

The Meaningful Argument:
High Stakes Argumentative Writing and Blending Genre in a 7th Grade Classroom

By

Ellie Haberl

B.S. University of Wisconsin-Madison

M.S. University of Wisconsin-Madison

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Written by Ellie Haberl

Has been approved for the School of Education at the University of Colorado Boulder

Elizabeth Dutro, Chair

Bridget Dalton

William McGinley

Silvia Nogueron-Liu

Cindy Cruz

The final copy of this thesis has been examined by the signatories and we find that both the content and the form meet acceptable presentation standards of scholarly work in the above mentioned discipline.

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Ellie Haberl (Ph.D., Literacy Studies- School of Education)

The Meaningful Argument: High Stakes Argumentative Writing and Blending Genre in a 7th Grade Classroom

Dissertation chaired by Elizabeth Dutro

The three-article dissertation draws on qualitative data collected through a participant observation research study. The abstracts describe the three focal articles and the approach to analysis of the larger study.

1. Lower Case *truth*: Bridging Affect Theory and Arts Based Education Research to Explore Color as Affect

As education researchers increase our focus on affect as a crucial dimension of school practice and pedagogy, we also have the responsibility of taking up the paradoxical nature of seeking to represent and analyze moments of feeling that, by their very nature, evade our understanding. This article explores the question of attending to affect in education research by drawing on research conducted in a 7th grade classroom in a mid-sized city in the western United States, where students were explicitly invited to ground argumentative writing in lived experiences that were significant to them, including those experiences often deemed difficult and thus saturated with affective intensities. Invited to use visual arts-based methods of representing the felt dimension of the project, participants used both color and abstract design as a method for representing the complexity of these affective intensities. The author makes an argument for this visual method of representation that invites students to illustrate their affective experience in ways that maintain its complex, contrasting and often non-linguistic nature.

2. The Meaningful Argument: High Stakes Argumentative Writing and Blending Genre in a 7th Grade Classroom

In this article I describe the key findings from my study of a persuasive writing unit in a 7th grade classroom in which children developed ideas for their arguments from short personal narrative writing activities at the start of the unit. I explore the way this invitation to write about an important moment from their life supported them in choosing arguments with visceral connections and the way this pedagogical shift created research and writing experiences that supported some students in feeling a sense of community with potential readers around this important event.

3. Connection Over Perfection: Supporting Teachers' Longing for Creativity & Ease

In this book for writing teachers, I enact the practice of reciprocal vulnerability (Dutro, 2009) by sharing aspects of my life in my writing in an effort to support teachers to take up a writing practice that draws on their lives as well. We know that one important characteristic of successful writing teachers is that they write and reflect on this writing. Further, writing teachers who share this writing with their students can support this process of reciprocity in risky writing. I structure this book with this goal in mind, starting each chapter with a vignette from my teaching life, my dissertation study or my life outside of school. Next, I offer teachers a creative practice, usually a writing practice, that serves as an open ended prompt to engage them in their writing practice. I draw centrally from what I've uncovered in my research study about the role that vulnerable writing can play in engaging young people in writing that feels important to them. With this in mind, I hope to facilitate this pedagogy by constructing a kind of 'writing

classroom' for teachers, though the work will be conducted across long distances and through the use of the book as the curriculum.

Contents

CHAPTER 1.....	1
Research Problem.....	1
Framing the Problem and Reframing the Achievement Gap.....	4
Overview of the Study.....	12
CHAPTER 2.....	16
Literature Review and Theoretical Framework.....	16
What Do I Mean and Not Mean by “Emotion”?.....	18
Emotion, Education, and Feminist Poststructural Approaches to Thinking about Both.....	20
Challenging Foreclosure of Emotion in School: Love as Pedagogy and the SEL	
Movement.....	22
Pedagogies of Love.....	23
Social Emotional Learning.....	26
Trauma Theory, Critical Literacy and Other Perspectives that Complicate Emotion In	
Schools.....	28
Genre Separation as Perpetuation of Emotion/Reason Binary.....	31
Increasing Focus on Informational Texts in Policy and Practice.....	33
The Framing of Genre Within the Literature.....	33
Scholarship Blending the Cognitive and Emotional Dimensions.....	36
Research on the Persuasive Writing Genre.....	39
Conclusion.....	47
CHAPTER 3.....	49
Methods and Process of Inquiry.....	49
Letting Go of Capital “T” True.....	49
Methodologies of Vulnerability.....	51
Art-Based Education Research as Practices and Process.....	54
Arts-based Methods Offer Space for Curiosity, Openness, Tensions.....	56
Art-Based Methods Often Invite Entry Into the Affective Dimension of a Context or	
Moment.....	57
Arts-Based Methods as Collaborative and Inclusive.....	57
ABER in my Study.....	58
Study Context.....	58
Millennial Middle School.....	58
From Collection to Connection: The Paradox of Observation.....	63
Data Sources.....	68
Rhizomatic Fieldnotes.....	68
Interviews as Open-Ended and Flexible.....	71
ABER in My Study.....	73
Digital Texts: Embodied Writing.....	76
Analysis As Artistic Process: Patterns, Poetry, Paper.....	77
Searching for Patterns and Themes in Word and Image.....	77
Privileging the Felt Experience: Poetry as Rhizoanalysis Tool.....	79

Paper Patterns: Collage as Rhizonalysis.....	85
Final Reflections on the Project: Affect and Abstract Art.....	92
Foreclosing Conclusions: The Paradoxical Nature of Post-structural/Art-based Research.....	94
CHAPTER 4.....	96
ARTICLE ONE.....	96
Introduction.....	97
How Do I Describe This?: “Tara Deletes the Story, Then Decides to Write It Again”.....	97
Theoretical Approaches to Considering Affect.....	99
The Paradox of Linguistic Representation of Affect.....	100
Existing Scholarship on Affect and Arts-Based Methodological Approaches.....	102
Research Context.....	104
Centering the Affective Nature of Persuasive Writing.....	105
Color as Imperfect Representation of Affect’s Complexity.....	107
Elena’s use of color and abstract art: Anger as red.....	107
Color and multiplicity in affective experience: Tara and Elise’s rainbows.....	110
Color Tryptics as Method of Analysis: A Collaboration of Child Artist, Street Artist and Researcher Artist.....	115
Implications for Education Research: Art as Metaphor for Affective Complexity.....	119
CHAPTER FIVE.....	121
ARTICLE TWO.....	121
Introduction.....	121
Inquiries Guiding the Project and Overview of the Context.....	124
Theoretical Foundation Supporting a Re-imagining of the Genre Binaries.....	126
Review of Research on Argumentative Writing: Focus on Genre Features.....	128
A Review of Persuasive Writing Research.....	131
Methods and Data Sources.....	133
Study Context: Nature of the Collaboration and Pedagogy.....	133
Participants.....	136
Data Collection and Analysis.....	136
Analytical tools.....	138
Findings.....	139
Lived experiences as a source of investment in argumentative writing.....	139
Writing Conferences as a Source of Permission.....	141
Research process as affective and connecting.....	144

Sharing Affect.....	151
Discussion and Implications for Research and Practice.....	155
Conclusion.....	159
 CHAPTER SIX.....	 162
[See PDF]	
ARTICLE THREE.....	1
PART ONE: CREATIVE PRACTICES FOR FALLING AND FLYING.....	4
Chapter 1: Writing Our Red Threads	5
Chapter 2: Our Wild, Precious Teaching Life.....	8
Chapter 3: On the Spiral Staircase.....	12
Chapter 4: Tomatoes and Mangoes.....	16
Chapter 5: Wild Writing With Poetry.....	20
Chapter 6: Findhorn.....	24
Chapter 7: Remembering.....	28
Chapter 8: I've Got Your Back.....	33
Chapter 9: Be the Source Project.....	38
Chapter 10: On Breaking Walls and Healing Breaks.....	42
Chapter 11: Losing Love is Like a Window.....	46
Chapter 12: On Writing Without Resolution (and cookie dough and full moons).....	50
CHAPTER 13: Found.....	53
PART TWO: TRAVEL, SPACE and PLACE AS A CREATIVE PRACTICE.....	56
Chapter 14: Howl.....	57
Chapter 15: We're all poets somewhere.....	61
Chapter 16: Following breadcrumbs.....	63
Chapter 17: Francis.....	65
Chapter 18: A World Worth Seeing.....	67
Chapter 19: Big Skies.....	70
PART THREE: COMMUNITY AND CREATIVE PRACTICE.....	72
Chapter 20: The Movement Suitable to the Situation.....	73
Chapter 21: On Seeing.....	77
Chapter 22: Meaningful Gatherings.....	81
Chapter 23: Connection Over Perfection.....	84
Chapter 24: When It Clicks and You Say Oh.....	87
Chapter 25: Storybowl.....	90
Chapter 26: Both, and.....	92
Chapter 27: Gardening Like Meryl Streep.....	96
Chapter 28: Your Final Assignment.....	99
 CHAPTER SEVEN.....	 163
 CONCLUSION.....	 165
'High Stakes' Argumentative Writing: Implications for Theory and Practice...	167
High Stakes for Argumentative Writing.....	167

Implications for Theory and Practice.....	171
Audience and Impact: Directions for Future Work.....	174
Emotion and Reason at this Historical Moment.....	176
References.....	178
Appendix A.....	192
Interview Protocol.....	192
Appendix B.....	193
Small Moment Writing Prompts.....	193
Appendix C.....	194
Description of Focal Students.....	194

Chapter One

Introduction

Ring the bells that still can ring.

Forget your perfect offering.

There is a crack in everything.

That's how the light gets in.

~Leonard Cohen

Airports are one of my scariest places. I am nervous to fly and so I always find a way to reach out my hand in search of another, preferably steadier, hand. Sometimes in my search for a brave person to lean on, I somehow find someone else looking for the same thing. One time I saw a woman crying just before we boarded the plane and I cut in line to see if she was ok. She said her boyfriend was staying in Colorado and she was going back to South Carolina. She had just found out she was pregnant. We sat together on the plane and went back and forth with “me too’s.” Years before the ‘me-too’ movement came to represent the way women are connected by our stories of positioning, harassment and assault, my new friend and I were experiencing that depth of connection as we moved through a list of stories that catalogued the diverse library of hard stuff. There is a unique kind of relief that comes only when we find out we are not alone.

Our conversation wove together the heaviness of sharing our real lives, with the humor we were bringing to these challenges. One of our flight attendants was dressed like Santa Claus and he kept bringing those tiny bottles of alcohol to us for free even though we knew that she couldn’t drink them. We just laughed harder when our personal bartender kept returning with little bottles of booze. When we landed, I noticed that my usual heart palpitations had been quieted by laughter or friendship or both.

To get to any kind of me-too's to help me with my fear of flying, I have to play the risky game of searching for something in common. This means I have to be willing to share a lot about myself. It also means I have to ask questions and listen deeply.

It is so strange to admit, but I routinely hide two details about myself during these moments of searching for something we both share. I never tell these two things. First, I very rarely talk about my family's history of addiction, alcoholism, and anxiety. Even though I agree with Leonard that the light is finding its way in through the cracks we try to hide, this particular breakage is one of the largest ones I have. This makes me want to bandage it up and carry it close to my body the way children carry their most important objects, the way Lenny carries the mouse in *Of Mice and Men*, like what they are holding, they are holding, *together*. I still feel the shame associated with healing mental illness, even though I recognize that so much healing has already happened, even though we are standing on the other side of this enormous crevasse shouting over a rushing river to the past: "It's better over here! We did it! We made it across!" Still, the leap across is not a permanent one, and healing comes in fits and starts.

I think I keep this still-shaming secret a secret because I still have visceral memories of swimming across the raging river. I am still afraid people will gasp. "You have...what?"

I am always risking this gasp, and I am always relieved when they whisper C.S. Lewis's mantra for healing: "*Me too.*" For me, the opposite of "Me too" is "*You Do?*" and this is why I tread so lightly when I play the Venn Diagram game on airplanes, searching for points of connection. I simply cannot risk being stuck next to a "*You Do?*" for three hours, especially if our flight attendant is dressed like Santa and on a mission to get us drunk.

I mentioned that I have two airplane secrets, and I am ready to share the second one. This one feels a little less risky, less shameful, but it has sometimes wound its way to the same result as my first secret.

My other secret is that I am a teacher. I do not share this with my seatmate. I almost never say that I care deeply about children and writing instruction and making schools better, more meaningful places for children to make writing and art out of their lives. Though this hardly seems like a statement worth hiding from anyone, I had to learn to keep it a secret after finding myself on the other end of many lectures about how schools should teach writing, and how they are failing miserably at this task. As we know from longstanding research, because most people have spent many years in schools as students, it is a topic they have thought about and formed passionate stances on and have been just waiting for an unsuspecting education researcher to finally sit next to them on an airplane so they can offer their advice (Lortie, 1975). I have been shocked too many times before when, after making an important connection with a new friend on an airplane, my friend suddenly learns of my passion for writing and reminds me that children's writing these days is *terrible*.

Just terrible.

This opens another crack in my heart, and one that is nearby the related crack in my family's history of addiction. They are intertwined fissures because my experience has been that the cracks in my heart are also the spaces where I make the best art. Writing has sometimes filled the cracks when my mom's control over her anger had lapsed. Writing, making art, and exploring other creative avenues sometimes formed a foundation that kept me from free fall in my own struggles. So, of course, I want this depth of meaning for children in their own experiences with their writing in schools.

I designed my dissertation study around this desire. I was lucky to meet a 7th grade language arts instructor with shared values about writing in school. We began to explore the way boundaries between genres in school writing curriculum often have the effect of making for uninspired writing practice. In particular, we both felt that boundaries between personal narrative writing and argumentative writing made the latter genre feel impersonal and lacking in meaningful investment. We both believed that the children in his class have deeply personal investments, just like we do. We designed a study that would make sure students found ways to uncover these investments (through short narrative writing activities) and to write impassioned, even emotional persuasive texts based on these investments. Yet, we didn't want to simply use one genre for the purpose of informing another. In fact, rather than simply find ways to draw on personal narrative writing for persuasive writing purposes, my study seeks to understand the way analytical, research based writing, is already affective. In particular, my study seeks to explore the way school writing curricula, with its assumptions regarding the boundaries between genres, often foreclosed meaningful investment in argumentative writing. We were interested in the way young people might discover meaningful investments in their argumentative writing and we believed wholeheartedly that the arguments students were desperate to make were likely desperately needed by our community, and potentially an even larger community than we could imagine. We could imagine that his two classes of 7th grade language arts students had arguments to make that had the potential to make positive change.

Framing the Problem and Reframing the Achievement Gap

Despite my careful guarding of these two secrets, I have still made visible these fissures and found my heart broken again after we land. It turns out that the airplane is just a compact, airborne microcosm of society on land, and though I learned to avoid these conversations on the

airplane, I have not mastered this evasion in the larger marketplace of ideas. This is most especially true in the online marketplace - where journalistic explorations of the achievement gap and the failure of American public schools grab my attention before I can force myself to click a digital headline closed. Things are getting worse in public schools, these headlines exclaim. *Much worse*. The achievement gap is widening and it's linked to social class and race, The *New York Times* recently reminded us, including a scatterplot that helped us visualize the correlation between SES and achievement (Rich, Cox, and Bloch, 2016). Sometimes writing is centered in these apocalyptic narratives as a large piece of the public education emergency pie, and, like my airplane seatmates, children are called bad writers and teachers bad writing teachers.

Though I am often cornered without a supportive sidekick on an airplane, scholars in the discourse community help me complicate these headlines. Scholars have long been pushing back against the way the achievement gap narrative is framed, including Gloria Ladson-Billings (2007) who reimagined the achievement gap as the “education debt” by linking differential rates of success in school to differential histories of slavery and land ownership, starkly varying opportunities often related to these histories, and the persistent racism that continues to act in insidious ways to stratify and classify children in schools. Other scholars frame their critique of the achievement gap with these questions: in what ways are these achievement gaps also a function of differential standards and ways of being/doing school that reflect a white cultural model? How does that biased model result in writing curriculum that is significantly less relevant and meaningful for students already marginalized in schools because of historical racism within and across schools (Lee, 2007; Lee, Spencer, Harpalani; 2003)? Taken together, these approaches allow me to think about the achievement gap assumptions in new ways – whether the ones I read in my Facebook newsfeed, that pop up on the news, or those I am confronted with on airplanes.

At the same time, I would argue there is still another way of reframing the debate that needs to be voiced more often. It is this approach to reframing the gap that I emphasize in my own research on writing instruction and as an explanation for the framework behind my study. I think we need to look at the *interest gap* and *the meaning gap*, the gap between what is happening in school and what is important to children's hearts and minds. As I discuss in what follows, it is this framing of the issue I find most compelling as the imperative for focusing less on standardized test scores and more on children's holistic experience with school.

My feet learned the hard way that this interest gap is where the juice is. As a public educator, I switched from high heels (the first week of school, my first year teaching high school language arts) to flats so that I could move quickly around the classroom to cajole, motivate, *and force* my students to write to my prompt. "One more sentence, Mike, you can do it! Okay. Now one more after that! Yeah! Type something. Type *anything*!" I also needed my flat shoes to run down the hallway to catch a kid so I could ask "where's your three-page, double spaced, Times New Roman font essay on *Hamlet*? Or *Catcher in the Rye*. Or even that "high interest" young adult novel we just read. Yes. Even essays about John Green books required sprinting to catch my students to request that they turn in something. *Anything*. My aching feet taught me that we have a gap in meaningful connection with writing curriculum in school. I think, of course, this gap functions differently for different students. Some children often jump through hoops even when they don't want to, whether based on their own drive to be the "good student", immense family resources, or so much extra support that participation is guaranteed even if motivation isn't. So, yes, we need to recognize that the meaning gap shows up differently for students and maps onto the rhetoric of the achievement gap across racial and socio-economic lines. However, I also argue

that it is present and pervasive in schools in a way that moves into categories not traditionally associated with this “gap.”

Of course, this gap in access to meaningful curriculum also adds to gaps in access to pedagogical approaches that are more than memorization and direct instruction. We know, of course, that this access differs across racial and class lines with children in white and wealthy districts offered curriculum with greater degrees of choice, and greater access to authentic learning contexts such as project based learning and inquiry learning (Bowman, 1997; Bowman 1993; Delpit, 1989; Hill, 2017; Levin, 2007; Luke, 2017). So, just as the achievement gap maps onto racial groups because of access to resources, as Ladson-Billings points out, so too does the mapping require us to think about different degrees of access to curriculum that challenges direct instruction and centers on creativity and choice.

Yet, scholars have been taking up this same argument for meaning in writing curriculum for decades now, and their interventions also centered on the importance of choice as a resolution to issues of motivation (Atwell, 1998; Calkins, 1994). So, I have to ask: why are we still running down hallways in search of missing assignments? Yes, it is crucial to see that these earlier interventions also centered on meaningful connection and choice. Nancy Atwell, (1984) an early leader of the writing workshop movement, describes watching one of her students force himself to complete a writing assignment early in the year before he had found a topic that mattered to him: “I worried that none of this writing meant much to him. I suggested topics and other modes. I nudged. I waited” (p. 245). At the core of her conceptualization of the writing workshop model is the idea that students aren’t simply producing writing but that there is some kind of qualitative relationship with that writing; *it means something* to the writer. Elbow (1998) an early leader of process-focused writing, also notes that the relationship a writer has with her work is central to

writing, arguing that some conditions make writing inherently better and that “These conditions usually involve a topic of personal importance and an urgent occasion” (p. 7). Calkins (1994), another early leader of the movement, often focuses her discussion of workshop writing on writing identity and positioning students as authors in contexts and with audiences that extend beyond the teacher.

I highlight these leaders to establish this foundational work as a precursor to my own research. However, I also want to emphasize the way in which choice, alone, and simply encouraging students to write for their own purposes doesn’t always attend to supporting students in finding subjects that offer investment, meaning, and relevance in writing projects.

I argue that there is more complexity to this process of choosing a topic than these trailblazers in the field speak to when they describe the process of supporting students in choosing meaningful content for writing. I will argue here, and elsewhere in these early chapters that even when we open up the doors and invite students’ lives into school writing practice, we must remember that the doors we are opening are tied to an institutional context with centuries of tradition, histories, and norms. This is what Stephanie Jones (2012), drawing on Bourdieu, calls the “nomos” of schools and what poststructuralist and feminists scholars describe in detail as a crucial foreclosure of emotion from schools (Boler, 1999) what Dutro and Bien (2014) refer to as the “dominant discourses” that enforce “what personal experiences are deemed acceptable in school; what it means to be a successful student” (p. 10).

We who have begun searching for subtleties in the writing workshop movement are asking if there might be something else at work, the circulation of expectation over what is welcome and invited, when students search for meaningful topics for their writing (Wissman and Wiseman, 2011; Dutro, 2008). Is it just as meaningful to write about the baseball game on

Saturday as it is to write about your mom who is recovering from addiction or grandpa who just passed away? Is there another kind of connection that matters just as much as an intellectual connection?

Of course, these questions are complex, and that complexity is at the center of my dissertation study. In chapter 2, I return to those questions again and again as I explore the way in which my research joins scholars centering on the affective dimension of writing practice, much in the same way choice was centered during the early days of workshop and process writing. The invitation to choice in writing is in tension with the fact that there is a context where certain topics for writing are foreclosed. In part, my dissertation study grew from the question of whether the inclusion of choice in writing pedagogy is still too limiting if those choices are constrained by norms related to what kinds of topics (and feelings, sensations, and embodied experiences) are allowed into students' writing?

At the other end of the spectrum is the argument that the invitation to choose one's topic isn't rigid enough. Here, pedagogues, teachers, researchers, and policy makers argue that genre flexibility and the ability to craft arguments is an important skill for all students to have, and that writing workshops often overemphasized poetry, personal narrative, and creative writing to the exclusion of more academic approaches to writing (Delpit, 1986, Pondiscio, 2012, Tyre, 2012). This is often one of the core critiques waged against the writing workshop model, especially by critical researchers who want us to think reflectively about whether or not students, especially students marginalized because of race or gender, are graduating from high school with the ability to craft poems and personal narratives but without the opportunity to participate in discourses of power such as academic and analytical writing (Delpit, 1986).

I read a more recent take on Delpit's seminal argument in *The Atlantic* a few weeks ago in Robert Pondiscio's (2012) essay "How self expression damaged my students" and then again in Peg Tyre's (2012) "The Writing Revolution." While Delpit's argument was nuanced in its ability to take a *yes, and* approach to thinking about these tensions between teaching skills and meaningful writing experiences (as well as the importance of race and class in these discussions), the articles I was uncovering in public discourse arenas like "letters to the editor" or *The Atlantic*'s debate on writing curriculum, seemed to deepen the dichotomy and force us to choose. In the latter example, Tyre praises New Dorp High school on Staten Island for the way it switched to a writing curriculum that offered direct instruction about introductory phrases and prepositions—a seemingly small, but, according to Tyre and other contributors to the online discussion, certainly significant grammatical on or off-ramp to later economic success. The examples of writing assignments students described in the article are primarily traditional prompts related to canonical fiction or scientific facts. One section of the article describes the use of sentence starters to help students answer this question: "Why is Willy Loman tired in *The Death of a Salesman*?" It seems students at New Dorp must choose between this academic, cerebral, upwardly mobile curriculum and the writing workshop model they were offered before the curricular revision. At least, this is the binary posed in the New Dorp High School debate in *The Atlantic* and in other editorial discussions discussing a crisis in education.

Ironically, much like Willy Loman, the focus of their assigned character analysis paper, the young people of New Dorp High School are required to keep up with their assigned tasks without stopping to consider whether or not their work means anything to them. New Dorp High School better hope their students don't read into *The Death of a Salesman* too closely or glean inspiration from it for their own situation.

Binaries have long been the norm in education, something feminist research often bring up when they talk about the separation of emotion and reason in school (Boler, 1999). Outlawed from academia, because it was seen as illogical, or unreasonable, emotion wasn't just subtly disallowed from academic discussions, it was often positioned as academia's opposite (Nussbaum, 1995; Micciche, 2007). With emotion in opposition to valid analysis, the *Atlantic's* framing of pedagogies that are highly personal (even emotional) is much less surprising. If we have to choose between skill and meaning, than we better choose wisely, especially when we have the Atlantic warning us of the economic repercussions of such a choice.

The assumptions about genre that my study aims to investigate are also central in the argument offered by *the Atlantic*. Specifically, the author argues that expository and argumentative writing is more valuable and useful than narrative. Much in the same way that skills are framed by *The Atlantic* as economic gatekeepers, literacy researchers point out that genres focused on facts and claims supported by research are privileged as more important to future success and critical thinking than their lighter, emotional counterpart, personal narrative or fictional narrative (DiPardo, 1989; Ravitch, 2014). The Common Core State Standards and their tremendous focus on informative reading and writing offer us a recent policy level example of this hierarchy (Maloch & Bomer, 2013) with a call for informational texts taking up half of the reading at the elementary level and 70% of high school texts (Ravitch, 2014). This immense shift toward expository writing, often to the exclusion of personal narrative is one of the driving contexts for my study. These standards are asking us to make tough decisions about the allotment of time given to narrative and expository writing respectively, and the discursive binary framing in *The Atlantic* article and elsewhere ask us to make the decision ask us to decide a focal genre for literacy curriculum.

My Study

My intent in my dissertation study is not to answer that question. Indeed, my research is driven by questions that invite us to consider the flaw *in that question*. Could it be possible that these genres—the personal narrative and the research report or persuasive essay—are not mutually exclusive? This is something bell hooks (2010) notes when she outlines her description of her own pedagogical choices teaching college level writing and is also the argument at the center of Delpit's (1986) critique of the early writing workshop model. Maybe the chasm between informational or “academic” writing and personally relevant topics isn't quite as far apart as we assume. Maybe we can see the way overlap or congruence is already inherent in this debate between “cognitive” and “personal.” In fact, arguing the falseness of that binary complicates even Delpit's *both and* approach to skill and choice in writing. A kind of poststructuralist dissolution of the binary helps us see ways in which the personal is intellectual, and the intellectual is emotional. As Rosen (1984) observed three decades ago, “Inside every non-narrative kind of discourse there stalk the ghost of narrative, while, conversely inside every narrative there stalk the ghost of non-narrative discourse” (p. 7). However, even as this is something long discussed and often accepted by literacy researchers, that binary continues to be reinscribed in literacy standards and curriculum.

In my research, I argue that questioning this binary asks us to question current models for writing workshop in which genre boundaries often inform unit planning (Atwell, 1998, Calkins, 1986, Elbow, 1989), as well as the related issue of the Common Core framework, in which standards are divided according to genre, and the relationship between genres is never referenced explicitly (<http://www.corestandards.org/ELA-Literacy>). How might genre boundaries be permeable to each other in ways not made available in most approaches to writing instruction? I

was motivated by the potential of this question to re-invent calcified distinctions between genres and support ways of putting genre-blending into practice in ways that may better support students in the very “informational” genres emphasized in the CCSS.

My study investigates the potential of undoing genre distinctions through focusing on a unit in which personal narrative writing and affective and embodied literacy practice served as inspiration for, and was woven into argumentative writing. I was guided by the following questions:

1. How can emotion and personal expression blend and weave with informational genres?
2. Can the dissolution of these rigid genre boundaries attend to the need for writing practices that include and support more students in finding meaning in school writing practice?
3. How will this new approach to teaching persuasive writing within a writing workshop curriculum feel for the young people participating in the project?
4. How will they describe the experience?

I take these central questions up through three primary articles. In my first article, I explore most centrally the way this new approach to persuasive writing felt to young people and the way they chose to describe this experience. The complexity of students’ description and their use of visual arts-based methods to speak to the affective dimension of their experience led me to center this first article on the use of abstract art to supported them in describing this experience. In particular, I explore the way students used color in abstract paintings to speak to this affective aspect of the project and the way I followed their lead and used photography as a method of analyzing their visual art.

In my second article, I explore my guiding research question regarding the way the dissolution of strict boundaries around genre supported students in finding meaning within

argumentative writing. I describe the way students spoke about this source of meaning as a kind of community that was knit together through the research process and also through their perception that their lived experience might be useful in creating positive change and offering support for other young people. In this second article, I also explore my research question regarding the way emotion blended with the persuasive writing unit, noting that the students' research process offered one central way in which feeling was woven together with reading and writing within informational genres. These two research questions and their related findings provide the framework for this article and offer me the opportunity to craft a larger overview of the project as a whole.

In my third manuscript, I crafted a creative, non-traditional product by writing a book for teachers in which I perform the methodology of reciprocal vulnerability (Dutro, 2013) that was so central in this study. Each chapter of the book begins with a vignette from my life, drawn from both my life inside the classroom as a teacher, my experiences with young people participating in my study on argumentative writing, and also from aspects of my life outside of the classroom that I found relevant to the project. Each chapter concludes with an open-ended writing prompt that is in some way related to the opening vignette. These prompts aim to support teachers in deepening their own vulnerable, creative, and meaningful writing practice across genres in inventive ways. These writing practices allow teachers to craft writing models that they might share with their students as invitations to story important experiences that are often left uninvited into school writing.

Throughout my study and as I write my dissertation, my goal is to show the melding of the binaries of thinking/feeling and affect/reason in my own motivations for pursuing this study. As

Anthropologist Behar (1997) writes, the only research worth doing is the risky work that comes the closest to touching the cracked parts of your heart, ringing the bells that still can ring:

“So it seems clear to me now: the woman has to throw an anchor back to the girl she left behind, the girl who’s just barely treading water, the girl who is still worrying about why she’s so shy and timid and not dressed nice enough” (Behar, 1997, p.).

This anxious girl in middle school with a mom recovering from alcoholism very much needed a school that saw her heart just as much as it valued her mind. She needed a place that didn’t see such a large gap between what was personally painful to her and what she wanted to say in her academic writing.

There is a crack in everything. That’s how the light gets in. But, as I explore with the middle school students in my study, the cracks are also where our light gets out. They are the windows where we shine our light out into the world.

At just the right moment in time, we know *just* when to click it on, where to shine its light, and how to say:

This has to change.

Chapter Two

Literature Review and Theoretical Framework

Those early morning drives through the country, when the sun hadn't yet risen, and the snow shaded the brown and ochre farmland white, found me listening to Paul Simon's Graceland in my car and sometimes just allowing tears to cascade down my face and onto my best attempt to dress like an adult. By the time I reached the school in rural Wisconsin, I had already taken a few deep breaths, dabbed my face with Kleenex, and used make-up to cover tear streams.

What was I crying about on my way to this job I deeply loved, where I got to spend time with adolescents I cared so much about? Most of the time, I was just plain *tired*. Days of teaching and nights of planning sometimes left me feeling worn, like a flickering bulb in need of replacement. Sometimes, though, I cried specific tears, tears tied to specific losses. Regardless of their source, I knew they weren't welcome, and that I should find a way to hide them behind made-up smiles.

How did I know I had to be happy-go-lucky at school, even if I didn't feel that way on the inside? Certainly it wasn't made explicit in my experience as an undergraduate at UW-Madison, a program often ranked highly for its critical perspectives and its close ties to the scholars who first offered us a framework for "culturally relevant pedagogy" (Ladson-Billings, 1995). I don't recall any explicit instruction to foreclose embodied literacy practices or to signal that certain emotions or life experiences were unwelcome in writing or speaking. But somehow I learned - always - to stay pleasant and joyful at work.

For many years, my high school English classes were enactments of the binders of curriculum left for me in a corner closet, full of Socratic seminars centered on canonical conversations in writing and graded discussion about texts like *Grapes of Wrath*. Even though I took bold moves to incorporate my social justice lens on these canonical texts, we were all still disembodied figures, crafting theses and citing evidence. I saw my students as thinkers, and I promoted the purpose of schooling as cognitive or activist, but not as emotional or embodied.

Perhaps this was the reason I spent my evenings returning to my body. In yoga class each night, I allowed the heat of the room to melt the walls I built around my body. I invited all of myself back home, calling all of the parts of me in again, but not fully integrating them. I relegated my body and mind to different parts of the day - at night I could feel, but in my classroom the next day I returned to living entirely from my mind.

Though it felt like a wholly individual struggle at the time, I see now that this Cartesian dualism between thinking and feeling was not my burden alone. I didn't simply imagine that school was the place where I should focus on my disembodied thinking mind and that home is where I can fully feel my humanity. Rather, as Boler (1999) points out, the roots of this gendered and raced historical separation of emotion and reason run deep. She traces the separation, drawing on several theorists' take on its origins: Bordo's argument regarding the 17th century "masculinization of thought" – a tangent of theory that separated self and world, or Lloyd's (1984) exploration of the exclusion of women from Western philosophy as a result of the Enlightenment projection of truth.

In the pages that follow, I will move more deeply into the theoretical underpinnings at the heart of this separation between reason and emotion and how it has been reinforced in educational scholarship. I also turn to theoretical lenses and scholarship located beyond that binary, including

post-structural feminist scholarship, critical theory, and scholarship outside of education in areas such as law, literature, and rhetoric and composition. I will also construct an argument from the literature about the way this separation is both reproduced and manifested in writing curriculum through discourse around genre and, in particular, on the framing of one genre, persuasive writing, as highly representative of the unfeeling, impersonal nature of theoretical conceptions of academic writing.

This will be my project, also: to write a kind of letter to myself as I drive through the countryside preparing to pretend. Though I would never encourage her to step out of her car weeping, I do know she could do a lot of good to challenge this culture of pretending by letting her students see her, as well as any of us can try to see each other, and allow ourselves to be seen. It is a starting point to understand how things came to be, to try to un-become them.

What Do I Mean and Not Mean by “Emotion”?

