12 public high schools during the 2009-10 school year. Of these schools, 8 qualified to receive Title I funding (NCES, 2011).

Because LPA is rooted within traditions of hip-hop and has often served as a tool of expression for underrepresented voices (e.g., poor, minority, immigrants), its presence is mostly seen, although not exclusively (especially since the onset of the National Poetry Slam movement) within urban areas where there is a large hip-hop culture and marginalized population (Kitwana, 2005; Smith, 2011). Despite the growing appearance of LPA in other regional contexts however, LPA still remains most dominant within urban locales. Thus, an urban school district was the most logical setting in which to conduct my study given the nature of my research questions and the need for multiple teachers who utilize LPA curriculum.

Woodrow district also served as rich site because literary performing arts curriculum was present within both high and low resource schools, which all served a significantly diverse population of students. In turn, the comparison of how literary performing arts curriculum manifested within these schools better illuminated the specific school conditions that promoted the use of this curriculum as well as the more general thematic district conditions that remained constant throughout each school (see findings). The three high schools used for this study were given the pseudonyms Evergreen HS, Van Buren HS, and Castlemont HS.

Additionally, two literary non-profit organizations, Community Arts (CommArts) and Writing Instruction in the Schools (WITS), specifically focused around the development of LPA curriculum for youth, are located within the Woodrow district. These non-profits further demonstrated that there was an already established presence of LPA within the educational culture and served as a rich source of information themselves especially in regards to their direct involvement within the three selected school sites.

	Evergreen	Van Buren	Castlemont	TOTAL
LPA Group	2	0	1	3
Non-LPA Group	1	1	0	2
Administrators	1	1	0	2
Writing Workshop Facilitators	*1	1	*1	2
TOTAL	5	3	2	9

**Figure 2.0. Study Participants**

A total of five teachers—three of whom self-identified as actively incorporating Literary Performing Arts into their teaching and the other two not (though they may still have been sympathetic with one or more aspects of LPA)—two school administrators, and two writing workshop facilitators from local non-profit organizations participated in this study. *Figure 2.0* demonstrates the number of participants within each school site and designated group, which amounted to nine total participants (with one facilitator present within two sites).

Because the LPA group was a more contained group than that of Non-LPA I began the participant selection process in this group. This process, in turn, determined the target number of participants for the Non-LPA group<sup>1</sup>. The goal was, however, to have at least 2-3 participants (10 total, across all participant categories) from each group. Random sampling of school sites was conducted initially for purposes of gauging how willing schools within Woodrow district were to participate in this study and to what extent. Sampling in this manner determined that out of the eight schools initially propositioned for this study, three schools demonstrated interest. The response of each school was based on the presence of LPA, in some capacity, at the given site. Non-LPA participants were then selected from within the three school sites for means of

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<sup>1</sup> Due to availability issues, the Non-LPA group was one participant short. For further discussion see Chapter 5: limitations of study.

comparison. This initial sampling method proved beneficial in narrowing down the sites to where LPA curriculum was, in fact, present.

Purposeful sampling served as the most ideal strategy with which to select teacher participants because different methods were required for both LPA and Non-LPA groups (Patton, 2002). After narrowing down the sites themselves, a “chain sampling” method was employed in the selection of two writing workshop facilitators and LPA group teachers whose names were mentioned by administrators either when initially propositioned to participate in the study or during an actual interview itself. This process strayed from the proposed sampling strategy in which recruitment of LPA teacher participants was to reflect the referral of workshop facilitators. However, because the presence of LPA at each school was larger than originally expected, administrators at each school site were able to provide the necessary information for recruitment. Although chain sampling can raise some issues of bias in teacher views and perspectives (i.e., one-sided views of potential participants), it was a realistic option given my lack of previous knowledge of which teachers at each school site actually used LPA. The study does address this potential bias surrounding LPA practice, however, by including LPA participants from two different schools and selecting the third LPA participant based upon referrals from multiple administrators and one teacher within the same school. This selection process, in effect, lessens the bias as the same person referred no two LPA participants nor did any participant ever collaborate on LPA related curriculum together. Additionally, this bias was further addressed as data collected from teacher participants was triangulated with interview data from administrators at two school sites, interview data from writing workshop facilitators who had collaborated with multiple teachers at the given school sites, and external documents collected at the district level regarding broader content standards as well as the specific school

sites themselves. This comparison of data collected from LPA teachers to the other points of data listed above provided more context and depth to the culture of LPA at each school site and thus helped to alleviate the risk of bias when employing chain sampling.

Because the population of ELA high school teachers who *do not* use LPA curriculum in their instruction was significantly larger, I utilized purposeful random sampling to select my participants in order to “reduce bias within a purposeful category,” such as that of the non-LPA group (Patton, 2002, p. 244). Using the Woodrow Public School database, I randomly selected ELA teachers from the 3 selected high school sites as potential participants of the non-LPA group. Although multiple concerted efforts were made in the recruitment process, participants in the Non-LPA group only represented two out of the three schools. Despite this, however, teacher participants (both LPA and non-LPA) from the same set of 3 high schools, in conjunction with the other collected data, allowed for a more in-depth comparison of specific school and district conditions within the larger high-stakes environment and revealed interesting themes regarding the role instruction played in shaping school culture.

Two administrators were interviewed within two of the selected high school sites, who served as a bridge between state and district concerns over student achievement and the school environment in which those concerns manifest. Additionally they served as a source for corroborating and comparing data collected from district and school spaces.

Although the goal was to have an equal amount of participants in both LPA, non-LPA, and administrative groups, participant availability and generally low rates of response, even with outreach to a large amount of participants, did not make this possible. This difficulty in participant recruitment would have most likely been avoided had there been a longer time frame for research and, consequently made time constraints a definite limitation of the study.

LPA curriculum facilitators were selected from their affiliation with one of two local literary arts non-profits as mentioned within LPA teacher interviews. Both non-profit organizations have in-school residency programs in which teachers are given the instructional tools to develop their own LPA curriculum. The facilitators of these programs assist the teacher in the development process through in-class modeling of LPA lessons and individual teacher training sessions. Facilitators offered a valuable and unique perspective to this study through extensive knowledge of LPA curriculum, their position outside of the traditional school environment, and their work with either teacher participants directly or more generally within one of the selected school sites.

### **Data Collection**

The principle forms of data collected and later analyzed within this case study were developed in such a way that data and inferences could be *triangulated* in multiple ways. In such an approach, multiple collection strategies are utilized and then compared to each other in order to better confirm the validity of the sources themselves (Glesne, 2011). The types of data collected for purposes of triangulation and comparison were as follows:

- Interviews with teachers, principals, and writing workshop facilitators.
- Classroom observation (minimal amounts).
- Instructional/district documents.

## **Interviews**

Each semi-structured interview was conducted on school grounds or at a coffee shop per the request of the participant. Participants were asked similar questions according to the protocol developed for each distinct participant group (see Appendix A). Taken together, the questions attempted to gather more information regarding individual school culture, the specific influences on instruction, and the manner in which LPA manifested within each school site as connected to the other two categories.

Each interview was voice recorded and later transcribed verbatim for purposes of accuracy. Written notes were taken as well to document surroundings, gestures, and other contextual aspects of the interview unable to be captured by recording. This provided a richer interview account, which helped to inform analysis of the actual text although no information of this nature was directly included.

The interviews gave teachers, administrators, and facilitators the opportunity to reflect upon their usage or non-usage of LPA curriculum, the high-stakes environment in which they work, and the conditions within the given school and district. Additionally the interviews revealed how individual participant experiences helped to shape their instructional and managerial perspectives surrounding education.

## **Classroom Observation**

Classroom observation was conducted in an “action research” mode, in which I took on a participatory role and taught multiple LPA lessons in one classroom at Evergreen. A more involved role was taken on per the request of the teacher who was interested in bringing LPA to her classroom but did not necessarily have the curricular knowledge to conduct a lesson herself.

Each lesson was tailored to the content in which the teacher was already focusing on. Reflective memos were done after each classroom session regarding how the teacher interacted with the students, the level of engagement with the lesson, and what instructional strategies were utilized in order to strengthen the lesson. “Descriptive” and “analytic field notes” were also recorded when possible, which further supported the reflection process (Glesne, 2011, p. 75).

Contrary to what was previously anticipated, observations did not play a substantial part in the overall study due to the lack of comparison between various classrooms. Although working with one teacher in a participatory capacity supported some claims made by the teacher regarding her instructional practice and values as an educator, it did not do much to support a thematic analysis, as too many variables were involved, and my role as LPA facilitator obscured the interplay of teacher and classroom factors.

### **Instructional and District Documents**

Examples of LPA lesson plans were collected from the LPA teacher participants for means of better establishing their goals as an instructor and how those goals influence how LPA is used. In other words, these lesson plans gave insight to how a teacher interacted with various curriculum standards and their overall teaching ideology, which contributed greatly to understanding the culture of the classroom and high school as a whole.

In addition to using previous research as a guide, teacher, administrator, and facilitator interviews helped to inform the collection of school and district level documents. These documents better illuminated the district’s relationship with state/federal content standards and assessment as well the high schools selected for this study. Additionally, district-level documents revealed how the district responded to the demands of standards based reform and assessment,

the effect this response had on instructional practice and curriculum, and the specific conditions that contributed to the utilization of or departure from LPA curriculum. Documents included: strategic reform plans for district high schools, school reports and district scorecards, district teaching and curriculum policies, district and school level assessment procedures (e.g. the Danielson Framework evaluation checklist used by administrators), and school/district budget reports.

### **Analysis of Data**

Constant case comparison method was employed for means of analyzing and coding the collected data (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). This method served the purpose of examining how teacher instruction of LPA curriculum or techniques manifested within the high-stakes district environment and the influence that district or school policies had on high school ELA instruction in general. This involved coding the themes, which arose from lesson plans, interviews, and district documents in order to draw patterns of consistency and continually formulate a set of results. Constant case comparison helped to draw common themes regarding specific school and district conditions that enabled or weakened the use of LPA curriculum, the nature of this curriculum in and out of school contexts, and the ways in which teacher practice was influenced by a high-stakes environment.

