"Untold Stories": Cultivating Consequential Writing with a Black Male Student through a Critical Approach to Metaphor

Sakeena Everett
University of Georgia

Several writing studies have affirmed the literacies of young Black men in schooling contexts in humanizing ways, which has importantly moved us beyond rationalizing their literacy practices in educational spaces. Less of this important research has directly focused on young Black men who are deemed academically high-achieving in traditional English language arts (ELA) classrooms. Thus, academically high-achieving young Black men are often silent in literacy education and research; they have "untold stories," as described by Shawn, the focal student in this critical ethnographic case study. In an effort to provide literacy supports for these students and their ELA educators, I developed a consequential literacy pedagogy. *In this article, I focus on* consequential writing—*one product of the consequential literacy pedagogy. Consequential writing concurrently develops academic and critical literacies. This layered literacy approach is intentionally developed by, for, and with historically marginalized communities to equip them to act against inequity within and beyond academic spaces through the learning, teaching, and sharing of writing. The current study cultivated consequential writing with a Black male student through a critical approach to metaphor. Metaphor is ideal for developing consequential writing due to its ability to simultaneously engage critical, creative, and cognitive literacies. In this paper, I address the following research question: How did an academically high-achieving Black male secondary student utilize the generative power of metaphor to cultivate consequential writing? Next, I illuminate the transferability of this work to support ELA educators in cultivating consequential writing with students beyond this study. Finally, I discuss some unintended consequences of consequential writing for Black youth in academic spaces that do not honor their lives or minds.*

It felt as if the school put more money into our security system than into our education. In other words, I walked through a correctional center every day and not a school. It was undeniable the schools believed we were nothing but criminals in the making. . . . I would hate to contribute to the problem, so I achieve the unexpected . . . by being a scholar in anything I do. (Shawn Alexander[1], 17, Black male high school student)

Introduction: Centering Black Male Academic Success

The opening quote is an excerpt from "Incarcerated Students," an essay written by Shawn, an academically high-achieving Black male high school student. Through his provocative metaphor, Shawn critiqued systems of education that negatively profile and mistreat students because of complex intersections of race, gender, neighborhood origin, and presupposed life trajectories. This kind of critique, which disrupts the negative ways Black male students are often positioned in academic spaces, is part of a broader educational discourse asserting that not only do Black lives matter, Black minds matter as well (Howard, 2016; Kinloch, Burkhard, & Penn, 2017; Wood, 2017). Toward this end, there is a growing body of educational research that rightly reframes narratives of young Black men and accentuates how they succeed in school by employing anti-deficit or academic resilience frameworks. This research offers much-needed language to describe and analyze the educational experiences and ideologies of academically high-achieving young Black men within educational contexts.

In an effort to de-center and "suspend damage-centered research" (Tuck, 2009, p. 409) about Black young men in educational contexts, this paper argues there is much to be learned from how they succeed in school. As Tuck (2009) explained, *damage-centered research* is

> research that intends to document people's pain and brokenness to hold those in power accountable for their oppression. This kind of research operates with a flawed theory of change: it is often used to leverage reparations and resources for marginalized communities yet simultaneously reinforces and reinscribes a one-dimensional notion of these people as depleted, ruined, and hopeless and has long-term repercussions on communities—*thinking of ourselves as broken.* (p. 409)

Tuck called for research that reimagines how findings might be used by, for, and with communities. Relatedly, Harper (2012) developed an *anti-deficit framework,* explaining that—despite what is consistently reported in the media, peer-reviewed academic journals, and research reports—there are many Black male students who enter postsecondary institutions with high levels of academic preparation, support, and motivation. It is significant to note that deficit reports also initiate and sustain the dehumanization and objectification (Haddix, 2009, p. 343) of Black male students. Furthermore, Haddix (2009) argued, deficit framings unfairly place the onus on individual Black males to succeed academically, without disrupting the institutional structures that shape their experiences in schools (p. 343). Thus, it is important to consider Warren, Douglas, and Howard's (2016) critical interrogation of educational structures that improve or impede the capacity of Black boys to realize their maximum intellectual potential.

Several researchers have appropriately amplified stories and models of Black male academic success across the elementary-university continuum (Bonner, 2014; Harper & Wood, 2016; Howard, 2014; Moore & Lewis, 2014; Warren et al., 2016). However, it is not clear how literacies (broadly defined in this paper as listening,

speaking, reading, and writing)—contributed to the academic success of these Black male students. Specifically, the terms *literacy, reading/readers,* and *writing/writers* rarely showed up in the titles, keywords, article/chapter content, or book indices. When some dimension of literacy was mentioned, the discussions primarily focused on Black male students' reading performance on standardized exams/inventories. Literacies are so dynamic, and they are difficult to capture on standardized exams. The need for a more complete understanding of how literacies function in the lives of academically successful Black male students is an urgent concern warranting focused theoretical attention and pedagogical supports.

This paper is primarily concerned with the writing development of Black male students within secondary school contexts. For far too long, literacy research about Black male students has presented an ahistorical myth about "the absence of literacy in th[eir] lives" (Kirkland, 2009, p. 376). Therefore, several groundbreaking writing studies have rightly (re)positioned young Black men in secondary contexts as writers and critical doers of literacy (Behizadeh, 2015; Kinloch, 2010, 2017; Kirkland, 2009, 2013; Tatum & Gue, 2012). This research has importantly moved us "beyond rationalizing the need to include the linguistic, literate, and cultural practices" (Paris & Alim, 2014, p. 88) of young Black men in educational spaces. I also believe this research was done with and for young Black men to "affirm their humanity" (Perry, 2003, p. 13) and "suspend brokenness" (Tuck, 2009, p. 409). Less of this important work has (1) directly focused on young Black men who are deemed academically high-achieving in traditional ELA classrooms/school contexts and (2) explicitly developed theoretical and pedagogical supports for ELA educators to meet their writing needs.

Few studies have investigated the writing of academically successful Black male students in academic contexts. Harper and Davis (2012) conducted a content analysis on the writing of academically successful Black male undergraduate students who pursued PhDs in education. Three themes characterized these students' encounters with and responses to inequitable schooling: (1) awareness of educational inequities, (2) beliefs in education as the great equalizer, and (3) purposeful pursuits of the PhD in education (Harper & Davis, 2012). At the secondary level, Everett (2016) examined the narrative writing of an academically high-achieving Black male student to understand how he imagined and later implemented new realities for himself. The student constructed, embodied, and negotiated a "manly" writer identity to "achieve while Black and male" in order to defy negative statistics about young Black men (Everett, 2016, p. 326). Simply stated, "Black men do care about education," even though "policies unfairly disadvantage them," and they have inequitable schooling and postsecondary experiences (Harper & Davis, 2012, p. 116). Hence, I have grappled with the question: How might literacy educators and researchers support the writing development of academically high-achieving Black male students in ELA classrooms?

