

14

Worthy Witnessing

Collaborative Research in Urban Classrooms

Maisha T. Winn and Joseph R. Ubiles

When we first started our work together in the Bronx, New York, at University Heights High School in the fall 2003 semester we seemingly wanted different things. Maisha, a university professor and researcher, wanted to learn more about the pedagogical practices of teachers who adopted out-of-school literacy practices in urban high schools. She approached the work with a belief that English language arts teachers who were engaged in writing and reading communities beyond school walls were able to create a forum for young writers that fostered democratic engagement. Joseph, a poet and a teacher grounded in Pan-Africanism and Freirian theory, wanted support for students in his Power Writing Seminar at an urban public high school in the Bronx. He also wanted someone to bear witness to the many truths his students shared through their original poetry and prose. Soon the objectives merged, creating a synergy of research, pedagogy, and practice (Fisher, 2007). Joe's classroom became more than a site in Maisha's study; this writing community became a space in which she witnessed the "pedagogy of possibility" in action (Fisher, 2009). Maisha's research, namely, ethnographic video, interview transcripts, and field notes, became both a mirror and a window for Joseph to reflect and map new directions for practice with his students. After reading a draft of Maisha's article, "From the Coffee House to the School House: The Promise and Potential of Spoken Word Poetry in School Contexts" (Fisher, 2005[AU: a or b?]) about Joseph's teaching and his students' learning, Joseph shared his reflections on what he thought Maisha's role was in his classroom:

I feel valued and I feel like you witnessed things and you were a legitimate witness. You are a *worthy* witness. It is a witnessing.

For Joseph, Maisha's presence and subsequent involvement was a witnessing of sorts. Both Joseph and Maisha believed their work together had larger implications for researchers who sought to work in urban classrooms. The purpose of this chapter is to define worthy witnessing and examine its role in teaching and

teacher education. In defining worthy witnessing we introduce a methodology that privileges student and teacher voices while building relationships between classroom teachers, students, and researchers. This work, we argue, is important to address issues of diversity in teacher education. First we offer a brief review of scholarship committed to teacher and student-centered methodologies. Next we share our journey as teachers and researchers that shaped how we approached our work. After our purposeful narratives, we examine the four phases of worthy witnessing including: (1) Admission, (2) Declaration, (3) Revelation, and (4) Confidentiality and how these dimensions unfolded in our work with ninth–twelfth grade students in an urban public high school in the Bronx, New York. Finally we reflect on what we consider to be the next phase of worthy witnessing, which is our work with preservice and in-service middle grades and secondary English language arts and social studies teachers. Our work has been guided by the following questions:

- What are the pathways for a researcher to enter a literacy classroom in an urban high school that support a dialectical relationship? In what ways can classroom teachers and researchers reconsider research methodologies that encourage reflection and inform teacher education in literacy-centered classrooms?
- What role does “worthy witnessing” play in the professional development of preservice and in-service teachers?

Joseph’s class, the Power Writing Seminar, was a cross-generational community of poets and writers who met at least three days a week in spite of the fact that only one day was formally part of University Heights High School extended day program. Students met Tuesdays after school, Friday mornings, and Saturdays throughout New York City. Saturday classes were sometimes held at a co-teacher’s loft in the East Village, New York City Botanical Gardens, the Cloisters, Hamilton Grange House, and various libraries, museums, and cultural centers throughout New York City. Since the initial study, Power Writing has found a new Saturday home in the Nuyorican Poets Café, which has been a cultural institution for literary arts, music, and theater in New York City since its doors opened in 1980 (prior to that the café started in Miguel Algarin’s living room in 1973). Power Writing has also been implemented in high schools in Brooklyn and Manhattan, and Joseph has created workshops for students in the juvenile justice and alternative school systems.

Joseph works with two additional teaching artists, Amy Sultan and Roland Legardi-Laura. Amy is a grant writer and filmmaker and Roland is a poet and filmmaker. School personnel also joined this class at different times at its original site, including the school counselor, attendance officer, and the principal. Elsewhere, Joseph has described Power Writing as having “the traditional elements of a family” (Fisher, 2007). Maisha was inducted into the family in fall 2003 through a process referred to as “worthy witnessing,” which is defined in this chapter. However, first we will examine other studies that examine diversity in urban schools and thus have implications for teacher education that embrace methods that demonstrate the three Rs—responsibility, respect, and reciprocity, which we argue are essential to studying diversity in teacher education.