Initial coding schemes regarding school/district conditions, school culture, and the characteristics of teacher practice with both LPA and more general ELA curriculum were developed throughout the data collection process using memos and reflective accounts, especially regarding the interviews and observations, as tools for determining these preliminary themes (Glesne, 2011). This constant deliberation with the data further oriented the study's findings and strengthened the research focus. After most of the data was collected, a process of

analytic coding was conducted in order to examine all of the compiled data together and generate what Glesne (2011) calls a “thematic organizational framework” (p.194). As demonstrated by the findings, this framework was constructed using themes that arose within three different educational contexts: instructional practice and values at the classroom level, the impact of school culture on the presence of LPA at the school level, and which factors or policies specifically at the district and state level had the most influence on instruction. This tiered framework was a direct result of the analytic coding structure utilized to approach the raw data and was effective in supporting the thematic analysis in which this study was grounded.

After building this framework and working with the themes drawn from each school, a comparison of those sites was carried out using the coding-scheme described above to synthesize the results. This final comparison between the schools in relation to each other as well as the larger district specifically, was a very important step as it was what allowed the study to make broader claims and identify larger themes, which not only pertain to the research questions, but help to inform future research done on LPA curriculum in relation to school and district structures.

## **Chapter 4:**

### **Findings: LPA Curriculum in the Context of Classroom, School, And the Larger Environment**

The analyses of data from this study yielded three sets of findings. The first concerned the forces and conditions inside classrooms that shaped how Literary Performing Arts (LPA) was implemented and what it could accomplish. Here, teachers' values, characteristics, and priorities were an essential part of the story. The second, one step removed from the classroom, concerned the set of forces and conditions inside the school—reflected in its climate and culture, as well as administrative supports—that promoted or inhibited the use of LPA curriculum. The third considers the way features of the larger policy and community environment—in particular, standardized testing and accountability pressures, content standards, and teacher evaluation systems, as well as the nature of the community served by the schools—may be influencing the LPA's presence in the classroom instruction and the actual forms it takes. Throughout the discussion, I use the term *curriculum* to include both “intended” and “enacted” curriculum.

#### **LPA Curriculum & the Classroom Context: Teacher Values, Characteristics, & Priorities**

First, a comparison between three LPA teacher participants and two Non-LPA teacher participants was conducted to identify any instructional characteristics or perspectives that may be unique to teachers of the LPA group, either within one school or across all three sites. Using thematic analysis, the study found that the teacher participants who utilized LPA curriculum were distinct from the Non-LPA group through their perspectives on personal student experience

and reflection as a strategy for engagement. Although almost all teachers discussed the importance of student engagement with the curriculum, only teachers within the LPA group emphasized the development of student voice as a means to, and reflection of, that engagement.

The study first examined the use of LPA in relation to teacher values and characteristics by identifying commonalities between LPA and non-LPA teachers. The identification of these factors established a basis on which to analyze how LPA and non-LPA teachers may differ in their approaches to instruction when a factor such as a curricular model is held constant. Using this structured analysis, the study revealed slightly different orientations and philosophies surrounding teaching between an LPA and non-LPA teacher at Evergreen, when the use of Readers & Writers workshop within a PBL environment was held constant. The inclusion of Reader & Writers Project is important because, unlike PBL, this curricular model is not a teacher requirement and thus helps to explain the specific values and priorities of the teachers who choose to employ it. Additionally, this comparison then provided a basis on which to identify the instructional characteristics and priorities of the other participants. The two teacher participants (LPA and non-LPA) were selected for the initial comparison as a result of the curricular models (Readers & Writers Project and PBL) utilized within their instruction. These models helped to promote a more in-depth understanding of what teacher characteristics and educational priorities might be attributed exclusively to LPA.

The “Literacy Tools for Transformation” framework put forth by Beach et. al. (see Chapter 2) was employed as a guide in which to analyze teacher values and characteristics for means of determining which aspects of the framework (i.e., literacy tools) were most represented by the participants and their respective school contexts. As described in an earlier section, these

literacy tools are: *engaging in critical inquiry, creating spaces, enacting identities, and establishing agency.*

### **Converging Instructional Patterns for an LPA and non-LPA Teacher**

*Readers & Writers Project* emphasizes student engagement through the use of texts, which reflect the interests of the student and are specific to their individual reading level. Regarding writing, students engage in this process through several different literary genres and are encouraged to develop drafts over time. Additionally, this workshop model allows for students to interact with their writing independently while utilizing teacher conferences and mini-lessons as a resource throughout this process. These specific instructional strategies as well as the curricular structure reveal the educational priorities of student engagement and emphasis on academic skills within a small-group discussion based environment.

Jenna Hargraves and Kevin Walters are teachers (non-LPA and LPA) at Evergreen who both choose to utilize this model, which indicates their shared set of instructional values. However, the way in which each teacher interacts with and displays these values within the classroom differs significantly. Kevin Walters discusses his strategy of engaging students with the curriculum through confidence building:

I do Readers and Writers Workshop at Teachers College from Columbia and so my philosophy is to get them to write as much as I can, look for avenues to compliment and to help grow allowing for students to be open...I don't red marker any writing, I don't destroy. It's always compliment compliment-you want to be more powerful? This is where you can grow and to push it that way.

Rather than structuring the skills that students are supposed to know within a given lesson, Kevin emphasizes a more open student navigated writing process that he supports exclusively through positive feedback. By giving students greater autonomy over what they write, within the given

genre, he believes that they will be more likely to produce larger amounts of authentic work, which he will then guide in order to support and cultivate a rigorous writing process. This instructional tactic demonstrates the significant role that building student confidence plays in Kevin's work as a teacher. Unlike Jenna, who also references student confidence as an educational priority, Kevin sees confidence not as a skill to be learned but rather something that is fortified through teacher encouragement and development of student voice. As confidence increases in response to this process, he believes, so too will the student's willingness to participate, share, and grow as learners outside of their own "truth".

The goal is getting kids to transition to, 'I've written enough about myself, my personal truth is out there-now I need to say something that's bigger than me.' So the audience moves from "I am my audience" to "now I'm writing for a larger purpose'. In order to make that happen you have to make it safe for kids to share their personal truth otherwise why would they share a more—to take that leap and that step to be comfortable...we need to build a culture not just in terms of being able to write to all writing styles, but also where our kids are celebrated for what they can do with writing and then build upon that.

Again, Kevin further demonstrates his instructional emphasis on student strengths and individual voice as a way to build confidence and subsequently transition into broader more focused areas of writing through this development process.

Jenna employs a different lens as she attempts to guide student learning through a concrete skills based process where the teacher plays a more central role in predetermining what student outcomes should be while still maintaining some level of student agency over the lesson itself. The manner in which Jenna approaches confidence building with her students, which like Kevin is emphasized as a teaching priority, serves as an example of this isolated skills based approach:

I know that performing arts has helped me immensely in public speaking skills and in confidence. In general being able to speak extemporaneously is a huge skill I notice

students...don't have. They are not asked to speak in front of the class...nearly enough to be prepared for their senior project-to be able to speak for a fifteen community panel. So I decided that I wanted students to do Shakespeare as much as possible....there is something about an exercise, having to memorize a passage and stand up and speak it that is really powerful to me because Shakespeare is widely recognized and I want students to be able to feel the power of his words.

Similar to Kevin, Jenna highlights the importance of building student confidence for means of making students more comfortable within the scope of a performance or presentation. Unlike Kevin however, Jenna does not emphasize the use of student experience or development of personal voice as a way in which to address this. Instead, Jenna utilizes Shakespeare, a more traditional text, and allows students to practice speaking aloud as an isolated skill rather than as a “place to share their personal truth” as highlighted by Kevin.

With the *Project-based Learning* (PBL) model, which both of these teachers are required to use, similar instructional patterns arise. Both Kevin and Jenna described their use of performing arts as a way of developing student writing within a project-based model. Beach et al. highlight the importance that curricular structure and instructional lens play in the student negotiation of this curriculum:

Stage performances, spoken-word poetry, reading aloud, and speaking as characters from a story are all examples of dramatic performances in the sense that people are, for a few moments or an extended period of time, dramatizing an improvised aspect of life in an imagined space. How dramatic improvisation is regarded and supported in classrooms makes a difference for how young people take up alternative ways of being in the world that they explore and enact to shape or develop their everyday life identities. p. 52

Thus, while both teachers utilized performing arts as an instructional tool, the manner in which they did so remains distinct and is reflected by how students negotiated that curriculum in and outside of the classroom context.

Again, Kevin employs a student-centered approach by allowing students an increased amount of autonomy and agency over the learning experience:

The thing that I like about spoken word is that you can allow it to be student centered where the students can run it and they can have every element of it. When we did the magazine release party I was on stage only at the beginning and I stepped out and they ran absolutely every part of it, which was cool because they're the performers, they're the Emcees, they're doing all elements of it and obviously things have been polished and supported behind closed doors but their best work gets to come forward in terms of organization management and performance.

Jenna also promotes a student-centered approach as she describes the structure of a performing arts project she used to address short-story writing:

We [Jenna and two other team teachers] decided that that since it's a short story we were going to do plays and so the only requirement was that it had to be Science Fiction. Classes started off with improve exercises and then moved into how do you write characters, how do you come up with conflict, how do you resolve conflict, and then do a story about it...and what our final was each class selected one play and we performed it after school as a festival of our own so they did everything from the directing to the costume design to set building...and the director had to cast his actors and then do rehearsals and memorizing...we did the whole thing.

This lesson is comparable in many ways to the one described by Kevin with its emphasis on student autonomy throughout all aspects of production, the use of performance as a central tool, and a targeted writing genre employed as a project guideline (i.e. Poetry for Kevin and short story for Jenna). The only thing that fundamentally differs between these instructional approaches is the presence of student experience and voice as a central role within the lesson.

