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Zine Culture: Identity & Agency Trajectories in an ELA Classroom

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Zine Culture: Identity & Agency
Trajectories in an ELA Classroom

By

W. Kyle Jones

A Dissertation
Submitted in Partial Fulfillment
Of the Requirements for the Degree of
Doctor of Education
In
Secondary Education
English
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My love of writing grew from the moment Ms. B, my readiness teacher, helped me publish my own story of a white cat that visited a magical land after falling into a rainbow. My love of reading began at the age of ten when my dad handed me the book *Ender’s Game*, and I became immersed in the psychology of a child my age playing the war games of adults. I fortified my love of writing when my friends humored me and read my angsty, teenage poetry and told me they liked it—they were being kind to say the least. I discovered I loved Shakespeare while reading, annotating, and watching *Titus Andronicus* in an undergrad classroom, realizing for the first time Shakespeare was the original Quintin Tarantino. So from the age of fifteen, I knew I wanted to be an English teacher. I have known for just as long that I wanted to earn a doctorate. This may or may not have had something to do with the *Indiana Jones* films. While the dream of completing my doctorate has been marinating for years and long awaited, it could not be realized without the support and care of others in my life.

First and foremost, I would not be in the position to extend my studies in English education without my wife, Dale. She is a genius, but too humble to admit it. I try to be more like her every day. Without my dad, Bill, I do not know if I would have ever have fallen in love with reading. He modeled a love of reading and always encouraged me to read. My mom, Deborah, always encouraged my creativity; she was always up for reading a new poem I wrote or listening to a new song I wrote with my brother, Michael. Michael has been my muse for my professional career. While he may have passed away during my third year of college, I have carried him into every classroom in which I have taught. My relationship with him and our story has bridged me to many of students’ lives. My grandparents, who I have been blessed enough to have throughout my adulthood, are pillars of what hard work and putting family first really looks like—I try to
emulate those values in my own family. My step-family—Anna, Emily, Megan, Katie, Paul, and Heather—loves me as their own, and I try to never forget how they share their lives with me and my parents. My in-laws, Mike and Lynn, support everything I do, celebrate me, and treat me as their own. Each of these people have inspired me to this point in my life.

Professionally, I would not be where I am without the friendship and guidance of Dr. Darren Crovitz who patiently answered every question I had as an undergrad about what it would take to get my doctorate one day. I also have colleagues both old and new to thank for supporting me and mentoring me over the years, including Dr. Reuben Gresham, Mr. Ed Shaddix, Mr. Nic Carroll, Mr. Mike Reilly, Mr. Bobby Gueh, Dr. Colette Grodzicki, Mrs. McCall Grosso, Mr. Taylor Cross and so many others I have had the honor to teach alongside.

To my cohort mates, thank you for your support, laughter, collective knowledge, experiences, and community. You all gave me a foundation to stand on, and I know much of this achievement is embedded in my experiences with you all. Krista, Kim, Nick, Ashely, Barbara, Corrie, Lea, Debbie, Ericka, and Allison, thank you each for your comradery and spirit.

I must also acknowledge and thank my outstanding and illustrious committee for their commitment to me, my study, and my growth as an educator. Dr. Jennifer Dail, thank you for being my strongest advocate and encourager—you always believed in my work and potential. Dr. Ryan Rish, thank you for introducing me to Henry Jenkin’s work and always holding me accountable to my reading and interpretations of theory and practice. You are truly one of the most well-read professors I may ever encounter—you have no idea how much I respect your knowledge. To my distinguished chair, Dr. Scott Ritchie, thank you for believing in my work, reminding me my study is important, and seeing me through to the end. I am so thankful I had you in my corner.
Finally, I want to thank my class of thirty-one ninth grade students who trusted me as their teacher and as a researcher, and a very special thank you to the four students who shared their experiences and allowed me to tell their stories. This class reminded me why my research is important and the value of purposefully creating spaces in public education for students to explore their identities and relationships.
DEDICATION

To my wife, Dale. Your love and care for me and others continues to inspire me to care and love those I teach and mentor—we earned this together. And to my daughter, Gwendolyn—in you I have seen and held true love.
The definition of what is considered literacy is ever changing as is the literacy practices that are welcomed into a classroom space by ELA teachers. This collective case study explores the social positioning, trajectories, sedimentation, and negotiation of students’ identities, agency, and relationships in an English language arts (ELA) classroom that welcomes students’ unsanctioned literacy practices and is framed using the tenets of participatory culture and care ethics. The ELA classroom is a space particularly positioned well to foster student identity exploration; however, an ELA teacher may inadvertently curtail or even suppress student identity exploration when deciding what is taught, how it is taught, and when it is taught. In addition, any teacher—and I argue particularly an ELA teacher—is positioned to foster students’ relational growth through the establishment of caring relationships in a classroom space.

The study is founded in sociocultural theory which views literacy to be multiple, multimodal, and multilingual as situated in and across social and cultural contexts. With a sociocultural approach in mind, I conduct an eight-week-long collective case study of four high school students situated in a suburban high school located in the Southern United States in order to understand the trajectories their identities, agency, and relationships take in an ELA classroom intentionally designed to welcome any unsanctioned literacy practices into the classroom through the making of zines. I observed their zine making over the course of eight weeks, and throughout that time I collected several sources of data, including video and audio recordings, written
reflections, formal and informal interviews, a researcher’s journal, and their zine artifacts. In the inductive analysis of the data, I notice recurring themes such as the students’ negotiation of identity and agency when creating zines and their negotiation of their relationships with their peers when sharing and discussing their zines.

Findings reveal that students can and do negotiate their identities using what they might perceive as typically unsanctioned literacy practices that are not always readily recognized in an ELA classroom. Students also can and do draw from the lived experiences to help them negotiate their actions in the classroom, including how much they participate or engage in discourse with their peers and teacher. In addition, students who are exposed to the literacy practices of their peers and share their own can and do develop more caring, empathetic relationships with their peers and teacher. As the four participants engaged in zine making, each was unique in which literacy practices they used and how they used them to negotiate their identity, how they positioned themselves and took up, resisted, or rejected how others positioned them, and how they negotiated their relationships in the classroom. These findings are particularly important to understanding how a classroom attempting to use the tenets of participatory culture as a framework for assignments and curriculum design may be beneficial to student identity work. However, I argue educators should be wary of romanticizing participatory culture, as its tenets are more aspirational than tangible depending on the educational setting and context. It is more important to concentrate on exploring meaningful connections between students and their literacy practices and their relationships to one another in support of those practices.

This study offers new understandings and insights into the literacy practices of students and how those practices are connected to the negotiation of their identities, agency, and relationship trajectories. It calls for future longitudinal studies that may determine further
nuances to the relationship between literacy practices and student identity formation as well as studies that look closer at the impact of identity exploration in the ELA classroom on students gaining deeper knowledge of the ELA curriculum and the differences in how male and female students may take up identity exploration.

**KEY WORDS:** care ethics, participatory culture, identity and agency negotiation, English language arts, unsanctioned literacy practices, zine
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CHAPTER 1
INTRODUCTION

Vignette

The classroom is buzzing with activity. Students stand in pairs, trios, and quads as many excitedly exchange zines, commenting on one another’s work. Each do-it-yourself, handmade magazine—or zine—captures either an aspect of what a student enjoys spending a lot of time doing, dislikes spending a lot of time doing, or imagines what they would do if they had the time and resources. There are zines about the potential of travel, the love of video games and television shows, the difficulty of chemistry, the exploration of Tumblr, and even interests in quantum physics. I help orchestrate the exchange of zines calling for students to find someone new with whom to exchange their work – someone with whom they do not sit or have not already shared. One student sprints across the room to share their work, while another does their best to sit and stay at their table. Three students claim they do not quite understand the quantum physics zine, but praise the author for their knowledge and interest. Another student expresses surprise to discover their quiet classmate who sits across the room is an active Tumblr contributor. A duo of students quietly laughs as they point to the contents of one another’s zines, and another student lauds the author of the chemistry zine for their humor and clear attempt at satire.

I grab the students’ attention with a loud request to look at him and to take a seat at their usual table. After a minute of shuffling across the room and conversations trailing off, the room grows quiet and the teacher asks, “Did you learn anything about anyone else in the room?” For a long moment, students simply stare at one another or at the teacher, but then a student raises their hand and—possibly feeling emboldened—another student raises theirs, then another, and another. As each student speaks, they explain a new aspect previously hidden to them about their
peers, and for a few, a pattern emerges. Quieting the class once more, I point out the pattern where five or six students have all made zines about traveling the world, which the teacher follows up with asking those students to consider those wonderful similarities of simply wanting to see the world outside the one they woke up to everyday. Eventually, I explain to the class how an exchange like this gives them a window into how people see themselves. I then state how easy it is to go through high school and not really know anyone, including the people they sit next to everyday. Several students nod in appreciation of my words, while most remain quiet, still listening for more. Internally, I hope this moment of zine sharing will provide a platform for them to explore who they have been, who they are, and what they may be becoming—all while hoping an ember of empathy toward one another has been stoked.

Statement of the Problem

I use the opening vignette as snapshot into my English language arts (ELA) classroom and one of my many attempts to engage my students in discourse that validates their identities in my classroom—all as a means to build more meaningful relationships among them. Identity is fluid and multiplicitous and is continually navigated throughout a person’s lifetime; therefore, there is a need for spaces in schools that welcome identity and relationship exploration to foster meaningful participation in those spaces. Adolescence is a particularly volatile time in an individual’s development where identity may at times be uncomfortable or even risky to disclose to others openly (Beach, Johnston, & Thein, 2015). Still, exploring identity in an ELA classroom has the possibility to be a safe space where students’ contributions and participation in the classroom are valued at all levels whether a student is always actively engaged in discourse or a student watches their peers before taking action. Between the texts that may be read, the discussions that may be had, and the writing that may be done, the ELA classroom has the
potential for an ELA teacher to invite students to explore identity and participate as desired in a space where empathy and care is fostered.

The ELA classroom is a space particularly positioned well to foster student identity exploration; however, an ELA teacher may inadvertently curtail or even suppress student identity exploration when deciding what is taught, how it is taught, and when it is taught (Beach et al.). In addition, an ELA teacher is positioned to foster students’ relational growth through the establishment of caring relationships in a classroom space (Noddings, 1988, 2003). Noddings (2003) argues any subject in school should cover the range of human experiences in order to put “an increased emphasis on biography and the meaning of the subject in individual lives” (p. 191). Hence, establishing caring relations in a classroom may contribute to students’ identity exploration and negotiation through discursive and literacy practices.

Finally, Henry Jenkins and his colleagues (2009) believe there is a participation gap—or “unequal access to the opportunities, experiences, skills, and knowledge that will prepare youth for full participation in the world of tomorrow” (p. 3)—that needs pedagogical interventions. While some students are clearly participating in media generation, there are many who may have latent talents or interest for participating in remixing and media production. I can see this need in my own ELA students. With the advent and increased access to social media and open source applications, my students have opportunities to explore and participate in a wealth of personal interests and collaborative media production. These sorts of productions are not always welcome in the ELA classrooms I have observed, including my own. My study inquires into the possibilities of intentionally framing the ELA classroom using the tenets of Jenkins et al.’s participatory culture and a relational, caring ethic to open the ELA classroom to students’ deeper
identity and agency exploration through the use of unschooled, or unsanctioned, literacy practices (Street & Street, 1995).

How someone acts (or does not act) and interprets themselves as well as how others interpret them are at the core of better understanding people as consumers and generators of media—labels that have increasingly blurring lines (Jenkins et al., 2009). Those blurring lines are of particular interest to me as an ELA teacher and researcher. Jenkins and his colleagues make a compelling case for an increasing need to acknowledge students’ engagement in remixing existing media and generating original media content in literacy instruction. There are rich literacy practices to be observed in spaces designed for participation in the ELA classroom setting. In an American education era demanding students be more critical, articulate, and collaborative, the ELA classroom could be more like what James Gee (2004) calls a portal (an entry point for student interests associated with affinity spaces), for students to engage in latent literacy practices where the tenets of participatory culture may be an affordance for student learning.

Closing a gap of any kind, let alone Jenkins and his compatriots’ concern with the participation gap of students, is a difficult endeavor when we do not understand how a phenomenon affects the individuals those gaps impact. The question is not whether or not there is a participation gap or if participatory culture even exists. The question of interest to me is how does an ELA classroom space designed to support collaboration allow exploration of student interests and act as an open forum for adolescent literacy practices inform how students identify themselves and their sense of agency in the ELA classroom?

I also posit any observable shifts in a student’s identity or agency may be further affected when an instructor endorses participation through an ethic of caring (Noddings, 1988, 2003,
Noddings (1988) claims an ethic of caring “prefers acts done out of love and natural inclination” (p. 219) rather than out of moral obligation. I am seeking to observe how a care dynamic (Noddings, 1988, 2003, 2012) rather than a hierarchical power dynamic—a dynamic often found in an ELA classroom where the instructor may be controlling or authoritarian—may support re-negotiating relationships when unsanctioned literacy practices are integrated using the tenets of participatory culture. Noddings (1988) claims, “Teachers have an obligation to support, anticipate, evaluate, and encourage worthwhile activities, and students have a right to pursue projects mutually constructed and approved” (p. 221); her argument implies the importance of working alongside students to achieve academic and learning goals. Two of the tenets of Jenkins et al.’s (2009) participatory culture states members within such a culture “believe that their contributions matter” and “feel some degree of social connection with one another (at the least they care what other people think about what they have created)” (p. 7). I argue establishing a relational, caring ethic in the ELA classroom may build upon features of participatory culture and in turn promote identity and agency exploration as well as support the negotiation of students’ relationships to one another and me as their teacher.

Ultimately, my study seeks to observe an ethic of caring dynamic between me as a practitioner-researcher my student-participants and how caring relationships support the tenets of participatory culture and the implications each have on students’ identity and agency. I am inviting an ethic of caring, the tenets of participatory culture, and unsanctioned literacy practices through the use of zines—alternative, do-it-yourself, self-published, self-distributed magazines that are typically photocopied or digitally crafted and often times exhibit counter-cultural narratives and information—into my classroom among my students. Unsanctioned literacy practices typically go unacknowledged in the ELA classrooms I have personally observed and
instructed and can be difficult to define due to their ever-evolving nature. For the purpose of this study, I define unsanctioned or unschooled literacy practices as those which are ignored, challenged, or rejected by the community at large, which may only privilege literacy practices that support dominant discourses such as written over oral, standard grammar over vernacular or colloquial grammar, and objective, neutral language over subjective, potentially abrasive language (Jenkins, 2009, 2013; Ito, M., Baumer, S., Bittanti, M., Boyd, D., Cody, R., Herr-Stephenson, B., Tripp, L., 2010, Street & Street, 1995). Street and Street (1995) argue that these practices are not ignored because of school in itself, but rather that the community at large sets literacy’s cultural and ideological patterns. I desire for my study to help disrupt these patterns in order to observe if such disruptions and re-negotiation of dominating, ‘pedagogized’ discourse impacts student identity and agency in the ELA classroom.

Acknowledging that unsanctioned literacy can also be pedagogized, which in this case means co-opted by a teacher in order to make it a mainstream teaching practice, is an important admission for this study as well. Ultimately, as the practitioner-researcher I cannot escape my position as an authority in the classroom, and by allowing unsanctioned literacy practices to permeate the space I traditionally control, I am at least in some form pedagogizing those practices. My intent, however, is to invite those practices into my ELA classroom in order to welcome caring relationships among my students and with me. Further, when restricting what literacy practices are or are not welcomed in the ELA classroom, an ELA teacher may decrease the number of students’ identity trajectories (Moje, Luke, Davies, & Street, 2009). Therein lies the rub. By integrating unsanctioned literacy practices into the ELA classroom, am I simply pedagogizing them, co-opting them as another form of power over my students? Maybe—but the
possibilities of welcoming such literacy practices to enter freely into the ELA classroom may have on student identity and relationship exploration is too rich not to explore.

**Research Questions**

My research questions are born from my direct interest in wanting to understand my students’ identities as individuals, students, writers, voyeurs, media consumers and producers and how they negotiate their identities and forms of agency. My readings and explorations have directed me to look at identity and agency negotiation through the heuristic of participatory culture (Jenkins et al., 2009, 2012, 2013) and an ethic of caring (Noddings, 1988, 2003, 2012). Participatory culture’s theoretical tenets provide a framework to enact a variety of student literacy practices, including those not typically appreciated or accepted in the traditional ELA classroom that I have often observed. As an act of caring from me, I also suspect inviting unsanctioned literacy practices into the ELA classroom may welcome caring relationships to form among my students and me, where students feel their contributions and identities are appreciated by me as well as their peers. This appreciation may be established through a “natural inclination” to acknowledge the value of students’ unsanctioned literacy practices in the ELA classroom space as well as through the development of reciprocity where students acknowledge those literacy practice may be intertwined with an aspect of a peer’s identity. My research questions are:

1. How do students negotiate their identities and exercise their agency in an ELA classroom framed by participatory culture?

2. What relationships do students re-negotiate and develop in an English classroom framed by participatory culture?
Purpose of the Study

The purpose of my study is to examine inductively how students negotiate their identities, agency, and relationships when an ELA classroom is framed by features found in Jenkins’ theory of participatory culture, which I use of the purpose of helping welcome unsanctioned literacy practices into my ELA classroom, and Noddings’ ethic of caring, which I use for the purpose of helping invite more caring and empathetic relationships in my ELA classroom.

The exploration of student identities may be fostered through social positioning such as how an individual takes up, resists, or rejects positioning socially enacted by others onto that individual (Davies & Harré, 1990) as well as how setting, context, task construal and tool acquisition might position them (see Smagorinsky, 2011). Davies and Harré’s (1990) social positioning theory helps me frame identity as fluid and iterative where discourse and interactions among individuals inform how an individual identifies themselves and others, meaning a person’s identity may take on new or varying trajectories at any time.

My use of trajectories as a metaphor for identity formation is meant to acknowledge an individual’s identity can change direction at any time. This direction is not necessarily linear, either. Rather, through an individual’s social positioning, they can move in any number of directions on what might be imagined as a three-dimensional plane. The metaphor also helps me establish that when an individual’s identity changes trajectories something may ‘stick’ from the previous positioning, or become sedimented (Holland, Lachicotte, Skinner, & Cain, 1998). This sedimentation acknowledges an individual may retain an aspect of their identity even as they negotiate new trajectories as positioned in a particular context or setting.

Beach, Johnston, and Thein (2015) posit identity work in the ELA classroom is important for the space it naturally provides for students to position themselves to explore past experiences
and construct their current identity. My study is designed in alignment with these arguments. I specifically want to observe how a broader range of literacy practices, including those often unrecognized in school, may be a conduit for students’ identity exploration in social positioning, personal experience, and relationships. The use of zines may be one tool that welcomes students to position themselves through narratives they create in their zines, using what hopefully amounts to a range of literacy practices to do so. I am also seeking how students may re-negotiate their relationships among themselves and me as their teacher when unsanctioned literacy practices are welcomed into the ELA classroom using zines as a tool.

**Significance of the Study**

I posit any time an individual explores and negotiates their identity and agency is valuable. An individual’s identity formation is not an isolated event, nor can it be seen as particularly objective where the variables of discourse and social interaction are discounted. In fact, as identity formation occurs, there may be lasting implications for the individual’s life as an agent to their own literacy practices and as a democratic citizen. The ELA classroom is an appropriate and apt space for positional identity work (Beach et al., 2015), and there is a need to acknowledge that student identities can be performed, mediated, disrupted as well as show sedimentation (a portion of one’s identity that may “collect over time” due to the conception of one’s identity by others and internalized by the individual) (Holland et al., 1998) in such a space—especially one dedicated to caring relationships. Identity exploration in educational spaces, which I also posit is inextricably tied to relationships, is sorely needed and worth observing for implications in pedagogy and literacy studies.

With concern to literacy, while what counts as literacy may be debated, the definition of literacy and what is seen as a literacy practice has expanded. The New London Group (NLG)
(1996) helped redefine literacy beyond a text-only modality to include visual, audio, spatial, behavioral, and gestural modes. Though some have argued that researchers have incorrectly operationalized the NLG’s concept of multiliteracies as a thing to discover in the classroom rather than an aspirational pedagogy in recent years (Leander & Boldt, 2013), access to digital media and multiple modes of communication continue to expand and with it an almost desperate need to prepare students to take up, challenge, and originate media on their own terms (Jenkins et al., 2009; Losh & Jenkins, 2012). There is undoubtedly a need to better prepare students to be critical of the media targeted at them while simultaneously preparing them to be critical of their own media production (Janks, 2010). In short, students need to own their literacy practices and media production and feel emboldened to push back against media produced for them.

In regard to pedagogy, students may position themselves into the ELA classroom as its own figured world—where people “figure” (or position) who they are through activities and social encounters situated at particular times and spaces (Holland et al., 1998)—and may foster identity exploration or reinforce previously acknowledged identities, while using literacy practices both familiar and novel to them. Davies and Harre (1990) explain this social positioning of identities as follows,

> Once having taken up a particular position as one's own, a person inevitably sees the world from the vantage point of that position and in terms of the particular images, metaphors, storylines and concepts which are made relevant within the particular discursive practice in which they are positioned.” (p. 47)

The potential for students to reposition themselves through their discursive contributions in the ELA classroom carries with it a substantial opportunity to encourage students to explore their identities, literacy practices, and relationships. The key to encouraging these explorations may be
for teachers to open their curriculum to unsanctioned literacy practices in a way that invites participation where students may care about one another's' contributions and positionality in the ELA classroom. Moje et al. (2009) argue,

...literacy-and-identity studies provide ample evidence for the need to include multiple text types and media in our literacy curricula, as texts and new media tools provide multiple opportunities in a classroom to engage generalized others, interpellate readers into particular kinds of relationships and positions, build *habituses*, provide tools for developing consciousness, or narrate oneself into the world. (p. 433, emphasis in the original)

A far more engaged student may develop from an open ELA curriculum when they have space and choice to explore their identity and act out their own positioning. By open ELA curriculum, I mean one in which a teacher consciously provides a tool (or tools) to engage students in open inquiry of texts, their writing, and themselves. In other words, ELA teachers recognizing why they interact as they do with students and how they adopt identities associated with positive relationships is just as important as what they teach (Beach, Johnston, & Thein, 2015). A practitioner must consciously allow students to take up the tool(s) at their whim, which in turn means the practitioner must allow students to reject the tool(s) as well as any literacy practice that could be created from the use the tool(s). In sum, the teacher cannot force literacy practices to take place nor actively try to shape a student’s identity as is typically the case in an ELA classroom where the curriculum, activities, and execution of both are either entirely practitioner-based or commercially packaged.

My study is aimed at understanding how students may explore their identities in their ELA classroom when unsanctioned literacy practices are welcomed into the ELA classroom
through the lens of participatory culture and an ethic of caring. I believe the answer is to be found in exploring student identity and agency utilizing the tenets of participatory culture to frame the inclusion of unsanctioned literacy practices. If student identity and agency formation may indeed be fostered through students’ use of unsanctioned literacies, then I argue there may be legitimacy for unsanctioned literacy practices place in the ELA classroom today and the future.

**Local Context**

The research conducted for the study took place in my ninth-grade ELA classroom at Lake Heights High School (names of places and people have been changed)—a mid-sized suburban high school about thirty miles northeast of a major metropolitan city in the Southeast. The student population was approximately 1,814. As of the 2014 school year, 11% of students were in the special education program and only about 3% were in the English language learners program. Also, as of the 2015 school year, 46% of the population was White, 24% Hispanic/Latino, 20% Black, 6% Asian, and 3% is Multiracial. Approximately 38% of students were eligible for free or reduced lunch. The school was less than a decade old and had upgraded facilities in terms of space (i.e. wider hallways, larger rooms) and technology access (i.e. multiple computer labs, laptop carts, engineering space, upgraded projection and media systems).

Lake Heights High School had ethnic, racial, and socioeconomic diversity. Students districted to the school came from upper-middle class, white collar families, lower-middle class, blue collar families, and low-income, blue collar families. There were students who lived in $300,000 plus homes, one of two local trailer parks, or even a small percentage of students who found themselves homeless at some point in the year.
Due to the smaller size of the school relative to the rest of the district, class sizes averaged 35 students. Lake Heights High School, again due to size, did not have any dedicated gifted classes, so gifted-identified students were integrated with regular education students who were taking honors or Advanced Placement level classes. My class size was 31 students with eight students labelled as gifted learners and the remaining 23 labelled as honors students. The class’s racial demographics nearly mimicked those of the entire school—the difference being the school was majority minority. Whereas, nearly 60% of my students were White, 25% were Hispanic/Latino, 10% were Black/African American, and 5% were Asian in my class.

**Conceptual Framework**

Using sociocultural theory (Bakhtin, 1984; Smagorinsky, 2011; Vygotsky, 1980; Wertsch, 1991) as a foundation, I attempted to integrate the features of Jenkins’ (1997, 2009, 2013) participatory culture and Noddings’ (1988, 2003, 2012) ethic of caring in the ELA classroom in order to observe unsanctioned (or “unschooled,” Street & Street, 1995) literacy practices and caring relationships heuristically and their implications for student identity and agency. Jenkins et al.’s (2009, 2013) participatory culture is defined by its low barriers to participate in communities that typically include some kind of informal mentorship, a belief that one’s contributions to the community matters, a culture that strongly supports creating and sharing one’s creations with others, and some degree of social connection (caring relationships) among its members. Here, culture should be defined as the social practices of a group of people as determined by their discursive and literacy practices in a particular context (Street, 1997). A participatory culture may be observed in some form through social organizations with shared interests (i.e. church, clubs, etc.) or in digital spaces (i.e. internet forums, social media, etc.).
However, in my experiences, it is a culture that rarely exists inside a classroom and is also not easily integrated into a classroom (Jenkins, 2013).

As a means to observe the tenets of participatory culture in my classroom, I am also intentionally framing my study with the features found in Noddings’ (1988) ethic of caring where reciprocity is meant to exist between the carer and the cared-for as each considers the well-being and feelings of the other. The features of this relational ethic support Jenkins’ and his colleagues tenets, focusing on how an individual sees their contributions mattering to a group and participants care about what others think of them and their contributions. Just as these tenets of participatory culture imply an individual (the cared-for) should feel their work matters to the group and in fact care about how others see them, a care ethic implies that individual’s work does matter to others (potential carers) in the group as well as that individual as a person who has physical and emotional needs.

To frame and define identity, I use Davies and Harré’s (1990) and Moje, Luke, Davies, and Street’s (2009) metaphor for identity-as-position. The identity-as-position metaphor helps me reinforce the fluidity of identity and argue identity is not static. Rather, an individual’s identity may be positioned due to context and setting, other’s externally positioning them, and the cultural labels they may or may not choose take up. To define agency, I use Ahearn’s (2000) sociocultural conceptualization of agency as oppositional, dialogic, and collective. Oppositional agency may be when an individual or group of individuals resist a task or disagree with a decision made by others; dialogic agency is demonstrated through discourse and how dialogic exchanges are influenced by social context; collective agency is when individuals act unison with one another, acting out of collective needs or desires. As stated above, Noddings’ (1988, 2003, 2012) conception of an ethic of caring frames the relational focus of my study as it
potentially connects to student identity exploration and exercising agency. Ultimately, I intend to examine inductively any implications participatory culture’s tenets have on student identity exploration and agency exercise in the ELA classroom, but I also intend to better understand if students might transform their experiences in the ELA classroom into one of caring, empathetic relationships built among one another and the teacher when the tenets of participatory culture and an ethic of caring are intentionally welcomed into the ELA classroom.

**Review of Relevant Terms**

- **New Media**—new ways of mass communication on multiple digital platforms and mediums (i.e. social media, apps, blogs, video streaming, forums, websites, etc.)

- **Unsanctioned Literacy Practices**—literacy practices ignored, challenged, or rejected by a school and potentially the community at large, which may only privilege literacy practices that support dominant discourses such as written over oral, standard grammar over vernacular or colloquial grammar, and objective, neutral language over subjective, potentially abrasive language (Street & Street, 1995).

- **Participatory Culture**—a culture featuring relatively low barriers to expression and civic engagement where individuals are encouraged to contribute content and ideas, has some form of informal mentorship, and contributors feel their work is valued and matter to the community (Jenkins, Clinton, Purushotma, Robison, & Weigel, 2009).

- **Ethic of Caring**—a moral and caring approach to teacher and student relationships where the teacher and student both develop caring relationships through genuine interactions of agapeistic love (a person listens, is receptive to needs, is empathetic, and puts the cared-for’s needs first) borne from contemporary feminist critique (Noddings, 1988, 2012).
• Identity—a socially mediated construal of individuals’ perception of themselves as well as other’s perception of them as positioned through the discursive practices an individual participates in (Davies & Harré, 1990). A socially mediated identity is fluid, dynamic, multiplicitous, and shifting (Moje, Luke, Davies, & Street, 2009).

• Agency—an individual’s capacity to act as is socially constrained by their culture or adhered to by the individual, but includes the possibility of an individual to push against or reject such social constraints (Ahearn, 2000).

• Zines—alternative, DIY (do it yourself), photocopied or digitally crafted magazines that have historically provided alternative information to the public that traditional news or magazine sources do not and are provided to the public through free distribution done by the creators of the zines.