WORTHY WITNESSING IN LITERACY RESEARCH

In an examination of educational research, Duncan-Andrade argues that conventional research methods in education can be problematic. Arguing that “*carino*,” or care and affection, should be central to research, Duncan-Andrade posits:

The value of this type of critical research is its focus on empowering individuals as agents of meaningful, sustainable change. The direct aim of this kind of research agenda is to positively impact the material conditions of those involved with the study; it is an approach to research that gives more than it receives. (2006, p. 455)

Indeed there is a growing body of research that seeks to “give more than it receives” by placing youth at the center of the work. Duncan-Andrade’s call ushers a new movement of scholars who are both researchers and practitioners devoted to improving the lives of urban youth in school and in out-of-school contexts. Part of this movement includes an area that scholars have referred to as “youth studies” (Ginwright & Cammarota, 2006). In an introduction to their edited volume of studies that employ participatory action research methodology, Ginwright and Cammarota contextualize the work of youth-centered research with four guiding principles:

1. Young people should be conceptualized in relationship to specific economic, political, and social conditions.
2. The youth development process should be conceptualized as a collective response to the marginalization of young people.
3. Young people are agents of change, not simply subject to change.
4. Young people have basic rights. (Ginwright & Cammarota, xvii–xix, 2006)

Contributing scholars to Ginwright and Cammarota’s volume used an inquiry approach to learn what issues impacted the youth with whom they worked. They allowed themselves to be guided by young people on their journey to fighting injustices in their schools and communities.

While the aforementioned volume examines educational research broadly, other studies have placed students at the center specifically on teaching and learning literacy. All of these studies can inform the work teacher educators do with preservice teachers and specifically those who will teach English language arts. For example, in an edited volume of scholarship examining literacy as a “civil right” (Greene, 2008), contributors challenge literacy researchers to use a “sociocritical” lens—that is, a lens that privileges the voices and histories of communities while seeking to honor the hybrid language practices of youth, help students of color create a toolkit, and develop “college-going trajectories” (Gutierrez, 2008). Gutierrez’s research on Latino youth in Southern California addresses institutional and systemic forces that attempt to silence and block young people while also providing resources to help them navigate their way through the maze of higher education. What scholars in this review and others understand is that youth must be literate in as many ways as possible, and one aspect of that literacy is the ability to exercise agency and fight for their rights and the rights of their peers.

In a study of Harlem youth performing narratives of community, Kinloch (2007) examines “how the lived experiences of urban youth embody a way of telling nar-

ratives about place, struggle, and identity that often times are not a part of the work students do, or perform in schools" (pp. 61–62). Through her work, Kinloch introduces Quentin, an African American young man confronting gentrification or the "white-ification" of his hood in Harlem. Using a methodology that includes analyzing narratives of young people, Kinloch co-defined the objectives of the project with Quentin. Kinloch was a "worthy witness" to the youth in her study as she created opportunities for Quentin and his peers to engage in critical dialogue about the displacement of his neighbors. Kinloch asserts, "Together, Quentin and I participated in local community meetings, interviewed teachers and students, and analyzed signs of struggle and culture in Harlem" (Kinloch, 2007, p. xx). Kinloch moves away from the false promise of giving voice to young people that some scholarship in diversity in teacher education claims to do. Youth in urban schools and communities already have voices—bold, courageous, and full of wisdom and insight. Rather than "giving voice" to youth, a new generation of literacy scholars seeks to use their privilege as professors at colleges and universities to generate and sustain forums to share and exchange voices.

Morrell's (2008) study of teaching critical literacy to urban youth in California depicts a researcher's dilemma. At the end of a program, Morrell chooses not to "collect" student journals that probably could have informed his research because he believed that students would benefit more from holding on to them. Morrell writes courageously:

On this occasion, I am reminded by a research colleague to try to gather the students' notebooks for analysis. I think to myself that the notebooks belong to the students and not the research team. The 100+-page philosophical, social, and analytical texts that the students have created over the preceding five weeks are mementos of a prolific time and will serve the students well as reminders of the past and predictors of a future of possibilities for writing and action. (p. 1)

Morrell's narrative captures the tensions of worthy witnessing. At times scholars will have access to rich data; however, scholars must make difficult decisions that require integrity and humanity. Here, Morrell refuses to reify the power dynamic between a researcher and participants by recognizing that these journals truly belong to the young people.