Jenna did however describe an additional version of the playwriting lesson that was conducted a semester later through another non-profit arts organization, which did encourage students to utilize their own experiences as a basis for their plays. Still, this curricular structure brought in by the organization did not necessarily reflect the instructional goals or strategies of Jenna herself:

There was no restriction on what they [the students] wrote...And uh, a student wrote about her troubles at home-she has these troubles at home. She just kind of wrote from her life experience there. So like to be open or whatever but I think having the structure of science fiction made it easier for students to decide what to write about. So if I were to do it again next fall I would probably go ahead and have to find a better way to link it up. You know, the idea of journey or you know some kind of greater theme that would allow students to have more of a structure.

In describing this experience, Jenna reveals the importance of having a subject or theme to guide the students in their writing. Although she did allow for more flexibility regarding students developing their own voice based upon personal experience for the one semester, she effectively deemphasizes this curricular strategy, while not completely discounting it, through her intentions to restructure the lesson in the future. Jenna's acknowledgement of personal student experience as a curricular strategy further supports her instructional stance as it confirms that not utilizing this strategy was a conscious choice rather than something she had no experience with or was unaware of.

The comparison between Kevin and Jenna thus helps to show that some characteristics and priorities traditionally associated with an LPA curriculum are, in fact, shared by at least one teacher who did not use LPA. These characteristics and priorities include: Building student confidence through oral presentation, active student engagement, utilization of curriculum with an emphasis on performing arts, and processes of student directed learning.

### **Distinguishing LPA from Non-LPA Teachers and Instruction**

This comparison also revealed an essential difference: the utilization of student voice as reflective of his or her own experience was not a priority for the Non-LPA teacher, where it was critical to the LPA teacher. This difference better illuminates the factors that may be unique to a teacher who uses LPA and their more critical stance on empowerment. It is important to note,

however, that because only one Non-LPA teacher participant was interviewed at Evergreen, this finding is insufficient in making broader general claims about other non-LPA teachers at Evergreen. But it does help to identify possible distinctions between LPA and Non-LPA teachers on a more general scale.

*Other ways of realizing LPA goals.* Not all LPA teachers approached this facet of their Language Arts curriculum in the same way. Mary Linden, a tenth-grade Language Arts teacher at Evergreen, also values the use of LPA in her instruction and helps to support the initial claim regarding student experience, voice, and self-expression as demonstrated by Kevin:

Well I think where it [LPA] fits in is...especially with kids from lower SES families they don't see books and the whole world of books or the whole world of English applying to them. Nobody in their family reads books you know. For them, making the connection between personal expression and the power of that and English can engage them in a totally new way...

Mary reveals her affinity towards personal experience as a means to engage students specifically from lower-income families. By addressing the strategies of LPA in this manner and regarding this student population, Mary demonstrates a more critical stance on education in which, as Mary states, students “realize how much power they have and they empower themselves and the world”. The use of the word power in relation to the context of the “world” indicates Mary’s desire to see her students not only develop their own voice, but use that voice in vital ways within a larger social, cultural, and political arena as well. The manner in which Mary structured one of her spoken word lessons, while teaching at another school, reinforces these aspirations of connecting student voice to the world:

Brave New Voices [a National youth poetry slam festival that aired on HBO]. We used those poems as examples and then the kids wrote theirs and we had them do a podcast of it and then we kept a podcast on the website. Yeah so everyday we'd just do another one and we'd model. I modeled one, the teacher I was working with modeled one...and the kids loved it and the community loved it...

The use of the podcast as well as the community presence demonstrates Mary's intention of giving her students agency within a larger community context. Thus, students were not only developing their voices, but also sharing them with a more substantial audience.

Though Mary finds LPA curriculum useful in accomplishing many of her instructional goals regarding self-expression, she found it difficult to integrate it into her curriculum due to her first-year status at Evergreen where she felt like she "had to conform to" what the teacher did last year in order to maintain alignment with the curriculum of the media teacher she was collaborating with. However, "now that I've got a year under my belt", Mary states, "I can totally see how I can do things differently", which would mean an increased presence of LPA curriculum and student voice. Despite this constraint, Mary was able to integrate one LPA lesson into the curriculum when she recruited me to come and work with three of her classes for a day. The topic of the lesson was structured in relation to what Mary and her social studies team teacher had been doing with the students on the Cold War. Using core principles of social justice, Mary and her team teacher had students fill out a graphic organizer, which was meant to orient students to the topic in critical ways. Maintaining this idea of critical reflection, I constructed an LPA lesson around "the universe of obligation" in which I had students critically think about social responsibility and the societal level (i.e. self, family, State, world, etc.) at which they no longer feel obligated to take action or uphold certain values present within a more personal scope.

Although Mary suggested loose guidelines, I was given complete autonomy over the content and structure of the lesson. Throughout each class session, Mary was actively involved with the students either helping to clarify something that was confusing, stepping in to ask a follow-up question during the discussion portion, or modeling performance work by reading her

own poetry to the class. Thus, a high level of teacher engagement was observed during the lesson, which indicated an interest in the lesson itself as well as a more general “hands on” instructional approach.

When I spoke with Mary about the proposed LPA lesson as well as the Cold War curriculum, it became clear that a big instructional priority was getting students to think critically about their social surroundings in new ways. However only the LPA lesson appeared to utilize elements of personal experience and performance within that critical process.

Mary’s educational perspective in conjunction with her use of LPA curriculum thus strengthens the claim, suggested by Kevin’s analysis, that teachers who utilize LPA do in fact prioritize student expression and voice within their instruction as a way of empowering and engaging students. Again, because Jenna was the only non-LPA participant from Evergreen included in this study, this does not necessarily support claims that only teachers who utilize LPA prioritize student experience in their instruction. However, it does further distinguish between the individual instructional characteristics of Jenna and LPA teacher participants, which help to contextualize and explain the school dynamics and culture as a whole.

A third LPA teacher—Joe Stackhouse, a 9<sup>th</sup> and 11<sup>th</sup> grade Language Arts teacher at Castlemont HS and last teacher participant in the LPA group—further substantiates claims regarding instructional characteristics and priorities associated with LPA teachers through emphasis of student voice and engagement within the curriculum. However, unlike the other LPA teacher participants, Joe does not directly promote the use of LPA as a way to connect students to their own experiences. Rather, these priorities are represented through the instructional perspectives of the resident artist, Anthony Delgado, who Joe recruited to come teach poetry twice a week for various ten-week residencies. Because Joe actively recruits

Anthony, he inherently prioritizes the content and instructional methods that Anthony employs, which thus upholds certain claims regarding student voice, experience, and LPA curriculum.

Still, in his own account outside of what Anthony relates, Joe predominantly emphasizes LPA as function of student engagement and skill building with little mention to how student experience is included:

Student interest is a big part of why I use spoken word and more and more in our curriculum here we have the International Baccalaureate Program (IB) and its important for students to learn how to present you know-how to be able to stand in front of an audience and do that well. So you know the skills involved in performance poetry translate to other forms of speaking-public speaking-so its kind of good all the way around. So yeah personal interest and trying to keep my curriculum interesting for my students are the main things.

Given the nature of the art form, the use of LPA or “performance poetry”, automatically incorporates facets of personal experience and reflection. However, this particular aspect can be downplayed as students take on more skill building and analytical roles. As demonstrated within the above explanation, Joe promotes the use of LPA curriculum for means of addressing public speaking skills in a manner that engages students. While student voice is apart of this process, it is not the central goal or outcome of the exercise itself, which is to, as Joe says, “stand in front of an audience and do that well”. The second aspect Joe himself promotes is LPA as a strategy in which to analyze literary conventions and poetic structure:

Its mostly looking at examples of spoken word poetry from online, from prose and then talking about what makes that poem work both in terms of the language that they’re using and the elements of performance that they’re using so kind of a critiquing based lesson...Its mostly literary analysis. What kinds of literary techniques are they using, figures of speech, and then you know um really getting into the sound element of you know why repetition, why alliteration-what do those do for an audience-you that kind of stuff.

While analysis of other spoken word pieces do in fact model for students various ways in which artists have used poetry as a form of agency, this again is not the aspect of the lesson Joe highlights. Rather, these poems function as a strategy in which to engage students with literary and poetic *conventions* and not necessarily their own *agency*.

In contrast, Anthony Delgado discusses LPA curriculum as it relates to critical understandings of self and the process of building voice for means of relaying those introspections to a larger audience.

Its really important to give students a space to talk about who they are and what they care about you know because they don't get much access for that you know. They don't get much space for that so like me as a teaching artist I feel like its my responsibility to create a learning environment that is-you know-conducive to them speaking about things that they care about you know and talking about their stories and empowering themselves through their own creativity and imagination

As evidenced by the above statement, Anthony takes on a significantly different perspective regarding the purpose of LPA curriculum. While he does mention the benefits of using spoken word as an “access to form and talking about what that form can do within a performative aspect”, Anthony effectively minimizes the structural attributes of this convention by later discussing how to “reapproach that form and use our personal experience and current modes to transform it”. This emphasis of LPA as an empowerment tool again supports the claim that teachers who do include LPA within their curriculum put high value on student experience and agency. However, the manner in which this perspective is advanced within the classroom through a community partner, distinguishes Joe from the other LPA teachers at Evergreen who, personally acknowledge student voice as a priority.

***How non-LPA teachers approach the curriculum.*** Like Jenna, Deborah Preston, an eleventh and twelfth grade Language Arts teacher at Van Buren and the second non-LPA

participant, did not appear to emphasize student experience in her curriculum at either the AP or regular track level. However, aside from this, Deborah's perspectives on instruction differed somewhat significantly from that of Jenna regarding what was emphasized within the classroom. Deborah was found to have minimal overlap regarding characteristics and priorities attributed to teachers who utilize LPA where, in Jenna's case, there was some overlap. Rather, Deborah focuses her instruction around more traditional aspects of Language Arts curriculum within the Advanced Placement (AP) model, which includes a large emphasis on content retention and preparation for college level classes. As the AP model greatly drives Deborah's instructional methods, these priorities were maintained even when teaching a non-AP level class:

I'm not good at teaching regular classes at all and I have to teach two of them next year and I don't know what I'm gonna do but um I think the last time I taught regular we did most of the work in class because students won't do homework and uh I read *The Great Gatsby* out loud to them? I figured that it was better than assigning it as homework and having them not read it and having them do the spark notes? Even though it took up a lot of class time and it was just me reading, I knew that they at least heard it.