**Organization of Study**

Chapter 1 of the study includes the introduction to the study preceding this section. The chapter includes the statement of the problem, research questions, the purpose and significance of the study, a brief conceptual framework, and definitions of relevant terms. Chapter 2 is a review of the literature concerning participatory culture, critical pedagogy, research-practitioner research, and identity and agency. Chapter 3 explains the study’s methodology, including the research design, data collection, and data analysis protocols. Chapter 4 presents the data and the analysis of the data relevant to the study. Chapter 5 provides a summary, discussion of the results, conclusions, and recommendations.
CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

Introduction

My study is designed to observe and reflect on how an English language arts (ELA) classroom intentionally designed to be a participatory space—one providing access to student interest, mentorship, creative ownership, and caring—and a space that integrates unsanctioned literacy practices may provide students an arena to negotiate their identity and agency. The following review of literature establishes a theoretical, empirical, and practical foundation for my study. At the core of my framework is Vygotsky’s (1987) sociocultural theory, which in turn helped me conceptualize student identity and agency—both being sociohistorically constructed, situated, and mediated. While I use Jenkins’ and colleagues’ (2009, 2013) participatory culture as a way to imagine my approach to instruction in my classroom, I welcomed the events and social interactions in my classroom among my students to help me understand the culture of my ELA classroom. I used an ethic of caring (Noddings, 1988, 2003, 2012) to frame how, as a teacher, I sought to encourage caring relationships in my ELA classroom. In addition, observed the negotiation of relationships in my ELA classroom among my students and me as their teacher through a sociocultural lens. In the following sections, I include a synthesis and critique of current empirical literature, exploring participatory culture and identity work in and out of the ELA classroom. Finally, I conclude with a summary and the implications this literature has on my study.
Theoretical Framework

A Foundation in Sociocultural Theory

Vygotsky’s (1978, 1987) sociocultural theory focuses on the mediation of social interaction being the center of learning and understanding concept development in an individual through a sociohistorical cultural lens “where historical analysis must be highly localized,” or, in other words, based entirely on a certain context (Smagorinsky, 2011, p. 232). Vygotsky (1978) argues children’s ability to develop speech provides them with a powerful tool to mediate various tasks where “Using words... to create a specific plan, the child achieves a much broader range of activity, applying as tools not only those objects that lie near at hand, but searching for and preparing such stimuli as can be useful in the solution of the task, and planning future actions (p. 26, emphasis in the original). Speech as well as other signs, therefore, are tools my students use to navigate complex problems both in real time and in future contexts. By acknowledging my students use their speech as a tool for problem solving and as the crux of their mental development in my classroom as a particular context, I can observe their negotiation of identity and relationships among one another during times of discourse and social interaction.

Vygotsky (1987) ruminated concept development is tied inextricably from an individual’s historical experiences, and emphasized “historical analysis becomes the key to the logical understanding of concepts” (p. 142). Having a grasp on my participants’ cultural histories, my own goal-directed behavior, and the degree to which my participants and I can take up words-as-signs in a similar fashion also informs my understanding of their negotiation of identity and relationships (Smagorinsky, 2011). Accounting for social-cultural-historical mediation where participant and researcher alike generate an intersubjectivity, where neither component of such a study, participant or researcher, may act independently of the other frames this understanding as
well. Each component mediates the other in real-time as well as through each’s cultural history. Hence, my participants’ discourse, interactions, and cultural histories are the focus of the analysis I conduct in the study to better understand their identity and relationship negotiations and trajectories in my classroom.

Smagorinsky (2011) explains, “A method needs to view artifacts, including words, as representative of social-cultural-historical phenomena and of the mediational means through which world views are represented and appropriated” (p. 232). Hence, in my data analysis, my participants’ speech and the words they use are of particular importance. Speech—or speaking—is not independent of thinking; therefore, speech gives a researcher one of the better insights into the human mind and its thinking processes as mediated through tools and signs while interacting with the world around us. Lantolf (1994) explains, “Sociocultural theory argues that while separate, thinking and speaking are tightly interrelated in a dialectic unity in which publicly derived speech completes privately initiated thought” (p. 7). The “privately initiated thought,” Lantolf argues, can only be observed through the speech of an individual. Smagorinsky (2011) cites Cole (1996) and Bakhtin (1981) when suggesting there is a hidden dialogue taking place during human thought processes. An individual assumes an audience and while this audience may never take physical form, an individual assumes a listener and will modify speech to the listener’s perceived needs even if the listener is the individual him or herself. Speech then becomes a means to which a researcher begins to conceive of an individual’s thinking processes.

There is an issue, however, with taking up speech alone as a way of interpreting an individual’s thinking. Silences—those moments when a person is not addressing someone else or themselves verbally—are of as much importance to better understand a person’s identity and agency as when a person is engaged in discourse. While I certainly look closely to my
participants’ speech to better understand their thinking and interactions, I also take a close look at the physical space of my classroom and the action, or inaction, taking place within it. A person’s social positioning, for instance, should account for an individual’s non-verbal contributions to a conversation (Davies & Harré, 1990).

Therefore, the specific setting individuals find themselves in are important. Vygotsky’s sociocultural theory demands a researcher account for the setting. How speech and speech-acts are situated, while highly problematic due to immense subjectivity on the part of the researcher (Smagorinsky, 2011), helps account for “cultural history and the potential to produce new thinking through the process of articulation” (p. 243). The setting in a sociocultural study situates the tools and speech-acts that are used by participants, and the setting also consists of the constraints a culture, with its multiplicitous histories, imbues. To this end, my study analyzes the tools (zines), used or unused, and speech-acts (discourses and non-verbal interactions) in the context of my classroom to move toward an emic understanding of the shared understandings my participants may have of their experiences in my classroom.

Sociocultural theory is the foundation of my study, and so too are the other theories and studies based on those theories I cite throughout this literature review. There is a shared understanding among these researchers that learning and acts of becoming are social in nature and are better understood through analyzing discourse, artifacts, and spaces shared by people. The contexts are situated and complex, but when abiding by the view of culture as a verb where the meaning individuals make of their own actions define that culture (Street, 1991), a researcher can leverage sociocultural theory to make powerful inductions about the topic being studied. I am following in this tradition and continuing a rich history of observing the world through the
analysis of people’s interactions, shared spaces, and experiences in order to improve instruction for my students and potentially other ELA students.

**Theorizing Identity and Agency**

Identity is a complex notion as is agency. For my understanding of identity and agency, I pull directly from Moje, Luke, Davies, and Street’s (2009) synthesis of identity scholarship with a focus on the metaphor of identity-as-position, citing Davies & Harré (1990) social positioning theory as the crux of the metaphor.

Moje and colleagues’ (2009) synthesis identifies five metaphors for identity formation: identity as difference, as sense of self/subjectivity, as mind or consciousness, as position, and as narrative. These metaphors each give rich possibilities in consideration of how an individual’s identity develops and takes on different trajectories through social interactions; however, the position metaphor is particularly versatile as it “allows for people to tell stories about themselves, to represent themselves in narrative, but also to shift positions and tell new stories” (p. 431). Theories that conceptualize identity using social positioning “build on the conception of self as interpellated (Althusser, 1971) but move beyond the initial act of interpellation to specify how positions get taken up and resisted and how those interpellations translate into identities over time” (p. 430). In other words individuals may choose to acknowledge their positioning as expressed by other individuals and, therefore, become subject to the identity others have provided for them. In my classroom, students have an opportunity to position themselves in formal ways (i.e. essays, discussion, debates) and informal ways (i.e. doodling, using social media, an off-topic discussion about an upcoming movie inspired by a formal classroom discussion) where they present an aspect of their identity to others in the classroom. Multiple identities might be present at any given time in the classroom based on how a student takes up or
rejects the interpellations others may try to subject them to as mediated through those formal and informal tools.

My use of zines as a tool for constructing narratives to take up or reject various interpellations may provide students a specific avenue to express themselves and narrate their lived experiences and therefore choose to identify with or against other’s positioning of them. I can use the identity-as-position metaphor for insight into an individual’s past identifications as well as identity-in-process as a person accepts, rejects, or pushes against the social positioning of others around them. In other words, the identity-as-position metaphor is a useful tool to help me frame my observations of the trajectories a student takes with their identity as they position themselves and how their peers position them in my classroom. These observations may lead toward a better understanding of how the ELA classroom, specifically, can be a space encouraging students to explore their identities and relationships just as they will explore their identities and relationships the rest of their lives in spaces outside my classroom and throughout their professional and personal experiences.

For agency, I use Ahearn’s (2000) assertions of understanding agency through linguistic exchanges. Ahearn cautions that agency is not limited to an individual. Rather, Ahearn (2000) asserts, “Whatever aspects of agency researchers pursue, it is crucial that scholars interested in agency consider the assumptions about personhood, desire, and intentionality that are built into their analyses” (p. 14). If reality is socially constructed by interactions among individuals, I cannot assume a person simply does or does not possess agency singularly; rather, I might conclude agency can be collective—shared among several individuals or even an organization—as well as socially constructed and enacted in social settings. Davies and Harré (1990) social position theory states, “the concept of positioning, anchored in a fine-grained analysis of
discourse, reveals that people give, receive, resist, and claim subject positions, often all within a short space of time or while they are ostensibly in the same role” (cited in Gillespie & Martin, 2014, p. 73). This implies agency is observable through how people position themselves in social contexts, and therefore I can make inductions about my students’ agency by observing and analyzing their social interactions (i.e. class discussions, small group discussions, one-on-one verbal exchanges, etc.) and artifacts (i.e. zines) where they might take up positions of resistance, acceptance, or other positions unforeseeable before analysis. Just as I intend to frame my understanding of my students’ identity trajectories using social positioning, I can observe forms of agency using observation and analysis of social interaction with a focus on discourse and linguistic exchanges (Ahearn, 2000).

Davies and Harré’s (1990) social positioning theory helps me understand my classroom as a site for possible identity trajectories as students position themselves and as others position them within the space of my classroom. Moje et al.’s (2009) identity-as-position metaphor, citing Davies and Harré as well as others, help frame my conception of these trajectories as students position themselves and are positioned not only by others but by the historical contexts of their former ELA and life experiences as well as the present context of my classroom where zines become a tool for narrating their lived experiences. Beach, Johnston, and Thein (2015) support this form of identity research in the ELA classroom, stating, “Bringing identity work to light opens up a host of possibilities for helping students become more conscious of the ways their identities and those of others are positioned by text, discourse, narrative, and so forth in their everyday lives” (pp. 6-7). While I justify zine use in my classroom by invoking the tenets of participatory culture (see p. 8), the goal of using zines as a tool is to observe “a host of possibilities” for my students becoming more conscious of their own identities and those of their
peers for two primary reasons—to promote identity and agency formation in an ELA classroom—whatever they may be—and to build an ethic of caring (Noddings, 1988) or site for empathetic exchanges among my students and me as their teacher. These explorations of identity and relationships have important implications for an individual’s lifetime where they will continue to negotiate their identities and relationships well beyond their years in secondary education. The opportunity to negotiate identity and relationships in the ELA classroom potentially provides a safe and productive space for adolescents to explore literacy practices otherwise ignored or rejected by their community at large.

Davies and Harré’s (1990) social position theory also helps me further unpack a student’s agentive actions and avoid assumptive “as ifs” that may too easily propagate when only considering the cultural and historical context for why someone acts as they do. For example, a researcher might assume a student’s poor academic performance is due to a lack of academic support at home based on observing the student’s ethnicity and the student being frequently unprepared for class and might try to conclude the student would potentially perform better academically as would be the case if there was more academic support at home. This approach is highly problematic as the researcher risks overlooking other factors contributing to the student’s actions (i.e. relationships with peers and teachers, non-school or home related experiences, etc). An analysis of my students’ discourse and actions can indicate tensions and factors contributing to why they act as they do while not simply relying on the broader sociohistorical and assumed cultural frames to establish the “as ifs” contributing to their actions and positioning.

**Participatory Culture and the ELA Classroom**

In order to help open my classroom to more opportunities to student identity and agency trajectories, I am using the design principles of Jenkins’ and his colleagues (2009,2013) theory of
participatory culture. The theory of participatory culture is composed of the following tenets as set forth by Jenkins, Purushotma, Weigel, Clinton, and Robison (2009), which lists:

1. Relatively low barriers to artistic expression and civic engagement;
2. Strong support for creating and sharing creations with others;
3. Some type of informal mentorship whereby what is known by the most experienced is passed along to novices;
4. Members who believe that their contributions matter; and
5. Members who feel some degree of social connection with one another (they care what other people think about what they have created). (p. 7)

I am welcoming some of these tenets—primarily the lower barriers to participation, strong support for creation and sharing, and the belief someone’s contributions matter—into my classroom using zines as a tool. Zines have no clear rules, and any rules potentially placed on their creation are subjective in nature. Zines are typically, but not always, built for a specific audience and are meant to be self-distributed by their creator(s). The ability of an author, or authors, to cover almost any topic, in any manner (text, images, video, etc.), in multiple mediums (physical and digital), and distributed to self-identified audiences helps to open my classroom to the tenets listed above, especially students connecting socially and caring for what they create and what others have to say about their creations.

The school classrooms within which I have taught or observed do not typically reflect Jenkins’ and his colleagues’ tenets as they designed them. However, their tenets may support my choice to use zines to welcome unsanctioned school literacy practices, or what Street and Street (1995) call “unschooled literacy” (Alvermann, 2008; Behizadeh, 2014; Ito et al., 2010; Jenkins et al., 2009, 2013) into my ELA classroom. By not allowing myself as the ELA teacher to entirely
dictate what is written, created, as well as read over the course of my students’ zine work, I may provide them an opportunity to use their unsanctioned literacy practices. Traditionally, in my classroom, the literacy practices focused on and encouraged to be cultivated center on texts often deemed as classic works of literature or texts found in a textbook or texts provided to me by other ELA teachers. In addition to the texts read, forms of writing are limited to expository, argumentative, and narrative essay and short story writing with some poetry included. When inviting a new mode of writing and expression such as a zine into my classroom, I may provide a space for identity and agency work where students decide what to write, produce, and share through their social interactions among one another and their teacher, using literacy practices they construct or bring with them into the classroom. These practices might include the mashing together of images and texts such as memes to write argumentatively, or they might be linking textual information to open-access videos to provide context to a text they have read or created. These are literacy practices I have typically excluded or left unrecognized in my classroom as a result of my own social context and identity as an ELA teacher interacting in various school spaces and in my community. However, I can use Jenkins et al.’s tenets of participatory culture as a means to welcome consciously those historically unsanctioned literacy practices into my ELA classroom. Ultimately, a student may choose to take up, resist, or reject the zine tool as well as take up, resist, or reject the opportunity to use their literacies known to them outside my classroom. Whatever a student’s choice, my use of participatory culture’s tenets is to welcome the opportunity to use those tools for students to explore their identities, agency, and relationships in my ELA classroom in preparation for the identity and relationship negotiations they will experience throughout their lifetime.
An Ethic of Caring and the ELA Classroom

For me, researching the development and trajectories of my students’ identities and agency is intimately tied to student relationships. As learning is a social act (Bakhtin, 1984; Smagorinsky, 2011; Vygotsky, 1987; Wertsch, 1991), relationships play a vital role in a student’s learning, including how their construal of classroom tasks and tool acquisition in a classroom setting develops. Encouraging my students to consider and reflect on their own social positioning and how they perceive the relationships surrounding them, including their relationships among one another and me as their teacher, may provide even further insight to the trajectories of their identities in my classroom.

Relationships—just as identity and agency—are complex, and they affect how an individual takes up, resists, or rejects participating in classroom tasks (Janks, 2010). Janks (citing Althusser, 1971 and Gramsci, 1971) argues there are subordinate groups who can either be persuaded or coerced into consenting to relations that benefit a dominant group. In my early years of teaching ELA, I was unaware of these relationships, so I accepted my role of having the potential power to tell my students what to do, when to do it, and how to do it implicitly and without question. As a possible consequence, I may have been curtailing my students’ engagement, relationships, and identity exploration in my classroom. Noddings (1988, 2003, 2010) theorizes a teacher can frame their relationships with their students using an ethic of caring where the establishment of caring relationships welcomes students to more deeply engage with and care for how a subject being studied fits into their lived experiences. In turn, what they read, write, view, and share may help them explore their identities while building caring, empathetic relationships with others in the classroom, including the teacher.
Noddings’ (1988) ethic of caring suggests relationships modeled after that of a mother and child produce more caring, empathetic individuals, emphasizing,

A relational ethic is rooted in and dependent on natural caring. Instead of striving away from affection and toward behaving always out of duty... one acting from a perspective of caring moves consciously in the other direction; that is, he or she calls on a sense of obligation in order to stimulate natural caring. The superior state—one far more efficient because it energizes the giver as well as the receiver—is one of natural caring. (p. 219)

Noddings (2012) explains this natural caring relationship—where a mother either consciously or unconsciously sees only benefits from putting herself second to the child’s need and in turn that child responds to that care by caring for others, including the child’s mother—is an important means to building morals and ethics within students. Noddings’ (1988) theory suggests “an ethic of caring prefers acts done out of love and natural inclination” (p. 219) rather than acts committed out of duty or obligation to a societal principle. In this regard, I can consciously frame my ELA classroom through my actions as a teacher to model caring from my own natural inclination toward my students in hopes this model might be taken up by my students as well.

My use of zines may provide a way to demonstrate this model of caring where I can show aspects of my own identity in a zine and demonstrate how openly sharing my zine provides others (i.e. my students) a view into part of my identity. Students willing to take up the task similarly may invite the negotiation of more empathetic relationships among their peers in the class. Just as important though, my students may choose to resist or even reject the task and my attempts to build caring relationships with them.

Bloome, Carter, Christian, Otto, and Shuart-Faris (2010) provide further insight into caring relationships being valuable in the educational setting when defining power as caring. For
Bloome et al., *power as caring* is entirely about foregrounding caring relations, which in turn foregrounds people having emotional, caring connections to others that are not optional and inform a person’s actions. In the educational setting, especially in terms of literacy, questions can be raised as to how a class engages with a story, with their writing, or the writing of others in concern to the care students have for one another and people outside of their class. The development of zines in my own classroom is meant to open my students to such possibilities. Zine creation provides opportunities to build empathetic relationships as students wrestle with personal stories, ambitions, passions, concerns, questions, insecurities and those of their peers. Such a tool, if truly allowed to be open to nearly any subject or issue, could provide me as a teacher an opportunity to become more empathetic toward my students as I include my own stories, ambitions, passions, concerns, questions, and insecurities. This assumes, however, I am utilizing zines as a tool for this explicit purpose. The tool could just as easily be used by a teacher who ignores this opportunity or even approaches the use of zines from a top-down, autocratic point of view. Still, for the purposes of how I am framing this study and my classroom, one of the many possible trajectories in a student’s identities or agency may arise from these opportunities to develop empathetic and caring relationships in my classroom.

**Review of Literature**

Both identity research in the ELA classroom (Gu, Patkin, & Kirkpatrick, 2014; Harnischfeger, 2015; Ntelioglou, Fannin, Montanera, & Cummins, 2014; Schofield & Kupiainen, 2015; Sinai, Kaplan, & Flum, 2012; Sluy, 2010) and the use of participatory culture as a heuristic in literacy research (Broderick, 2014; Buckingham, 2013; Garcia, 2015; Hickey, McWilliams, & Honeyford, 2011) have helped the field of education research understand the significance of identity development in the engagement of students in school and potential of
inviting students to participate in literacy practices on their own terms. However, research concerning both of these simultaneously and exclusively in the ELA classroom is difficult to find. Moreover, finding similar research that employs an ethic of caring and identity also appears to be rare. However, Noddings’ (1988) ethic of caring is cited in several literacy studies considering caring’s role in reading, writing, and student engagement (see Langer, 2000; Nelson, 2000; Puidokas, 2000; Quinn, 2000). The following studies provide empirical data supporting my own research, which seeks to use social position theory (Davies & Harré, 1990) as a primary heuristic to observe identity and agency work in my own ELA classroom intentionally framed using tenets of participatory culture and an ethic of caring. These studies also demonstrate a gap in the overall body of identity and literacy research as well as a need to include to an ethic of caring to strengthen the usefulness of the tenets of participatory.

**Identity Research in the ELA Classroom**

Gu, Patkin, and Kirkpatrick (2014) uses Davies and Harré’s (1990) position theory to frame their understanding of how English as Langua Franca (ELF) interactions contribute to the sharing of cultural knowledge and the construction of multicultural identities. The researchers posit, “ELF participants' institutional roles are culturally determined, and are not fixed but vary in different phases of the discourse (Knapp, 2011)” (p. 139). The study determined the participants—university students from Hong Kong—could draw on their own expertise to reposition their identities from learner to information provider based on previous experiences and how they positioned others as “less-informed” or “less-academic.” The researchers observed these positionings were fluid and could change over the course of a single conversation.

Gu et al.’s study provides insight to the value of using position theory to understand the fluid nature of how a person’s identity is always being mediated through discourse and relies on
a person taking on, resisting, or rejecting others’ positioning of them. The study, which is part of a much larger sociocultural study taking place in various Asian countries, does not, however, provide better insight into my methodology choice as their overall method is not clear. Rather, their data analysis choice of discourse analysis (Gee, 2011) was clearly defined and reported. While this study does not help me better understand my own methods, it does support my use of position theory to best understand the identity trajectories of my participants where identity is fluid and never fixed.

Schofield and Kupiainen (2015) use mediagraphy—where students are appointed as researchers who study four generations of their family and their experiences with media—as the primary tool for identity work. They argue, “media goes beyond practical function, and becomes more a matter of social practices and identity work” (p. 80) when using the mediagraphy approach. Schofield and Kupiainen conclude the mediagraphy approach fosters deeper self-reflection and introspective contemplation and becomes representative of one’s identity, stating, “students construct and reconstruct their identity through working with mediagraphy” (p. 91). Mediagraphy, much like using a zine, is meant to help students build their own narratives in order to observe identity formation.

However, this study’s conception of identity is limited. While the researchers clearly view identity as fluid (“constructed and reconstructed”), they fail to acknowledge any real social forces that influence adolescent identity where an adolescent may take up identities as recognized and diffused by others. I addressed this concern in my research using social positioning to acknowledge and better understand how my participants take up, resist, or reject those identities.
A study by Harnischfeger (2015) centers on the narratives of non-conforming youth. An instrumental case study, Harnischfeger observed twelve eighth graders in an alternative education program demonstrate the formation of identity through narratives—both written and spoken. The researcher uses discourse analysis (Gee, 2011) to, “understand [the] participant youths’ key identity related motifs and affinities” and found, “Designations of outsider status stemmed from both perceived and actual interactions between school members or seemed to be a long-held construction of the participant’s own self-perception” (Harnischfeger, 2015, p. 1147 emphasis in the original). The study’s observation of the identity of students as outsiders aligns well with my own understanding of how Moje et al. (2009) articulate identities being both taken up externally and internally by an individual where a person’s identity is recognized both socially and by the actual individual. The study demonstrates how its participants push back against typical expectations of what someone might identify as a ‘good’ middle school student.

These alternative identities are negotiated through interviews and written narratives as well as the perceptions of teachers who work with the students. A study such as this supports my own suspicions of how a portion of a student’s identity may become sedimented or “thickened” due to both self-perception and how those perceptions are reinforced externally (see Holland, Lachicotte, Skinner, & Cain, 2003). My own students may have partially sedimented identities where a student may internalize a portion of his or her identity from others reinforcing it externally. However, any sedimentation of a student’s identity does not mean the identity is stuck or immobile. Harnischfeger’s study demonstrates the fluid nature of identity through both the external identities cast on students as well as how they are internalized, or not, by students. For instance, whereas a student and his or her parent appreciated the student’s otherness—a term used to describe the student’s outspoken nature or resistance to school cultural norms—the
school’s faculty clearly viewed such otherness as a deficit and as a way to label a student as “at-risk.” While the participants certainly maintained an outsider identity, this label, self-imposed or not, is but one possible identity. The research provides insight into the benefits of schools’ recognizing students’ *otherness* and recognize their unique qualities as assets. However, the study does not clearly address any shifts in the students’ identities or agency. Still, as this study suggests, I wanted observe how a student’s identity possibly takes on new trajectories when their unsanctioned literacy practices were considered assets rather than deficits in my ELA classroom.

Ntelioglou, Fannin, Montanera, and Cummins’ (2014) research explores multimodal literacy practices and their influence on identity and agency among multilingual students. Ntelioglou et al. conclude students invest in their identities, autonomous learning, and literacy engagement when given multiple opportunities to choose mediums of expression and their meanings. The study frames identity using sociocultural and poststructural theories, and points to students’ developing a positive sense of who they are and how they relate to those in the classroom when afforded the opportunity to pull from their cultural knowledge and capital. In other words, what students come in knowing and the literacy practices they already possess are essential to the process of witnessing students construct their identities (how they and others see them) and agency (observable acts they commit openly). While multilingual students are not a population for my study, this study’s conception of identity and agency supports my own. My students used zines to bring in their own cultural knowledge and capital into my classroom as well as provided them with more choices in how they used or integrated that knowledge.

A study from Sluys (2010) provides the closest look at identity formation while also considering elements of participation (i.e. students as cultural meaning-makers and text-producers) to frame her understanding of identity formation in her study. Sluys’ study uses
participatory action research (PAR) to involve eighth grade students with issues common to them and their communities. PAR seeks to engage students through greater access to a student’s existing knowledge, cultural capital, and working with others to learn new skills or build on existing expertise.

In her theoretical framing, Sluys, citing Campano (2007) and Guitierez et al. (1997), aptly states,

“[Students] will need tools for noticing and naming issues, tools for thinking about those issues, and tools for taking action. They will also need sanctioned spaces for participation in this important work—physical as well as theoretical spaces that embrace the values, customs, and practices that support creative, critical, and active social participation.” (p. 142)

Sluys explores supporting the creation of such sanctioned spaces through participation. Specifically, she explores the inclusion of students as co-researchers. In turn, the study acknowledges noticeable shifts in how students identified themselves in relation to literacy practices. Sluy witnessed shifts in students’ conceptions of writing and research. When made co-researchers and given ample feedback, students claimed “a successful student identity,” and could characterize themselves as “strong writers” (p. 149). Similarly, I was interested to see if zines mediated a similar opportunity for student identities in the ELA classroom to shift toward rethinking their positioning as writers, creators, students, or as a person in general.

Finally, Sinai, Kaplan, and Flum (2012) consider the implications of a school’s focus on curriculum and pedagogy on promoting identity exploration. I am integrating zine making into my own pedagogy, so Sinai et al.’s results are of particular interest to me. The researchers claim,
“content-based academic educational activities can be designed to promote identity exploration among early adolescent students,” and go on to explain:

The findings suggested that various events in the lesson—the homework assignment, the teacher’s questions, peers’ questions and reactions to the assignments, or combinations of these events—had causal roles in eliciting students’ reflection over and questioning of self-related experiences, thoughts, feelings, perceptions, and goals.... (p. 203)

The use of the word “causal” is important to note here. While mostly qualitative in nature, the study uses mixed-methods. While I would not make the same causation claim, the study’s results provide reason to believe that my implementation of zines as a pervasive and continuous tool in my curriculum may mediate an opportunity for my participants to explore their own identities within my classroom.

Two defining mechanisms found in the Schofield and Kupiainen (2015), Ntelioglou et al. (2014), and Sluy’s (2010) studies are student choice and the provision of feedback. The studies show empirical evidence of student identity shifts and agentive acts in respect to literacy practices, which is precisely what I hope to observe using zines to welcome the use of unsanctioned literacy practices. Each study provides evidence to consider in my own study. Namely, zines must welcome choice and opportunity for students to self-define a zine’s purpose, and I must provide continuous, targeted feedback. Most of the targeted feedback I did provide during the study was verbal and through discourse with individual students and small groups.

**Participatory Culture and Literacy Studies**

Garcia (2015) uses participatory culture as one lens to observe and make a case for the emergence of a wireless critical pedagogy in an ELA classroom. His study is the closest in resemblance to my own where participatory culture helps to frame the ELA classroom as a space
welcoming unsanctioned literacy practices. (Many of the preceding studies do not take place in an ELA classroom setting.) Garcia’s study emphasized the role of wireless tools (i.e. smartphones, tablets, laptops) in facilitating the building of relationships and mentorship among students and with the teacher, stating, “[wireless tools] emphasize a teacher response to students—creating content, posing questions, and building theory, students share their work with each other and the teacher, who then provides feedback, suggestions, and critique” (p. 32). Jenkins’ participatory culture’s tenets support sharing student work and informal mentorship, which is partially what Garcia’s framework for wireless critical pedagogy utilizes. My use of zines is meant to provide a similar opportunity for students to create content, pose questions, and share their work, while being supported with feedback from me. The traditional modes of expression I have asked students to create in my classroom such as poetry welcomes similar opportunities. However, a zine tends to require less experience to use as it has no conventional or formal rules or expectations; whereas, when an individual writes poetry there are conventions and formal methods to consider. Garcia’s focus on how wireless devices can be used for critical pedagogy provided insight to how I my use of zines—as a less formal mode of expression—to be part of a classroom space helped to welcome unsanctioned literacy practices and caring relationships.

Hickery et al. (2011) is the only other study to focus on a secondary ELA classroom. The researchers attempt to leverage the skills and mindsets adolescents develop when using digital technologies in a secondary English classroom and Herman Melville’s _Moby-Dick_ to re-envision classroom participation. In this revised approach, students’ participation is honored on multiple levels, including a student’s option not to actively contribute immediately and instead observe as a means to ready themselves to contribute as they feel their work would be appropriately valued.
(Jenkins et al., 2009). As a result, the curriculum had to accommodate a learner’s option to “lurk” or observe over time as trust and skills grow. Hickey et al. ascribe to Jenkins’ suggestion that integrating “new media literacy” into a curriculum allows for higher degrees of participation in communal engagement and a deeper understanding of individually valued ideas and concepts. This simply may not be true, or it is at the very least unrealistic in all settings. Hickey and colleagues’ flaw in this study may be the ascription to participatory culture existing in any given classroom, or the belief participatory culture or new media literacy allows for greater participation or deeper understanding without considering context and setting.

Ultimately, the study tries to integrate the tenets of participatory culture through various assessment tools. Some are informal assessments but are meant to promote communal reflections on practice (e.g. close-level, activity-oriented reflection), while others were more formal, short answer exam questions (e.g. distal-level, standards-oriented assessments). While, however, I am not interested in assessing my students’ participation through a rubric—my students do reflect on the process and their experiences in formal writing, however—Hickey et al. provide insight into the benefit of altering the approach to curriculum integration when sanctioning typically unsanctioned literacy practices. There may be push back, however, to sanctioning these practices as they may be seen as competing against school practices students already identify strongly with or students may simply see the effort as disingenuous and reject the opportunity all together. Still, such an approach allowed me to refine my own curriculum using zines. For instance, the use and creation of zines in my classroom helped invite participatory actions as well as the negotiation of empathetic relationships among my students.

Broderick’s (2014) study provides insight to relationships being renegotiated in the classroom when the tenets of participatory culture may be present within a classroom.
community. Her analysis demonstrates how individual students imagine their roles as participants in the community at the beginning of their work as individuals versus how they reimagined themselves as a group. In the study, a student’s work is regularly designed, redesigned, remixed, and reconfigured as the group works towards a mutual and agreed upon aesthetic. Broderick explains the transformative process stating, “This [student] work ethic developed over time as my students began to trust that their lived experiences were valued in the school and within [the classroom’s] participatory culture” (p. 206). For Broderick, the possibility that aspects of participatory culture exist in her classroom was constructed over time and through the publication of a student developed journal. Similarly, I am using zines as a means of cultivating a community that may evoke collaborative and participatory interactions among students. Her study also implies participatory culture’s tenets alter the teacher’s role in relation to his or her students. Broderick reflects, “The explicit class maxim was, ‘If you can imagine it, then we can figure out how to make it happen.’ Embracing this maxim required me to reconsider my notions of ‘teacher as expert’ as my students regularly imagined fantastic design ideas beyond my capabilities” (p. 204). This repositioning of a teacher’s expertise can alter students’ perceptions of their relationship with their teacher. Such repositioning encouraged the growth of empathetic and caring relationships between me and my students. Students constructed identities as experts, intellectuals, and owners of the work taking place and no longer relied on me to continually control the classroom’s dynamics.