Perhaps no other community of teachers and students are in need of worthy witnessing more than the tireless soldiers and literacy activists in New Orleans. In a critical study of a community of young writers and "neo-griots" in New Orleans, Buras (in press[AU: add to refs]) examines the efforts of a literary community working with "text, sound, and light" to illuminate the lived experiences of young men and women who continue to endure the injustices that were magnified by Hurricane Katrina and the fragile levees that at one time protected the city. Buras's work is essential because of her deep commitment to contextualize the current discussion of post-Katrina New Orleans in a broader conversation about the rich histories of the city and the traditions its residents have graciously shared with the world. However, Buras's work also uncovers the painful reality of the work ahead for teachers like Jim Randels and Kalamu ya Salaam who struggle to keep their program, Students at the Center, alive. Students at the Center (SAC) is a small class at Frederick Douglass High School where students bring original writing and

have an opportunity to exchange their work, much like the Power Writers in the Bronx who we discuss at length later in this article. A community like SAC is even more important because many students have chosen to return to New Orleans without their families due to their deep love for their communities and desire to graduate in the city that has been a part of their identity. Buras witnessed the intimacy of the SAC circle:

Welling up with emotion, one student read aloud the story of how death has been visited upon her family since Katrina. Her grandmother died on her brother's birthday, while another close relative had cancer and passed away. Most students closely related to what they called her "tears on paper" and believed that few people outside of the city understood the amount of death that has plagued New Orleans, especially over the last several years. It was far from insignificant, pointed out Randels, that Douglass had twenty-two security guards, but only two guidance counselors, and he pondered whether or not students might "secure" themselves by getting to class on time and then mobilize for more counselors. (in press[AU: add page number of refs])

Duncan-Andrade, Kinloch, Morrell, and Buras are in the center of the struggles in the communities in which they work, yet they gracefully move to the margins allowing the stories to unfold so scholars, teacher educators, and practitioners can actually hear the youth and the committed team of teachers who share their lives with them. Collectively these scholars challenge the current paradigm of research in teacher education. First, they are more than participant observers; they are engaged in the work of their respective communities by building partnerships with classrooms and teachers in schools and in out-of-school settings. In some cases these scholars are actual teachers, calling attention to the important role of teacher research. Additionally this work does not mention diversity in passing; race, class, and agency are central to the work. In the following sections, the authors return to their stories as a practitioner and researcher. In the spirit of the aforementioned scholars, the authors approach their work with reverence for the youth they encounter. Additionally they offer a model for scholarship dedicated to studying diversity in teacher education.

JOSEPH'S JOURNEY: A SOCIAL HISTORY OF POWER WRITING

My students watched the Twin Towers burn and fall from the southern windows of Nichols Hall, on the campus of Bronx Community College, which is located in University Heights. Albert Einstein used to teach in this building, a fact not often shared with students and certainly not celebrated. The education system depends on the notion of separate worlds. Watching the great buildings fall and then walking home with colleagues and students, we observed New Yorkers in our great mosaic of beauty and strength, tragedy and sorrow, and I thought of my poets-writers-students. How can we create a safe space beyond the conventions of public education where education would be a relevant, potent, and liberating experience? And how can this space inform a new generation of teachers and the teacher educators who serve them? The fifty-minute period, one day a week for my poetry club was clearly inadequate and yet contained many elements of a solution.

When Amy Sultan, then the executive director of Early Stages, arrived in my classroom with Roland Legiardi-Laura, an artist and public intellectual in tow, more of the issues of our struggle for a humane and innovative literacy forum were crystallized. In fact, the distance between our students and the site of the fall of the towers could not be measured in linear miles alone but rather in the forces of history and the class and caste contradictions of American society. Our students, whose backgrounds are Nuyorican (New York Puerto Rican) and Afro-American, Dominican and Haitian, Central and South American, African and European American are all trapped in what Franz Fanon, in his classic description of oppression called "mutual obscurity." We needed to develop a process through which our students would engage in a true education, where teacher and student would be both fluid and interchangeable, and where all participants are of equal value, mutually engaged in what Paolo Freire [AU: add year of source and add source to refs]called "an intervention in the world."