Before I move into my review of the research related to this binary and its reproduction in genre framing, I first want to qualify my use of the term “emotion” throughout this chapter and also in other areas of my analysis. Joining critical scholars such as Ahmed (2004) I, too, recognize that the term “emotion” is in no way neutral or without a history tied to race and gender, what Ahmed describes in greater detail in *The Cultural Politics of Emotion* when she argues for the importance of reading texts “which work by aligning subjects with collectives by attributing ‘others’ as the source of our feelings” (p. 6). This “aligning of subjects” so as to position and blame *is* the history of the term “emotion.” As a more specific example, Ahmed highlights the way a propaganda poster in England incites anger for “illegal immigrants and bogus asylum seekers....seeking easy comforts and free benefits” (p. 2). Thus emotion circulates around and is directed toward certain bodies in ways that makes the “emotion” a dangerous one to use without

acknowledging this context. Emotion has also been historically tied to gendered and racialized bodies, and, particularly within the field of social emotional learning, certain emotions are labeled as “good” and others as “bad”. Such associations, then, become tools for positioning groups according to emotions they might exhibit, a hierarchy Ahmed (2004) labels as a displacement of the related hierarchy of emotion and reason.

One important critique of some scholars who examine and historicize the theoretical separation between reason/emotion, is that they look primarily at the way such hierarchies position women, without also seeing how this binary is so clearly related to race and class. For example, my critique of Boler isn’t so much in her use of the word “emotion” (which she explains is a utilitarian choice more than a philosophical one) as it is with her failure to look more at dimensions outside of gender where a binary like this one can have real consequences. I include the critique in order to be mindful in this framing of emotion in my own work, and also to align more closely with Ahmed’s (2004) recognition of the term than Boler’s.

Finally, I will conclude this qualification of my use of the term “emotion” in my literature review by briefly touching on its history in the field of cognitive psychology. This is another area where emotion has a shameful history as a labeling and ranking mechanism. Charles Darwin’s (1872) *The Expression of the Emotions in Man and Animals* offers a powerful visual example of the way psychology categorizes emotions through facial expression, and also the way the field still sees some emotions as positive and others as negative (i.e. an entire field of psychology is labeled “positive psychology” and is devoted to tracing the origins of happiness). This obsession with labeling and classifying is broken into smaller units of focus, with some scholars debating the precise trajectory of emotions (i.e. is it the physical state that precedes thinking as William James (1872) argued. Even psychologists who use the term affect do so in order to label and

categorize. Tomkin's (1982) organization still centers his nine innate, biological affective states present at birth in their logo - nine distinct, only slightly overlapping, circles meant to correspond with the nine affective states denoted by Tompkins.



I offer this very brief critique of psychologists' devotion to labeling and ranking emotion and the use of these labels as mechanisms for gendered, racialized, and classed positioning in order to recognize a complication of my use of the term in this chapter. Though I take up the term emotion or feeling, I do so for pragmatic reasons, as a convenient shorthand that makes my writing accessible, especially in my work with practicing teachers and my intention to write for them as a primary audience. I, in no way, want to join in the historical use of the term to oppress and problematically position. Much like Boler, (1999) who explains that she chose to use the term 'emotion' in her writing because it is a term that will resonate with most readers as it is used so frequently, in this chapter I also use the term as I am in conversation with literature on the topic and in order to maintain a sense of flow and consistency. In the analysis of my data, I sometimes also take up the term "affect" for the way in which it actively attempts to avoid, within the theoretical traditions I engage, such labeling and positioning. The term affect, rather, allows us to think in terms of the unlabel-able or precognitive experience (Stewart, 2007). Throughout this chapter, I explain and illustrate the usage and definition of affect in the way I am taking it up in my project.

Emotion, Education, and Feminist Poststructural Approaches to Thinking about Both

I want to begin by placing my research in context of the larger conversation that has been unfolding within critical discussions in feminist poststructuralist work that seeks to disrupt hierarchies and divisions between emotion and reason and private and public. St. Pierre (2000) explains that binaries are at the heart of much of the feminist poststructuralist scholarship because the division between reason/emotion was paired with the devaluing of emotion, the celebration of reason, and the association between women and the lesser quality of emotion and men with the esteemed quality of reason. However, the critique within feminist poststructural thought extends beyond simply bemoaning such a ranking system. Rather, scholars address the way the binary, itself, is a false one that reinforces the illusion that thought and emotion are separate. This false binary is what Jaggar (1989) corrects when she argues, “emotions are neither more basic than observation, reason or action nor secondary to them, each of these human faculties reflects an aspect of human knowing inseparable from the other aspects...the development of each of these is a necessary condition for any one of these” (p. 172). In Jaggar’s view, emotion isn’t simply an important precursor to knowledge or an avenue for building investment in cognitive projects; rather, thought and feeling are intertwined far too much to categorize, label and classify - especially in that temporal way that also “uses” emotion in service of gaining knowledge.

In her writing on emotion and reason, Boler (2004) explains that the work of school throughout the nineteenth century was to discipline moral behavior and that emotional control was a cornerstone of that project. Since Protestant and other religious camps framed the “good student” as the obedient student, children were taught to “self-police their emotions for the purpose of good mental hygiene” (Boler, 1999, p. 48), which is an interesting corollary of today’s mindfulness project (something I will touch on later in this chapter). Much like today’s social and emotional learning movement, emotions like anger were described as physiological disruptions

that upset mental capacity and thus one must “cool off before thinking clearly” (p.48). Further, Boler (1999) describes emotions as sites of social control that are mapped differently on girls than they are on boys. Girls’ emotional control was for the benefit of society, while boys regulation of anger was a benefit for their own thinking.

Jones (2012) performs a similar enactment of poststructuralist deconstruction by pulling back the curtain on the “nomos” of teacher education - those norms that have become calcified reality. Drawing on Bourdieu’s concept of nomos, Jones challenges these norms by including emotional and artistic reactions to young adult literature in her teacher education courses. She also pushes back against the kinds of language and topics that are often barred from academic discourse, such as sexuality. For instance, when she noticed that her students were hesitant to use words such as “penis” or “vagina” in even the most appropriate contexts such as the class’s discussion of a sex scene from Stephanie Klein’s memoir *Moose*, she invited the conversation and also encouraged the class to reflect on why the conversation felt so uncomfortable for them, and if this discomfort might be linked to the academic context. In chapter three, I will further discuss how the binary questioned within poststructural thought also applies to power hierarchies in research design.

Challenging Foreclosure of Emotion in School: Love as Pedagogy and the SEL Movement

Of course, scholars have taken up this foreclosure of emotion in school spaces and challenged the binaries that seek to disallow its presence. In this section I will highlight two theoretical approaches that aim to disrupt this foreclosure of the presence of emotion in schools described in the previous section. Here, I will examine these two camps as contexts of work on emotions in schools, as well as to critique how each of these conversations fail to center these disruptions within a critical discourse that examines the way power sometimes circulates under

the guise of emotion through a discourse of love and care. The first camp I am calling the “love as pedagogy” movement, an approach to thinking about teaching that emphasizes the word “love” and often frames the teacher in gendered ways as a motherly, nurturing figure. The second approach is the Social and Emotional Learning movement (SEL) and the offshoots of this movement that often fall under the heading of “mindfulness learning.” I will explore each in turn, attending to both the theoretical discursive framing of these topics and also take a critical stance on these perspectives, examining how they might position children of color and/or reproduce gendered ways of thinking about teaching.

Pedagogies of Love

Before I explore the discursive framing of the “love as pedagogy” movement, I first want to affirm this movement as radical in the way it supported new ways of thinking about teaching and opened up wider perspectives on the presence of love and emotion in school. J.O’Quinn and Garrison’s (2004) critique of top-down, hierarchical approaches to teaching gives a historical overview of the kind of radical change that has already occurred thanks to early pioneers of “love as pedagogy” movements. These conversations centering the teacher as caring and the practice of teaching as care has to be acknowledged for the revolution that it is, or to borrow a now ubiquitous term from Kuhn (1970), a real paradigm shift in the way we think about teaching as an emotional practice, instead of solely a cognitive one.

However, this “teacher as caring, loving supporter” describes teaching in highly problematic ways. Noddings (2005), for example frames the teacher as “carer”, even using gendered pronouns to denote carer as “she” and cared for as “he” – “in order to avoid the awkward s/he or repetition of he or she” (p. 772). Noddings acknowledges that care between adults has a sense of mutuality, whereas care between children and adults has an appropriate

differential in care. Thus, there needs to be a time and place where teachers “put aside the assumed need to learn specific aspect of subject matter and address the expressed need of the student for emotional support, moral direction or shared human interest” (p. 772). However, through her framing of “care ethics,” Noddings emphasizes students’ needs and the importance for teachers to listen and respond to those needs as they are expressed by students. Though she has been a leader in the reframing of classroom practice as a practice of “care” she also does so by feminizing teaching practice, as well as perpetuating already existing power hierarchies, where teachers have the power to love, nurture, and even “save” children, while children are sometimes positioned as weak or helpless.

Liston and Garrison (2004) frame their take on “love as pedagogy” similarly, arguing for “seeing the students before us as whole human beings in search of meaning and the kind of understanding that a loving perspective affords teachers. Seeing the hurt and pain that inevitably arise from daily life is another such recognition” (p. 2). It is the use of “seeing,” here, that is reminiscent of Noddings’ framing, and though both scholars make the revolutionary and important move toward attending to the child as a whole person; their move requires a recognition of the complexity of locating all actions related to love and care in teachers who are watching for students’ needs and listening as they share them, rather than building relationship together in mutually beneficial ways, and in ways that also recognize how children are also intuiting and empathizing in important ways.

Parker Palmer (1983), a founding figure in this area, also importantly dislodges a purely cognitive perspective on learning. Here, too, the language of those arguments deserves further attention for how it can position “feeling” in problematic ways. His language is not that of “care” or “love” the way it is for Noddings, but he recognizes the value of “making space for feelings”

so as to make space for learning. Palmer explains, “We often clutter our learning space with obstacles and distractions to evade the emotion that education evokes. If we leave those emotions unattended, we will not be able to clear that space. Fear of feelings - and especially the feeling of fear - are major barriers to creating the space this sort of teaching requires” (p. 83). For Palmer, the invitation to bring feeling into the classroom is in service of learning – we must “clear the space” by sharing feelings so we can move to the heavy lifting of teaching and learning. Palmer offers a phrase teachers should use in their classes in order to make sharing feelings a safe practice - “This is the place where it is safe for your feelings to emerge. I have feelings too, and I will make myself vulnerable by telling you some of them. Teaching and learning are human enterprises and we must use human emotions in the learning process rather than letting them use us” (p. 84). Palmer’s sanction of emotion of school is a crucial argument, but the wording in his description is somewhat reminiscent of the cognitive approaches to emotion I highlighted earlier. Emotion could be interpreted here as a barrier to learning- something to heal before moving on to the important cognitive work of learning. However, elsewhere in his writing Palmer describes how important it is to value the whole student- emotional and cognitive. In this way, his discussion requires our attention to the complexity of this relationship and the embedded dimension of power inherent in the invitation. The absence of attention to power is a common theme among scholars like Palmer and Noddings who wonderfully center love in their framework but also would benefit from critical approaches to thinking about emotion.

Boler (2004) offers another way of thinking about care in teaching, an interesting contrast to Palmer and Noddings’ framing of teacher as caretaker. In her reflection on supporting the students in her class who are going through the “pedagogy of discomfort” as they integrate social justice frameworks, she argues that the teacher’s role is to provide compassion for these students.

Yet, for Boler, compassion moves students toward “clarity of reality,” and this is an uncomfortable process that requires a teacher’s compassion. Here, care and concern are not just about listening to students or caring for their emotional well-being, but also about maintaining expectations for change and drawing on one’s compassion when that change feels challenging. In this way, Boler also blends cognitive, emotional, and social justice oriented perspectives by arguing that feelings, thoughts and beliefs overlap in a complex matrix. Teachers’ role, in her perspective, is to honor young people’s discomfort with learning, while also observing that their feelings of anger and frustration are a part of learning and changing. Feeling isn’t in the way of learning, nor is it in service of learning; rather, the two dimensions co-exist and a teachers’ role is to support this process in all of its dimensions.

The scholars I have mentioned thus far view the invitation of emotion into classroom practice through the lens of the teacher’s experience and as a change the teacher makes when he or she sees students as a “whole person” (Palmer, 1989) or care for the students with love (Noddings, 2005). Again, teachers are discursively positioned as caretakers in these arguments. It is the teacher with the “caring loving eye [who] tailors the standards to fit the students” (Liston and Garrison, 2004, p. 3). It is important to see the way existing hierarchies between teachers and students as well as racial hierarchies in classrooms with students of color are being reproduced despite the good intentions of those in this love as pedagogy movement. Unless we see the way children are loving each other and their teacher, and are, themselves, already disrupting cognitive/emotion binaries in school, we risk reproducing a savior complex or, worse still, a white savior complex.

Social Emotional Learning

The social and emotional learning movement is another related practice that aims to challenge the binary of emotion/reason by disrupting its foreclosure in school spaces. As I discuss in this section, SEL is often focused on controlling emotion, rather than just inviting the disruption of its foreclosure. Jones and Bouffard (2012) describe social and emotional learning as programs in schools that recognize “children and adolescents need to have skills such as managing negative emotions, being calm and focused, following directions, and navigating relationships with peers and adults” and offer skill-based curricula to support these ends (p. 1). The language, here, is indicative of a popular way of thinking about social and emotional learning as mechanisms that help control “negative emotions” and teach positive emotions like “calm and focus.” Their language also points to the nature of SEL’s dual goals of body control over negative emotions and the cultivation of positive emotions.

In those approaches to SEL, I am reminded of Ahmed’s (2004) argument that creating models of emotion that are hierarchical produces a spectrum of “good” emotions and “bad” emotions that allow for both negative positioning of others by labeling emotion in this way, blaming people as the source of their own bad feelings. Ahmed explains, “those who are ‘other’ to me or us, or those that threaten to make us other remain the source of bad feeling in this model of emotional intelligence” (p. 5). The language of the social and emotional learning movement encourages these kinds of hierarchies.

A gendered and racialized dimension exists within much of the SEL scholarship, with interventions being centered (and praised for this centering) in urban schools or schools with higher proportions of students of color. For example, the way SEL is often taken up is in terms of mindfulness and a kind of bodily control and resilience in the face of hardship in diverse communities. In the film *Mindful Schools*, African American and Latino children are the focus of

mindfulness-based interventions. The website for the film describes the benefits of mindfulness as “resilience: seeing things objectively - which reduces the amount of narrative we add to the world’s natural ups and downs, giving us greater balance”. However, this focus doesn’t attend to the fact that much of the trauma children experience is not “natural” or even a matter of “ups and downs” as much as it might be a result of our culture’s racist or heteronormative practices, trauma incurred from emotional or physical abuse or even the sense of loss that occurs after the death of a loved one (Butler, 2004 Dutro & Bien, 2014; Eng & Kazanjian, 2003). Similarly, the film *Healthy Minds*, which has a split focus on the use of meditation to support veterans and children, also centers significantly around a Latino boy. The film explains that brain changes from the trauma of foster care may contribute to children’s fears. Again, rather than offering opportunities for the expression of these fears, the meditation curriculum is offered as a solution that doesn’t require the teachers to be present with emotion or another’s challenge or to reflect on structure of inequity and racism that contribute to these difficult feelings.

I see both the mindful schools movement and the social and emotional learning movement as related in the way they skip the important stage of expression and also in the way they categorize emotions as good or bad, a categorization that is connected to the labeling of bodies and the judgments of entire groups because of those labels (Ahmed, 2004). Additionally, the teacher’s role in much of this literature is to make sure children have a way to avoid expressing tough feelings, but this also allows teachers to avoid having to be present with uncomfortable feelings. This pedagogical method, in some ways, is a modern, even trendy, version of the foreclosure of emotion I described in my brief description of the history of emotion in schools in my earlier section. Also, if SEL and Mindfulness-based methods to discussing emotion in schools don’t also attend to the way children are positioned according to race, gender and

sexuality, then they are trying to treat this binary as ahistorical and also failing to see that these pedagogies function differently across racial lines.

Trauma Theory, Critical Literacy and Other Perspectives that Complicate Emotion In Schools

Despite the prevalence of color blind approaches to thinking about emotion in school, there are a few approaches that bring a critical lens to this work. Dutro and Bien (2014), for example, draw on trauma theory and weave the approach together with a critical literacy lens, inviting educators to think about the way power and privilege circulate when we aim to invite difficult experiences into classroom practice. They also emphasize the way this invitation to bring deeply felt experiences into classrooms requires a paired recognition of the tenuous role of the teacher as a reciprocal witness, language that attends to the problematic discourse of the “love as pedagogy” movement in which teachers keep their own vulnerability at a distance. Similarly, Wissman and Wiseman (2011) take a trauma studies and critical literacy approach to thinking about students’ writing, and their research reflects the still calcified distinctions between writing content that isn’t seen as appropriate for school. Like the love as pedagogy movement, however, Wissman & Wiseman’s research focuses primarily on students’ vulnerability with teachers cast in the role as caretakers. Despite this oversight, they include a critical dimension that attempts to weave together critical approaches with their trauma theory lens, and this linkage is rare. Finally, Jones (2013) both sanctions and analyzes the way embodied experience in the courses she teaches is so central to her teaching philosophy. Her writing, like that of Dutro and Bien, reflects a disruption of the “love as pedagogy” framing of the teacher in the role of the caretaker. Jones makes her own experience with emotion in the teacher education classroom explicit, and rather than casting herself in the role of caretaker, explores her embodied experience with an emotional

reaction to a song played during her class. This is just a short list of researchers attempting to find ways to bridge these disparate fields by recognizing that power is always circulating and we cannot simply try to bring love and mindfulness into the classroom without thinking about how that will operate to reify existing power structures.

My brief exploration of practices that aim to disrupt the foreclosure of emotion in schools provides a lens on the need for continued and critical work in this area. As I illustrate, simply inviting teachers to “love” their students or students to feel their emotions in the classroom doesn’t acknowledge the circulation of power in this practice. I also draw on examples of critical affective scholars in order to position my work within their existing frameworks.

Binaries Between Skill-Based and Choice-Based Writing Curriculum

A tangent to this binary of thinking and feeling in school contexts is a related discussion around direct instruction and skill-based approaches to teaching that are often placed in opposition to constructivist or choice-based approaches. I will highlight the way this tension shows up in the context of writing instruction and writer’s workshop models in particular. This tension emerged within the implementation of new models that often challenged the separation of personal and public lives of students by inviting students to write about their lives and have a sense of freedom in their writing practices. These approaches are all indicative of the larger movement called writing workshop that became prominent in writing pedagogy a few decades ago. Lisa Delpit (1986) was an early critic of writing workshops’ impact on communities of color, but she was also noticing the way a binary had emerged that was harming African American students. In her critique of Nancie Atwell and other early writing workshop pioneers, Lisa Delpit (1986) describes the implementation of progressive teaching methods in her classroom, and her shock when she noticed that her white students zoomed ahead while her black students struggled:

“I was doing the same thing for all of my kids - what was the problem?” (p. 381). Following a conversation with an African American friend in the Bay Area Writing Project, she reflected, again, on the way process writing and goals of “fluency” instead of skills has differential results for children, with white children mastering sentence structure and skills while African American students still weren’t offered learning in these basic skills. Thus, Delpit became an early proponent for the blending of both of these approaches—explicit instruction of writing skills and opportunities to engage with the writing process. She also pointed to the dominance of white researchers in the process writing movement and argued that there is much to be gained by inviting minority involvement into the conversation. In this way, Delpit’s argument provides a crucial foundation for my study, which looks at the way expressive writing might be paired with informational writing in a way that supports both high interest writing practice while also ensuring that students gain the academic skills crucial to writing argumentative texts.

Genre Separation as Perpetuation of Emotion/Reason Binary

Just as binaries between emotion and school practice are perpetuated on the macro scale in many of the ways I have mentioned thus far, one of the goals of my study was to explore how genre functions at the level of classroom practice to reproduce and disrupt this binary. In this section, I will primarily focus on the way genre is defined and taught by scholars and proponents of the writing workshop model. As I demonstrate in my discussion of this research literature, I am primarily interested in discourse analysis as a tool for understanding what is emphasized and devalued through the framing of different genres.

I first turn to the way genre is discussed in the Common Core, including the 7th grade standards since this is the context for the persuasive writing project at the center of this dissertation.

Text Types and Purposes 1:

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.CCRA.W.1

Write arguments to support claims in an analysis of substantive topics or texts using valid reasoning and relevant and sufficient evidence.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.CCRA.W.2

Write informative/explanatory texts to examine and convey complex ideas and information clearly and accurately through the effective selection, organization, and analysis of content.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.CCRA.W.3

Write narratives to develop real or imagined experiences or events using effective technique, well-chosen details and well-structured event sequences.

Research to Build and Present Knowledge:

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.CCRA.W.7

Conduct short as well as more sustained research projects based on focused questions, demonstrating understanding of the subject under investigation.

Interestingly, the Common Core standards are separated by genre with “texts types and purposes” emphasizing personal narrative writing as one standard with its own genre features and informative writing as separate. Both research and informative writing places a heavy emphasis on “understanding the subject” and, for informative writing, choosing “effective organization and analysis.” Thus, understanding, clarity, and organization are placed at a premium within informative writing. Personal narrative, interestingly, also heavily values organization and structure. Neither genre emphasizes personal investment in topic as a goal, nor are the genres

connected in any way in the Common Core writing standards. Their visual separation betrays a belief that these genres are distinctly different and meant to remain that way.

Increasing Focus on Informational Texts in Policy and Practice

The Common Core is a part of a larger shift in curriculum policy emphasizing informative texts in classroom literacy practice (Maloch & Bomer, 2013). Following the movement toward expressive writing in the 1980's, a pendulum swing in policy and practice shifted curricular requirements toward more depersonalized writing (Purcell-Gates, Duke, Martineau, 2007). The tremendous swing toward informational writing is also tied to the college readiness movement, given the genre's presence in college-level writing assignments. This shift in attention is dramatic; for example, in the elementary grades, nearly half of all texts students are expected to read are supposed to be within the non-fiction genre (Moss, Leone, & Dipillo, 1997) though research, a stark contrast with data from the late 90's in which only 3% of the print environment in 20 elementary schools was devoted to the genre (Duke, 2000). Quantity of time and texts has become a key approach to measuring this increase in attention to the informative genre, with experts using "availability and accessibility" as the language to address the shifts in policy at the classroom level (Maloch & Bomer, 2013). Though this enormous increase in our attention to informational texts in recent, I see it as an extension of the historical celebration of reason in schools, to the detriment of other dimensions of writing practice. The expressive writing movement was an anomaly within the reason-centric narrative of the history of schooling that I described earlier. This shift toward informational texts seems to be a return to the norm of schooling practice rather than an integration of expressive writing and informative texts. It is this

lack of integration between the two genres, and production of genre hierarchy in literacy policy and practice that I hope to address in my study.

The Framing of Genre Within the Literature

When I turn my attention to the discursive framing of genre by scholars focusing on writing workshop, I see a similar approach to thinking of genre as separate and distinct. Here, again, the Cartesian dualism of feeling/thinking and emotional/rational maps onto this separation of genres, with personal narrative acting as a marker for emotional writing or private writing and informative/explanatory texts nearly synonymous with rational, cognitive writing. Calkins (1986) and Elbow & Belanoff (1999) divide their books on writing workshop and writing curriculum into paragraphs and chapters according to genre. Elbow and Belanoff, for instance, label chapters “the essay” “persuasion” and “research” and also divide their chapter on genre into separate paragraphs according to the genre he wishes to explore. Calkins (1986) devotes one chapter of her book on *The Art of Teaching Writing* to “genre studies” in which she explains that genre is “primary” and “the emphasis we [teachers of writing workshop models] place on genre is, in fact, one of the distinguishing characteristics of the work we do, one of the things that sets our work apart from other educators” (p. 357). Calkins thinks of genres as distinct, separate and autonomous. She lists them as such: “picture books, drama, short fiction, letters, literary nonfictions, memoir or poetry” while also making an argument for each one to have its own unit of study. The genre of focus alters the kind of writing students do in their notebooks during those distinct units within the curriculum. Interestingly, one of Calkins (2012) more recent books was devoted entirely to navigating the Common Core, a reflection of the increasing pressure and focus on student performance on standardized tests. Interestingly, Calkins organizes the way she talks about genre in this more recent text dividing the book into chapters according to genres as they

are divided in the Common Core. Also, though informational writing wasn't listed in her list of genre, she devotes a chapter to its discussion in this new book and she reflects on the fact that this genre's increased focus is a significant shift in the field and one that will require close attention from teachers increasing their focus in the writing curriculum.

Elbow and Belanoff (1999) describe genre as the "form" of writing and his emphasis is on structure and organization rather than word choice, style or purpose (the way Calkins' seemed to conceptualizes genre). They organizes his list by genre the way Calkins does: "1. Description or portrait 2. Narrative or story 3. Dialogue 4. Persuasive essay 5. Expository writing 6. Satire or poetry 7. Meditation or personal essay" (p. 45-51). Rarely do they note the way writing in these styles or forms can bleed into each other. However, they do, very briefly, make a significant recognition of the way persuasive writing might already exist within the body of a piece of "private writing" (an interesting descriptor they give to writing students have done in their journals). Elbow and Belanoff (1999) explain "if what you wrote privately was already more or less in a persuasive mode just write for a few moments about what changes you would make to shape it or make it stronger" (p. 47). They argue that that even chaotic, private, exploratory writing has form, and a pattern would likely emerge if we looked for one in the pages of a personal journal. This free form chaotic writing wasn't "genreless" they argue; rather, it has some sense of organization or genre lurking in the writing and we can shape or organize this writing for our purposes. They also note the way genres might blend together in this private writing: "you can choose and develop two or three of the overlapping organizations that are operating, like overlapping wave patterns caused by two or three pebbles dropped into a pond" (p. 54).

Despite the use of clear divisions between genres in their books and practices, Calkins, Elbow and Belanoff (1999) see personal writing as a way into other genres. They call informal

personal narrative “private writing,” a descriptor that certainly points to the traditional binary around public/private thoughts and feelings. For Elbow, private writing can be, what he calls, the “germ” of an idea. But much of his discussion is about transforming these private pieces into a different genre. For Calkins, (1986) “pieces - those short things children have written in their notebooks” are the material that will later be crafted into something else. Calkins explains “writers will reread their collection of entries on a topic and then imagine different genres for what Isoke Nia calls the “blob of stuff” (p. 362).

Like Elbow, Belanoff, and Calkins, Nancie Atwell (1998) describes genre by listing options for her students: but rather than organize units around genre (1998), she tells her students that “sometime during this academic year produce a finished piece in each of the following genres: a short story, three to five poems or songs, op-ed piece about an issue that matters to you, a book review, a memoir.” Atwell’s approach is different from Calkins’ in that she denotes the difference between teaching genre as a way into writing practice vs. writing freely and then noting differences in the characteristics of one’s writing. Hers is an open framework, but one that still sees writing through the lens of distinct genres.

Scholarship Blending the Cognitive and Emotional Dimensions

Though the scholars I have highlighted in this section recognize areas where genre can and does blend or where emotional and “personal” writing can inform writing in other genres, this observation is not explicitly the focus of their scholarship, and, at times, not recognized at all. For this reason, I extend my reach outside of education as I continue reflecting on scholars who have taken up this feature of writing practice. I want to begin by noting scholars who might not explicitly use the word genre, but who are disrupting the binaries between emotion and reason in

their work - a disruption that sometimes also maps onto their classroom's writing and thinking practices.

Naussbaum, (2001) has built her career in law around the notion that the separation between emotion and reason is a false one, and, instead, argues that rational political decisions are informed by emotion. Naussbaum (2001) defines emotions as "intelligent responses" and "part in parcel of ethical reasoning" (p. 3). Further, she adds, "we cannot possibly omit emotions once we acknowledge that emotions include in their content judgments that can be true or false and good or bad guides to ethical choice. We will have to grapple with the messy material of grief and love, anger and fear, and the role these tumultuous experiences play in thought about the good and the just" (p. 3). Arthur Weinstein (2003) similarly seeks to disrupt the foreclosure of feeling in cognitive pursuits such as the humanities courses he teaches at the collegiate level. As a professor of literature, he argues that the emotional nature of reading texts and the emotions inherent in the texts themselves are a crucial part of teaching literature.

Brand (1987) also observes the relationship between affect and cognition in writing, arguing,

"Historically, the field of composition looked first at the what of writing, the product. Over the last two decades, it has added the how of writing, the process. It follows that the field looks next at the why of writing, affective content and motivation. Understanding the collaboration of emotion and cognition in writing is both fundamental and far-reaching. It is in cognition that ideas make sense. But it is in emotion that this sense finds value." (p. 442).

For Brand, like Weinstein (with reading), the reason for writing is emotional even if the process is cognitive. Naussbaum is more likely to argue that the cognitive process of writing is also emotional and that separation is, itself, a false one.

In their analysis of the complex relationship emotion and reason have had in schools,

Liston and Garrison (2004) list philosophers (Aristotle, William James, John Dewey, John Paul Sarte, Simone Weil and Iris Murdoch) who have celebrated the “rationality of emotion” and Post-modern/post-modernist feminist thinkers like Alison Jagger, Sandra Barky and Sara Ruddick, who have long critiqued the patriarchal bifurcation of thinking and feeling. I have also touched on scholars valuing, or at the very least mentioning, this complexity of thought and feeling within writing workshop. So, though an explicit blending of genre or emotion/thinking for the purpose of persuasive writing is not currently widely theorized or part of writing curriculum, the precedent and rationale for this work is present across these disciplines.

Feminist scholars of color have also long written in ways that transcend any labeling. Anzaldua’s *Borderlands*, for example for example, calls us to reconsider genre entirely. Certainly, she argues for shifts in the cultural ways of positioning women as well as American treatment of communities that live on the border of Mexico and the United States. Her argument takes the shape of poetry, as symbol and metaphor, and often as stories from her life. The emotions that saturate her writing are rarely labeled as such; rather, affect transcends clarity as the stories and arguments blend with each other and with reasoning and feeling. Anzaldua (1987) performs one of her sentences from the book: “rigidity means death. Only by remaining flexible is she able to stretch the psyche horizontally and vertically” (p. 79).

Counternarratives, in general, weave narrative, emotion, and argument into a complex and layered genre that both depicts the reality of difficult and oppressive experiences while also calling for real changes in racist policies and actions. (Solórzano & Yosso, 2002). Testimonio, writing that also describes state imposed violence in communities of color, also draws on personal experiences written as narrative to also offer a vision for change or call to action (González, Plata, García, Torres & Urrieta, 2003).

Curricular innovation has also, already pushed back against these binaries. Connected learning and interest-based learning both ground curriculum in children's personal connections and out-of-school literacies into curricular learning and, thus, dissolves some of the divisions we often draw between thinking and feeling and our public and private selves. As an example, "connected civics" invited young people to draw on their social media practices as a medium for participatory politics, a practice that invites youth to weave narrative and argument in their production of pieces for a youth radio organization in LA (Ito, Soep, Kligler-Vilenchik, Shresthova, Gamber-Thompson & Zimmerman , 2015). The authors call these productions 'hybrid narratives' for the ways in which the final product is both personal and also inherently political.

Research on the Persuasive Writing Genre

I turn now to research in the field of persuasive writing, specifically, as this is the focal genre for my study, and also as another example of the way this thinking/feeling binary shows up in curriculum. Further, persuasive writing curriculum offers an example of the way genre framing reproduces this emotion/reason split. Prior to this section, I primarily focused on an examination of the overarching division between reason and emotion in philosophy and education (and in genre studies, specifically). I want to shift my focus now to the way research within the persuasive writing genre joins this conversation.

I see the way the conversation within persuasive writing research often tends to emphasize the framing of argumentative writing through the lens of genre studies and also with a skill-based focus on academic language (Dobbs 2013; Uccellie, Dobbs & Scott, 2013). Relatedly, persuasive writing is also explored through the lens of its future usefulness. For instance, the genre is explored as preparation for career and college (Kahane & Cavender, 2006), future argumentative

writing in academic contexts, and writing at the secondary level (Jacobson, Reid, 2010).

Persuasive writing is also examined for its support in developing critical thinking skills (Toulmin, 2000), as a medium for advocacy and citizenship activism (Brett & Thomas, 2014), and as a context to develop strategies for making arguments through oral and written debate (Felton & Herki, 2004). These key themes offer us a window into an overarching framework in which persuasive writing isn't seen as a process in service of supporting students as they express their own urgent beliefs, as much as a means to obtaining the useful skill of argumentation. Primarily, the research emphasizes the importance of persuasive skills for future use or as a kind of necessary skill all people should have to be critical thinkers and communicators. There is a focus on the ends over the means, and the ends are placed in an unknowable but certain time and for an equally vague but just as certain purpose.

Even more apparent in this research, is a theme of absence of any mention of emotion or personal investment in making arguments or claims. A discourse analysis of the literature's framing of persuasive writing is notably devoid of references to the emotional nature of arguing for something one cares for deeply. Rather, persuasive writing is described often with a cognitive and psychological frame with little attention paid to student investment in the topic. For example, in their study of the impact of peer revising on persuasive writing with fourth and fifth graders, Philippakos & MacArthur (2016) describe the process of choosing prompts this way:

Several steps were followed in developing the prompts. First, a list of writing prompts was generated on topics considered to be interesting and accessible to students in fourth and fifth grades and unbiased by gender or cultural background. This list was compiled after an examination of topics used in research studies on persuasive writing, in published programs, and in Internet teachers' resources. Second, 12 teachers of grades 4 and 5 from schools other than the research site gave feedback on whether the topics would be interesting to their students and whether their students would be able to respond to them. Third, these same teachers asked their students to write about five topics (uniforms, school on Saturday, use of vending machines at school, effects of television viewing, and

cancellation of field trips). The topics for the pretest–posttest tasks were selected from these topics (p. 423).