Finally, Buckingham’s (2013) study of a Creative and Media Diploma in the United Kingdom cautions the possible disastrous results when the tenets of participatory culture are institutionalized and co-opted at an institutionalized level. Buckingham found teachers who participated in a now defunct program reported feelings of being angry, disappointed, and feeling
that there were missed opportunities for them and their students. He concludes unrealistic expectations about the potential of media education through participation are worth challenging, especially if the governing bodies cannot clearly articulate expectations, implement assessment, and provide students with a realistic means to be successful after secondary school.

Buckingham’s conclusion is a great cautionary tale—one that reminds me to be mindful of trying to force participatory culture to be anything more than a theory with guiding tenets that may or may not exist in any given classroom context or setting. I believe it also reminds anyone attempting to use the tenets of participatory culture curriculum change really happens from the inside out, where grassroots efforts and relationships typically improve the classroom setting and student participation. Hence, my study did not concern itself with proving participatory culture’s worth. Rather, my study used the theory to frame my use of zines for students to practice their inherent and constructed literacy skills and ultimately to observe the implications of their identities and agentive actions in-process in the ELA classroom.

**Summary and Implications**

The ELA classroom is a space rich in opportunities to explore student identity and agency. Traditionally, in my own experiences, the ELA classroom limits student identity and agency trajectories far more than it liberates them. Acts of literacy, however, offer several tools (i.e. written and oral language, images, symbols, media) that are powerful and potentially liberating in the ELA classroom. Acts of literacy touch every part of a schoolhouse and every part of a student’s lived experience outside of that schoolhouse. When the ELA classroom becomes a space where acts of literacy are free to be used to interrogate one’s own identity through social interactions, it is potentially a space that promotes identity and agency trajectories to freely form (Beach et al., 2015). The ELA classroom may become such a space when at least a
few of the tenets of participatory culture, where student interests and expertise are welcomed into the classroom, are intentionally used to frame the classroom by an educator. In turn the ELA classroom may also become a space conducive to promoting caring, empathetic relationships among students and their teacher (Noddings, 1988, 2003, 2012). As the definition of literacy expands in the field of education, so too must the ELA classroom expand its use of literacy in capacities that may not be traditionally acknowledged. In this regard, understanding identity and agency trajectories in the ELA classroom may provide further inquiry into the sanctioning of traditionally unsanctioned literacy practices and the possibility of these practices fostering caring and empathetic relationships in the ELA classroom.
CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

Introduction

The purpose of this dissertation is to gain some understanding of how students’ identities as ELA pupils, adolescents, or individuals in general and their agency may take up various trajectories as positioned as students in the ELA classroom and have greater access to integrate their personal interests and literacy practices into the learning they do in the classroom. The study also takes a close look at caring relationships in the ELA classroom. Using zines—do-it-yourself, self-distributed magazines—as a primary tool, I used social positioning theory and care ethics as my theoretical lenses to observe, interpret, and report on student identity, agency, relationship trajectories. Chapter 1 introduced the study, presenting the problem, purpose, research questions, and significance. Chapter 2 presented a literature review, which included theories and research on identity in the ELA classroom, participatory culture, an ethic of caring, and unsanctioned literacy practices to provide the necessary background knowledge for understanding this study. In this chapter I provide the methodological theory for my research. I include a rationale for my methodological choices and detailed description of the methods used throughout the study. The chapter also includes positional and ethical considerations as well as potential limitations related to my methodology selection. The final section of the chapter is a summary of the chapter. Pu’s (2013) collective, cross-analysis case study serves as a model for the organization of the chapters of my study. Pseudonyms are used for people and places throughout the report.
Research Questions

Qualitative research provides a naturalistic paradigm to better understand social interactions, learning, and identity and agency formation, making it the best suited research approach for this study. Identity is not static, nor is agency; therefore, discussing with students their experiences in and out of my classroom and observing their interactions and analyzing their artifacts in social settings are necessary in order to further my knowledge and understanding of how my students take up, resist, or reject their various identities and take action in my classroom. With this study, I am seeking to better understand how framing my classroom with the tenets of participatory culture and an ethic of caring through a social positioning heuristic opens students to a space and setting where their identities and agency can shift in meaningful ways. The research questions guiding my study are:

1.) How can/do students develop identity and a sense of agency in an ELA classroom when framed by the tenets of participatory culture?

2.) How can/do students renegotiate traditional power structures (i.e. teacher-to-student, student-to-teacher, student-to-student relationships) in the ELA classroom when allowed the use of their unsanctioned literacy practices utilizing the tenets of participatory culture?

Case Study Research Methodology

Case study fits under the umbrella of qualitative research and is meant to develop an in-depth understanding of a single case (or multiple cases) within a bounded system, bounded by time and place (Creswell, 2013). A qualitative case study is also composed of special features—it is particularistic, descriptive, and heuristic (Merriam, 1998). It is particularistic due to its keen focus on a particular person, group, event, or phenomenon; descriptive due to its goal of
producing rich, thick descriptions of the phenomenon under study; and heuristic due to its ability to illuminate a new understanding of the phenomenon and bring about discovery of new meanings (Merriam, 1998).

A qualitative case study also rejects positivistic views of reality where reality is stable and measurable; instead, Merriam (1998) explains, “reality is constructed by individuals interacting with their social worlds” (p. 6). In other words, reality is messy as each individual builds his or her understanding of the world. Case study is built for this complexity. A researcher using case study can manage a deeper understanding of a case through multiple means of data collection, ranging from interviews, to field notes, to documents/artifacts, to audiovisual materials (Creswell, 2013; Dyson & Genishi, 2005; Merriam, 1998; Stake, 2010). Collecting a wide-array of data from several sources allows for a thick description of the cases from cross-analysis of the data and the themes I identify. Hence, such an approach empowers the researcher to better understand individuals’, as well as their own, constructed reality within a bounded system.

Case study methodology also entails seeking to observe phenomena and understand what occurs, the implications of what occurs, and relationships linking occurrences (Dyson & Genishi, 2005; Merriam, 1998). However, the “something” being studied is not the phenomenon itself (e.g., emergence of unsanctioned literacy, writing development); rather, the something being studied is the case itself (e.g., a student’s literacy practices, a teacher’s pedagogical practice). The case is a confined unit (i.e. the something) being studied; this confined unit can be a person, a group, a socially defined or physically bound area, or an entire community. Case study has a keen focus on context—or the setting of the research—and its complexities. Rather than trying to observe social interaction to develop quick solutions to a problem, a case study more often
complicates the problem through continuously asking more questions. These questions provide a researcher the opportunity to develop a rich description of a case and its setting, providing a much deeper view of the case’s complexity and accepting that observations of one case’s context may not work in another context (Dyson & Genishi, 2005). Noting cases are co-constructed and not found (Dyson & Genishi, 2005) is important, which implies the researcher puts his or her own angled view on the case. Ultimately, a researcher—and in this study, a researcher-participant—is looking to observe particular people, particular events, particular interactions, or particular practices for a case study. The result of a case study should describe both the case itself and the themes that I identify from the data (Cresswell, 2013), and conclude with “assertions” (Stake, 2010) meant to derive meaning from the case(s) being studied. Creswell (2013) describes these assertions as “general lessons learned from studying the case(s)” (p. 99). My study is meant to be both exploratory and comparative (Creswell, 2013; Stake, 2010) in order to better understand the differing perspectives potentially created in the experiences of students in an ELA classroom that attempts to provide a space for identity, agency, and relationship negotiation.

While I had 26 participants while collecting data, I only developed an in-depth, thick description of four participants from the overall participant population of my study. These participants are my four cases for a cross-analysis, collective (or multi-case) study. A cross-analysis, collective case study (Cresswell, 2013), involves multiple cases being used to illustrate one issue or concern. Creswell explains, “Often the inquirer purposefully selects multiple cases to show different perspectives on the issue” (p. 99), which is precisely my purpose for choosing four cases for my study. I believe a collective case study provides greater representation and
inclusion of data and the themes I assert from the data and any implications they have for my context and potentially other settings as well.

I developed a thick description of my cases, using an open coding method for each in order to look for emerging themes within the data. I collected data from interviews, student generated documents/artifacts (i.e. zines, written reflections), a reflective observation journal that I maintained, and video recordings. I began with a within-case analysis of each case followed by a cross-case analysis in order develop final assertions and explain lessons learned in my reporting (Creswell, 2013).

**Setting**

The research conducted for the study took place in my ninth-grade English language arts classroom at Lake Heights High School. The student population was approximately 1,796. As of the 2015 school year, 11% of students were in the special education program and only about 3% were in the English language learners program. Also, as of the 2015 school year, 47% of the population was Caucasian, 24% Hispanic, 19% Black/African American, 6% Asian, and 3% is Multiracial. Approximately 36% of students were eligible for free or reduced lunch. The school was less than a decade old and had upgraded facilities in terms of space (i.e. wider hallways and larger rooms) and technology access (i.e. multiple computer labs, laptop carts, engineering space, upgraded projection and media systems).

Lake Heights High School had ethnic, racial, and socioeconomic diversity. Students districted to the school came from upper-middle class, white collar families, lower-middle class, blue collar families, and low-income, blue collar families. There were students who live in $300,000 plus homes, one of two local trailer parks, or even a small percentage of students who may have found themselves homeless at some point in the year.
Due to the smaller size of the school relative to the rest of the district, class sizes averaged 32 students. Lake Heights High School, again due to size, did not have any dedicated gifted classes, so gifted students were integrated with regular education students who were taking honors or Advanced Placement level classes. My class size was 31 students with 8 students labelled as gifted learners and the remaining 23 labelled as honors students. The class’s racial demographics mimicked those of the entire school where nearly 60% were Caucasian, 25% are Hispanic/Latino, 10% are black/African American, and 5% are Asian.

**Overall and Sample Population**

A case study’s sample selection is based on the researcher’s inquiry, so there is no one particular way of selecting a sample for a qualitative case study (Merriam, 1998). Case study demands the researcher determine where, when, whom, and what to observe. The goal is to narrow the choices available to a researcher seeking to use case study methodology. Selection may have to be done out of convenience, which can problematize a study’s trustworthiness. However, a thoughtful, purposive sampling can help overcome such concerns.

As stated in the previous section, there were approximately 28 student participants in my study; however, the actual number of cases for the study were four individual students. I deliberately choose four students in order to enact a cross-case analysis, collective case study, where comparing the four cases provided rich and valuable insight into the relationships and implications of using social positioning for observing student identity and agency formation. I wanted to analyze four different cases in order to wrestle with their similarities, differences, sameness, and dichotomies. I sought maximum variation in my cases as to best observe a range of actions and potential trajectories in these students’ identities as English students, adolescents, and their personhood in general. This approach better equipped me to answer my research
questions when I saw a spectrum of student participation and how they engaged, interacted, or demonstrated resistance throughout the study differently. I purposefully choose at least 1 student who demonstrated a high level of participation in the production of zines. I also purposefully choose one student who resisted or pushed back against participating in the production of zines. I had one student as a case who had surprising ways of demonstrating caring about relationships with me and several of her peers during zine production as well as a student who avoided building new relationships during zine production. I did not, however, choose a student who opted not to participate altogether. Consequentially, I did not get maximum variation as originally intended. Still, my four cases provided a wide range of experiences for me to observe and analyze in my inquiry to better understand their identities and agency trajectories and their relationships among one another and me while in my classroom.

These participants were selected out of convenience and the for the amount of data I was able to capture on each in an attempt for a wide variation experiences to observe and evaluate themes that cut across a diverse population among the participants. Using purposive sampling, I looked for what Sharan Merriam (1998) and others call maximum variation in my sample, looking intentionally for both participants who take up and embrace the literacy tasks I offer in my classroom as well as participants who resist or remain disengaged in those literacy tasks (Merriam, 1998). As mentioned above, I did not accomplish a true maximum variation. I became concerned I did not have enough data to provide a rich, thick description of any of the few students who did not participate in zine making altogether. The four participants/cases I did choose were selected on the grounds of variation of observed participation in class activities, self-described engagement in activities, self-reported use of both sanctioned and unsanctioned literacy practices, self-identified race, disciplinary records, sex, and the amount of data I was
able to collect on each. Ultimately, these participants are meant to be representative of the larger context of my school as well as possible outliers.

**Access to Site**

As the teacher and researcher, my ability to gain access to the school and participants for my study was found with relative ease. My district provided access to researching student participants for graduate degrees and personal edification at the school an individual teaches at as long as the principal for the school agreed to the research. Since I conducted my study at the school in which I teach, I only needed permission from my principal, my students, and my students’ parents to conduct my study, which included a simple form that he signed.

After obtaining permission to conduct the study within my schoolhouse, I was able to easily access the overall population from which I selected my participants. My participants were my own students. I was specifically limited to 31 potential participants due to my hybrid position at the school where I taught only one class and otherwise acted as an administrator in charge of professional development and connecting our school with local professional and community members.

**Participant Selection**

Once I obtained permission from both my district’s and the university’s institutional review boards, I provided my potential 31 participants in my classroom with an explanation of my study as well as the documentation for them and their guardians to sign. Of the 31 possible participants, I received 26 permissions forms signed by students and their parents. I collected data on all 26 students; however, my selection of my four cases was based on purposive selection while completing initial reviews of the data I had collected. From my reviews of the data I selected my four cases based primarily on their participation in zine making, their discourse and
interaction with their peers, and their interactions with me throughout the study. I also selected my cases based on their variability in gender and ethnicity. As a majority minority school, the exclusion of a Caucasian student as one of my cases was purposive as a representation of the larger student body outside of my classroom.

My four cases included: Anya, a 14 year old, female Black student of Caribbean descent and self-ascribed dedicated soccer player and hard-working student; Myriah, another 14 year old, female Black student who strongly identified as a singer and regular church attender; Hwan, a 14 year old, male Asian student of Korean descent and self-ascribed lover of the sciences and tennis; and Jorge another 14 year old, male Hispanic student of Mexican descent who loved hip-hop and was relatively skeptical of the benefit and purpose of school.

Data Collection

A qualitative case study makes it essential to collect data that illuminates a phenomenon further than what is already available in the literature. A case study is information-rich, allowing a researcher to learn about the topic of research in-depth and highlight issues of importance to the purpose of the inquiry (Merriam, 1998). The four students selected as cases for the collective cross-case study were interviewed in-depth for their participation, or lack of, in activities, self-described literacy interests, self-ascribed classroom and personal identities, and their self-described positioning in the classroom (See Appendix A). These interviews took place as semi-structured pre-interviews, on-going, informal interviews during classroom activities captured on video, and a semi-structured post interviews. A few of the pre-interview questions include:

- How would you describe yourself as a student?
- What kind of specific activities and assignments do you enjoy in a language arts class? Why do you like them?
• What are some interests you have outside of school and the classroom?

• What experiences stand out to you that defined your relationship with your former language arts teachers?

A few of the post-interview questions include:

• Why did you choose to make a zine? OR why did you choose not to make a zine?

• In what ways did zine making allow you to explore your personal interests? Why do you think zine making did not allow you to explore your personal interests?

• How has zine making changed how you view yourself as a language arts student?

• How did your relationship with me, your teacher, change during the project?

I also video recorded each class period relevant to the study, and collected participant generated artifacts ranging from written documents, to drawings, and to digital compositions. As a way to check my positioning and inform the other data being collected, I maintained a reflective researcher’s journal that included entries at the conclusion of each class period relevant to the study. I wrote my reflections of what I observed in my classes no later than 24 hours after a classroom session in order to accurately report what I observed and provide myself with reflective feedback. In total, I continuously collected data for eight weeks in order to collect a rich assortment of data over a reasonable length of time during a high school semester composed of eighteen total weeks.

Data Analysis

The data were viewed both inductively as well as reflexively so the study would be ‘grounded’ in the data and to adhere to my theoretical framework (Dyson & Genishi, 2005). In a case study, it is important to mindful of how my own life mediates my interpretation of the data collected and how that data interrelates.
Due to the nature of the data collected, developing a system of coding and subcodes was used to create a framework of relationships that were evident—as well as elusive—in the data. These codes and subcodes were extracted specifically from data accumulated from the four participants selected for the collective case study with a concentration on coding transcripts and written artifacts line by line or in some cases small chunks of lines. Data collected from my other 22 participants were reviewed, including their zine artifacts (if they made one) and their written reflections on the process of zine making as well as any instances they were noted in my researcher’s journal. I did not, however, transcribe all the video—except for interactions directly related to the four selected cases—or interviews of each participant.

My open coding helped me narrow my data to more analytical codes where they illuminated and helped me examine my research questions (e.g. Identity Exploration → Other’s Perceptions → Concern with How Others See Them). This allowed me to work toward an emic perspective and maintain a grounded approach to my data, while trying to avoid simply hunting for what I wanted to find in the data as it related to my research questions (see Appendix D).

I used Dedoose, a web and cloud-based qualitative analytic software, to contain and analyze my data. The web-based software afforded me flexibility and storage for my data; the system was also highly visual and intuitive, which cannot be said of all qualitative software programs. Dedoose allowed me to code text systematically and develop a system of codes; use those codes to browse or search documents, manage, and arrange material; visualize my results in graphs and charts; create code families based on my codes, memos, quotations and more. A limitation of the software was how it deletes any codes or memos applied to a document if a researcher ever went in and edited the document; I needed to be patient in deciding when to upload files in order to avoid potentially losing time coding. The program also has difficulty
uploading data from an Excel file with multiple spreadsheets; however, the program did offer a solution to safeguard against data loss. The only other limitations were the program only allowed up to five levels for a code tree and the only video format the program takes was mp4. Video uploads were relatively slow as well. Still, the platform had powerful and flexible applications and was friendly to most file formats including for text and audio.

I transcribed and coded each of my 4 cases’ interviews and all researcher journal entries. I also coded my four cases’ artifacts—which included mostly visual artifacts—and video footage (see Appendix D). I analyzed the codes and collapsed them into axial coding until themes could be induced. My family codes, and the subcategories I induced as well, became part of my discussion and eventual assertions drawn from the study (see Appendix D).

**Trustworthiness**

Glesne (2011), citing Holloway and Jefferson (2000), provides four core questions researchers should ask themselves as they work with their data, which is linked to the trustworthiness of their analytical interpretations:

1. What do you notice?
2. Why do you notice what you notice?
3. How can you interpret what you notice?
4. How can you know that your interpretation is the ‘right’ one? (p. 210)

The first question really asks a researcher to consider what was not noticed—what was missed while the researcher noticed other occurrences? Basically, this question creates consciousness raising, so a researcher might account for what might be missed throughout the progression of a study and acknowledge those gaps. The second question asks the researcher to be critical of his or her own biases and assumptions, or to essentially openly list them through a reflexive process.
Questions of why a researcher or participants behave as they do are important to reflexivity. The third question has everything to do with time. You must have time to generate an interpretation, or Glesne persists, “Time at your research site, time spent in interviewing, and time building sound relationships with participants all contribute to trustworthy data” (p. 211). When time is allotted in a qualitative session, researchers have more time to process their own biases and assumptions and reflect on their cultural positions. The fourth and final question requests that others put their eyes on the data and provide feedback. The feedback of colleagues and participants are both valuable sources of trustworthiness.

I sought to take on each of these questions in order to establish trustworthiness and credibility in my study. My journal helped me reflect on what I was noticing and what I was not as well as to be critical of my position as a teacher and researcher. I also talked to a fellow doctoral student at the University of Georgia about my positioning, biases, and assumptions as well as intentionally listed those biases and assumptions as I recognized them. Noting my position as a teacher who gives grades to the students, I am asking to participate in my study was important here as well. I choose to grade only my students’ final reflection essays (see Appendix B), which were designed to reward students with high marks as long as they reflect on the process of making zines whether or not they ever made one over the course of the study. There were no daily participation grades or grades associated with the zines as products. Students were also given the option to write a more traditional argumentative essay rather than create a zine if they preferred. My intention was to distance myself from a top-down relationship with my students—where I as their instructor make all the decisions for what text to create and how to create it for them—and instead continued to work toward a more caring and empathetic relationships (Noddings, 1988, 2012).
I tackled the third question by allowing time for my study. My study collected data over an eight-week period; what amounts to just under half a semester at the site of my research. I added to this time through what amounted to months of analysis after data collection as well. I tackled the fourth question primarily through member checks. I checked with my four primary participants for veracity in my interpretations of what they were saying and doing throughout data collection and at its conclusion. These member checks were valuable in redirecting me when I was misrepresenting a participant’s actions (e.g. one student disagreed with my observation she was still angry with another student after an incident; she was adamant she had quickly moved on from her feelings of anger toward another student). I also sought out a trusted doctoral student, again from the University of Georgia, familiar with my work and the school context in which I work to review portions of my data. Specifically, I had him act as a reviewer for my reflective journal before final analysis and for my interpretation of the data in my journal, the interviews, and video transcripts. These reviews were used for consideration only and as another form of data collected for wrestling with my own assertions and helped guide implications pulled from my data. His review was particularly helpful when he questioned why I had written that one particular student was resisting zine making due to how long he was taking to work on a single page when he thought the fact he was working on a zine at all was evidence of continued participation. These comments helped me stretch how I was defining participation as I was observing it and reminded me of the importance of acknowledging participation in all forms, including the decision to not participate.

At the core of what made my study trustworthy is triangulation—the collection of all my data using multiple methods and checking it against one another to see if any of the data merged with one another (Merriam, 1998).
Limitations

One of the initial challenges inherent in a qualitative case study is in selecting a case, or bounded system. There are typically many possibilities in any setting and the choice of case is not always clear (Creswell, 2013). Another challenge is the number of cases to select if multiple cases are being used. My study was helped by having my sampling be based on convenience and being purposive. I was limited by the number of students I could choose from to be my cases; however, I did know that I wanted four individual students to be the bounded systems I studied. I purposively choose students who engaged in the study’s activities and students who were resistive or demonstrated reluctance in order to wrestle with the implications of all four cases. In this regard, I had an opportunity to overcome these challenges to a qualitative case study.

Positionality and Ethical Considerations

Positionality. At the onset of this study, I am a 31-year-old, able-bodied Caucasian male. I possess three college degrees, and I come from a middle-class economic background. I would currently consider myself to be positioned as upper-middle class due to the combined incomes of me and my spouse. My gender, racial, and ethnic identity along with my economic status provide me vastly greater opportunities in my community and the world than almost all my fellow human counterparts. Thus, I have a privileged history as well as a privileged future in comparison to many I teach, work alongside, or interact with in my community. I have grown increasingly aware of my social position over the course of my studies and have had to work to understand this positioning as it pertains to the experiences of others around me—especially those I teach.

I have been teaching English language arts for nine years and immediately after completing my undergraduate degree began my teaching career at an affluent, high performing, and large suburban high school. Recently, I left my original position at that school to teach at my
current school and location of my research. My current school, Lake Heights High School, has relatively different racial, ethnic, and academic performance demographics from those at my original post. The school is set within a large school district made up of 19 different high schools; my current school ranks just outside the top ten in the district for academic performance on measures ranging from SAT/ACT scores, to graduation rate, to state testing data, and to the local district’s own assessments. I left my former school due to a growing unhappiness I felt after spending years developing a project-based learning (PBL) (Boss & Krauss, 2007) classroom with waning support from the school as well as the influence of my doctoral studies. At my current school, and site of my research, I discovered an opportunity to continue using PBL instructional strategies, and an administration that would support any innovative teaching practices I wanted to try. My current school’s support is partially what makes my research possible.

In my study, I am both the researcher and the teacher as well as a research participant. My role is complex; however, this complexity is part of what made my thick description of my cases rich and relevant. I am not a complete outsider. To some degree, I am an insider as I am the primary orchestrator of how my classroom is managed, and therefore the degree to which my students gain access to tools that may mediate their literacy practices and ultimately their identities and agentive actions. Whereas many qualitative researchers might have to wrestle with deciding the location and participants of a study (Dyson & Glenishi, 2005), my classroom immediately offers me a space to put theory into practice and observe the implications. Pappas, Tucker-Raymond, and Braverman (2011) explain, “Teacher research enables teachers to explore the underlying assumptions, biases, values, and ideologies that are inherent in their curriculum and pedagogies” (p. 3) and go onto emphasize teacher research is intentional and systematic and
is meant to privilege a teacher’s own voice and point of view. As an insider to my own classroom, I must be mindful of how I am privileging my own experience throughout the study and acknowledge my voice, point of view, biases, and values in reporting my results.

Unlike an outside observer, however, as a teacher, I am also in a position of power over my students. Kuby (2013) provides valuable advice for educators to consider due to our positioning stating:

As educators, we need to interrogate and nuance power to better understand critical literacy... some see power as binary—composed of the oppressor and the oppressed....

[others] believe that power is dispersed, manifested, and exercised in discursive practices.

Power is not a possession; it is unstable and localized. (p. 21)

Kuby goes onto explain how she explored and negotiated power with her students through discussions that highlighted both vertical and horizontal directions of power. My position as a teacher and researcher allowed me to do the same, where I could interrogate power in my classroom and negotiated its imbalances there as well. Specifically, I approached power as caring (Bloome et al., 2010) in my classroom where people are connected through emotional, caring relationships to others “...and that these emotional, caring connections are neither frivolous nor optional...” (p. 165). These connections were realized through actions, which was part of what I sought to observe and answer in my research questions. In my position as a teacher and researcher, I was seeking to bolster caring relationships among my students and myself. I purposefully looked for inductive hints of caring relationships—in whatever multiplicitous forms they took—throughout my study and in my data.

My position of privilege is influential when considering the intersubjectivity of myself and my participants (Glesne, 2011). I interacted with my participants daily in an active role and
did not be merely observe their actions and discourse from afar. My relationship with my participants was that of a teacher and student, adult and child, mentor and mentee. Even if not explicit, my power over my student participants to control the curriculum they are provided with was always present. My willingness to remain open-minded, curious, and my desire to collaborate with my student participants through caring relationships was my best way to control what I could of my positionality as I could never control my fixed attributes or others’ social labels of me. I stressed to my student participants their position as co-inquirers, and mine as a collaborator, working with and alongside them in order to build trust and integrity throughout the project.

**Ethics and Confidentiality.** Students participating in this study underwent the rigorous IRB requirements of Kennesaw State University and the Lake Heights High School’s district. Both institutions had to grant permission to conduct the study.

To obtain permission to collect data from student participants, I first reached out to the parents of my students through a combination of email and phone calls as well as an afternoon where I welcomed any concerned parents to ask me questions in person. I then explained the study’s intentions to my students for their consideration. Once I had confirmation and signed forms of consent from both parties, I proceeded with the study and made myself readily available for questions and concerns both parties may have throughout the process. All student participants were given pseudonyms and had their identities protected at all times. A copy of the district’s IRB approval remained locked away at the district office; however, no actual copies of documentation with participant information was retained by the district. All IRB related paperwork connected to Kennesaw State University will be safely stored for three years. After
three years, all related paperwork connected to the study will be destroyed, protecting the all participants’ identities and confidentiality.

Summary

A qualitative case study methodology and research design was selected as the researcher determined it is the most effective method of inquiry for answering the research questions. The setting, participants, assumptions, biases, and limitations were considered when developing the research design, which informed both the theoretical framework and in turn the selected methodology. The design was implemented in order to best observe and analyze relationships of participants’ literacy practices, socially constructed identities, and peer-to-peer, student-to-teacher, and teacher-to-student relationships. The intent of this analysis was to generate inductive assertions that can better inform the provision of unsanctioned literacy practices, an ethic of caring, and the tenets of participatory culture on student identity and agency in the English language arts classroom.
CHAPTER 4

RESULTS

Vignette

Anya, a 14-year-old Black, female student, raised her hand emphatically. She was both stretching her fingertips toward the ceiling and partially standing up and out of her high-top chair. Her desire to get my attention was highlighted by her pleas, “Oh, Mr. Jones! I want to go first!”

Anya’s wish to go to the podium first to give her end-of-the-year speech did not surprise me. She often volunteered to speak or provide an answer to questions I posed to the class. I became accustomed to her gregarious personality over the course of the year she had spent in my language arts classroom. I found myself often times appreciating her willingness to engage in class discussions and activities even when she knew her answer or approach might not meet my exact expectations. Admittedly, speaking in front of peers and other adults is a challenge for most 14-year-olds and as I scanned the room, no other students were competing with Anya’s request. In fact, several students were avoiding eye contact with me. After making Anya wait just a moment longer as I watched the room, I nodded at Anya, “Okay, Anya, the floor is yours.”

Anya’s eyes immediately lit up as she hopped out of her high-top chair. With a single notecard in her hand, she bounded toward the podium. Once settled behind the podium, she cleared her throat and looked around to her classroom peers. Students had all taken their chairs and put themselves into a semi-circle just beyond the podium in the style of an amphitheater with high-top chairs in the back and regular-height chairs in the front. Anya was on stage. There was no other place she would rather be. She began with a large, white smile beaming from her dark
complexion that is complimented by her kind, brown eyes. Anya pushed her black-framed glasses into place on the bridge of her nose and spoke to me and her peers:

I’ve learned that all my teachers, their, all of them—throughout school people tell you ‘Oh, your teachers are your best friends and they’ll help,’ and I never really believed that until I came to high school—and I realized everyone, all my teachers, they’re such an amazing staff. They’ve helped me through everything, especially Mr. Jones. You’re a really great teacher. I feel like I speak for all of us when I say you’ve always been there for us. Like, you let us know from the get-go that you’ve always been there for us, and I want to thank you for that. And I want to thank you guys as my peers also because I had bad days too. I may not have shown it, but I had bad days too. But you guys tolerated me—Nylah, Hwan, and all the rest of you too. I try to be as happy as possible. I don’t like being that person that has a sad look on their face. I want to be that person that when you need that person to talk to or to put a smile on your face I want to be that person. And I feel like high school is going to be that place that I can give back to people because I see lots of people with sad faces; like, I want to be that happy, energetic person (Anya, video, 05/20/2016).