One of the most valuable lessons was how critical teacher collaboration was to the program. Teachers have few opportunities to collaborate after their teacher education programs; however, we learned that community partnerships provided a way to reflect on our own practices, challenge ourselves, and expand. Part of this collaboration meant we extended the traditional classroom to include the entire city. Amy brought resources and ideas including field trips to Broadway plays and art films, museums, and major cultural institutions. We developed a commitment to unswerving intellectual rigor and geographic and mathematic literacy. We recognized the imperative that our students acquire a genuine literacy, which we define as the ability to read the world, write the world, and speak the world. We asserted that the mastery of the language is not merely a source of power but is power itself and as such is essential to the survival of our community. Our students learn to examine the world critically, to ideate, and to write and speak their own truths.

We evolved from one, fifty-minute period per week into fourteen hours of class per week spread across two school days and Saturdays. Our students learn to take ownership of their own lives and educations, to travel throughout New York City, and to fearlessly present their ideas and worldview in many artistic and intellectual venues. We study Bronx history as well as world history and claim the right to define our space and our place in it.

In the third year of our praxis, Maisha began attending class as a post-doctoral researcher at Teachers College, Columbia University, and subsequently published *Writing in Rhythm: Spoken Word Poetry in Urban Classrooms* (2007), in which she analyzed the Power Writing seminar from a socially and politically aware academic perspective. Her continued collaboration has been critical to our self-assessment process and issues clarification. Her support and intellectual contributions have been invaluable in the continuation of the work. Perhaps most important was for me as a teacher was having a living example of a code-switching woman of color who was accessible to my black and Latino female students. We expected much from her; in addition to asking her to join our team of teachers, we also wanted a systematic examination of our program that asked compelling questions that would help us think about how we might use our methods in other teaching contexts.

Many of the award-winning poets and scholars that the program has produced were once "hooky queens" and "hallway kings" for whom school was an oppressive and dehumanizing environment. Together we witnessed and continue to wit-

ness that the transition and transformation of these young people is the product of vigorous, visionary, and relentless work. As former students graduate from college and return to the program to teach and mentor, the institution achieves a life of its own. It is our hope to help other teachers in urban, public classrooms transform schools into safety nets for children and to demonstrate how teacher and researcher collaborations can begin this dialogue.

MAISHA'S JOURNEY

When I first visited Joseph's Power Writing class at UHHS in the Bronx, New York, I was ill prepared for the hazing I would receive from his students as part of my education in the circle. In Joseph's classroom, it was ultimately the students' decision whether or not I would be invited to stay. In Joseph's words, I had to become "more than the professor who wanted to study them." I had to be a "truth-sayer" and eventually a "worthy witness" in a classroom community where students shared their life experiences through poetry and prose. While I have written about my experiences with Joe and his Power Writers, I have always wanted to work with Joseph in co-constructing a methodology that synthesizes the objectives of students, teachers, and researchers in this literacy-centered community. Additionally, I wanted for us to consider ways in which we could share this work with ELA preservice teachers. As a researcher in the Power Writing seminar, I first had to experience what it means to be a part of this writing community. In my experiences as an educator and teacher educator, I have never entered an urban school that did not need some kind of assistance, whether it be volunteering, mentoring, or tutoring.

I remember my first time conducting a study of an after-school program as a graduate student for one of my courses. My plan was to "observe" the program by sitting quietly in the back of the room and record notes. While there were opportunities for me to do just that, I could also see an urgent need for someone to help students and teachers. I realized early in my research trajectory that I could never accept the luxury of just sitting and watching when there was so much work to do in our schools.

One thing that I learned from Joseph rather quickly was that he was an avid reader. He and I exchanged literature and academic journal articles as easily as lesson plans or literature guides. We wanted to be sure we developed a foundation for our knowledge as we worked together. I was also committed to getting education research into the hands of classroom teachers. There is often an unspoken, and sometimes spoken, concern that education research does not find its way into the everyday classroom or into a teacher's hands. However, I believe that scholars can get these projects into the worlds of classroom teachers and invite them to be a part of the conversation. Of course this model is not new; the M-Class teams (Freedman, et al., 1999) began their journey as teacher researchers with a common set of readings and attending a symposium addressing intersections of race, class, and literacy teaching and learning. Additionally, teachers in the M-Class teams participated in a forum that introduced them to some of the ideas that have been analyzed in education research circles. Much of Joseph's work reminded me of the Carol Lee's Cultural Modeling Project. I remember Joe calling me after reading Lee's work and how enthusiastic he was to read about someone conducting research in which he could

locate himself and his work with the Power Writers. Additionally, Joseph found the work of Kris Gutierrez and the concept of "Third Space" useful for conceptualizing the work of his student poets. Joseph also found it helpful to read the writing of English and social studies teachers in Freedman's 1999 edited volume, *Inside City Schools*, and was keenly interested in the ways these teacher researchers generated research questions about their own practice.