To provide much-needed supports for these students and their English educators, I developed a *consequential literacy pedagogy* framework. In this paper, I

focus on *consequential writing,* which is one process/product of the consequential literacy pedagogy framework. The consequential writing discussed in this paper foregrounds metaphor. To unpack the characteristics of consequential writing, I center Shawn's metaphor, "Incarcerated Students," his artifact, and reflections thereof. Shawn was an academically high-achieving Black male student in my writing course when consequential writing was initially developed. Specifically, I address the following research question: How did a Black male secondary student utilize the generative power of metaphor to cultivate consequential writing? I also detail the transferability (Bhattacharya, 2017; Steinberg & Cannella, 2012) of this work to support ELA educators in cultivating consequential writing with students beyond this study. I end my discussion with implications about the unintended consequences of consequential writing in ELA classrooms that do not affirm the lives and minds of Black youth.

Positionality and Purpose: Consequential Writing, Black Young Men, and Metaphor

As a Black female, critical English educator, literacy researcher, and teacher educator, I am concerned about the intersection of critical, creative, and cognitive writing experiences with Black, Brown, and Indigenous communities of color—in this paper, especially Black youth. My goal is to ensure that young Black scholars concurrently cultivate "academic literacies"—those literacies that have currency in traditional educational institutions (Morrell, 2002)—and "critical literacies"—the ability to not only read and write, but also access texts to understand the relationships between power and domination that underlie and inform those texts (Bishop, 2017; Freire, 1970; Morrell, 2002). Black youth can and should compose consequential writing in ELA classrooms.

Consequential writing is writing that is intentionally developed by, for, and with communities. It concurrently cultivates both academic and critical literacies of historically marginalized communities in a way that encourages justice-oriented action, which ensures that community members actively shape community goals. Thus, consequential writing is rooted in a historicized literacy stance that acknowledges community members' agentive "identities as learners and historical actors in the academy and beyond" (Fisher, 2009; Gutierrez & Jurow, 2016, p. 574; Perry, 2003; Tatum & Gue, 2012). Consequential writing is active, and has five key characteristics: (1) creativity, (2) intellectual rigor, (3) critical consciousness, (4) honoring humanity, and (5) leading to action against inequity. This layered literacy approach equips Black youth—in this case, young Black men—with strong academic and critical competencies, so they can confidently communicate their expertise in and beyond academic spaces. As an ELA educator, one competency I have developed with young Black men is the use of metaphor. Metaphor is ideal for developing consequential writing with young Black men due to its ability to simultaneously engage critical, creative, and cognitive literacies.

Toward Expanding Metaphor as a Theoretical and Pedagogical Framework

> A metaphor in my eyes was always something described as a figurative speech that compares two different things without using *like* or *as.* (Shawn, Critical Reflection)

Metaphor is more than a traditional conceptual literary device or figure of speech. Like many ELA teachers and teacher educators, year after year, I confront teaching the concept of metaphor. Researching and teaching metaphor over the years has pushed me to expand the theoretical and pedagogical utility of metaphor in my ELA classroom. To do this, I have moved from thinking of metaphor as a mere literary device to including critical pedagogy and interdisciplinary perspectives of metaphor. Critical pedagogy seeks to understand, analyze, problematize, and act against asymmetrical relationships between people and social institutions in teaching and learning. Though critical pedagogy defies a single starting point or definition (Darder, Baltodano, & Torres, 2017), it has a unifying commitment to represent multiple readings/writings of the world in pursuit of social justice, equity, and empowerment (Willis et al., 2008). Building on critical pedagogy, critical literacy is a pedagogical process of teaching and learning where students and teachers interrogate the world, unmask ideological, hegemonic discourses, and frame their actions in the larger struggle for social justice (Darder et al., 2017). A critical literacy approach to metaphor expands its theoretical and pedagogical utility beyond that of a literary device, offering immense potential for ELA educators.

Freire (1970), an influential critical literacy scholar and philosopher, developed a powerful metaphor, *banking education,* to theorize inequality in teaching and learning. Banking education, Freire argued, positions teachers to treat students like empty containers to be filled. "Education thus becomes an act of depositing, in which students are the depositories [ATMs] and the teacher is the depositor" (Freire, 1970, p. 72). According to learning theory and philosophy, metaphor is an "interpretive tool" (Schon, 1993) to examine our assumptions about teaching, learning, schools, and purposes for education. As such, metaphor has been dynamic in engaging critical theories in education. Though Freire used metaphor to theorize about education, the emphases were on the theory and pedagogy of education. The current study, which is part of a larger study, shifted the unit of analysis to explicitly consider the critical, creative, and cognitive functions of *metaphor* itself—in the writing of a Black male secondary ELA student, Shawn. Given the ways young Black men are often positioned in schools, I used metaphor to design and implement a consequential writing framework in praxis with Shawn. Praxis, a core philosophical principle of critical pedagogy—is the ongoing relationship between action, dialogue, and reflection (Darder et al., 2017; Freire, 1970; Willis et al., 2008). Our ongoing active, dialogic, and reflective work about education through metaphor cultivated consequential writing experiences.

Beyond a critical approach, metaphor activates creative and cognitive activity. According to cognitive science linguists Turner & Fauconnier (1999), metaphor is a "mechanism for creativity" because it evokes the conceptual integration of

multiple inputs, or *conceptual blending*, which is "the cognitive ability to create new meaning out of old" (p. 397). This blending, they argued, is dynamic, supple, and active in the moment of thinking; it moves us beyond "observable metaphorical conceptions" to account for cultural history and the explicit emergent structures they produce, both over cultural time and over individual time (Fauconnier & Turner, 2008). Cognitive linguists and philosophers assert that we can examine the everyday language of metaphor to determine how it structures not only our inner thoughts, but also our actions (Lakoff & Johnson, 2011). This makes metaphor generative in at least two ways; it offers a "product . . . and a process by which new perspectives on the world come into existence" (Schon, 1993). To summarize, metaphors organize creatively, cognitively, linguistically, and philosophically what we believe to be possible. In other words, once metaphors have structured our inner thoughts, they develop practical application in our daily lives. With interdisciplinary theories of metaphor and my commitments to critical pedagogy in mind, I expanded the theoretical and pedagogical utility of metaphor in my writing course for high school students.

We Choose to Learn (Background)

The larger study took place in a program called We Choose to Learn, a 4-week, residential, asset-based, academic enrichment summer program hosted annually at Success Ticket University (STU); it was founded in 2005. Asset-based pedagogies, Paris and Alim (2014) argued, reposition the linguistic, literate, and cultural practices of working-class communities of color as resources and assets to honor, explore, and extend (p. 87). In other words, We Choose to Learn took the unwavering stance that students of color were brilliant and capable, and brought assets that we, as instructors, could learn from.