As this excerpt describes, topics were generated by researchers and affirmed as “interesting and accessible” by teachers from a different school who had no personal connections with the students participating in the study. Further, the topics are chosen because they are “unbiased by gender or cultural background”: a detail meant to support the worth of their study, but without a recognition of what will be lost in eliminating topics that are tied to marginalization and discrimination according to race, culture and gender. Also, this study emphasizes the common theme in the literature of measuring success in persuasive writing by looking at the elements of persuasive writing (i.e. position, rebuttal, evidence). As another example of the genre features focus, though Petit & Soto (2002) emphasize the value of students’ enthusiasm for their arguments, something they demonstrate by constructing a game in which students have to argue for a plate of cookies, the scholars also center their study on the mastery of technical terms in service of convincing their audience. Authenticity in writing practice is described as students’ connection with an authentic desire for the cookies. But students don’t have any autonomy over this topic. The goal of the study is not to support young people in making an argument that might have an impact on something they care about; rather it is a valuable exercise because it can support learning persuasive writing features. The authors explain that games (like this one) are “not designed merely to amuse”; rather, they serve a “complex, cognitive function” (Fredericksen, 1999, p. 117 qtd. in Petit & Soto, 2002). Indeed, the skills that are centered in this study are argumentative techniques described as “cognitive” even as they are also positioned in service of social goals.

Where emotion does explicitly enter the discussion of persuasive writing is as a persuasive technique labeled “pathos” with the focus of the emotional dimension placed on manipulating the

audience's emotions in order to persuade them, a focus reflected in their definition of pathos as "Appeals to the audience's emotions. How is the speaker or author appealing to the audience's emotions? Why? Always try to name the emotions being appealed to (love, sympathy, anger, fear, hate, compassion) and figure out how the emotion is being created in the audience" (p. 679). The focus is on techniques that will produce an emotion in the audience so that the reader will be persuaded to agree with the author rather than encouraging the writer to choose an argument with an existing emotional connection. Pathos is described as something to be produced through writing, not as a way to express existing emotions.

Interestingly, this study illustrated that when students wrote arguments about why their team should be awarded the cookies prior to any explicit instruction about persuasive technique, all of the groups intuitively chose an appeal to pathos as their strategy. The authors observed the irony of this choice considering the bias against pathos in classrooms and textbooks that privilege logos or reason over emotion and feelings. For many speakers and writers, pathos is the default strategy, "the persuasive technique used more often than any" (p. 678). I also find it significant that students chose emotion as their central focus in persuading their audience, and also, that the scholars situated emotion as something in the audience despite their students attention to it as writers.

Critical scholars bridge narrative and persuasive writing, though not always labeling it with those exact terms. The genre of testimonios, for example, as well as the way storytelling is taken up by Critical Race Scholars points to the way stories already make arguments, and the way arguments often draw on personal experience. Stories can be persuasive in and of themselves, something critical scholars have pointed out in relation to genres where stories argue for social justice or the trauma embedded in lived experience is, already, a critique of the way things are.

Ladson-Billings (2010) explains that storytelling's central role in Critical Race Theory is to "add necessary contextual contours to the seeming objectivity of positivist perspectives and, of course, these stories speak to, passionately describe and of course seek to alter the culture of oppression and racism" (p. 11). In her description of *testimonio*, Cruz (2012) describes the way narrative written by a young person living on the street can be representative, speak about "all of us who live on the streets" and that writing and sharing this narrative can be inherently "a political project" (p. 463). As these two examples illustrate, narratives can both depict and reimagine the racial, sexual, gender, and socioeconomic discrimination in young people's communities. Though narrative isn't described as 'argumentative' explicitly in these two examples, storytelling is depicted as commentary on injustice and, in this way, is inherently argumentative. Also, in narratives that speak to social injustice, emotion is not sifted out of testimony to leave an organized, simplified persuasive piece; emotion is a crucial part of the argument because it points to the impact of injustice.

Within the research on persuasive writing, I unearthed little explicit research on supporting students in finding their deep affective motives for developing arguments, whether built from already existing feelings of personal investment or grounded in experiences they have had that produced a strong stance, or in an argument that has high stakes and real consequences for their own lives. I was, however, able to uncover research tying the genre of persuasive writing to personal narrative, with the personal narrative writing acting as a precursor and source of inspiration for persuasive work (Radcliff, 2012). In that way, Radcliffe's published study connects closely to my own. Yet, this study assigned the topic of "teen violence" for all of the students' persuasive essays, and though Radcliffe emphasized the students' enjoyment of this revision on the traditional approach, the use of an assigned topic raises questions about whether

had varying levels of investment in this “one size fits all” approach. Also, I want to respectfully point out that this study was conducted by a classroom teacher publishing work aimed toward practitioner readers, and its presence as the only study I could find aiming to draw on expressive writing as inspiration for persuasive writing is a crucial observation regarding the calcified binary between the genres in education research.

I do want to recognize other studies that attempted to find topics that would feel personally meaningful but I was fascinated to find that these studies gave students a list of controversial topics to choose from rather than invited personal investments to guide choices and continued to foreclose emotional investments that may already exist in connection with the approved topic. For example, one study narrowed topics for students’ essays to hate speech, abortion, gun control (Felton & Herko, 2004) and though these topics might potentially hold personal meaning and investment for students, the stories that inspired the stances were not a part of the writing process in this study. For example, Felton & Herko describe a student who chose from a list of approved topics to write abortion. The researchers discuss her essay in detail but don’t discuss its meaning for the writer.

Within the very small existing literature on the use of personal narrative writing as inspiration for persuasive writing, there is assumption about the inherent potential for personal narrative to be meaningful while persuasive writing remains a kind of academic necessity, but not an inherently pleasurable text to write. For example, in describing her practice of pairing narrative and persuasive genres, Radcliff (2012) frames the narrative genre as something we might use for the purpose of “sneaking in” a genre like persuasive or informative writing that students might not enjoy as much. Radcliff describes this process as “allowing my students the opportunity to embrace their love of narrative writing as a tool to reach proficiency on the district- and state-

mandated writing assessments” (p. 19). Here, we see again this overemphasis on persuasive writing as a means to an end, rather than as a potentially meaningful process in and of itself. Though I acknowledge the kind intentions of pairing the necessary practice of testing with one students enjoy, in order to add sweetness to the experience, this argument misses a central point I investigate in my study. That is, that the genre of argumentative writing itself *also* has the potential to be meaningful. To leverage narrative writing to pass a test misses the opportunity to understand persuasive writing as a genre that has its own merits as a meaningful writing practice - one students might enjoy if their arguments are something that, to them, feel worth fighting for. I also want to call attention to this study’s nearly singular presence in the literature on blending argumentative/personal narrative. Given that this research was completed by a classroom teacher for a practitioner audience, I certainly don’t aim to invalidate the piece based on the author or audience. I only want to point to the absence of studies on emotional and meaningful argumentative writing within the research community.

I unearthed one study within this research community that explores the way the personal and the academic can merge in persuasive writing, even though they do not emphasize personal narrative or emotion (Carbone & Orellana, 2010). Focusing instead on Elbow’s description of resonant ‘voice’ as important in academic writing, they take up this focus on investment in persuasive writing this way:

A resonant voice exposes the relationship between what the writer writes and what the writer is unconsciously thinking, making the writers’ subjectivities apparent. For example, writers may reveal a sentiment, not if writers’ honest (unconscious) intentions do not support the sentiment, it will resonate as untrue or hollow. Writers must be metaphorically behind the words, not only in voice, but also in body, to reveal themselves consciously

and unconsciously to give presence and weight to their words” (p. 296).

The researchers were primarily interested in looking for the way students altered their voice in persuasive writing in order to attend to two different audiences. They asked students to write a letter to someone they know as one persuasive text and then to write an essay for a more general audience. Though the focus of the study was on these alterations in voice, it also reflects the role of personal experiences in persuasive writing. For example, one student participant argued against immigration and wrote a letter to her mom about her stance on immigration. In the more general and traditional persuasive text, the student drew on her relationship with her mom and her personal tie to immigration in order to convince her audience, writing “this is the opinion of a young daughter of an immigrant” (Carbone & Orellana, 2010, p. 304). The letter she wrote to her mom about immigration was a precursor to her “academic” piece and she still found a way to infuse her personal relationship to the topic into the genre by drawing on the letter.

Though the authors were interested in seeing the way the different audiences and genres would reflect academic identities and discursive choices, I also see their study as a reflection of the power of infusing investment and relationships in the process of persuasion. Their study seems to reinforce the binary between personal and persuasive by favoring the reproduction of norms within academic writing, but I also could easily see the way the emotion and the stories present in the letter genre could also find their way into the persuasive text even with the emphasis on genre features.

Given the fact that most of the studies on persuasive writing required students to write to a specific topic or choose from a narrow list, I also want to note that this study offered students the opportunity to choose their topic and supported them in making a meaningful choice with

unstructured brainstorming as the technique used to support students in choosing their arguments. Their framing of voice in academic writing and their centering of investment echoes my own argument regarding the potential for personal connection to persuasive writing, though this study doesn't draw on students' personal experiences as much as it values their personal investment. Another difference between our work is their labeling of the writing as 'academic' and their focus on academic identity development throughout the article, language that I think potentially perpetuates binary thinking about cognitive/emotional and personal/academic. Still, this article comes closest to mirroring my own study of persuasive writing pedagogy and it certainly voices the crucial call for investment in argumentative writing.

Conclusion

Perhaps teachers and students have long felt divided by their home and school selves. Perhaps the walk or run home made their heart beat with intensity such that they arrived at their doorstep panting, reached for a glass of water, sweated through their clothes – felt themselves embodied. Maybe bedroom doors still slam at 4:15 as children finally feel the unprocessed grief from conflict on the playground or shame or loss or all of the many complex feelings that accompany the risks that come from learning and relationships.

The centering of the cognitive and rational in persuasive writing, without recognition of the emotional nature of fighting for an argument you care about, is a tangible example of the way the theoretical framing of the emotion/cognition binary shows up in real practices in schools. I will argue that the things we fight for in our lives *are always* tied to deep personal investments. Why then would we label the genre of argumentative writing as impersonal and highly academic? Why wouldn't we make explicit, and honor through our practice, the ways in which children and

young people are already experiencing the personal and emotional dimension of fighting for something they believe in? Tears have their place in these fights. The parking lot masquerade with which I began this chapter, like those of so many of our students, is a missed opportunity to make our writing passionate and convincing. We can all just imagine the things we are desperate to fight for, lined up in neat rows like cars in a lot.

Just waiting.

Chapter Three

Methods and Process of Inquiry

Letting Go of Capital “T” True

As I conceptualize the words that will give voice to my methods and processes of inquiry during the months I spent with Michael’s language arts class, I am reminded of a poem I kept trying to write in college about a complex object, a wooden spoon, that resisted my understanding. It is this invitation to the complexity of experience that I will take up in this chapter. I first describe the connections between my theoretical framework and how I approached the research process. I then turn to the ways I learned from students, including interviews, observations, and the written and visual projects students created. Finally, I describe my approach to analysis. Across these discussions, I describe my use of art-based education research methods as both data source and analysis tool.

I still haven’t found a way to write about my mother’s wooden spoon: the maker of an angry sound (as she once threw it down the hallway so that it made a cracking noise against the wall), but also the stirrer of homemade vegetable soup, the ladler of produce from her garden, the producer of that wonderful smell in our house a mix of turmeric, ginger, cilantro and tomato. The spoon was both, and so was she, though time pulls a gauzy shade of love over the image of her, so that my memory of a thrown spoon is foggy too in its affect, colored by other memories that blend together like watercolors.

For many years I was in search for the capital “T” truth of my childhood memories. I wanted answers to this question of a thrown wooden spoon, the truth about the night I lost a small gold

plastic pinky ring in the backyard and made my parents come home from their date to help me look for it in the garden, and the way our feet felt while they squished into the garden's muddy floor, how our hands prickled by thorny plants as we peeled them away in search of a hidden shimmer amid the plants. I wanted to get to the truth of these memories so I could file them under their category headings, label them, and finally understand them.

When I was in elementary school I went to see the movie *The Truman Show* in our local theater and became obsessed with the potential of recording events in real time so as to make this process of categorizing easier. Suddenly, I had a secret wish, but also a secret fear. I wondered if I was the subject of a reality TV show. My mom would play along, spontaneously staging a commercial for Pepsi to an invisible camera in a corner of the room. Winking at the audience and sipping from an imaginary can: "Ah, refreshing *and* delicious. Pick up a Pepsi today."

I was fascinated by the transparency of reality television. The word itself, "reality" pointed to some kind of objective answer to the messy and paradoxical nature of experience- the wooden spoons that show up in our lives and confuse our sorting process. As a child of the 90's, I had the false promise from reality TV: "We can rewind! We can see what really happened!" Yet, I am sure I knew all along that life was full of wooden spoons. I knew there is no one way that *it really happened*. I knew it was usually both. I also sensed that my brother was seeing it all differently, and I keep forgetting to ask him if he even heard the wooden spoon crack or noticed the way it was also the spoon in the soup. Something else *really happened* for Jimmy, the same moment I watched the spoon fly.

As I grew older, research sold itself as a truer form of reality TV. I would pour over TIME magazine if a story intrigued me and then I would share the facts later at dinner. Somehow I didn't see that research, like reality tv, required skepticism. It was a paradigm shift for me when I

read “Constituting The Feminist Subject in Poststructuralist Discourse,” the work of several poststructuralist scholars revisiting the stories of their youth and situating their memories in the many ways subjectivities were created for them and through them (Davies, Brown, Gannon, Hopkins, McCann, Wihlborg, 2006). Their recall illustrated the complexity and multiplicity of memory but they also recognized what I knew from watching the spoon. It isn’t memory that fails us in finding out *what really happened*; it’s the nature of perspective, the unknowable affective dimension, the complexity of the construction of subjectivity and, I would add, the tensions that must coexist without resolution.

As I move into describing the methods I employed during my research in a seventh grade language arts classroom, I situate all of my analysis in the recognition that I am working within a theoretical framework that is suspicious of clear answers and prefers to weave together the complexity and contradiction rather than provide those easy answers called Truth (Alvermann, 2000; Davies, 2006; St. Pierre, 2000). I know there is no one way *it really happened*.

For this reason, I also chose methods that I felt would help me better understand children’s thoughts and feelings about writing in school and about one particular unit of study, the persuasive essay project. However, I also chose methods that I saw as avenues for honoring complexity in their experience as well as the limitations of language and potentialities of abstract representation. In what follows, I offer a detailed description of this research project- its context, processes of observation and collection, tools of analysis, and my positioning throughout. Yet, I do so inside of a framework that recognizes the way every experience is filled with wooden spoons. My healthy suspicion doesn’t invalidate the deep value in asking questions and exploring answers. Rather, it so values the process that it honors its multiplicity, its rhizomatic quality, its width.

Methodologies of Vulnerability

By way of framing my methodology, I should also note that I have a particular approach to thinking about my presence in the classroom closely tied to my theoretical framework but also in relationship to my position related to both my race and gender.

My own life is implicit in my work with youth, a researcher vulnerability that includes my own exposure in the work (Villenas, 2000; Behar, 1996). This is true, not just because I am a writer and an artist who stories my life through these mediums, but also because I feel that I cannot invite students' vulnerability into their work without also centering my own hi(stories) in our process of making together and also in my later representation of their work. In my attempt at the poststructuralist rethinking of the subject as autonomous and individualized, I can also re-imagine the process of narrative as relational. This has rich implications, not just for composing these narratives that entwine us to the figures in our stories, as Butler (2004) argues in her discussion of narratives of grief, but also in the way she argues that they connect us to each other. This has particular implications for researchers, and requires us to be "complicit in the narrative." Dutro and Bien (2014) note that witnessing students' difficult experiences "dissolves the us/them binary" that allows teachers to hold their students at a distance. While always mindful of the danger of "appropriation" and the need to attend to difference, my willingness to weave my own difficult stories, family pictures, and important songs into my work with youth and the collective composing and sharing of our writing is a performance of this belief that we are complicit in each other's stories. In this way, I am less a watcher than a vulnerable participant. For this reason, I used personal narrative writing to openly share my family's intergenerational struggle with addiction, anxiety and depression. In these shared narratives, I made explicit my mom's 30-year successful recovery from alcoholism and grandmother's lifetime struggle with the same addiction.

I also shared my own history with anxiety. I felt this sharing was a crucial move for setting the tone and challenging boundaries of what is/isn't invited in classroom contexts.

In addition to challenging the boundary of what is invited into public spaces, I also wanted my research to challenge the idea that this practice is race or gender neutral. With a critical lens on my work, I found it important to acknowledge the way my race and gender may have interacted with the study. Several students in my study wrote about racism and discrimination either in the context of immigration policy or in experiences in school with white teachers. I am aware of the way my identity fits the key demographic of teachers - white, female, middle class. I acknowledge my privilege because I think this is an important part of our work, but also to push back against the notion that white women can't do critical work that questions privilege and challenges colorblindness. We can talk about race and power, but we also have to be awake in the ways we benefit from these systems. But a framework of transformed consciousness needs to be manifested in tangible ways. Titone (1998) describes 'missed opportunities' to do critical work as split second decisions to redirect a class conversation about race or even to center scholarship in a race neutral way. With this framework in place, I was hyper-aware of moments when allyship meant moving into uncertain territory in students' writing or conversations. For me, this often meant sanctioning and inviting stories that are often foreclosed as one of the most powerful ways of enacting disruption of a "curriculum of whiteness" (Semali, 1998). In her recent reflection on white teachers as allies, Sonia Nieto (2016) echoes one of the central tenants of Critical Race Theory when she notes that the stories we center and value in the curriculum is a crucial area for thinking about teachers as allies. For me, this certainly became an area for disruption and resistance, especially after students began taking up topics in their narratives that described racism in the school and community.

Given that several of the narratives young people took up as inspiration for their persuasive writing involved stories of oppression and marginalization tied to their identities as students of color in a primarily white school and community, I also drew on research that complicates overly simplistic approaches to thinking about this marginalization. Inspired by Cruz's (2011) use of 'faithful witnessing' in her work with LGBTQ youth, I also draw on Lugones' argument that to research "from" or "with" participants also shifts our positioning, aligning ourselves with resistance. Here, Lugones (2003) both upends the traditional stance of the researcher as an observer toward a positioning in which the researcher stands alongside young people aligning her the purpose of the research with the purpose held by young people, for equity and resistance of this oppression. At the same time, Lugones also calls on researchers to expand our viewpoint beyond just noticing oppression, toward also honoring and including the acts of resistance that are often present within experiences of oppression. Lugones observes, "a person may be both oppressed and resistant and act in accordance with both logics" (24). This recognition of the flawed binary was inherent in much of students' writing and was thus important for reframing the research to include this resistance and also my own identity as an ally alongside young people working to write persuasive essays in pursuit of equity.

Art-Based Education Research as Practices and Process

In addition to feminist and poststructuralist lenses, art-based research methods influenced my approaches to data collection and some of the processes and products that served as sources of my learning from youth. Thus, I begin this section by providing a brief theoretical framing of arts-based education research and to explore the way these theoretical approaches connect with

the post-structuralist theoretical framing I offered in the earlier section. In addition to producing my own art around the project, I also invited students to draw images that would depict the way the writing process in this project made them feel. Cahnmann-Taylor and Siegesmund (2008) note that ABER isn't just for analyzing data but also for creating it, and participant-created data often attempts to represent the nonlinguistic experiences for participants. In describing the way A/r/tography functions in education research, Singer (2006) notes the need to introduce shifting terminology. As one example, Singer argues for the term 'practices' rather than 'methods' because the arts-based practices of artists and educators inform the practices participants will engage in throughout the project. In inviting youth to paint and draw the way it felt to engage in the writing project, I was also inviting them to move beyond linguistic forms of knowing, and inviting them to consider affective aspects of the project that might be challenging to put into words.

Jongewood's (2009) work with arts-based methods often involved the use of color as a non-linguistic form of representation since color is often associated with emotions like sadness, joy, anger, fear, and peacefulness, but that these associations vary according to the artist or student. In inviting children to share their images and their thinking, I was able to learn so much about how the young people felt about the project and about themselves as writers. The work of scholars within affect theory speaks to the impossibility of representing moments of intensity, but also remind me that it is important to try processes that will help us point to an experience even if we cannot fully represent it (Stewart, 2007). Though I don't want to oversimplify by trying to define, I would like to point to descriptors given to this term 'intensities' that point to the moments I felt drawn to interpret through my own art- visual or poetic. Stewart's (2007) description of affect describes moments of intensity: "varied, surging capacities to affect and be

affected...things that happen impulses, sensations, expectations, daydreams...modes of attention and attachment...catching people up in something that feels like something” (p. 2). For me, intensity points to these moments of surging, vibrating sensations. The images and poems I created in response to these moments of intensity, though clearly not an exact reproduction of students’ (or my) thoughts and feelings, served as a wonderful entry point to moments of intensity during the project.

In her overview of the importance of arts-based approaches to social science research, Leavey (2009) highlights a core tenant of arts-based research, noting that these visual, poetic, dramatic approaches are not just “another way of getting at the data” but that they actually provide alternative understandings of our data. ABER researchers often call the perspective that these methods lend them “a new way of seeing” (Gallagher, 2010; Barone, 2008). Gallagher (2010) even calls art the entry point to an examined life. This way of framing art as research methodology feels closest to my own intention to engage the research process to see data in a new way. Eisner (2004), an early leader in ABER, points out that arts-based approaches can occur at different junctures of the research process (i.e. participant created-art, researcher created art in response to data or art as form of representation). However, I see all of these entry points as congruent in that they provide artist, participant, or researcher, with this new way of entering the experience.

In the following section, I highlight the way theorists explain how the arts provide a new entry point, or new way of seeing an experience, and ways in which these ‘new ways of seeing’ informed my research design.

Arts-based Methods Offer Space for Curiosity, Openness, Tensions

Born from a movement of Canadian education researchers A/r/tography is an approach to arts-based research that privileges and values remaining open and evading closure and certainty. Much like post-structuralist feminist perspectives, A/r/tographers articulate the importance of continued inquiry and curiosity without the possibility of reaching a final destination or answer (Leggo & Irwin, 2013).

Art-Based Methods Often Invite Entry Into the Affective Dimension of a Context or Moment

In her exploration of the unique features of poetic research, Patricia Leavy (2009) highlights the way poetry provides a particular entry into the “feeling picture” – offering the opportunity both to represent what is felt (though imperfectly) through sensory scenes, and also to experience the feeling picture in the midst of composing. For Greenwood, (2012) it is the sensorial nature of the arts, the fact that making art takes us into our bodies to experience the world as sound and image that is what evokes the kind of emotive nature of the arts. Often, Greenwood argues, we know things, but sometimes in ways that are not deemed as cognitive or intellectual. As I mentioned earlier, theorists in this area also note the way the visual often addresses that which evades language and requires alternative attempts at understanding and representation, most especially the emotional dimension.

Arts-Based Methods as Collaborative and Inclusive

In their work with youth in a participatory research exploring students’ feelings about their school, Knowles and Thomas (2002) argue that inviting students to make art to illustrate their feelings had an added benefit in helping students have agency over what they choose to share with researchers. Similarly, both Greenwood (2010) and Hershorn (2005) highlight the way visual art research methods invite participants to choose how much they would share and how much

they would allow others to contribute. This is particularly important for projects that ask participants to share vulnerable parts of their lives. For example, Kim Hershorn (2005) invited youth to make art to represent the violence and destruction they see everyday. Inviting participants to be makers, rather than just participants in a study, shifts their role to an active one and makes their participation creative and open-ended with lots of room for choice over the content and form of their contribution.

ABER in my Study

I invited students to make art throughout the project, using any medium and mode they chose to share their reflections on their writing. I brought supplies for acrylic painting, watercolor painting, and collage with paper. I invited students to make art together at the end of the project after they had completed their persuasive essays. However, students were invited to draw on multimodal ways of representing their stories by including images, hyperlinks, and songs in what I came to think of as a digital collage. In this way, the writing project as well as students' reflection on their writing were hybrid combinations of the visual, textual, and sonic.

For me, the synesthetic nature of representation was an important way to honor the fact that we were centering, as a class, the affective and embodied nature of the lived experiences they were writing about during the unit. Yet, I also wanted to disrupt the idea that it is only within narrative genre that affect is circulating. Centering the recognition that affect is *always*, present, I also emphasize the importance of acknowledging the affective nature of research and persuasive writing. For this reason, art-based methods are an important way of honoring this knowing through embodied and sensorial research practices.

Study Context

Millennial Middle School

Having situated my research in a legacy of feminist and post-structural work, and having described my intention to make much of my own life accessible to the students in the study, I shift now from theoretical contexts (though I will return in later sections) to my description of the very tangible school context.

Each morning during the month of April and early May, I made a precarious entrance into the middle school. With a drink tray balanced carefully in my left hand and a bag of recorders, video cameras, and notebooks slung on my shoulder I entered the front office to sign in. I often hand Becky, the primary administrative assistant at the school and the happy greeter of all visitors, her favorite drink- an iced mocha. As my budding connection with Becky testifies, I felt like a new member of this school community.

I tried to bring Michael a coffee at least once a week, when I return from my lunch break, but he usually declines, shaking his head over his daily caffeine intake. When he places an order, he goes big, a Bhakti Chai with a double shot and cream, or vanilla latte with whip. Michael is the 7th grade language arts teacher who has been my primary partner with this project. I will go into greater detail about Michael later in my writing, but should mention now that he always follows up his coffee order with a rating of how tired he is, and it is often on the upper end of the scale. Michael is very invested in the school and often spends evenings at school board meetings or hosting open mic nights for his students at a nearby coffee shop. He even stepped in to direct the school play *James and the Giant Peach* when the current director had to leave the role following her mother's death. "Better make that a latte. I was up late with play practice last night. Only two nights until the show." Michael's teaching is no less dedicated than his after-school service. He rarely eats lunch outside of his classroom and always has students in his room during his prep

hour catching up on work. He is meticulous in his organization and grading, following students' missing assignments so closely that he often knows where students are in the completion of a project by memory. He passes out slips during the class and invites students to come in for help.

Millennial Middle School is located at the base of the mountains in a mid-sized college town in the west. It is a school of roughly 300 students and 40 staff members. The staff felt like fast and easy friends to me. "Happy Monday! (Or Tuesday or Wednesday....)," Becky, the administrative assistant always chirps as she hands me the sign-in sheet and my name badge and I hand her the mocha. Becky always follows her greeting with the same exact advice as I walk out of the office and down the hall: "Hang in there." "You too!" I always shout back and she sometimes raises her coffee to me as I move out of earshot. "Thanks again!" "No problem!" I yell back. Of course, it isn't a problem. Becky has already made me feel like part of the school community even though I have only been visiting one morning, once a week for about six months before I began my project. Now that I visit each day and stay all morning and into much of the afternoon, Becky still shows me the ropes: how to pay for drinks in the teacher's lounge, how to make copies in the office, where the bathrooms are. The iced mocha is the least I can do.

I appreciate Becky's warmth and her smile, but more than that, she really represents the way the school feels to me. Nancy, the math teacher in the classroom next door, is counting down days to retirement and she often catches me in the hallway to tell me about her plans for the summer and her first year of retirement "I'm thinking that next year take a yoga class during the day, maybe buy a canoe." Teachers introduce themselves to me in the hallway and remember what I'm up to, asking next time "How's the research going?" The special education office is usually empty and they allow me to hold interviews there after lunch. If they have to jump into the room to get something, we smile and laugh about long (and sometimes fast) teaching days.

Despite this warm vibe, I also feel the complexity inherent in the larger context of the city. The school is situated in the complex racial and socio-economic context of the surrounding city, like all schools in America negotiating differential access to extracurriculars, food, and safety. This city is particularly interesting because of its enormous gap in socioeconomic status and also in its tremendous lack of diversity. The city housing prices are nearly double what they are in the rest of the state. 88% of the city identifies as Caucasian. The school reflects these city demographics somewhat with 63.5% of the students identifying as Caucasian, 23% of the student population identify as Hispanic, and a smaller percentage of students identifying as other racial identities of color. Michael explained that there was recently a shift away from integrating the large portion of the primarily Spanish-speaking students in most classes. Instead, English classes, in particular, were de-integrated just last year with students labeled “ESL” moving to separate spaces for smaller classes with their own curriculum. Michael expressed frustration with this new policy and highlighted it as a core weakness in the school’s attempt to be inclusive and equitable.

Michael’s classroom requires sophisticated navigation to find, even though I’ve been visiting his class weekly for nearly months prior to the focal unit, to build relationships with students and staff and sense if this was the right context for my research. More than once over these last few months, I’ve lost my way in the twists and turns only to ask a student for help. From a glance at his walls, it is clear how much Michael values inclusivity, kindness, diversity, and hard work. Posters from the magazine *Teaching Tolerance* line his walls as do affirming and positive statements welcoming students to be authentic and follow their hearts. He values structure, organization, and consistent class norms. For instance, daily lesson plans are written in detail and projected for students each morning; students are required to have their binders checked for organization, points can be lost if you forget a pencil on a designated “check” day.

But, he is also incredibly lighthearted and kind – laughing about the announcements or performing a hand motion I still haven’t gotten the hang of yet - the “Dab.”

Michael is also extraordinary in that he always describes a significant trauma from his childhood at the start of each year. Usually woven into his introductory unit on the hero’s journey, Michael tells the story of his father’s death - the result of a break-in by two men who were living in the halfway house where Michael’s dad was a social worker. Michael even shares the details of this trauma with his students - the way his mom hid him in the closet to protect him and also the way she unraveled following the loss, an unraveling made worse by her husband’s family’s feeling that she was at fault for the break-in. He tells his students that he is estranged from her now and is open with his sense of anger toward her. Michael doesn’t make this the centerpiece of the class and he doesn’t tie his trauma to excuses for himself or others. In fact, students in difficult spots themselves are still held to high standards and great disappointment when they don’t follow through and turn in an assignment. This was particularly noticeable with Eric, who lost both of his parents in a single day when his dad killed his mom and then himself, thus sharing a similar history with Michael. Eric had a significant amount of missing assignments and Michael was noticeably tough with Eric when Eric would forget his homework, arrive late to class, or seem like he wasn’t paying attention during class. One time he even kicked Eric out of class because he seemed distracted. This interesting mix of emotional openness and structured expectations permeates his classroom, and students treat him in ways that illustrate their respect.

Though I sometimes bristled and disagreed with this approach to Eric, most of my values and approached to teaching felt congruent with Michael, it was this blend of attention to academic rigor and emotional vulnerability that made Michael such an excellent fit as a co-teacher for this project, but despite such our congruent framework, our meeting was incredibly surprising and

serendipitous. He was the only teacher I met with to discuss the possibility of completing a study together. One of my doctoral committee members mentioned his name as a potential collaborator and though I don't remember the wording exactly, it was something pointing to his extraordinary presence in the classroom. Also, Michael and I share a commitment to the social justice project of school and to honoring young people's communities, interests, and history. During our first meeting together he described his first unit of the year, "The Hero's Journey" as a chance to share his loss of his father at such a young age with his class and to invite students to write about their lives using the Joseph Campbell archetype as inspiration. Our initial meeting was in the fall of 2015 and my weekly observations gave way to lengthy meetings discussing and planning the possibility of a study in the spring. We decided we would co-teach and co-plan the unit together, and our planning time also felt easy and full of affirming exclamations: "yes!" "exactly" "absolutely." I noticed that we often drew on many of the same texts and examples as we argued for a shared vision of what is possible for making curriculum meaningful.

In the section below, I detail the ways in which I approached collecting and recording important moments from my time in Michael's classroom. I highlight my methods of recording fieldnotes and observations, conducting interviews, and framing students' projects as well as the great challenge of remaining connected to the students throughout my time in Michael's classroom.

From Collection to Connection: The Paradox of Observation

At the heart of my work with youth in Michael's classroom was my desire to enter the space with an open heart and a willingness to share the way writing has been meaningful in my own life. I saw my role in the classroom as something altogether different from simply a "participant" and my desire to observe and try to understand as different from "observations" in

the way sometimes described as participant-observation (Spradley, 2016). Of course I honor and build on these foundational practices, making them feel authentic to my work but with great respect for the ways scholars working within participant observation/ethnographic traditions already question power dynamics between researcher/researched (Spradley, 2016). Still, I find the language of questioning power within participant observation in feminist methodologies to ring closest to my own approach as an education researcher. The “politics of the gaze” and the question “who is researching whom, why and how” is the most helpful reflection of my own reflexive presence in the classroom (Pillow & Mayo, 2012, p. 190). Also, the centering of relationship in my participant-observation raised familiar questions: Finding a balance as an observer-participant—when to wear the researcher hat and when to become involved by giving your opinion, providing help, or actively leading a project—is difficult and specific to each research context (Pillow & Mayo, 2012, p. 190). Regardless of this dilemma, I felt strongly that my intention in entering the classroom was really more about connection than collection, even as I needed and wanted to gather aspects of the experience that would help me tell the stories I wished to tell and make the arguments about writing classrooms I wished to make. I wanted to build relationships with students, and this requires a willingness to be a part of the sharing that goes on during the research process.

I remember the moment Eric first talked about the death of his mother. I even remember tentatively asking, “How did she die?” I remember his answer as if he had told it in slow motion - the story of the police arriving at school to tell him, the way he chose words to describe his father - *that he had a mental illness and that’s why he killed her*. I was thinking of Ruth Behar’s (1996) opening moment in the *Vulnerable Observer* - recounting the photographer Rolf Carie watching as Omaira Sanchez sinks in the mud until something in him snaps and he drops his camera and

throws his arms around her. Behar asks us to consider this question of what it would mean to feel the unbearability of watching without connecting - to take pictures without also getting into the mud. Since I had spent plenty of moments in the mud during my childhood and adolescents, I wanted to be careful not to show up, now, as a voyeur or to sensationalize his experience.