Introduction

Anya’s words culminated in an end-of-the-year speech meant to reflect on her first year in high school and her time in my ELA classroom. She thanked the teachers at the school, me, and her peers. As she commented, she was always smiling in class and showed happiness on the outside no matter what her circumstances were. Anya, though, also became vulnerable in this moment. Her show of appreciation towards us all demonstrated the relationships she had formed with the class. She saw herself as supported, cared for, and understood. While her bright smile
was almost always visible, her concerns for the society around her were always present; they just laid under the surface of her happy demeanor. As Anya heard her peers’ experiences and she relayed her own, she grew in appreciation of others and found a voice to call for justice for herself and others battling racial stereotypes. Yes, Anya presented a self-ascribed happy-go-lucky girl, but she was also so much more.

This chapter is dedicated to presenting the lived experiences of Anya and three other students (Myriah, Hwan, and Jorge) as individual case studies as they were situated socially inside an ELA classroom framed around the tenets of participatory culture (Jenkins et al., 2009) and care ethics (Noddings, 2003). Using interviews, observations, field notes, and their zine artifacts, I provide a thick description of each student negotiating their identities, agency, and relationships in my classroom. I investigate each student’s self-perceptions, their perceptions of their peers and those peers’ perceptions of them as well as their perceptions of relationships through classroom discussion and using their zines as both a way to express their literacy practices and a way to relate to their peers and me as their teacher. I accumulated rich information on their past ELA classroom experiences, and how their lived experiences may affect how they navigate relationships and participation in an ELA classroom. I also capture how they navigate their identities, agency, and relationships through their day-to-day interactions in the classroom, including moments of tension, cooperation, misunderstanding, appreciation, and even forgiveness.

In order to understand the nature of the fluidity of their identities and unique literacy practices in and out of the ELA classroom, I focused on their zine development process, including how they focused their own zine construction around some aspect of their identity. I used zines as a tool to frame my ELA classroom as a space with participatory culture in mind in
order to investigate aspects of their sociocultural experiences and agency that manifested and were constructed while making their zines. Finally, to understand the nature of their relationships formed in the classroom, I paid attention to their actions, reactions, and interactions as they related to their social positioning, including interpersonal discourse and their physical making and exchanging of zines.

In the following section, I begin with the case of Anya, a self-identified skilled athlete whose engagement in zine making and discussions connected her to her identity as an advocate that pushed against her self-ascribed neutral social positioning in the classroom. Next, I explain the case of Myriah, a student who sought the title of “good student” and was surprised her peers embraced her unique literacy of natural hair in her zine work. Then there is the case of Hwan, who fluctuated between his desire to be identified as a hardworking student and his self-perceptions as an average writer and reader who developed a strong appreciation for the passions of his peers. Finally, I develop the case of Jorge, a rap music enthusiast who threw himself into the task of making a rap zine but presented a social disconnect from his peers, and the voices of others.

**Anya: The Case of a Gifted Black Athlete Discovering Her Voice**

Anya was a ninth-grade, Black female student at Lake Heights High School. At the age of fourteen she was part of premier traveling soccer team, spending much of her time outside of school at soccer practices, games, and traveling. I learned Anya’s strong identification with being an athlete stemmed from her parents, especially her father—a former pro-soccer player and her soccer coach. She carried this identity—that of a student-athlete and dedicated soccer player—into the classroom space regularly. Anya routinely wore attire with emblems of her traveling team or with Lake Height’s own soccer logo. Even if she did not wear apparel exclusive to her
participation in soccer, Anya wore athletic clothing regularly, including an athletic headband meant to keep her shoulder-length hair from her face. She made it clear that, “Outside of school I’m obsessed with soccer, I guess. I love it” (Anya, interview, 03/16/2016).

Her love of soccer, while literally worn on Anya’s sleeve, was not the only aspect of her I observed. Anya frequently walked into the classroom with a smile on her face and was eager to talk to her teammates—Jorge, Keri, Alejandra, and Benji. Anya brought a sense of positivity to the room and loved discussion—both lesson-related and to have discourse with her peers. Rarely, if ever, did Anya walk into the classroom with anything less than a smile. This was what made one particular interaction between her and another student, Hwan, all the more interesting as it was the first time I observed Anya upset in the classroom. This interaction is explained in detail in an upcoming section. The incident may have brought out a part of Anya’s identity she had not welcomed her peers to observe—a less curated part of herself.

Anya’s self-ascribed identity as a soccer player and lover of the game can be considered one of her many identity trajectories where she accepted her social positioning. In other words, Anya’s positioning as a soccer player and enthusiast is but one aspect of her identity that others—her parents, peers, coaches, etc.—may have socially positioned her as well. She also positioned herself as a reader both inside and outside of school prescribed texts, claiming “When I have time I love to read. I guess I’m a bookworm” (Anya, interview, 03/16/2016). She demonstrated her love of reading during class discussions of The Tragedy of Romeo and Juliet and professed that discussing the reading in groups helped her enjoy the difficult comprehension of the text. Outside of class, Anya sought any book with adventure and appeared to identify with strong female protagonists, such as Katniss in The Hunger Games. She explained she read more during the summer for enjoyment when soccer and school were less demanding. In addition,
Anya positioned herself as an eager learner and a hard worker when in the pursuit of a goal. These positions never appeared to change or shift over the course of my time with Anya. Rather, previously unacknowledged and new positionings were negotiated through discourse and interactions with her peers.

As a student, Anya presented herself as eager to learn new information, and she expressed a desire to “dive into what I’m learning” (Anya, interview, 03/16/2016). As an ELA student, Anya confessed to being less sure of herself at first. She claimed she thought she was a weak writer and felt she had difficulty expressing her thoughts in written text. Anya lamented, “I don’t really like having to sit down and write a paper. I’m not really a writer. I’m more of a speaker, I guess. I like to voice my thoughts instead of bringing them down on paper” (Anya, interview, 03/16/2016). Anya’s identity as an active participant in discussion in the classroom played out regularly. Whether in small groups or speaking to the class as a whole, Anya would participate, openly, expressing her opinions to her peers. I watched this scenario most days in the classroom.

Anya was often affable in her interactions with her peers, and she worked collaboratively with students sitting in close proximity to her. This included Alejandra. Anya purposefully sat next to Alejandra when given the opportunity in class. They shared similar interests such as soccer and television shows. The connection between the two students made collaboration easy for Anya; she was willing to compromise when collaborating even if she did not fully agree with Alejandra’s strategy. When first exploring zine making, I caught this exchange while they decided what their topic would be for one of their zines:

**Al:** I don’t know what to do, Anya. Should I do social media?

**An:** Let’s do the same one.
Al: Social media? We could do like all the social medias we’re on. . . . I know what we could do, Anya!

An: What?

Al: T.V. shows!

An: Yes!

Al: Oh my god, I’m so smart!

An: What T.V. shows?

Al: All of mine. We could look up the logos for all of them.

Al and An (in unison): Teen Wolf, Vampire Diaries, The Originals—

An: —and Revenge

Al: I get One Tree Hill?

Visible eye roll from Anya (Anya and Alejandra, video, 03/15/2016).

Despite Anya’s clear distaste for Alejandra’s request for One Tree Hill, the duo moved onto listing a few more shows they both enjoyed. Agreeing on shows they both liked in order to make the same zine together appeared to be more important than getting their individual way. When comfortable with the peer she was working alongside, Anya remained neutral and avoided fighting exclusively for her way or her opinion. Certainly, as the eye roll action from above suggested, Anya demonstrated unhappiness or displeasure at the decisions or actions of her peers at times; however, these moments of irritation resulted most often in compromise in order to complete a task. As the task of zine making becomes more personal for Anya, her social neutrality shifts into actively pushing against her other peers’ ideas and began to advocate for her stance on social issues, which I explored in detail in upcoming sections.
Observing and understanding relationships in my classroom were imperative to helping me understand Anya’s identity and agentive actions in my classroom. Anya relayed to me she had always felt she has had positive relationships with her English language arts (ELA) teachers. She even expressed her ELA teachers were those she felt closest to “because I guess, like, every single one of them have really told me from the get-go that they’re always there for me” (Anya, interview, 03/16/2016). Feeling cared for was important to Anya. Between speaking of her positive relationships with her parents and teachers, it appeared Anya has felt cared for in a manner Noddings (1988, 2012, 2013) refers to as the care relation between Anya and many of the adults in her life, where the carer (Anya’s parents and teachers) was attentive and responded to the cared-for’s needs and the cared-for (Anya) was receptive and appreciative of the care.

Throughout my time with Anya, she articulated her parents and teachers were encouragers (“biggest fans”) and caregivers (“[teachers] helped me through everything”), and in my experience she never waffled from this interpretation of the adults in her life. Anya took these positive relationships into my classroom. She saw no reason not to participate in my classroom after so many years of encouragement both at home and in the ELA classroom. She positioned the ELA classroom as a safe space to both express herself and participate. Anya’s interactions in former ELA classrooms as part of her sociohistorical experience, where she has felt supported to share her thoughts and creative work as well as believing her contributions mattered, may have been the basis for her participating, sharing her work, and caring for what she and others created.

While Anya conveyed she had positive relationships in the ELA classroom and would regularly participate in required assignments, there was an aspect of her identity she may have never fully explored before engaging in zine work in my classroom. Even though I cannot be
certain, Anya had not positioned herself as an advocate for her racial identity in previous ELA classes, and her time in my classroom certainly welcomed her to negotiate this position. The root of her advocacy appeared to be grounded in her parents. Anya explained how much her parents pushed her to take pride in where she came from and to be persistent even when she wanted to give up. Anya spoke of her parents’ maxims she took up in her own worldview stating, “Don’t settle for any less” (Anya, interview, 03/16/2016) and “If you have a problem, deal with it right there and then leave it to see what happens. . . Don’t look back” (Anya, interview, 05/19/2016). She also recalled noticing when her parents were stereotyped based on their racial identity. This foundation of pride in her racial identity and corresponding worldview may be what Holland et al. (2003) referred to as sedimentation where aspects of someone’s identity ‘sticks’ over time and remains relatively constant. At least to some degree, a portion of Anya’s identity was not only deeply tied to her race but also to the reciprocal care and love of her family within that identity. This became evident in an episode between Anya, Hwan, and another young man, Clark, during a lesson centered on rhetoric, which is detailed in the following section.

**Identity & Agency: Zine Making as an Expression of Participation and Advocacy**

Anya, like many of the students in my class, was immediately interested in creating a zine when first introduced to them, while simultaneously acting weary of such an unfamiliar task. Anya “really enjoyed it because it was something that I got to be totally myself and it’s something I got to be true to myself” (Anya, interview, 05/19/2016), but she also reflected, “The very first time you taught us about zines I really thought, ‘I’m never going to do one they seem so lame’” (Anya, reflection, 05/06/2016). Also like many of my students, Anya struggled with making a zine. “The most frustrating thing was actually thinking of an idea and sticking to it” (Anya, interview, 05/19/2016). A zine as a tool for expression, advocacy, and literacy was
foreign to the entire class. Anya was excited about the prospect of making a zine nonetheless, but initially did not see its usefulness.

I introduced the class to making a mini-zine out of a single sheet of copy paper as starting point. In order to prepare students to create a zine for the first time, I had them answer three questions: 1.) What do you spend a lot of time doing that you enjoy doing?; 2.) What do you spend a lot of time doing that you do not enjoy doing?; and 3.) What would you do if you had unlimited resources to do it? While these questions were meant to help inspire a theme or topic for their mini-zines, a few students, including Anya, still struggled to develop a topic for their zine. To choose a topic for her first encounter with zines, Anya dialogued with Alejandra for approximately 15 minutes. They appeared determined to create the same or similar zine. As noted in the previous section, they considered creating a zine about social media but they both felt that while they spent a good deal of time on social media, they did not have enough to say about their activity for their zine. Quickly, the topic changed to favorite television shows, several of which both shared an affinity for watching and discussing.

Anya’s first attempt at zine making was a collaborative expression of her television fandom. Part of the appeal of participating in zine making for Anya was the collaborative opportunities. Anya showed herself to be gregarious whenever given the opportunity work in groups or participate in discussions in class. Zine making was no different for her, “Along the way of the zine making process I was having a fun time bouncing ideas off my table (group) we laughed, we joked, and worked which made me enjoy it even more” (Anya, reflection, 05/06/2016). Through discourse with Alejandra, Anya identified her passion for television shows they both watched and followed live and on the web. Zine making for Anya began as an enjoyable activity that expressed her shared love of television shows with a friend. Anya knew
her initial work was appreciated by Alejandra, and access to information and the option to collaborate had no real barriers, welcoming her to participate in the appropriation of television shows and remixing their logos onto a zine as a new expression (Jenkins et al., 2009, 2013). Here is where Anya’s unsanctioned literacy practices (Street & Street, 1995) came into focus first. Eventually, Anya focused her zine advocating against racial stereotypes, but until that point, she explored her knowledge and enjoyment of television shows with a peer—a way of reading the world not typically celebrated in the ELA classrooms I have observed.

What zine making ultimately became for Anya was an opportunity to explore her identity as an advocate for herself, her racial identity, and the racial identity of others, while expressing that advocacy in the classroom. This was evidenced by her choice to create a zine focused on combating racial stereotypes—a topic she did not appear to come to easily. Advocate as one of Anya’s identities was in juxtaposition to how her peers had positioned her as “goofy” and “easy-going” (Anya, interview, 05/19/2016). Her time spent both playing with zine making and the appropriation of cultural phenomenon around her (i.e. Black Lives Matter, memes, hashtags) opened Anya up to participating in remixing. Jenkins et al. (2009) explains “Often, remixing involves the creative juxtaposition of materials that otherwise occupy very different cultural niches” (p. 33). Anya took existing media from pre-existing contexts and reframed it to speak to her concerns over racial stereotypes, eventually resulting in Anya feeling she was “way deeper than I actually feel I am” and she “really got to see the deepest part of myself through [zine making]” (Anya, interview, 05/19/2016).

The exploration of racial advocacy began for Anya with a desire to combat stereotypes and bullying and originally had little to do with race initially. She waffled on both subjects explaining, “At first I wanted to do stereotypes because you showed us a zine about stereotypes
and I remember actually enjoying the zine. I felt like I could really connect very well to that topic. Then, after a while I was like, ‘Now I’m thinking about bullying,’ because I like felt really strongly about it because in elementary school and growing up I was bullied and I felt really strong and connected to that topic” (Anya, interview, 05/19/2016). Her initial interaction with zines my students had created in the past clearly helped mediate her initial approach to creating her own zine. When I asked her in her final interview why she had eventually avoided bullying as the subject of her zine, Anya stated, “When it comes to have to talk about my personal life, I just am very guarded. . . . I don’t like having to put my burdens on others’ shoulders” (Anya, interview, 05/19/2016). Anya’s experience with bullying may have been too personal for her to explore, and her concerns with racial stereotypes included some of the bullying she had experienced without making it about “me, me, me” (Anya, interview, 05/19/2016).

Another influential factor in Anya’s subject choice for her zine may be connected to a confrontation she had with Hwan, a Korean-American student, and Clark, a Caucasian student, during a class discussion on rhetoric. To provide context, the interaction occurred just as the Black Lives Matter (BLM) movement was fully in the limelight and consciousness of the United States of America. The hashtag #blacklivesmatter, which promoted BLM on social media, was regularly used on the platforms my students used for their own social media such as Twitter and Snapchat. The lesson on rhetoric centered on breaking down the purpose of pathos, ethos, and logos in various mediums and requesting students provide example arguments that could fit into or encompass the three primary rhetorical strategies. My research journal may have best reflected the scenario as it occurred,

[The class was] reviewing pathos and beginning to discuss logos. When reviewing pathos, students had to brainstorm in groups ways to make a claim for three different
ways of making an emotional appeal (Sympathy/Empathy, People and Things We Care About, and Ideology/Beliefs). Hwan made the decision to choose a claim he himself did not believe in but knew he would get an emotional reaction. Under ideology/beliefs he wrote ‘#blacklivesdon’tmatter.’ This caused a small ruckus among a few of my Black students. Specifically, Anya was very offended. Clark tried to stand up for Hwan and reason that Hwan meant nothing real by it and was simply exploring pathos. Anya was not having it, asking Clark to simply walk away, which visibly upset Clark. All the while, Hwan kept to himself.

At some point, a student erased the ‘don’t.’ I caught much of the exchange between Clark and Anya. I took a moment to commiserate with Anya and agree with her that Hwan’s actions were not okay. . . . I went to Hwan after talking to Anya and acknowledged to him that he meant no harm, but that there was great danger in the words he used even with good intent. He acknowledged he had made a mistake. I ended up giving Hwan a chance to publicly apologize to the class, which he did with sincerity. The look on Anya’s face did not really show forgiveness at the time. By the time class ended, Anya said something to the effect of ‘All is forgiven Jesus says to forgive, so all is forgiven’ (Jones, journal, 03/23/2016).

As the journal entry makes clear, Anya appeared to experience anger at Hwan’s insensitivity toward Anya’s and other students in the class identity as Black students. However, Anya shifted the focus of her identity as a Black young woman to her identity as a Christian who is expected to forgive those who hurt them. These identities existed at the same time and were not mutually exclusive; Anya fluidly shifted her identity in this particular context for reasons she never discussed with me during our discussions of the incident.
Anya connected the interaction as one of her inspirations for her zine. Anya’s primary comment on the incident spoke more to how she desired to position herself when in conflict with others, commenting, “I’m just that type of person that forgives, but never forgets, I guess. So after I did that I feel like, I started to beat myself up because I just don’t like to being mean to people. I feel like I could’ve handled it differently maybe. Like I didn’t have to be so mad about it, but like it’s just a very touchy subject,” and she acknowledges the impact on her zine stating, “After that class when we walked out I left it on the project. . . . I feel like it really helped me in my zine project because it helped me see something like, ‘If I could get that mad in just a second imagine like the whole world being stereotyped and all those stereotyped people’” (Anya, interview, 05/19/2016). While Anya wanted her peer-to-peer relationships to remain cordial, she used her zine to advocate for herself and what she saw as the unjust judgment of others based on their race. The zine itself might imply some connection to the tense encounter as part of the front cover states, as a stereotype, “All blacks are bad” (See Figure 4.1).
The audience for Anya’s zine is her peers. She uses Tumblr quotes and memes to build her case against stereotypes. In a page dedicated to stereotypes related to hair color (Figure 4.2), Anya highlights the media as a culprit for diffusing stereotypes and denotes to her reader they cannot fall victim to believing the stereotypes movies and television promote. Another page uses
memes and a Tumblr quote to fend off stereotypes about a person’s racial identity being related to their level of intelligence (See Figure 4.2). Using these pages, Anya positions herself as an advocate for all who have felt society and individuals have stereotyped them.

Figure 4.2: Anya’s Zine Page 3 & Page 4

Anya saw herself in these stereotypes as she positioned herself as a girl, as Black, as an athlete, as an intelligent student, as a media consumer, and as an agent who pushed against how others might position her (Davies & Harré, 1990). Her zine making provided Anya space to be an advocate for herself and others who have felt stereotyped by hair color and race, which she may not have encountered as an identity on the soccer field, at home while reading, or even in her typical interactions in an ELA classroom (Moje, 2004). Anya also constructed a new,
unexpected position for herself after making her zine—she identified herself as emotionally deep. Anya had been positioned by others as “goofy,” but her approach to devaluing stereotypes gave her a sense of having depth and having something to say.

Anya’s agency in this instance may be mediated by her interaction with Hwan and Clark, her occasional tablemates, and me, her teacher (Ahearn, 2001). She was empowered to act in a way that hoped to reframe Hwan’s and Clark’s understanding of BLM specifically, but she also utilized her zine to reconstitute others’ positioning of her as a stereotype and the stereotypes she perceived of others. This sense of agency is captured in her reflection writing:

I felt like my zine related to me as a person, because being a Black person is not an easy road to walk, and I’m constantly being stereotyped by people because of my race, and I don’t find it fair for me, and I don’t find it fair for not just me, but for any and everyone doesn’t deserve to be put in a box that someone else puts them in. . . . I feel like this was an AMAZING project and I would do it over and over again if I could (Anya, reflection, 05/06/2016).

The usefulness of the project to Anya was evidence of her individual agency through literacy as she believed the content of her zine could cause an effect within others. Her ability to reframe her and others’ racial identities as something to be celebrated may have been supported through her zine project, which was designed to support identity and agency trajectories in the ELA classroom.

**Relationships: Appreciating the Experiences of Others**

Anya frequently commented on her admiration of her peers’ work and expressed appreciation for their identities and lived experiences. One of the culminating activities for the class’ zine making was what I had coined a “zinecast.” Zinecast was a term I used to title the
class’s online live video stream via Google On Air Hangouts to present their zines to a wider audience outside of just the local community. For approximately an hour, eight students volunteered to walk online audiences through their zine’s pages and explain their design and topic choices as well as explain the rhetorical strategy they employed. Using this technology was one way I tried to build in authentic writing audience for my students. During this zinecast was one of the more explicit moments Anya expressed her admiration for her peers openly. The zinecast itself was an hour-long, live-streamed conversation using Google Hangouts On-Air where eight students volunteered to showcase their zines to an online community. Anya was not one of the volunteers. Instead, she was an active audience member. As discussed in the previous section, Anya had not completed her own zine by the designated due date. She was still uncertain of how to finish her final product. Anya’s missing zine did not detract her from fully engaging in the presentation of the zines of her peers. Anya remained attentive while eight of her peers discussed the design and purpose of their zines, and even ‘shushed’ Benji, one of her regular tablemates, for whispering while the other students were presenting. Anya demonstrated an investment in wanting to learn more about the motivations behind her peers’ work.

One particular zine crafted by a student named Kendall was informative to Anya, and the focus of the zine—explaining the thoughts of an introvert—resonated with her. Towards the conclusion of the zinecast, Anya provides Kendall with comments of encouragement and appreciation:

I would say I am an extrovert. But um, like I didn’t know you called the opposite an introvert. I always thought you might be shy and stuff, but I didn’t know you thought that way. To me it felt like, I don’t know, like I really didn’t know the difference, like it’s really good that you did this (Anya, video, 04/28/2016).
Anya demonstrated a sense of empathy, having been attentive to understanding Kendall’s identity as an introvert (Noddings, 2012) and noting she “felt like” she didn’t know the difference between the two personality traits.

In addition to her experience with Kendall, Anya expressed what Noddings (1984, 2012) would call empathy, born from being attentive and receptive towards someone else’s state of mind or feelings, toward Myriah whom I describe in detail in an upcoming section. Myriah’s zine depicted the struggle associated with having and caring for natural hair typically found among Black and African American people. As Myriah and Anya both identify as Black, Anya recognized the struggles Myriah described as those of her own:

I can really relate to this. I was born with natural hair. I hate going natural, I do, I don’t do natural hair during the school year. It’s too much to handle, so I’ll do it during the summer and stuff, but, yeah (Anya, video, 04/28/2016).

Anya’s immediate connection to Myriah’s zine was also echoed by Nylah, another Black, female student who followed Anya’s comment by stating she has plans to go fully natural next year and knows it will be difficult. The experiences of these three young women were foreign to the majority of the class but for them, the lived experience of having natural hair provides them with an instant caring ethic toward one another.

While Anya clearly connected to Myriah’s and Nylah’s natural hair experience, she demonstrated moments, such as the one with Kendall during the zinecast, where she cared for and appreciated the identities of other students. From the near onset of the project, Anya wanted to share her zine work and see others’ zine work. Her self-proclaimed identity as an extrovert manifested any time I offered students a chance to exchange their zines as a way to share ideas and to some degree their lives with one another. Anya was always open to sharing her zine work
and to experience seeing her peers’ work. No matter the opportunity, Anya continuously showed encouragement and appreciation for her peers’ zine work. One such moment came when looking at a zine arguing what the best military-grade gun was by a student named Jordan. Jordan is a Caucasian male who had expressed a deep interest in entering the military upon completing high school. When Anya had the opportunity to see Jordan’s work, she expressed unease and unfamiliarity with the subject of guns, but she encouraged Jordan, stating she had learned something from his zine and that she liked his detailed drawing of a gun on the cover. During the same class period, Anya expressed a sense of appreciation for Ana’s, a female student of mixed Caucasian and Asian heritage, zine which displayed hand drawn images of women from various cultures accompanied by statements of affirmation such as, “You are beautiful.”

The appreciation Anya demonstrates for her peers’ work cannot be said to be attributed solely to the zine-making process, the classroom environment, or even the relationships she had built in class. Rather, noting Anya may have carried her empathetic and attentive care for others into the classroom from other sociocultural experiences is important to understanding there could be a history of caring I cannot account for here. Anya’s identity as a daughter, sister, and soccer player could all play a significant role in her agentive actions to celebrate her peers. She conveyed her appreciation and experiences of being supported in our first interview, stating, “Well, soccer for starters, I just love the feeling of knowing that you’re in a good team and knowing that you have them to support you,” and “My dad is my coach right now, so yeah, he’s my number one fan. They really push me, you know. They don’t let me give up. . . .” (Anya, interview, 03/16/2016). Anya has encountered the support and encouragement from teammates and her family, which she very well may have mirrored in the classroom.
Whatever sociohistorical context Anya brought into the classroom, it manifested in her continual display of appreciation of her classmates’ zines and identities. When reflecting on better understanding and connecting to Kendall after reading and discussing her zine on introverts, Anya commented, “Kendall is really fun, she makes me laugh. Actually, she’s really funny. People, like I said, the people I never thought in a million years that I’d ever have a conversation with actually proved me wrong” (Anya, interview, 05/19/2016). Anya also developed a relationship with Nylah—one they did not have before creating and sharing their zines. Nylah’s zine focused on issues related to rape culture. Anya appreciated its serious and relatable tone, explaining, “Nylah. Me and her actually became very close after that, after the zine process because her zine actually really touched me. It was a really serious topic in the zine that she wrote about. But after that, me and her actually started talking a lot” (Anya, interview, 05/19/2016). Anya found both appreciation and relatability to peers she otherwise knew little about in terms of their experiences and thoughts. Anya found their stories relatable and found herself celebrating and caring for them.

What sums up Anya’s experiences in my classroom was one of her responses in our final interview together:

I really noticed that lots of people were—everyone came out of their shells. That’s what I noticed. Everyone really just came out of their shell, even Kendall. She came out of her shell and told us all about how she feels. I feel like me as a person I care about what everyone’s doing but maybe in the moment sometimes I could think less about me. I felt like that would be a process that would help me think that before I say something, before I ask, before I think that I need to step back and think about how it would feel if I was in their shoes (Anya, interview, 05/19/2016).
Jenkins et al. (2009) provide some insight into Anya’s care ethic toward her peers, claiming, “Young people who create and circulate their own media are more likely to respect the intellectual property rights of others because they feel a greater stake in the cultural economy” (p. 10). Anya demonstrated respect for her peers intellectual property whether she connected to it and agreed with it (Nylah and Myriah’s zines), did not connect or agree with it (Jordan’s zine), or learned something new from it (Kendall’s zine).

Anya’s appreciation of her peers also extended to me as her ELA teacher. I purposefully attempted to frame my classroom with Noddings’ (1988, 2003) care ethic in mind. I consciously worked to demonstrate a caring relationship to the students in the classroom by attempting to be both attentive to their needs and responsive to their feelings. To be clear, Anya’s positive relationships with her ELA teachers began well before she entered my classroom. As previously noted, the first time I sat down to interview her, Anya relayed she has always felt she had close relationships with her ELA teachers, and that they had expressed to her they cared for her. Anya has felt cared for in her ELA classrooms throughout her schooling experience, which may play an important role in her conception of her relationship with me. When speaking of her experience in my class, Anya expressed appreciation for what she interpreted as my caring for her, her work, and her peers, stating, “You like to believe in us. You’re our biggest supporter. . . . You are really engaged in [the zine process] and in my entire youth of going to school I’ve never had a teacher be so interested in something I was doing. That’s where I really feel like you opened my eyes that you really do care” (Anya, interview, 05/19/2016). Anya continued to feel cared for in my classroom space both as a person and as a zine maker. My intention of opening my classroom space to different literacy practices and providing a caring environment seems to have come to fruition for Anya.
Summary

Anya represented a case of a student negotiating her identity and agency through text and discourse. The zine Anya produced and the discourse she engaged in with Hwan and Clark were central to her experiences in my classroom and in turn central to her own identity work (Beach, Johnston, & Thein, 2015). While Anya presented herself as an affable and self-ascribed goofy young woman who enjoyed conversing with peers and laughing, she constructed her identity as an advocate for her racial identity and her social positioning as she utilized the zine as a tool to express those positions. Anya also negotiated her agency using her literacy skills informed by her lived experience as a young Black woman (Ahearn, 2001). Even though her position as an advocate for her race and social positioning put her initially at odds with a few peers, the discourse those interactions elicited were essential in unifying her with her peers to appreciate one another’s contributions to the class. By the end of the project, Anya expressed an appreciation her own identity as a young, Black woman, the identities expressed by her peers, and the caring relationships she formed with them and her teacher.

Myriah: The Case of a Talented Black Singer in Pursuit of a “Good Student” Identity

Myriah was a 14-year-old Black female student at Lake Heights High School who styled her hair naturally, wore glasses most days, stayed up too late, loved signing, and disliked being told what to do. Myriah was another smiling face I saw in my classroom daily unless she was exhausted from the previous night. On days when the previous night Myriah had stayed up too late to be able to get restful sleep, her head would often slump down onto the table. At least once a week, I would walk up beside her and quietly request she lift her head up. This gentle reminder came in the form of whispers and shoulder taps. I tried not to ever embarrass her or single her out. Still, Myriah became defensive at times, claiming, “I am awake,” and “I was paying
attention” when I approached her. As long as what was happening in class involved her actively writing, reading, or discussing ideas with peers, Myriah was engaged, but in the quiet moments, the small lectures, and small wait times when she was done while others were working, Myriah would lose interest and either put her head down or pick up the latest book she was reading to entertain herself.

Myriah is considered a gifted student by the standards of the school district and had been tested to receive that label during her elementary school years. Having taught gifted students for 6 years, I was never surprised when Myriah became bored or simply gave into her desire to sleep. If anything, her behavior reminded me that I could be challenging her more during class time.

In time I learned Myriah was a voracious reader—an identity supported by my observations of her having a book in her hands any time there was a lull in classroom activity and Myriah’s own admission, “I like to read. I like to read a lot” (Myriah, interview, 03/10/2016). Myriah did not, however, identify herself as a writer. Myriah found the task of writing unclear at times and would wonder, “What am I supposed to do?” (Myriah, interview, 03/10/2016) when faced with formal classroom writing. However, not all of Myriah’s writing experiences in the ELA classroom have been frustrating. Myriah had recently found an old writing journal from third grade when we sat down for our first interview. She reflected on how looking back at her former personal thoughts day after day was “cool.” Myriah found frustration in feeling unequipped for the writing she was asked to do, but found comfort and a welcome nostalgia when looking back on some of her completed writing. Myriah’s zine writing experience might have mirrored these two attitudes. I will discuss extensively the social positions
Myriah took up as related to these attitudes and her experiences in my classroom in the following section.