FOUR PHASES OF SERIOUS ETHNOGRAPHIC INQUIRY

Scholars, teacher researchers, and teacher educators must be aware that ethnography and cultural anthropology have evolved in concert with a complex order of domination. They have been the dominant classes that traditionally practice these methodologies. This fact is central to our work involving urban literacy; we wanted to return the power to define process, structure, and function to the group being "studied." As we considered the role of the ethnographer in the recording, interpretation, and analysis of our student-controlled literacy project, a protocol evolved out of our praxis. How could we intrude yet be unobtrusive? In what ways could we understand our affect in and effects upon the social construct we are studying? How could we insure that our inquiries and analytical formats enhanced and did not arrest the development of the social entity that we sought to understand? How could our work be repositioned and redefined so as not to be voyeuristic, colonial, and paternalistic in its structure and function? And most important, how could our work be used to help teachers in other urban classrooms throughout the country? These, we claim, are the essential questions involving ethnography in studying diversity in teacher education.

In their seminal work, *Literacy: Reading the Word and the World* (1987) Freire and Macedo reject the deficit model of "Banking Education" by offering the observation that "no one is ignorant of everything, no one knows nothing." This is an important concept for the ethnographer to bear in mind. In our work with literacy-based Power Writing, in the South Bronx and the Lower East Side of Manhattan, urban youth practice a liberation-driven model of literacy acquisition. It is in this setting that the ethnographic inquiry, worthy witnessing, has evolved: Admission; Declaration; Revelation; and Confidentiality. We believe this method of inquiry is essential to collaborative research between and among researchers who are also teacher educators and classroom teachers.

Admission. Admission, the first phase of worthy witnessing, certainly has a price. For a scholar to enter a community as a stranger and expect to "conduct a study" can be problematic. Conversely, a scholar who enters a particular community with guiding questions about the teaching and learning taking place, with an openness to be "schooled" by students and teacher, will have more to offer to the larger polylogue. The need to critically examine the classroom communities and pedagogical practices of educators who are committed to their students and to provide opportunities for students to develop critical literacies is undoubtedly urgent. There are many "soldiers"—literacy activists and advocates who work with our youth in schools and in out-of-school contexts throughout the United States (Fisher, 2007). In the context of the Power Writing seminar, the researcher, an African American middle-class woman from California, sought admission to a community of student

writers—ninth–twelfth graders of African American, Dominican, Puerto Rican, and West Indian descent and largely from working-class families from the Bronx. Initially, Maisha believed her ticket for admission had already been purchased; when she saw the students she saw herself. What Maisha did not take into account was the ways in which students would read her in terms of speech, way of communication, and style of dress. While she carried the ethic of “carino” in her heart and her approach to her work, Maisha still had to demonstrate to this collective of student poets that she would learn how to follow their lead.

Admission emerged in three phases. Initially there was admission to the school and classroom, which was in large part dictated by the principal and classroom teacher, as well as institutional review boards for the university and the school district. Next, there was admission to Joseph’s world, which involved extensive dialogue about teaching philosophies, common readings, and pedagogical models. Last, there was admission to the Power Writing circle. While the group accepted Maisha’s presence and participation, she still had to forge relationships on her own. Most important, there was admission into individual student lives, which eventually led to interviews that were conducted at the end of the academic year after relationships had been established throughout the school year.