This feeling was persistent for me as I both shared my life with the students and listened as they shared their narrative writing and then when we, together, tried to find ways to unearth the arguments in their memories. When Eric and I whispered in the back of the class as other students worked, that first day he told me about his mother's death, I showed him my grandmother's ring, took it off of my finger and let him hold it, and we talked about how much it meant to me to have something of hers since I never met her. He shared a bit about the jewelry his mother left behind with his grandmother and her promise to save it for him. When Michael told me that Eric hadn't finished his essay because he was leaving the school and would be headed to a boarding school in Texas the following year, I asked if we could schedule a second interview to talk about this sudden shift in his life. Of course, I wanted to know more about how he felt for the way it would add greater complexity to my understanding of his life circumstances and help fill out gaps in his narrative, especially since he wouldn't be writing the persuasive essay; more importantly, I wanted to offer my heart and listen deeply to how he felt about this change. These dual intentions, to learn from students through observation and interview and also to connect with students as we wrote together were woven together for me for the entirety of the project. I took notes and asked questions, but I often closed the computer, felt the pulse of the moment, and to borrow Geertz's words "put [myself] in its way and it enmeshed [me]" (qtd. in Behar, p. 4). I cared and still care deeply for these children and observation, even participation, doesn't fully represent the emotional connection we built together.

Given this framework for my attention to building relationships with students and teachers, I wanted to be certain I was present in the school for a significant period of time prior to data collection. I began weekly visits in November of 2015 and I would participate in one class period supporting students alongside another community volunteer. I also stayed for Michael's prep period following the class and we would talk through the unit plan I was hoping to study and also our personal investments in teaching and the events in our lives that drew us into the profession. In April of 2016, I began participating with two class periods in order to build connections with the two classes I would study: second and third period. In May of 2016 (through the end of the school year) I came to class everyday for second and third period and stayed through lunch to conduct interviews with students from these two classes. Given the relationship Michael and I had built, we felt very comfortable co-planning and co-teaching the unit together. Usually I would teach the first part of class in which students would engage in writing we called "small moments": short personal narratives based on open-ended prompts such as "write a letter to someone you miss" or "describe your most important object." During the second half of class, Michael would take up instruction of persuasive writing techniques and analysis of advertisements and articles using these techniques. I would often circulate the class during this second half of the lesson, supporting students with their work. We both wrote models of our own writing and would share these models with students before they took up a prompt.

Though I want to recognize the complexity of identity markers and the intersectionality of the labels we often use to describe our participants in qualitative studies, I do see value in providing more details about my participants. I worked with second and third period and nearly all the students consented into the study in both classes. In second hour, all 13 students (5 students who identify as female and nine who identify as male) all consented into the study save for one

male. In third period, of the 19 students (8 identifying as male, 9 identifying as female) all consented except 2 (one male, one female). Second hour's racial demographics: 3 Caucasian females, one Latina female, 9 Caucasian males. In third hour the racial demographics were 7 Caucasian females, 1 first generation American female with whose family immigrated to America from Mexico but she was born in America, one first generation American who immigrated with her family to America from Nepal when she was a baby, two twin females adopted from South Korea when they were infants, five Caucasian males. Given that most students in both classes consented to the study, we were able to make a few minor adjustments to attend to the few who did not. For example, Michael was changing the seating arrangement anyway, so he made sure to make it so that we could easily position the camera so as to avoid recording those students. I treated those students the same way as the rest of the class, offering them my support during independent work time and helping them find a meaningful topic for their persuasive essay. I certainly noticed differences in socio-economic status from conversation with student or my own observation, but I find it difficult to make clear delineations regarding number of students I might classify as middle, upper, or lower class.

In terms of social hierarchies within the groups, I did not notice that there were groups that had been ranked as 'cool kids.' I do remember a conversation with Gina on our way to the interview where she pointed out the 6th graders who hung around the older kids. Gina still stayed connected with that group and was, in fact, motivated to write her essay on cyberbullying following an incident with the group after a messy break-up with one of their members. Yet, I didn't see her in this role in the class. Rather, it seemed clear to me that groups of two or three friends were the norm in Michael's class, and these small groups served to isolate students from each other. Thus, a larger class dynamic was offset by these smaller triads of friends.

Data Sources

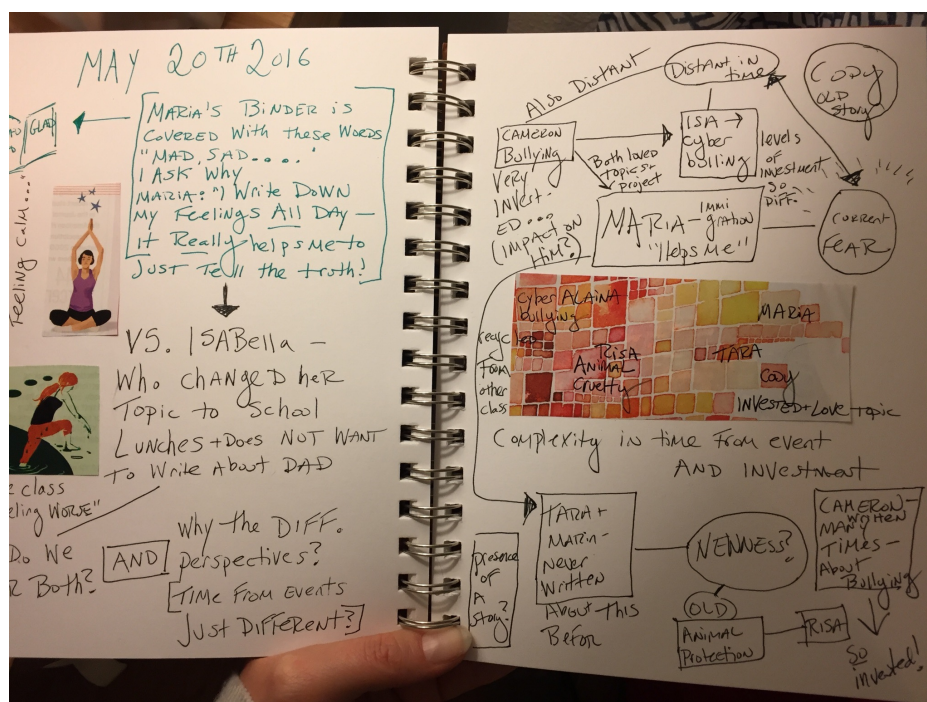
Rhizomatic Fieldnotes

Notetaking in my visual collage journal and also on my laptop was central to my attempt to remember all of the rich and important moments unfolding in the classroom. My visual journal was a collection of images I'd collected from used books and magazines as well as my own writing and watercolor illustration. The journal resembled an 'art journal' in the way it included multimodal artifacts. I describe the journal in greater detail later in this section. In my notetaking practices on my laptop and art journal, I took fieldnotes in broad and intuitive ways, privileging the connections that arose and intentionally deciding where to position myself during independent or group work. I wasn't looking for "The Story" or to "Get It Right," but I searched for the stories behind the stories. For example, two students were working on essays about the school lunch program even though both students had very detailed and important stories during their "small moments" activities. Joana, for example, is the daughter of a recent immigrant from Sweden, and she travels there frequently to visit her family, which she admitted missing deeply in her writing. I talked with her for an entire class period about her family's relationship to food and the foods they eat together when she visits Sweden. I wasn't trying to get at the truth behind her decision to write about school lunches; I was just trying to see the many ways this topic branches off into different areas of her life beyond school. I had a feeling she had picked a topic that was significant to her personally, even though it didn't appear that way on first glance. I wanted the thread follow it where it would lead - even toward a description of a certain kind of sandwich her family gets in Sweden and tries to replicate when they return home. In my interactions with students, I followed lines of conversation and thinking together outside of school and outside of writing into areas that were important to students.

My fieldnotes also took on this kind of freedom. I took notes on my computer during class that involved making notes on some of the key conversations I was having with students during their work time, any observations regarding students facial expressions, an affective sense of the feeling in the room (regardless of how hard that was to put into words), notes on discussions led by Michael that included his wording and students' response. I used bullet points to organize these notes as it allowed me to focus on content rather than organization. However, I also made notes in my journal later that night in a more rhizomatic way, described below, and then built collages that night in my fieldnote journal. Since my goal was to follow ideas, rather than try to record a true story, I sought approaches that emphasized openness over closure. Those goals resonated with the idea that inquiry can become what Deleuze and Guattari (1987) call "lines of flight" (xvii). In their view, one may resist lines altogether, for the end of a line, of a study, of inquiry is neither desirable or possible. Analysis within this theoretical framing offers a less linear symbolic construction. For example, Alvermann (2000) applies Deleuze and Guattari's (1987/1980) rhizome network to her analysis of a reading group at a public library. She notes the way the rhizome is capable of "strangling the roots of the infamous tree" (p. xiii). Here, she alludes to Deleuze & Guattari's central metaphor of the tree of Western thought that supports a binary logic and symbolizes linear and ordered systems of thinking (p. 116). Alvermann (2000) draws on the rhizomatic mapping to create non-hierarchical maps linking the study's findings to popular culture that encouraged her to question closure-seeking propensities. A rhizomatic process became a way to move between and nullifying beginnings and ends. Alvermann's process of making associations with pop culture references inspired me to make associations in my fieldnotes as well and to trace lines of flight in my recording process.

Of course, rhizomatic fieldnotes cannot be contained on the page and resist simplified

descriptions that can become prescriptive. There isn't one 'way to do it' and I certainly didn't do it that right way; rather, I invited and allowed unexpected turns in conversation in my notes-linkages to important songs, scraps of an image from a magazine, and reflections on my life outside of the classroom. In the same way that students' stories and lives were layered rhizomes, my own notes on my experience in the classroom also contained complexity in content and form and freedom to follow lines of flight where they appeared. For example, in the image of rhizomatic fieldnotes below I explored the way two student's feelings about the project differed so greatly. I was curious about the differences between students' investment and connection with the project so I followed some trains of thinking through students' experiences with the project. This train of thought emerged from a conversation with Elena that day and then I followed the train of thought regarding these diverse feelings. I'll describe this process in greater detail when I explore my analysis tools, as these fieldnotes functioned as ongoing rhizo-analysis of what I observed in the classroom in addition to a way of recording my experience in the classroom at the end of the day.



In addition to taking notes in my written/visual journal at night, I also recorded observations on my computer when I wasn't teaching a lesson. I audio recorded all of the classes and video recorded days that felt particularly important: the days we introduced a new "small moment prompt" the days we bridged the narratives to the persuasive writing essay, the days students presented their final projects, the days students reflected on the project by making art. I haven't yet transcribed these videos, but plan to watch them and compare what happened in the video with my field notes from that day.

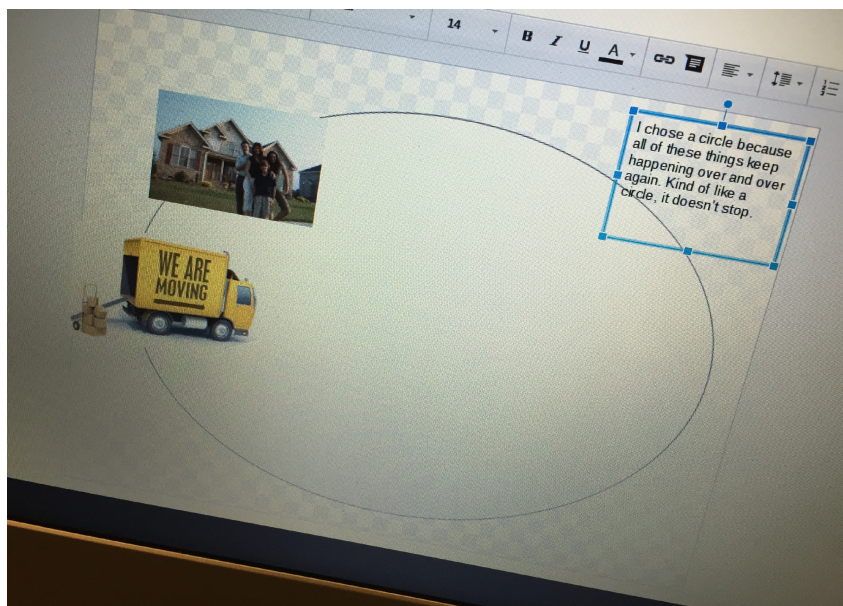
Interviews as Open-Ended and Flexible

I scheduled interviews for one-time blocks during students' lunch periods and met with students in an office adjacent to Michael's classroom. I audio recorded these interviews and occasionally took notes or invited students to draw or write their thoughts during the interview. Most interviews included only one student, but one or two interviews included two students working on the same persuasive essay project either because of scheduling limitations or because the students expressed that this format would help them feel most comfortable.

Inspired by a semi-structured approach to interviews (Edwards & Holland, 2013), I crafted questions that pointed to my key research interests and guiding themes. Three guiding themes pervaded my questions (see Appendix A). I was most interested in students' relationship with writing in school and perception of themselves as writers, in their thoughts about emotion and writing about their lives in school, and in their experiences with the persuasive essay unit and the way their narrative impacted their persuasive writing. These interviews took place during students lunch and usually lasted from 40-50 minutes. As I mentioned earlier, I was lucky to have a room, the special education office, where I could conduct the interviews without interruption and without the presence of teachers or other students. This was important given that many students

shared important stories about their families and schooling experience. I interviewed all students who had consented to the study. I interviewed one student, Eric, two times- because he was leaving the school before the end of the year and I wanted a chance to give make art to reflect on the project as a whole. This was the activity the rest of the class completed at the end of the year. Two students wanted to be interviewed at the same time and wouldn't consent to an interview without this modification, but the rest of the students were interviewed individually.

I viewed interviews as opportunities to have authentic conversations and make connections with students. If students had something that I knew was on their mind from earlier conversations in class, then I would often make space and time to discuss that during the interview. Yet, it was often these turns down alleyways that brought us to the heart of the students' feelings about writing. For example, Gina was really focused on her sudden and impending move to California. Gina explained she couldn't possibly write about the move as she felt too worried she would cry in class and too uncertain about what she even thought or felt. I saw her write in small ways, though, about the move to California. For example, her writing self-portrait, pictured below, featured a moving van and a family in front of a house.



By opening the interview to revolve around the students' lives and their current worries and joys instead of just relying on protocol questions to guide our conversation, the children and I often found our way together back to the focus of my study and the questions I had crafted: meaningful writing curriculum and students' use of personal writing to inform argumentative writing. We did so, though, in a way that honored what was already on the child's mind. Thus, the interviews were conducted with the goal of being relational and reciprocal in the ways feminist researchers have described (Hesse-Biber, 2012)). Drawing on these traditions, I honored the argument made by feminist scholars that "without empathic, interpersonal relationships, researchers will be unable to gain insight into the meaning people give to their lives (Collins, 2000; DeVault, 1990 qtd. in Hesse-Biber & Piatelli, 2012).

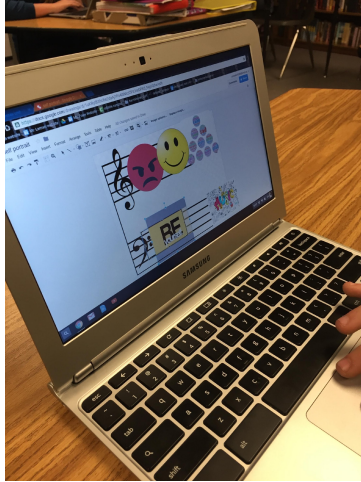
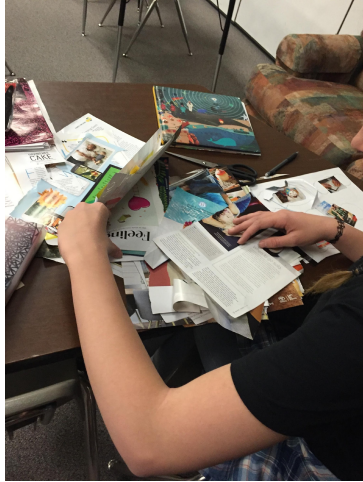
Centering relationship and acknowledging power dynamics positioned this interview approach within these feminist traditions (DeVault & Gross, p. 215). Students knew I wasn't participating in grading, but I also was a co-taught the unit and was a visitor from a nearby university. I looked to be in an equal power position with the teacher who would be responsible for grading and I was aware that they might think I had control over their grade or influence on their teacher. I was aware of this potential conflict, and though I couldn't alter the perception entirely, I tried to encourage students to share what they really thought about the project without worrying about their grade. Of course, there are always power dynamics in place that aren't related to grading procedures (i.e. age, race, class, SES and education), but I still tried to disrupt these inequities as much as possible by sharing my own writing and vulnerabilities with the students.

ABER in My Study

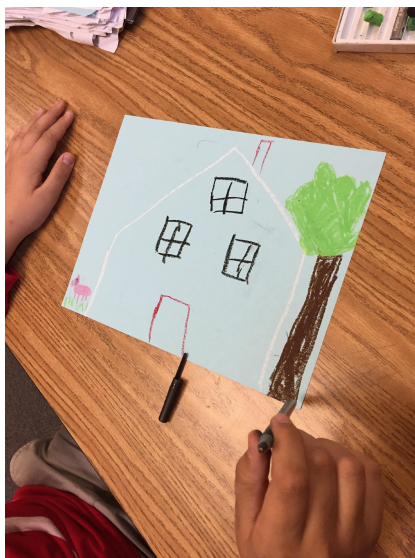
I invited students to make art throughout the project, using any medium and mode they chose to share their reflections on their writing. I brought supplies for acrylic painting, watercolor painting, and collage with paper. I invited students to make art together during two key times of the project: in the middle as we transitioned from the narrative essay to the persuasive essay and again at the end of the project after they had completed their persuasive essays. However, students were invited to draw on multimodal ways of representing their stories by including images, hyperlinks, and songs what I came to think of as a digital collage. In this way, the writing project as well as students' reflection on their writing were hybrid combinations of the visual, textual, and sonic.

For me, the synesthetic nature of representation was an important way to honor the fact that we were centering, as a class, the affective and embodied nature of the lived experiences they were writing about during the unit. Yet, I also wanted to disrupt the idea that it is only within narrative genre that affect is circulating. Centering the recognition that affect is *always*, present, I also emphasize the importance of acknowledging the affective nature of research and persuasive writing. For this reason, art-based methods are an important way of honoring this knowing through embodied and sensorial research practices.





Finally, I often invited students to use metaphor as a way to think about their visual art. For example, in the image below, a house serves as the extended metaphor for Robert's writing identity and experience with writing. Robert spoke at length about the way his house mapped onto his understanding of the way writing functions for him. Robert explained that the windows are the way people can see him through his writing....the doorway is about trying to connect with what readers have experienced....the chimney is getting out all the things he wants to say and how he feels."



One of the most important parts of including art in students' reflections about the project was inviting them to describe and interpret their creative decisions. One of the tensions Eisner (2002) highlights in ABER is the conflict between art that is aesthetically pleasing but somewhat less communicative, what Eisner calls "well crafted but ambiguous" (p. 20), and art that might not be categorized as aesthetically appealing in a traditional way. Inviting students to interpret their art was a way for me to value the meaning of their art over the product. The art was a way into their thinking and also an opportunity for embodied, sensorial reflection on an embodied writing practice. Given my theoretical framing of the project as a whole, I held no positivistic beliefs about what kind of art should count as beautiful or worthy. Of course, this tension regarding the quality of the art is another key tension in the field of ABER, one which often coexists with questions of whether amateur artists should be allowed to make art or if ABER is meant only for professional artists (Eisner, 2002). Again, this tension feels less relevant considering my theoretical positioning which values expression over traditional ways of evaluating artistic aesthetic, and my inclusion and celebration of a stage in the research in which participants interpreted the meaning behind their artistic choices.

Digital Texts: Embodied Writing

In addition to collecting artistic reflections at the conclusion of the study, students also created several texts throughout the course of the project and located these "pages" as multimodal texts on a Google site they designed. I've mentioned throughout this chapter the way "small moments" were a way of inviting several personal narratives into the unit. We began almost each day with revising or composing a small moment piece with 3 pieces completed as final drafts. In the latter half of the unit (the final 2-3 weeks) students wrote 3 "research memos" in which they composed a summary of an article related to their persuasive essay topic, and wrote about their

personal reaction to the article and how the argument compared to their own experience. Finally, we also asked students to compose a persuasive essay drawing on their small moments and research memos. We encouraged students to make their texts multimodal and to use the benefits of the online space by hyperlinking their articles and adding image and music to their writing. Taken together, these pieces are important texts that informed content analysis, and my rhizomatic collage synthesizing interviews, and fieldnotes.

Analysis As Artistic Process: Patterns, Poetry, Paper

In addition to inviting participants to contribute their thoughts about the project through artistic mediums like paint, I also found the tools of analysis in ABER and A/R/tography to be compatible with my poststructuralist theoretical perspectives. Yet, I didn't rely entirely on art-based methods of analysis. Rather, I situated my analysis within both ethnographic traditions of looking for patterns and themes within fieldnotes and interviews as well as art-based approaches. I turn to this aspect of my analysis later in this section. In this section, I will go into greater depth on the ethnographic strategies. Before I describe these coding approaches, I want to highlight, again, that my work is situated in poststructuralist ways of rethinking clarity, certainty and answers. That is, as I was exploring the patterns and themes in the interviews, fieldnotes and writing, I viewed emerging patterns through a poststructuralist lens, one which attended to difference and diversity in my data as well as the sometimes uncategorizable, or unknowable observations.

Searching for Patterns and Themes in Word and Image

In the ethnographic tradition, the search for patterns or codes is useful to get at common experience or perspectives and experiences that seem to emerge again and again across different participants and contexts (Miles, Huberman & Saldana, 2014). Certainly, I was incredibly

interested to see how students would take up the invitation to write about their lives and then craft arguments based on these experiences. I wanted to see if certain topics emerged again and again and so qualitative content analysis is useful and important to this end (Miles, Huberman & Saldana, 2014). I also wanted to learn more about students' experiences with the process of bridging these narratives and persuasive essays. I saw coding as another key to understanding if this writing pedagogy felt meaningful or useful and what other nuances might emerge from their reflections and my observations. I also approached this question through art-based reflections in which I invited students to draw their experience with the project. Here, I was again looking to see if similar patterns and ways of thinking about this writing project seemed to carry across the students despite unique choices in writing topic. Later in the chapter, I describe the way I took up collage to link student's writing with their lives and comments in intuitive ways, but I want to mention that I also printed out and organized paper files for each student with transcribed interviews, their art, their writing from the unit, any fieldnotes that were focused on them. Though this might seem an archaic practice, I am a visual learner/observer, so it has been useful to have all of the texts in print in order to observe the themes emerging from their work. After laying out this data, I began looking for themes/codes across students.

I also wanted to observe the patterns or refrains in student's content. As I mentioned in an earlier section, each student wrote three to four "small moments", three "research memos" and a final persuasive essay. In order to see the relationship between the topics students took up for these assignments (and the relationships between the assignments) I created a matrix (Miles, Huberman & Saldana, 2014) to record their topics. Within the matrix I included a sentence or two of detail in order to help me see connections that might not be immediately visible. For example, one student, Lilly, wrote a letter to her grandmother in Hawaii as her small moment, a story of

moving to Colorado from Hawaii as her “sad moment” and a persuasive essay arguing that people should quit smoking. On the surface, it might seem as though these topics didn’t inform each other, but in writing short descriptions of the content, I was able to see two things: she is very close with her grandmother and misses her quite a bit now that she lives in Colorado, and also that her grandmother is a smoker. In this way, even though her persuasive piece doesn’t center her grandmother, I was able to see how her personal narrative pieces are connected to her persuasive piece.

From a poststructuralist perspective I saw these codes as refrains rather than accurate “findings” that I could report as generalizable to other students. Deleuze and Guattari (1987) write about refrains through the metaphor of a bird’s song, and I find this term ‘refrain’ useful in undoing the idea that codes can represent some kind of truth. Refrains echo with repetition but also diverge and sometimes change altogether. I kept this way of thinking about refrains in mind, and willingly noticed when students would communicate conflicting feelings or contradictory ideas or change their mind altogether throughout the project. I am reminded of Alvermann’s approach to thinking about her participants, teacher candidates, as complex subjectivities with room for contradictions and change. For me, watching for themes offered me ways to picture the landscape of experiences, but, like natural landscapes, this landscape always remained complex interlocking even as the codes served to help me notice emerging patterns.

Privileging the Felt Experience: Poetry as Rhizoanalysis Tool

At the heart of processes of arts-based research is the unique reality of the dual function of art as both a way into representing data, interviews, and important moments in the classroom, as well as a way to analyze those significant moments and representing that analysis. Poetry is often used for both purposes in art-based methodologies and I used poetry in my project. I saw my

poems as examples of both analysis and representation. Patricia Leavey (2009) highlights poetry as particularly well-suited as a way into feeling the affective dimension of an experience, what she calls the “feeling picture,” of a moment. Fox (1997) refers to this process in poetry as “integrating” the sensorial dimension of the lived experience into our writing. Ely, Viz, Downing, & Anzul (1999) call the sensorial, the felt or the affective dimension, the “vividness of the moment” and note that artistic representation such as poetry or visual art offers a way to re-experience the embodied nature of the experience.

Poetry was one medium I found helpful in accessing the emotive, affective, and sensorial dimensions of the moments I spent with students during their persuasive essay unit. I certainly did not write a poem for every experience that felt “sticky” to me, to borrow Ahmed’s (2004) way of conceptualizing affect’s impact. Rather, poetry functioned for me as a way of processing and re-experiencing the moments that were particularly full of intensity or felt too complex to capture in a quick note in fieldnotes. I wrote about Colin’s story about racism and how he was called to the vice principal’s office after word got out in the school about the essay. I wrote a poem about the moment Eric told me about the process of doing research and connecting with other people who had also lost their parents in a sudden way, the poem about a few students who wrote letters that seemed really important to them and then chose persuasive essay topics that were unrelated to the letters. Sometimes poetry was a way of feeling through the day (in the way my journal entries were) and sometimes it was written weeks later (or over the summer) as I began looking more deeply at the data. In addition to their ‘stickiness’ moments that turned into poems were also moments where I felt confused about what was happening, like the gap between students letters and persuasive writing. Poetry wasn’t an ‘answer’ to my confusion, it was a way to stand in the gap and try on possibilities. A poststructuralist framing of poetry as a method felt particularly

congruent. Given that I would never reach an answer, I wanted a medium that would help me hold the complexity. My process would be to follow lines of flight in a stream of consciousness way, and return to the poem after the draft to find places where I wanted a word that felt right, to clarify what I meant, or to rearrange for flow between the lines.

This approach feels especially crucial given that students were taking deep dives into important moments from their lives, and then sharing these experiences in the form of argumentative writing with the class; affect is always circulating in classrooms, even when uninvited or unacknowledged. However, in this project, students were writing about events that were often difficult, so this affective dimension was really centered in the project. For me, poetry as a tool of analysis was a way to honor and recognize the affective dimension of the classroom experience.

In addition to offering access to feeling an event again, poetry can also be a way of thinking through an affective event, a form of analysis that allows us to see an event in a new way. A benefit of ABER I've highlighted already is the opportunity to see a situation anew, what Fox (1997) points out as the way writing a poem often surprises the writer with feelings and thoughts (or in this case, analysis) that the writer didn't know before writing. Poetry becomes a way to think/feel our way into making-meaning.

I noticed the way composing poetry also lends itself to rhizomatic ways of thinking and feeling. One can break rules of linearity, moving back and forth in time, as well as write snapshots of moments as isolated lines that never fully come to completion but lead to a new connection in the next line. This is what Cahnmann-Taylor and Siegesmund (2008), in quoting poet Robert Bly, describe as poetry's ability to support the writer as she makes "leaps in time and thought" (p. 50). Irwin, Beer, Springgay, Bickel (2006) note that art methods, and A/R/Tography

in particular, lend themselves to rhizomatic ways of researching the world, noting the way time poses a challenge to research since situations may seem to occur chronologically, but they are actually complex processes with layered participants and connections that occur across space and time. This recognition requires methods that move beyond linear ways of thinking about the world. As I began analyzing the important stories that unfolded during my data collection, I saw that both the stories that students wrote and the moments that unfolded around those stories were layered and complex. Initially, I documented these moments in a collage, but this approach seemed to communicate a kind of holistic image that didn't capture this layering or the notion of complexity between the aspects of one story. Thus, I turned to poetry to better capture those moments.

For example, Colin's writing rippled out beyond the classroom and through complex series of relationships. Power dynamics, particularly related to race, were at work at the same time as he was negotiating the content of his narrative. When his narrative about racism in school became the argument for his persuasive essay and he shared that argument with the class, students told the history teacher that Colin had called him a racist. There were so many offshoots of this event, including a visit to the vice principal's office to discuss the essay as well as conversations I was having with Colin about the essay and with Michael, the language arts teacher, about Colin. These were complex conversations in which Michael negotiated his own identity as a teacher and his curiosity about Colin's sense of whether he was also racist the way the history teacher is according to Colin's essay. Additionally, the student who shared the essay with the history teacher was moving through intense moments of remembering the death of her friend. Yet, she had betrayed the privacy I thought the class should grant to each other. Colin's relationship to his own story is also complex - he explains he is happy he wrote it but also describes wishing the

essay remained private or could be “rewritten so no one can tell it is me.” He found the discussion with the principal empowering since the principal encouraged him to “fight back,” but he also struggled with what to make of it - whether his decision to speak up against racism in the future could have any impact since the principal told him racism would “always be happening.” Finally, I carried complex feelings of guilt that I had encouraged him to write the story and he was called to the principal’s office as a result.

These complex and multilayered scenes, emotions, actors, settings, and beliefs were not something I found easy to code, articulate or understand. However, writing a poem about the event helped me “think my way into” the complexity of the rhizomatic nature of unfolding affect. I was able to write free verse to follow the non-linear connections without feeling like I had to label or simplify the moments. I share my poem below as just one example of the way I used poetry as a tool for thinking rhizomatically and building three dimensional rhizomes around complex moments, but I also feel that poetry lends itself to considering affective intensities.

Did I make a mistake?

When you wrote about naptime in preschool- you couldn’t fall asleep~
About [snap]ping crayons layer that day because you knew your teacher didn’t like you.
I asked, “why not?”

And I think it was you who said “because I am black.”
But I know it was me who said- what if you wrote about that.
About Racism? You asked.
Yes. I said. That would be a good topic.
And then you did.
You wrote about it.
And when Michael heard you say the name of your social studies teacher in your presentation, he winced.

And when the assistant principal called you to the office to say~
“this is how it will always be for you. You will have to work harder to prove yourself. Like I did.”
I thought he was censoring you- closing your mouth and making you get in line.
Did I make a mistake?

Because you said, *instead*: “I feel stronger. I’ll keep fighting back. I’ll always have to.”

His words,
now your words.

And days before Rachael told your history teacher about your story, I asked how you would feel if your teacher found out.

You said: *I wouldn’t want him to read it because he might think it isn’t true but it is really true.*

Did I betray you? Placing you in the position to defend your experience.

It is a double bind.

When persuasive essays have institutional stakes, I want the stories to go out into the world and make ripples of change.

In gentle ways we can shake the world.

But these institutions still have the power to shake you.

Thank you for being brave with your words.

For saying in the end that you’re glad you shared your persuasive essay with the class.

Maybe my greatest mistake was that I mis(took) your strength.

This moment was rhizomatic in terms of its complex emotional layering, but also spatially in that it spilled out into so many different contexts and involved several spaces in the school - the principal’s office, the social studies room, Colin’s home, my car where I felt terrible because my unit had been the cause of Colin “getting in trouble” with the vice principal. In this way, the emotional layering was rhizomatic and complex for the different people occupying these spaces and involved in the event.

In writing the poem, I came to see that what was most important to me was whether or not Colin was okay that he choose to write about racism or if I should have been more careful about how much I encouraged the choice? This seems central to whether or not we invite students to argue for something they care about very deeply - what if their important argument is judged or

people disagree with it vehemently or worse, the student gets in trouble for holding this view?

Colin explained he would have chosen the topic again. For me, the poem helped me wade through complexity of these rhizomatic layers – with its offshoots in so many directions. But it also helped me get to the heart of what felt so important to notice. I didn't know what that was until I allowed myself free association in short bursts of phrases. The poem freed me from constraints of sentences and allowed interpretation to shoot in one direction and then another and another until I saw what felt important to revisit with greater depth. Behar (1997) argues that poetry also invites us to preserve the voices and words we hear throughout the research process, just as they are. I thankfully asked Colin the crucial question of whether he regretted his choice of topic and if he felt discouraged by the discussion with the principal. His answer entered my poem just as he had said it and preserving his language feels particularly important to me given the way the school had so clearly invalidated what he was trying to tell them. I wanted to be certain I wasn't allowing my positionality or my own interpretation to alter his words in any way thereby joining other adults in their failure to honor his story.

Paper Patterns: Collage as Rhizonalysis

As I mentioned earlier, I used collage alongside poetry as a way to think through important moments in a non-linear, rhizomatic way. As refrains emerged through linguistic coding, I also analyzed these refrains through visual collage techniques.

I mentioned my collage journal earlier when I described my approach to visual and textual fieldnotes, but I want to return to the collage journal again here as it also served as a kind of analytical tool that allowed me to reflect on what was meaningful for me that day and how I would make sense of important moments with word and image. Much like poetry, collage

provided dual purposes, in that making collages is a valuable form of representation, but also provide a way to think through and with the paper, glue and other materials.