Myriah also strongly identified as a singer. “I like singing a lot,” she told me emphatically at our first interview. She was careful to point out, however, that she did not enjoy singing when it felt like a job such as any time she had to sing for her pastor at her church. Myriah explained she sang informally all over her house and was met with positive reinforcement frequently from her family. That reinforcement had also come from community and church members. In one of Myriah’s anecdotes, she shared:

And then with singing, I’ve been singing since like ever. I think I got involved in chorus in my third grade. I actually found a CD, like, with my old tracks in third grade before I had a lesson and everything and, like, everyone’s like, “You’re very good.” And I was like, “Really?” And they were like, “Yeah, like you could be a country singer.” I don’t know how that happened, but they were like I can sing—I can sing country (Myriah, interview, 03/10/2016).

While her church community heard a country accent in her singing voice, Myriah focused on pop music when the choice was left to her. She had an affinity for Michael Jackson and performed his song “Man in the Mirror” at Lake Heights High School’s spring talent show. For Myriah, as long as she had a say in what she was singing, she was happy.

Myriah as a reader, a hesitant writer, and a singer are all social positions she has designated for herself and positions that have been reinforced by others. These positions might come with unconscious assumptions on Myriah’s part (Davies & Harré, 1990). Myriah might assume, for instance, her identity as a reader was attached to multiple encounters with reading spanning across her lifetime. In other words, Myriah saw herself as a reader over time, which
demonstrated a sense of authorship in her own lived experience with less need to have others reinforce that position. Myriah might assume her identity as a hesitant writer was the product of how teachers had positioned her as a bystander when in contexts requiring writing. She might assume her identity as a singer was the culmination of what Davies and Harré (1990) refer to as a braided development where several storylines—her lived experiences, including encounters with her community—combined to form her interpretation of her singing ability. Whatever the case might be for Myriah, her positions at the onset of the project were made explicit.

When I first sat down to interview Myriah, she spoke quickly, almost nervously as though she could run out of breath at any time as she described herself. What I discovered in time was Myriah was a little nervous for reasons I cover toward the end of this section. Myriah also simply had a lot to say and appeared confident of who she was as a person and student. Myriah described herself as “All or nothing,” telling a quick anecdote to describe her position, “If I really want to do it, like. . . I am in chorus right now and I’m like, it’s not fun anymore so I’m kind of not doing my best effort for it because I liked it because I was like singing and everything. But that goes for everything, if I’m not going to do it, then I don’t do it” (Myriah, interview, 03/10/2016). If Myriah believed in the work she was doing, or at the very least enjoyed it, then she would give an endeavor her full attention. However, if the work no longer piqued her interest or held her attention, she would gladly dial down her efforts. Myriah’s demeanor toward school work to which she felt disconnected to might have been reinforced by her mother. During Myriah’s end-of-the-year speech, she spoke to the class candidly about her mother’s advice on school work she did not like, telling her classmates, “My parents, my mom is like, ‘They can’t make you do anything. If you don’t want to do it, don’t do it’” (Myriah, video, 05/24/2016).
What was important to note about Myriah’s disengagement from aspects of a class she typically enjoyed, such as chorus, was she never stopped participating all together. Rather, Myriah appeared to shift her level of effort. An experience with a former ELA teacher provided insight into why Myriah positioned herself and her actions (consciously or unconsciously) from a highly-engaged student to a student cooperating with a teacher’s expectations. Myriah explained:

I remember in like third grade we had this poetry reading thing where we had to read a poem or whatever. The teacher is like, ‘I have a big poem. I want you to do this Paul Revere poem.’ It was pages long and I was like, ‘No, I can do it, I can do it.’ She’s like, ‘Are you sure?’ I’m like, ‘Yes.’ She said, ‘I believe in you.’ And then I didn’t study enough until it was time for me to read and I was like, ‘Paul Revere…’ or whatever. And then she said it was kind of good, gave me a B for effort because I didn’t do—I didn’t remember the whole poem, but I got through a portion of it” (Myriah, interview, 03/10/2016).

Myriah originally had a high level of interest in taking on a challenging poem to memorize, but she mismanaged her study time, which might be expected of a third grader. Myriah appeared to accept her third grade teacher’s expectations of her and appreciated the high marks despite knowing she did not really complete the task required of her. This as well as other experiences over time may have helped shape Myriah’s view of assignments that lost her interest. In this instance, she received an acceptable grade for a limited amount of effort. What was possibly more interesting about this early event in her formal education was Myriah’s desire for her teacher to know she could do the work and that she would do the work, knowing the poem was long and challenging. For Myriah’s teacher to have a perception of her as an aspirationally good student might have been more important to her than the reality of the grade
she received. The desire to be perceived as a “good student”—hard working, meeting deadlines, focused—is a position Myriah wanted me to acknowledge during the project as well. This desire was in opposition to her social interactions in the classroom at times (e.g. putting her head down in class).

The explicit identities Myriah shared with me—reader, hesitant writer, singer, and good student—might represent what Ahearn (2001) cautioned as oppositional agency. While only one of many ways of possibly framing agency, Myriah demonstrated regular acts of resistance both inside and outside the classroom. Myriah’s resistance was not born out of some misguided binary such as rebel/adherent. Rather, Myriah’s demonstrations of resistance were complex—far more complex than I might have teased out of my limited data exploring Myriah from a sociohistorical lens. Outside of my classroom space, Myriah opposed singing songs she did not choose or felt practicing became a chore. These instances came up in our discussions about chorus and singing at church. Inside my classroom space, Myriah resisted writing, including, at first, the zine project.

As found in our initial conversations early in the project, Myriah had consistently disliked certain modes of writing throughout her schooling career. The reason for Myriah’s dislike and resistance to writing came in the form of unfamiliarity or openness/lack of structure with the mode of writing. Myriah expressed frustration when there were not clear and specific guidelines for what and how to write:

I don’t like just when I have to write down some creative writing where I have to create everything. If I have to do it, like, ‘Ugh… I haven’t done it.’ It’s like, ‘You only have to do this, have to do this, have to do this,’ and if I don’t have that and I have like free will, then I just don’t what to do it. I kind of get lost, like the zine thing, you were like ‘Do
whatever you want,’ and I’m like, ‘What do you want me to do? I don’t know what to do’ (Myria, interview, 03/10/2016).

Unfamiliar writing modes were an issue for Myria. She reinforced this idea when referring to a memoir-writing project earlier in the year. When I asked her about what she had not really enjoyed in the class, she answered, “The writing mostly. I think it was my memoir. I just I couldn’t remember anything else like, ‘Oh my God, this is going to be terrible. I can’t remember everything that happened,’ and then like I can’t, like how much deeper do I go? Like, ‘What am I supposed to do?’” (Myria, interview, 03/10/2016). The “What am I supposed to do?” question became thematic throughout the zine project just as it had played out with previous writing projects unfamiliar to her. Myria did not see herself as a writer because she simply did not know what she was supposed to write. She enjoyed writing with boundaries and clear expectations; she was not comfortable with gray areas or ambiguity.

Whereas some students might have disengaged from the class when they felt challenged to engage in unfamiliar writing tasks, Myria’s desire to be recognized as a good student overshadowed her concerns for writing in an unfamiliar mode. She demonstrated concern about how her teachers perceived her as we started the zine project. The following is a quick exchange during our first interview when I inquired into her relationships with her language arts teachers,

**M:** I think we’ve had a pretty good relationship. I don’t feel like I get on your nerves. I hope, I hope not—

**T:** You do not get on my nerves.

**M:** I always try to say good morning and how are you to let you know that I’m ready to learn. Like, even if I put my head down in your class, I still listen to you.

**T:** Right, I got you. I got you. (Myria & Teacher, interview, 03/10/2016).
Myriah showed concern that I thought she might be a disengaged or an uninterested student. Making sure I knew she cared and was listening seemed important to her. This meant that turning in her final zine in on time was a non-negotiable for her. Despite any situation in which Myriah might not like an assignment, she always turned the assignment in on time. This helped position herself as good student in her own perception and what she hoped would be my perception of her. In our last interview she stated, “I think I’m a good student” (Myriah, interview, 05/16/2016)—a position she felt secure in once she had completed the zine project on time and received praise from me and her peers. In her written reflection at the end of the project, Myriah explained, “The reason I think I was so against making [a zine] was because I didn’t want to be disappointed. I didn’t want to put my name on something I wasn’t proud of” (Myriah, reflection, 05/06/2016). This point corresponded to her starts and stops throughout the project that culminated in completing her final zine at midnight the day before it was due. She had started what became her final zine just a few hours prior. She wanted a sense of perfection, creating something she had never done before. She wanted to maintain her position as a good student in both her own view and how she hoped I might view her.

Myriah negotiated her identity as a good student using her zine at first as a personal symbol of her timeliness and dedication to assigned work. Eventually, her perceived identity as a good student was supported by how me and her peers positioned her as we praised her artistry in her zine and relatability some found in the zine’s contents.

As a writer, Myriah maintained she did not like writing, and did not see herself as a writer. Myriah claimed, “I really don’t like writing. . . but I can write in short bursts, like little comments. . . but I can’t write anything lengthy. I feel like I get repetitive” (Myriah, interview, 05/16/2016). The zine writing represented those “short bursts” of writing. Ultimately, Myriah did
not associate her zine work with academic writing or her ability to write in general, and as a language arts student she learned, “I like to read, I don’t like to write, and I’d rather be doing something where it’s like you see the words in the picture and not actually write them down” (Myriah, interview, 05/16/2016). Myriah appeared to feel images could and do speak as clearly and as loudly to an intended audience as words can and do.

**Identity & Agency: Zine Making as an Expression of Lived Experience**

Myriah openly resisted zine making. When introduced to the medium briefly before my study even began, I can recall her explicitly saying she did not want to make one and found the exercise useless. On the first day of the study when I introduced the concept of zine making again, Myriah audibly sighed in displeasure. She was not looking forward to using the tool. I learned through interviews and discussions with Myriah that her distaste for zines originated out of simply not knowing where to begin or what to do with a zine. The comments, “What do you want me to do? I don’t know what to do” (Myriah, interview, 03/10/2016) were commonly used when first challenged with zine making, which hinted Myriah may have been spoon-fed how and what to write throughout her formal education.

As stated in the previous section, I discovered the zine-making process was a challenge for Myriah due to unfamiliarity, which was a theme in her ELA experiences as she had stated in her first interview. She had never made anything like a zine in a classroom before, and there were only a few guidelines to follow for creating a zine; they concerned embedding students’ knowledge of rhetorical strategies. Myriah was not comfortable with so much freedom to create a zine on any topic she would like. Admittedly, some of this discomfort might have stemmed from a concern over her grade on the project. When asked why she choose to make a zine rather than write the more traditional essay option offered to her, Myriah claimed, “The zine seemed
like less work” (Myriah, interview 05/16/2016). When weighing which option would take less time and render the best grading results, she choose zine making; however, Myriah continued her comments, admitting, “But then I was writing and writing, and like ugh, this is a lot of work.”

When all was said and done, Myriah worked on three different zines. Her original zine was meant to be a satire of learning chemistry. This zine was inspired by a conversation I had with her during the first zine-making day in class. I knew Myriah, despite wanting to be perceived as a good student, complained about school, teachers, and her work load, so I suggested she focus her zine on poking fun at her school experience,

M: I don’t know what to do this on.

T: What did you write down for what you spend a lot of time doing that you don’t enjoy?

M: Chemistry

T: Why not make your zine about chemistry?

M: What do you mean?

T: You could satirize it. Make fun of it. Pick out a few of the most recent experiences in the class to mock.

M: I can do that?

T: Of course! Think about it. You’ll have a topic to create a zine, you might actually enjoy making fun of chemistry, and you might even retain some stuff you need to know for the class (Myriah & Teacher, video, 03/15/2016).

Myriah started working on a zine satirizing chemistry. For nearly an entire hour and half she drew pictures on each page and anchored words to her pictures. Once she had an idea of what to do, Myriah engaged in the process. Her second attempt at a zine—after deciding she was no longer interested in continuing her chemistry zine—focused on her acute interest in
paradoxes. I noted in my research journal how I was immediately drawn to the artistry of her cover where the word ‘Paradox’ folded into the second page. The paradox zine, however, did not last long. Myriah later clarified, “Next I did paradoxes because I like them and why not. Well that took too long to write out so I scrapped it too” (Myriah, reflection, 05/06/2016). Creating a zine was not a task she wanted to spend ample amount of time doing. Her third zine, and the one that stuck, was deeply tied to her lived experience and physical identity as a young Black woman with natural hair. Myriah’s final zine was titled “7 Natural Hair Struggles,” (Figure 4.3) where she documented 7 realities of what living with natural hair was like. Interestingly, the idea to make a zine about natural hair was one of her first ideas before she tried making the paradox zine, claiming, “I was gonna do natural hair stuff, but I didn’t like my drawings so I gave up” (Myriah, reflection, 05/06/2016). Myriah also later reflected that her decision to make the zine about natural hair was based on time and what she knew—her hair,

> I think it’s because I already knew it. I thought it about as I was standing back and doing my hair, or when my hair looks like in the morning, or whatever, it kind of started in my head like this is so hard. I was like, “Oh, I could do this.” And like it wasn’t that hard to think of doing a natural hair zine (Myriah, interview, 05/16/2016).
Myriah acted as an expert on natural hair as it was her lived experience she encountered every day. During the zinecast, Myriah provided insight into both her experience and her expertise,

**M:** I went natural about three years ago. My mom was like, ‘You’ll like it when you’re older.’ And she’s right.

**T:** So what do you mean by being natural?

**M:** Like, I don’t get perms. My hair’s not straight. Like, usually it’s curly, but I used to get perms like all the time to get my hair straight because it was easier, but now, like, my hair is always curly.

**T:** So based on looking around the room, most of us in here have no idea what it’s like to have natural hair or choose to have natural hair or not (Myriah & Teacher, video, 04/28/2016).
Myriah’s unsanctioned literacy practice was writing about her natural hair. I had never taught in or observed an ELA classroom where the subject of natural hair came up in discussion or writing. This could have been due to my own lack of experience with having natural hair and in general taking for granted the lived experiences of my Black students in previous years. Whatever the cast may be, the subject had not manifested until Myriah’s diffused information about living with and maintaining natural hair with her zine. Myriah knew what having natural hair meant in terms of time, products, and process, which only two other young ladies in the class could identify with the same experience—Anya and Nylah. Both had at one time expressed they had worn their hair naturally at one time or another. This framed Myriah as a primary expert in the classroom space, meaning the teacher nor the majority of the class had the literacy schema necessary to fully understand the subject matter. Myriah contributed her own expertise to the process of zine making, calling on multiple intelligences to generate the images and words in the finished product (Jenkins et al., 2009). Myriah’s expert status in my classroom due to her typically unsanctioned school literacy expertise (her natural hair and the process to manage it) was what Moje (2000) expresses as a rare opportunity in schools for adolescents to have spaces that encourage them, “to explore and experiment with multiple literacies and to receive feedback from peers and adults” (p. 402). As discussed in an upcoming section, Myriah’s expertise was appreciated and encouraged by both her peers and me, her teacher.

The cover of Myriah’s zine (Figure 4.3) implies an important aspect to her identity as part of the Black community who have gone to wearing their hair naturally. Part of the assigned zine-making task in my class was to integrate a rhetorical strategy into their zines. Myriah’s use of a statistic about a drop in perm sales indicated her use of logos; however, ethos became an important aspect of her zine even though Myriah may have not realized it initially. The ethos
existed entirely on her identity as a young Black woman with natural hair. This identity was maybe most obvious in the images Myriah drew to demonstrate the seven struggles she expressed in the zine, where the images of hair resembled her own (Figure 4.4). The labels at the top of each page are also unique to Myriah and those in her community who are familiar with the same experiences and vocabulary. Both “Edges” and “Shrinkage” were unfamiliar terms to myself and the majority of my students, demonstrating Myriah’s expertise in a particular literacy skill—writing about and articulating terminology and issues related to natural hair—unknown to most in our shared classroom space. Myriah’s hair and her knowledge of her hair were part of her identity.

Figure 4.4: Myriah’s Zine Pages 1 & 2

Myriah demonstrated in her zine frustration towards her peers and others unfamiliar with her identity as a young Black woman with natural hair. Her page dedicated to “Petters” (Figure
4.5) was the most obvious attempt at pushing against inappropriate behavior she had experienced, where others potentially ignorant of appropriate cultural behavior would touch Myriah’s hair without permission. This pushback might have demonstrated Myriah’s sense of authority and agency. When Myriah writes, “I’m not an animal,” she positioned herself in opposition to the notion her hair resembles that of animals and therefore should not be touched as someone might touch or pet an animal. Myriah’s lived experience or narrative was much different than that of many people she encountered in her own observation (Davies & Harré, 1990). Her position assumed many of the people she has met do not understand the sense of degradation experienced when someone who was not Black assumed they could touch Myriah’s hair. No matter how true those assumptions might be Myriah’s experiences have framed both this aspect of her identity and agency as they played out in my classroom.

![Figure 4.5: Myriah’s Zine Pages 3 & 4](image-url)
Zine making became an opportunity for Myriah to explore her lived experience, express one aspect of her identity as a young Black girl with natural hair, and to be an agent in my classroom. Myriah expressed this to a degree in our final interview where she explained, “I think [zines] are kind of like a way to express yourself easier or be heard” (Myriah, interview, 05/16/2016). This was but one aspect to Myriah’s identity and still only showed a limited view into her sense of agency. Her zine provided insights and potentially a nuance into how Myriah sees herself or even a bit as to how others have positioned her, but these insights were limited. As a researcher, I did not assume Myriah’s experience with zines was transformative, but rather the experience welcomed her to author her experiences for an authentic audience (her peers, family, and community members) going beyond myself and my physical classroom.

**Relationships: Accepting the Appreciation of Others**

Myriah struggled to understand why so many classmates, peers, and even adults appreciated her zine work. She received feedback from me, her classmates, her family, and friends that her zine was good and in some cases really impressed them. Myriah had originally conceptualized her zine late at night just hours before it was due. To her “The 7 Natural Hair Struggles” was a product of procrastination and not careful planning, which pushed against her own conception of a good student identity. Myriah may have believed that for school work to be labeled as ‘good’ it must take a lot of time, energy, and effort. As noted earlier, Myriah had a tendency to work toward perfection in her school work and desired very clear-cut expectations and directions from her writing instructors. The zine project presented an ambiguous mental space for her with which to work, resulting in a zine she perceived as rushed, which meant she may not have connected her zine work as something taking a lot of time, energy, and effort. The fact Myriah wrestled with what to do for her zine and spent hours making, scraping, and then
remaking her zine demonstrated to me that she did indeed put in time, energy, and effort into her zine. She was thoughtful in her approach. Even if the final, physical product was produced in an hour or two in the late evening the day before it was due, Myriah had still spent hours mentally composing her work.

When Myriah first handed the zine into me, I was immediately engaged in her drawings. I remembered feeling as though they were comicstrip-worthy. I was drawn to the details in the hair on each page and her deft ability to express emotion in how she drew her avatar’s lips. One of the better examples of her avatar emoting is on her page dedicated to “Straightening” (Figure 4.6). Her initial avatar clearly expressed satisfaction with how the practice of straightening should have turned out, while her second avatar on the page clearly expressed disappointment and maybe even frustration. I was drawn to how she expressed her experiences with hair in a relatable and accessible way, especially considering her hair is outside of the personal experiences I have had.
Myriah’s drawings were certainly valued by me, but they were also valued by those around her. When I inquired into how she felt her zine turned out, she exclaimed, “Actually really good. I really liked it. I gave it to my sister last night and she loved it. She was, ‘Oh my God! I’m going to tell all my friends,’ and I was like, ‘What?’” (Myriah, interview, 05/16/2016). Myriah’s shock to hear her sister’s comment on loving the zine and wanting to share it was genuine. Myriah was also surprised by her peers’ reaction to her zine, but she expressed enjoying the their reaction,

I think that people liked it, but I thought, “Ugh, nobody’s going to care about this zine or what I wrote about” and I was really nervous. But then people were like, “Oh, this is actually really cool.” I thought people were going to be like, “Why are you putting this in my face?” But for whatever reason they actually liked it. They said, “Yeah, I liked it a
lot. Can I have a copy?” And I was like, “Oh, they think it’s good.” People liked it. (Myriah, interview, 05/16/2016).

While Myriah was once skeptical of even attempting to make a zine, she ended the experience being praised for her literacy skills both inside and outside my classroom. Myriah, her family, and her peers expressed what Noddings (2003, 2012) defines as reciprocity toward one another. There is a mutual recognition and appreciation in their responses to Myriah, her zine, and one another.

Myriah, through reciprocity, learned to appreciate how her peers and how I appreciated her. By the end of the project, Myriah was having lengthier conversations with her peers in the class than she ever had before, explaining when she saw her classmates, “I just went, ‘Hey,’ and they’re like, ‘Oh my god! How are you?’” (Myriah, interview, 05/16/2016). These encounters surprised her considering she expressed she would not have necessarily expressed such a genuine response to her classmates. She was a bit befuddled as to why they cared. One of the instances that highlighted her peers and my own appreciation for her and her zine came at the end of the zinecast,

M: I’m not an artist, artist, so I just drew what I could.

T: Who thinks she did a pretty good job?

Class: (Clapping while one student yelled, “I do!”)

T: I have no shame in telling you this, and I’ve told you before, this is one of my favorite zines this entire time, so now that you actually finished the zine and you’ve heard my comments about it and friends, are you glad you did it?

M: Yeah
T: Okay, yeah, I’m just excited for you because I thought this turned out really well.
(Myriah, Teacher, & Class, video, 04/28/2016).

Myriah’s own expression in reaction to the evolution of our relationship by the end of the project came in our final interview where she simply said, “Oh yeah, you’re a great teacher” (Myriah, interview, 05/16/2016). Myriah did not necessarily form deep and potentially long-lasting relationships during the project; however, Myriah did experience caring relationships and forms of affirmation from me and her peers, which she in turn reciprocated.

Summary

The case of Myriah presents the complexity of identity and agency negotiation in the ELA classroom. Myriah presented herself as both a dedicated student and a student struggling to stay attentive and accepting of the tasks given to her by authoritative figures. She demonstrated oppositional agency when conflicted over the positioning she desired versus the positioning others in authority gave her. This included opposition towards her peers at times. Myriah, consciously or unconsciously, created a zine that symbolically cut across the relational positioning she had experienced with me and her peers (Holland et al., 2003). While Myriah took for granted how her zine reflected her lived experience, most of her classmates and I who were not part of her culturally figured world (Holland et al., 2003), a world most of us could never enter—that of having natural hair—were given a window into her world. Myriah helped to build emerging relationships among her and her peers by making and sharing her zine (Noddings, 2012), which was an unexpected consequence for Myriah.
**Hwan: The Case of an Involved Asian Student and Gamer Eluding Meaningful Participation**

Hwan was a 14-year-old second-generation Korean-American, male student at Lake Heights High School who was a self-professed gamer and YouTube watcher, balancing his additional identities as a focused student and athlete. His identity as a gamer and YouTuber were carefully curated in a way that only his close friends knew how much time he spent playing and viewing games being played. The adults in his life rarely, if ever, got a glimpse at this positioning. Instead, Hwan maintained an outward identity as a hardworking, focused student and tennis player.

Hwan was often playful and open to new experiences during class. Outwardly, he wanted both his teachers and peers to see him as the hardworking student as well as creative in his pursuits of completing assignments. His playfulness could sabotage his curation of his focused student identity. I observed Hwan’s regular pursuit to balance his positioning where I found him at times focused on a classroom task, while other times I found him telling jokes with tablemates or distracting himself and others with imaginative stories or interesting facts he had recently learned.

As an ELA student, Hwan expressed he felt he had a good relationship with his former ELA teachers, and identified himself as “I’m not a bad person, but I’m not the quiet and like really good person. I’m just there” (Hwan, interview, 03/16/2016). He followed up by expressing he enjoyed joking with his former ELA teachers, so he had a chance to get to know them as people and went on to claim “as you make jokes and as other teachers make jokes it reveals more of their personality and I like that about them. And that's how I strive to get closer to people” (Hwan, interview, 03/16/2016). Hwan looked to relate to others using humor and appeared to
judge other teachers’ personalities based on their level of humor. If anything, Hwan recognized he responded best to his teachers when humor was tied into the relationship. In terms of his identity an individual and not just a student, Hwan appeared to want to position himself neutrally. He did not want to be seen as ‘bad’—although, Hwan never defined what ‘bad’ as a label meant to him—but he was okay with being seen as flawed as well. Hwan appeared to associate ‘good’ behavior with sitting still and being quiet; based on his comments above, he pushed against others view of him as still and quiet. Still, Hwan enjoyed being recognized as mature. In an early conversation, Hwan mentioned he had heard he was “very outgoing from various people and then I’ve heard from multiple people that I’m a lot more mature than my age” (Hwan, interview, 03/16/2016). His identity as a mature young man was one he appeared to accept and appreciate.

While as Hwan’s teacher I recognized and welcomed his identity as a mature young man based on our prior interactions, I was surprised to learn of Hwan’s positioning as a gamer and YouTuber. In our first interview, Hwan explained, “I like gaming and I also like playing tennis as a hobby. And then I like watching YouTube” (Hwan, interview, 03/16/2016). This included watching others play games on YouTube as well as interesting shorts on the sciences—“It goes along with my interests, like MinutePhysics. . . philosophy, like gamers, like PewDiePie (Hwan, interview, 03/16/2016). Hwan’s YouTube viewership and gaming were aspects of his identity he did not show explicitly in the classroom, so when he explained he spent about six hours a week watching YouTube and an additional two hours playing computer games, I was a bit beguiled. I realized what I knew of Hwan as of that first interview was truly only what he showed on the outside when he walked into my classroom every day. Outwardly, Hwan talked about two primary topics during class—his classes and tennis. Physically, Hwan wore jeans or shorts and a
t-shirt that was either emblazoned with the school’s tennis logo or the logo of a national brand such as Hollister or American Eagle, and he always had on his black rimmed glasses.

Davies and Harré (1990) theorize a person can change from one form of self to another based on changes in discourse, causing contradictions in that person’s storyline, and Holland et al. (2003) discuss how a person may improvise their positioning in various settings, contexts, and discourse. During our interview, Hwan demonstrated these concepts in the function of agency and identity. In a public setting, Hwan presented himself as the focused student and dedicated tennis player. In our private discussions, Hwan revealed his identity as a gamer and YouTube watcher to me. The change in setting—a private interview in my office versus the classroom in front of classmates—might have contributed to his change in identity expression.

When asked to elaborate on his admiration for gaming, Hwan explained his brother got him into playing games, and he loved role-playing games (RPGs), “because I get to develop and create my own character. And then I like, I get to decide what happens and what doesn't happen” (Hwan, interview, 03/16/2016). Hwan’s affinity for RPGs and character creation was connected to the flexibility he had acting vicariously through his characters and helping to determine the character’s fate, explaining, “you get to choose what happens to each and every character, either every character dies or every character survives. And you can determine where each path goes and at the slightest chance, like if I just do this one minor thing it seems insignificant but then it will change the whole story” (Hwan, interview, 03/16/2016). Hwan appeared to relish the ability to take up a virtual identity and explore that character’s options, knowing each decision will have a consequence, or as he described it, “a butterfly effect.”

Hwan’s viewership of YouTube took place entirely out of school hours. He clarified, “I don't [watch YouTube at school] because I feel like I have more stuff to do. Like if I’m at school
I feel like I need to do some schoolwork, if I have to do something (Hwan, interview, 03/16/2016). This was an example of the contradictory storyline Davies and Harré (1990) posit. Hwan strongly identified privately as a YouTube enthusiast, but he drew a line at when and where he would participate in viewing YouTube videos. Hwan prioritized school work at least at school over his interest in gaming and YouTube as he found school and his other interests in conflict of the identities he most wanted teachers and peers to see. This was not for a lack of desire to pursue his identity as a gamer and YouTuber. When I asked him if he had ever considered making his own YouTube channel and broadcasting his own gaming experiences with others, Hwan explained, “Yeah, I’ve thought about it. I’ve thought about it a few times because I’ve always wondered. I’m like, it seems so interesting and so fun doing it but then it's also so risky because if I’m like bored or if I don’t get enough users or something happens (Hwan, interview, 03/16/2016). For Hwan, the risk was not worth the potential reward to further explore his own identity or agency in that particular space.

Because of the hesitation Hwan expressed in his initial interview, the fact Hwan did not choose to make a zine about gaming or YouTube channels may not be surprising. As explained in the upcoming section, Hwan chose instead to create a zine dedicated to his admiration for and participation in tennis—a well-documented aspect of his expressed identity in my classroom. Hwan’s choice was a reminder that simply providing students with the option to participate and explore their interests and unique literacy practices did not guarantee students will use the opportunity as an educator might anticipate.

When considering Hwan forewent using his zine to express his out-of-school interests, Hwan’s reaction to the opportunity might not be surprising as well. In our final interview, I asked Hwan how he thought the project helped him personally. Hwan replied, “I don't think it did help
me. For me it was a fun, creative project, but it was just still a project (Hwan, interview, 05/10/2016). This sentiment was reiterated in his written reflection on the project he had recorded just days prior—“To me the zine felt like an assignment, but don’t get me wrong it was interesting and fun” (Hwan, reflection, 05/06/2016). Hwan positions himself as a student intent on meeting the expectations of an assignment crafted by the teacher, rather than a person exploring interests and his identities outside of the classroom. Tennis player and tennis enthusiast were well documented aspects to Hwan’s identity and ones he curated for his teachers and peers to see daily. This was not meant to imply Hwan did not have a meaningful experience engaging in the project and participating in a classroom framed by the tenets of participatory culture and care ethics. On the contrary, the following two sections extrapolate on other aspects of his experience, demonstrating Hwan’s development of a strong sense of community he felt with his peers and me, his teacher. While he chose not to use a zine to explore any new or different identity trajectories openly with his peers, Hwan did express feelings of closeness to his peers and teacher in the ELA classroom by the end of his zine making and sharing experience.