The National Center for Education Statistics reports that approximately 2 million students across the United States participate in summer bridge, college transition, or university pipeline programs. These programs are typically geared toward low-income, first-generation college students or students of color. University pipeline programs are often framed as "remedial" or "intervention" programs to assist students in their academic and social transition to college. However, STU, a large, predominantly White institution, intentionally built partnerships with urban school districts in the state to create a sustainable, asset-based, academic enrichment pipeline program for students of color to attend STU's College of Education, and thereby diversify the teaching force in the state.

We Choose to Learn had two primary goals: (1) to prepare high school students of color for college and (2) to nurture their career interests in education. To actualize these goals, We Choose to Learn covered all expenses (including travel to and from STU) for *all* student participants. This eliminated any financial barriers for any student to participate in the program. Unlike students in many university pipeline programs, We Choose to Learn students represented diverse family structures and socioeconomic statuses. We Choose to Learn made no explicit distinctions among

students fitting into any combination of these diverse categories (these distinctions only became clear to me as I interviewed my research study participants).

We Choose to Learn aimed to let high school students of color with budding career interests in education develop college-readiness, build academic skills, and ultimately have fun. The students learned about everything from completing college applications and preparing for standardized exams (SAT/ACT) to examining theoretical and pedagogical dilemmas in urban education. We called the We Choose to Learn students *scholars* because this signaled their identities as learners and historical actors (Fisher, 2009; Gutierrez & Jurow, 2016; Perry, 2003; Tatum & Gue, 2012). During the program, scholars took four courses (writing, critical examination of urban education, college preparation, and educational leadership); these courses were taught by faculty and graduate students of color in STU's College of Education. Within this context, I designed and taught the We Choose To Learn summer writing course for four consecutive years. My commitments to critical English education, literacy research, and teacher education pushed me to expand the theoretical and pedagogical utility of metaphor in praxis with young scholars of color in asset-based ways.

Research Method

I employed critical ethnographic case study methodology to investigate my students' metaphor writing and its impact over time. Everyday teaching and learning are complex social happenings, and deep understanding of them as such is the grand purpose of qualitative case studies (Dyson & Genishi, 2005). My study included two phases that took place over 12 months (July 2013 to June 2014). Phase I (July–August 2013) took place during the We Choose to Learn writing course. Phase II took place in the three respective high schools of the focal scholars during the 2013–2014 academic school year. The vast majority of the data discussed in this paper came from Phase I. Thus, I will meticulously detail my methods in the We Choose to Learn writing course. My detailed notes provide clarity about the preparation, rigor, and length (average ELA unit of instruction) of my metaphor writing project to support ELA educators in cultivating consequential writing with students beyond this study.

During the 4-week We Choose to Learn writing course (July–August 2013), my scholars and I met face-to-face 11 times (2 to 3 times per week), for a total of 20 hours. On the first day of class, my scholars received a syllabus (see Appendix A). I explained that our course goal was to utilize metaphor to interrogate our identities and critical theories in education. Scholars were assigned a list of readings. After each reading, the scholars composed one-page, typewritten, critical reflections for homework. These written reflections invited my scholars to analyze the text, reference a related personal educational experience, and pose one to two burning questions. Scholars were told they would create a metaphor essay at the end of the writing course to capture their experiences in education, the development of their critical consciousness in the course, and insights from the readings.

By design, my scholars read multiple texts, written by researchers and authors who were diverse (in race, gender, nationality, theoretical paradigms) and provided varying perspectives on identity, literacy, and teaching/learning, which is consistent with the aims of critical literacy pedagogies. I intentionally left room in the syllabus (see Appendix B) for my scholars to read and write about topics they found interesting or important. Scholars wrote an initial draft of their metaphor essay for Day 10, engaged in a guided peer-review process in class, received constructive criticism about their work, and submitted a final draft of their narrative on the last day of class. Also, on the last day, our class had a gallery walk; scholars displayed the final drafts of their metaphor essays and a physical (three-dimensional) artifact. Pahl and Rowsell (2010) argued that artifacts "provide a platform from which students can access literate identities" and "open up worlds that bring in new identities" (p. 64). Complementing their metaphor essays with an artifact offered a creative and cognitive dimension for my scholars to express their values and experiences. Each scholar received peer-reviewed feedback on their displays, wrote reflections about their process, and engaged in a verbal class dialogue.

Beyond the assigned readings, I created mini-lessons throughout the summer to scaffold my scholars in identifying and developing academic arguments. For example, I used Belcher's (2009) Chapter 3, which explains how to construct strong academic arguments. I also adapted mini-lessons from Rosa and Eschholz (2009) and Hairston, Ruszkiewicz, and Friend (2002) to provide guidance for composing texts. I scaffolded and generated learning spaces to expand the utility of metaphor, deconstruct critical theories in education, and demystify effective writing. In this way, my writing course simultaneously cultivated my scholars' academic and critical literacies within the context of a collaborative writing environment.

As I expanded the theoretical and pedagogical utility of metaphor in my writing course, I eventually named my scholars' metaphor essay project "Artifactual Literacies Education Narratives" (A LENs). *A LENs* is an obvious play on a (corrective) lens, and it became a metaphor for my theoretical and pedagogical praxis (Everett, 2016) with Shawn—to see differently. As I dialogued with Shawn about his writings, I realized he helped me to *see* differently. His intellectual curiosities and creativity pushed me to understand the experiences of secondary Black male student writers in nuanced ways. For example, Shawn often spoke about how the course readings "opened [his] eyes," made him think, and prompted him to ask questions about his schooling experiences. Shawn's use of the expression "opened my eyes" sparked my curiosity about how corrective eyewear, quite literally, functions. So, I visited an eyeglass shop to understand the science behind how a person could go from having poor vision or even being virtually blind to getting eyewear, acquiring sight—or *having their eyes opened,* which fundamentally altered their interaction with the world.