Also, like poetry, collage lends itself to a kind of rhizomatic way of thinking and feeling in that linearity, hierarchy and certainty are not privileged as much as layering, synthesis and juxtaposition. This isn't inherently true about the genre (collage or poetry) but was true for me, as artist, in the way I approached both collage and poetry. Both poetry and collage disrupt traditional ways of categorizing, labeling and ordering. Collage disrupts a linear organization of events, allowing all to coexist on the same plane and in the same visual space.

Collage also lends itself to representing what other affect scholars have illustrated using text. For example, Kathleen Stewart's (2007) work describing the affective saturation of an ordinary moment reflects that in each moment, so many vignettes are happening all at once, all of them full and overflowing with intensity. Bertelsen and Murphy (2010) highlight affect's 'cross-temporal' nature, the way an experience moves into the future as a kind of precursor for a future event at the same time as it moves into the past, as memory. They argue that the overlapping nature of simultaneous events is a participation of "temporal contours" — a looping of refrains (Bertelsen & Murphy, 2010, p. 146). Collage also attends to a false sense that certain experiences are bracketed to a moment in time or space. Affective intensities stick with us and layer on top of or underneath old moments. Experiences exist together in an affective collage; they do not evaporate. Time cannot bifurcate affect. As I mentioned earlier, poetry invites a similar disruption of linear and coherent narrative, and in its invitation to bend grammatical restrictions, allows us to break free from rigidity to privilege affect over content or plot.

Finally, I argue that both poetry and collage center feeling impressions since both mediums are often taken up to story affect. Visual art draws on color and composition to produce

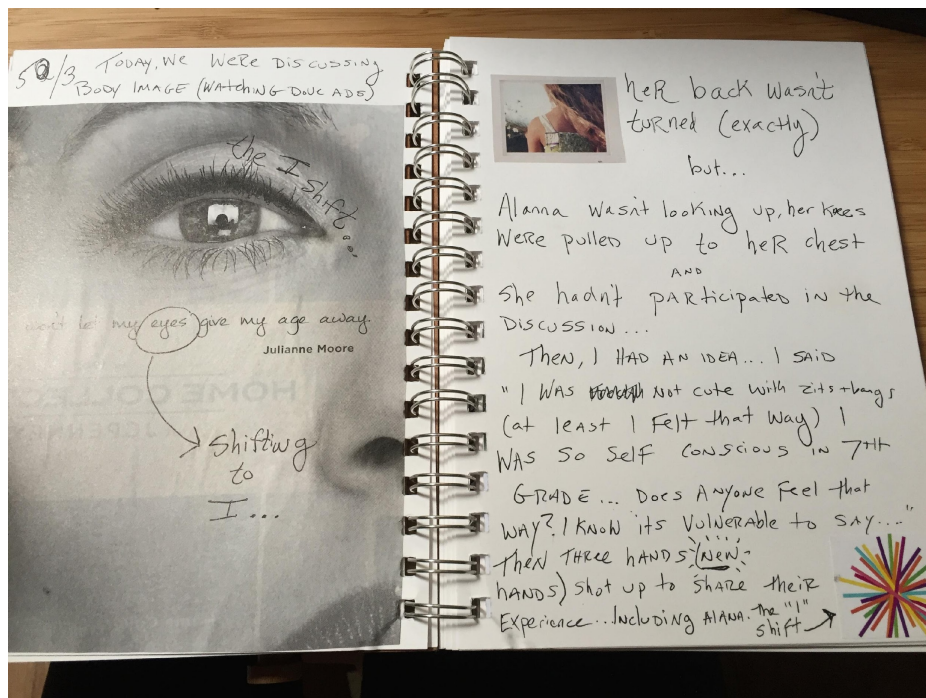
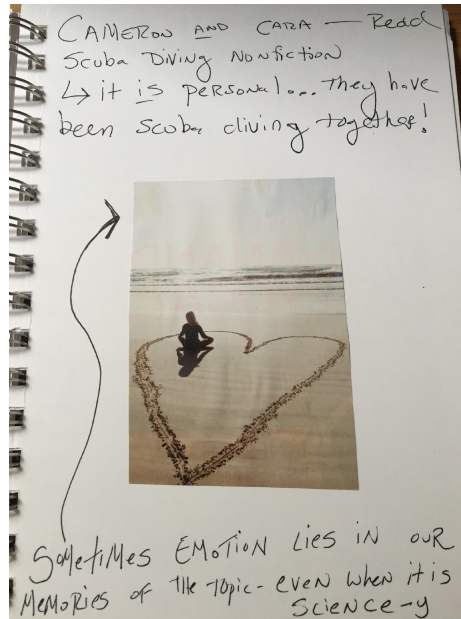
sensation while poetry utilizes diction and syntactical freedom to do the same. I don't want to essentialize genre with this claim, but I do see that historical use of genre for affective purposes lends itself to this current project, one that wants to center affect in social science research.

At the conclusion of each day spent onsite in the seventh grade classroom, I chose to analyze the day using collage. Arriving home, I would make a "quick collage" of my felt impression of an important moment from the day. The moments I often chose to collage were primarily what Stewart (2007) describes as moments of intensity, which are moments when there was a felt surge of feeling or tension or energy in the space, or a disruption in the ordinary (a "punctum"). I wanted to build collages that would help me get at what I experienced in the classroom during observations. The sense that the affective charge is always circulating, always in the air, so to speak, but that some moments are concentrated as intensities was central to my decision regarding which moments to collage each night, when the experience was fresh in my mind and still embodied in my physical memory. Drawing on work that uses collage as a medium for analytic memoing (Butler-Kisber, 1999) and collage as a tool for conceptualizing ideas (Butler-Kisber & Poldma, 2010), I used collage as a way to draw both from fieldnotes and from embodied memory in order to think/feel through important moments from the day.

I analyzed these moments with hybridity in image and text, a strategy Diaz (2002) employs in her work studying gendered roles of the 1950's, a strategy that allows her to blend her own words and participants' words with and within the images from magazines. My decision to approach these collages with words and images was the result of my sense that the words the youth spoke during these surges in intensity in the classroom were really at the heart of the experience. I wanted to center their words, and, as with my poetry analysis, I didn't want to change their language or paraphrase what they had said.

I also used my daily collages as sources of data collection for my further analysis and as avenues for ongoing daily analysis. Hunter, Lusardi, Zucker, Jacelon, and Chandler (2002) note the way making art in the midst of data collection encouraged “ideas [to] percolate, patterns [to] emerge and original conclusions develop” (p. 389). My nightly reflections were both methods of capturing what had happened (e.g. visual data created each evening later became useful as I flipped through my journal and saw patterns in visual content) but also for helping me think about how it felt to be in class that day.

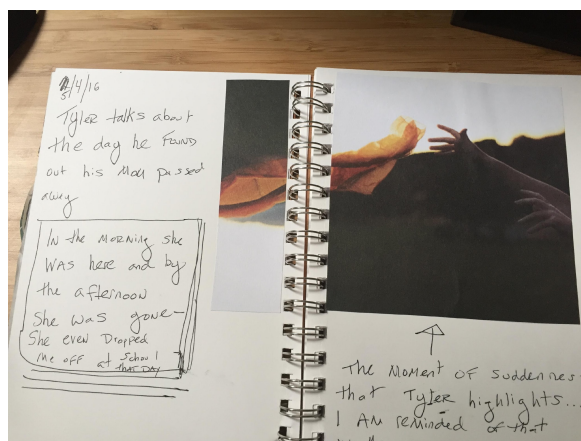
In the images below, I highlight an entry that was more literal in representation - a dog image I used to mark the centrality of pets in the letters students wrote when we invited them to write to someone they missed. The image beside it is an association I had with another moment that day. A heart in the sand made me think about watching two friends who had been bullied as young children, who now go scuba diving together, who I saw reading a scuba diving article together that day as a part of the persuasive essay unit. The sand heart helped me remember the way this moment illustrated the way emotion enters into non-fiction and analysis, but it also helped me remember that I learned this from watching two boys read about diving in the ocean. More importantly, the image didn’t perfectly map or represent the moment, but, for me, it felt tangentially connected and associated. Still, the image invited me to analyze the moment- as one that was emotive, but in the context of doing research. Finding the image in a magazine that night helped me feel/think about what I had seen that day but not yet analyzed in a meaningful way. Like poetry, collage was not just a way to represent, but a way to think and feel my way into what I had experienced. Flipping through magazine and book pages each night was like flipping through the experiences of the day.



My nightly collages were like imprints of what really stuck with me that day, but they weren't representative in a literal way. In the journal above, I wanted to illustrate what happened when the class discussion shifted to the more personal side of body image, when I asked if anyone could relate to the video we had watched in class during our discussion of persuasive techniques used in advertisements. In my mind, this was the shift to "I" but I used an image of an eye to

represent the shift. A starburst shape offers an abstract representation of what happened in class after the shift - lots of hands shot up in the air to contribute to the conversation. It felt like a starburst or firework explosion, the energy and participation in the class increased so suddenly.

I also tried to reflect the affective intensities of a moment in the collage - what was circulating in important moments. In the image below, I collaged a conversation with Eric in which he told me about the day his mother died. The moment was so intense for me because I had not been given any information about Eric prior to this conversation. As I described earlier, the teacher of the course, Michael, had shared a story very similar to Eric's both with the class and also with me. Michael's father was killed in a violent intrusion into his home. I was both surprised that Michael hadn't mentioned Eric's story to me and also moved that they shared this important story. I wondered how both of them would craft an argument out of the story. For me, the orange scarf represented the sense of loss that Eric communicated to me and the feeling I had in response- deep sadness. At the same time, Eric also said it felt good to share the story and so I found this image to be one of both loss and beauty.



Of course, the great irony and challenge in taking daily notes as rhizoanalysis was the way this style of notetaking included timestamps and seemed to, perhaps, point to beginnings, endings, and daily points of closure. I hold the timestamps as ellipses rather than periods and so I don't feel

concerned with this issue. However, I did want to find a way to attend to the rhizome without “beginning or end: always in the middle, between things, interbeing, intermezzo...between things does not designate a localizable relation going from one thing to the other and back again, but a perpendicular direction, a transversal movement that sweeps one and the other away, a stream without beginning or end that undermines its banks and picks up speed in the middle” (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987, p. 25).

It is this vision of the rhizome as the roots that intertwine beneath the earth (rather than the tidy(er) branches that extend upward, that helped me birth another tool for rhizo-analysis. Inspired by my rhizo-art journals in which I followed associations freely through image and text, as well as Alvermann’s (2000) analysis of her data using associations with pop culture, I made a large mural sized collage in which I allow myself to make linkages and associations between my data: “a map that is detachable, connectable, reversible, modifiable and has multiple entryways and exits and its own lines of flight” (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987 p. 21). I see this as a macro-level way of connecting interviews, fieldnotes and student data and also incorporating image and collage in the making of this mural. As a visual learner/thinker, it is useful for me to actually *see* the connections across my data. This mural invited that new way of seeing while also enacting a visual representation of the rhizome without fictive closure. I see the way this form of analysis-visual, non-linear, and open-ended deterritorializes traditional ethnographic coding practices, but

still honors the human desire to look for connections, patterns and repetition.



Final Reflections on the Project: Affect and Abstract Art

Although I analyzed my data through the process of daily collage pieces, I also invited students to make art at the conclusion of the project in order to reflect on their experience in a non-linguistic way. Recognizing the embodied and sensorial nature of painting and drawing, I saw this invitation as one that centered their embodied experience with the project. Yet, I do not feel that the art is a direct expression of their felt experience with the project. Here, I found Susan Best's (2011) book *Visualizing Feeling: Affect and the Feminine Avant-Garde* helpful for thinking about how the art students made might reflect the affective dimension of their writing experience. In her critique of traditional ways of thinking about the art emerging from the avant guard movement of the 1960's and 70's, Best argues that we have failed to see the way affect was a central concern of the many of these projects. Drawing on philosopher Edward Casey (1970)

she also critiques the idea that objects are an expression of feeling or affect, noting instead that these are aspects of the object or art itself as well as an interaction between viewer and object. In this way, Best joins affect scholars like Ahmed (2004) who critiques the idea that affect comes from a person and is projected outward. Instead, affect is viewed as a dimension between objects, or as Best argues, inherent in objects rather than in people. According to this model, art is not an expression of the artist's affect. Art is affective.

I also see the way abstract art, in particular, invited a pre-cognitive and non-linguistic mode compatible with the way affect is framed as a dimension that we cannot label or categorize the way psychologists use the term emotion. I invited students to paint an image that would represent how the project felt to them. As I walked around the room watching students pick up oil pastels and acrylic paints and begin making art, I suddenly noticed that many of the students were making large sweeping lines of color across the page. Without direction, many of the students had just begun making abstract paintings. When I started asking them about the paintings, they explained that the project had made them feel so much, and they weren't sure how to represent that with actual images, so they preferred to use color to communicate that dimension of the experience.

Tara, who had written about her best friend's death also painted an abstract image and used color and line to communicate how she felt. The tension and contrast in her feeling was representable by various lines she labeled as happy and angry and sad. In my mind, these labels differ greatly from psychologists more reductive tendency to label and position. Tara is drawing on words that are accessible to her, but she is complicating them by placing them together as paradoxical and conflicting sensations. Of course, this tendency to label and describe also reduces the affective nature of experience into limiting and incomplete linguistic markers. Yet, I still see

the making of the art as more purely reflective of the experience, and the labeling as a challenging component of researching affect. I wanted to understand students' affective experience, without reducing the experience through words; yet, I also wanted help viewing their painting through their eyes. So, though potentially reductive, I found making abstract art and then discussing it together to be a powerful window into the affective dimension of the project.

Of course, there is an inherent irony in the use of abstract art to represent the aspect of affect that is “under and beyond meaning, semantics, fixed systems, cognition” (Massumi, 2002 qtd in Bertelsen & Murphie, 2010, p. 147). This is in tension with the practice of interpreting one's art and the use of this interpretation to try and say something meaning-FULL about a research project or a participant's experience. However, I felt that the description of the artist's work, especially when made by the artist herself, provided valuable insight even if this insight is contextualized by our understanding that affect cannot be given meaning or even described and understood. So, just as my research exists within a theoretical frame that questions its ‘validity’ or truth, so, too, does the use of art as a entry to affect need to be understood within a definition of affect as beyond meaning. To use a method, at all, to understand affect, is to begin to misunderstand what it is right from the start. I don't think this means we should ignore the affective dimension, it just means we look at the tools we have used to understand it and then use them as best as we can, within this recognition.

Foreclosing Conclusions: The Paradoxical Nature of Post-structural/Art-based Research

I am highly conscious of the way conclusions are theoretically and practically impossible given my earlier theoretical framing of my research. I can note themes, make poetry out of my observations, even wonder or get curious about what a student's use of the color red means when that student makes a painting about a project. Yet, the temptation to end even a non-traditional

methods section with a conclusion is strong. Instead, I borrow from Julia Cameron (1998) who describes her process of noticing/researching life this way:

“As a writer, I am always looking at things from a distance, always looking at something moving toward me from a long way off, not only weather - the rain stalks across the plain- but also people, events situations. I love staring off into the distance. I love squinting at images of things yet to come. I love watching them come into focus” (p. 28).

Of course, the irony in doing art-based poststructural research is that we all work together to bring our sense of how it happened and how we felt about it into a picture or poem or story and this will bring the moment into focus. We look at the layers of experience, opinions, artifacts, words, video, interviews and fieldnotes and then try to arrange them into a mosaic, placing each tile together. But, when we stand back and squint at the image, we suddenly remember that there is no possibility for it to ever, really, *fully* come into focus. Like Cameron, we are better off squinting so the image remains hazy; the inherent tensions in life will keep it from coming into focus.

Still, despite the hazy image, we are struck by it - how beautiful, how complex, how, *somehow*, lower case “t” *true*.

Lower Case *truth*:
Bridging Affect Theory and Arts Based Education Research to Explore Color as Affect

I found Sabrina Ward Harrison's books in the darkened halls of the library, minutes before closing. I pulled her art journals from the stacks and sat on the ground to turn the pages as quickly as I could. The announcements were blaring at lingering patrons to proceed to the check-out area quickly, but I struggled to close the book. I was mesmerized by the big inky loops across pages that had been painted and torn. I stopped to linger on one page that blended messy, uneven lines of writing in ink and pencil with swirls of blue chalk. I stayed with one sentence for a few extra seconds, feeling its resonance with the way my life felt in that moment:

"sometimes I feel closed in the trunk of fear. Sometimes I leave the tiny afraid girl inside of myself all alone, betraying myself."

I felt encased in fear too, having just left college a few weeks into a new semester. My anxiety had ramped up so much that I was struggling to sleep and eat and couldn't slow down my mind enough to grit my teeth and push, push, push my way through to May. I withdrew from classes, returned home to live with my parents for the rest of the semester, and avoided grocery stores and malls, places where I might run into my friends' parents, who would see on my face that I was not ok.

But now, here, alone, on the floor of the almost empty library I felt just the tiny sliver of space around the anxiety. Somehow, I saw myself in the painted pages and uneven sentences. Sabrina had found a way to make art in the middle of the mess. Maybe I could too.

The next morning, I woke up early to drive to the closest art supply store to buy paint, ink, and a black spiral notebook. My art journal became medicine during this lost, lonely semester. Though I returned to school that winter and finished my degree a few years later, I

never forgot crumpling to the floor of the darkened library with Sabrina's circles of red clay colored chalk and deep indigo ink, colors that felt like water I could drink to give me relief from the thirst of loneliness and fear.

How Do I Describe This?: “Tara Deletes the Story, Then Decides to Write It Again”

Fifteen years later, I found myself on the floor again. Differently this time. Now, well into my graduate work, at a middle school working on my dissertation study, I found myself on my knees with uncertainty, with a question that felt unanswerable. The research project involved vulnerable writing, an invitation to 7th grade students to explore writing about their lives, especially those experiences that are rarely sanctioned in school writing, experiences that might be described as affective. Their teacher, Michael, and I wanted to explore the way this kind of writing might help students uncover an argument for a persuasive essay that is deeply meaningful for them, a teaching practice born partly from my own experience with writing during the difficult season in my life when I found Sabrina's books.

Michael and I shared a devotion to this pedagogy of vulnerable writing that has roots in challenging life experiences. Michael's father passed away when he was just a baby and my family has a lineage of addiction and anxiety that has been a central challenge woven across my life. We share these stories with Michael's seventh grade class, drawing from Elizabeth Dutro's (2011; 2013) work with reciprocal vulnerability, an invitation to teachers to include aspects of their lives that are often not invited into school writing. This model invites students to take up topics that are important to them, even if it feels risky for writing in school, and involves a recognition that these life experiences are not separate from children's or teacher's experience with literacy, but are always, of course, present in the classroom, even when left unacknowledged or uninvited.

It is this highly affective dimension of our work together that poses a methodological question for me, taking me to my knees again. It happened one morning, in the early days of the unit after I shared a letter to my grandpa who passed away a few months ago. I described the way I held his hand, the way he squeezed it so that even though he wasn't talking anymore, I could tell he knew I was there. After I finished reading, I invited students to write a letter to someone they miss. As I walked around the room, I saw letters to grandparents and pets and friends who live far away. And then I paused, as I saw Tara stop typing on her chromebook, highlight a page of writing and press delete, erasing her letter with a quick click.

I could still see what was left on the computer screen: a newspaper article with an image of a young girl, a ring of flowers resting on her head, smiling in an embrace with several other young girls dressed in white flowing dresses. I read the headline about a car accident that pushed an SUV over a bridge into a rushing creek and about the death of the smiling girl in the photo, Samantha.

I knelt down near Tara to whisper my question, and asked if she was a friend of Samantha's. Tara explained that my intuition was right but then quickly followed by saying, "I actually don't think I can write a letter to her in school. I wouldn't want anyone to see me cry."

I had cried in front of the class as I read my letter, just minutes ago. I felt this way too, that school required me to hide my tears. So, here we were. Both of us feeling the visceral way writing can take us somewhere risky, somewhere we don't always want to go, but somewhere we also, maybe, already are.

When I returned to my seat to write a quick note about this moment, I found myself typing quickly in my fieldnotes: "Tara highlights writing, hits the delete button and explains, 'I don't think I can write about this in school.'" The words looked ridiculous. That wasn't what happened.

There was so much more to this moment. I felt something. Did Tara feel it too? I knew I could ask her and she would give me more words for my fieldnotes. And they would be useful placeholders. I could trust these words to carry some of the meaning of the moment. But I also felt that this moment called for more. I felt this question as a wall that would slow the research until I could explore new ways of answering it: *How else could we represent this moment?*

Theoretical Approaches to Considering Affect

I turned to affect as a theoretical home for my question. Affect scholars have long pointed to the way affect slips between words, undoing our tidy attempts to describe it with any certainty. As I searched for theoretical approaches to representing affect, I started to see the way affect scholars rely on metaphors as a kind of *pointing* to affect, rather than clarity of language to label, name, describe. Gregg and Seigworth (2010) describe the fleeting sensations that we experience as “intensities”, both embodied and between bodies. Affect is also described as shimmers (Gregg & Seigworth, 2010), ruptures (Massumi, 2002), impulses, sensations, expectations, daydreams, encounters in something that feels like *something* (Stewart, 2007). Affect is “sticky”- those experiences “stick” to us and between us (Ahmed, 2004). Such descriptors invite me into an embodied engagement as I read them, since many of these terms evoke the sensorial and call us to experience them in our bodies as we read them, but they are also words that proliferate beyond a single meaning. Stewart’s (2007) list contains thirteen ways to describe affect, but ends with the evasive *something*. By definition, affect requires us to release our need for certainty and asks something else of us entirely. It asks us to experience through feeling. And though I join in this suspicion of language, I am still searching for a way to describe this moment in fieldnotes, to honor this *something* that happened.

Ever since my encounter with art journaling on the floor of the library, I have often relied on mixed media to voice those life experiences that slip past words, so I turned to arts-based education research methods to explore a new take on this question of representation. Yet, while qualitative researchers have certainly explored affect in the context of education research (Anwaruddin, 2015; Boldt, Lewis & Leander, 2015; Dutro & Cartun, 2016; Hollet & Ehret, 2014; Leander & Boldt, 2013; Leader & Ehret, 2018) and researchers have looked at the use of arts based approaches to attend to embodied dimensions of experience in education research (Knowles & Cole, 2008; Leavy, 2008), there has not yet been a rich source of research that seeks a bridge between these two fields to make explicit what ABER offers us as researchers of affect in schools.

In the following pages, I share my process of theoretical discovery and its application to this research project in a 7th grade classroom. First, drawing on affect theory as a conceptual framework for this paper, I describe the way scholars think about affect as something that is particularly challenging to represent. Next, I describe the context of the persuasive writing unit in which arts- based methods were employed. Finally, I describe two approaches to visual methods of representation and analysis: students' use of color and abstract design in their representation of the feeling dimension of the writing project, and my photography of street art and city vignettes as an alternative tool for analysis in this project.

The Paradox of Linguistic Representation of Affect

Affect, as a unit of analysis, provides researchers with the paradox I described previously as the desire to value and represent a dimension that evades clarity. The tension between language and affect is one of the primary sets of concerns scholars return to frequently in their explorations of affect, especially in our methodological attempts to write about affect. Seigworth and Gregg (2010) describe this aspect of affect theory,

“[as] an attempt to turn away from the ‘linguistic turn,’ this turn toward affect theory is sometimes focused on understanding how the ‘outside’ realms of the pre-/extra-/para-linguistic intersect with the senses (such as touch, smell, rhythm ,and motion sense.... Frequently, this work focuses on those affective encounters with music, dance and other non-discursive arts” (p. 8).

This move away from linguistic ways of knowing also stems from post-structural critiques of language’s failure to map words onto meaning, the critique de Saussure (2000) calls “the gap between the word and the thing” or the sense that there is an arbitrary nature to a signal and its signification (qtd. in St. Pierre, 2000, p. 483). This lack of inherent meaning in language produces a rupture in its use and poses a challenge for researchers working within language as our primary tool of representation.

Scholars extend this recognition of the linguistic gap to the representation of affect, especially to difficult, traumatic experiences, noting that these experiences provide an extenuating example of language’s limits as they exceed language and defy representation (Caruth, 1996, Dutro, 2013). Within affect theory, scholars take up this argument as it relates to translation, noting as Gibbs (2012) does, that such conversion of affect into words produces a “brutality” in relation to the “felt” experience.

Rather than resolving this tension, arts-based research methods, have the potential to perform the linguistic failure, by bypassing the use of any language to voice an experience. Bennet (2005) describes contemporary art as a medium that encapsulates this failure without resolving it, since art “does not convey the meaning of a work” or the secret of personal

experience; rather, the interaction between artist and viewer is “transactive” (p. 8). Art enacts this failure of language to transmit meaning by engaging in a different kind of relationship with viewer, a transactive one in which the viewer experiences the sensorial dimension of an experience, rather than the purely linguistic one. Art theorists who see contemporary art as something inherently non-representational also recognize the project of art to be an affective, embodied one, what O’Sullivan (2001) argues by drawing on “Deleuzo-Guattarian terms to move the register away from deconstruction and away from representation, the *molecular* beneath the *molar*. The molecular understood here as life’s, and art’s intensive quality, as the stuff that goes on beneath, beyond, even parallel to signification” (p. 126). For O’Sullivan, again quoting Deleuze and Guattari, art activates the “bloc of sensations” in spectators, rather than transmitting some kind of predetermined meaning. He places art parallel to signification, a move that evokes Sedgwick’s (2003) argument for the word “beside” as a placeholder that encourages proliferation, for, presumably infinite 'besides' have the potential to proliferate as 'lines of flight.'

Existing Scholarship on Affect and Arts Based Methodological Approaches

I see the need for this theorizing of representation of affect in arts based practices as crucial for this moment in education research. Though still an emerging body of research in the education field, there is increasing interest in the affective dimension of schools, especially within literacy research (Anwaruddin, 2015; Cartun and Dutro, 2015; Leander & Bolt, 2013; Wargo, 2015). While we must be careful about producing hierarchies between arts-based and traditional ethnographic approaches, (Irwin and Spinggay, 2008), we can explore arts-based approaches as crucial, but additive to our existing methods of inquiry, especially in our attempts to understand affect which poses challenges to using traditional modes alone.

There are already many scholars within ABER who take up research that explores what I

am referring to as affect, but with terminology that differs from that employed by affect theorists. A tenant that permeates ABER is the way in which researchers make use of “emotive, affective experiences, senses, and bodies, and imagination and emotion as well as intellect, as ways of knowing and responding to the world” (Finley, 2005). Various mediums offer different affordances for attending to feeling and sensation. For example, Leggo (2008) describes poetic ways of knowing as “a process of attending sensually and sensitively to life” (p. 171). Though poetic modes certainly draw on linguistic forms of representation, they do so in ways that differ from other linguistic forms of representation “by using words sparsely...[where] words, rhythm and space create sensory scenes where meaning emerges from the construction of both language and silences” (Leavy, 2009, p. 64). Visual methods offer unique potential to represent the sensorial, what Leavy (2009) describes as the visual modes’ “visceral” affordances. In her use of photography to represent stories of women in the early years of the Cuban Revolution, Elvy (2008) observes that photography offers a language that can transcend linear thought to represent a “felt knowing” that will “carry through past the immediate, when words alone fall short” (p. 147).

Outside of ABER, scholars in education explore the use of research methodologies that draw on modes that we would consider artistic to describe the affective nature of experience, even though this term isn’t taken up explicitly in their work (Ayers & Tanner, 2010; Low & Jones, 2013). To point to just a few examples of this area of work, Vasudevan, Schultz and Bateman (2010) use of photography with young people describing their neighborhoods through images, Jones’s (2012) use of collage with teaching candidates in undergraduate education writing method’s courses to respond to fiction, and Mills’ (2015) use of video sensory walks around youth’s community are several examples of arts-based approaches that use neither the language of

ABER nor the language of affect theory, but use art as a way to speak to representation of the embodied dimension in education research.

Research Context

I turn now towards describing the specific context where this guiding question regarding representation surfaced.

This paper emerged from data from a qualitative study in a 7th grade language arts classroom in a mid-sized city in the mountain region of the United States. In the context of a persuasive essay unit during the concluding eight weeks of 7th grade, Michael, the male language arts teacher and I co-constructed and co-taught two class periods with a total of 32 participating students. Michael and I met through a professor in the school of education at the university where I am a doctoral student and Michael completed a master's degree. After visiting his class weekly in the fall of 2015 to see if the partnership would be a fit, we began planning and conducting the project in the spring of 2016.

The focal class for this paper's analysis included 16 students with seven Caucasian females, one Latino female, one first generation American who immigrated with her family to America from Nepal, two twin females adopted from South Korea when they were infants, and five Caucasian males. 24.7% of these students participated in free and reduced lunch. Both Michael and I self-identify as heterosexual and white.

Michael's 7th grade language arts course was designed around common core language arts standards with attention to supporting narrative, expository and persuasive genres in the writing curriculum. Within these expectations, Michael and another 7th grade language arts teacher designed much of the curriculum around a social justice framework. Michael confirmed that he was able to innovate within the expectations provided by the district, and he was excited and open

to altering aspects of the argumentative writing unit to attend to the affective dimension of argumentative writing. Michael had a lighthearted rapport with students, often including a great deal of humor in his teaching and this connection was reciprocated through students' disclosure of significant aspects of their lives in their conversations with him.

Centering the Affective Nature of Persuasive Writing

Central to the persuasive unit was our vision for a writing community in which students would feel comfortable including the affective dimension of their lives in their school writing, a practice that would disrupt existing norms around certain topics and feelings not usually sanctioned for school writing (Boler, 1999; Dutro, 2013; Jones, 2012). Situating the art-based education research methods within larger post-structural feminist theoretical perspectives provided me with models of ethical and relational feminist research practices in which researcher vulnerability is implicit in the work and affective and embodied experiences can be woven into the research narrative (e.g. Behar, 1997). Such perspectives offered me the encouragement I needed to include my family's struggle and recovery from addiction and anxiety in the writing I shared with students. As mentioned earlier, Michael and I designed our instruction around Dutro's (2011) work on reciprocal vulnerability, an approach that invites teachers to model the inclusion of topics that are rarely endorsed for school writing. The approach addresses a flaw in many writing workshop models in which young people take up a vulnerable writing practice while the teacher's silence maintains existing hierarchies of power. In addition, the approach mitigates against the risk that entire domains of children's experience are uninvited in writing practice, which can occur even within open-ended approaches like writer's workshop. By grounding her argument in a critical affective theoretical approach, Dutro (2011) also recognizes the way in which areas of difference further produce hierarchies in school, such as race, sexual orientation

and gender identity, while traditional approaches to writer's workshop do not always recognize the inherent power in uneven expectations around vulnerability. Embedded in this approach is the finding that students deepen their connection with school writing, and challenge themselves as writers, when they draw on important life experiences as inspiration for their writing, even when those experiences might be seen as difficult (Dutro, 2011; Winn, 2011; Wiseman & Wissman, 2010). This approach guided the design and implementation of the persuasive writing unit I describe in the following sections.

After Michael and I shared our own writing with the class, students were supported as they wrote short personal narratives, what we called "small moments" (Oxenhorn & Calkins, 2003) that emerged from open-ended prompts like "describe a time when you felt fear, love or loss" and "write a letter to someone you miss." Michael and I modeled persuasive arguments tied to our short personal narratives. Drawing on my extended family's experiences with addiction, I chose to share an argument regarding the kind of support schools might offer children experiencing addiction in their families, and Michael chose to critique the U.S. prison system's rehabilitation services, an argument grounded in Michael's narrative describing the way his father died; he was killed by a former resident of a halfway house for recently released prisoners where his father worked as a social worker.

During writing conferences, we supported students in choosing an argument that would have great investment for them and feel closely tied to their "small moments." Next, students compiled research from online sources and made connections between the research and their own experiences in written responses called "research memos." Finally, they crafted argumentative essays based on this research.

Color as Imperfect Representation of Affect's Complexity

Though arts-based approaches were not, initially, a core component of the research design, my early struggles with representing affect, described in my opening vignette, inspired me to bring art materials to the research site near the conclusion of the project. I offered participants 8 colors of acrylic paint, several paintbrushes and 8 by 10 pieces of white paper and invited students to paint the way the writing project felt and to write a corresponding artist's statement to describe their image. As youth crafted images and artist's statements, I walked around the classroom to observe the emerging pictures, and immediately noticed that nearly 1/3 of the class chose color as a tool for representing affect. That is, many artist's statements aligned the colors they chose with the affective dimension of the experience. Further, I noticed that most of these images were abstract renderings that placed most of the burden of conveying the meaning of their piece on color, rather than on the use of objects, people, or scenes. In what follows, I describe three students' drawings to more closely explore the varying ways color became a method for representing affect, and what this might offer researchers interested in centering affect in their work.

Elena's Use of Color and Abstract Art: Anger as Red

Elena grounded her persuasive essay in her experiences with American immigration policies that produced an ever-present fear that her family will not be able to remain together in the United States (see Figure 1). Elena and her brothers were U.S. citizens, but her parents emigrated to the U.S. from Mexico before she and her brothers were born and had sought U.S. citizenship status without success. Elena described the research process for the essay as a hopeful discovery of the way she might help her family stay united despite mixed citizenship status. Yet, as she explained in an interview, she also felt anger when she encountered anti-immigration sentiment in the form of a U.S. immigration "pro-con" list as part of her online searches, a list that

pointed to increase in competition for jobs as one “con” and an influx of talented and skilled individuals from other countries as one “pro.”