The teacher priority for students to receive and understand the content of the story is more important than a focus on reading skills improvement, which essentially counters the goals of Readers and Writers project model used by Jenna and Kevin where skills are integral to the learning process. As Kevin states, when "you're in college...they teach you the content there. You need skills to access it".

Deborah, however, did appear to place value upon skills like close reading and literary analysis within the AP classes where students were given the actual reading content as homework. This process then left class time open to work on reading and writing skills required for the AP exam as well as for college level classes. As Deborah discussed her instructional

strategies at greater length, it became clear just how much they were influenced by AP exams and college preparedness:

I think the basic skills on the AP test are really helpful. Its basically literary analysis...you know it's all about reading something and analyzing it. Those are skills students need for college even if there was no AP test so that's what I always tell them. I tell them you gotta do all the practice tests because this is what you're going to have to do in college.

Deborah's instructional strategies and foci are driven by the fact that students are college-bound and thus need certain skills to be prepared, which explains why she might deemphasize teaching these skills to a class that is neither taking an AP exam or on a college track especially if there is already a significant lack of student motivation to begin with (at one point in the interview she mentions how the students "were all kinda half asleep" throughout the year). In contrast, because Evergreen operates as an all-inclusion model school, Jenna must utilize the same curriculum and instructional methods with all of her students.

Shakespeare was a particular topic, which both Deborah and Jenna highlighted as one of their favorites to teach. This comparison further reveals the difference in teaching styles even when, as Deborah demonstrates, the topic and lesson structure are similar:

Hamlets definitely my favorite thing to teach and I love Shakespeare and that's my favorite play. So we do a lot of performing arts when we do the Shakespeare. You read things out loud informally and then the students have a major project where they choose scenes and then they either perform them live or film them and then they do a creative project where they have to write about how they would direct the play and it's a really fun scene...and then they also have to do an analytical paper so its not just that.

Although these instructional approaches may very well reflect each other, the goals and lesson objectives remain distinct. For example, like Jenna, Deborah utilizes scene work and student performance as a strategy in which to orient students with the Shakespearean content. However, a notable divergence becomes present as Jenna emphasizes building student confidence through

readings while Deborah emphasizes student retention and academic analysis of the content itself. It is important to note these emphases do not necessarily mean that other instructional goals and outcomes are missing completely. However, it does indicate what teachers *most* value and, in turn, how they subsequently structure the lesson and evaluate their students.

Because Jenna and Deborah were so different regarding their instructional goals, methods, and curricular structures, no patterns were supported within the non-LPA group aside from the lack of individual student experience within the curriculum. Using this information in conjunction with the amount of instructional similarities present between the teachers at Evergreen, the study found curricular structure and overall culture of the school (at both professional and social levels) to be more accurate determinants of teacher characteristics than that of non-LPA and LPA groupings across schools.

### **LPA Curriculum & the School Context: School Culture, Learning Models, and Administrative Support**

Out of the three high schools profiled in this study, Evergreen was the only school in which LPA was present within the larger school culture outside of individual classrooms and targeted lessons. A close look at school-level conditions in this case may reveal how the school can shape and sustain the presence of LPA. Through analysis of interviews and online school and district resources the study found *curricular model(s)* and *active administrative support* to be the biggest influences on the presence (or absence) of LPA curriculum at the school level.

Evergreen High School is located in the south end of the city and serves a diverse community of students. Of the 750 students that attend the Title I school, 43% are African American, 37% are Asian/Pacific Islander, 12% are Hispanic/Latino, 5% are Caucasian, and

69% qualify for Free/Reduced lunch. In 2009, Evergreen became a Science, Technology, Engineering, and Math (STEM) academy which, due to the alternative school designation, changed the student enrollment from exclusively local to an “all-city draw” enrollment procedure. Thus, while still predominantly local, the student population is becoming more diverse in regards to both race and income each year as more and more students from other parts of the city enroll. Due to student test scores on the State exams, Evergreen continues to hold its “failing status” designation although scores have been steadily rising since the 2009 inception of the STEM program. As a result, the pressure to perform academically and the corresponding district oversight is significantly greater than other district high schools without the “failing” status.

### **School-Wide Curricular Model: Project-Based Learning**

Although no direct relationship appeared between the use of LPA curriculum and PBL, the model itself reveals a specific student-focused perspective on education, which contributes to the type of environment necessary for LPA to thrive at a school-wide level. In addition to becoming a STEM-designated school, Evergreen also adopted PBL in 2009, which currently all teachers are expected to utilize as an instructional framework. Jenna Hargraves identifies how PBL strays from more traditional approaches of instruction:

Project Based Learning has definitely changed the way curriculum works. The idea is students direct the flow of the investigation...rather than the teacher bringing the question to the students and we say this is what we're going to learn...We instead create a project where we have an angle in mind...like we know we want students to have a certain set of skills taught. And so we write entry docs students are supposed to go through and figure out what they need to know in order to do this end product.

The use of PBL as the main source of instruction is indicative of the greater school mission in which students play a highly directive role in the active learning process. According to Markham (2011), “PBL refocuses education on the student, not the curriculum” emphasizing skills that “cannot be taught out of a textbook, but must be activated through experience” (p. 39). The instructional culture in which PBL helps to structure thus emphasizes an alternative learning atmosphere distinct in its approach to engaging students who have been historically marginalized within a more traditional curricular framework. Dr. Taylor Jackson, the Assistant Principal at Evergreen and strong supporter of the PBL model, describes the importance of providing this type of curricular model to the students at Evergreen:

When you have a sizable number of kids in your school population who aren't quite there yet in their baseline skills...one of the adjustments that you have to make in your lessons, particularly Language Arts, it doesn't matter the subject-you have to provide as many different avenues for that student to demonstrate his or her understanding of whatever the subject your topic is that's being focused on. One of those elements of course is the ability...to make personal expression. You have to be able to show that you are getting the concepts.

Because PBL promotes student negotiation with real life scenarios and active voice within those scenarios, it effectively represents ideas surrounding critical development of student agency and empowerment in relation to larger societal issues. Beach et. al. (2010) identify many of the strategies found within a PBL model as critical aspects to enacting this agency:

Essential to assuming agency is the extent to which students have the opportunity or potential to propose and make actual change both within and outside the classroom. Simply engaging in ‘knowing-telling’ regurgitation activities that reify existing knowledge, affords them little opportunity to adopt alternative voices associated with the sort of ‘epistemic agency’ grounded in particular ways of framing the world, which are needed to sustain acts of change. (p. 53)

This critical change process, while not emphasized as a main goal in the use of PBL at Evergreen, is represented through the type of teacher recruited into the school, which then

promotes an atmosphere where curriculum, like LPA, is more likely to be present on smaller scales within the school culture.

### **Building a Professional Culture that Supports LPA**

The kind of culture built at the school, starting with the kinds of staff who are brought in, are especially important in presence of LPA at the school and classroom level. Dr. Jackson discusses some of these key characteristics administration looks for when hiring new teachers:

I think that a element of a good teacher is when you recognize a means of communication practice within your students. You want to leverage that first of all to draw them into the curriculum-keep them interested. You want to leverage that in terms of providing them that opportunity to demonstrate their knowledge, which is what we want...our professional development is focused specifically on that. Looking at different means of engaging the student and also different ways in which that we can put out there for the student to be able to show their learning.

Dr. Jackson speaks to the importance of not only having teachers at the school who value alternative forms of student expression and knowledge but also to the importance of further developing and supporting those values within the context of school wide professional development activities. Thus, school wide professional culture, as shaped specifically by administration, becomes a culture more synonymous with many of the attributes found within LPA than the other two sites, which lack a uniform curricular model where specific instructional strategies are emphasized.

Mary Linden serves as an example of how PBL has facilitated this specific type of teacher presence as she discusses the “relevancy” and “authenticity” that a PBL model brings into the classroom:

So many students are just doing the game of school you know they’re just going through the motions and they’re doing the bare minimum that’s due-they’re just not engaged at all and they do not see how it connects to who they are and I find when kids do something

real that has a real audience or that really helps the community or somehow connects, ...its like a whole new world for them...it's really powerful.

Mary highlights the importance of student engagement and it's role in facilitating higher levels of achievement among less academically inclined students. For her, as with the tradition of PBL, establishing a personal connection between the student and curriculum is a useful engagement strategy to promote more meaningful interactions within the classroom. She further emphasizes the importance of this personal connection as it pertains to larger societal processes in which the students take part. However, it should again be noted that while PBL allows for teachers to encourage personal student connections with the curriculum, not all teachers emphasize or employ this method. Rather, as demonstrated by Jenna, other teachers opt to structure highly engaging projects within contexts external to student life but still relevant within the model itself.

A particularly memorable lesson that Mary conducted with her students previous to working at Evergreen is representative of her outlook on instruction and educational purpose. In response to a class action lawsuit brought against a predominantly white high school for teaching *Huckleberry Finn* in their curriculum, Mary constructed a lesson that integrated the current lawsuit with larger themes of race and sociopolitical dynamics.

I had a class of seniors for contemporary world problems and they were embarrassed about it [the lawsuit]...we did a lot of brainstorming and then one of my girls was like "you know I don't even know any black people"...and I had just come from Clover Park HS and I was like "I know school full of kids of color! Maybe we should go visit". At the time Clinton had this dialogue on race so...the kids like designed this exchange and they designed this dialogue on race...We went to their [Clover Park] school...once they met, it was just magical. It was just so cool and it probably was one of the most rich experiences I've ever had as a teacher.