I learned the *focal point* of a corrective lens is an intersection of several light rays, and it is also the exact location where one's vision is most clear (Everett, 2016). Through my metaphor-inspired praxis, my scholars (in this case, Shawn) became a focal point to provide clarity about how young Black men succeed in literacy
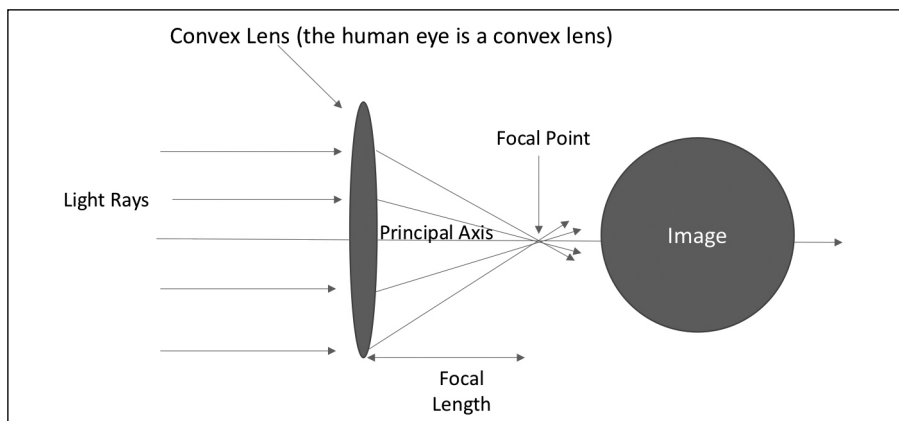
FIGURE 1. *Corrective lens as metaphor*

and in school more broadly. Figure 1 displays this process—of acquiring corrective lenses and gaining sight, which ultimately allows people to see what was already "in front of their eyes," to use Shawn's words. Situating A LENs as metaphor allowed me to closely examine "*how* we come to see things in new ways" (Schon, 1993). A LENs provided a significant "interpretive tool" (Schon, 1993) that "structured [my] thoughts" (Lakoff & Johnson, 2011) and actions with Black male writers, like Shawn, in my ELA classroom.

Description of the Context
In Phase I, there were 20 scholars in my writing class (4 Black males, 3 Latino males, 1 Latina female, and 12 Black females). All We Choose to Learn scholars had 3.0 to 4.0 grade point averages on a 4-point scale. It is important to note that, though all my scholars had high GPAs on paper, they came from public schools in various urban school districts across two Midwestern states. Thus, they had varying levels of reading and writing skills (like students in many ELA classrooms) and their cumulative GPAs and standardized exam scores did not necessarily indicate that they were prepared for the intensive amounts of reading and writing I required in my course. Therefore, I provided several layers of scaffolded reading and writing supports for the scholars to learn how to develop academic arguments and write effectively. Scholars did not receive any formal grades in We Choose to Learn. However, I was deeply invested in my scholars' writer identities, and I provided daily substantive writing feedback. I asked all four Black male scholars to participate in my larger study focused on the literacy practices of academically high-achieving Black male scholars; all four scholars agreed to participate. Shawn, one of my Black male scholars, was 17 years old when I first met him in the We Choose To Learn program. His story is like those of the other three participants in that they all present meaningful opportunities to explore how academically high-

achieving Black male scholars simultaneously experience invisibility, silence, and dehumanization at school. Moreover, the remaining three scholars were also top students in their respective high schools. However, Shawn was key in naming our consequential writing project, A LENs.

In Focus: Shawn Alexander

Shawn lived with his mother and stepfather in a working-class home. His mother was a hairstylist and first lady of a church, and his stepfather was a pastor. Shawn's parents sent him to an all-male high school, Urbantown High School. It primarily served African American students. Shawn had a 3.68 GPA and a 32 ACT score[2] when he was admitted to We Choose To Learn. He was a well-rounded scholar who played football and engaged in community service projects. On his way to becoming a first-generation college student, Shawn was intentional about researching academic enrichment summer programs across the country at both historically Black and predominantly White institutions to find the best fit to actualize his goals.

Data Collection and Analysis

Through critical ethnographic case study methods, I describe the concrete experiences of everyday school, social patterns, and the deep structures supporting them (Steinberg & Cannella, 2012). Data were collected and analyzed across Phase I and Phase II. In Phase I, as a participant in the We Choose To Learn writing course, Shawn composed eight writing samples and one artifact (see Appendix B). He attended all 20 hours of the video-recorded classroom sessions. Plus, he and I had three intensive interviews (193 minutes) across Phases I and II. Each interview was audio-recorded, and later transcribed and coded for themes.

In Phase II, I spent an academic year working with Shawn beyond We Choose to Learn (his senior year in high school) to trace the consequences of his metaphor. I visited Shawn's school, Urbantown High School, which afforded me opportunities to meet some of Shawn's teachers, administrators, and friends, as well as students he mentored. I also collected data in the form of a follow-up interview, observations, field notes, and reflective memos. Informed by multiple sources of data across academic spaces (We Choose to Learn and Urbantown High School), over time (July 2013 to June 2014), I triangulated the data to enhance its rigor and complexity. Triangulation allowed me to authentically center Shawn as a writer and focus on his writing development with metaphor.

I started my analysis with Shawn's eight writing samples, which were collected daily in Phase I. Later, I included my observation notes, his A LENs artifact, intensive audio-recorded interviews, classroom videos, and reflective memos. Specifically, each time I facilitated a class, I collected a writing sample, reviewed the video from that day, took copious notes and wrote questions about the videos, and later interviewed Shawn about his work. I also spent time with all scholars outside of my writing course. Because We Choose to Learn was a 4-week residential summer program at STU, I had ample opportunities to observe the scholars in their other three courses, eat meals with them, and attend extracurricular activities.

My coding across the multiple sources of data was "inductive and reflective" (Dyson & Genishi, 2005). I coded the data in two phases: initial coding and focused coding. In the initial coding phase, I used word-by-word and line-by-line coding to determine the nature of the data in the eight writing samples. At times, I highlighted specific parts of Shawn's writing (that I wanted clarity about) and later interviewed Shawn about his writing and writing process. I showed Shawn my highlighted word-by-word and line-by-line codes to get his input. Thus, each interview served as a detailed and extended reflection about the writing samples. In the focused coding phase, after each interview, I wrote copious reflective memos and transcribed the audio-recorded interviews. As I taught the writing course, reviewed the videos, and spent more time with Shawn in the We Choose to Learn program and at Urbantown, I was able to cross-reference my codes across his writing samples, artifacts, interviews, and videos, as well as my observation notes and reflective memos. This iterative data collection process helped me to identify the five characteristics of consequential writing:

- Generates creativity
- Anchors intellectual rigor
- Raises critical consciousness
- Honors humanity
- Leads to action against inequity

Shawn's A LENs project informed the generative "product" and "process" (Schon, 1993) of his focal point—the space of clarity where Shawn cultivated consequential writing. In the findings described below, I detail the five characteristics of consequential writing. I intentionally center Shawn's voice throughout this paper, but especially in my findings.

