Identities-in-Practice in a Figured World of Achievement
Toward Curriculum and Pedagogies of Hope

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ACCORDING TO HOOKS (2003), "hopefulness inspires us to continue our work for justice even as the forces of injustice may gain greater power for a time" (p. xiv). Like desire, hope has been theorized in psychoanalysis as emanating from want or lack (Mitchell, 1993), but it can also be conceptualized as a productive force that propels creativity, action, and change: "There is no change without dream, as there is no dream without hope…[T]he erstwhile future is a new present, and a new dream experience is forged" (Freire, 1992, p. 77). In directing the gaze toward what *can be,* a becoming (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987), hope incites the multicultural imagination to envision educational experiences that are yet to come (Greene, 1986).

In this article, I examine the interrelatedness of identity construction, experiences of curriculum, and academic achievement of minoritized[1] students as a way to foster such multicultural projects of hope in education. Drawing from a larger case study of a cohort of students from diverse racial, ethnic, and socioeconomic backgrounds at Northeastern Urban Academy (NUA), a selective urban middle school, my analysis focuses primarily on Jonah, a 14-year-old Dominican student, some of his 8th grade peers, and their English language arts (ELA) teacher, Ms. Brian (all names are pseudonyms). Following a brief overview of the research site and the theoretical orientations that inform this work, I examine three marginalizing discourses of achievement (equity, effort, and colorblindness) in the current high stakes context of standardization and accountability (Popkewitz, 1998; Taubman, 2009) that perpetuate deficit perspectives about minoritized students and shape the figured world (Holland, Lachicotte, Skinner, & Cain, 1998; Urrieta, 2007) of achievement at NUA. In subsequent sections, an *assemblage* (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987; Walkerdine, 2007) of narratives by (and about) Jonah serves to illustrate how this figured world of achievement intersects with students' construction and negotiation of identities, positionalities, and experiences. I close by proposing that conceptualizing identities as in-practice, constructed and negotiated in particular figured worlds,

can lead to curricula and pedagogies of hope in an increasingly stratified multicultural and global society.

Constructing and Negotiating Multiple Identities in a Figured World of Achievement

In 2007-2010, when the data for the larger qualitative case study was collected, the NUA student population of 100 students per grade had a fairly even gender balance and consisted of approximately 50% Hispanic or Latin@, 25% White/Caucasian, 12% African American/Black, and 10% Asian, South Asian, or Middle Eastern students from three very different urban school districts. Recognizing that "urbanness is a continuum" (Weiner, 2000, p. 369), and that not all schools who serve lower-income students of color are located in large cities, the term urban serves to situate this study in the context of a large metropolitan city in which students who lived in relatively close proximity to each other may come from very different cultural and socioeconomic backgrounds and have a wide range of experiences in elementary education. Students who resided in one of these three districts were eligible to apply to NUA if they had a grade point average (GPA) of 3.0 or higher and scored "Proficient" or "Excellent" in both their Math and English Language Arts (ELA) standardized state assessments. The school's stated mission was to provide a challenging academic environment for "high achieving" students from diverse backgrounds.

Given my role as an English Language Arts at the school for three years, it became increasingly evident to me that although the school's overall standardized state assessment scores remained consistently high (90-100% of students scoring "Proficient" or above), some students had difficulty meeting the school's expectations with respect to academic achievement as measured by course grades. In spring 2008, the school's course GPA data indicated a wide distribution of student performance in ELA. At the end of their second semester, 24 out of 94 (26%) 6th grade students had semester GPAs below passing in ELA (less than 70% semester grade average); of these 24 students, 21 (87.5%) self-identified as Black or Hispanic. The stratification in achievement patterns is most notable given the current context of accountability, in which standardized assessments are highly valued as predictive of student success (Hillocks, 2001; Ladson-Billings, 2006; Lipman, 2004), at the expense of other measures of learning. Given these students' initial positioning as high achievers, and their continued "Proficiency" on standardized tests, the disproportionately low ELA course grade data suggest that there are factors beyond "ability" and motivation that contribute to students' achievement, particularly raced, classed, and gendered ones, which may significantly impact students' identities and experiences in ELA. As a Latin@ woman, I am/have been part of the marginalized "other" and yet I have also become, via my work as secondary English teacher/administrator/consultant, and academician, part of mainstream education and (sometimes oppressive) achievement discourses in society today. These contradictions are tied to the assumptions that undergird my work—that our many subjectivities, the identities that we construct and negotiate, mediate our engagements in research and practice. I am drawn to the intersection between students' identities, experiences, of curriculum, and achievement because it begins to illuminate regulatory structures and discourses that can be deconstructed—this type of analysis, among others, seems to catalyze the necessary "conscious, practical work" (Freire & Macedo, 1987) of recognizing and exploring difference as part of the struggle toward a more just society.