The significance that this experience holds for Mary demonstrates her personal beliefs surrounding education and instruction. Not only was it important for her, as an instructor, to

facilitate critical thinking about an issue directly impacting the students, it was important to apply that thinking to a real world context where dialogue between different types of students could occur. Additionally, Mary emphasizes the student-centered nature of the lesson where students are given the opportunity to be leaders and actually shape the course of instruction.

The other social studies teacher [at Clover Park HS] and I worked together to design it [the lesson] and facilitate it-but really the kids were so into it...I mean they made it their own in a way that I rarely have seen kids do it...I love when kids realize how much power they have-how they empower themselves in the world...

Although the lesson itself only represents a small part of what Mary has done as a teacher, it reveals core values such as student engagement and social equality, which inevitably shape her instructional practice as a whole.

Kevin Walters, also a proponent of PBL, exhibits many of the same instructional characteristics as Mary regarding student engagement, empowerment, and critical dialogue. This was especially apparent as he described his ideal teaching environment:

The perfect environment would be a boarding school...and it would be focused on finding adults who care deeply about helping kids find access to more happiness and can see that kids are the center of all-the kids have control over all of the learning

Kevin references the Highlander schools and their emphasis on building social equality through critical action as a model for which to base his own ideal environment. He highlights the school's purpose of educating students outside of their communities so they may gain the necessary skills to then deconstruct and confront the oppressive environment to which they belong. Within this, Kevin also discusses how PBL helps to facilitate these instructional goals:

The Civil Rights and Labor Movement came out of the Highlander Schools and they focused on, 'here's a problem, how do we solve it?' And so...the problem is this, you put together an action plan, you move forward on it and you evaluate it...So its project based learning but at its core its not artificial problems-its real problems...and over consistent interventions kids learn to trust themselves and different methods that might function

better for them socially and academically and economically as opposed to hand to mouth or reactionary

Like Mary, Kevin emphasizes social equality and PBL as a way of engaging students with real world contexts for means of building confidence and skills to better negotiate their surroundings. Often, the emphasized contexts have historically worked against a large population of Evergreen students, which plays a key role in how both Mary and Kevin approach their instruction.

Through personal accounts as well as the greater inherent values connected with PBL, this study reveals the importance that a curricular model has had shaping this culture and the type of teacher employed at Evergreen, which in turn, has helped to explain the presence of LPA within the larger school context.

### **Administrative Support for LPA**

While the PBL curricular model helps to explain a school culture based upon a distinctive set of core educational values at both teacher and administrative levels, this study found that active administrative support and maintenance of LPA was what informed the curriculum's specific presence within the greater school environment. The word "active" is key here because it distinguishes between merely *permitting* the use of LPA and *sustaining* its presence. Ferris Glover, the Language Arts Department Chair at Van Buren High School and Ms. Whitney, the Principal of Evergreen HS, demonstrate this difference through their orientation to and involvement with LPA.

While Ferris shows interest in maintaining LPA curriculum and even acknowledges it as an asset within the classroom he demonstrates minimal engagement with the actual curriculum itself:

I get gushing thank you letters from Writing Instruction in Schools (WITS) every year even though I spent the year feeling at least a little bad because I've ignored them so much and they're just so grateful that I've "protected them" all because I said "are we still in the budget for the PTA? Ok good. Mr. Jenkins your class is still good" (laughs).

By ensuring the budget for WITS, a non-profit writing program, which sends resident artists into classrooms to teach creative writing, Ferris is maintaining teacher access to these programs and thus supporting the presence of LPA at the classroom level. However, outside of this access, Ferris remains disconnected from LPA itself:

My experience with LPA is totally teacher specific. It's definitely done at the teacher level...it is not done school wide...its not part of our conversation, which is a shame but it's the truth.

Again, by exhibiting discontent with the lack of presence LPA curriculum has on a larger school level, Ferris not only demonstrates his approval of LPA but the desire to see an increase in its visibility as well. However, despite these perspectives, Ferris himself does not *actively* support the presence of LPA.

In contrast, Ms. Whitney and Dr. Jackson of the Evergreen administration demonstrated an active involvement with LPA, which has helped to support the presence of LPA at a school level. Kevin Walters, the teacher credited for establishing multiple school wide poetry slams throughout the year in addition to working with students on LPA across grades, speaks to the crucial role that administration has played in facilitating his school wide work with LPA:

The culture of it [LPA] I think is most supported by Ms. Whitney who has attended all of the slams and been a judge...I don't think we're given support at the district level-the support for things like this but...I think Ms. Whitney is trusted to get her building to do what she's supposed to do so moving past Ms. Whitney for support is necessary and in this district it feels like as long as you have an administrator supporting you then you're good. Without an administrator's support, you then you know have to move in the direction that the administrator wants you to.

According to Kevin's account, Ms. Whitney shows a vested interest in LPA curriculum by involving herself within its culture. Kevin also notes how Ms. Whitney has helped mediate some community opposition to the poetry content, which has been crucial to sustaining the authenticity of the poetry slam. Kevin recounts one such incident and how Ms. Whitney was able to assist in ameliorating the situation:

There was a parent who was angry that there was cursing on stage and Ms. Whitney was a judge...the parent was saying "I can't believe they're doing this" but you know we always just start with "this is personal truth and personal truth has different words and kids have been instructed not to go outside family norms. They might not be your family norms but that doesn't mean they're not family norms and so please respect everybody's truth and the words that are selected". We communicate that and that's enough for most- for a few people not enough but overall be supportive and do whatever you want.

The manner in which Ms. Whitney handled community backlash in the above experience reveals her interest in maintaining this curriculum on a school wide level and in its authentic form despite how it might be received.

Through personal involvement, support, and mediation, Ms. Whitney thus confirms the importance of LPA within the school, which assists in transitioning LPA into the school culture rather than just the focused context of the classroom. Dr. Jackson also mentions LPA as something that is important to the overall school culture. While not involved to the extent of Ms. Whitney in actual LPA activities (i.e. being a judge at a poetry slam) he is greatly aware of LPA activities going on in and outside of classroom and attends the after-school poetry slams when he can.

Another way that the value of LPA curriculum is reflected through administrative support is the use of funds from a community school grant to have after-school LPA workshops for students. Given the budgetary constraints of the school, the presence of these workshops demonstrates how LPA is maintained as a priority of the school administration. While Van

Buren also struggles to find funding, the strong fiscal support of their PTSA helps to sustain LPA workshops much like that of the community grant at Evergreen.

What is revealed through these accounts is the importance that active administrative support plays in transitioning LPA curriculum from the classroom into a school phenomenon. Without the backing of the administration in manners that are engaging, as earlier noted by Kevin, it would be very difficult to foster a school culture in which LPA played a role, which thus explains much of the distinction between Evergreen, Van Buren, and Castlemont.

### **LPA Curriculum & the Greater Environment: Testing/Accountability, Content Standards, Teacher Evaluation, and the Community Context**

Although LPA is heavily rooted in a tradition of literacy that aims to confront heteronormative structures of oppression and build critical forms of agency, this purpose, although present in some participant perspectives on education and after school workshops, was not emphasized within classroom contexts nor was it reflected in the lesson objectives themselves. The study was unable to make a definitive claim as to why *critical pedagogy* specifically did not serve as an instructional goal and strategy within the LPA curriculum at these three schools. However, the data did reveal that external influences from state testing, content standards, teacher evaluation/accountability practices, and student population were influential in shaping general teacher practice as well as LPA more specifically. These influences, although again not conclusive, may help to provide a context of possibilities for why the underlying goal of critical pedagogy is more or less absent within the LPA curriculum when, in some participant cases, teachers and workshop facilitators actually ascribed to this type of pedagogy for means of shaping their ideological stance on education. Although the study did find high-stakes tests, specialized program exams (e.g. AP/IB), and core content standards to have influence on how

and what teachers taught, the *tension* between instruction and these external requirements, as suggested by the literature, was not prevalent on a thematic scale.

### **Influence of Testing & State Accountability Pressures**

Currently, all tenth grade students within Woodrow School District are required to take exams in reading and writing. The goal of these exams, according to the State is “to measure a student’s proficiency of basic skills” and serves as a requirement for graduation as well as a tool in which to evaluate teacher practice<sup>2</sup>. Regarding the writing section specifically, students are asked to write one expository and one persuasive essay, which are being evaluated based upon proficiency in the following skills: varied sentence structure, ability to provide clear transitions that connect ideas, establishing a tone appropriate for the audience to which you’re writing, the ability to create a logical organization pattern, and ability to maintain focus on topic throughout essay. Regarding reading, target skills are broken into critical thinking, analysis, and comprehension categories where students are asked to display knowledge of specific literary conventions such as: comparing and contrast elements of a text, analysis of author’s purpose, summarizing author’s purpose with evidence, and ability to make logical inferences based off the reading.

According to Dr. Jackson, the high-stakes that surround State exams play a role in shaping instruction at the school level:

It [the tests] really tempts a school to focus instruction around those tests because they’re really high-stakes. We publish the results and put them out there for the whole world to see and people form opinions about schools anyways based on the communities in which they’re rooted in. So it REALLY makes this hard.

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<sup>2</sup> Information retrieved from State Dept. of Education Website under ‘exam information’, 2012. In order to maintain anonymity of district, schools, and participants, the specific source is not disclosed.

Because Evergreen is designated as a “failing” school based on its test scores, the pressure to raise these scores becomes that much more important and often directs the types of skills students should be practicing. This testing influence, according to Dr. Jackson, is especially strong at the ninth and tenth grade levels when students first begin taking their high school exams in math (ninth grade) and Language Arts (tenth grade). Teacher accounts help to support this claim as they demonstrate various levels of influence that testing has had on their instruction.

Jenna was the first teacher to discuss how testing shaped the manner in which she approached her instruction. Although ninth grade students do not take the Language Arts State exam until the tenth grade, Jenna still experiences the pressure of preparing students for the next year. Jenna discusses one of the major ways in which she has had to alter her curriculum to accommodate what is reflected on the test:

I’ve had to bring in more straight up vocabulary. I’ve had to bring in a lot more Latin roots because it tests all those things. And I saw all these like really old texts from the canon on there. And it makes me want to start teaching more of those older texts. They’re being asked to read some really obscure things and its not written in the vernacular they’re used to. These tests take clips and snippets from books that are written in a way that people haven’t spoken in a hundred years...It has definitely made me a lot more anxious about how much literature we’re getting versus just skill content.