Findings: "Metaphor Made Me Ask Myself Questions"

Metaphors We Live By changed my understanding of metaphors and the role of our language. The reading was difficult, but interesting. . . . The authors' definition and descriptions of metaphor made me ask myself questions. It's a really convincing reading. (Shawn, Critical Reflection)

Introducing metaphor as a mere literary device is typical in many ELA classrooms. However, in the current study, I utilized a critical lens and interdisciplinary theories of metaphor. Exposing Shawn (and the other scholars) to interdisciplinary framings of metaphor positioned him to cultivate creative, generative, problem-solving metaphors. He was invited to write a metaphor essay at the end of the 4-week writing course and to choose a physical, three-dimensional artifact to accompany his metaphor essay. The students' artifacts and metaphor essays, collectively known as A LENs, were displayed in a writing class gallery walk. Shawn called his work "Incarcerated Students."

Creativity: "Incarcerated Students"

Figure 2 is a photograph of Shawn's artifact for "Incarcerated Students," which is a plastic yellow school bus with plastic silver handcuffs wrapped around it. Shawn made efficient use of his artifact by examining the "combination and interrelation" of a school bus and handcuffs—a complex "contextual association across schemata" (Fludernik, 2005, p. 236) that would not have been achieved by using one or the other in isolation. His provocative artifact generated an important opportunity to learn about Shawn's "mechanism for creativity," achieved through conceptual blending (Turner & Fauconnier, 1999).

Such blends yield a product that has a logic (Turner & Fauconnier, 1999, p. 399). In one interview about "Incarcerated Students," Shawn explained his "conceptual logic" (Turner & Fauconnier, 1999). The school bus, according to Shawn, represented the "system of education," and the handcuffs represented "incarcerated students," who "don't know it." What made Shawn's conceptual blend particularly effective was his "concrete and realistic representation" (Turner & Fauconnier, 1999, p. 406) of "Incarcerated Students." Shawn's artifact was intentional; he chose a classic symbol, a school bus, for its recognizable association with systems of education. The school bus signified a vehicle used to transport students from one place to another, usually from home to school or vice versa. By design, the school bus had rigid, uninteresting rows and columns that could be seen through the windows. For Shawn, the school bus's rows and columns symbolized students in working-class, urban communities who were often "passed along." When students are "passed along," they "don't know their abilities," according to Shawn.

The school bus also represented how Black students in urban contexts were effortlessly transported from schools to prisons, because ironically, the schools believed the students were "criminals in the making." The handcuffs, Shawn explained, represented constraint, limited movement, and inhumane treatment. Collectively, the school bus and handcuffs represented how the school-to-prison phenomenon facilitated the criminalization of Black students, especially Black male students in urban communities. In a way, Shawn's conceptual logic of the school bus and handcuffs visual blend "personified" (Turner & Fauconnier, 1999, p. 407) his artifact. Through his artifact, Shawn communicated that
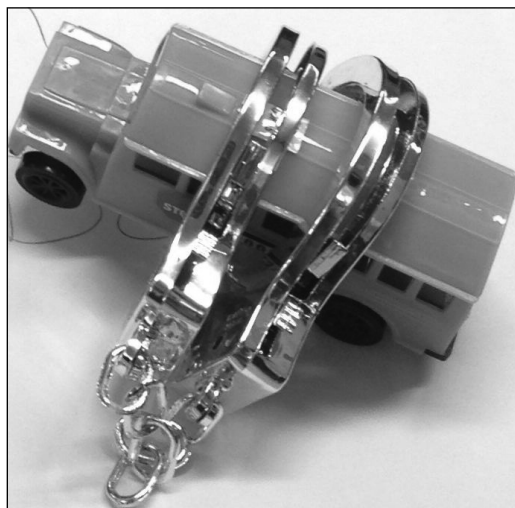

FIGURE 2. *"Incarcerated Students"*

school, for him, was both "physically and ideologically associated with prisons" (Johnson, 2015). Shawn's artifact also offered a generative "interpretive tool" (Schon, 1993) to frame his metaphor essay.

Critical Consciousness: "We Became So Used to Lockdowns"

Shawn's essay, "Incarcerated Students," constructed a clear argument and critique about his schooling experiences. Shawn's writing and his interview reflections thereof illuminate *how* his expanded understandings of metaphor cultivated his creativity, critical consciousness, intellect, humanity, and action against inequity—collectively, what I call consequential writing. In the previous section, I detailed Shawn's creativity through his artifact. Here I demonstrate how his creativity extended into his writing, with an emphasis on his critical consciousness development. Cultivating critical consciousness involves understanding one's own identity; perceiving social, political, and economic contradictions; and acting against oppression. Shawn's metaphor critiqued urban schools' institutional practices, a concern that disproportionately and negatively affected the schooling experiences of Black male students, he explained.

Shawn's central thesis in "Incarcerated Students" was "I walked through a correctional center every day and not a school." According to Shawn, his "school put more money into [his] security system than into [his] education." To highlight this point, he explained:

> Students who attend schools in urban areas are given discomfort. They come to school and have to be patted down, empty their pockets, walk through metal detectors, put their book bags through scanners, and attend every class with cameras staring them in the face.

Shawn's writing created vivid imagery about his schooling experiences. His school was a "correctional center" because of the criminalization of its students. Shawn was positioned as an object in his school because he endured criminal-like treatment each morning before he even entered a classroom. Security was prioritized over learning. Once he entered his classroom, he noticed surveillance "cameras staring [him] in the face." Being subjected to these daily practices, according to Shawn, "make[s] a kid not want to come to school."

In "Incarcerated Students," Shawn wrote: "[School,] the most cherished institution we have, one that speaks in the most direct way about how society wants to invest in the future, . . . now models a prison." For Shawn, school reflected the economic priorities and moral compass of society in "the most direct way." In other words, one could look to schools for direct indicators about the aims of society. Schools in urban, working-class communities like Shawn's were modeled after prisons. According to a report about Shawn's school district, all high schools had uniformed police officers in the hallways and over 5,000 students were arrested on school grounds in the 2013–2014 school year. Of those students, 74% were Black; most were males. Because Shawn's school was a Black male high school with several police officers and metal detectors, he interpreted this investment in security as a microcosm of his district's larger aims to incarcerate Black males.