Declaration. The second phase, declaration, involves the researcher introducing him- or herself and introducing his or her ideas. Where declaration diverges with a typical introduction of a research project is the unmasking of social and political ideologies that frame the work. Power Writing was political in nature; Joseph’s orientation toward his work as a teacher in urban high schools was to resist attempts to colonize youth and thus colonize the teaching of reading, writing, and speaking. Joseph and his students deserved and demanded to know my philosophy of education and my family history, which was grounded in a commitment to Independent Black Institutions (IBIs) (Fisher, 2009)

Revelation. Revelation refers to the process of students and researchers achieving an equilibrium of acceptance through the bonds of mutual respect that can only be reached when the research is engaged in classroom activities. When students and researchers work side by side, the bonds of mutual respect and understanding allow a new practice to evolve in which the researcher is fellow traveler, journalist, critic, and contributor. Additionally, students begin to see themselves in analytical and reciprocal roles in relationship to the researcher. In many ways this process mirrors Rogoff’s notion of apprenticeship, in which she argues that the learning process occurs on three planes including apprenticeship, guided participation, and participatory appropriation (1995[AU: add to refs]). Students realize that there are implications for what they are doing that can inform students and teachers in other schools and regions. This realization then leads to the development of relationships that extend far beyond the project, characterized by mutual respect, caring, and, dare we say, friendship.

Confidentiality. All teacher researchers and university researchers have to make decisions about what aspects of the findings make final reports, articles, and publications. While teachers and students provided signed consent forms to participate in my project with the Power Writers, Joseph and I still discussed which poems and which conversations around particular poems exposed too much of our students’ lives. The last thing either of us wanted was to create a culture around sensationalizing the heartache and frustration many of our youth endured. We also felt a strong

sense of responsibility given the trust and faith they held in us. It was quite possible they thought they wanted particular poems that revealed their multiple and shared truths accessible to the public; however, we erred on the side of caution they may not foresee possible regrets they may have about sharing certain aspects of their lives.

THE ROLE OF ETHNOGRAPHIC VIDEO IN WORTHY WITNESSING

In the context of the Power Writing study, ethnographic video included the uninterrupted filming of class sessions, unexpected sounds, noises, and unrehearsed moments. This notion of uninterrupted filming is important because that is where many potentially useful lessons for preservice and in-service teachers began to unfold. While the camera was seemingly unobtrusive—Maisha often set it on a window sill or somewhere out of the way—students began to pass the camera around and film each other at different points during the read and feed process. In many ways the camera was a part of the circle, being passed from the hands of one student to the hands of another, eventually finding its way back to the sill when it grew too heavy or cumbersome. Joseph began to use the camera as a second pair of eyes. According to Joseph, student interactions with the camera represented the many encounters student would have with strangers and people who were unfamiliar with their styles, “Bronxonics,” and other elements of the circle. The camera, much like the stage where the Power Writers sometimes shared their work, was a metaphor for the reality that someone would always be listening and watching. Joseph encouraged students to be prepared for any possible scenario, and it was his desire that students exhibit confidence in their communication abilities. One unforeseen benefit of using ethnographic video was that teachers used footage to reflect on their pedagogical practices and language with the students. Since the tapes were not edited for “best practices” or used as “highlight reels,” the data reflect the real classroom community—unrehearsed and honest. Power Writers also appreciated being able to watch and hear themselves, often using the LCD screen as a mirror and a window for where to go next.

In our work with preservice teachers in teacher education programs we have been able to use the footage not only to demonstrate the ways in which the Power Writing process fosters democratic engagement and positive peer networks but also to offer educators a window to view the way we worked through difficult issues such as race, class, and religion, raised by student poets in their poetry and prose. Employing these pedagogical portraits has been a way for us to begin conversations with novice and experienced teachers about building community, learning when and where teachers’ voices enter and when teachers should move out of their students’ way.

“AT HOME WITH BOOKS”: WORTHY WITNESSING WITH PRESERVICE AND IN-SERVICE TEACHERS

One of the prevailing questions during and after the ethnographic study of the Power Writers was how Joseph’s, Amy’s, and Roland’s work with the Power Writers could best be replicated by teachers in urban classrooms. As Joseph often said to the Power Writers, “I can’t teach you what I know, but I can teach you how I know.” In