These changes indicate how testing content specifically has influenced Jenna’s goals as an instructor and what is important for the students to know. Additionally, she highlights the tension between PBL/Readers & Writers Workshop and testing as the models rely heavily on accessible curriculum that utilizes modern vernacular and highlights skills over content. Balancing these two facets within her instruction is something Jenna says she still struggles with.

Because the State exam in Language Arts occurs at the tenth grade level, Mary also expressed that she feels pressure to integrate testing content throughout the year in order to

prepare her students for the exam. As Mary states, “my focus until March was the test and just making sure I built in all the skills they would need...to pass the exam”. More specifically,

Mary mentions how testing guides the manner in which she plans to approach poetry:

We have to do poetry because its on the test right?...I can see marrying traditional poetry study and spoken word in a really cool way that engages kids in what that is. Something like you know so Longfellow did poetry slam in 1800 whatever whatever.

Again highlighting the importance of engagement, Mary frames the use of spoken word as a strategy in which to orient students to the more traditional poetic content that is reflected on the test. This strategy demonstrates how the content of LPA (i.e. spoken word) curriculum itself is structured and developed in response to the testing content rather than as a singular lesson.

Additionally, Mary demonstrates how LPA helps to address the tension referenced by Jenna, between the more traditional test content and the curricular models employed at Evergreen by creating an access point to which students can relate.

Kevin also addresses how the skills he teaches through LPA are used as way in which to connect students to writing structures present on the test as well as within the ELA content standards:

You can give them a structure and you can fit them into the box that they’re looking for...and its anecdotal in a sense, its persuasive but anecdotal evidence and its suppository but anecdotal evidence so you can almost bring any piece of evidence in as long as you get a few central sentences to connect it...But ultimately when kids feel comfortable they’ll try harder and poetry is a tool that I’ve that all kids buy into if you do it right.

Like Mary, Kevin utilizes LPA as form of engagement. However, the *point* of engagement differs between the two teachers as Mary sees connecting LPA to testing *content* (e.g. the “Longfellow” example) while Kevin attempts to connect students with the *skills* that are highlighted by content standards and not necessarily the exam itself. It is important to note that

by the twelfth grade a large majority of students have already passed the State exams thus lessening the stakes and instructional responsibility of test prep. Therefore Kevin has more flexibility to instruct students through a skills-based model, which is supported by the current standards, rather than having to focus somewhat heavily on content (e.g. traditional canons) like the others:

I teach stylistic elements through poetry...Writing that's realistic to the world-you know any writing that's cathartic has style in it so teaching kids to recognize the tone and style of their own writing through poetry...that's what I attempt to do.

As students begin to establish their own voice and style within their writing, Kevin believes that this, intertwined with the basic essay structures, will be sufficient for students to pass the test successfully if they have not already done so. In this sense, Kevin does not appear alter his curriculum as drastically, if at all, as Mary and Jenna, whose instruction is highly tied to preparing for the tests and the results that ensue.

Joe Stackhouse, in a more unique position than the other teachers as he currently teaches both ninth and eleventh grade, emphasizes the role that outcomes and standards play as he develops his curriculum:

In the back of my mind it's always like what am I expecting them to know and then backtracking to "ok I gotta do this and this and this so that they can get there". So outcomes is always kind of the first thing to think about...in our school IB stuff is part of that whole planning-what do they need to be able to do in eleventh and twelfth grade as outcomes...yes I mean the bottom line yeah you want kids to be able to read and write according to the standards so they can pass the test.

Because of Castlemont's switch to an IB program model in the early 2000's, as Joe mentions, much of the ninth and tenth curriculum is designed to prepare students for the academic IB content they will encounter in their last two years. This includes the culminating exams, which assesses a student's knowledge of the IB curriculum and the corresponding standards. Within

this as well is preparation for the state exam, which is encompassed by much of the IB testing as that program tests at a much more rigorous level in ELA subjects. Thus, Joe's instruction and, more specifically, use of LPA as a strategy, is highly shaped by the program model, the required skills within that model, and the corresponding tests.

Through this analysis, it is apparent that teachers who experience the most pressure to align instruction to the test are the ones who teach at a grade where the test is either first taken or will soon be taken. Furthermore, regarding the teachers who use LPA, the data indicates that the more instruction is influenced by testing content and general standards, the more likely it is that LPA will be used as tool to engage students with that content rather than in other contexts. Consequently, the presence of LPA within these schools is significantly bound to the curricular structure and academic requirements that surround it therefore potentially limiting its scope as a product of critical literacy.

### **Content Standards and Ideological Influences on LPA Instruction**

Similar to testing, the study found content standards to be a significant influence on how teachers developed their curriculum and utilized instructional strategies, in ways that could influence whether or how they used LPA. Unlike testing however, content standards shaped instructional practice equally across grades whether or not students were tested at a given level thus expanding the scope of their influence within a given school. These standards included requirements both set by the State and district as well as the individual school itself.

All teacher participants and workshop facilitators either mentioned directly the impact that content standards had in shaping their instruction or gave examples of their teaching, which revealed patterns of instruction aligned to standards. While all content standards at the State and

district levels remained constant throughout all schools (i.e. all students must acquire the same skills/content and pass the same test) the manner in which they were funneled and represented within the specific curricular models of each high school remained distinct.

As WITS is the principal non-profit program present within each school site and, in many cases the only way LPA curriculum is present in the school, the manner in which the organization itself frames the use of LPA becomes integral to how it is subsequently represented in the classroom. According to its mission statement WITS attempts to:

Inspire students to engage in the writing process, build skills and improve the quality of their writing, and increase their self-confidence; Invigorate the teaching of writing by providing teachers with innovative lessons and literature, fresh techniques, and the time and encouragement to join their students in writing; Support and sustain a positive culture of reading and writing at each school.

Through these goals, WITS confirms the importance that student engagement and literary empowerment play in the development of LPA curriculum. WITS thus greatly parallels, both in structure and content, how LPA curriculum is utilized by teacher participants and in some cases serves as the access point for how teachers inevitably orient themselves to LPA. Thus, the study found that as content standards directed instruction, so too did it direct the purpose and content of LPA as well.

This manner in which LPA is presented both through WITS and LPA teacher participants thus establishes an interesting dichotomy between the tradition of LPA as a vehicle for critical social action and the current practice of LPA as a tool to engage students with various ELA skills and content standards. According to Parmar and Bain (2007):

Hip hop and spoken word poetry are just one example of a cultural literacy that, as a political discourse, all people can assert their right and responsibility not only to read, understand, and transform their own experiences but also to reconstitute their

relationships with wider society by writing, voicing, and performing these experiences. (p. 154)

In this sense, LPA is structured as a way to disseminate a self-discourse that actively works against the oppressive societal norm in which the subject themselves has been constructed. Through this reauthorization of self, the subject then subsequently engages in a critically transformative process.

While the LPA teacher participants do replicate many of the same strategies reflected within the traditional model of LPA described above (e.g. performance technique, the use of student experience in writing, analysis of rhythm/tone, etc.), the critical ideologies surrounding those strategies remain thematically nonexistent in the wake of standards-based instruction. Daniel Chapman supports this claim as he explains the goals of Community Arts (CommArts), another literary performing arts organization with an emphasis on LPA, and their divergence from that of WITS:

CommArts sees that essentially what we do as teaching artists as anti-oppression work. WITS is more based around the craft of what it is that we're teaching...there's no talk about how to engage or how to be aware of our own biases and prejudices or how to address those prejudices when its the school that's putting them in place and reinforcing those things. Also, talking about when we see oppression how we might handle that...that's the sort of training CommArts does provide...and yet, that's not the mission of WITS.

Because these programs essentially provide the same services to schools regarding the creative writing instruction and literary engagement, the greater prevalence of WITS over CommArts within school and classroom contexts communicates a specific set of values surrounding education and the content that is most important for students absorb; as evidenced by the lesser presence of CommArts in conjunction with the emphasized content standards, these larger educational values do not include in them ideologies of critical literacy. As a proponent of this

transformative model, Daniel has thus been forced to alter the manner in which he instructs and approaches LPA while working with WITS. He indicates that most of the alterations he makes to his instruction of LPA is in direct response to what the teacher wants from the lesson, which, according to Daniel is highly correlated to the production of poetry itself:

I'm not there to necessarily educate kids regarding racism and oppression. I still tend to bring that into my classrooms nonetheless? Because the poetry that I'm bringing in is in a lot of cases addressing those things...but I can't have that be everything that I bring and I can't have that be the ultimate focus because again what they're looking for is the kids to produce poetry.

Thus, while Daniel maintains some form of critical perspective in his lessons through the selected poetic content, this is effectively minimized by the overall educational structure that he must conform to.

Anthony Delgado, the second workshop facilitator and also represented by WITS, provides more evidence of how school values and instructional goals affect what is emphasized within the LPA curriculum through his discussion of the lessons he brings into the classroom:

Spoken word just allows access to teach poetry and sort of like the current poetics of poetry. One of the things I'm most proud of recently is just teaching Sestina as a spoken word form? And like sort of using spoken word as an access to form you know and talking about what it is that form can do within the performative aspect also.

Again, Anthony demonstrates the use of LPA as an introduction to poetic forms and structure; a lesson, which is demonstrative of the larger themes found within the structure of LPA curriculum.

How WITS and CommArts function within school contexts not only helps to reveal the instructional *purpose* of using LPA in the classroom but also illuminates the *educational values and goals* guided by larger more systemic formations of ELA content.