Invited to paint an image to illustrate the way the project felt, Elena painted thick red, white and blue lines splattered white paint (see figure 1). Her image resembled a reimagining of the American flag, with congruent colors and shapes but an alternative design. After she finished her painting, she read me her artist statement, an explanation of the way the color red, specifically, stands for the anger she felt while she read the U.S immigration pro/con list online and while she wrote her persuasive essay arguing for her family’s continued safety.

Though I resist claiming authority to analyze her image, I see the way Elena’s painting exemplified a methodological affordance of color as a window into the affective dimension of the persuasive essay project given the way color offers an alternative to the use of linguistic forms of knowing. Her description of the use of the color red, as the color for “anger” in the painting can help researchers learn more about how the writing process felt and challenge binary perspectives that position the persuasive writing genre as primarily rational and thus somehow distant from feeling. Color was the tool Elena used to voice the affective dimension of the project, and color was also the fulcrum of later conversations we had about her feelings during the project.

In Bertleson and Murphie’s (2010) exploration of the “Tampa crisis,” in which 400 Afghani refugees sought asylum in Australia only to remain in the ship while Australian authorities resisted their entry, they observe the redness of the ship as a refrain, an “uneasy, persistent redness sitting on the horizon” (p. 142). For Bertleson and Murphie, the “red shipness” produces an affective intensity that provides an entirely different aesthetic than, say, a wooden fishing boat. Redness is its own assemblage that “summons up an unusually wide ranging but often-open, ambiguous power to affect and be affected” (p. 139). Here, color remained open

rather than tied to a particular, knowable, feeling, but had the ability to affect people who saw the red ship sitting on the horizon. We might stitch together associations with a particular color such that our encounters with that particular color can produce an experience of similar affective intensity that echoes across different contexts. Though these refrains remain open and changing, in no way ‘mapped’ onto specific affective labels, these affective associations with a particular color can become assemblages we might want to label, the way Elena labels red as “anger.”

Of course, in her linguistic description of her abstract image, we learn more about how Elena mapped color to an emotional label, anger, *as* red. In this way, language played a crucial role in describing her experience. Yet, I noticed that it is the image, and the use of color specifically, that allowed entry into this space of reflecting on, and representing, affect. Elena used labels we often associate with emotion rather than affect, and I agree with Massumi’s argument that “emotion and affect follow different logics...affect’s logics are not those of received psychological categories” (qtd. in Bertleson & Murphie, 2010, p. 148). However, I would argue that Elena complicates such labels by choosing to represent affect as abstract color, transcending the use of language and form. Also, such labels are, of course, so pervasive in our culture as tools for discussing felt experiences that it is not surprising that they are provided as the answer to my inquiry on “feeling.” Certainly, we, as researchers, might offer analysis that maintains a logic of affect as “unqualified intensity” (Massumi, 2002, p. 27) even as representation of young people’s thoughts will often require the use of the emotion terms children and youth have available to capture their felt intensities. The closest we might come to representing “unqualified intensity” is abstraction, and Elena’s image is an abstraction of color, with color outperforming language’s limitations in the face of feeling.



Figure 1: Elena's painting

Color and Multiplicity in Affective Experience: Tara and Elise's Rainbows

Tara, the student who chose to write about the death of her best friend in a car crash in the opening vignette, also used color to illustrate the way it felt to write about this accident in school (see Figure 2). In her reflection on the painting, she explained, "I painted all of these colors to show all the ways I felt during the project." When I asked Tara if the colors felt singularly descriptive of feelings, with each color standing in for a specific feeling or sensation, she explained that they didn't because she felt "so many mixed emotions." Tara explained in an interview that, though her mom attempted to talk with her about Samantha, Tara preferred to avoid any conversation about the accident. This project was the first time she had ever spoken or written about the loss of her friend, and not surprisingly, she had complicated feelings about processing it in writing for the first time. Still, Tara expressed that it felt good to write about Samantha and though she had a "hard time with it [the writing project], it helped" and that her feelings about writing about her friend's death were "hard to explain."

Interestingly, in Tara's reflection on her painting, she continued to leave those feelings "unexplained," never denoting what the colors mean. In this way, she skirted the temptation to

reduce affect into a word, a temptation researchers might also face in their tendency to assign codes to feelings. Tara painted the image, noted its complexity and maintained the incomprehensibility of her feelings. Tara's painting offered me another way of thinking about ABER, as a method of representation that maintains the sense that feelings are multiplicitous, allowing for contradictory, feelings in-tension to co-exist in their representation. That is, within one visual frame, she was able to represent the multiple feelings she experienced, without having to privilege one as central. Also, her willingness to leave her feelings unlabeled invites us, as researchers, to reconsider our desire to seek clarity and conclusion. Tara added a tree to her abstract image, offering a sense of hybridity between abstract and representational art, but also left the presence of the image unexplained. Especially when young people are invited to paint affect, their work might require us to maintain its non-linguistic form without using words to interpret intended meaning or draw certain conclusions.



Figure 2: Tara's painting

Elise took a similar approach when she painted the way it felt to write about an experience with a gym teacher who segregated girls and boys during gym class, providing significantly different exercise options to each group and positioning girls as less capable than boys (see Figure 3). Elise's persuasive essay, drawn from this experience in gym class, was an argument for equal

funding for male and female athletics. Like Tara, Elise used a rainbow of colors to represent the affective nature of the project, and the research process, in particular. In her interview, she noted that after reading an article opposing equal funding for girls' and boys' athletics, "I just want to throw this computer across the room." After writing about an article that affirmed her stance in her persuasive essay, she explained "I could just hug this computer." Elise's feelings for her computer pointed to feelings-in-tension as she conducted research. Yet, Elise did not label these changing intensities in her interview as "frustration" or "anger" or "affirmation." Through her use of parallel curved lines of differing colors, her image also maintained a sense of simultaneity of intensities across the project. Though Elise used the language of emotion in her artist's statement, she also painted an image that points to the potential for affect to exist as overlapping bloom spaces of intensities co-existing even as they contrast (Stewart, 2010). Elise noted the coexistence of feelings in space/time, explaining, "it has a lot of feelings that represent feeling happy, sad...and a splatter of angry." The dots of paint that stand for anger overlap on top of the other colors, in a move that disrupts linearity or singularity in these affective intensities.



Figure 3: Elise's Painting

Both Tara and Elise used multiple colors as a way of pointing to the feeling dimension of their experience with writing, but each refused to label the colors as specific feelings. Semiotics can be a territorializing force as language can offer the appearance of clarity through the use of concepts and labels. De-territorializing semiotics and meaning in art requires us to interact with art on the level of aesthetics, and to skirt the edges of research processes that lays claim to clarity. This is especially important in working with young people, who are often asked to draw images for researchers so that such images can stand in for clarity to inform a project's findings (Eldén, 2012). Instead, abstract art invokes an entirely different perspective in which we can value what young people hope to say about affect in school, while also maintaining the ambiguity that is inherent in these felt experiences

Zepke (2014) offers that abstract art is unique in that it affords forefronting sensation over meaning, given its break with representation. He explores the mechanics of abstraction this way: "It is by using line and color against its representational functions that painting expresses the immanence of inorganic life directly in a sensation. This involves freeing color from its overcoding by the line so that form emerges through the modulation of color as a set of different relations and freeing the line from its representational function so as to give it a non-stated movement" (p. 226). Abstract art's formless dimension offers the opportunity to experience life as sensation, without form as such an overbearing filter of that experience. Abstract paintings do not resolve the "gap between the word and the thing," as much as they metaphorically *represent* this gap, *perform* this gap by using formlessness and color instead of words to demonstrate its message.

In her analysis of the feminist avant garde movement of the 1960's, Best (2011) offers a strong argument for abstract art's unique ability to speak to affect. Critiquing scholars who have

called this period of abstract art “affectless” because of its abstract nature, Best argues that the nature of their work as “minimal” is exactly what makes their work so successful at pointing to affective encounters. Yet, Best also offers a caveat to her claim, drawing on philosopher Edward Casey, who complicates the idea that art is a “direct communication of the artist’s feelings” noting that the art object isn’t a direct transmission of the artist’s feeling. Abstract images hold the potential for viewer to be affected, but the affective event is inherently an encounter with the viewer made all the more interactive by the absence of overt meaning in the work. The absence of semiotic clarity is a vacuum that privileges experiencing art as sensation, outside of a linear transmission of an overarching message.

Without such a linear transmission of meaning, researchers must tread carefully when thinking about color as a source of information. Rather than seeing color as a positivist data point for analysis, color offers an entry point for young people to share the affective dimension of the experiences they are having in school. Kathleen Stewart’s description of a group that meets for color therapy points to this approach to using color as an avenue for discussion since “people who are really into color therapy don’t read color as symbols or codes. They don’t care what colors “mean.” They’re fooling around with the forces that be to see what things are made of. They want to send things in alchemical motion. They’re talking things over with like minded people” (p. 33). Color, in this context, is entry for ‘talking things over.’ Rather than mapping color onto affect, we can use color to point to feeling.

Tara, Elise, and Elena use color as a starting point for talking about the affective nature of the experience of writing about deeply important topics in school. Though I had not envisioned color as the method that would facilitate this conversation, they used color in this way, and I took

notice, following their lead and honoring their method as I turned toward my own process for reading, analyzing and (re)presenting their images.

Color Tryptics as Method of Analysis: A Collaboration of Child Artist, Street Artist, Researcher Artist

Once I observed that so many of the young people participating in the writing project were drawing heavily on color as their method to discuss the affective dimension of their writing, I began looking for ways to represent my understanding of their affective experience, without reducing it or oversimplifying it with linguistic analysis. In this section, I turn to a description of how I attempted to craft a method of analysis from the children's use of color and my interest in the connection between arts-based methods and the affective dimensions of persuasive writing. During this process of analysis, I was in the midst of developing my own craft of digital photography, and I was frequently visiting an area in a nearby city covered with enormous murals by street artists. I immediately saw a similarity between the way many of the street artists were utilizing color in their work, and the way children had described color as representative of affect. I was reminded of photographer Sophie Calle's project *The Blind* in which she asked people with vision impairment to describe something beautiful, and then used these descriptors as inspiration for her own photographs. With children's artists' statements as the descriptors for my project, I took photographs of street art that reflected the colors children centered in their artists statements and photographs of everyday objects I encountered that would honor the student's vision. Using the artists' statements as guiding descriptors, I began composing tryptics with the street artist's image, the student's painting, and my own photograph. Using their intuition as inspiration, I aimed to center children as authorities on their affective experience and their artistic methods for using color to represent that experience.



Figure 4: Tryptic inspired by Elena's Artist Statement

As a method of analysis, I chose to include images of street art in the triptych because I saw the way children's persuasive writing often took up critiques of injustice in their lives in the same way that street artists often paint similar critiques. Initially, I was reminded of Mark Jenkins's piece "Giving to the Poor" a street art piece he painted between an ATM machine and an area where people without homes often gathered to sleep to emphasize the economic disparities in the city (Burnham, 2010) and Banksy's Santa's Ghetto in Bethlehem project that aimed to make the Israeli separation wall easier to see (Parry, 2010). In these examples, I noticed the way art provides a dual purpose for supporting change as it works on the public consciousness to help us see the ways in which rigid structures, institutions, and politics need to be critiqued while, at the same time, offering the medium with which to craft our resistance (hooks, 1994). This paired motivation is an inherent part of the street art movement and one that I saw as ideologically aligned to children's artwork, since these images were drawn as an illustration of the affective nature of the persuasive pieces they wrote, many of which were commentaries on injustice in our world.

With Elena's, Tara and Elise's use of color as inspiration, I looked for street artists who used similar colors in their paintings. Rather than search for images that would match the child's image in form, I used the artist statement to find objects that would help me privilege the colors they captured. In this way, I honored the fact that they valued the abstract nature of color, since color was often what they centered in their artist statements.



Figure 5: Triptyc Inspired by Elise's Artist Statement

Tara's statement contained the same attention to color's affordances as a way to discuss affect as abstract, but she also described the object in her drawing, a tree. She offered no further explanation on how a tree serves as a metaphor for the affective dimension of the project, and in this way, the inclusion of the tree is also an ambiguous symbol, potentially an abstraction as well. The semiotic role of the tree disappears and it stands without explanation. I sought a tree as a subject of my photograph that would help honor Tara's decision to use the tree as an affective symbol in her drawing.



Figure 6: My Tryptic Inspired by Tara's Artist Statement

Rather than offering the product as a representation of the affective dimension of the writing project, I saw the process of taking photographs and building the typtics as my way of seeking to better see this, often invisible, dimension so that I would be able to honor their vision. The final collage of three images and the artist statement are a product, of course, that communicates the affective nature of this writing practice for several students, but I feel it necessary to avoid any temptation we might have to offer these collages or the students' paintings as representations of affect in a definitive way. I would argue, rather, that they attempt, through color and text, to stand as a kind of witness to the *something* students felt as they wrote and their intuitive use of color to communicate this affective *something*.

Implications for Education Research: Art as Metaphor for Affective Complexity

Just as I began this methodological meditation by calling out the paradox of researching affect in the classroom, I want to end, again, by noting how strange it is to try to describe what I understand to be beyond representation. Still, what we look for often reflects the values we hold,

and so the affective dimension of the classroom, students, teacher and writing was far too present with me to abandon in this process of sharing the research experience or in students' representations of their experiences writing about the affective nature of their lives. So, in an attempt to support and encourage research interested in critical affect in an educational setting, I describe my process of intentionally choosing visual methods that would not resolve complexity, but perhaps, even perform it. Abstract visual art offers a kind of metaphor for this complexity and these tensions of, non-linguistic, indescribable, abstract, changing, in-tension affective intensities.

Though the arts based approaches I catalogue in the previous section are particularly focused on the sensorial and embodied dimension of experience, I agree with Irwin and Spinggay's (2008) caution to resist the tendency to set up a binary with traditional modes of research by suggesting that the arts are suited for embodied forms of research, while traditional modes are not. Rather, my exploration here emphasizes what the visual arts can offer us as we explore affect in education research, not to claim it is an ideal method that precludes other ethnographic approaches.

Finally, in bridging critical affect as a theoretical lens with arts-based approaches to research, I see the importance of supporting children's central participation in research, a move that invites young people to voice their own perspectives through their visual art, sonic stories, drama, poetry, narrative and dance. Practices that many young people already find meaningful can be applied toward children-led artistic reflection on a research question, community problem, or project. Especially for those of us wanting to place critical affect in the center of our research, there is an imperative to hand over the materials, spill them on the table and get out of the way lest we risk continuing to reproduce existing inequities in the way we take ownership over representation in the research. Some foundational leaders in the field point to the question of experience, noting

that perhaps arts-based practices should be utilized only by professional artists (Eisner, 2002). Yet, as this project illustrates, arts-based methods offer new insights on how young people are experiencing the affective nature of pedagogy and curriculum, so the risk of an imperfect rendering of an image must be weighed against this loss of insight.

Of course, the irony in art-based research on affect is that we can all work together to bring our sense of how ‘it’ happened and how we felt about it into a picture or poem or story and this will bring the moment into focus. We can look at the layers of experience, opinions, artifacts, words, video, interviews and fieldnotes and then try to arrange them into a mosaic, placing each tile together. But, when we stand back and squint at the image, we suddenly remember that there is no possibility for it to ever, really, *fully* come into focus. We are better off squinting so the image remains hazy; the inherent tensions will keep it from coming into focus.

Still, despite the hazy image, we are struck by it - how beautiful, how complex, how, *somehow*, lower case “t” *true*.

The Meaningful Argument:

High Stakes Argumentative Writing and Blending Genre in a 7th Grade Classroom

The world went dark when I was sixteen.

I only lost my eyesight in my right eye, (so maybe I should say that half the world went dark). But it was terrifying in its suddenness and uncertainty, the way unexpected shocks always jar us out of our accepted reality, the way safety can be interrupted so quickly and we are left to navigate a new world that suddenly feels groundless, as though we are in free-float, like astronauts tied with only a thin tether to their base.

I still went to school everyday, but I spent afternoons at medical appointments seeing specialists who would blast small puffs of air at me and test for all sorts of things usually relegated to older demographics: glaucoma, retina detachment, macular degeneration. Nothing surfaced. No one knew why this had happened. So, I just kept walking the halls of my high school with a thin film over the right side of the world.

We were reading *The Turn of the Screw* in English class and preparing for an inventive activity wherein we would put the governess in the novel on trial for the death of the children. We were required to argue for the prosecution or the defense, and draw evidence from the book to support our side. It was argumentative writing come alive in a courtroom, and we actually filed onto yellow school buses to travel to the nearby civil courtroom to plead our case. Cast as the governess, I squinted through my hazy vision at mock depositions and attempts at opening statements and lines of questioning, but I kept it a secret from nearly everyone throughout the trial. The terror that loomed large in the background of my days at school was invisible to everyone else, and I worked hard to keep it this way.

But I knew how to keep a secret. I had so many of these secrets in school.

I never mentioned addiction to anyone even though it was another hazy lens on my world: an ancestral lineage that had tethered so many generations in my family and left its residual fingerprints on us even as my mom has been sober for 32 years.

I would never have whispered the way anxiety and perfectionism had been my particular strain of this history, the way my body buzzed when it was time for sleep or made it hard to eat or laugh sometimes even though I didn't self-medicate the way my ancestors had.

After a few months, my eyesight came back. The foggy haze on one side of the world didn't stay with me the way the buzzing, fizzy pulse of anxiety did. It was a slow lifting of a film, a slow motion version of a camera snapping a blurry image into a crisp, sharp picture.

But I had learned something from living in two worlds for a while. One- clear and sharp. The other- hazy and matted. Now I knew the way the dance looked- to pretend the world is clear and crisp when there is another world you are also inhabiting, a secret loss or fear or memory that lives alongside you.

It would still be nearly ten years, not until I was a high school English teacher, that I would realize how many of us who spend our days in schools know this dance- how to occupy these two worlds at once- less a binary than a blend, the other never leaves us fully, but we often keep it quiet, unsure how to say it, or where it belongs. It would be longer still before I saw the way I might have reimagined the story of losing my eyesight or the story of addiction and anxiety as argumentative writing, just as worthy as topics within this genre as the case I made in the mock courtroom, squinting my hazy eye so I could read my supporting evidence.

I am certainly not the first to observe the way students and teachers learn to hide some aspect of their lives or identities in school or to argue for a reimagining of these norms around how much of our difficult experiences we can bring to our writing. Literacy scholars have

explored the way life experiences we might call difficult or visceral can be invited into school writing practice in intentional ways, with the paired recognition that these aspects of young people's lives are, "already in the room, whether acknowledged, invited, or not" (Dutro, 2017, p. 331). Often this invitation to include these visceral life experiences comes within writing assignments we categorize as personal narrative (Atwell, 2014; Calkins, 1994; Dutro, 2009; Dutro, 2011; Dutro & Bien, 2014; Wood Ray, 1999). Yet, it is rare to consider the way our important, but often hidden feelings and experiences relate to those genres we categorize as "informational," "analytical," "expository," and "argumentative" and the ways in which genre as a framework for teaching writing has sometimes relegated personal connections and visceral ties to personal narrative and fiction, while tight boundaries around informational and expository writing emphasize reason and research to the exclusion of writers' visceral connections with their work.

At the same time, it is timely to theorize about ways in which argumentative, informational and expository writing has the potential to be a meaningful, personally relevant practice for young people, particularly within a K-12 literacy context. The pendulum swing of the 1970's, this move toward the inclusion of more expressive writing and writer's workshop pedagogies, seems to be on its return journey toward an increased focus on expository and informational texts (Maloch & Bomer, 2013). We need look no further than the increased emphasis on both reading and writing in these genres in the Common Core State Standards as a recent policy-level example of this hierarchy (Applebee, 2013; Ghiso, 2015; Maloch & Bomer, 2013). Policy has been operationalized with a call for informational texts taking up half of the reading at the elementary level and 70% of high school texts (Ravitch, 2014). Greater attention has also been placed on argumentative writing, in particular, as a form of writing that best

represents the critical thinking skills so crucial for college and career (Kohnen & English, 2016), with focus granted to features of language use and organization (Applebee, 2013) and as a genre that supports future economic success. Certainly the search for balance makes this swing both expected and, perhaps, wise. At the same time, I argue that such an increase in focus must be paired with attention to the dimension of writing experience I will refer to as “meaning”—that is, the sense that children feel that their writing is worthwhile, enjoyable, impactful, or that it draws on their important investments and life experiences. My use of “meaning” here, evokes an idea that has been conceptualized as motivation in other research on writing instruction (Curwood, Magnifico & Lammers, 2013; Moje, 2006). However, I think about it as the sense that children and young people are invested in and feel rich engagement with their writing.

In telling the story of this search for meaning, I begin by describing the theoretical foundation that guides this work, followed by a closer exploration of recent research on argumentative writing in research and practice, and finally, engage in description of the themes that emerged in this research and the potential implications for research and practice that follow from these findings.

Inquiries Guiding the Project and Overview of the Context

Within expository writing, several sub-genres offer rich areas to consider these questions of meaning. My emphasis in this study was on the genre referred to as “argumentative,” “persuasive,” or “opinion” writing. Argumentative writing, as a particular kind of informational writing, offers a unique lens on meaning, different from other forms of informational writing in an important way, as its focus is on arguing *for* something that potentially holds high stakes for one’s own beliefs and values, as well as for others involved in the debate or controversy. It was in this

particular context that I asked my primary research question about how educators might support young people in making the arguments that feel important to them.

I took up this question in the context of a study in a 7th grade language arts classroom where students were invited to write short personal narratives, what we called ‘small moments’ drawing on Oxenhorn and Calkins (2003) approach to personal narrative writing. The teacher and I then asked students to craft an argumentative essay by drawing from one of their personal narratives. These paired assignments provided a way to explore how we might craft writing curriculum that would allow young people to write arguments that drew on their personal investments and thus felt worth writing.

Within this larger area of curiosity, I designed several specific lines of inquiry that would serve as the guiding questions for the project. To get at this larger question around “meaning” in argumentative writing, I asked students about their experiences with the project, focusing primarily on how it felt to write their small moments and argumentative essays. This was primarily a question of affect, and so I attended both to the way young people described their feelings about the project, and also to moments in the classroom that *affect* scholars would call moments of “intensity,” or what Stewart (2007) describes as moments when “something is happening - something that needs attending to” (p. 5). I also sought to understand the way young people talked about their argumentative writing. That is, I was curious why some argumentative writing mattered to them while other writing did not. This question reflected an interest in unpacking how young people find meaning in argumentative writing and what kinds of argumentative writing carry authentic purposes for writing. I was also concerned with the affective dimension of the project. Thus, my second inquiry was related to the way young people would describe their affective experience with the project. Finally, as I invited students to engage

in narrative and argumentative writing throughout the unit, I wondered: how can emotion and personal expression blend and weave with informational genres?

Theoretical Foundation Supporting a Re-imagining of Genre Binaries

My project questioning boundaries between personal narrative and informational writing is grounded in the theoretical conversation within feminist poststructural perspectives that have long challenged this binary thinking around what is allowed to be shared within public/private spaces and the way these spaces often reify this binary between emotion/reason (Jagger, 1989) even framing emotion as reason's opposite (Boler, 1999). Feeling hasn't just subtly been barred from academic discussion because it was viewed as illogical or unreasonable, it has been falsely positioned as a barrier to making a sound, logical argument (Nussbaum, 1995; Micciche, 2007).

Feminist perspectives on education research highlight that within the field of education, this binary is often operationalized in schools as a hierarchy that both values reason over emotion and feminizes emotion, subtly communicating norms about what degree of emotion students and teachers are to demonstrate in their behavior and their work (Boler, 1999; hooks, 2010; Jones, 2013). Although subtle tears in the fabric of this binary approach have begun to find their way into our curricular and pedagogical practices, literacy researchers point out that genres focused on facts and claims supported by research are still privileged as more important to future success and critical thinking than their "lighter, emotional" counterpart, personal narrative or fictional narrative (DiPardo, 1989; Ravitch, 2014). Further, divisions between life experience and argument call up binary perspectives on cognitive and emotional dimensions of writing and feminist perspectives that have long questioned the term 'objectivity' as a term that is used to delegitimize diverse sources of knowledge, especially embodied and experiential knowledge that stem from complex and layered identities (Ghisso, 2015; Haraway, 1988; Kerkhoff, 2015).

Further, these perspective on literacy and the body also contain a strand of work more interested in the way literacy experiences are felt in an embodied way as affect, emotion, or sensation (Boldt & Leader, 2017; Enriquez, Johnson & Kontovourki, 2015; Jones, 2015).

My approach to considering the felt dimension of this project draws most centrally on perspectives from affect theory that are commensurable with the feminist lenses I discuss above. Affect theory complicates the notion that feelings are ‘within’ bodies, offering instead that such feelings circulate between bodies, “pulled beyond its seeming surface-boundedness by way of its relation to, indeed its composition through, the forces of encounter” (Seigworth & Gregg, 2010, p. 2). These visceral experiences transcend our cognitive understanding (Stewart, 2007; Sedgwick, 2003) and belie our ability to fully know or understand them (Alvermann, 2000; Britzman, 2000; St. Pierre, 2000). Rather, such experiences exist as precognitive “preliminal, preconscious phenomena...against the more social expression of emotion” (Watkins, 2010, p. 268). Though I still sometimes use the word “emotion,” especially in my discussion of children’s languaging around their experience in the study, I broaden its meaning to complicate its often-simplified social use. Instead, I rely on theoretical perspectives within affect theory as a lens on children’s experiences and language in this project, and also as a way of disrupting the temptation to simplify experiences with language and labels. I approached moments of intensity during the project by drawing heavily from Stewart’s (2007) approach to storying affect- what she describes as something that does not allow for clarity in representation. Rather, she explains, her goal is to “find something to say about ordinary affects by performing some of the intensity and texture that makes them habitable and animate” (p. 4). I take up that approach with the recognition that affect is woven into the fabric of every classroom context, perhaps felt and acknowledged, as ‘affective attunement’ with a teacher’s enthusiasm for a project, for example, or as feelings that often slip

beyond teachers' and students' recognition or understanding, though are no less present in the space (Watkins, 2010).

Within affect scholarship, a smaller subset of work is focused more centrally on considering affect within critical frameworks, noting that affect cannot be untangled from racial and other social positioning and historical contexts (Ahmed, 2015). A critical affective lens becomes particularly important when we invite students to story their lives, as we did in this project. Here, the precarious potential is that such vulnerable sharing might be a route to deficit thinking, rather than a recognition of the marginalization and racial inequity that often give rise to challenging life experiences (Dutro & Bien, 2014).

Review of Research on Argumentative Writing: Focus on Genre Features

With the above frameworks as a lens on writing instruction, it is important to see the ways in which genre, as a way of organizing our thinking about writing, often reinforces calcified distinctions between emotion and reason by maintaining clear and distinct boundaries between thought and feeling. Genre, we should note, with its description of distinct purposes, norms and features, continues to be a guiding approach to organizing the writing workshop curriculum just as it was in the early days of its inception within literacy theory and research (Calkins, 1986; Elbow & Belanoff, 1998). Genre has also served as the guiding framework for organizing writing standards (<http://www.corestandards.org/ELA-Literacy>) and also as a framework for assessment, with the norms and features of various genres offering a metric to judge writing as successful or unsuccessful (Dobbs 2013; Uccellie, Dobbs & Scott, 2013).

Further, genres are not always framed as equally challenging or valuable; rather the rhetoric around genre continues to reinforce the hierarchical approaches to thinking about analysis and experience (Kerkhoff, 2015). For example, some research views genre instruction from a

developmental perspective in which students begin with personal narrative writing as young children and progress toward genres deemed more intellectually rigorous such as argumentative and informational writing (Schleppegrell, 2004; Uccellie, Dobbs & Scott, 2013). Other research argues that argumentative writing, in particular, is the crucial genre to master for college (Comstock & Wodon, 2017).

In addition to imposing hierarchies on genres, research often reinforces the notion that walls between genres are distinct and impermeable, with writing mastery judged by metrics of norms and features of different genres (Calkins & Ehrenworth, 2016). Occasionally, these walls between genres are permeable, particularly within writing workshop theory, but this flexibility is located primarily in the drafting or brainstorming phase of the writing process, what Elbow and Belanoff (1998) describe when they note that narrative might serve as “the germ of an idea” for academic writing or what Calkins (1998) describes as early “pieces” of freewrites that can later be transformed into a final draft. However, these are small exceptions in the larger rhetoric around writing that reinforces the assumption that to demonstrate mastery in a genre, one must remain true to the norms of that genre, rather than seeking new ways of blending and weaving different genres together.

Scholars have also taken up these calcified divisions by questioning the exclusion of their lived experiences in their academic writing. In her essay ‘Dare We Say I’ Ruth Behar (1994) describes the historic, often calcified walls that make academic writing sacrosanct and the limitations that stem from these unspoken expectations. Behar acknowledges that to traverse genre boundaries is also to risk legitimacy in the academy: “No one objects to autobiography as such, as a genre in its own right, what bothers critics is the insertion of personal stories into what we’ve been taught to think of as an analysis of impersonal facts” (B2). In response to this, Behar

argues for the value of bridging personal writing and academic writing in higher education - the potential to say something that resonates with readers, to ultimately “engage both the reader’s hearts and intellect” while also helping young, diverse scholars with unique approaches to research and writing to see themselves in the academy (B2). Hers is an argument around authenticity and effect, a recognition that we can draw on our own lived experiences to write something that is thoughtful but also meaningful, something that resonates with readers while still feeling important to us. In this way, we still accomplish our academic ends without sacrificing the stories that are woven into our academic pursuits, the stories that often serve as the inspiration for our work and the important stories that are inevitably, always, ever-present in our lives, including our academic lives. Like many other young people in the argumentative essay project, Behar draws from experiences many might deem difficult - an injury as a child that required her to stay in bed for a year, a story about missing the death of her grandfather because she was in Spain conducting fieldwork on death, and then she weaves these memories into her research and her writing, challenging the norms for academic writing.

Outside of school writing, in advertising and in print and TV journalism, argumentative writing frequently blurs boundaries between the affective and analytical, as arguments written as op-eds are frequently grounded in the visceral nature of lived experience or as narratives that offer persuasive examples of an argument (Bilandzic, 2012). This link between narrative and persuasion has been particularly visible in the wake of the Trump-era violent anti-immigration rhetoric, with examples of an online “story wall” called “American Dreamers” on the New York Times website and opinion pieces that center narrative in the Huffington Post and on National Public Radio and other stories about immigration policy that weave argument with narrative

(Moreno, 2017; and Martin, 2017). In this way, there is a disconnect in the way writers blend genre for rhetorical effect and in the way we teach and assess genre in K-12 curriculum.

A Review of Persuasive Writing Research

Research on argumentative writing, specifically, is theorized squarely within this framework on genre, often focusing on effective ways to teach and measure students' internalization of argumentative features like the ability to make claims, support claims with evidence, and use techniques of persuasion such as logos, ethos, and pathos (Brett & Thomas, 2014; Petit & Soto, 2002). The emphasis on argumentative writing in standardized tests strengthens this focus on genre features in writing instruction in K-12 settings.

Given genre features are such a central focus of standardized assessment, education research, and teacher education contexts, it is not surprising that the choice of a topic for argumentative writing is often framed as tangential in both the Common Core and in most research on argumentative writing in K-12 language arts classrooms. Research on argumentative writing gives little to no attention to the way topics are chosen. Lists of approved topics are often offered to students, but even if a personal connection to one of these arguments exists, young people are not given a process to explore these important ties (e.g. Radcliff, 2012). For example, one study narrowed topics for students' essays to hate speech, abortion, gun control (Felton & Herko, 2004) and, though these topics might potentially hold personal meaning and investment for students, the stories that inspired students' stances on a topic were not a central part of the writing process in this study.

Carbone & Orellana (2010) describe a study in which they did invite affective and personal connections to argument, and they use the writing trait "voice" to describe what they argue is a crucial component of argumentative writing:

For example, writers may reveal a sentiment, but if writers' honest (unconscious) intentions do not support the sentiment, it will resonate as untrue or hollow. Writers must be metaphorically behind the words, not only in voice, but also in body, to reveal themselves consciously and unconsciously to give presence and weight to their words. (p. 296)

The study values students' personal connection with their topics, as an embodiment of their beliefs. However, they also note the importance of academic voice in these expository genres, encouraging students to keep the stories that link to their argument outside the text of their writing and to maintain an academic style in their persuasive piece, which they describe as a sense of distance between the writer and the reader (Carbone & Orellana, 2010). As with most research on argumentative writing, the affective or emotional dimension of argument is described in this study as a persuasive technique, an attempt to draw on pathos to make a personal appeal to readers' emotion, rather than an inherent component of crafting an argument about a topic that holds high stakes or deep connections for the writer. The allegiance to academic voice is certainly understandable in this era of high-stakes standardized testing, and Carbone and Orellana's study certainly points to the unique challenge of supporting these visceral ties within a climate of standardization.

A significantly smaller body of work has begun to make in-roads toward critiquing approaches to persuasive writing that precludes personal, visceral ties with one's argument. Ghiso's (2015) description of persuasive writing with young children explores the embodied nature of knowledge and the way in which children's lived experiences inform their argumentative investments. Kerhoff (2015) draws on feminist composition pedagogy to analyze the framing of argumentative writing in the language of the Common Core through thematic

content analysis. Kerhoff found that, though feminist composition pedagogy and the English language arts common core state standards both value critical thinking, a distinct difference is visible in the way argumentative writing is categorized by the common core as the most important form of writing, a move feminist approaches to pedagogy would certainly not make. Rather, Kerhoff argues, a feminist approach to composition would emphasize a dialogic perspective that does not “take away children’s ways of knowing” (p. 453). This small strand of research offers examples that seek to center the arguments children and young people make in the personal investments that stem from their life experiences.