sum, Joseph was invested in the process of cultivating new writers who could make decisions about where they wanted to go after being equipped with the necessary tools. Additionally, Joseph wanted to assist new and experienced teachers with this process. While the Power Writing teaching team was a dynamic collective of educators who shared similar ideals, the collective sensed this work could be adopted in different settings. When Joseph and Maisha first planned a Power Writing workshop for preservice teachers, they spent a lot of time discussing the key components of the process. One thing that they agreed on was that many who dared to teach language arts were often men and women who at some point in our lives became intimate with words both spoken and written. In other words, many of the preservice teachers shared memories of sitting in parent's laps while being read to, taking trips to the local library and bookstore, or a single teacher taking time to make sure reading was a joyous experience for his or her students. It was Joseph and Maisha's desire to create that same sense of intimacy for students in literacy classrooms in urban schools. The worthy-witnessing workshop encouraged preservice teachers to explore how they acquired literacy and a fondness for reading, writing, and speaking in order to think about how their experiences impacted their teaching. In workshops for preservice and in-service teachers, Joseph and Maisha asked teachers to create a footprint map of their neighborhood or community in which they acquired literacy. On 11x14 sheets of paper, workshop participants reconstructed these communities while unearthing memories of their first experiences with words and language. Some maps focused on individual homes or buildings, while others show an entire block or streetscape. Participants sometimes labeled relevant buildings, including corner stores and libraries, or do not include any words at all. After participants completed their maps they wrote a short piece using poetry or prose that described their experiences learning to read, write, and speak. Once everyone completed their maps and their writing project, Joseph and Maisha gathered the group into a circle, giving everyone a chance to talk through their map, pass it around, and read their poem. Joseph and Maisha used the same format used in the Power Writing class; everyone chose one "feeder" or a person who provides feedback after they read their piece. The feeder was selected prior to reading their piece (you can have more than one "feeder" if time permits). One of the Power Writing rituals was to "clap" the reader in to welcome him or her as well as to offer encouragement. We typically asked someone to be an emcee who introduced each reader and his or her poem, which helped participants get to know each other's work. All of us read and we discussed the experience as well as the ways we can see it working in our classes. Joseph's "At Home With Books," depicting his mother's and grandmother's pursuit of literacy for themselves and their children, was used as an example during the process:

One door opens
Another closes
Somewhere
A door slams shut
Somewhere
Sirens scream
Still sounds sound
Silently
Memory shimmers with

Colors and darkness
 Grandma had the alphabet up
 Written on brown paper
 Taped to a wall
 It hung long after
 We had learned
 To read and write
 I see the letters
 The kitchen wall
 Hear moms reading to us
 Everyday
 Sometimes folktales
 Sometimes fairytales
 Adventures and mysteries
 We had books
 Laboriously towed
 From the Salvation Army
 Red wagon
 With hard rubber wheels
 And ungreased axles
 Squeaking into the wind
 I read everything
 Once I had learned the code
 Letter-sound-silent letter-sound
 Diphthong-sound-letter-word
 Image
 Idea
 Object
 Subject
 Feeling
 Thought
 Emotion
 Expression
 Impression
 Damn, I love these books and stories
 They make me what I am

In these circles we have had teachers experience themselves and others in new ways. For example, teachers reconnected with the vulnerability one feels when asked to share their work aloud as often is the case in classrooms. Teachers also learned about traditions, customs, and experiences of fellow teachers that did not mirror their own. Most important, teachers were able to trace their trajectory with literacy learning and consider the ways in which these experiences influence their teaching. The most powerful workshops have taken place with Power Writing alumni or student poets who participated in the Power Writing seminar at University Heights High School. Amanda, Arline, Ramon, and Ron Jay,¹ along with Joseph and Maisha, led workshops at the University of Puerto Rico Mayagüez for the “English as a Field of Change and Flow” conference.² This collective of Power Writing alumni taught workshops in high school classrooms in Mayagüez as well as for graduate students and teaches at the “collegio” or the college. Worthy witnessing with Amanda, Arline,

Ramon, and Ron Jay created another critical layer to the process. Not only did workshop participants learn to use their lived experiences as a mirror and a window to improve their work in urban classrooms from students but Joseph and Maisha also were able to reflect on their practice and learn from former students.