## **Teacher Evaluation as an Influence on LPA Curriculum**

A comparison of evaluation policies at Evergreen and Van Buren revealed how the specific school environment and structure may influence a teacher's relationship with accountability procedures. Castlemont was not included in this section of the analysis due to the absence of an administrator perspective, which was deemed necessary for the comparison of specific evaluation procedures and their effect on teacher practice. Using data from participant interviews, school report cards, and content requirements at State and district levels, the study found teachers at Evergreen to be much more concerned about district and within school evaluations than teachers at Van Buren due to the school's "failing status" designation. In other words, Evergreen's standing as a "failing school" played a role in how much influence evaluation procedures had on teacher practice as well as the manner in which teachers related to those procedures.

Specifically, the level of district involvement within each school was most highly correlated to academic standing as determined by test scores. At Evergreen, district involvement included classroom evaluations of teaching practice, assessment of progress made on test scores, and how effectively the school has responded to district requirements (i.e. transitioning to an all-inclusion model classroom, integration of new evaluation standards, compliance with professional development standards, etc.).

*School & teacher evaluation procedures at the district level.* Beginning with the 2010-11 school year, Woodrow is currently in the process of transitioning the district-wide teacher evaluation system to fit the Charlotte Danielson framework, which assesses teacher effectiveness based upon four central domains: planning and preparation; classroom environment; instruction; professional responsibilities. Specific standards of teacher practice are included under these

broader categories and are the factors that inevitably determine a teacher's ranking of innovative, proficient, basic, or unsatisfactory under the four-tiered performance model.

The implementation of the Danielson Framework was in direct response to State legislation, which required all school districts, by no later than 2013, to employ a new evaluation system, which utilized the four central domains described above. At the time of this study, Evergreen was already using the Danielson framework while Van Buren projected its use starting the following school year.

This process of implementation serves as an example of how accountability procedures are regulated at each level of the educational sphere and the subsequent effect that this regulation has on teacher practice.

***Teacher evaluation at Evergreen.*** A significant characteristic of evaluation at Evergreen is the high classroom visibility of administrators both at school and district levels. According to Dr. Jackson there are four distinct groups who are actively monitoring teacher practice within Evergreen: a teacher's designated supervisor (i.e. assigned school level administrator), a larger school based administration team, the district area supervisor, and the surrounding community. The broader the context in which these evaluators reside, the less present they are within the classroom. This involvement ranges from Dr. Jackson who is in his assigned classrooms everyday to community groups invited in two to three times yearly. In response to the amount of external oversight, teachers at Evergreen do feel an increased pressure to perform favorably within the context of the framework:

Mary L: It's a "we suffer no fools kind of building"...you're always under a microscope. There's like district people coming in because of the failing status. There's always people so there's this real pressure-it's the pressure of the district coming in. You don't wanna be the one that looks like an idiot or gets written up...You feel really vulnerable and exposed and its time ten here over other schools I've worked in.

In addition to the pressure that district presence evokes within the actual classroom context, teacher evaluations based upon State testing scores pose concern for Evergreen teachers as well. As a result of the “failing status” more pressing expectations are put upon teachers to demonstrate academic improvement within this assessment capacity. This, in turn, directly influences what content teachers emphasize in the classroom as well as the manner in which they choose to teach it:

Jenna H: Teaching to that test becomes a scary thing because our evaluation is also based off that test. Its supposed to be-its not right now-like I can't be dismissed or whatever if my test scores don't go up right now but its in the works of being negotiated as one of the points of reference for “is the teacher being effective”?

The evaluation practices at Evergreen reveal a highly regulated environment in which teachers are assessed at multiple levels of the educational tier through different capacities. This culture of accountability is greatly shaped by the “failing status” school designation, which raises the stakes for teachers regarding their own performance as well as the performance of their students.

In contrast, the teacher participants at Van Buren displayed little to no concern regarding in class evaluation procedures or student performance on State exams. Additionally, the school displayed a larger amount of flexibility and autonomy over the content with less pressure coming from high-stakes evaluations. The manner, in which these two high schools interact with the district and, more specifically accountability practices, exhibits the relative importance that district involvement, or lack thereof, has in guiding teachers to a given curriculum structure and content.

Although the data indicated that accountability procedures and evaluation practices do in fact inform teacher practice and the subsequent Language Arts content emphasized, there was no

direct correlation between district/school oversight and the use of LPA as tool for critical pedagogy.

### **Community Context for LPA Curriculum: Serving a Marginalized Student Population**

The vast diversity of students present at Van Buren, Evergreen, and Castlemont was found to play a large role in the presence of LPA curriculum at each school site. Additionally, the student population greatly affected how LPA curriculum was utilized within various classroom settings.

Both Dr. Jackson and Ferris Glover discuss how the “lower achieving” marginalized student population was the impetus for promoting LPA [as well as similar curriculums] in the school setting:

Dr. Jackson: South Barrington Hill as a community is one of our you know low income operating community and we have a high level of students who-in terms of their reading and writing scores-tend to be on the lower end of the measure...so poetry or song lyrics or all of those things, those elements, are very important pieces in differentiating student assignments...everybody in the building pretty much emphasize that.

Dr. Jackson further emphasizes the importance of these curricular elements, LPA included, as the school transitions to an all-city draw model. “ Since we are now getting a sizable population that is on the opposite side of [the lower achieving population]”, he states, “its been quite a dynamic to balance...the increased need for supports”. Thus, having as many ways in which students can demonstrate their competency becomes that much more imperative to include within the school and classroom arena.

Like Dr. Jackson, Ferris Glover speaks to how LPA and external arts programs are contracted specifically with the lower achieving student population in mind:

we have always um tried and most often succeeded to aim it [the WITS program] at lower achieving students...40% of our students are in the district's advanced program... which means that the lower-end classes or regular classes don't get as much attention... part of our responsibility is to make sure that everybody gets good stuff-and when something like this comes along its like well "yeah the AP 12<sup>th</sup> graders probably would write super great poetry but they've-they've gotten a whole bunch of stuff their entire lives...and so it isn't you know policy but generally in the department that's where we stand-its like "no lets do something that's more engaging and more cool for kids who haven't had that much of that".

Although the presence of WITS within Van Buren did not end up being exclusive to this student population [at one point Daniel Chapman was only in one "regular" class out of his contracted three], it played a large role in the initial recruitment process of LPA into the school, which proved to be a significant.

The use of LPA as a response to the needs of a specific student population may help to contextualize its main purpose not as tool for critical transformation but as a supplemental support within the traditional school structure.

At the classroom level, student population was most influential regarding how and what material was highlighted within LPA. For example, Anthony Delgado discusses how he tailored his workshops based upon what he felt the students were ready for:

...the motivation or like educational commitment varies from class to class sometimes and so you have to find a way that like certain kids will relate...depending on the vibe in your room. Some students are signing up to take poetry-they're writers already so I can run that class more like you know a freshman level university class...on the other side I had a class-they were not really feeling the poetry or whatever it was that I was trying to give them so I just had to completely switch gears...

Anthony's experience demonstrates how student population altered the manner in which he approached his lessons, which not only determined the *type* of LPA strategies enacted but the *purpose* attached to those strategies as well. Daniel Chapman relays a similar experience with his

classes at Van Buren stating that each group had “their own kind of distinct personalities”, which shaped the nature of his instruction.

Although it is probable that student population was a factor in how LPA and Non-LPA teachers tailored their instruction as well, the workshop facilitators provided the only definitive evidence in this strain because they remained outside of the formal school structure and the confines, which may or may not influence teacher instruction more than student population.

### **Organization of Data & Findings**

The findings demonstrate a how a tiered system of education is structured, and the possible influences, at each level, which contribute to the instructional core itself. Furthermore, the complex nature of these conditions and their interaction helps to explain the distinct experiences within school and classroom arenas. In this case, through analysis of these interactions, the study was able to better illuminate the possible dynamics that structured LPA curriculum within more localized educational contexts when various conditions were held constant at each level (e.g. curricular models, use of LPA curriculum, use of same workshop facilitator in different school sites, etc.). It is for this reason why I chose to begin analysis at the core (comparing individual teacher and facilitator values/instructional strategies) and, from there, develop out to school, community, and district arenas. This process allowed for me to better understand what conditions most influenced the instructional presence of LPA and the level (i.e. district, school, classroom) at which that condition was placed.

## **Chapter 5**

### **Implications & Significance of Study**

Understanding the role districts and schools play, within a high-stakes environment, in the use of Literary Performing Arts (LPA) classroom curriculum notably contributes to the vast body of research on the academic and social benefits of LPA for high school students by helping to illuminate how LPA can become increasingly accessible to students, under the right conditions, within an urban context. The school and district conditions addressed within this study help to contextualize strategic interventions in classroom instruction to include LPA and/or other curriculum, which elicit similar benefits.

While the results of this study can only be directly applied to the environment in which the research occurred, larger more general themes have potential to be drawn out when integrated with both future and related research discussed above. These themes, more specifically, include: the principle school and district conditions that permit or inhibit the use of LPA curriculum in the ELA classroom, the influence of high-stakes testing/accountability on the manner teachers utilize alternative forms of curriculum such as LPA, and the way in which high schools (and oftentimes individual classrooms themselves) may respond differently to the same district conditions and structure. Again, these potential findings are not meant to draw conclusions outside of the context and time period in which they are produced. However, because little research has been done on the relation of LPA curriculum to school, districts, and high-stakes conditions as influences of utilization, they may serve as a helpful point of reference or corroboration for future research on this topic.

## **Limitations**

It is important to address the limitations of this study in order to better contextualize the findings. Although the study did reveal the way in which LPA functioned within each school site, the findings did not (nor were they meant to) provide adequate evidence for LPA curriculum at a general district level. However, because LPA was found to function differently at each of the selected school sites based upon individual school climate and culture, it can be assumed that the presence of LPA would most likely be distinct at other sites within the district as well.