**Identity & Agency: Zine Making as a Means to Participate in Sanctioned School Literacies**

Hwan was immediately open to zine making. Hwan demonstrated regularly he was up to try anything new in a classroom and would follow my lead. His ample amount of personal interests provided Hwan with several initial ideas for making a zine. While he did avoid using the zines to explore his interests in gaming and YouTube, he did use his first attempt at zine making to explore his interest in quantum mechanics. On the first day of zine making in class, Hwan sat next to Clark and almost immediately dove into the task, using each page of his zine to describe various theories and philosophies embedded in quantum mechanics. Clark stalled most
of the class as he struggled first with a concept for a zine and later making a perfect cover. All the while, Hwan locked into his topic of choice for that day.

Ultimately, Hwan did not finish his quantum mechanics zine and instead created his zine on “Why You Should Join Tennis” (Figure 4.7). Much like he had avoided using his zine to explore his out-of-school interests and literacy practices, Hwan avoided his interest in quantum mechanics. Hwan’s explanation of why he moved away from this interest is important too. In our final interview, Hwan clarified, “The assignment was to use pathos, ethos and logos and to deliver that. And then if I was going to write a zine I’d use the physics thing because I feel like that would give more insight to me as a person because of my interest, but the assignment would best fit if I did tennis because it would include ethos and logos (Hwan, interview, 05/10/2016). Not only did his comments provide a reason for forgoing using quantum mechanics as a topic, they might provide insight to why he avoided using his other interests as topics. Hwan was ultimately concerned with his performance on the assignment, so he chose the topic he felt he could best meet the requirements asked of him. Hwan made his choice based on his position as a student rather than any other positioning. Hwan’s choice was a reminder that the contexts and social forces found in a classroom cannot be taken for granted or ignored. Hwan’s sociohistorical experiences in school may have reinforced what was expected and accepted in the classroom space, which may have been perpetuated over time, influencing Hwan’s decision to choose a logical and safe topic for the project (Street & Street, 1995).

Just as importantly, my construction of the assignment to have to include elements of rhetoric appeared to curtail Hwan’s willingness to explore his personal interests. I aided in positioning Hwan to take up a topic he felt he could most comfortably execute my expectations in the assignment, which did not include his interest, or identity, as a gamer or YouTube watcher.
Hwan’s explanation of why he chose tennis as his topic over his other out-of-school interests was a valuable reminder of how complex and intertwined social actions and positioning were to his decision-making in my classroom. In Hwan’s case, his unsanctioned literacy practices were not openly explored in my classroom.

Figure 4.7: Hwan’s Zine Cover

Hwan’s use of his zine making experience was unexpected in the sense he used it to further position himself as a student who can meet the teacher’s expectations on an assignment.
Rather than use the opportunity to bring in his out-of-school literacy practices, Hwan used his zine to ensure he met the assigned constraints I put on his work. Thus, Hwan perpetuated his use of the sanctioned literacy practices with which he was most familiar. Schools often reward adhesion to community and social expectations of what counts as literacy (Street & Street, 1995). Hwan’s decision to use the zine to construct the best result for himself in how he might be assessed demonstrated his own belief in such a reward system.

While a surprising revelation of Hwan’s zine making experience, his decision to make a zine on a familiar topic that he could leverage for a desired grade still provided him with enjoyment and a chance to participate. In our last interview, Hwan explained, “When I chose to make my zine about tennis I thought about how much fun tennis was, and I wanted everyone to have or share the same experience (Hwan, reflection, 05/06/2016). Hwan’s motivations, then, were not entirely grade inspired. Hwan wanted to share his enjoyment of the game with his peers, and he claimed, “I found enjoyable the fact that I can write something about what I like and then it's like tennis and that's what I enjoy” (Hwan, interview, 05/10/2016). This appeared to contrast his earlier sentiment that zine making was just an assignment. Here, I should note the potential conflict I presented to Hwan being both the researcher and his teacher. His explanation of enjoying sharing his love of tennis might have been a way for him to avoid disappointing me and assuring me my assignment was worth doing. This, however, is speculation as I am unsure why in the same final interview Hwan both professed zine making was just an assignment, but also one he enjoyed because he was able to share tennis with others.

Hwan saw value in using a zine as a new medium for expression of ideas and as a tool for communication. There may have been something more authentic about the zine making than the traditional essay writing he had grown accustomed to throughout his formal schooling. When I
asked him why he chose to make a zine to express his understanding of rhetoric rather than the essay that was offered, Hwan replied, “I wanted to express myself more rather than just writing, because all my life I’ve writing essay, essay, essay. And I wanted to be in something that’s more innovative and I would learn a lot more from this than just writing an article (Hwan, interview, 05/10/2016). Hwan expressed he learned more from making a zine than writing an essay. Something about the experience helped him retain the rhetorical strategies and provided him a way to express that understanding in what he considered as an innovative manner.

Much like he predicted, Hwan’s zine captured the primary function of each rhetorical strategy. For the opening page (Figure 4.8), Hwan expressed, “I wanted to include something that was like bold, something that would relate to students in the first few pages. And I’ve heard about Ethos. The first page was about Ethos (Hwan, interview, 05/10/2016). He used his physical education teacher’s knowledge as a way to establish credibility. He then immediately used food as a form of pathos to entice his audience to consider the benefits of being a tennis player at the school. Hwan quite successfully utilized the unschooled medium introduced to him to support my expectations of the use of schooled literacy—in this case rhetorical strategies—in his final product. Ultimately, Hwan fully participated in the experience from beginning to end. The value he found in the endeavor came from his option to choose his topic and the opportunity to share his passion for tennis with others.
Interestingly, Hwan’s participation in zine making might also provide evidence for his experiencing a sense of collective agency (Ahearn, 2001; Holland et al., 2003; Jenkins, 2013). Hwan received a relatively warm and encouraging response to his zine by his peers and other teachers. In our final interview, Hwan reflected on the what he enjoyed about handing his zine out to others,

I found it rewarding the most about like how people look, like the expressions that both students and teachers would give me like after I give it to them. They're like, “I liked it. It was really interesting.” It was just like, “Wow! I never knew that you’d like this,” (Hwan, interview, 05/10/2016).

Figure 4.8: Hwan’s Zine Pages 1 & 2
The sense of collective agency Hwan experienced came from working with his tennis coach and having a shared sense with his classmates’ appreciation of one another’s work. Hwan explained, “I gave one of my [zines] to Mr. P, and he was really surprised and shocked and he really liked it” (05/10/2016). Mr. P. liked the zine enough to use it as a recruiting tool for his team at the end of the school year. Hwan and Mr. P partnered together to use Hwan’s zine as a way to explain the benefits of trying out for the tennis team. Jenkins (2013) explains collective agency in a participatory culture refers to people working together towards a shared goal and common interest. While Mr. P. did not help Hwan make the zine, he saw value in the tool and worked to help Hwan use it as Hwan had intended—a zine on why people should join the tennis team, a result both Hwan and Mr. P. wanted. The following section explains Hwan’s collective agency with his classmates in detail.

**Relationships: Appreciating the Classroom as a Community**

Hwan found himself deeply appreciating the passion many of his peers showed to write about and argue for their interests through the zine making process. He also found a sense of community among his peers and teacher through the experience. Hwan spent most of his time working at the same table as Clark, Nylah, Jordan, and Ana, so he regularly interacted with these students and observed their zines’ taking shape over time. When reflecting on his observations of his tablemates’ work, Hwan clarified,

I don't know, it was really, I thought it was interesting the fact that I can see other people's work, and like how like Nylah and Ana they were part of my group and they’re like in my field of vision and I can see what they were writing and like how interesting what they did was (Hwan, interview, 05/10/2016).
Noddings (1988), when framing the benefit of students working in small groups, argued, “The object is to develop a caring community through modeling, dialogue, and practice” (p. 223). Hwan had developed appreciation for the contributions of his tablemates and in turn might have developed a care ethic towards them. He related his appreciation and care for his tablemates to a common literary theme the class had discussed earlier in the year,

What's the phrase about books and it talks about how…? “Don’t judge the book by its cover.” And I learned that like some people, you won't expect to them have this as, for them to have this thing but they do. And you'd never expect it because they never talk about it, or they don't want to talk about it, but they express it through their writing. And that's how I learned more about them and just more about some people. There’s more about, yeah, just people in general (Hwan, interview, 05/10/2016).

Hwan felt he discovered aspects of his peers he could not envision without seeing their identities unfold in their zines. He appreciated there was more to his tablemates than what he had first assumed. Hwan spoke to how this appreciation for others’ work shaped his own mindset when working, “It made me want to strive to like make my zine more, like, because I saw how devoted Nylah was. . . [she] took a lot of time and [she] learned a lot when doing it. I might be able to do it too” (Hwan, interview, 05/10/2016). Nylah inspired Hwan to want to improve his own zine, and he cared about how his own work might be taken up by his peers in comparison to someone like Nylah’s work.

Hwan’s appreciation did not end with just his tablemates, however. A profound moment for Hwan appeared to be when he learned another student in the class, Samantha, had autism. Samantha had dedicated her zine to autism awareness and dispelling myths and misinformation about autism. Hwan was one of the students who appeared to have misconceptions of autism, “I
would never have figured her to have autism because she's like a smart and like bold student and like she’s outgoing, she's like nice, so I never expected it” (Hwan, interview, 05/10/2016). This revelation about Samantha shifted his understanding of autism and of Samantha potentially drawing him into a stronger sense of community with her.

Even his experience with Anya documented earlier, appeared to draw him closer to his classmates. Anya’s willingness to speak to Hwan outside of our classroom space to forgive him of the misstep he took in class and his own willingness to admit he had made the misstep meant there was no long-term tension between the two. While the two did not become friends or spend extended time together, they appeared to show respect to one another as the school year drew to a close. During the end-of-year speeches, Anya took a moment to publicly forgive Hwan and tell him they “were all good.”

Evidence of Hwan developing a strong sense of community in the classroom came from his end-of-the-year speech. With a few tears and a genuine tremor in his voice, Hwan addressed his classmates,

My goal was to make a 4.0 this year and even though I didn’t do it. I achieved more than I ever could have. At the beginning of the year, I was in it for myself. All I would think about is how I could change my year and how I could change my grade. But now I think about this class. I can’t. . . there are no words to express that (Hwan, video, 05/20/2016). Hwan clearly felt he cared about the class and in turn felt cared for as he expressed a change in how he saw only himself to how he saw his classmates beside him.

Finally, Hwan also demonstrated an appreciation for me as his teacher in his end-of-the-year speech,
H: The first time I met Mr. Jones, I’ll be honest, I did not like him all that much. I saw him as a by-the-book teacher until my schedule got changed and then I was into his class. And then he just changed my thinking and way of life. He showed me valuable lessons and he challenged me so hard. He made me into the person I am today, and I can’t thank him more for that. Because—

T: I got you, bro.

H: So hard not to cry.

T: You broke the tension, man. You’re good. You’re good. You got this.

H: He’s challenged me so hard and he’s made me such a different person. (Hwan, video, 05/20/2016).

To provide context, Hwan had entered my classroom two weeks after the fall semester had begun, so he was unfamiliar with my teaching style or expectations. Hwan appeared to change his mind about my role in his life. The label of “by-the-book teacher” in his speech was meant to imply a sense of rigidness on the part of the teacher—a lack of reciprocity. What Hwan felt he found out instead was my attempts to challenge him were meant to show my care for him. My use of the word “bro” as a way to address him was of importance as well. While subconscious in my use, I clearly positioned Hwan as someone I wanted to support in a brotherly manner. In his moment of vulnerability in front of the class, I wanted him to know I supported his feelings and respected his willingness to share them. Addressing him informally as “bro” and “man” provides a snapshot of how I had tried to position my relationship with him as one of caring and not strictly as one of authority.

In reflection, Hwan’s experience in the classroom demonstrated an opportunity to grow in caring relationship with his peers as well as me as his teacher. These caring relationships
might have been connected to his self-ascribed maturity and openness to new experiences. Whatever the exact reasons, Hwan reciprocated the caring feelings I attempted to show him—he clearly felt cared for—and in turn he presented what appeared to be a caring approach toward his peers.

**Summary**

The case of Hwan’s was an example of a negotiated identity. Hwan presented himself outwardly as studious, affable, and an athlete, which was modeled in his zine. Through conversations over time, Hwan constructed his latent identity as a gamer and YouTuber—an identity he shared with only a few close friends. He protected his identity as a studious and focused student in his zine making, choosing a topic he felt he could best meet the parameters I placed on the assignment. In this regard, my assignment appeared to have constrained his identity exploration (Beach, Johnston, & Thein, 2015). Despite any constraints Hwan might have felt, he potentially found a sense of collective agency with his tennis coach, Mr. P. If nothing else, Hwan had collective agency with many of his classmates where as a group they showed care and appreciation toward one another as zine makers and individuals. He, like many others, expressed appreciation for his classmates and me as his teacher. Hwan’s relational positioning to his peers and his teacher found him in a sense of community where he both felt cared for and cared for others (Davies & Harré, 1990; Noddings, 2012).

**Jorge: The Case of an Aspirational Latino Rapper Resisting the Influence of Others**

Jorge was a 14-year-old Mexican-American male student at Lake Heights High School, customarily independent from his peers, whose deepest desire was to produce his own raps and beats as his livelihood. Jorge might be perceived by others as a quiet student. Unless otherwise told to sit elsewhere, he always sat at the table in the classroom with five other students,
including Anya, Alejandra, and Benji who were the most convivial of any other table. Jorge rarely participated in their vociferous discussions and tangents. Rather, Jorge would get lost in the music pumping from his in-ear headphones or daydreaming on his own. In his end-of-the-year speech, he rhetorically asked his tablemates if he ever said more than ten words on any given day. The consensus was he did not. In our final interview, he made it clear he did not find his tablemates distracting and instead used their lack of focus on their zines as motivation to focus more on his own and tune them out.

Jorge’s clothing style appeared to be an important aspect of his identity. He often wore white sneakers that were always in pristine condition with khaki or denim jogger pants, brilliant white t-shirt, silver chain, and black vinyl jacket with a record company’s logo emblazoned on the back, all impeccably coordinated. This aspect of Jorge’s identity could be considered what Emdin (2016) defines as neoindigenous—or an urban youth, or youth that strongly identifies with urban culture. Jorge’s attention to his own aesthetic was an important aspect of his identity; he most likely wanted his attention to detail in his clothing selection to be recognized by peers and teachers alike. His selection and coordination of his clothes may imply Jorge comes from a challenging socioeconomic background; although, Jorge did explain in an informal conversation that his parents owned a local Mexican restaurant. Whatever Jorge’s actual socioeconomic status, Emdin (2016) makes it clear, “the less engaged in modes of aesthetic expression one is, the less value and social standing one has within the neoindigenous community” (p. 163). Jorge’s attention to his own aesthetic implied his own desire to be acknowledged and respected in Lake Height High School’s own neoindigenous community—a community not really represented in my classroom. The majority of my students, while they certainly showed care for what they wore, did not give the same level of attention to the cleanliness and coordination of their dress as
Jorge did, which very well could explain why he did not readily identify with many of his peers in the class.

Much like his clothes were coordinated and carefully chosen, Jorge could also always be found with his white headphones either in or near his ears and appeared to be an extension of his clothing ensemble. If not in his ears, the headphones would rest just over the top of his earlobe. Whatever Jorge was doing, he wanted his music close and accessible. What Jorge wore was a reflection of what he liked and what he aspired to be: “I mean, I really like music. To be honest, somewhere in the future I really want to make music” (Jorge, interview, 03/18/2016). Jorge envisioned himself as either a rapper or a rap producer.

In general, Jorge viewed himself as someone who was an average student, and he identified he had strengths and weaknesses as a person, explaining in our first interview, “I wouldn't consider myself a good person or a bad person. I'm just me, you know, because no one is perfect” (Jorge, interview, 03/18/2016). As a student, Jorge demonstrated similar feelings of working just hard enough to be a step ahead in his grades. He described himself as an average student—“I kind of consider myself like in between as far as grades go, but I’m not too smart but I’m not, like, too bad either. I'm just doing enough to get myself ahead” (Jorge, interview, 03/18/2016). Jorge appeared to position himself in a neutral role devoid of conflict or kinship. He accomplished this positioning when remaining silent through most of a class period and generally keeping to himself. His peers reinforced his positioning by simply allowing Jorge to remain quiet and remained reserved from the boisterous group he sat with nearly every day. When I asked the other students in private conversations what they had learned about their peers during the project, Jorge’s name did not come up. I could only speculate from what I observed over the course of the project and my conversations with Jorge that his peers and tablemates in
the classroom knew of his career plans, so his decision to explore the history of rap in his zine was not a surprising choice.

Jorge reinforced his aspirational rapper/producer identity during our interviews. He spoke of his appreciation and enjoyment of watching a rapper build their reputation and stature from the ground up, highlighting some of those rappers on the back cover of his zine (Figure 4.9). Jorge explained, “I like rap, I’m not going to lie. . . . It's interesting to see like all these rappers come up from small towns and build their fan bases up and like performing at big cities. It's just fun to see that” (Jorge, interview, 03/18/2016). He connected this interest to his own attempts at rapping and its resemblance to other forms of art, continuing, “When I’m innovating it’s so interesting because I see it come together. It's just art. . . . It's basically expressing yourself, whether it's in words, whether it's in painting, or you know” (Jorge, interview, 03/18/2016). Jorge’s body language when explaining his respect for self-defined rappers and rap as an art form came across as genuine and exciting for him as he sat across from me in our interviews. Nothing else we spoke about made him sit up and smile as our discussions about rap did.
Rap enthusiast and rap creator were well established aspects of Jorge’s identity well before he entered my classroom. This identity was negotiated through his clothing, the music pumping through his headphones, and the conversations he would occasionally engage in during class. While these traits all reinforced his positioning, his actions in the classroom separated him...
from many of his peers. Jorge did not look to influence nor be influenced by his classmates. He demonstrated this position during the project by solely focusing on the task of building his zine. He would remain quiet, put in his headphones, draw or write, and occasionally use his phone to look up images of album covers and to research hip-hop albums. Jorge tuned everyone else out.

What was particularly interesting about Jorge’s ignoring his classmates was he purposefully spent the most time with the most gregarious students. When I asked Jorge what it was like to work beside his hypersocial classmates, he replied, “It wasn’t really distracting. It really just pushed me to do better because I see everyone like doing their own thing or not even working on it, or goofing off. And it just pushes me to work harder, be more focused than the group (Jorge, interview, 05/19/2016). Jorge utilized the interactions around him to motivate himself, making his zine a symbol of focus and of his desire to be the harder worker, to disassociate from his peers not making a zine (Holland et al., 2003). His drive to develop and create his zine in comparison to where he saw little or none in his tablemates might be a way Jorge was meditating his identity in my classroom.

Jorge’s situated experience in my classroom might have also influenced his decision not to engage in regular conversation with his peers. There very well could be a space and a time that Jorge engaged in continuous dialogue with others; however, my classroom was not that space nor that time. Despite my hope Jorge might engage more with his peers and develop empathetic relationships with them, my classroom space did not appear to be the space that positioned him for those relationships to be negotiated. Jorge might not have felt affiliated with the classroom or as though he was a member of the classroom community (Jenkins et al., 2009). In fact, upon closer examination of the rest of the class, none of his peers dressed as he did. As Emdin (2016) points out, others’ lack of attention to their own physical aesthetic might have signaled to Jorge
his peers did not care about what they wore and therefore might not really care much about him or his aesthetic.

Any affinity he felt toward the classroom and assignments was also tenuous at best. The kindest compliment he paid the classroom was said in his first interview, “I mean, I don't hate [the class] because, I mean, I love poetry. So I’m on for that. But it's an okay class” (Jorge, interview, 03/18/2016). Jorge appeared to affiliate more with the music he listened to than to the people in the classroom itself, and he appeared to remain true to that affiliation. His love of rap was symbolic of his personal story, but only the part of his story he allowed others to see. In sum, there was no doubt Jorge’s identity had been shaped by discourse unseen in the classroom space—he at one point mentioned his cousin’s getting him into hip-hop before he was a teenager. His choice not to engage in discourse with his peers might be part of a collective agency he resisted. Rather than engage in the zine making as a time and space for discourse with classmates, zine making became a time and space to be an agent for himself, exploring an internal dialogue rather than outward discourse.

Identity & Agency: Zine Making as a Medium to Perpetuate Identity

Due to Jorge’s quiet nature during class, I knew very little about his desire to rap and produce hip-hop. This latent identity was shown to me through Jorge’s zine making. As indicated in the previous section, many of Jorge’s classmates already knew of this identity. Had his peers not already been so familiar with this aspect of Jorge’s identity, I might have mistaken his zine making as a way of negotiating a part of himself unknown to most. In our final interview, Jorge clarified briefly his classmates already knew he loved rap and wanted to work in the music industry one day. Rather than Jorge’s zine, entitled “The Rap Year Book” (Figure 4.10), acting as a tool to explain a part of who Jorge is to his classmates, it acted as a tool that perpetuated the
identity Jorge had already established through social interactions taking place before and outside of my classroom space. This was also made clear when Jorge explained, “I enjoyed that we could, like, make it about what we wanted and that it could be something that we are passionate about” (Jorge, interview, 05/19/2016). Clearly, this suggests that Jorge did not feel he typically had opportunities in his classes to explore his passions and interests. For Jorge, zine making appeared to offer him a genuine opportunity to celebrate an unsanctioned literacy practice (Street & Street, 1995). While hip-hop lyrics and music had been used by me in my classroom before, I did not incorporate them as a regular form of literacy. This is in large part because it is a figured world (Holland et al., 2003) I had never explored or attempted to enter. Jorge read much of his world through hip-hop and rap culture. His zine making welcomed him to bring hip-hop into my classroom as a form of literacy. A small section of my post-interview with Jorge showed this,

**T:** So, I also, I mean, clearly you did your entire zine focused on the history of rap, you know, “The Rap Yearbook, man”, that’s what you came up with. Tell me a little bit of the process of deciding how you wanted that zine to come across or evolve or what it would look like when it was done?

**J:** Really… I just… I took my hobby and I turned it into like something that you people can know that I am passionate about.

**T:** Absolutely. So, I mean for instance, how much did you know about the 80s and the 90s and the 2000s before you made it?

**J:** A lot.

**T:** Okay, alright. So I just, I didn’t want to assume that you would have already known all that or if you did research while you were doing it too. So kind of a follow up question is
that, what made you make the decision that you needed to break out the early 2000s vs. like 2006 to the present, towards the present?

J: That was kind of a turning point where… You really have to listen to the music to know the difference. Especially because the lyrics were different, the music, the type of music was different when you actually grew up. (Jorge, interview, 05/19/2016)

Jorge knows rap and hip-hop. He paid attention to the nuances of lyrics and the music tracks themselves. His hip-hop literacy played out as an asset to his zine making, and in turn he sanctioned the use of the history and nuances of hip-hop for himself in the ELA classroom.

Undoubtedly, Jorge was passionate about rap, and he made clear his goal for making his zine, stating, “I took my hobby and I turned it into like something that you people can know that I am passionate about” (Jorge, 05/19/2016). Jorge used the zine to solidify and perpetuate his identity for his peers in the classroom and to make his passion clear to his intended audience—his peers. During the zinecast, I asked Jorge who he would give his zine to, to which he replied, “I’d hand this [zine] to people who haven’t heard of this genre or just friends cuz I know, I know a lot of people who write music and produce music so I got a feeling they would get a kick out of this” (Jorge, video, 04/28/2016). In an informal conversation after the zinecast was over, I asked him who he meant by giving it to people who had not heard rap before. Jorge simply replied his friends and the people he goes to school with. His comments during the zinecast also provided insight to how he positioned himself in his friendships, pointing out he had friends who write and produce music like he hoped to do. These friendships, while not present in my classroom, appeared to be important to how Jorge hoped to be positioned in the future as a writer and producer of music as well.
The design of Jorge’s zine mimicked an aesthetic often found in hip-hop and hardcore music zines. Jorge photocopied every image he used and each image was laid out purposefully, including the cover’s title situated in the middle of a long black strip in the middle of the page (Figure 4.10). The images chosen were all album covers, and their placement in the zine was determined by the decade in which the album was released. There was observable order and function to the zine’s organization. Jorge used a combination of researched information and his own prior knowledge for his text. Jorge’s design decisions were potentially informed by previous
encounters with other texts and mediums such as the organization and purpose of a traditional yearbook or taking the photocopy aesthetic from reviewing amateur zines my former students had made. Jorge might have also made his design choices based on his research or prior knowledge of the history of hip-hop. During the zinecast, I asked Jorge to explain some of his layout, to which he replied,

"I started with a NWA album cuz that’s kind of what sets everything off because before that there wouldn’t really be rap. Before, people would take funk and take that as a rap. And eventually it turned into something else, where the 90s came around and funk was still used around then but it was, um—what would you say—um, sampled in the background of music (Jorge, video, 04/28/2016)."

Clearly, Jorge at the very least designed his zine to represent the progression of rap music over time. He also made the distinct choice on the first page to have NWA represent the entirety of 80s rap (Figure 4.11). Texts are never neutral and take on different meanings when anchored to particular images (Janks, 2014). Certainly, Jorge’s zine is not neutral. His design choices and the words he chose provided a personal hierarchy of the rap artists he believed were worth featuring on each page. While several hip-hop artists became popular during the 80s, Jorge demonstrated an affinity for NWA. Consciously or unconsciously, Jorge’s design conveyed a message of how he identified with rap music and in turn how he wanted to communicate with his potential audience.
Jorge appeared to see himself represented in his zine, “It’s just, it’s just a way to see myself, allow how I can express my own thoughts in better words” (Jorge, interview, 05/19/2016). As a tool, the zine was an outlet for Jorge’s passion and expression in a medium he had not previously encountered. Jorge, however, never discussed the zine in a manner to indicate it was a powerful tool for him. He appeared to enjoy the process of making his zine as he worked on it in class everyday he was given the opportunity, so he did certainly participate and engage in expression (Jenkins et al., 2009). Still, Jorge never gave any indication the experience was in anyway transformative, which was an important reminder no particular literacy tool or
participatory opportunity guaranteed the transformation of a student’s identity or agency. If anything, participating in zine making, welcomed Jorge to engage in positioning himself to his peers and his teacher as rap enthusiast and historian—a trajectory for his identity he appeared to carefully curate.

**Relationships: Appreciating an Experience While Remaining Distant from Others**

In our last interview, Jorge expressed appreciation for what the experience of zine making might have brought to bear on his personal growth and his understanding of others, reflecting, “I learned that this, this, all this knowledge this could really help me because I want to make music. . . . I learned that everyone has their own hobby and everyone is deep… everyone is deeply passionate about something (Jorge, interview, 05/19/2016). Jorge’s words were cautious as if he was not even fully convinced the experience had helped him; however, his words still provided some insight into his lived experience in the classroom. He indicated he gained a deeper knowledge of the music he loves, and he recognized his classmates all have their own passions and hobbies. If nothing else, Jorge demonstrated an awareness of his classmates he had not acknowledged previously.

Still, Jorge remained distant from his peers. Jorge voiced few epiphanies about his peers or even himself—the quote above being one of the few—once zine making and the school year were coming to a close. He may very well have felt close to a few of his peers in class, but Jorge never expressed a feeling of closeness to anyone. The quote above from his final interview with me did show he could sympathize with his peers and appreciate their individuality. When asked about his relationship with his classmates and how any of those relationships might have changed, Jorge replied, “I mean, it didn’t really change because we, my peers, we’ve all been good friends for a long time” (Jorge, interview, 05/19/2016). If Jorge felt close to anyone in the
class, that bond existed before my class and certainly before the project. Ultimately, Jorge expressed a sense of familiarity with his peers and acknowledged them as friends. What those friendships meant to Jorge was not expressed in the data.

The distance Jorge appeared to keep between himself, his classmates, and me, his teacher, can be summed up in his end-of-the-year speech. For context, Jorge presented toward the end of the two days the class gave speeches. Prior to his speech, many students had expressed emotion when talking about the impact they felt the class had on them, how they appreciated other students in the room, or even how much they appreciated me as their ELA teacher. Jorge’s speech was the antithesis of many of his peers’ speeches. When Jorge stood behind the podium in the center of the classroom, he spoke earnestly,

I mean, [this year] was quite an experience. They say that your freshman year in high school is when you start to develop and change mentally and physically and they’re right. I remember walking into this class not knowing what to expect I just sat down and waited for what I had in store. . . I could make this entire speech about how this class changed me or changed my writing, but if I’m being god-level honest, it didn’t. . . . I learned something this year that has completely changed my perspective on school forever. It’s not even about learning anymore. It’s just about passing (Jorge, video, 05/24/2016).

If Jorge had a microphone to drop in that moment, I thought he might have dropped it as he walked away from the podium as soon as he finished his line, “It’s just about passing.” In our private conversations, Jorge expressed some appreciation for the zine making process and his peers, but in this public platform he made it clear the time he had spent in class was not transformational or particularly meaningful for him. He also expressed cynicism towards what school had felt like to him that year. This might be seen as a ‘tough guy’ persona that is seen
among hip-hop artists. An indictment like “It’s not even about learning anymore” provided the reality that a singular positive experience in a classroom cannot be expected to supersede the experiences and sociohistorical contexts that exist outside of that space. Jorge very well could have thoroughly enjoyed his experience in my classroom, including developing feelings of empathy toward his peers, but based on his private conversations with me and his public expressions, I do not have the evidence to say definitively.

**Summary**

The case of Jorge was that of the sedimented identity of a Latino, aspiring rapper negotiated and perpetuated through his zine making whose caring relationships did not visibly change over the course of the project. Past experiences, discourse, social positioning, and a number of other variables can influence someone’s identity (Holland, et al.) as well as how they interact with literacy practices both familiar and unfamiliar. Jorge presented the image of a quiet, average student, doing just enough to get ahead in his classes. While this image of him remained to a great extent, it also became more complex. Jorge was motivated to spend time designing and developing his zine as others around him procrastinated, and he pushed himself to produce a well-researched and aesthetically pleasing product. He was critical of his schooling experience and demonstrated a level of critical thinking not immediately observable when first meeting Jorge. He also demonstrated respect for his peers while remaining personally distant and even taking for granted the established relationship he already had with peers he had gone to school with for years. Finally, on the surface, Jorge appeared sure of his identity. He conveyed a sense of knowing what he was passionate about, what he believed about school, and how he related to his classmates.
Final Summary

Each case presented in this chapter—Anya, Myriah, Hwan, and Jorge—provided valuable insight into the possible trajectories a student’s identities, agency, and relationships may take when the ELA classroom is purposefully framed with the tenets of participatory culture and care ethics. Each student performed a student identity as well as identities outside of the school and classroom. Anya and Myriah both positioned themselves as good students based on their former experiences in the ELA classroom and their perceived efforts inside and outside of class and the desired perception each hoped to achieve with me, their ELA teacher. Hwan and Jorge positioned themselves as students who did what was necessary to achieve an acceptable grade in the ELA classroom and did not claim to be good or bad students exclusively. In spaces outside my classroom, each student accepted other socially positioned identities that they brought, at least partially, into the classroom. Anya strongly identified as a soccer athlete; Myriah as a singer and church volunteer; Hwan as a gamer and YouTube watcher; and Jorge as a rap/hip-hop lover and enthusiast.