Methods and Data Sources

Recognizing the need for additional research that recognizes the value of supporting young people in uncovering their existing investments and visceral ties to their argumentative writing, I shift now to describing the specific group of students who agreed to engage in thinking about this process of crafting meaningful arguments and the context where we wrote together during the argumentative writing unit in their seventh grade class. These young people were generous with their hearts, their experiences, their important investments, and their insight into argumentative writing as a genre that holds potential for deep, visceral ties.

Study Context: Nature of the Collaboration and Pedagogy

I sought a teacher willing to invite students’ lives into their writing practice even if the writing included stories of difficulty or challenge. I was fortunate to connect with a 7th grade language arts teacher, Michael, who was already practicing a pedagogy that closely resembled critical witnessing, the framework articulated by Dutro’s (2011) work, and my guiding framework for the pedagogical approach to writing instruction in this project. Dutro describes critical witnessing this way:

this sharing of our students' wounds demands us to awaken to the ways our stories are connected to those we witness. At the same time, those connections must be allowed to reveal the potentially different ways that we and our students are positioned by our challenges. Our own testimony, then, functions as a conscious, risky, move to share the vulnerability that is inherent in classrooms, while remaining aware of how privilege and power shape the stakes of those exposures. (p. 199)

Michael and I both engaged in what Dutro calls "reciprocal vulnerability" or the sense that teachers do not just witness children's experiences in their writing, but also write in ways that speak to their own important experiences. We knew it would be crucial to share the life experiences that point to our own deeply held investments. Our hope was that our vulnerable sharing would proffer invitations for students to draw from their life experiences in order to uncover inspiration for their argumentative writing.

Our goal was to improvise within the existing district writing curriculum, rather than re-visioning it altogether. Indeed, our primary alteration to Michael's existing persuasive essay unit was, first, the invitation for students to write short personal narrative pieces preceding their choice of topics for persuasive pieces and periodically throughout their writing of their arguments; and, second, inclusion of arts-based methods, including visual representations of their topics and responses to the writing process. Working largely within the existing curriculum was important for at least two key reasons. The language arts teacher was accountable to a curriculum that had been mapped to learning standards and exploring minor alterations allowed us to investigate the impact of small innovations in challenging boundaries between genres, thus unearthing a curriculum that might be adopted even within districts with an existing argumentative writing curriculum.

The argumentative writing unit came at the very end of the year, as a closing project in May, and much of the unit, especially its focus on rhetorical strategies of ethos, pathos, and logos remained the same. Students were taught these key approaches to persuading readers, as well as features of persuasive writing such as the guiding thesis, the use of several reasons and supporting evidence to craft their argument and the use of key phrases to signal transitions between supporting reasons. Michael and I drew on Oxenhorn & Calkins' (2003) 'small moments' approach to writing the short personal narrative pieces we incorporated into the unit. We crafted short personal narrative prompts to use at the start of the unit to inspire young people to unearth something they would want to argue for in the persuasive essay (see appendix A for a full list of the prompts). As an example, one small moment prompt asked students to describe a time when they felt sad, angry, or another strong feeling and another prompt invited students to write a letter to someone they miss.

Michael and I answered each prompt and then demonstrated how we would draw from these small moments to craft an argument that means a great deal to us. I shared a personal narrative describing the impact of intergenerational addiction in my family and the way unhealed addiction sometimes materialized as anxiety within my family. Michael shared a personal narrative that explored the way a person living in a halfway house where his father worked took his father's life while he hid in a closet as a small child. We also modeled the strongly held beliefs and resulting argumentative essays that stemmed from these life experiences. I argued that schools should take a more central role in offering support for children experiencing the effects of addiction in their families and Michael argued for better systems of rehabilitation and support for people exiting the prison system as the person who took his father's life had previously been an inmate at a prison prior to his time in the halfway house. Our modeling offered examples of the

way young people in the class might find a bridge from their experiences to their beliefs and thus, their narratives to their arguments.

Participants

At the time of the project, the young people were in their final month of their 7th grade language arts class. Their school is located in a mid-sized college town in the mountain region of the United States. Their school demographics reflect greater diversity than the larger demographics of the surrounding city: with 63.5% of the students self-identifying as Caucasian, 23% of the student population identifying as Hispanic, and a smaller percentage of students identify as other racial identities of color. 24.7% of students in the school participate in free and reduced lunch. The 27 total students in the two focal classes for this study reflected the demographics of the larger school, but with a somewhat larger percentage identifying as white in these classes (22), one student self-identifying as Nepalese, one as Latino, and two as South Korean.

Michael, the teacher of these two focal classes, identifies as a white male. At the time of the study he was in his 4th year of teaching and had been at this school since the start of his career. I identify as a white female and taught English and composition at the secondary level for 5 years prior to starting a doctoral program.

In this analysis, I focus primarily on several focal students. I turned to them as they illustrate central themes that emerged in terms of both the content they chose to feature in their writing and also their way of conceptualizing their writing process.

Data Collection and Analysis

As a participant observer and co-teacher, I spent almost a year visiting Michael's morning classes weekly, developing relationships with the young people, helping them with their

language arts work, and planning the persuasive essay unit. In late April, I began visiting Michael's class each day during his second and third hour classes. I collected and analyzed the several data sources during the unit. I audio and video recorded select class sessions. I recorded classes that included direct instruction with a focus on explaining the norms of argumentative writing and also classes that emphasized student discussion. I also audio recorded and transcribed 45 minute interviews with each participating student. The interviews were semi-structured and occurred in an empty office across from the language arts classroom. My questions focused on inviting students to share their perspectives on the activities of the unit, as well as descriptions of their persuasive essays and their process of writing it. In addition, I conducted three interviews with the teacher, Michael, of approximately one hour each. I also kept fieldnotes from all visits. Because I was co-teaching during the unit, those fieldnotes were written as soon as possible after my visits and were importantly augmented by the video and audio data. In addition, I collected writing from students' personal Googlesite where they completed all of their "small moments" and "research memos," paragraph-long descriptions of sources they were reading for their persuasive essay, as well as their final draft of their persuasive essay, the culminating text for the project.

Given the goals of the study, it was important to expand the data sources to include forms of representation that would speak to the affective dimension of the writing process. Drawing on visual arts-based education research methods (Jongeward, 2009; Leavy, 2009), I invited students to draw and paint images and also write corresponding artist's statements to describe the way the project felt to them. This method provided insight into the layered complexity of affect that often supersedes linguistic representation, even as the artist statements and interviews also provided a multimodal artifact to support my understanding of this dimension of the experience.

Analytic Tools

My analysis of the interviews, fieldnotes, images, and artist's statements began with reading and rereading in search of emerging coding categories that answered my guiding research question regarding how the personal narrative writing might impact students' experiences writing the persuasive essay. In particular, I began my analysis with a focus on students' description in interviews and writing of the affective dimension of the project, how it felt to write these stories, conduct research, and craft an argument based on memories of often challenging times. I coded my fieldnote data with this lens as well. For example, I analyzed my fieldnote data such as classroom observations and non-verbal student behavior to reflect my interest in students' affective disposition, as well as the way they described their experience with the content of the lessons. I kept a daily visual journal as well, a place where I reflected on the affective nature of the classroom in writing, collage, and analytical memos each evening after the day of observation.

Next, I analyzed the students' writing and interviews to explore the way argumentative essays were potentially tied to their personal narratives and what I might learn from the relationship between these genres in their writing and thinking as well as the way they spoke to their experience of the project. I began my analysis by reading fieldnotes and interview transcripts and developing initial codes around students' description of their experience with the unit. I placed these codes into a table and began organizing the data according to initial codes such as "research process" "audience" and motivation." Through this iterative deductive coding process (Miles, Huberman & Saldana, 2014) I crafted subcodes that corresponded with these larger themes to explore more nuanced themes such as "Empathy as motivation" or "the affective nature of research process." I also coded the content of students' writing in order to explore the

way young people took up the invitation to write about important life experiences and also the relationship between small moment personal narrative pieces and argumentative essays. This process unearthed codes such as “concern for animals” “the loss of an important person” “physical injuries” “bullying” “racism” and “gender discrimination.”

Findings

Lived Experience as a Source of Investment in Argumentative Writing

I shift now toward describing central themes that coalesced around my guiding inquiries at the start of the project. Given my central interest in young people’s personal investment in their argumentative writing and my search for a method that might support such investment, I was closely attuned to their process of choosing an argument following our initial personal narrative or the “small moments” writing prompts. As a central finding, I describe the ways in which students talked about the relationship between these two genres and also the role the personal narrative, and the life experience that inspired the writing, played in contributing to young people’s engagement with their argument. The young people I describe in this section chose arguments that were most closely connected with their narrative pieces, but I also want to signal that many students wrote a persuasive piece that was in some way connected to their small moment, even if those links were not always initially as clear and for some, those connections emerged in later reflection and interviews.

The small moment prompt ‘letter to someone I miss’ played a central role in supporting Tara, Eric and Caleb as they drew on this writing as inspiration for their persuasive essays. Eric wrote a letter to his mom, who was killed by his father when Eric was six. He wrote, “I miss you. I miss your warm hugs and your big smile.” His plan for his argumentative essay stemming from this experience loss was to write an argument regarding how schools should approach supporting

young people who have lost a parent. Both students made a more general case for the importance of creating structures that would offer support to young people who are grieving, an argument that certainly attends to a current gap in the availability of resources for children and families of diverse means.

Children reflected on this process of drawing from the personal narrative to inform the choice of the argumentative essay. When I asked Eric about the role the letter played in helping him decide on his persuasive essay topic, he explained that it was while he was writing the letter to his mom that he thought of his idea for his persuasive essay: “when we wrote the letter, I wanted to basically talk to her. I wanted to write something that seemed suitable to write to her and then I realized, oh, that’s what I’m going to write about for the persuasive writing.” Eric was unique in that he chose his argumentative topic long before the rest of his class. The rapidity with which he came to his topic made me wonder if he had perhaps written about this topic in earlier years, but when I inquired about whether or not he had written about the experience in school for other persuasive essays assignments, he explained that he really hadn’t explored this significant life event in any of his writing assignments across genres, though he had written about it in out of school contexts like therapy or with his grandma.

For Caleb, writing the letter didn’t just support him in finding a topic for his persuasive essay, but also helped him connect to the magnitude of the intensity of feeling he has for his topic. Caleb decided to alter the prompt a little and wrote his letter to a boy who had aggressively bullied him for several years, turning the other students in the class against him and isolating him from any potential for friendship in his grade. The experience was so difficult that Caleb’s family eventually moved to a different state across the country to help Caleb have a better experience in school and find some physical distance from the bully. In his letter he wrote:

“You terrorized me, Luke. I still think you don’t understand that, you made me want to hurt myself, when I was only seven years old. Three days a week I remember wanting to cry myself to sleep. I felt like I had no friends.”

Caleb chose to write his argumentative essay about how bullying might be prevented and approaches to addressing it when it begins, with a particular emphasis on the context of school. When I asked about the role the letter played in helping him find an argumentative essay topic that held meaning for him, Caleb reflected: “I think the letter prompt for sure made me feel stronger about my topic.” Like Eric, Caleb also explained that he had never written about this experience in persuasive writing in school and that the ‘small moment’ narrative writing played a crucial role in his decision to take up the topic in his argumentative piece.

Writing Conferences as a Source of Permission

Writing conferences played an important part in supporting many students as they made this shift from “small moment” to an argument for their persuasive essays. For some students, the conference offered a sense of permission to explore a topic that felt controversial or had never previously been invited in school writing. Colin, for example, wrote a small moment describing the way racism and discrimination has impacted his life. However, he expressed uncertainty if this topic was really something he was allowed to share in school. For Colin, an African American student, memories of discrimination in school stretched back to his preschool days when he recalled breaking crayons in protest of his teacher who he felt was treating him differently than the other students. He also wrote about his current 7th grade history teacher who, after seeing other students’ similar projects and their significantly higher scores, wondered if the grade was tied to the fact that he and his partner for the activity were the only African American students in the class. After writing these two small moments, I suggested he might consider

writing about racism in school in his argumentative essay and he responded that he believed that new teachers should have extensive coursework on anti-racist teaching practices as part of their certification process. This became the guiding argument for his piece.

A writing conference also played an important role in Tara's decision to write about an important memory. Tara lost her friend, Samantha, in a car accident and was inspired to write an argumentative essay about how important it is for adults to support children who are grieving the loss of an important person in their lives, and that all children should have access to this support through therapy or another means. Yet, Tara did not initially feel as though she could take this topic up in the school environment. As I was walking around the classroom supporting the class with their small moments, I noticed that Tara had highlighted her entire letter to her friend Samantha and then deleted the entire letter.

When I crouched near her desk to ask why she deleted the letter, she explained that she did not want anyone to see her cry in school and that writing about Samantha's death would be the first time she ever revisited it, and would bring those tears to the surface. My visit to her computer was a kind of impromptu conference in which I listened to her concerns and encouraged her to write about it if she wanted to, explaining that I thought it is okay to cry in school, and reminding her that I had cried when I read my letter to the class.

Conferences became these crucial sites of permission to write about something that was outside of the scope of the usual classroom norms. I was reminded of Megan Boler's (1999) argument regarding emotion as a site of social control. Boler observes this regulation as a form of pastoral power, or the "form of governing populations by teaching individuals to police themselves. For example, children are increasingly taught not to express their anger, not to question authority, and not to resist those who have power" (p. 33). For Tara, this "pastoral

power” enforced rules about where it is acceptable to cry, something she regulated without an overt cue. Colin took up an argument that he explained was woven together with feelings of anger toward adults in powerful positions who have control over his life, who act without concern for fairness. In these encounters, the jump from the small moment to the persuasive essay was also a way of going beyond the self regulation Boler describes, moments where adult granted “permission” to traverse the rules around expressing anger and sadness in school and rules around critiquing adults who sanction these oppressive and racist systems. In her own reflection of the affective dimension of self-regulation in schools, Theil (2015) calls us to reframe these moments of affective expression in literacy experiences as a “subversive response that garners resistance to that which attempts to territorialize or orient and control a body into compliance” (p. 101). To cry in school or express anger at a teacher for racist grading practices both deterritorialize the norms around usual affective expression during school writing. It is perhaps not so surprising, then, that writing conferences were such a crucial aspect of this decision to challenge these affective boundaries, with Michael and I offering a bridge to this new way of feeling within the writing process in school, both in terms of content and affective expression.

In the same way that the students in this project traversed these norms around exhibiting their feelings in school, they also challenged genre norms that divide story and argument.

Importantly, a number of students thoughtfully decided not to center their own stories in their persuasive essays. I was interested in understanding and honoring why some students would choose not to draw on their personal narrative, or to choose a personal narrative topic that didn’t speak to the important life experiences that they shared with me in earlier conversations. When I asked students who had decided not to write a persuasive essay that spoke to a significant moment in their lives, they often cited how uncomfortable they would be with displays of emotion in

school. A few other students explained that the timing of the memory played a role in whether or not they would write about it in their argumentative paper. For example, Gina learned she was moving to California during the course of the project, and she explained that she needed time to process the knowledge so she made just a few mentions of the upcoming move in her personal narrative writing. Similarly, Allyssa, whose grandfather passed away during the persuasive essay unit, made a similar choice, explaining that the memory felt far too tender to explore in the pages of her persuasive essay. Rina, a student who shared with me that she and her twin sister were adopted from South Korea as babies, explained that she didn't want to write about this important part of her identity in school because it is something she doesn't even talk about (the adoption) with her mom even though she thinks about so often. Though many students decided to use their "small moment" narratives as a seed for their persuasive essays, I include these exceptions because they point to the importance of choice and intention around what young people want to share in their writing and the pedagogical implications for this choice.

Research Process as Affective and Connecting

The importance of the research process was another theme that emerged in the way young people described the process of drawing on their narrative small moments as inspiration for their argumentative essays. As a primary aspect of the project, the young people conducted online research that would offer them evidence and information to support their persuasive essays. What was most salient about this research portion of the project was the way young people described research, a process that is often approached as a search for "objective facts" (Flint et. Al, 2017), as affective and visceral in the way it evoked strong feelings and embodied experiences.

In reflecting on the many students described this portion of the project I draw on Kathleen Stewart's (2015) approach to writing about affect - what she describes as "performing some of the

texture and intensity” of moments where “something happened” (p. 4). I drew on this approach to attend to the shifts in children’s dispositions as they conducted research and as they described their experience with the research process. Though students used terms we usually label as ‘emotions’ to indicate how it felt to engage in the research and writing process for their persuasive essay, affect offers a theoretical way of describing this dimension of feeling and intensity without diminishing complexity with a psychological label such as sadness, anger or joy.

Eric, who wrote about the loss of his parents, described the research process as one that affected him in an important way:

“It was really nice to read about other people because even though inside I know other people are going through what happened to me, but it is nice reading first hand because I know for sure. Cuz if there is a three page article on this one thing then people have to be going through it there can’t be just a few people and so I was like oh ok I actually know for sure there are other people going through it and I could see them and their stories so it and it was showing how do they go through it and showing pretty much how I went through... and so it definitely happens.”

He explained that he had never explored any research on the loss of a parent, though he had engaged in several years of therapy in a one-on-one setting. He describes researching grief as an experience that served as an important turning point for him for his own sense of connection and community with others who have lost a parent at a young age.

When I sat beside Eric as he described this experience with the research process, his energy was different than when I’ve sat beside him during other moments during the unit. In an effort to describe this feeling that “something had happened,” I borrow again from Stewart’s

(2007) description of affective impact. When we are affected by *something* “a charge passes through the body and lingers for a little while as an irritation, confusion, judgment, thrill, or musing” (p. 39). As I sat beside Eric to hear more about the research about children grieving the death of their parents, I sensed this as a charge or resonance that passes between us, something that might be imperfectly described as joy or enthusiasm. It almost felt like Eric had just found *something* he had been looking for and wanted to hold it up for me to see it too. The research process had evoked in him an intensity of feeling that he describes as linked closely with his new understanding that he wasn’t alone in his loss or grief, that other children had experienced this too. Near the end of the unit, when I asked Eric to draw the way both the research process and the writing process felt to him, he drew a picture that pointed to both the affective intensity of the experience and also to the complication of binaries in feeling, as the smiling and frowning face illustrates - a sense of affective complexity that included what we commonly refer to as joy and sorrow. Here, the affective complexity of the project is reflected in the coexistence of multiple, seemingly contradictory intensities. On the left side of his face he draws a visit to his mom’s grave, and on the right side, he walks with her and also opens up a box labeled “thoughts” while his figure throws its arms in the air.



[Figure 1: Eric's drawing depicting the way the project felt]

Tara described the research process in a way that echoed Eric's, as an experience that supported her in feeling connected to other children who have grieved the loss of a friend. When I asked her how she would describe the research process, or what she learned from it, she explained:

“I gained the fact that my life can be a lot like others, so anybody always says to be your own person, but in a way there are thousands of people coming through the same thing, who feel the same thing. When I lost Samantha, her sister and all of her friends were going through the same thing and I shut everybody out instead of understanding that I wasn't the only one and so many other people could have helped.”

Tara's reflection on the research process pointed to this same sense of community that Eric referenced, but Tara also bridged this feeling with the lack of community she felt right after

Samantha passed away. In researching grief during the persuasive essay unit, Tara came to a feeling of connection with the people she was reading about in the articles and also with Samantha's sister and her friends. Yet, she also found the research process very frustrating. She described reading an article written by a psychologist that argued that young people who are grieving should be under 24 hour watch, seek psychotropic medication, and talk with adults as a way to process the grief. Tara explained that after the death of her best friend, she didn't want to talk about it with her family right away and needed distance from the constant discussion of her friend's death. She also took issue with the notion that psychotropic drugs are immediately necessary for all young people who are grieving loss. Tara describes feeling "angry" and "frustrated" with the researchers for making arguments that were so directive and didn't allow for an individual's own grief process.

As Tara's experience illustrates, when research contradicted the young people's personal experiences, many of them were poised to argue against this research in their own essays, but not without feeling the intensity of frustration of disagreeing with "experts."

This recognition of reading as an affective encounter and of texts as "objects" that pull on our associations, is, of course, central to our understanding of theories of reader response (e.g. Rosenblatt, 1982) but, here this relationship between lived experience and research offers an important way to rethink the way research is often framed, as a reading process that draws less on our personal heartbreaks than a novel or a poem. These examples offer a contradictory perspective that highlight the way in which reading academic articles can provide a similarly affecting experience. When research contradicted the young people's personal experiences, many of them were poised to argue against this research in their own essays, but not without feeling the intensity of frustration of disagreeing with "experts."

For Colin, researching racism in school to support his argument in favor of teaching new teachers anti-racist pedagogies and practices was difficult to put into words: “not mad happy or sad. Feelings were just like- I don’t know how to explain it.” Then later in our conversation I asked him about his experience of reading other children’s accounts of racism. He referenced the fact that reading these stories was a new experience, and brought him into contact with other kids who had experienced racism in school for the first time. This was a new experience for him given his school and community demographics: “If you go somewhere you won’t see too many black students. It is kind of hard. You don’t know anyone that is a different color.”

Social perspectives on feeling offer this wider lens on the embedded oppression and institutional forces that incite feeling, and recast the notion that individuals are solely responsible for their felt experience, a recasting of the ‘within’ model of emotion that allows for blame and responsibility to often rest at the feet of marginalized populations (Ahmed, 2004). Ahmed observes that affective encounters cannot be separated from the racial injustice that positions some bodies as worthy of hate and fear. Anger in response to such positioning is also woven into the fabric of inequity. Ahmed argues that suffering points to what is wrong with systematic violence “as relations of force and harm” (p. 192).

The research process revealed to Colin the way his own feelings were tied into this larger system of oppression. He began to see these larger institutional structures throughout the research process. In this way, emotion can be decentered from something ‘in’ a person to something that was a part of the institution of schooling, something that circulates between bodies. Yet, the ‘affective encounter’ was also a virtual one, happening ‘with’ the research, itself. Seigworth and Gregg (2010) challenge us to see affect as unbounded by the body- “pulled beyond its seeming surface-boundedness by way of its relation to, indeed its composition through the forces of

encounter...the body is as much outside itself as in itself- webbed in its relations-until ultimately its firm distinctions cease to matter” (P. 3).

For Colin, this process of researching other students’ stories and experts’ analysis had the effect of decentering these feelings of anger as ‘his’ alone, instead widening his understanding of the scope of racism in school and also introducing him to academic research on the way racism is a systematic problem in schools through an affective encounter with others who were not physically present, but shared this affective space. Still, this made the affective nature of the research process complex, something that defied description, even as it also provided supportive evidence for his argument.

For some students, their deep personal ties with the research process stemmed from the way the information offered solutions to address current concerns in their lives. This provided them with a new perspective on the way the research process is often framed, as a process of synthesizing sources in order to ask a guiding question that might not actually have pressing consequences on the researchers’ individual life. In a conversation with Chris, who crafted an argument in support of adding meditation classes to school curriculum to help students with anxiety, I learned that they had used a few of the techniques for calming down before a baseball game. Chris reflected on the article’s usefulness to him in his research memo, “I love this quote because it shows you that meditating can really calm someone down before anything. The day after I read this article, I used the finger breaths to calm myself down before my first bat at my baseball game. I did it in the batting circle and when I finished, I felt calm and relaxed. When I got up to bat unfortunately I flew out but I still felt calm. Similarly, Caleb reflected on how helpful the articles would have been to him when he was experiencing bullying. “I feel a personal connection to this article because when I was bullied I was always struggling with ways to stop it,

but I couldn't. Maybe if I had these steps I would have been able to stop it. Fortunately, I have learned how to stop it on my own now, but I wish I knew then, because it would have been *extremely* helpful.”

In their introduction to the special issue *Language Arts* devoted to exploring kids as researchers, editors Flint, Holbrook, May, Albers & Dooley (2014) call for a shift from considering research as a process often disconnected from any real stakes for children, what they describe as the research project focused on gathering ‘facts’, toward research as a method of attending to real problems that impact their community and thus feel relevant to children. Bomer & Bomer (2001) explore this model of approaching expository writing, arguing that nonliterary genres “emerge out of a need felt by a writer or more commonly a group of writers living in a community and interacting with other community members in ways that raise problems writing can help solve- the need arises in life” (4). The needs the students addressed in this project were not just relevant to the larger community, but personally relevant to the young people because their arguments held individual consequences for them. It was the affective impact of these challenging experiences on their lives that seemed to make the research process feel so relevant for the focal students I describe here.

Sharing Affect

Given my central interest in the meaningful nature of argumentative writing, I attended closely to the way the young people in this project wrote and talked about whether or not this project felt worthwhile and if they would choose to write this argument again in another context. Here, two themes coalesced around the way young people discussed these areas of inquiry.

One core idea that emerged was the sense that the project was meaningful because it might be helpful for other children. An unprompted but common sentence stem arose across students’

reflections regarding the level of investment they held for the project: “I want people to know...” Again, affect as an experience born in ‘in-between-ness [that] resides as accumulative beside-ness’ (Seigworth & Gregg, 2010, p. 2) rather than within us, was reflected in the way young people described the writing process as something that helped them feel connected to their future readers or to other young people with shared experiences. It was an affective encounter that extended outside of the boundaries of time, into the past as they met with research that spoke to shared feeling and toward a future reader as they imagined how their writing could be helpful to children who had not yet encountered a similar challenge that was to come.

Eric explained “But I kind of want to write this to people feeling the same thing that I did. Like it is really hard. It is going to be difficult but you will get through it. But, whoever it is [who passes away] doesn’t really leave you there is always some that stays behind so she is never really gone.”

Similarly, Colin, who argued in his persuasive essay that pre-service teachers should learn anti-racist practices to reduce the racism in school that he experiences, ended his essay by reflecting, “I hope this paper has inspired you to help push back racism and change the world into a better place where there is less fear.” When I asked Colin later if he was glad he wrote this essay and if he would continue speaking and writing about racism in school, he said the argument “was important because people need to learn about it.” At the same time, Colin explained, “racism is like a train that’s starting up and once it starts you can’t stop it.” Colin’s reflection on the essay project contained both of these ways of thinking about racism, with hope and defeat. This tension required me to think about critical approaches to inviting students to draw from their lives as they craft their essays, and to thus be reflective about the burden of feeling the consequences of the inequity you are arguing against in a persuasive essay. Of course, counter-storytelling has been a

central aspect of Critical Race Theory, as a way to challenge marginalization and racial inequality” (Ladson-Billings, 2014; Solorzano &, 2002); still, scholars have also argued that, when taken up as an aspect of critical literacy in school curriculum, it can also produce a dual burden, placing the weight of the process of enacting change on already marginalized young people. I was attuned to this concern with Colin, frequently checking in with him, and he continued to express the sense that racism was something he really wanted to expose even though the process was challenging.

A corollary to this desire to be supportive and helpful to others was the way many young people expressed a desire to strengthen their knowledge about the topic and thus be more effective at making change, and eventually support others impacted by their topic. I asked Elise if she was still happy with her choice to argue in favor of Title IX, even though it was hard for her. She answered, “I am because I really want to learn more about it so that I can talk about it and make a good argument.” Danielle reflected on her argumentative essay in which she argued that all hospitals should have special emergency rooms designed for children by observing the way her essay might be helpful in making a visit to the emergency room less traumatic for other children. She offered, “Well knowing what I am writing about might help me publish it and maybe I can help get emergency rooms for children.”

In her reflection on loss, Butler (2004) asks, “Is there something to be gained from grieving, from tarrying with grief, from remaining exposed to its unbearability and not seeking relief from grief through violence?” (p. 30). I heard Butler’s question in the responses of Elise, Colin, Eric and Danielle in the way they answered my question regarding the worth of this project, offering that the project mattered to them because it might allow them to help prevent something from happening to another child or support a child in a similar circumstance. In this

empathic desire, I heard echoes of research within critical literacy that explores writing as a tool for pursuing justice, where one's own suffering because of inequity and discrimination serves as the impetus for activism (Bomer & Bomer, 2001; Christensen, 2009; Cruz, 2012; Lily, 2016; Zenkov & Newman, 2016) and also of research focused primarily on the way many who have endured difficult life experiences feel a renewed sense of motivation to help others who might be experiencing something similar (Staub & Vollhardt, 2006). When this theme in so many young people's answers began emerging in our conversations, I was struck by the way empathy for other children became a central thread whenever I asked them if they enjoyed the project or if the writing mattered to them.

Yet, I also heard, in their reflection, the way in which the research and writing process offered another way of thinking about witness and testimony. Dutro (2011) draws on language from trauma theory to think about the stories children write about what we might call difficult life experiences as "testimony" of these experiences, and the listener or reader is in the position as witness to their narratives. Shining a light on the power differential that is inherent in a teacher who might always serve as witness to a students' testimony, Dutro asks us, as educators, to be intentionally vulnerable in the writing we share with students, viewing this process of witness and testimony as reciprocal. As young people speak to their desire to help other children through their persuasive writing, they call on readers to be witnesses but also, in a way, put themselves in the position of witness to these imagined readers, these children they have never met. Persuasive writing, with its existing emphasis on an "audience" who is to be persuaded, also contains the promise that such a reader might have shared stakes in the argument, even personal stakes, as the children writing the essay certainly do.

Positioning this conversation about testimony and witness within a persuasive writing context brings a new perspective on the idea of witnessing. In this context the testimony is tied to both a vision for change and an extension of empathy to others in a similar situation, who might serve this witness capacity, but whose experiences are also witnessed across time and place, as they are an imagined audience with imagined and yet to unfold similar life experiences. As Eric explained, the project was worthwhile because he had found others who had had a similar experience, what we might call “a witness”, through the research. In this way, the reciprocity of witness and testimony extends to both the imagined reader and also to the writers of the research young people read as they were seeking sources to support their own arguments.

Ahmed’s (2015) description of the contingency of pain also speaks closely to the way I noticed young people explaining this reciprocity in witness and testimony. Ahmed offers that despite a western perspective that represents pain as inherently lonely, an experience impossible to be known in the same way by different people, pain is inherently tied up with connection. She observes, “It is because no one can know what it feels like to have my pain that I want loved others to acknowledge how I feel. The solitariness of pain is intimately tied up with its implication in relationship to others” (p. 29). In exploring reciprocal witnessing, with imagined readers and the young people who were writing to them, I saw Ahmed’s description of this inherent desire for a witness inextricably linked with what both Dutro and Ahmed acknowledge as the impossibility to fully comprehend another’s pain. This is a particularly crucial move when so much writing surfaces racial and socio-economic differences that are embedded in structures of inequity that Dutro (2011) points to as requiring “two moves - a self-conscious attention to both connection and difference between one’s own and others’ testimonies” (p. 199).

If persuasive writing is intimately tied up with the importance of a witness and an opportunity to also be witness and support for another child facing a similar challenge, as several of these young people argue it is, then our existing structures for engaging young people in crafting arguments have perhaps skirted this opportunity, instead positioning persuasive writing as something we write in order to change our audience's mind, rather than changing the systems and structures for the purpose of supporting children who might someday benefit from these changes. This is a small shift in the way we might frame persuasive writing, but it seems to activate a different way of conceptualizing the reason behind the genre, and perhaps also, an activation of what makes this genre worth writing.

Discussion and Implications for Research and Practice

I began this study with the hope that I might better understand the way genre is fluid and complex and the way the boundaries we have built around genre are permeable. Yet, the students' experiences with the project pointed to ways argumentative writing is already permeable in ways the literature has not as deeply explored. For instance, argument, itself, is inherently communal; persuasive argument is so interconnected with its audience; argument also points to a vision for a different kind of world, and an imagined future for the people inhabiting this potential world. Perhaps I didn't initially envision the way argumentative writing already has the charge of intensity that comes from urgency, and the way this genre already tugs at the writer's deepest values and aims to affect the reader too.

Persuasive writing, even as it is most often currently taught, is inherently tied up with audience - the writing is crafted with the understanding that there is *someone* to persuade. The students I describe in this project ask a question about audience that differs from the kinds of questions that often prompt our evaluations of this genre: was your argument convincing? Was I

swayed by your reasoning and evidence? Though their essays contained reasons and evidence, their question differed, and offered, instead, an echo of Butler's (2004) question: "From where might a principle emerge by which we vow to protect others from the kind of violence we have suffered, if not from an apprehension of a common human vulnerability?" (p. 30). At the heart of Butler's question is the bold move that could lead us to expand our sense of what kinds of arguments children and young people should take up in argumentative writing. It also points to how they might discover the beliefs they deem worthy of the fight, grounding these arguments in our hope to support others as they encounter a source of suffering that we have also known.

Drawing on affect theory as a way of understanding young people's writing experience also calls us to see writing, especially informational writing, as inherently affective, that is, as something that has the potentially to affect us, and our readers. Probyn (2010) observes that all writing is "corporeal" since "we work ideas through our bodies; we write through our bodies, hoping to get to the bodies of our readers" (p. 76). Yet, argumentative and informational texts are so often associated with facts rather than feeling (Flint et. Al, 2017). Even the first person "I" is metaphorically barred from much of this writing. As these young people show us in their thoughtful reflections about their writing process and in their writing itself, even analytical writing allows for the opportunity to affect and be affected. Writing, when research and experience is woven together, is a complex encounter. Just as we don't enter a room and "feel" affect as a neutral body having a fresh encounter with an atmosphere, but rather experience this affective dimension *as* an encounter (Ahmed, 2004) so too might the research and persuasive writing process feel like an encounter with existing feelings, memories, opposing views, and hope for change.