The participant pool size reveals another research limitation. Given the distinct nature of personal perspective, even the nine interviews that were obtained could not frame the general experience of teachers at given school site. Triangulation of interviews with district/school documents and some classroom observation, discussed earlier, helped to alleviate some of this bias by corroborating evidence in which thematic analysis could be drawn. However, it is imperative to note this limitation as it does inform the findings. Another limitation was the lack of participants procured in the Non-LPA and administrator groups. At Castlemont, for example, interviews from administrators and non-LPA teachers were absent from the study, which made it difficult to establish a strong means of comparison with the other sites regarding how LPA functioned at a broader school level. Thus, as represented in the findings, the data from Castlemont was only used as a means for comparison regarding teacher utilization of LPA curriculum and the experience of workshop facilitators within the given school site. Had these participants been included, a stronger correlation could have been made between the three sites and, in turn, provided more context to the study itself.

Taking these limitations into account, however, the study still maintains significant findings using the rich set of data that was obtained. It is important to note that while the

limitations regarding participant selection and setting did render some findings inconclusive, they had little effect on the data, which could be synthesized within the given parameters.

## **Conclusions**

The reappropriation of LPA from traditions of critical pedagogy to that of state and district standards reveals the integral role that external educational structures have in determining how and what curriculum is taught. Specifically, this study reveals how LPA was restructured to support the high-stakes testing environment in which this curriculum has traditionally confronted. While the use of LPA within school and classroom contexts helps to identify a culture, which values empowerment, agency, and active engagement with student experience, it does not intrinsically confirm the presence of critical ideologies and social action.

According to Giroux (1981), simply acknowledging the oppressive atmosphere that traditional schooling perpetuates will not itself produce a “transformation of consciousness” (p. 66). This act, Giroux states, does “little to help [students] move beyond a cheery spontaneity, the substance of which is anchored in the manipulative behavior it is alleged to overcome” (p. 66). Thus, using LPA as tool in which to promote academic achievement under state and district structures, is unlikely elicit the critical change within those structures even if teacher and school values do in fact support that critical process. According to Giroux (1981):

...if the curriculum field is going to resist the conformity that threatens to overtake it, its members will have to reassess its possibilities for critique and growth against the influence and mediations of those dominant instructional forces that often work to limit the curriculum field’s power as a mode of critical discourse and inquiry. p. 113

The orientation of LPA within the three school sites is greatly demonstrative of this. While LPA teachers and workshop facilitators harbored many of the characteristics representative of critical

pedagogy the outlook did not inherently combat the academic structure of standardized testing, assessments, and overall school culture.

However, I argue that while the use of LPA may not itself confront the “dominant instructional forces” as defined by Giroux, it still remains an important instructional tool for engaging students with their own voice and this, I believe, is its own form of critical transformation. As we deconstruct what LPA *should* look like, we often miss the importance of what it *is*: a tool for agency and expression, which has the potential to broaden the spectrum of assessment and, consequently, include more types of student learning within our current evaluative processes. In other words, LPA does not necessarily have to resist the high-stakes environment in which it is placed. Rather, LPA can, as demonstrated by this study, provide essential instructional supports to better ensure the academic success of disenfranchised students *within* this high-stakes system. Perhaps this is the ultimate revelation of this study; to show us the presence of LPA in a new era where student voice is not necessarily an agent of critical change but still carries the mellifluous rhythms of educational progress.

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APPENDIX A:  
INTERVIEW PROTOCOLS

**A-1. INTERVIEW PROTOCOL FOR INTERVIEWS WITH LPA GROUP  
TEACHERS**

*Code: (ex. LPAT-01; this signifies that the interview would be the first one out of all the interviews for a teacher in the LPA group)*

1. Can you tell me a little bit about your professional background? (Probes: How many years have you been teaching ELA? What types of schools and grade levels have you predominantly worked with? In what area(s) have you worked?)
2. **The following questions will address your use of literary performing arts curriculum. We will then transition into discussing your experience with this curriculum in your current school setting.** When did you first begin to use literary performing arts curriculum in your teaching and why? What attracted you to this type of curriculum?
3. Literary performing arts has a wide range of meanings and applications within the classroom. How do you define literary performing arts? How do you think this definition influences your instruction of LPA?
4. Can you give me an example of a particularly memorable ELA lesson you have taught using literary performing arts curriculum? What do you think made this lesson stand out from other LPA lessons you have taught or observed? (Probe: who was involved in this experience? Where did it take place?)
5. **At this time, I am going to ask you questions in regards to your specific school site.** Professional school culture is oftentimes shaped by an assortment of different factors such as teacher leadership councils, the types of professional development activities available to teachers in and out of school contexts, teacher backgrounds, and other things of this nature. What would you say most contributes to the professional school culture at this site? (Probe: can you give an example of how each component contributes?)
6. If I were a new ELA teacher at this school, what professional development activities would you recommend I get involved in? Why?

7. When developing a new ELA lesson or curriculum what sorts of things do you generally take into account? Why? (Probe: Can you expand upon these ideas by giving an example?)
8. What have you found to be the biggest challenge or set of challenges in this development process (Can you describe a time when this challenge was especially prevalent?)
9. In what ways, if any, do you think your choices in curriculum and instructional strategies are influenced by external forces or policies?
10. Can you describe to me your ideal teaching environment? This includes how you would structure the duration of each class period, the type of ELA content that would be taught, how students are graded and assessed, the type of professional development activities available, and any other things you think would contribute to this ideal environment.

## A-2. INTERVIEW PROTOCOL FOR INTERVIEWS WITH NON-LPA GROUP TEACHERS

*Code: (ex. NONLPAT-01; this signifies that the interview would be the first one out of all the interviews conducted for teachers in the Non-LPA group)*

1. Can you tell me a little bit about your professional background? (Probes: How many years have you been teaching ELA? What types of schools and grade levels have you predominantly worked with? In what area(s) have you worked?)
2. **At this time, I am going to ask you questions in regards to your specific school site.** Professional school culture is oftentimes shaped by an assortment of different factors such as teacher leadership councils, the types of professional development activities available to teachers in and out of school contexts, teacher backgrounds, and other things of this nature. What would you say most contributes to the professional school culture at this site? (Probe: can you give an example of how each component contributes?)
3. If I were a new ELA teacher at this school, what professional development activities would you recommend I get involved in? Why?
4. When developing a new ELA lesson or curriculum what sorts of things do you generally take into account? Why? (Probe: Can you expand upon these ideas by giving an example?)
5. What have you found to be the biggest challenge or set of challenges in this development process (Can you describe a time when this challenge was especially prevalent?)
6. In what ways, if any, do you think your choices in curriculum and instructional strategies are influenced by external forces or policies?
7. Can you describe to me your ideal teaching environment? This includes how you would structure the duration of each class period, the type of ELA content that would be taught, how students are graded and assessed, the type of professional development activities available, and any other things you think would contribute to this ideal environment.

### A-3. INTERVIEW PROTOCOL FOR INTERVIEWS WITH WRITING WORKSHOP FACILITATORS

*Code: (ex. LPAF-01; this signifies that the interview would be the first one out of all the writing workshop facilitator interviews conducted)*

1. **At this time, I am going to ask you questions in regards to your work as a writing workshop facilitator in regards to broader contexts and within your current organization.** Can you tell me a little bit about your professional background? (Probes: How many years have you been a writing workshop facilitator? What types of schools and grade levels have you predominantly worked with? In what area(s) have you worked?)
2. Can you give me an example of a particularly memorable LPA lesson you have taught? What do you think made this lesson stand out from other LPA lessons you have taught or observed? (Probe: who was involved in this experience? Where did it take place?)
3. When developing a new ELA lesson or curriculum what sorts of things do you generally take into account? Why? (Probe: Can you expand upon these ideas by giving an example?)
4. What have you found to be the biggest challenge or set of challenges in this development process (Can you describe a time when this challenge was especially prevalent?)
5. In what ways have you personally partnered with schools or individual teachers in developing or promoting LPA curriculum? (Probe: Can you give an example of a particularly memorable experience?)
6. In your experience, what do you think is the overall mission or goal of your organization? Does this mission or goal influence the way you approach your writing workshop sessions? In what ways?
7. What do you think are the most positive attributes of the type of LPA curriculum utilized within your organization? What attributes do you think could use improvement? (Probe: Drawing on past experiences can you give an example of these attributes “in action”?)

What school and district conditions do you think hinder or promote the use of LPA curriculum in the schools? How do you think these conditions, if at all, influence your organization’s partnership with the schools?

#### **A-4. INTERVIEW PROTOCOL FOR INTERVIEWS WITH PRINCIPALS OR ELA DEPARTMENT HEADS**

*Code: (ex. LPAP-01; this signifies that the interview would be the first one out of all principals/ELA department heads being interviewed within the LPA group)*

1. Can you tell me a little bit about your professional background? (Probes: How long have you been a Principal/Department Head? What types of schools have you worked in?)
2. School leadership can have many different meanings and representations. From your own experience, how would you define school leadership?
3. What do you believe are important things to consider (e.g. administrative-teacher communication, professional development plans, community partnerships, teacher quality/evaluation, etc.) when structuring effective school leadership? (probe: can you give an example of a time when you saw or participated in an effective school leadership plan?)
4. **At this time, I am going to ask you questions in regards to your specific school site.** Professional school culture is oftentimes shaped by an assortment of different factors such as teacher leadership councils, the types of professional development activities available to teachers in and out of school contexts, teacher backgrounds, and other things of this nature. What would you say most contributes to the professional school culture at this site? (Probe: can you give an example of how each component contributes?)
5. In what ways do district policies and procedures influence how your school is run and the curricular content that is utilized? (probe: can you give an example of each influence in relation to the school setting?)
6. Can you describe the state and district testing procedures at your school? Do these tests influence your leadership and goals as a principal/ELA department head?
7. What are the biggest challenges you face as a principal? In what ways do you think these challenges could be alleviated?
8. What has been your reaction to the decentralization effort within the Seattle public schools? What are the biggest ways in which decentralization has affected your relationship with both the school and district environment as well your responsibilities as a principal/ELA department head?

9. Does the school budget influences your decisions as a principal/ELA department head? If yes, in what ways (give an example)? If no, what external entities allow for you to not have to take the budget into account when making decisions?
  
10. If you had to choose one or two, what would you say are the most positive attributes of your school? What attributes would you say most need improvement?