While not an explicit focus of the study, how Myriah and Anya took up the task of zine making versus how Hwan and Jorge took zine making indicates there may be important differences in how genders explore identity and agency in adolescence. Specifically, both Myriah and Anya appeared to welcome being more vulnerable in front of their peers and their teacher, taking on topics in their zines that were not explicitly discussed or explored in the classroom. Both young women were ultimately willing to expose a part of themselves to a wider audience even though both at some point showed hesitation to do so. Hwan and Jorge on the other hand appeared to purposefully forgo sharing a more intimate part of themselves with their peers and
teacher; rather, the two young men took on topics in their zines that their peers would readily recognize about them as an established part of who they were perceived to be.

Each student participants’ time making zines in my classroom was meant to welcome each student an opportunity to explore these and other identities further, and each took this opportunity up differently. Anya wrestled with publicly identifying herself as an anti-bullying advocate as well as an advocate to discredit racial stereotypes. She used her zine as a way to explore her identity as an advocate without exposing more of herself than she desired to among her peers. Myriah, after talking herself out of the topic and then talking herself back into it, explored her identity as a young Black woman negotiating natural hair, taking for granted how few of her peers understood her lived experience before sharing her zine. Hwan purposefully avoided using his zine to further explore his identity as a gamer and YouTuber and instead continued to curate an identity he had previously positioned himself in and others had accepted of him being an avid lover and player of tennis. Jorge used his zine to perpetuate his identity as a rap/hip-hop enthusiast, but also established himself as a bit of a hip-hop historian and a bit of a tough guy, claiming he dislikes school.

Finally, the social interactions and acts of sharing their zines welcomed each student to negotiate and explore their relationships with their classmates and their teacher. Through my intentional framing of my classroom as a space where I attempted regularly and consistently show genuine care for my students, each student took up relationships with me and their peers in various similar and differing ways. Anya, Myriah, and Hwan each expressed they felt cared for by me and in turn reciprocated that care toward me. Whereas, Jorge did not express any elevated feelings of care toward me or that he felt I had shown any particular care toward him. Anya and Hwan expressed that they felt closer to their classmates and felt connected to them personally,
having learned about their classmates’ passions, interests, and feelings. Myriah demonstrated surprise by the level of affection her peers showed toward her zine work and her personally; however, she did not express she felt closer to any of her classmates. Jorge positioned his relationships with his peers as generic, already-established friendships and did not express a sense of closeness of community with his peers or with me as his teacher.

These cases provided ample data to discuss and have major implications for the ELA classroom as a space for identity, agency, and relationship negotiation. In the proceeding chapter, I provided a cross-analysis of these cases in order to discuss these results and their implications further.
CHAPTER 5
CONCLUSIONS, DISCUSSION, & IMPLICATIONS

Introduction

In this concluding chapter, I begin with summarizing my results, and then proceed to link my conclusions to identity and agency studies concerning adolescents. Next, I discuss the results in relation to the larger theoretical contexts of participatory culture (Jenkins et al., 2009), unsanctioned literacy practices (Street & Street, 1995), and care ethics (Noddings, 1988)—all of which have sociocultural underpinnings. Finally, I consider the limitations of my study, reflect on pedagogical implications, and offer future recommendations for research.

This collective case study is meant to explore how four students negotiated their identities, agency, and relationships as they were situated within their suburban ELA classroom framed with the tenets of participatory culture and an intentional care ethic. The study examines what identities are fostered, constituted, or are suppressed as well as what exercise in agency, if any, the cases demonstrated. It also investigates in what ways relationships within the ELA classroom are fostered, negotiated, strained, or may remain static. I also question how students negotiate identity when unsanctioned literacy practices are welcomed into the ELA classroom and how those negotiations of identity, agency, and relationships welcome opportunities for expression and engagement in more traditionally sanctioned literacy practices.

Summary of Results & Conclusions

The case studies in the previous chapter depicted each participant as a unique participant in my ELA classroom—each exploring their identities, agency, and relationships through zine making and discourse. As I have already acknowledged their individuality and individual experiences, in this next section, I summarize the results based on patterns implicated from the
four cases’ relationships among one another and their peers as they used, or did not use, unsanctioned school literacy practices while addressing my research questions. I define these patterns through a cross-analysis of themes implied within each case individually through open coding. I use cross-analysis to compare these codes and themes across all four cases and their experiences as extrapolated from the data inductively.

In the following section, I compare each case’s experience in order to show differing perspectives on identity, agency, and relationship trajectories in the ELA classroom. I use these comparisons to help me draw conclusions to how each case’s experience speaks to how these students negotiated their identities, agency, and relationships as they were situated in my ELA classroom.

**How Do Students Negotiate Their Identities and Exercise Agency?**

The majority of my research in this study focused on participants’ use of zines as a tool for identity and agency negotiation. The purpose of the zine making as a tool was to welcome any potential unschooled literacy practices (Street & Street, 1995) the participants used outside of the ELA classroom into the ELA classroom. My welcoming of unschooled literacy practices into my classroom provided me an option to frame the zine project with the tenets of participatory culture in hopes participants would explore their identities readily if provided the opportunity. The concept included lowering barriers for students to express themselves as artists and civil participants, welcoming their personal expertise into their work, providing opportunities to share their work, and encouraging them to care about one another’s zines (Jenkins et al., 2009). The following sections explore the results from a cross-analysis of the cases in the study and other student-participants as they took up, resisted, or even rejected zine making as a means to negotiate their identities and agency.
**Negotiating Identity in the ELA Classroom.**

In order to provide opportunities for students to express themselves, draw upon their expertise, share their work, and care about one another’s work, there were large segments of time in class dedicated to participants making zines. All students, including the participants, had no limits to the topics of their zines and were encouraged to focus on personal interests. One constraining factor of the zine project was the necessity for students to utilize their knowledge of rhetorical strategies within their zines (See Appendix B). The requirement was meant to help ensure students were provided the opportunity to explore a standard required by Lake Heights High School 9th grade ELA curriculum. The participants all had tablemates with whom they interacted with daily, and they were provided the opportunity to talk freely amongst their tablemates about their work and their lives. Weekly, the participants and the rest of the class were asked to share their zine work with one another. There were also several occasions students were asked to share their work with students whom they did not sit near or interact with regularly.

While the end product of a zine was predetermined by me as their teacher, students chose their topic and the design of their zine. The zines I used as models for the class were all physical and were either made from a single sheet of paper, creating a mini-zine, or out of several sheets of paper folded over and stapled together. The topics covered in the example zines ranged from prior student-generated zines focused on pushing against stereotypes, love of video games, original poetry, and experimental narrative writing to more professionally published zines with high quality, glossy covers focused on short prose, comic strips, and survival guides. Within those zines former students as well as zine authors I did not know explored tensions with race, social media addiction, the trauma of adolescence, and how-to guides for when someone might
be lost in the wilderness. The zines sizes ranged from the size of the palm of a person’s hand to full-sized sheets of copy paper. Myriah and Hwan chose to create mini-zines, while Anya and Jorge created half-sheet-of-paper zines. No student in the class who chose to create a zine made an electronic zine, preferring their creations to take physical form.

Of the 26 participants, only two did not make a zine at all—Benji and Tim. Benji chose to do the alternative written assignment instead of making a zine for reasons I did not capture in my data collection, while Tim had several stops and starts in an attempt to make a zine about baseball, but he never produced a final product. Just like Benji, I was unable to capture Tim’s reasoning in my data. Still, the zines all other students created covered an array of personal interests or personal features of the students, ranging from explaining the reality of being an introvert to what autism is and is not to the benefits of social media to issues with high school hallway etiquette to women’s lacrosse needing to be as physical as men’s lacrosse. My four case participants’ personal explorations in their zines were no different.

When comparing Anya, Myriah, Hwan, and Jorge, each created zines that touched on an intimate aspect of how they positioned themselves or how they felt they were positioned by others. There is an implied vulnerability for each my case participants as they made conscious or unconscious choices to produce zines that constructed identities foreign to me and their classmates or constructed identities familiar to us. Each case participant had to weigh the risks involved with sharing an aspect of themself.

Myriah, Hwan, and Jorge positioned themselves as experts or at the very least informed authors of their chosen topics. Myriah’s expertise was founded in her lived experience as a Black young woman who purposefully maintained natural hair. She was able to speak to the difficulties of such maintenance because the difficulties were intimately tied to her daily social interactions
at home, church, and school. Hwan, too, drew from personal experience as a tennis player, extrapolating from his own positive experiences playing the sport. Jorge’s expertise was founded in his lived experience as a Hispanic male with a strong affinity for hip-hop, urban culture as well as the research he conducted for his zine. Anya positioned herself as an advocate based on her lived experience. Anya understood from personal experiences the realities and consequences of racism directed toward her family. Each participant demonstrated negotiating their social positionalities reflective of what Davies and Harré (1990) deem the multiplicities of ‘self.’ Each student appeared familiar with social categories they felt applied to them (e.g. Anya and Myriah as Black females and Hwan and Jorge as males), and imagined themselves positioned in particular categories while dismissing others (e.g. Myriah as a Black female with natural hair, not a Black female who treats her hair). They also recognized characteristics of themselves that located them in subclasses of dichotomous categories (e.g. Anya seeing the world as someone who has experienced being a Black female who has been racially stereotyped versus someone who has not experienced being racially stereotyped).

As discussed briefly at the end of chapter four, Myriah, Anya, Jorge, and Hwan’s gendered positioning of female and male appeared important to how each expressed an aspect of their identity. Myriah and Anya demonstrated vulnerability as they narrated their experiences with time-consuming hair care and experiences with bullying respectively. Neither of these topics had been previously discussed and presented to the class. Both young women took a risk by exposing an inner part of themselves they did not readily share with others. Jorge and Hwan essentially did the opposite and stuck to topics that expressed a part of their identities that were already well documented in the classroom. This implies females may be more apt to take a risk to share more intimate aspects of their identity with other peers than males may be. As I point
out in an upcoming section, this may be one trajectory future research concerning identity and agency could go in order to better understand how gender plays a role in identity and relationship exploration in secondary classrooms.

Ultimately, there was evidence of Anya, Myriah, Hwan, and Jorge each negotiated an aspect of their identity in their zine projects. In the case of Jorge, an aspect of his identity was perpetuated and reinforced. His classmates knew of his proclivity for rap music. Jorge appeared to have used his zine to reinforce his identity as a rap enthusiast. Jorge’s classmates supported and acknowledged this identity. Jorge was able to reflexively position himself and he welcomed being positioned as a rap historian and enthusiast by his peers and teacher (Davies & Harré, 1990).

Hwan also reinforced his identity as a tennis player, but not for the same reasons Jorge reinforced a part of his own identity. In interviews, Hwan expressed a desire to meet the requirements of the classroom task. So he chose what he knew and was comfortable with, forgoing the opportunity to position his identity differently to his peers. His interest in quantum physics and unconventional science were curtailed by a stronger desire to position himself as an able student who met a teacher’s expectations. Hwan felt positioned by me as his teacher to conform to my expectations and accommodated that positioning.

Anya negotiated how important fighting stereotypes was for her. She appeared to create an identity as an advocate not previously demonstrated in front of her peers. While she distanced her personal experiences with racism and stereotypes from her zine, the racial tensions she recognized in the media and in our classroom appeared to provoke her to identify as a person who wanted to advocated for tolerance and rallied against stereotypes, especially when they were informed by misinformation associated with race. Anya had clearly been positioned by others in
the past who accepted and perpetuated stereotypes of Black people. While she very well may have shown resistance to this positioning before, Anya made her resistance to this position perfectly clear through her zine design and discourse with her peers (namely her interaction noted in chapter 4 with Hwan and Clark).

Myriah used her hair to negotiate her identity as a young Black woman. Her zine explored the physical aspects of identifying with natural hair as well as the social aspects. Myriah was simultaneously able to connect this part of her identity to two other young black women in the class and educate the rest of her peers about the social faux pas of touching someone’s hair without their permission. Myriah’s reflexive positioning was acknowledged by a few of her peers who took it up “by adopting a story line which incorporates a particular interpretation of cultural stereotypes to which they [were] 'invited' to conform” (Davies & Harré, 1990, p. 53). In this particular case, her peers, Nylah and Anya, conformed because they directly identified with Myriah’s lived experience as similar to their own.

Socially, Myriah and Anya were the most open about how their families and community positioned their identities. Both young women spoke of their parents’ influence in their decision making and accepted their parents’ authority in their lives. Myriah had support from her mom and sister for both her identity as a singer and how she identified as a Black woman with natural hair. Myriah’s identity was also reinforced through her church community where she was provided opportunities to sing and serve younger students. The church was also where there were other women who looked like her and embraced natural hair. Anya had support from her mom and dad for her identity as a soccer player; her parents also influenced her position as an advocate for others and learning to confront conflicts immediately. Anya’s friend group reinforced her soccer player identity as well as one where Anya saw herself as amiable and a
“goofball.” These were identities they may have already internalized (Holland et al., 2003), which meant their experiences of feeling appreciated (Myriah) and as though they were a deep thinker (Anya) were revelations to them and their identity.

Hwan and Jorge were more guarded about their lives outside of my classroom; therefore, determining how they were both socially positioned by their families and communities never came to fruition. Rather, Hwan demonstrated how school and former teachers had positioned him to see himself as a hardworking student with aptitude and a drive to succeed on classroom tasks. Jorge actively pushed against the potential positioning of others, whether they be fellow students or teachers. My observations and analysis reinforced my understanding of Jorge as independent and a nonadherent to the identity others may have cast on him. In the end, Jorge’s identity appeared to be contrived and perpetuated on his own with his classmates readily accepting his positioning, including his tough guy exterior, which may have acted as an emotional shield against me and his classmates. I can see that this is not meant to suggest Jorge had no social forces acting upon his identity. Surely, this would include his friend group—those who shared his neoindigenous aesthetic particularly (Emdin, 2016)—or at the very least his cousin that introduced him to rap aided in his social positioning. Whatever the case may be, his time in my classroom did not make these influences clear. In both cases of Hwan and Jorge, their choice of making a zine that perpetuated an identity classmates mostly recognized or understood did not provide the same revelations and risk-taking Anya and Myriah experienced. Instead, Hwan and Jorge were able to reaffirm and perpetuate identities they knew others accepted and understood.
**Negotiating Agency in the ELA Classroom.**

My case participants negotiated agency differently as they were situated in my classroom. Each case took actions aligning with their self-described identities; however, those actions were ultimately mediated differently through their classroom experience as they interacted with their peers, family members, and me, their teacher. This is not to say their actions did not have commonalities.

Myriah and Jorge, for instance, demonstrated oppositional agency (Ahearn, 2001). Myriah resisted the zine making task at first, but she was not alone in the resistance to the task. Benji and Tim also opposed the task: Benji in almost complete totality by choosing not to attempt the task at all, while Tim possibly out of frustration or displeasure with the task. Several others in the class, including students whose final products were celebrated such as Kendall and Samantha, also initially appeared to oppose the task. As explored in the previous chapter, this resistance or opposition may have stemmed from a sense of unfamiliarity with the task particularly for Myriah, but also for students like Tim, Kendall, and Samantha. The task was also still ‘top-down’ where, as the ELA teacher, I decided what would be made and in what timeline it would be made. In this regard Myriah showed some opposition toward me as did Benji and Tim. She claimed she was glad she made her zine, but she did not see herself using zines as a tool outside of the classroom, maintaining some opposition to the task itself and even opposition toward me as her teacher who clearly wanted her to take up the task and see value in it.

Jorge’s opposition came in the form of rejecting the expectations of his peers. As discussed in chapter 4, Jorge typically sat at a table with a gregarious group of students. This is at the same table Anya sat. Whereas Anya would get caught up in conversations started by Benji or Alejandra and focus on the matter of zine making later, Jorge ignored those conversations,
keeping his headphones in and his head looking toward his work with a pencil in one hand and his phone in the other. His peers certainly tried at time to pull him into conversation, but Jorge made it clear he was okay with his silence. In this regard Jorge’s silence during classroom time was as an important aspect to his agentive actions as any discourse that occurred. While he was expected by his peers, and even me as his teacher, to engage in discourse as he worked, Jorge typically chose silence.

In addition to his use of silence, when Jorge did speak, he still chose to demonstrate opposition. When the time came for Jorge’s end-of-the-year speech, he made it clear that he did not feel the class or his experiences in it changed his life or that he felt any closer to his peers. For context, the majority of the peers who gave their speeches before him claimed the students had grown closer to their classmates and appreciated their experience in the class. Jorge resisted this narrative and chose instead to claim he felt more disillusioned by his freshmen year experience rather than a closer sense of community with his peers or teachers.

Anya and Hwan, on the other hand, demonstrated some sense of collective and dialogic agency (Ahearn, 2001). Anya gravitated toward celebrating her peers’ work as did Hwan. Their expressions of appreciation appeared to be based on their social interactions with their peers as well as their personal willingness to share publicly their feelings. Anya and Hwan’s collective agency was representative of the majority of their peers’ open expressions of appreciation and care toward one another. Both expressed appreciation for their teacher and their peers in their end-of-the-year speeches; Anya even expressed this appreciation during the zinecast event. This was the collective outcome of how many of the students expressed their experiences within the classroom and throughout the zine project. While certainly Myriah, Jorge, and a few other peers did not verbalize a deep sense of caring or appreciation for their experiences, the vast majority of
the class expressed similar feelings and actions as Anya and Hwan; hence, a sense of collective agency in the classroom. Noddings (1988) suggests “Teachers have an obligation to support, anticipate, evaluate, and encourage worthwhile activities, and students have a right to pursue projects mutually constructed and approved” (p. 221). My students’ zine work in tandem with their culminating end-of-the-year speeches were opportunities for them to do that mutually constructed work and in turn supported their growth as carers within my classroom. In the end-of-the-year speech, Samantha commented that she would be exiting special education services and expressed she believed her peers had a hand in making that possible for her; Ana expressed how she wanted her peers to know she would always be there as a shoulder to cry on; Clark expressed how much he enjoyed getting to know everyone in the class even if he did not always agree with them; and in a final interview with a student named Camila, she expressed she had never been in a class that cared so much for one another.

Dialogically, Anya’s incident with Hwan over a controversial counterclaim of #blacklivesdontmatter as a means to provoke pathos may very well have inspired Anya to follow through with her zine meant to dissuade others from using stereotypes. Originally, Anya had wanted to explore bullying, but she did not want to get personal. Her stereotype zine was situated as a way to mediate a personal cause or concern while avoiding using personal experience to make her case. As she was socially situated, Anya took action to defeat stereotypes, but did so in way to protect her experiences outside of the classroom. Hwan, at one point early in the project, was told his quantum physics zine he began was complicated and went over the understanding of a peer. This conversation may have very well mediated his decision to move away from making a zine based on that interest. As a way to connect potentially to a broader audience, Hwan chose to make a zine highlighting the benefits of playing tennis. While that last claim is more
speculative, I know from my observations and discussions with him that Hwan chose to make a tennis zine as a way to position himself for the successful academic completion of the task. As explored in the previous chapter, these actions appeared to be mediated by past experiences in other ELA classrooms with other ELA teachers based on academic reward or punishment. Both the previous discussions in ELA classrooms and the current discussions and interactions during the project mediated the actions of Anya and Hwan.

**What Relationships do Students Re-Negotiate and Develop in an English Classroom?**

Interestingly, the data presents a theme of appreciation for the work of peers and their lived experiences for all my student participants, including of course Anya, Myriah, Hwan, and Jorge. Benji, a student who sat at the same table as Anya most of the time, was the only clear outlier. As mentioned before, Benji did not choose to make a zine at all; there were many times he would start conversations unrelated to the zines his tablemates were making, which others may have found distracting. Overall, Benji did not appear to demonstrate much care toward his peers based on the data I was able to review for him. Still, the rest of the participants tended to display appreciation and some level of care for their peers’ work. For instance, the tensions that arose between Anya and Hwan, while at first volatile, were subdued in a matter of days as each appreciated the other’s intentions. Classmates were shocked to learn the amount of time it took Myriah to do her hair each day and acknowledged that they did not know how much time and level of difficulty the process required. Similarly, Samantha’s and Kendall’s zine work, focusing on the topics of autism and introverts respectively, was appreciated and in turn students in the class had a new appreciation for their identities as people living in very specific figured worlds unlike their own (Holland et al., 2003). While Noddings (1988, 2003, 2012) would suggest caring should be altruistic in nature, I would suggest my students’ care toward one another—
while not out of obligation—came from a place of respect for one another’s talents and lived experiences. From that standpoint, I would posit my students did feel empathetic toward one another even if Noddings would not define their relationships as founded in a true care ethic. The following section explores the results from a cross-analysis of the cases in the study and other student-participants as they negotiated relationships with one another.

**Negotiating Relationships in the ELA Classroom.**

Anya and Hwan negotiated their relationships in my classroom in similar ways; they both developed reciprocity with their peers and with me and publicly stated as much in front of their peers. Both Anya and Hwan’s final interviews and end-of-the-year speeches celebrated their peers’ work and acknowledge they had felt cared for in my classroom. Anya acted as an encourager and supported the zine work of students even when she felt disconnected from the content of their zine. This was observed during her conversation with Jordan, discussing his zine about the best military weapon. Her reciprocity was also seen when connecting with Nylah and Myriah over Myriah’s zine as well as her high praise for what she learned about Kendall through her zine about introverts. Hwan, while less vocal in public than Anya, made sure Nylah knew he thought her zine about rape culture was designed well, serious, and meaningful. Individually, Anya and Hwan openly showed empathy and appreciation towards their peers by the end of the project, including some appreciation for one another.

Myriah’s relationships in my classroom may have lacked reciprocity but did not lack a care ethic all together. Rather, Myriah negotiated how she should value the attention she received from her peers over her zine as well as how to respond to her peers who suddenly greeted her in the hallways outside of our classroom. While she appeared to embrace the affection of her peers, she remained wary of her peers’ intentions and did not appear to understand why many
classmates she had never spoken to before purposefully engaged her in greetings and conversations. With me Myriah negotiated our relationship cautiously. She wanted me to see her as a good student—a student who did the work required—but she also hinted she could be rebellious and did not want to engage in tasks that lost her interest. In private conversations, Myriah expressed she appreciated the care she felt I had shown for her and had even called me a great teacher. However, publicly, Myriah did not openly express those same feelings. I posit these public and private conversations justify Myriah having multiple identities, and these identities are tied to her feelings for me and her classmates. That is not to say her feelings about our relationship were not consistent; however, she clearly did not feel positioned to openly share those feelings of appreciation in school. School, and specifically my classroom, was not a place Myriah wanted to share her feelings of appreciation, indicating her identity as a student and a caring individual are identities she often kept separated.

Jorge, while demonstrating respect towards his peers’ ideas and identities, did not negotiate his relationships as Anya, Hwan, or Myriah did. Rather, Jorge remained distant to his peers, or at the very least, he was satisfied with the state his relationships with his peers was in during prior years in other classrooms. From my own observations and interactions with Jorge, I can not claim we became closer in the sense that he saw me as a confidant or advocate. Noddings (2003), however, claims, “The child, as one cared-for, will often respond with interest to challenges proffered by the one caring, if the one caring is loved and trusted by the child” (p. 64). In this regard, Jorge must have trusted me as part of his willingness to take on the challenge of zine making—an unfamiliar and potentially complex task. While I could not go so far as to claim Jorge loved me, he did respect and trust me. Based on our interactions, I suggest we felt a sense of mutual respect towards one another. Still, I cannot conclusively claim Jorge felt his time
in my classroom improved his relationships with his peers. However, there is no evidence to suggest his time in my class harmed those relationships. School—as a collective agent including teachers, administrators, and peers—appeared to position him to keep his feelings to himself and keep his identity as a student separate from his identity as a caring individual.

**Discussions**

This study provided significant insight to how a few of the participants used their unsanctioned literacy practices (Street & Street, 1995) while other participants used literacy practices more often sanctioned in ELA classrooms to negotiate their identities, agency, and relationships in a classroom framed with the tenets of participatory culture. These insights broaden our understanding of the complexity of the trajectories of identity formation; oppositional, collective, and dialogic agency; and the formation of caring relationships as situated in an ELA classroom. First, the participants connected the literacy topics they were familiar with—some, such as tennis and stereotypes, were sanctioned literacy topics—topics familiar to many in the class already—while others, such as hip-hop and natural hair care, were unsanctioned literacy topics—topics less familiar or celebrated in my classroom space. They then translated them into their zine. Second, they used their zines as a tool to uncover, perpetuate, or affirm their identities as they positioned themselves and others positioned them. Third, they connected with others or distanced themselves from others in the classroom through their agentive actions and relationships while engaging in discourse and zine making.

**Participatory Culture in the ELA Classroom**

Previous research concerning participatory culture did not explore how its tenets may welcome students to explore and negotiate identity with their unschooled literacy practices. While Broderick (2014) championed benefits of collaborative design as a means to push back
against the labeling of “at-risk” students, the scope of identity negotiation explored was limited in the study. However, my study did reinforce Broderick’s claim that, “Enabling participatory cultures in school settings supports such a shift [in labeling students] and challenges educators to embrace the complex ways students already make meaning beyond the classroom doors” (p. 207). The significant difference is the open-ended nature of my own study. I was not looking to replace previous labels of students, nor did I assume any labels they carried with them into the classroom. For example, the label of “gifted” was never discussed in my interviews or interactions with students. Rather, I wanted to welcome students to position themselves using a framework they were already in the process of understanding—their own identities. In order to evoke my participants to recall and possibly use their unschooled literacy practices, I purposefully framed the beginning of the zine project with having them answer the following questions,

1. What do you spend a lot of time doing that you enjoy doing?
2. What do you spend a lot of time doing that you do not enjoy doing?
3. What would you spend a lot of time doing if you had unlimited resources to do it?

This became an important entry event for my participants. As Jenkins et al. (2009) explained, “Not every member [of a community] must contribute, but all must believe they are free to contribute when ready and that what they contribute will be appropriately valued” (p. 7). The questions above welcomed each student to contribute their identities and their potential unsanctioned literacy practices, or in the case of my students, their use of unsanctioned literacy topics. Anya contributed her personal understanding of the damaging effects of stereotyping while Myriah’s contribution centered on the physical and social difficulties of having hair unique to her race and ethnicity, which only a few other students could also claim as part of their identity. Hwan contributed his knowledge of tennis, and Jorge contributed his detailed
knowledge of rap’s origins and impact on hip-hop culture. Each felt welcomed to contribute something to the project, but their contributions were of their own positioning not the positioning of a school system. In other words, Anya, Myriah, Hwan, and Jorge named their positioning and bridged the divide between topics typically afforded by the ELA classroom with the topics that mattered to them if for no other reason than they were welcomed to do so in the community of my classroom.

In addition, just as Broderick (2014) repositioned herself as teacher from expert to co-learner, I repositioned myself in a similar fashion that once I shared my knowledge of zines and how to make one, I too became a co-learner and explorer. While I did not simultaneously make a zine alongside my students, I did share previous zines I had made with other students or contributed to outside of the schoolhouse. I attempted to position myself as a facilitator, welcoming my students to negotiate their relationships among one another and with me openly. Anya and Hwan both provided evidence for deeper caring and empathetic relationships forming in my classroom as both made claims of feeling thankful for me and appreciating their peers’ work and relationships to them. Myriah, too, expressed gratitude towards me as her teacher even if she did not feel particularly closer with many of her classmates. Only Jorge remained stoic in our conversations and through my observations, never really expressing more empathetic feelings towards me or his peers.

My study also provided better insight as to how identity, agency, and relationships might be better explored and supported in an ELA classroom. Using the tenets of participatory culture could be a viable option for any ELA teacher desiring to welcome identity, agency, and relationship exploration in their classroom. In order to do so, however, I posit the tenets of participatory culture are best represented through the grassroots efforts of individual teachers or
singular schools. In turn, students may take up the tenets—as some appeared to with my participants—to explore their identity, agency and relationships in meaningful ways. I am not convinced without further research the experiences of my students can be expected to be similar to participants who might use the tenets in a program designed by a large, decision-making body.

**Caring in the ELA Classroom**

The particular care I showed toward my students and the ownership I took of designing the project might better suggest a high level of engagement (only 2 of 26 students did not produce a zine) rather than a curriculum and framework designed for me with the expectation I would implement it. Anya, Myriah, Hwan, and Jorge invested time into the construction of their zines and used their familiar literacy practices readily with only small bouts of resistance and doubt. Based on the feedback each student provided, the care I put into the design of the project was something they all acknowledged and appreciated or at the very least respected. How a teacher invites unsanctioned literacy practices and the tenets of participatory culture invokes the need for more research and potentially looking at issues of attempting to force the tenets of participatory culture into the classrooms of teachers who are unfamiliar or even resistant to its features.

My study reinforced the concern over unnecessary barriers educators construct for students to access discourse as it happens in the professional world. Anya, Myriah, Hwan, and Jorge all had the opportunity to communicate with their peers in the classroom freely and without rebuke from me as they made their zines. I intentionally focused on lowering barriers for students to participate in zine making and building relationships in my classroom. Just as my students might one day talk candidly to co-workers or other adults as they work, my case participants all had the same opportunity to candidly discuss a litany of topics with tablemates.
and the entire class without concern that I would restrict them or rebuke them for their discussions and technology use. My study helps further the discussion for the potential benefits to student participation when a teacher intentionally lowers barriers for students to access their unschooled literacy practices and to use those practices and discourse as a means to negotiate their identities.