Shawn also called his school "a correctional center" because it conducted "something called lockdowns." The practice of lockdowns, he noted, originated in prisons. Shawn explained that lockdowns in his school were explicitly intended to "control the movement of students" and lasted anywhere from "1 hour" to "the whole day." During lockdowns, the security guards and administrators looked for "illegal substances or weapons" among the students. Shawn said, "Lockdowns became the norm," and that students "became so used to lockdowns." To frame this point, he discussed administrators announcing over the loudspeakers, "It's a code blue lockdown." *Code blue* meant the students would be physically contained in one classroom "for the next two classes," whereas "code red could lead to an all-day investigation." Here, language is an important source of evidence for the *systematicity,* or systematic pattern (Lakoff & Johnson, 2011), of Shawn's metaphor. Words like *lockdowns* and *codes* helped Shawn build his argument about Urbantown High School as a correctional center. Shawn further explained, "Students caught on [to the codes] after a while because the lockdowns happened so often." Shawn noticed an increasing number of lockdowns after the state- and district-wide exams. Because the curriculum was standards-driven, teachers taught less academic content as the school year came to a close. He wrote that lockdowns were the "most discouraging thing ever! How do you take education away from the students for hours at a time, then expect them to cooperate?" His writing raised an important rhetorical question that highlighted a paradox in practicing lockdowns in schools.

Intellectual Rigor: *"When a Book Makes You Think"*

In my We Choose to Learn writing course, Shawn was encouraged to explore his own educational experiences and engage in complex problem solving through reading, writing, and dialogue about his writing. He read Freire's (1970) *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* for the first time in my writing course. In response, he wrote, "When a book makes you think, that's how you know you're reading something good." Shawn further explained, "It makes me question the way I've been taught in school for 12 years." He engaged in a critical literacy process to unmask ideological, hegemonic discourses, and frame [his] actions in the larger struggle for social justice (Darder et al., 2017). When he reflected about his previous educational experiences, in comparison to his We Choose to Learn courses, Shawn wrote, "our curriculum wasn't rigorous so we all could succeed."

Shawn's mastery of standardized exams (e.g., ACT) and grade point average metrics did not equate to a "rigorous curriculum." Quite the contrary—a rigorous intellectual curriculum, as opposed to a "banking education" (Freire, 1970), made him think, stimulated his creativity, prompted him to ask meaningful questions, and engaged him in conscious complex problem solving. Shawn wrote, "It [banking education] takes our creative power." The danger of banking education, in Shawn's view, was that "we would never gain power to question a teacher and feel comfortable with being taught one thing, one way." Students whose knowledge is "banked" are not intellectually challenged, underutilize their creativity, and rarely actualize their abilities to transform the worlds they exist in.

Reading, writing, and dialoguing about critical theories in education helped

Shawn to articulate in "Incarcerated Students" how he "felt obligated to question authority" in his school. However, his natural inquisitiveness was often silenced in school because he "would get in trouble each time." Kirkland (2013) described the silence that underwrites Black male literacy practices and characterizes Black male lives as "unforced silence (never being heard)" (p. 35). Shawn desired to be challenged intellectually in the classroom, but those desires came at a cost—"get[ting] in trouble." He surmised that the current educational setup reinforced inequitable conditions by making young Black men believe they "can't all succeed." Underexposure to intellectual rigor within his traditional school context led Shawn to expand his knowledge in other ways like participating in summer academic enrichment programs like We Choose to Learn. Being a part of organizations beyond his school exposed him to different realities and generated new possibilities.

Honoring Humanity: "I Achieve the Unexpected"

Shawn assessed his *perceived* value as a young Black man in a single-sex school in an urban community. He determined, "It was undeniable the schools believed we were nothing but criminals in the making"—because he was greeted at the school doors with pat downs and scanners every morning. Shawn's assessment of the treatment of Black males in his school is consistent with scholars who write about the presumed criminality of Black men (Alexander, 2010; Kinloch et al., 2017; Neal, 2013). Shawn "refused" (Tuck & Yang, 2014) the ways he and his schoolmates were treated in school.

As Tuck and Yang (2014) explained, "refusal is not just a 'no,' but a redirection to ideas otherwise unacknowledged or unquestioned" (p. 239). To refuse, Shawn wrote in "Incarcerated Students," "I achieve the unexpected . . . by being a scholar in anything I do." Being a scholar was *unexpected* because "the most 'legible' Black male body is often thought to be a criminal body and/or body in need of policing and containment" (Neal, 2013, p. 5). Shawn's conscious efforts to be a *scholar* are connected to a historicized literacy stance for African Americans to affirm their humanity—to "focus on education as an act of freedom, as an act of resistance, as a political and communal act" (Perry, 2003, p. 49).

Even though Shawn was scholastically savvy and mastered "academic literacies" (Morrell, 2002), as evidenced by his grades and exam scores, he had virtually no opportunities in his honors English class at Urbantown High School to enact critical literacies (Bishop, 2017; Freire, 1970; Morrell, 2002). Because of the aforementioned presumed criminality of young Black men, even in educational spaces, they benefit from simultaneously cultivating academic and critical literacies. This layered literacies approach and interdisciplinary use of metaphor generated a unique opportunity for Shawn to refuse a dehumanizing learning environment. More importantly, he could honor his own humanity—in this case, through "a redirection of ideas" to be "a scholar," which meant confirming his identity as a thinker and writer, maximizing his intellectual capacities, and solving complex problems in communities he cared about.

Acting against Inequity: "I Could Use My Education"

Despite the discouraging practices in his school, Shawn believed he had agency to disrupt this vicious cycle. Therefore, his metaphor essay shifted toward a more agentive tone. Specifically, Shawn expressed:

> My experiences with education make me want to become a teacher. I could use my education to influence the people around me. I would purposely work in an urban school in an urban community. I want to show students it is possible to succeed no matter where you come from. . . . I want to show them sports aren't the only way.

Shawn's shift in his writing was a humanizing act of agency. He positioned himself to "become a teacher" and "use [his] education to influence the people around [him]." As a Black male athlete, Shawn had firsthand experiences with the ways sports were sold to Black male students as the golden ticket to success. While he enjoyed being a football player, he explained, "I also like to write," which was Shawn's way of redefining success for himself and for his community. Beyond writing for himself, he also liked sharing writing with young people. These (re)positionings demonstrate how Shawn's metaphor, "Incarcerated Students," became a generative space to create new realities, first conceptually and later in praxis. Shawn's process is consistent with that described by metaphor theorists Lakoff and Johnson (2011), who argued that metaphors first structure our inner thoughts and then our actions.

Shawn leveraged his developing critical consciousness to cultivate the critical consciousness of other young Black men. He further wrote, "I feel I can help these kids realize teachers don't have to give you knowledge in order for you to learn. . . . I want to make it noticeable that there are people who want these kids to fail." Therefore, Shawn mentored several young Black men in the We Choose to Learn summer program and in his high school during his senior year (after We Choose to Learn). I observed his mentoring in both academic settings. During that time, he created a writing program for elementary students at the local elementary school, which was located on the first floor of his high school building. Utilizing the generativity of metaphor cultivated consequential writing, not only for Shawn, but also for the elementary students he worked with.