Similarly aware of the tensions implicit in such intersections between identities and achievement, student participants in the study reported tensions in their negotiations of multiple identities and perceptions about achievement. For example, in one interview, Manuel discussed how being a self-identified "Hispanic" positioned him:

> Here, if you say "I'm Hispanic," they'll say like, "Are you passing?" … You know, ignorant stuff like that. If you think it's a White person, then you'd be like, "Ah, they're passing."

For Manuel, self-identifying as Hispanic automatically put in question (for others) whether he was "passing," or meeting the minimum academic expectations at NUA. Although there were students from all backgrounds in his and other cohorts with both high and low GPAs, being "White" was somehow automatically associated with "passing" and being "Hispanic" was not.

To address such identifications and the positionalities with which they were interconnected, I invited a gender-balanced purposive sample (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007) of eight students of color who represented the achievement range in the class and expressed a willingness to engage in self-reflexive conversations about their multiple identities and experiences in ELA. Over the course of the spring 2010 semester, I collected data from various sources: school documents and policies, ELA lesson plans and curriculum materials, students' written work and portfolios, results of a student questionnaire on students' identities, and their self-published student profiles. I also conducted two interviews with each participant and one focus group discussion with all of the focal students. The data for the larger study were analyzed in an ongoing, iterative (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007) examination of how students constructed and negotiated multiple identities and experienced the curriculum in the figured world of achievement in their ELA classroom.

In this analysis, I conceptualize the student as a negotiator of the multiple identities derived from available discourses of achievement and their shifting and overlapping subjectivities in academic contexts. While critical theories tend to focus on how identities such as race and ethnicity are embedded in social and institutional hierarchies, poststructural thinking around subjectivity attends to the "shifting, fragmented, multi-faceted, and contradictory nature of our experiences" (Davies, 1994, p. 1). Focusing on subjectivity as a way to understand the interplay of multiple identities serves to problematize the notion of a stable, unitary self that is often implicit in the framing of identities as a series of "parts" to a "whole" which make up an individual (Hagood, 2002). Although scholars in various disciplines have questioned the role of race, class, and gender identity politics (Crenshaw, 1991; Moya and Hames-Garcia, 2000) in relation to research and scholarship on intersectionality (Andersen & Collins, 2007; Asher, 2007) and subjectivities (Davies, 1994; Davies & Harre, 1990; Miller, 2005), I agree with Weis, Fine, Wessen and Wong's (2000) position regarding the need to acknowledge participants' lived presence of race, class, and gender. In this study, the raced, classed, and gendered identifications I address are those that students (and occasionally teachers or administrators) identified. Throughout my analysis, I emphasize that raced, classed, and gendered constructs are not understood to be definitive or prescriptive, but rather interrelated to the multiple identities and subject positions that participants, students and teachers alike, constructed and negotiated. Framed by an identities-in-practice framework that bridges the critical emphasis on identities as situated within/among power relations with poststructural concerns about shifting and multiple subjectivities (Caraballo, 2011), my analysis of these student participants' narratives addresses how identities derived from their experiences in the context of existing social hierarchies (such

as those associated with social constructions of race, ethnicity, class, gender, achievement) are implicit in students' academic identities in the context of classroom practice at NUA.