WITNESSING THE FUTURE

In this chapter we attempted to show a movement in educational research that focuses on the lives of urban youth in school and in out-of-school contexts throughout the United States. More specifically, we focused on studies in language, literacy, and culture that inform teachers, teacher educators, and researchers while having implications for studying diversity in teacher education. We urge future studies that are committed to addressing diversity in teacher education and urban classrooms to consider the following:

- **Demonstrate responsibility in the research community.** Responsibility comes in many forms but one of the most important aspects includes dependability and accountability. Teachers and students open their classrooms—in school and out of school—to researchers and thus their personal lives and experiences through the work witnessed and heard. In some contexts responsibility comes in the form of advocacy work around issues that impact the lives of youth and their families.
- **Establish an opportunity to exercise reciprocity.** Exercising reciprocity for teachers may come in the form of co-authoring studies, professional development opportunities at universities and with national organizations at conferences, volunteering in other classes, and sharing books, journal articles, and other resources that may be relevant to the particular teacher's life and work. For students, exercising reciprocity may include an ongoing relationship that may include editing and proofreading personal statements, college essays, and other kinds of writing; assisting students in establishing ongoing social networks and meaningful work.
- **Ritualize respect.** "Respect" is a word that can be taken for granted but it has profound consequences when it is not established mutually. Showing responsibility in a research community and exercising reciprocity are at the foundation of respect. However, the road to respect does not end here. One thing that we established early is that there would be opportunities for us to present the work we do as teachers and researchers, and other times students from the Power Writers would present the work. Joseph did not want students to be "specimens" or in the audience if their lives were a part of the materials being presented. We want to foster opportunities for Power Writers to speak for themselves about the ways in which their participation impacted their lives beyond high school. A last but critical component of ritualizing respect is being open to the work with preservice and in-service teachers.

In order for scholarship to have an impact on studying diversity in teacher education, classroom teachers, university researchers, and students' work have to be col-

laborative and rooted in the aforementioned components. Participant observation is a witnessing of sorts; researchers have an opportunity to be a part of a classroom community, quite often a sacred space where he or she is initially a stranger and attempting to translate lessons learned to a new generation of educators. Being a *worthy* witness entails being actively engaged in the community.

NOTES

1. Amanda, Arline, Ramon, and Ron Jay were a part of Fisher's (2007) ethnography of the Power Writers, *Writing in Rhythm: Spoken Word Poetry in Urban Classrooms*.
2. The University of Puerto Rico, Mayagüez "English as a Field of Change and Flow" conference took place in February 2009.

REFERENCES

- Buras, K. L. (2009). "We have to tell our story": Neo-Griots, racial resistance, and schooling in the other south. *Race Ethnicity and Education*, 12 (4), 427–53.
- Duncan-Andrade, J. (2006). Utilizing *cariño* in the development of research methodologies. In Kenchloe, J., Hayes, K., Rose, K., & Anderson, P. (Eds.), *The Praeger Handbook of Urban Education* (pp. 451–60). Westport, CT: Greenwood Press.
- Fisher, M.T. (2005a). Literocracy: Liberating language and creating possibilities. *English Education*, 37(2), 92–95.
- Fisher, M. T. (2005b). From the coffee house to the school house: The promise and potential of spoken poetry in school contexts. *English Education*, 37(2), 115–31.
- Fisher, M. T. (2007). *Writing in rhythm: Spoken word poetry in urban classrooms*. New York: Teachers College Press.
- Fisher, M. T. (2009). *Black literate lives: Historical and contemporary perspectives*. New York: Routledge.
- Freedman, S. W., Simons, E. R., Kalnin, J. S., Casereno, A., & the M-Class Teams. (1999). *Inside city schools: Investigating literacy in multicultural classrooms*. New York: Teachers College Press.
- Freire, P., & Macedo, D. (1987). *Literacy: Reading the word and the world*. Westport, CT: Bergin & Garvey.
- Ginwright, S., & Noguera, P. (Eds.). (2006). *Beyond resistance! Youth activism and community change*. New York: Routledge.
- Greene, S. (Ed.). (2008). *Literacy as a civil right: Reclaiming social justice in literacy teaching and learning*. New York: Peter Lang.
- Gutierrez, K. (2008). Language and literacies as civil rights. In Greene, S. (Ed.), *Literacy as a civil right: Reclaiming social justice in literacy teaching and learning* (pp. 169–84). New York: Peter Lang.
- Kinloch, V. (2007). "The white-ification of the hood": Power, politics, and youth performing narratives of community. *Language Arts*, 85(1), 61–68.
- Morrell, E. (2008). *Critical literacy and urban youth: Pedagogies of access, dissent, and liberation*. New York: Routledge.
- Rogoff, B. (1994). Observing sociocultural activity on three planes: Participatory appropriation, guided participation, and apprenticeship. In Wertsch, J. V., d' Rio, P., & Alvarez, A. (Eds.), *Sociocultural studies of the mind* [AU: add page numbers]. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.