On a school visit to Urbantown High School, Shawn's school administrators shared with me, Shawn was well received by the elementary students. In fact, they loved him. Shawn's work with the elementary students far exceeded my expectations for the A LENs project. He did not request or need my permission to create this program; he just did it. Thus, I cannot take credit for Shawn's innovative work with the elementary students. I can only note that it aligned with the inequitable issues he raised in "Incarcerated Students." Furthermore, Shawn's attention to and action toward inequitable schooling conditions align with Harper and Davis (2012). Shawn wanted to use his education to benefit his community, which is consequential. During his senior year in high school (after We Choose to Learn), Shawn applied to college to be an elementary education major. Fortunately, he was accepted into 37 colleges/universities and amassed over $500,000 in academic
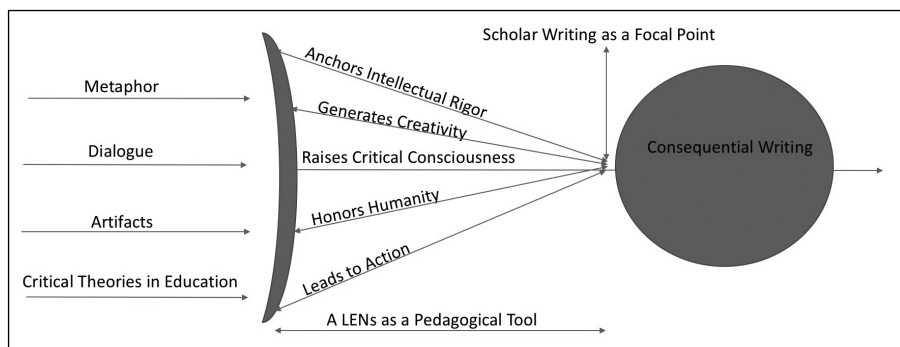
scholarships. Earning academic, as opposed to athletic, scholarships was important to Shawn. In fact, Shawn was featured on the news in Urbantown for having the most college acceptances of any student at his school. Shawn described his experience as "an untold story . . . it's like a whole bunch of untold stories."

Discussion: "When Students Don't Know Their Abilities"

Expanding the theoretical and pedagogical utility of metaphor within the context of an ELA classroom cultivated consequential writing for a Black male secondary student. Consequential writing is intentionally developed by, for, and with historically marginalized communities to facilitate justice-oriented action. It "suspends damage-centered" (Tuck, 2009) writing and ELA instruction more broadly. There are multiple ways to cultivate consequential writing, as I have conceptualized it. However, in this paper, I specifically discussed how I expanded the utility of metaphor as a theoretical and pedagogical framework for cultivating consequential writing because of my explicit goal—to support ELA educators in meeting the diverse literacy needs of their academically high-achieving Black male students, who are often silent and invisible in literacy education and research. The expanded utility of metaphor I described involved a critical literacy and interdisciplinary approach to teaching and learning about metaphor. Figure 3 (metaphor as a theoretical and pedagogical framework) builds on Figure 1 (corrective lens as metaphor) to illustrate how the characteristics of the metaphor framework work together to cultivate consequential writing.

I intentionally centered Shawn's *story*[3] as an opportunity to "identify ways to humanize the classroom space and support [his] ongoing movement into critical consciousness" (San Pedro & Kinloch, 2017). "Incarcerated Students," a metaphor composed by Shawn in my writing course, is an illustrative example of consequential writing. In "Incarcerated Students," Shawn described at least two types of school-based incarceration: physical and intellectual. Both were dehumanizing for Shawn. The physical incarceration produced "discomfort" like pat downs, scanners, cameras, and school lockdowns. However, the intellectual incarceration was the

most damaging, according to Shawn, because "when students are incarcerated but don't know it . . . students don't know their abilities." Shawn's thoughtful words frame this discussion and provide a pathway forward for English education.

Shawn's metaphor was creative. According to cognitive scientists, visual representations of metaphor often exploit accidental connections ingeniously (Turner & Fauconnier, 1999, p. 408). His school bus and handcuffs metaphor and subsequent interview offered a generative "product" and "process" (Schon, 1993) to understand Shawn's complex "contextual association across schemata" (Fludernik, 2005) that would not have been achieved by using one or the other in isolation. Investigating Shawn's logic provided a window into the development of his critical consciousness, which named the paradox in practicing physical and intellectual "lockdowns" in school.

Shawn's metaphor also brought attention to the significance of intellectual rigor in ELA classrooms and schools more broadly. Oftentimes, literacy research about Black male students presents an "ominous myth about the absence of literacy in th[eir] lives" (Kirkland, 2009, p. 376). However, as Shawn explained, school-based literacy tends to lack a "rigorous curriculum." This point is worth elaborating on. Shawn had earned nearly perfect academic scores (3.68 GPA; 32 ACT score) when he came to my writing course as a rising senior in high school. Yet, Shawn quickly realized that mastery of academic literacies did not equate to a "rigorous curriculum" for him. Instead, he preferred reading and writing that "made [him] think" and "ask [himself] questions." Thus, my attention to Shawn's metaphor and academic performance challenges the reliability of academic performance indicators like grades and assessment scores, which are faulty proxies for actual learning. Instead, a combination of academic and critical literacies enhance intellectual rigor for young Black men.

Given the presumed criminality of young Black men in schools (Alexander, 2010; Kinloch et al., 2017; Neal, 2013), facilitating a critical and interdisciplinary approach to metaphor positioned Shawn to "refuse" dehumanizing schooling experiences (Tuck & Yang, 2014) and "suspend damage-centered" writing (Tuck, 2009). Shawn's refusal honored his humanity and allowed him to redefine "success" that leads to action against inequity on his own terms. In this case, honoring his humanity specifically involved using his intellectual ("being a scholar [who] also like[s] to write"), as opposed to his physical (being a football player), influence to change his community. He wanted to teach younger people in urban communities how to write. This unapologetic stance was anchored in a historicized literacy stance for African Americans' "philosophy of literacy for freedom, racial uplift, and leadership" (Perry, 2003).

Overall, Shawn's literacy experience facilitated his divergent thinking and positioned him to juxtapose deep critical, creative, and cognitive literacy work. When asked about the consequences of his metaphor project, Shawn explained:

> This was a great experience. It showed me how people can actually take their time out of their day to help inner city or suburban area children. I've never done anything like

this. This one project I can say flashed my light back on my education because I was starting to doubt the schooling system and was losing interest in school.