Discourses and Identities in NUA's Figured World of Achievement

To better understand the student's identities and experiences at NUA, I first turn our attention to the discourses that produce figured worlds of achievement in schools and classrooms. The discourses of achievement that regulate social institutions such as schools are generally uninterrogated, often perpetuating conceptions and attributions regarding students from nondominant (Gutierrez, 2008) backgrounds that are based on a history of White middle-class dominance (Anyon, 1980; Banks, 1993; Jones, 2006; Lareau, 2003). These discourses, perpetuated and reified by "visible" artifacts such as grades and standardized test scores, are embodiments of raced, classed, and gendered identities, and the acquisition of certain skills, knowledges, and literacies. At NUA, discourses of equity, effort, and colorblindness produce particular discursive academic identities or versions of "student" and "achiever" to be taken up, resisted, or reframed, by NUA students.

Equity as a discourse of achievement. The United States is characterized by its free and universal educational system. For many lower-income students of color, in particular, academic success is one of few paths to higher education and gainful employment in a highly technical global economy (Muller, Riegle-Crumb, Schiller, Wilkinson, & Frank, 2010). Equality, as well as justice, (as implicit in the title *No Child Left Behind*), is predicated upon students' "access" to educational opportunities. The promise of social mobility via the opportunity to achieve is an idea that students and their families can rally around, along with the educators who are committed to their students' success. Suma shared in an interview that her 5th grade teacher, "who pushed [her] really hard," encouraged her to apply to NUA. She also recalled her mother's hope that NUA would prepare her daughter "for college and things that [they] didn't get to do when [they were] younger" due to life circumstances such as work and family responsibilities. Suma, her teacher, and her parents believed that the college preparatory education offered at NUA would level the playing field for these students.

In the "recognition of particular populations for inclusion" in the equity mission of the school, in this case lower-income students and students of color, there are implicit "commitments about correcting wrongs" (Popkewitz, 1998, p. 10). However, "the very desires to include are inscribed in systems of thought that create continuums of value that differentiate, divide and abject" (p.10). In a letter to parents, Mr. Santiago professed the school's commitment to equity and diversity by asserting that "academic excellence and high expectations and rigor do not have to be compromised by diversity." His assertion obscures the assumptions held by school personnel about what it might mean for "diverse" students (read "lower-income students of color") to be successful in the "excellent" and "rigorous" academic context of NUA. Within these assumptions, the "desires to include" marginalized students as a way of "correcting wrongs" frame hope in terms of filling a void or lack, rather than as a productive impetus for change.

Furthermore, conceptions of achievement are informed by conceptualizations of equity and social justice that are mainly distributive. Connell (1993) explains that distributive social justice is largely attentive to the creation of purportedly universal and accessible institutions and programs. At NUA, all coursework is designed to prepare students for the college-preparatory path leading to greater equity. As stated in the school's mission statement, "[The] program of study provides a challenging academic experience that prepares its students for selective

colleges." Therefore, due to accountability pressures and concerns about standardization within the school, the curriculum tended to focus on the skills needed to perform in traditional academic settings and assessments. In an interview, Suma described the way her assignments were assessed as constraining her ability to express herself in ELA: "the rubric is already made, there's no opinion behind it. It's like just do this and then hand it in. Although students felt like they had more freedom in their informal journal writing, academic essays were privileged as part of the "challenging academic experience" that would prepare students for future study.

Committed to preparing students for college admission, NUA's faculty and administration did not seem aware of the ways in which the schools' conceptions of equity, achievement, and success (Wills, Lintz, & Mehan, 2004) excluded students' cultural literacies (Street, 1984) and funds of knowledge (Moll & Gonzalez, 2004), implicitly and explicitly privileging some dispositions over others. As a grand narrative of education, achievement operates as one of the "mechanisms of the state" (Foucault, cited in Stoler, p. 84). The fact that all students are, in theory, "eligible" to succeed within the grand narrative of achievement is particularly problematic because this meritocratic façade obscures the racialized discourses that underlie the rhetoric of achievement pedagogies and reforms. Some of these racialized discourses are perpetuated by understandings about ability and effort in diverse and multicultural academic settings such as NUA.