Writing and talking about writing creates “a world of affinities and impacts that take place in the moves of intensity across things that seem solid and real” (Stewart, 2007, p. 127). In this project, the world of impacts sometimes left the page as conversation, sometimes lived in the writing, sometimes existed in the research that “hit us or exert[ed] a pull on us” (Stewart, 2007, p. 4). Yet, this move toward questioning binaries between feeling/thinking and story/analysis also reflects a much wider theoretical shift, what Behar (1996) describes in the context of academic writing as “efforts to map intermediate space we can’t quite define yet, a borderland between passion and intellect, analysis and subjectivity, ethnography and biography, art and life” (p. 174). Theoretical perceptions of genre that see clear divisions between personal and political or rational and emotional miss the mark in that they fail to see the way affect saturates the literacy encounter when the connections with content are embedded with our life experiences, regardless of the genre we take up as a form our writing.

Significantly, these affective narrative connections were invited through purposeful pedagogic design, the use of narrative to uncover children’s beliefs and writing conferences to encourage children in following threads that felt risky but also urgent. To shift this practice in support of young people connecting with their real investments, will require a shift in our pedagogical practice both in how we support young people in uncovering those investments, and also how we witness their stories and beliefs after they do. When we invite students to enter into the affective dimension in any of their writing, we must also bring to this tenuous work a framework that is intentional and full of the recognition of the way power and privilege is so often woven into stories of challenge and loss. Here, I refer again to Dutro’s (2011) conceptualization of “reciprocal vulnerability” and “critical witnessing,” as it reminds us that young people’s stories often enact and describe larger systems of power that circulate through their writing. Further,

Michael and I were both vulnerable in our willingness to share our childhood experiences with grief or addiction even as these stories offered us “a contact zone for analysis” (Stewart, 2007, p. 5) or an opportunity to craft evidence-based arguments that wove the affective intensities of our experiences together with our vision for change. We felt honored to join our students in this crucial practice so as to sanction it and demonstrate its potential for the meaningful argument, a move that was important in changing what Boler (1999) refers to as the hegemonic and underexplored “social control of emotions” in education. A key implication for practice and pedagogy is the dismantling of teachers’ barriers to centering the affective nature of caring deeply for an argument. As teachers explore the way argumentative writing is inherently, already, affective they might become increasingly more open to supporting this process of choosing a topic that holds this kind of affective investment for them. Rethinking the genre of argumentative writing allows for this understanding of the way our strong beliefs call up the intense affective intensities that are associated with the reason we hold this belief in the first place, often an affective experience that birthed the belief.

Given the way this approach to argumentative writing challenges the calcified norms that are associated with the genre, teachers will be important leaders who model the process of sifting through our life experiences in order to uncover these investments. For this reason, reciprocal vulnerability, where teachers willingly share their strongly held beliefs and the life experiences that birthed these beliefs features prominently in the revision of existing curricular models for approaching argumentative writing.

Conclusion

In my work on this project, I began to consider a new metric for successful persuasive writing, something that would take into account whether or not the argument was one the young people participating in the project truly deemed worthy of their intense effort and depth of feeling.

It is a feature of persuasive writing so rarely included on rubrics and standardized assessments, but one that serves as the core of the genre - to care so deeply about one's argument that one would risk daring to disagree with adults in service of instituting change. Such writing breaks through the theoretical and pedagogical walls we build around feeling and cognition, the kinds of walls that contain affect as a persuasive strategy, pathos meant to convince readers, rather than feeling as an inherent part of a deeply held belief. When young people participating in this project wrote the arguments that pulse with feeling, boldly disagreeing with the way things are, they also began to consider making the kinds of changes in the world that they were uniquely positioned to see because of their own experience of lack, the kinds of shifts that would soften the world for them and for other children, make the world a more equitable and loving place. Further, given that strong persuasive writing so often stems from a strongly held belief, the writing process described here, results in the kind of persuasive writing teachers hope to encourage, arguments that are infused with the kind of passion and investment that make them persuasive and compelling to readers.

But, returning to the stories from my own childhood, I also wonder about the way I had learned to inhabit two perspectives simultaneously, one in which I felt I had to pretend that all was well as I crafted an argument in my writing class and the other in which the hazy fog overtook half my world. What would I have felt was worthy of arguing for if I had been invited to draw from a different well of experience? What argument would be born from this moment in time with its many textures? What is lost when I argued on behalf of the governess from the novel, rather than on behalf of myself?

Maybe our vision of argument, when seen through the lens of the affective intensities that surround our deeply held investments, becomes a different kind of persuasive text, one that moves

from the page to the world with a kind of intensity that produces the changes that can only come when our deeply held investments meet the world's greatest needs.

Chapter Six

Connection Over Perfection

Excerpt from *Supporting Teachers' Longing for Love, Creativity and Ease*

I cried in the bathroom at a pottery painting bachelorette party.

They weren't the kind of tears I could dab with a Kleenex, tiny and contained, but the mascara-smearing kind that redden the cheeks and make it impossible to answer, "fine" when someone asks if you're ok.

It was September in my second year of teaching, and it is not an exaggeration to say I was a wreck: wound up, jumpy, and always on edge. My body buzzed with anxiety and overwhelm all day, and at night I came home exhausted but with piles of work still left to do. My worn-out heart was running on caffeine, wine, and ice cream to push through the cycle of planning, teaching, and grading. Yet, even though I felt so used up and wrung out, I was too anxious to ever really, fully rest. Most nights, I looked like my nephew after a day at the museum or a birthday party, still moving around the room but just bumping into things before collapsing on the couch.

I had always been a doer, always taken on more than was probably healthy or necessary, but teaching cranked up this already dangerous tendency. What's worse, most of my life was too full to include time for any of the things that had once kept me grounded and fulfilled: driving through the Wisconsin countryside to take pictures of abandoned barns, painting abstract watercolor paintings, writing poems and short memoir vignettes in my art journal, meeting with friends for old black and white movies or dancing. This creative life that had sustained me was displaced, replaced with surviving, and I feel so sad to write this - waiting for Friday. If you're a teacher, you probably know this story; seasons where work eclipsed well-being and rest was postponed until June.

Here in the bathroom of a paint-your-own-mug ceramic studio, I felt, for the first time, deep relief from the frenetic hustle. I don't know exactly how this works, only that my body relaxed, my breath slowed, and the mind-spin stopped as I swept the brush across the ceramic. I lived a half-hour of peace for the first time in a year. As the tears fell in the bathroom stall after I finished my mug, I saw for the first time how far away I'd traveled from myself.

And I finally told myself the truth. I couldn't hide anymore. It was simple and clear: If I was going to continue teaching, I would need to find a new way to do school. I was desperate for it, and there was no way I would be able to continue ignoring how miserable I was and push on for

years, maybe decades.

And I finally heard the question I had been running from for fear there might not be an answer: How could I make this work that I loved sustainable, while staying true to my deep commitment to serving young people and their growth as writers and readers and thinkers? Is there a way I can take care of my students and also myself?

I traveled across the world with this question. I asked it of Scottish Waldorf teachers. I took it with me into yoga classes and self-help books. I sang it and wrote it and danced it. And though I never did find an easy fix or a magic potion, I did find new ways to be a teacher that allowed me to bring ease and joy and meaning into my work, and this shift changed the game for me. I saw that I would need to weave creativity into my life outside of my classroom and share more of myself and my own writing and my life with my students. I

saw that I would need to look closely at this urge to over-work and people-please my way into some kind of teacher hall of fame. I saw that my urge to be perfect with my students actually pushed them further away and prevented the connection I was hoping for.

And it made me want to start some sort of a revolution, a call to take off some of our armor, release our need for perfection. Take breaks. Make more art. Write more. This is what it all boils down to for me: I am a better teacher/daughter/wife/friend/human when I am rooted and filled up. “Root to rise” I can still hear my friend Polly saying in her best yoga teacher impression.

What I found during my self-care experiment is that the fill-it-up recipe for me (and so many humans and teachers I know) includes, as a key ingredient- creativity. I don’t mean fancy/perfect creativity like writing the next great American novel or painting an uncanny life-sized likeness of your dog. My vision of creativity is mostly about process, making something new just for the joy of it.

It’s radical, isn’t it? To claim that self-care and creativity is as important to good teaching as extensive undergraduate training and continued staff-development and social justice pedagogy. It’s radical to argue that teachers need time for rest and creative play just as much as they need goal-driven lesson plans and standard-aligned assessments.

But here’s another thing I know for sure. This creative self-care will spill into our classrooms, even if only in small spaces in our lesson plans and scripted curriculum. We might read our poems to our class, or sing songs on the guitar before the day starts or hang abstract watercolors on the chalkboard. If we all decide to put down the grading for just a few minutes and nourish our

souls with creative play, our work, our classrooms, and our lives will be transformed. Creative practices take us back to our heart, so we can hear that quiet inner voice that gives us wisdom for our lives and energy to carry out these new instructions. I know this in my bones.

I admit it sounds impossible to fit more into an already packed life. It may feel like I just extended an invitation to build your own house from scratch and casually dropped off a pile of lumber on your front yard. But trust me on this one, because it is one of the very few things I know for sure. We *can* make small shifts. Those few minutes devoted to creative self-care can offer large shifts that will light up your classroom. I sound like an infomercial, I know: “With just five minutes a day - imagine the possibilities!” But I’m telling you this because I have seen it many times; when we share our writing and songs and paintings with our students, when we share our authentic selves, students will absolutely amaze us with all of the inventive, hilarious, heartbreaking, and creative things they begin to make in response. That’s just the way inspiration works. You light a fire in the room. Everyone comes to warm themselves at first, and then they are ignited too. When they come back to share what they’ve done, it will blow you away.

I sense you’re in. You’ve made it this far. So, here’s how our revolution will work. Each chapter begins with a story from my life, the hard and beautiful bits, my teaching life and my outside of the classroom life-life, and then, each chapter ends with a little nudge to help you make something new, to play with words and pictures, to excavate your memories

1

and your imagined futures, to go on a creative adventure, to story old memories in image or sound, to pay attention to your world and then make something in response to what you see.

I’m telling you, this is a game changer. But, really, see if these little creative invitations bring something new to your teaching game - ease, joy, meaning, and that something I had thought was never to be mine again the moment I started carrying buckets of papers and grading home. Dare I say it? My final claim: *Fun*.

I have so much love for all of us as we do the important work of nurturing children, young people and ourselves. And I’m so glad you’re here.

~Ellie

Conclusion
‘High Stakes’ Argumentative Writing:
Implications for Theory and Practice

It was first lunchtime during one of the final days of school and Alyssa and I sat in the special education office to finish our interview. The sounds specific to these last days of school echoed in the halls- the slamming of lockers and energetic laughter mixed with those conversations about endings and beginnings, summer plans and retirement. I had tried to schedule an interview with Alyssa for a few weeks and we finally settled on this quick lunchtime meeting on one of the last days of school. Alyssa had written her argumentative essay about what schools need to do to prevent cyberbullying, an argument she had drawn from an experience with a boy who was harassing her online. Between bites of sandwiches and salad we talked about her relationship with writing in general and the argumentative essay project specifically, until I stole a quick glance at the clock to see how many minutes we had before the lunchtime bell, and made a mental note to make sure I squeezed in one of my favorite questions before the bell rang and she was swept back into the busy hallway. “Alyssa, can I ask you one more question before you go to class? It’s kind of a big question, so just answer in whatever way you want, just sharing whatever comes up for you.” She was mid-bite but nodded for me to go ahead. “What did you learn about writing from this unit?” She swallowed her food and began to answer, “Well, I learned about persuasive writing when you have a really strong opinion about something, I learned you can express it in your writing as persuasive which is really cool. I mean, yeah, I did persuasive writing last year but my topic, it wasn’t as strong as this one so I didn’t really get to learn. My topic last year was that kids should have their cell phones in school. I had good reasons, but the topic didn’t really have an effect on me and so that didn’t help me understand what persuasive writing is and

this unit really helped me with that. That other topic didn't have an impact on me. Last year it was one of my really weak opinions and so I didn't get to learn. I like my phone so I thought it would be cool to have my phone in class."

Our time was up and I felt relieved I snuck one of my favorite questions into our last few minutes together, as Alyssa had voiced something that mirrored what I had heard other students say in their interviews too. Alyssa pointed to what's at stake when we write, why we write, what we hope will come of our writing, and how we find those topics that can speak to this specific kind of mattering. Elena had talked about the high stakes for her research, the potential she might find a way to get a visa and keep her parents in the United States or join in the larger movement to revise immigration laws hostile to families with mixed citizenship status. Caleb had spoken about these 'high stakes' when he described wanting to hurt himself as a child who was bullied so violently that he had contemplated suicide. Tara and Eric spoke about the high stakes for children grieving the sudden loss of important people, and the need for support. Miles explained what is at stake when had written about making therapy accessible for all children, an argument born from his grandfather's battle with cancer, an experience that left him feeling fear. These were arguments that had the ability to affect their writers, and so, had the potential to function differently than a topic without such personal impact. Alyssa had given this unique dimension of persuasive writing a name, had pointed out that these topics are not abstract, they have an *effect* on our lives. This is something that might seem obvious, part and parcel of argumentative writing, but it was clearer for Alyssa in the context of her experience with cyberbullying, the school's lax policy hadn't protected her from the boy harassing her online, the principal had let it go and the bullying had continued. Now, Alyssa argued, persuasive writing is when you have a

“strong opinion about something” and this kind of writing feels different than the writing we do about a topic without such high stakes, the cell phone policy, for example.

I checked my tape recorder to make sure I captured her answer and we said goodbye and hugged as I saved my notes and packed up my lunch. Alyssa had pointed me, again, to the dimension of argumentative writing that can never be untangled from our lives, the aspect of argument cannot be divorced from experience. She noted the way our deepest beliefs are woven into our memories and so tied to the feelings that come up when we revisit those experiences. Maybe this is what I am learning about argumentative writing, maybe I am remembering why we need the genre of argumentative writing at all.

In this concluding section, I further explore the thematic threads that emerged within this larger recognition regarding the deep ties between life experience and argument that Alyssa highlighted in our conversation. In this closing section, explore the way these themes appear across the three primary texts I’ve crafted from this research: two academic articles and a book for teachers. Next, I describe larger implications for theory and practice that stem from these guiding themes. Finally, I conclude with directions for future research and approaches I plan to take to deepen this work with persuasive writing and affect.

High Stakes for Argumentative Writing

Alyssa’s observation regarding her earlier experience with argumentative writing in school points to another key theme that is woven across the articles and is centrally explored in the book of creative writing practices I’ve written for teachers. That is, Alyssa noted the way the topic she took up in an earlier argumentative essay project, the argument in favor of cell phone use in school, had lower stakes than the one she took up in this unit. Many young people in the project also pointed to the role that personal narrative played in inviting them to explore these higher stakes arguments, arguments linked in some way to their life experiences. The expression

that this project was somehow ‘different’ from previous argumentative writing projects in that it had ‘stakes’ for their own lives was made explicit across the data. Smagorinsky’s (2018) recent article on argumentative writing emphasized the way choosing a topic needs to be more central in argumentative writing, since “it seems kids would need something to argue about that they care about” (p. 100). Yet, he also tied this observation to a concern over the way emotion in our current political climate following the presidential election of 2016 requires us to unpack the source of our deep emotional ties, what he calls our ‘gut reactions’ lest we be swept by unexamined beliefs or values into making unsound arguments based solely on feeling or, worse, perpetuate arguments based on racist and discriminatory beliefs without reexamining them in light of facts and reason. At the same time, he critiques the traditional approach to teaching argumentative writing as an approach more concerned with the features of writing and less with topics kids actually care about, offering, “It’s not clear, however, whether this approach will pay off when students disagree on things that matter to them and their beliefs come from the gut rather than following a logical, analytic process” (p. 100).

Yet, such an argument still seems to position emotion and reason in opposition, arguing that our ‘gut’ is still at odds with logic and analysis. The word points to what we know because we have felt the reverberations of an experience in our bodies, maybe in our stomach, our gut, or in our chest or around our bodies, or between bodies as energetic vibrations or the sensation of a charge in the space (Ahmed, 2014; Stewart, 2007). What is missing from this conversation around supporting young people in finding these topics that they care about, is attention to this affective dimension of experiences that inform our strongest arguments and a valuing of feeling as equally important to logic and reason, as woven together with thoughtful analysis of an issue. As so many of the young people in this study argue, the kind of argumentative writing they care about has

high stakes for them and their community and so they have felt the reverberations of these issues in affective, embodied ways as intensities that stem from these significant life experiences.

At the core of this process of finding that ‘something’ that we care about deeply is also the exploration of the blocks that make it challenging to find and the norms that make it challenging to take up even once we’ve found it. This finding was also closely linked to my theoretical grounding in post-structural feminist perspectives that trace historical norms around what is sanctioned in school writing and the way these norms reflect alternative perspectives that see division between what is personal and what is public, often feminizing and devaluing the former (Boler, 1999). Certainly, my study confirmed what other scholars have argued regarding the way some young people learned the norms of a space and felt the need to regulate emotions so that they appear appropriate to that space (Boler, 1999; Zembylas, 2002). Other studies have explored this binary in the context of literacy education by noting that important visceral connections with literacy that already, always circulate sometimes just under the surface in the classroom- “already in the room, whether acknowledged, invited, or not” (Dutro, 2017, p. 331). Of course, teachers and professors of teacher education courses and undergraduates in those courses also have affective experiences with research and writing even if they remain below the surface because of the enforcing norms around academia (Jones, 2013). This theme echoes across my articles. As I emphasized in the opening vignette of my article exploring abstract art as a methodology, Tara begins writing to Samantha and then deletes her letter, sharing with me the fear she might be seen crying in school and it is the support of her teacher and myself that encourages her to take this up.

In my exploration of other moments during the research project, I note the role that writing conferences played in offering two students ‘permission’ to take up topics of racial injustice, topics both students explained they had never written about in school writing

previously. The role of teachers as models for this ‘high stakes’ argumentative writing and as supporters of young people throughout the writing process is one theme that emerged across the findings and was the motivating impetus for my focus on supporting teacher’s writing practices in my book. Of course, writing research has long explored how important it is for writing teachers to be writers, themselves (Graves, 1993; Nagin, 2006; Wood Ray, 2002). Yet, this observation takes on another facet in terms of offering students permission to write about topics that might seem ‘too personal’ for a genre considered impersonal like argumentative, expository or informational writing. That is, if we want teachers to value and model this kind of argumentative writing, and personally meaningful writing across genres, we have to build models for teachers to dive deeper into their own writing. My hope is that the book will be one avenue to support teachers’ writing lives, a crucial aspect of this argumentative writing pedagogy.

This is particularly important given the way this study reflected the role that expectations around genre can play in further regulating those norms around affective expression. A cursory exploration of research on persuasive writing yields studies that emphasize the genre features of argumentative writing (Dobbs 2013; Uccellie, Dobbs, & Scott, 2013). As Ghiso (2015) argues in her study with children on argumentative writing grounded in embodied experience, “engagement with taking a position, providing evidence, and considering opposing perspectives needs to be located within issues they [children] are invested in exploring, or the genre may risk becoming a rote exercise imposed on students rather than an opportunity for children to deepen, refine, or alter their perspectives” (p. 211).

My study confirmed that approaching argumentative writing from a place of feeling and memory is a radical break with this usual focus on features of the genre. Young people, like Alyssa and others in the project, reflected that previous argumentative essays were far afield from

the investments that are most important to them. Here, the role of narrative ‘small moments’ at the start of the class was cited as a crucial aspect for many students in unearthing their argument. This explicit invitation to argue for something that is felt is especially important for genres where visceral ties are very rarely invited, in writing curriculum focused on informational and expository writing and for many young people in the study this really was the very first time they were writing about this important life experience in school and certainly the first time they chose to center it in a genre outside of personal narrative.

Implications for Theory and Practice

This recognition of the role of genre in enforcing calcified boundaries around reason and affect has important implications for theory and practice. In particular, the students in this study had experiences with the research process that requires us to rethink the way we frame the research process in our instruction. Literacy researchers have already begun this process of considering research in service of students’ own curiosity and personal interest to take up inquiries that have impact on their community (Flint, Holbrook May, Albers & Dooley, 2014; Norton & Oesterreich, 2014). However, recasting research as affective and closely tied to life experience is terrain that remains fairly unexplored in work that examines the research process. As both of my articles illustrate and certain chapters in my book explore, the young people in this project had such strong visceral reactions to the research process that they required me to center this finding in my reports and to make this an area of future exploration in later research.

Implications for practice extend beyond the choice of an important topic, to the research process that follows after young people have picked an argument that holds deep meaning for them. I saw how potentially harmful it would be to have students engage in research about topics they hold close to their hearts without also supporting the affective nature of this process,

acknowledging it and creating opportunities for young people to share and reflect on this felt dimension. This is especially important in research projects that ask youth to take up issues of injustice that impact their communities and families directly. Colin, for example, felt the intensity around researching racism in schools. He encountered several studies as well as anecdotal evidence in op-eds that mirrored his own experience with grade discrimination and he oscillated between feeling hope that there was potential to change school culture and also the sense that racism was an unstoppable train, to borrow the metaphor he used to describe his feelings. Here, Dutro's (2013) model of critical witnessing is particularly important, not just as a framework to help us support the experiences young people have with writing, but also for the experiences they will likely have with the research process, when the research process is framed as affective and modeled by teachers willing to explore their own visceral arguments. Dutro (2013) reminds us that this process of 'witnessing' doesn't always call on us to take action. There is a dimension of being, with, "When trauma enters and we are jolted into a visceral space of not knowing we can be a *presence* in that space. It is the *willingness* to remain in the space of what cannot be fully comprehended that is the key to witnessing" (p. 310). When Michael and I conceptualized our vision for 'research memos' we were certain to include a space for students to reflect on their connection to this expert's opinion, but witnessing the intensities that arose in reaction to the research they encountered required this presence with their experience outside of these memos. We circulated the room to listen as students shared their visceral reactions to the research. Our role as teachers in this space was also as witnesses to their anger, frustration and joy as they encountered stories, expertise and arguments that contradicted or supported their own experience.

There is an embedded call within this finding on the affective nature of young people's experience with the research process to continue to recast reading and writing about informational

texts as potentially affective in the same way scholars have already recognize the affective dimension of reading literature (Thein & Schmidt, 2017; Thein, Guise & Sloan, 2015).

In addition to recasting the way we approach research, we can also reimagine the way the argumentative essays, themselves, might blend genre norms to allow for inventive writing styles. We might invite young people to include narrative in their argumentative writing as long as it is woven together with the features of argument we also want young people to master such as the use of additional evidence, outside of personal stories, to further support one's central claim. Ruth Behar (1994) notes that this move has the potential to deepen an argument when she offers that personal evidence "gives 'the facts' another twist of urgency and poignancy" (B2). Certainly, academics experiment with these stylistic norms in their writing in ways that deepen their analysis as they play with style, form and content of academic pieces (Behar, 1993; Behar, 1996; Dutro, 2011; Smagorinsky, 2014). Even informational and expository writing, when linked to our important life experiences might require flexibility in pronoun use and shifts in the norms around inclusion of descriptive language or narrative. Of course, professional writers have played with these norms for a long time, even developing new genres that blend memoir and explorations of scientific topics and current research. The TED talk frequently launches with a narrative before moving into current research, deeply rooted in logic and facts, only to circle around again to the opening vignette or the affective dimension of the research. Ludwig (2017) calls this method of persuasion with its characteristic blend of humor, story and a sales pitch, an 'emergent genre' that has been taken up in education as another approach to teaching informational and argumentative writing (Janzen, 2014). Genre is less contained in writing and speaking outside of schools, and my work with 7th graders points to the way these boundaries and norms around genre can continue to be experimented with in inventive ways in k-12 writing pedagogy. Young people in

this study also played with style and form in their writing and, though I did not take this up centrally in my articles as it felt outside the scope of my focus and deserving of its own article, I do plan to write about this finding from this project as a crucial implication for the way we approach writing instruction with genres like expository writing and informational texts.

Audience and Impact: Directions for Future Work

Given the way so many young people noted the way they found meaning in the project from the potential to support youth who might someday experience similar challenges, or to prevent them from experiencing those challenges, there is an opportunity in future research to pursue ways in which persuasive essays might be shared more broadly with audiences who have the power and resources to put the recommendations from the argumentative essays into practice. This attention to writing for a real audience in order to have significant impact in the community is a strength of some existing work on argumentative writing, (Brett & Thomas, 2014; Hansen, 2012; Ife, 2012; Mayer, 2007; Rejan, 2017) and is particularly central in work that is grounded in social justice and tied to making significant changes in communities (Ghiso, 2015; Hansen, 2012). Oesterreich and Nadja (2014) for example, note the way the research process also contains an inherent impetus for social change, describing the process this way: “there has always been child activism in the world—on a kind of grassroots organization level; those people really look at how children have been able to use their voices to see things, to witness them, to name them, and to make change, which is connected to the agency- oriented frameworks” (p. 73). Yet, a gap remains in the research between argumentative writing grounded in these visceral life experiences and work that takes young people’s arguments into the world to begin enacting significant, tangible change. The bridge between these two approaches is certainly something I plan to pursue in future work.

I also saw the young people in this project looking for ways to implement the changes they were arguing for in their writing. For example, Danielle described her hope that all hospitals would have an area of the hospital devoted to a children's emergency room, given an experience she had after she was injured playing baseball and had to wait to see a doctor in an adult emergency room. Her research revealed the impact on children of seeing adults bleeding and in pain and also gave her several examples of children's emergency rooms across the country that were colorful and filled with toys and comfortable seating. During a conversation on one of the last days of the class, she and I began thinking about where she might share her argument. We decided she could alter her persuasive essay into a letter that she might send to local hospitals or we considered the potential she might write an op-ed and send it to a local newspaper. Here, the role of audience became an important part of the project, but one that wasn't originally included in the scope of the original project.

Similarly, Colin, who wrote about racism in school wondered with me how he would share his argument with undergraduates pursuing teaching licensure. Again, I brainstormed with him about his intended audience and how he might be able to share his experience in writing, perhaps even coauthoring a piece with me that would be published in a journal for practitioners. However, we haven't put our idea into motion yet, and the timing of the project at the end of the school year also limited our ability to move the projects into publication in the community. Future work around argumentative writing grounded in visceral, affective life experiences would need to be organized around this key finding from this initial project which recognizes the importance of audience and the need for young people to begin implementing their arguments in contexts where they see the need for change. In future work, this attention to audience and support in enacting

their arguments would be woven into the project from the very start and thus given the time and attention it would need to develop fully.

Emotion and Reason at this Historical Moment

I send these articles and my book into the world with some trepidation at this historical moment in our public political rhetoric in America. With emotion still pitted as reason's opposite in the public consciousness, and current leadership at the highest levels denouncing facts as fake news and inciting the emotions of his base as a source of xenophobia, violent policy and discrimination, I fear my argument regarding feeling and reason might be misunderstood. So, I am careful to note that a larger context for supporting young people in crafting these affective arguments within a framework of justice and equity is crucial. I was lucky to inherit a classroom culture already rooted in principles of social justice and empathy for others, such that no student would have crafted an argument grounded in hatred or racism. In fact, I think the danger is that we have already, always tended to censor stories of testimony that point to these lived experiences, preferring instead to ask students to choose a topic from a prescribed list, sidestepping the opportunity for students to craft the kinds of texts we often assign in a social justice curriculum. It is a question of faith in young people to draw from their well of life experiences and voice an argument even as it traverses the artificial boundaries we've constructed between cognition and affect while at the same time recognizing that this expansive invitation will not mean that we have abandoned the need to also teach methods of reasoning and research, nor does it mean we abandon the need for evidence to support our guiding claims. Many of these norms of argument will remain, but they will be infused with the degree of investment that so often stems from the affective experiences that birth our strongest beliefs. Now, we have the opportunity to explore this new space beyond the dichotomy where we don't see our affective

investments as something that takes away from the strength of our arguments but, rather, supports these arguments in having deeper roots and greater impact.

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Interview Protocol

Title: Developing Meaningful Persuasive Essays by Drawing on Multimodal Personal Narrative

1. Tell me about your own experiences with writing?
 - a. How did you feel about writing in school?
2. Do you think you are a good writer?
 - a. What do you think makes a good writer?
 - b. Do you write outside of school?
 - c. What do you write about in your free time? (and where)?
 - d. Does your outside of school writing involve multimodality (image, word, video)?
3. What was your favorite piece of writing you wrote from this year?
 - a. Why?
4. I'd like to hear more about your experience writing your personal narrative/small moments
 - a. What did you decide to write about in your small moments personal narratives? Why?
 - b. What was the impact of the personal narrative your instructor shared with you?
 - c. How did it feel to compose using different modes (image, embedded video, song)?
 - d. What other modes did you decide to include in your personal narrative? What was the relationship between these art pieces and your story?
 - e. Do you have a favorite genre for your own writing?
5. I'd like to talk a bit about your experiences with the persuasive writing portion of the unit.
 - a. What did you decide to write about for your persuasive essay? How did you make this decision?
 - b. What is the relationship between your personal narrative and your persuasive essay? Were they connected for you?
 - c. How did the use of multiple modes in your personal narrative/small moments impact the composition of your persuasive essay?
 - d. Did you enjoy writing your persuasive essay? Why or why not?
6. What did you learn about writing from this unit? Did you learn anything new?
7. Tell me what you typically left class thinking about during this unit?
8. Did this unit have any impact on the way you feel about school?
 - a. How do you feel about school?
 - b. What do you still worry about or struggle with in terms of writing and school?
9. What do you still worry about or struggle with in terms of writing and school?
10. What would you like your writing teachers to know:
 - a. About what makes a good writing teacher
 - b. About what makes a meaningful writing curriculum

Appendix B

Small Moment Writing Prompts

“Small moment” writing prompts were offered at the start of class during the first week of the argumentative essay unit. Each day began with a different prompt and students were given about 10 minutes to freewrite on their password protected Googlesite. Sample responses to the prompt were written by Ellie and Michael and read aloud prior to the students’ freewrite.

1. Write a letter to someone you miss. You might write to someone who passed away. You might also consider sharing important memories or stories or questions with this important person. Perhaps you want to write to someone who lives far away or a friend you had a conflict with. Explore what you would want to say to this person if they were here with you now.

2. Write about a time when you experienced a very strong feeling. You might have felt so angry that you wanted to scream or very scared or very sad. Or, you might choose to write about a time you felt excited and happy. Explore this feeling in your writing by describing this memory.

3. Objects can be important to us because they offer us associations with important people we love or miss. Sometimes we hold objects close because they remind us of a significant memory. In today’s freewrite, describe an object that is very meaningful for you. Share the reason you care so deeply for this important object. You may even want to include a picture in your post.

Appendix C

Description of Focal Students

Student Name	Likes/Dislikes/Interests	Significant Memories Shared in Writing or Interviews
Tara	Tara loves reading the Harry Potter books, plays the violin, and is on a freestyle ski team.	Tara wrote about her best friends sudden death in a car accident and she wrote an argumentative essay about the way adults can support young people who are moving through grief.
Danielle	Danielle performs in musical theater, wants to be a lawyer when she grows up, has a sister, and was preparing for her Bat Mitzvah during the time of the project.	Danielle wrote about hurting her finger at a batting cage and she wrote her argumentative essay about the need for emergency rooms for children.
Elise	Elise is a gymnast, and she loves traveling with her family for vacations at a lake house in Michigan, and she loves summer camp. .	Elise wrote about her gymnastics coach and how much she appreciated him. She also wrote a about an experience where she felt she was discriminated against in gym class because she is a girl. Elise wrote about an experience in gym class in which she was t In her argumentative essay, she argued that girls and boys should be treated the same in gym class.
Colin	Colin really likes doing parkour, listening to dubstep, and playing with his pet turtle. Colin is the only African American student in Michael's morning classes and one of the few African American students in the school.	Colin wrote about his experience with a history teacher who he felt had discriminated against him in his approach to grading. His argumentative essay was about the importance of including anti-racist approaches to teaching in pre-service programs and how to stop racism in schools.
Chris	Chris competes in ski racing, playing video games, and listening to Van Halen.	Charis wrote about the anxiety he feels before a baseball game and his argumentative essay was about the importance of offering children mindfulness instruction in the form of 'calming classes.'
Gina	Gina has moved 15 times since she was 5. She loves spending times	In her small moment, Gina described going on a webpage

	with her large family especially her younger cousins. She likes listening to Ariana Grande.	called Ask.fm and experiencing harrassment through negative comments. Gina wrote her argumentative essay about cyberbullying.
Lilly	Lilly lived in Hawaii for most of her life before moving to Colorado. Lilly knows how to surf. She loves dogs.	In her small moment, Lilly wrote a letter to her grandma explaining how much she has missed her since Lilly moved from Hawaii to Colorado. He argumentative essay is about why it is important to quit smoking.
Kiana	Kiana was adopted from South Korea. Kiana dances with a competitive dance company. Kiana loves listening to music.	In her small moment, Kiana wrote a letter to her twin sister explaining how much she loves her. She also wrote about a small moment in which she explained that her family had adopted an abused dog from the humane society. In her argumentative essay, Kiana wrote about how important it is to prevent animal abuse.
Rina	Rina loves listening to music. She describes being very close to her sister. She describes herself as someone with a big imagination.	Rina wrote a letter to her sister explaining why she's so glad Rina is her sister. She also wrote a small moment about the day they adopted their dog. Rina wrote her argumentative essay against animal abuse, and puppy mills.
Caleb	Caleb enjoys writing his own music, skiing, listening to his family's stories, and working out with his mom who is a personal trainer.	Caleb wrote his small moment about the experience of bullying when he was growing up in New York. He described this experience in a letter he wrote to the boy who bullied him. In his argumentative essay, Caleb argued for ways to prevent bullying.
Eric	Eric likes photography and film. He has a younger brother. He loves	In his small moment Eric wrote a letter to his mom saying how much

	animals and he has two dogs and one horse.	he missed her and sharing his favorite memories. In his argumentative essay he planned to write about how schools can support children grieving loss.
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