My intentional approach to emote care for my students, their work, and their experiences was meant to alleviate the constraints on identity exploration through teacher controlled discourse, which as an ELA teacher I have certainly done in previous iterations of my classroom. My study simply expands the conversation where emotion plays an important role in student identity construction and how a classroom teacher may influence those emotions and in turn students’ identity trajectories. Anya and Hwan’s relationship was welcomed to evolve due to my approach in handling their contentious encounter over a racially charged social issue. While I spoke with both separately about the incident, I initially welcomed the contentious and emotionally charged discourse to take place among the class. While I could not predict that the two would make amends and walk away with respect for one another, welcoming them to openly define their relationship did not seem to constrain their identity production. Similarly, three of the four of my case participants’ use of zine making invited the formation of new and more meaningful relationships where students shared personal narratives and provided insight into one another’s interests and lived experiences. Myriah connected to several students in the classroom with whom she had not previously been associated with through the appreciation her classmates showed for her zine. I invited Myriah to develop a zine on a topic entirely of her choice, and her personal exploration of her struggles with her hair both resonated with and informed her peers. Her exploration demonstrated and perpetuated an aspect of her identity. Myriah’s new
relationships and her sense of her works being cared for supported her identity positioning. Jorge, however, was an important reminder that keeping students’ choices for the production of identity open does not guarantee a student will take up new relationships or see relationships as an important reflection of their perceived identity. Still, Jorge’s decision to distance himself from his classmates throughout the project was respected by me and his peers as was how he identified with rap and neoindigenous aesthetics (Emdin, 2016).

I chose explicitly to work to be aware of my biases as a teacher and in turn be open to how my students positioned their identities. I can affirm through my study how an educator positions a student may impact how a student positions themself. I attempted to focus on my four case participants’ identities as they saw themselves rather than how I might have framed them from their time in my classroom before the project. This approach provided me the unique opportunity to see Myriah, for instance, frame herself as both a good student and potentially a rebellious student who craved engagement. Her positioning went against my initial positioning of her being a disengaged student when she put her head down in my class. My study expands the conversation of the importance of a teacher’s intentionally opening up their classroom to the counter positioning of students through discourse as well as tasks such as zine making to explore their identities and welcome student agency.

Identity Exploration and Participation in the ELA Classroom

In tandem with Sluys’ (2012) study, there was an implication in my study that students need “physical as well as theoretical spaces that embrace the values, customs, and practices that support creative, critical, and active social participation” (p. 142), which I attempted to supply via zine making and my intentional attempts to build caring relationships with my students. All of my cases provided positive feedback on their zine making experience and expressed that they
liked how their work transpired. Anya and Hwan expressed appreciation for the work of many of their peers and supported their peers positions even if they did not fully understand them. Myriah was glad she made her zine despite several false starts as she explored her creativity, the customs and practices of her community, and frustrations with social faux pas associated with having natural hair. Jorge had space and time to explore and display his value of rap music in his life, and its impact on the culture of modern rap music. Each case participant took advantage of the spaces I purposefully provided in order to evoke participation and, in a few cases, their use of unsanctioned literacy practices.

My study also demonstrated how identity exploration may aid in the deeper learning of content and skills in my ELA curriculum. I found evidence for this ‘deeper learning’ in two of the case participants in my study. In our post interview, Hwan repeatedly discussed how making his zine reinforced his understanding and use of rhetorical strategies, and Anya negotiated how she saw herself as a deep thinker, an identity she was not cognizant of prior to the study, attributing this identity to her deeper understanding of stereotypes and rhetoric.

My study also implied students may not find motivation or a deeper understanding of content just because identity exploration is invited into the ELA classroom. The context and setting in which a person learns remained an important consideration for my students’ deeper learning. While I controlled the context of my classroom in terms of how I framed opportunities for identity and agency negotiation, the context and setting of the school did not necessarily share my same views on how to approach the ninth grade ELA curriculum. (For instance, I was the only ELA teacher in the school utilizing zine making as a medium for expressing students’ understanding of rhetorical strategies.) Myriah and Jorge, while they fully participated in making a zine, did not demonstrate a deeper understanding of rhetorical strategies or that either were
particularly more motivated to participate in class. Hence, how a teacher frames a curriculum may provide students opportunities to negotiate their identities and agency in meaningful ways, while that same framing may not further motivate a student or deepen their understanding of content.

**Limitations of the Study**

This study only examined four cases of students who had been identified as honors level or gifted level ELA students situated in my ninth grade ELA classroom. Although, I included male and females, three racial groups, and a small variation in socioeconomics, I only included those participants that demonstrated some level of engagement in zine making. I did have a couple of students who did not take up zine making, but they may have not given me permission to collect data on them or the amount of data I collected did not provide a detailed enough narrative to use as one of the cases.

The scope of my study limited me to only understanding their out-of-school literacy practices as they described them to me. I was unable to observe their actions or literacy practices outside of my classroom. At times the quality of the audio in both my interviews and video recordings limited the data I was able to capture as well. Finally, I was only able to capture this data over the course of eight weeks in a singular ELA classroom of the participants’ ninth grade year. A longitudinal study connecting participants’ literacy practices, identity, agency, and relationships over the course of their high school careers will provide more complete descriptions of the participants’ expression of identity, agency, and how they negotiate their relationships among one another, their peers, and teachers.

I also limited my participants’ choice of tools by not providing examples of online and/or digital zines. My choice to use physical zines as the primary model for my students and only
passively mentioning the existence of digital zines may have influenced their decisions to create physical zines only.

**Pedagogical and Educational Implications**

The results of this study convey several pedagogical and educational implications for literacy and education researchers and ELA teachers. In particular, researchers and teachers alike may notice the implications caring relationships could have on student participation in identity exploration and agency negotiation.

First, my results suggest literacy and educational researchers and ELA teachers should continually reconsider the value of welcoming and celebrating what a student might perceive as unsanctioned literacy practices into the ELA classroom as well as the value of intentionally using a care ethic to build caring and empathetic relationships in the ELA classroom. Second, the results also suggest framing an ELA classroom with the tenets of participatory culture may aid in the negotiation of a student’s identity, agency, and relationships. Students can benefit from seeing their unschooled literacy practices valued as part of their identity in the ELA classroom as they find commonality among their peers and feel their contributions and identity are appreciated and matter. Third, the results suggest students can benefit from an ELA teacher’s demonstrating and modeling a care ethic in their classroom, intentionally reflecting on their own biases and intentionally showing care for the identities and contributions of their students. Finally, the results suggest the tenets of participatory culture have features that couple with caring relationships that may help engage students in participating in unfamiliar literacy tasks, including tasks that include standards imposed by federal, state, and local school governing bodies. In the case of this study, using zines—an atypical literacy tool—to explore rhetorical strategies, an
expected standard to be covered in my ELA classroom, invited students to explore unsanctioned literacy topics of their own interest while taking up and using rhetorical strategies.

One of the major implications of this study was students can and do negotiate their identities and agency through their perceived use of unsanctioned literacy practices (Street & Street, 1995) when those practices are welcomed into the classroom. The participants each made zines stemming from literacy topics already known to them but went unrecognized for a few of them in prior ELA classroom experiences (e.g. Myriah’s knowledge of natural hair, and Jorge’s historical knowledge of hip-hop). Primarily, what acted as unsanctioned literacy practices or topics were students’ use of their knowledge that might be valued outside of my classroom but had not been openly recognized in my classroom, and students taking advantage of my intentionally lowered barriers to participation to express that outside knowledge. Specifically, once I intentionally requested my participants to pull from their lived experiences, I in turn intentionally lowered the barriers to what might be considered viable and acceptable literacy practices and topics in my ELA classroom. My participants engaged in making zines that expressed a sense of who they were as they were situated both inside and outside my classroom. In turn, the participants were free to explore and position their identities in an ELA classroom and be positioned by their peers through various forms of discourse (Davies & Harré, 1990). Ultimately, this left the participants less encumbered by the restrictive curriculum choices I might have typically made while also opening up vulnerabilities (Beach, Johnston, & Thein, 2015). Openly expressing variations in a person’s identity is particularly risky during adolescence, where emotions are volatile and subject to sudden, even jarring changes. Such vulnerability is difficult for any individual to present to others let alone an adolescent student in midst of negotiating their identities.
By modeling my own appreciation for their contributions, the participants and many of their peers in the class showed similar levels of appreciation for one another’s contributions with a few exceptions. Three of the four participants appeared to genuinely care how their peers and their teacher viewed their zine work, and felt like their contributions mattered. This expression of appreciation was common among two of the participants and many of their classmates, demonstrating a sense of collective agency as a group. The resistance to zine making by a few participants and the rebuffs to discourse with peers of at least 1 participant demonstrated a sense of oppositional agency. This suggests we should welcome the potential to use unsanctioned literacy practices in ELA classrooms as a means for students to negotiate their identities and agency. Instead of seeing unsanctioned literacy practices as a deficit or as interference to students’ deeper learning and participation, literacy researchers and ELA teachers should consider these practices as assets to students’ social writing practices and as tools for exploring identities as a person, student, writer, reader, etc.

Another major finding of this study was caring and empathetic relationships can encourage participation in various literacy tasks when an intentional care ethic (Noddings, 1988, 2012) is conveyed by an ELA teacher. By intentionally foregrounding caring relationships (Bloome, Carter, Christian, Otto, & Shuart-Faris, 2010), I welcomed their influence on my participants’ actions. Three of the participants took actions that demonstrated a care ethic of their own as they showed a sense of caring for their own contributions being turned in and evaluated by the teacher and their peers. Two of the three case participants in this study also demonstrated a sense of reciprocity where feelings of appreciation were reciprocated among them and their peers (i.e. Anya and Hwan). Only one case participant did not indicate an increased sense of care for his peers or teacher (i.e. Jorge). This suggests literacy and education researchers and ELA
teachers should expand their understanding of how caring relationships may encourage or limit participation in various literacy tasks in the ELA classroom. While all but two student participants made zines, the development of caring relationships did not appear to play a significant role in either deciding to participate. However, I argue that, as evidenced by the four case participants, caring relationships do have the potential to encourage participation in literacy tasks in an ELA classroom that might be otherwise ignored or rejected. The practice of zine making, for instance, is not a common literacy task in an ELA classroom. The foreign nature of the task coupled with the participants’ general unfamiliarity with the task could have easily driven any of them to forego participation in zine making. I posit my intentionality to encourage my students through demonstrating care for them and their contributions did encourage their participation despite any initial misgivings or false starts and encouraged them to develop caring relationships toward one another.

Ultimately, any ELA teacher who might open their classroom to identity, agency, and relationship negotiation and exploration may benefit from encouraging deeper learning of the ELA curriculum as well as inviting deeper, more empathetic relationships among students and their teacher. When ELA students can openly position themselves within an expected task, those students may very well connect a portion of their identity to the content (e.g. Hwan’s claim he really understood rhetorical strategies after completing his zine). Fostering empathetic relationships can be useful to encourage students to participate in a wider array of literacy tasks that may feel unfamiliar (e.g. zine making but also could include writing an argumentative paper for the first time), and therefore a student may oppose or resist participating (e.g. Myriah’s opposing creating a zine due to its unfamiliarity but eventually embracing the task once encouraged by her teacher and peers). In sum, ELA students who explore and negotiate their
identity, agency, and relationships in a classroom that welcome their literacy practices are in a position to engage in ELA tasks in deeper and more meaningful ways.

Any future research in a similar vein might attempt to expand on these initial results in order to tease out any nuances to the relationships between identity, agency, and caring relationships to literacy practices and participation as well as how these relationships may encourage or limit students’ deeper understanding of ELA skills and content. This sort of research may want to more deeply explore differences in how different genders explore identity, agency, and relationships as well and the implications the lived experiences of being male or female may have and bring to bear in an ELA classroom.
REFERENCES


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doi:10.3102/0013189X14529604


doi:10.1386/jmpr.14.1.25_1


Appendix A

Pre-Interview Semi-Structured Questions

1. How would you describe yourself as a student?
   a) How would you describe yourself as a person?

2. What do you like and dislike about language arts?

3. What experiences can you remember in any language arts class when you realized you liked or disliked the class?

4. What kind of specific activities and assignments do you enjoy in a language arts class? Why do you like them?

5. Which specific activities or assignments do you dislike in a language arts classroom? Why do you dislike them?

6. How do you feel about your relationship with your language arts teachers in the past?

7. What experiences stand out to you that defined your relationship with your former language arts teachers?

8. What are some interests you have outside of school and the classroom?

9. When you are doing *insert activity*, what about it do you enjoy?

10. How often do you spend on *insert activity* in a week typically?

11. Where do you usually do *insert activity*?

12. Who or what got you into *insert activity*?

13. Who else do you know that also does *insert activity*?

Post-Interview Semi-Structured Questions

1. What was your role in the class like when making zines?
   a) What was enjoyable or frustrating about your role?

2. Why did you choose to make a zine?
   a) OR why did you choose not to make a zine?

3. How do you feel your zine turned out?
a) What was most rewarding about the process?
b) What was most stressful or difficult about the process?

4. I recall *insert moment* during the project. Walk me through your decisions and what you recall happening.

5. At one point, you created *insert artifact*. Explain to me why you made it.
   a) What is important about *insert artifact* to you?

6. In what ways did zine making allow you to explore your personal interests?
   a) Why do you think zine making did not allow you to explore your personal interests?

7. How has zine making changed how you view of writing?
   a) What moments can you recall that started making you think differently?
   b) How do you see zine making fitting into your everyday writing life?
   c) How has it changed how you view academic writing?
   d) Why do you feel your view on writing has not changed?

8. How has zine making changed how you view yourself as a language arts student?

9. After making zines, how do you feel about collaborating with your peers?
   a) What about making zines made it easier or harder to collaborate with others?

10. What do you think the benefits of making zines might be for you and other students?
    a) How has it helped you personally?
    b) Why do you believe there was no benefit for you?

11. How did your relationship with your peers change during the project?

12. How did your relationship with me, your teacher, change during the project?

13. What did you learn about yourself during this project?
    a) What did you learn about your peers?
Appendix B

Zine Reflection Paper

Instructions: In one class period—on your own sheet of paper—you will write an organized essay reflecting on the process and impact of making zines. Keep in mind your reflection should demonstrate what the process of making zines was like for you as well as how you see it impacting your audience (whom you made zine for). You may use the pronoun ‘I’, pen or pencil, and the front and back of a sheet of paper. I suggest writing in pen and double spacing (skipping lines), but you do not have to. Don’t forget to add your name to your paper.

PROMPT: Using the guiding questions below, write an organized, thoughtful, and clear reflection on your personal experience of making a zine (or not making one), collaborating with your peers, and the possible impact your zine could have on its audience. Your essay should address most of the questions below, but should not look to just simply answer them in order. There is no length requirement.

Questions to consider:
1. What were a few difficulties you faced while deciding what to make or write for your zine?
2. What were a few skills or some knowledge you learned while making and writing your zine?
3. Do you see yourself any differently as a student in a language arts class? Why or why not?
4. How will you use the skills you gained in zine making in your life as a student or in general?
5. How do you think the audience you made your zine for will interpret or react to your zine?
6. If you collaborated with other students to make your zine, what did you learn from working with those students?
7. Do you see your relationship with your peers or your teacher any differently than before making zines? Why or why not?
8. If you did not make a zine, why?
9. How did your zine relate to your personal interests?
10. How do you think your audience will react to your zine? Why?
### Zine Reflection Paper Rubric

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Below Standard 15-16 Points</th>
<th>Approaching Standard 17-21 Points</th>
<th>At Standard 22-25 points</th>
<th>Above standard [ ]</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Introduce the Topic; Organize Complex Ideas, Concepts, and Information</strong></td>
<td>Introductory ideas do not introduce ideas clearly or lack supporting ideas such as references to personal experience, readings, or culture. Writing is unorganized, making it difficult to understand.</td>
<td>Introductory ideas do not introduce ideas clearly or lack supporting ideas such as references to personal experience, readings, or culture. Organization of ideas is questionable, making writing harder to understand.</td>
<td>Introductory ideas not only introduce ideas but may lack supporting ideas such as references to personal experience, readings, or culture. Early organization of ideas is questionable, making writing difficult to understand.</td>
<td>Early organization of ideas introduces ideas but may lack supporting ideas such as references to personal experience, readings, or culture. Early organization of ideas is questionable, making writing difficult to understand.</td>
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<td><strong>Depth of Learning Relating to the Reflection</strong></td>
<td>Little to no understanding of how zine making did or did not affect your learning is evident. Connections to personal experiences, readings, or culture are unclear or difficult to ascertain.</td>
<td>Demonstrates some understanding of how zine making did or did not affect your learning. Connections to personal experiences, readings, or culture are clear or difficult to ascertain.</td>
<td>Demonstrates a deep understanding of how zine making did or did not affect your learning. Connections to personal experiences, readings, or culture are clear or difficult to ascertain.</td>
<td>Demonstrates a deep understanding of how zine making did or did not affect your learning. Connections to personal experiences, readings, or culture are clear or difficult to ascertain.</td>
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<td><strong>Clear, Coherent Writing Appropriate to Task</strong></td>
<td>Reflection tends to lack focus; the logic of the writing is difficult to follow.</td>
<td>Reflection tends to lack focus; the logic of the writing is difficult to follow.</td>
<td>Reflection tends to lack focus; the logic of the writing is difficult to follow.</td>
<td>Reflection tends to lack focus; the logic of the writing is difficult to follow.</td>
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<td>Does not address any of the questions in the prompt, or provides limited answers.</td>
<td>Does not address any of the questions in the prompt, or provides limited answers.</td>
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<td>Does not address any of the questions in the prompt, or provides limited answers.</td>
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<td><strong>Formatting and Mechanics</strong></td>
<td>Grammatical mistakes in punctuation, capitalization, or usage are highly distracting and impedes readability.</td>
<td>Grammatical mistakes in punctuation, capitalization, or usage begin to impede readability or are distracting.</td>
<td>Grammatical mistakes in punctuation, capitalization, or usage are distractingly distracting.</td>
<td>Grammatical mistakes in punctuation, capitalization, or usage are distracting.</td>
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<td>Grammatical mistakes in punctuation, capitalization, or usage are distracting.</td>
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Mini-Zine Challenge

**Challenge:** Create a mini-zine that uses pathos, logos, ethos, or a mix of rhetorical strategies that you distribute to ten individuals that meet the criteria of the audience you decide should receive your mini-zine.

Instructions:
- Choose a topic and an audience!
  - What is the content in your mini-zine going to concentrate on?
  - Who would be the perfect audience for your topic?
- Choose a rhetorical strategy:
  - Pathos = Emotion
  - Logos = Logic
  - Ethos = Ethics/Authority
  - Mix of two or all three!
- Create content!
  - Map out the content of your zine. What will go on each page? Your cover? Are you using images, text, drawings, links to websites/videos? Will your mini-zine unfold into a poster?
  - Decide how you’re making your content. Will you need a computer? Magazines to copy and paste images from? Hand-drawings? Hand-written? Typed? What resources do you need? How will you get them?
- Put it together, photocopy, and distribute!
  - I’ll help make 10 copies. You hand them out.

Rubric (For a Major Writing Grade):

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Teacher Review (Worth 90pts):</th>
<th>Peer Review (Worth 10pts):</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Complete mini-zine cover to cover: _____/50</td>
<td>Mini-zine makes a rhetorical argument: _____/5</td>
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<td>Mini-Zine has a clear audience: _____/15</td>
<td>Mini-zine appeals to an audience: _____/5</td>
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<tr>
<td>Mini-zine uses a rhetorical strategy: _____/15</td>
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<tr>
<td>Mini-zine is Photocopied and Distributed: ____/10</td>
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<tr>
<td>*Bonus: Includes a poster: _____/5</td>
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</table>

**NOTE:** I do have an alternative assignment for anyone who does not want to take up the mini-zine challenge. Ask and I will get the alternative assignment to you!
Appendix C

Anya’s Zine

Text: Top- Center: Stop this Crime; Middle-Center: *Word Cloud with the largest words “people,” “black,” “woman,” “book,” and “stereotypical;” Clockwise from left hand corner: Why Do You Judge Me? Blondes are Dumb. He’s Asian so he Can’t See. Whites are School Shooters. All Hispanics are from Mexico. All blacks are bad.
Meme: “JUDGING A PERSON DOES NOT DEFINE WHO THEY ARE. IT DEFINES WHO YOU ARE.

Text: “When you judge someone you never know what they went through that day or in their life.

Right Page:

Meme: “Dumb blonde;” “Stupid, Dumb, Uneducated, Slow, Wears pink, Mean, Low IQ, Girly girl, spends a lot of time on their looks.”

Text: “Since when was it okay to judge someone off their hair color just b/c they may be blonde doesn’t mean they’re dumb & movies & T.V. shows keep showing that on the screen, which makes people think it’s okay to judge them, but it’s not!”
Left Page:
Top-Center Meme: “when you’re asian and there’s nothing left to eat”
Center-Left Meme: “I only got a 99%... why not a 100%?!?” Book bindings read, “AP CALC, SAT, ACT, AP BIO, AP CHEM”
Center-Right Meme: “ Asian drivers -_-“ *Quote below title unreadable
Text: “Your race shouldn’t determine your intelligence—Anonymous”

Right Page:
Meme: *Over Black child’s face—“illiterate, poor, slave.” *Back of shirt—“Stereotype me. Society does.”
“I believe society that society shouldn’t have a say in who you are only you have a say—Twitter”
Left Page:
Text: “Make sure if you try to stereotype someone then you need to be perfect for the rest of your life.” ~Tumblr

Right Page:
Text: It doesn’t matter if your black, white, Asian, Arabic, orange, blue, or pink NO ONE DESERVE TO BE STEREOTYPED! ~Common Sense”
Meme: “GO AHEAD. JUDGE ME. JUST REMEMBER TO BE PERFECT THE REST OF YOUR LIFE.”

Text: “Remember everyone has feelings even if they smile they could be faking it.”
For years perms were the norm in the black community. Now the natural hair movement is alive and well. With the sales rate of perms dropping almost 30%. These are some of the problems we have to deal with.

Natural Hair STRUGLES

Text: “For years perms were the norm in the black community. Now the natural hair movement is alive and well. With the sales rate of perms dropping almost 30%. These are some of the problems we have to deal with. 7 Natural Hair STRUGLES”
Left Page:
Text: “‘Edges;’ Yes, a tooth brush (new); What I want; What they do”

Right Page:
Text “‘Shrinkage;’ @ Night; In the Morning”
Left Page:

Text: “’Petters,’ Yasss this puff is popping!; Why ask if you’re just gonna do it. Smh; I’m not an animal; flattening my shape; dirty hands”

Right Page:

Text: “’Products;’ ’15 lb of Gel;’ ‘pointless edge control;’ ‘conditioners;’ ‘shampoo’”
Left Page:
Text: “Sore Arms;’ Eighty twist’s in and your arms are already on FIRE”
Right Page:
Text: “’Straightening;’ after straightening; leaving the house”
Text: “Drying”
Text: “Why You Should Join TENNIS!”
Left Page:
Text: “Coach xxxx stated in his P.E.; class to review for the test that tennis is the best sport for speed, endurance, technique, and power, and is overall the best sport.”

Right Page:
Image: ‘FOOD’ *Text on box image—“Pizza”
Text: “At least for Lake Heights H.S. you get pre-game meals for every tennis match.”
Left Page:
Text: “Tennis is one of the most played sports in the world, and the sport encourages interaction and communication. So you can make friends.

Right Page:
Text: “According to the outdoor participation report authored by the Outdoor Foundation, 17 million people play tennis in the U.S in 2012.”
Left Page:

Text: “Scientists and Doctors around the world points to tennis as one of the healthiest sports because it delivers overall physical, mental, and emotional health.”

Image: *Tennis Racquet and an iPhone*

Right Page:

Text: “Tennis develops a work ethic, learning sportsmanship, accept responsibility, manage mistakes, enhance discipline, and developing healthy habits.”
Text: “The RAP Year Book”
1980’s

Certified triple Platinum in 2015 *Ranked #144 on Rolling Stones list of the 500 Greatest Albums of All Time*

N.W.A. - Straight Outta Compton. Being one on the First rap albums of all time, N.W.A. broke into the scene fast and loud with their debut album. Also with brutally honest lyrics in every track recorded by the group’s deejays/producers Dr. Dre and DJ Yella. In 2015 a biopic was released of the same name (Straight Outta Compton) which was dedicated to late member Eazy-E’s memory (Real name Eric Wright).

1988

*Certified triple Platinum in 2015 *Ranked #144 on Rolling Stones list of the 500 Greatest Albums of All Time*

Early 90’s

2Pac - Me Against the World. This album focused more on 2Pac’s sentimental side rather than the ‘gangsta’ image he portrayed. He confirmed the album was inspired by his childhood growing up poor in South Central L.A. *Won a Soul Train Award for Best Rap Album in 1996.

The Notorious B.I.G. - Ready to Die. Widely known as Sean Diddy’s protégé, Christopher Wallace, better known as Biggie Smalls debut album made East Coast rap mainstream. With his singles “Juicy” and “Big Poppa” he was widely known for his smooth flow and sampling jazz in his songs. *Certified 4x platinum in 1999.*
Left Page:
Text: Top-Center: “2000-2006”; Bottom-Left: “Eminem-The Eminem Show. This is the fourth studio album by Detroit rapper, Eminem. His critically acclaimed singles ‘Without Me,’ ‘Cleaning out my Closet,’ ‘Superman,’ and ‘Business’ were commercially successful. In 2002, it was the best selling album in the United States. *Nominated for Album of the Year at the 2003 Grammy Awards, 2002.”; Bottom-Right: “T.I.-King. T.I.’s fourth studio album put him onto mainstream success with his widely successful single, ‘What You Know.’ It is considered one of the pioneer songs of trap music. *Sold over 500,000 copies in its first week due to the promotion of his debut film, ATL. 2006.”

Right Page:
Text: Top-Center: “Late 2000’s”; Middle-Right: “2009. *Debuted at #9 on the Billboard 200 chart in its first week.”; Bottom-Center: “Young Money-We Are Young Money. This was a compilation album released by Rappers Lil Wayne, Jaw Millz, Gudda Gudda, Mack Maine, Drake, Tuga, T-Streets, Short Dawg, Shanell, Nicki Minaj, Lil Twist, and Lil Chuckee contributed to the album. It mostly received recognition for the hit single ‘Bedrock.’”
Text: Top-Center: “2010’s”; Top-Left: “Drake-Take Care. This album was the follow-up to Drake’s debut album ‘Thank Me Later.’ Ngah ‘40’ Shebib and Drake’s protégé, The Weeknd produced the album. *Won a Grammy for Best Rap Album in 2013. 2011.”; Top-Right: “Wiz Khalifa-Rolling Papers. Although this was Khalifa’s third studio album, this helped him break into the mainstream rap scene. His hit single ‘Black and Yellow’ received massive radio play. *Debuted at #2 on the Billboard 200 chart on its first week. 2011.” Bottom-Left: “Kendrick Lamar-good kid in m.A.A.d city. This album follows the story of Kendrick’s teen experiences in the gang-filled city of Compton, Cali. Lamar got producers Dr. Dre and Pharrell on board to produce the album. Received mainstream success. *Received 4 nominations at the 56th Grammy Awards. 2012.”; Bottom-Right: “J. Cole-2014 Forrest Hills Drive. This is J. Cole third studio album which was named after the address where his childhood is located. It was released under his own recording label, Dreamvile Records. *Sold over 1 million copies as of March 2016. 2014.”
Interested? Check out these mixtapes!

Kap G - El Southside

Young Thug - Slime Season 3

Drake - If You're Reading This Its Too Late

Travi$ Scott - Days Before Rodeo
## Appendix D

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Case</th>
<th>RQ1 Themes</th>
<th>RQ2 Themes</th>
<th>Themes Refined</th>
<th>Open Codes &amp; Sub Codes</th>
<th>Common Threads (Axial &amp; Selective Coding)</th>
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<td>RQ1: Enacting Agency</td>
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<td>o Connecting with others</td>
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<td>o Design/decision making</td>
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<td>o Task enjoyment</td>
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<td>• Community building</td>
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<td>o Assisting others</td>
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<td>o Informing others</td>
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<td>• Perseverance</td>
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<td>• Resistance</td>
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<td>Identity Exploration</td>
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<td>• Other’s perceptions</td>
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<td>o Concern with how others see them</td>
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<td>• Exploration through gaming/sport</td>
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<td>• ELA student</td>
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<td>o Social learner</td>
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<td>• Perceptions of others</td>
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<td>RQ2: Axial: Collectively caring for one another’s work in a small community</td>
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<td>RQ1: Axial: Desire for teacher(s) to identity they are capable and responsible students</td>
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<td>Identify closely with lived experiences</td>
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<td>Sharing their identity feels risky, leaving them vulnerable to others’ perceptions</td>
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<td>Teacher valuing students’ counter positioning</td>
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<td>Selective: There is vulnerability and risk taking in sharing identities</td>
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<td>Task interpretation can influence student agency</td>
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<td>Anya</td>
<td>1.) Social Positioning—Seen as humorous and gregarious by others; self-proclaimed hard worker, athlete, reader</td>
<td>1.) Caring For and Appreciating Others—identifying with others’ experiences and appreciating the insight of others</td>
<td>Negotiating an Activist Identity in the ELA Classroom</td>
<td>appreciating the Experiences of Others</td>
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<td>2.) From identifying as a weak ELA student to having emotional depth expressed in writing/visual texts</td>
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<td>3.) Empowered to speak openly to peers and express opinions and information through zines outside of class</td>
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<td>Hwan</td>
<td>1.) Self-identified hard working student and gamer; believes others</td>
<td>1.) Appreciates others’ interest and dedication to those interests</td>
<td>Negotiating devotion as a student and non-academic interests (i.e. gaming)</td>
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### Appendix D

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Jorge</th>
<th>1.) Self-identified rap enthusiast and aspiring rapper/producer 2.) Personal aesthetic is important from clothing to appearing “tough” in front of peers</th>
<th>1.) Respect for others interests, but does not express a connection to peers 2.) Vocalizes his distrust of school and its purpose</th>
<th>Negotiating a rapper and tough guy persona to peers Dismissive of relationships with classmates and of school as site to build meaningful relationships</th>
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<td>RQ2 Negotiating Relationships</td>
<td>• Self-perception  o Familiarity  o Epiphany</td>
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<td>• Student-to-Student  o Shared affinity  o Tension between students</td>
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<td>• Student-to-Audience  o Privileging out-of-school literacy</td>
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<td>• Student-to-Teacher  o Expectations for assignments  o Expectations for teacher caring</td>
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<td>• Teacher-to-Student  o Demonstrating empathy  o Expectations of students</td>
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<td>• Caring  o Appreciation  o Cooperation  o Encouragement  o Forgiveness</td>
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<td>Appreciating individual’s lived experiences despite differences in values and beliefs Skepticism toward school being a place to build meaningful relationships among classmates and teachers Selective: Appreciation of a classroom space that valued and respected individual contributions as a collective community</td>
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