Ability vs. effort in discourses of achievement. Like many teachers and educators in contemporary educational discourse, NUA teachers believed that all students were capable of equal academic success if they put forth enough effort. Similar to teachers in other subjects, Ms. Brian made references to effort in virtually all 8th grade students' mid-semester progress grade narratives in Fall 2009 and Spring 2010: "put 100% effort into every assignment as every little point adds up" and "in order to improve, [s/he] needs to be sure to study well in advance of all tests." While the behaviors and attitudes associated with academic engagement and achievement certainly provide opportunities to NUA students, the uncritical internalization of these discourses has significant unintended consequences when students position themselves according to binaries regarding race/ethnicity and effort/achievement. As Jason articulated in our focus group discussion, and others concurred, the correlation of effort and achievement contributes to students' internalization of perspectives about themselves as "Hispanic" students:

Jason: They are obsessed with their homework.
Limarys: Who's "they"?
Jason: White people . . . They spend most of their night, like their whole night, on homework and stuff, while us Hispanics we do try, but we are like, "OK, we are done."

Jason, who calls himself and others "Hispanic," positions himself as removed from Whites' "obsession" with homework. His implicit critique suggests that White students are narrowly focused on achievement, while Hispanic students "do try" but also have other interests and concerns to attend to—interests and concerns that are perhaps outside of what is framed as "academic" by mainstream discourses of achievement. His statement resonates with Jonah's differentiation between students who come to school to learn, not to "act like their race, as he shared in his interview. Jonah positions some students of color as aligning themselves with a White/neutral space where students come "to learn," in contrast to those who "act like they were Dominicans and talk about everything and like, make a drama." Acting "Dominican" is understood to be tangential to learning and inappropriately "dramatic" in contrast to properly neutral and rational mainstream norms often associated with the White middle class.

Beyond perpetuating attributions about engagement and achievement based on race and/or ethnicity, correlations between effort and achievement among students of color who do succeed in school are often used as "examples to support the claim that the only barrier to fulfilling the American dream is a lack of individual motivation or effort" (Markus, 2008, p. 87) and propagate deficit perspectives about less academically "successful" students of color as unmotivated, lazy, disengaged, or lacking parental support. Similar to Hatt's (2007) description of the figured world of "smartness" in schools, in which artifacts such as grades and diplomas signify "smartness," at NUA, grades, test scores, the Principal's Scholars list, and behaviors such as oral participation in class discussions are part of the figured world of achievement. Hatt argues that the ways in which smartness is constructed in schools "is especially harmful for racially, ethnically, and economically marginalized youth" because it "operates as a powerful factor in the education of marginalized students who are often wrongfully left feeling or labeled as incompetent" (p. 148). Abstract artifacts such as labels (e.g., honors, gifted) that make up the figured world of smartness in schools are "semiotic mediators" that make smartness appear ''real'' and "tangible or biologically based rather than as something socio-culturally produced" (p. 151). These artifacts function as a way to classify students as "smart/not," "passing/failing" and/or "motivated/lazy" in academic contexts.

Colorblind, Colormute: Conceptualizing "Diversity" in Academic Contexts.

According to Tough (2006), the achievement gap exists in our educational system "because we have built it that way," and it is in our power to "create a different system, one that educates most (if not all) poor minority students to high levels of achievement" (p. 13). However, this achievement/failure binary conceals expressions of racism that legitimize, validate, and reward what has been associated with middle-class Whiteness and "others" that which is not. Uninterrogated perspectives about students of color are further propagated by a "colorblind"[2] discourse in contemporary educational contexts that manifests itself in school's curriculum, official documents, and images. At NUA, despite the school's emphasis on the education of diverse students, discourses of achievement are arguably colorblind/colormute (Pollock, 2004). As Pollock suggests, Americans' concern about being labeled as racists is a likely reason for the "muting," via avoidance or suppression, of race talk; some even argue that "using race labels publicly is tantamount to reproducing racism itself" (2004, p. 2). Unfortunately, the omission of race labels, or colorblind discourse, does not mean that racial categories and inequalities will be erased from our minds, nor that race-based patterns of inequality will disappear. A position announcement for a faculty opening illustrates the way in which diversity at NUA is arguably addressed from a colorblind perspective:

> Intellectual curiosity, a humanistic world outlook, the capacity to work in teams and be a school leader, and a commitment to professional excellence are requisites. Bilingual proficiency (English–Spanish) and experience working with diverse students in urban settings is highly desirable.