Shawn's "doubt [in] the schooling system" and "losing interest in school" are important for ELA educators to be aware of and attentive to—there may be a dangerously short distance between academic "success" and "failure" for young Black men in schools. In other words, the complex—and perhaps false—binary of "low" and "high" academic achievement has serious and material consequences for young Black men. To explicate this point, Kinloch, Burkhard, and Penn (2017) raised an important question: "When school is not enough, how might students learn to cultivate their literacies, nurture their spirits, and chart their own trajectories within out-of-school spaces?" (p. 36). One young Black man in their study, Rendell, explained that he had chosen to "step away from school to learn"—to "step away" being a conscious decision to "not quit, but step back" (p. 49). This is a type of "refusal" (Tuck & Yang, 2014). Rendell's refusal could easily have been Shawn's chosen mode of refusal because Shawn's Honors English class, which he reported receiving an "A" in, failed to adequately equip him with rigorous academic and critical literacies—and Shawn entered school with a deep love for reading and writing. What might this mean for students who "don't know their abilities" yet? In Shawn's case, a critical and interdisciplinary approach to metaphor as well as participation in asset-based, academic enrichment programs like We Choose to Learn, re-ignited his interest in school. This is consequential, given the ways he described Urbantown in "Incarcerated Students."

My focus on consequential writing is not meant to be prescriptive. English educators should adapt the readings and mini-lessons discussed here to fit their classroom dynamic. My description of consequential writing offers new terminology anchored in a historicized literacy stance. Also, I draw attention to Shawn's metaphor, "Incarcerated Students," and his high academic performance in school not because they are *exceptional*. Rather, they complicate "untold stories" about the significance of academic success and dehumanization for young Black men in school.

To be clear, my consequential literacy pedagogy was developed by, with, and for Black and Brown youth from urban contexts. Consequential writing was initially developed as a theoretical and pedagogical tool to concurrently develop the academic and critical literacies of youth of color. With that said, while the characteristics of consequential writing were first conceptualized in reference to an academically high-achieving Black male secondary student, the transferability (Bhattacharya, 2017; Steinberg & Cannella, 2012), as opposed to generalizability, of consequential writing can support English educators and researchers who work with students beyond this study. I included detailed methodological notes and appendices for this explicit purpose. As I mentioned earlier, students who participated in We Choose to Learn had varying levels of reading and writing skills, much like students in any traditional ELA classroom. My scholars' previously high cumulative GPAs and standardized exam scores were not necessarily indicators of

their readiness to engage in creative, critically conscious, or deeply humanizing work—which is not captured by standardized metrics or in Advanced Placement and honors classes. Therefore, I built in multiple reading and writing supports for my students to experience success. In other words, I had high academic demands *and* offered high levels of academic supports.

Looking Ahead (Implications and Conclusions)

Black males already have voice, so English educators cannot *give* them voice. However, English educators can create opportunities for young Black male scholars to *activate* their voices in ELA classrooms. Expanding the theoretical and pedagogical utility of metaphor in the ELA classroom requires serious work. ELA educators must be thoughtful about selecting texts, framing writing, structuring reading and writing supports, creating a collaborative literacy learning culture, and preparing for the unintended consequences of consequential writing. That is, it is both beneficial and dangerous to have consequential assignments in schooling spaces that do not affirm the lives and minds of Black youth. Because critical literacy pedagogies seek to understand, problematize, and *act* against asymmetrical power relationships, English educators and researchers who wish to take up consequential writing must be willing to appropriately attend to the risks and risk-taking students may engage in—especially in potentially dangerous and oppressive learning spaces. You can't predict what students will write about or want to change in their communities, as Bishop (2017) fittingly questioned, "Where can critical literacy learning be authentically exercised?" (p. 376).

It is essential for English educators to recognize the diversity in the literacy needs of their Black male students. This recognition allows for English educators to provide ample viable entry points into writing, offer sustainable writing scaffolds to help Black males realize their own abilities, and provide adequate feedback loops for writing. If English educators increase the conceptual demands of writing without supportive feedback loops, they might unintentionally (re)create dehumanizing pressures for their students. English educators can utilize student writing as a *focal point*, as I did with A LENs to offer a corrective lens for supporting and sustaining consequential writing.

Appendix A: Consequential Writing Assignment

This work is meant to be a tool for personal, political, and intellectual reflection about your educational and life experiences. It is important and beneficial for you to continuously assess your personal development, confront your weaknesses, and acknowledge your strengths. . . . This paper should include a metaphor that compares your academic experiences to something else. Consider how Paulo Freire compared his thoughts about education to "banking." When you think about your experience in education (as a teacher or student), what would you compare it to? This should not be a boring narrative, so please tell your

stories in full detail and help the reader experience the moment by using sensory images, active verbs, and compelling metaphors. Please include a physical artifact to represent your metaphor. We will display these physical artifacts in class on July 24, 2013, when we do our Gallery Walks. You are expected to use 3–5 readings from your classes. At least 2 readings should be from our writing class this summer. You should cite these authors accordingly. Demonstrate through your writing how you understand their ideas and the relationship between their ideas and your experiences.

Appendix B: We Choose to Learn Phase I Data Chart

	Face-to-Face Class Time in Hours	Readings by Author	Assigned Reading Page-Length	Shawn's Writing Samples
Day 1	1.5	N/A	N/A	N/A
Day 2	2	B. Tatum, (1997)	6 pages	1.5 pages
Day 3	1.5	Freire, (1970, Chapter 2)	16 pages	1 page
Day 4	2	Lakoff & Johnson, (2011)	11 pages	1 page
Day 5	2.5	Zancanella, (2007) Ladson-Billings, (1992)	8 pages 7pages	N/A
Day 6	2	Guzzetti, (2013) Kirkland, (2012)	11 pages 9 pages	1 page
Day 7	1.5	X, (2009) Tan, (2009)	4 pages 7 pages	1 page
Day 8	2	No assigned Readings	N/A	1.5 pages
Day 9	2	No assigned Readings	N/A	2 pages
Day 10	1.5	No assigned Readings	N/A	N/A
Day 11	1.5	No assigned Readings	N/A	5 pages (Incarcerated Students)
Total	20 hours	8 Readings	79 pages	14 pages

NOTES

1. All participant and place names are pseudonyms.

2. The national ACT average score was 20.19 in 2013, the year of the study.

3. San Pedro and Kinloch (2017) explained that stories carry the histories of how people from marginalized communities of color have worked against having their voices silenced or re-storied by researchers who hypervisualize pain as hopelessness and ignore the transformative power that exists within the communities where they work (p. 374S).

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Sakeena Everett is assistant professor at the University of Georgia's College of Education. Her research and teaching focus on the literacy development of Black male students, urban education, writing pedagogies and practices, culturally sustaining pedagogies, transformative education, critical perspectives in English education, and English teacher candidate preparation. Her work on the writing practices and educational experiences of high-achieving Black male high school students who participated in an academic enrichment program received the 2016 Outstanding Dissertation Award from the Critical Educators for Social Justice Special Interest Group of the American Educational Research Association. She has been a member of NCTE since 2011.

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