In this announcement, "neutral" qualities such as "intellectual curiosity" and a "humanistic world outlook," as well as professional and leadership skills are required, while "experience working with diverse students in urban settings," is "highly desirable." The reference to diverse students in urban settings is a colormute proxy for lower-income African American/Black, Latin@, and/or immigrant students that deemphasizes race and class. The privileging of intellectual and

professional qualities, presumably inherent ones, suggests that the experiential knowledge to be gained by working with diverse urban youth, while beneficial, is not really necessary. There is an implicit colorblindness in assuming that an intellectual, capable, and professional teacher, regardless of background or experience, will be well-suited (and well-disposed) to work with any student.

A similarly colorblind ideology is implicit in ideas surrounding students' effort and academic motivation that came up in my interview with Ms. Brian as we were discussing the upcoming unit on *Romeo and Juliet*:

Ms. Brian: I also think that kids who are not willing to put in the work are not gonna like it. Because, even if Shakespeare is fun, like, it's still, still requires some effort, to, to stop, figure out what's going on, figure out what's being said, ask questions when you don't understand. So, I don't know. I feel like the kids who pick it up and go, "Oh, this is hard," and then put it down, who don't have a lot of patience or perseverance with it. . . .

Limarys: Why do you think some kids aren't willing to do the work? What do you think their reasons are?

Ms. Brian: I don't know. Maybe disinterest. Just kids who don't—who aren't really that focused on academics…

Limarys: Disinterest in academics? Or disinterest in what you're asking them to do?

Ms. Brian: Mmm. Both…and I could…almost tell you who those kids are.

Similar to the assumptions reflected in the ELA faculty position announcement about what it takes to be a successful teacher at NUA, this interview excerpt conveys a colorblind approach to students' motivation and effort toward academic tasks—or, possibly, an internalized suppression of "race talk" as inappropriate (Pollock, 2004). While making generalizations about students' potential connections to class texts based on race and ethnicity would be problematic, the fact that the ever-present subtext of race (Greene & Abt-Perkins, 2003) is excluded, whether deliberately or not, perpetuates uninterrogated assumptions about students' motivation and engagement without considering the importance of cultural relevance (Sperling, 2003) and cultural capital in students' engagement with texts and assignments. The students who Ms. Brian thinks "are not willing to put in the work" are cast as disinterested and "not really that focused on academics"—and, since Ms. Brian can "almost tell you who those kids are," these students are likely to be positioned as such at the first expression of difficulty or "disinterest" in this unit on Shakespeare. Interestingly, a few days after our interview, during the pre-unit activities for *Romeo and Juliet* in ELA class, I recorded in my field notes that when Ms. Brian asked who could define "iambic pentameter" and "sonnet," the three students who volunteered responses where White. While many students in the class eventually participated on some aspect of the discussion and/or the assignments pertaining to *Romeo and Juliet*, however, my fieldnotes from class observations and teacher interviews indicate that the same three White students remained the most engaged and participatory throughout the Shakespeare unit. Although there are many possible explanations for their apparent "advantage," including students' previous experience or exposure to Shakespeare, which may or may not be linked to a student's cultural and/or academic background, the framing of whom might do well in the unit strictly due to "interest" and "effort" can obscure raced and classed patterns in students' experiences of the curriculum that a teacher may otherwise have been able to proactively address.

Furthermore, colorblind ideology is "damaging to academic identity development for children of color" due to an "implicit definition of educational equality as that of equivalent treatment" that "does not take into account differences in the cultural capital—the cache and quality of life chances that accrue" for mainstream students (Murrell, 2007, pp. 9-10). Today, "acts of racism today are much more covert," as racist practices are present in various school and academic structures and are

> hidden in the meaning systems of a school community, such as when, for example, the ideology of colorblindness shapes schooling practices and policies in ways that place children of color at a disadvantage with respect to their White peers (Murrell, 2007, p. 8).

Despite the evidence that in the fall of 2009, 17 of the 19 (89.47%) students in the 8th grade who had overall GPAs below passing (below 70%) self-identified as Black or Latin@, and similar numbers were observed in the ELA course grades, my field notes indicate that race and ethnicity did not enter into my conversations with Mr. Santiago, or at faculty meetings that I attended at NUA in which achievement and student progress were discussed. This unaddressed disproportionality, however, did not go unnoticed by students and teachers, who developed their own attributions and justifications for these "facts," as evident in Jason's comment during our focus group about how "Hispanic students are loud, and we are always failing and stuff." Having examined the interconnectedness of notions about equity, ability, effort, and colorblindness in contemporary discourses of achievement in education, it is possible to imagine how teachers, administrators, and students themselves participate in creating the figured worlds in which they will construct identities-in-practice.

The Student as Assemblage in NUA's Figured World of Achievement

Discourses create "'social positions' (perspectives) from which people are 'invited' (summoned) to speak, listen, act, read and write, think, feel, believe, and value in certain characteristic, historically recognizable ways, combined with their own individual styles and creativity" (Gee, 1996, p. 128). Notions of equity, effort, and colorblindness, as discourses of achievement, inform how students construct and position themselves in their academic context as well as how they interact with, resist, and respond to curriculum in the figured world of the classroom (Wortham, 2004, 2006). A key assumption in this study was that students' narratives of their curricular experiences and their versions of themselves in the figured world of their ELA classroom, as elicited in interviews and present in their written work, were connected to the construction of their multiple identities and experience of literacy practices. To disrupt the tendency to construe narratives as orderly versions or representations of experiences (Ochs & Capps, 1996, p. 19), I drew upon Walkerdine's (2007) use of Deleuze and Guattari's (1987) conceptualization of *assemblages* to present narratives that are understood as "not fixed or static" representations, but rather composite portraits that depict a "constantly shifting set of relations" (Walkerdine, 2007, p. 33). Framing a student's multiple identities as an assemblage, a composite representation assembled out of multiple raced, classed, gendered, and academic identities shaped by discourses of achievement, renders visible a multiplicity of subjectivities and positionalities that are simultaneously available in this figured world as students (and teachers) experience the curriculum.

I present Jonah *as assemblage* of/among/between a multiplicity of possible identities within the figured world of achievement at NUA. The assemblage is a heuristic tool that

demonstrates the interconnectedness of multiple identities and subject positions that are not fixed—the concept of assemblage is helpful in illustrating the rhizomatic multiplicity and connectedness of multiple identities and subjectivities because "[a]n assemblage is precisely this increase in the dimensions of a multiplicity that necessarily changes in nature as it expands its connections" (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987, p.8). Building upon this notion, I present narratives by/about Jonah to draw some of the between/among multiplicities of selves, rather than as attempts to "make sense" or "reconcile" his academic identities and experiences (Ochs & Capp, 1996). Jonah *as assemblage* encompasses a multiplicity of identities made available within/among the discourses equity, effort, and colorblindness that shape the figured world of achievement at NUA. The assemblage momentarily suspends the dynamic set of relations between and among multiple rhizomatic identities in the context of practice long enough to illustrate the otherwise (in)visible negotiations among students' academic selves-in-practice and imagine potential spaces for hope in the context of the figured world of achievement.

Jonah *as Assemblage*: Between "Passing Student" and "Failing Student"

In February 2010, Mr. Santiago, sent Jonah's parents a letter indicating that Jonah might not be able to return to NUA for the next academic year:

> Your child is in danger of not being promoted to 9th grade in June 2010 because your child is not yet performing at the level needed to meet the criteria in the subject(s) listed below. Your child can only be promoted to the ninth grade if your child meets the relevant promotion standards in June.

That was not the first time Jonah's parents had received such a letter. A similar letter had been sent home in April, 2009:

> It is very likely that [Jonah] will, unfortunately, fail the current grade…Jonah will … be enrolled in our Academic Support Program (ASP)… The ASP is designed to assist students in remediating their grades and is the last opportunity NUA will provide for them for passing the grade.

The Academic Support Program (ASP) is a bi-weekly "course" which functioned as a structured study hall and allowed students to earn up to 15 points toward their semester grade in the subject(s) to be remediated if they completed all of their makeup work.

The foreboding 2009 letter may have had some role in motivating Jonah, who did manage to "pass" 7th grade. In our focus group discussion, Jonah shared that:

> Something that motivates me is trying to prove Mr. Santiago wrong … because last year he told my mom, like around January, that I wasn't gonna make it, and that it was possible that I would need to go to another school, and I passed last year with a 75 GPA.

The idea of proving Mr. Santiago wrong resonated with some of the other students in the group, most of whom felt that although it was true that the principal was trying to motivate them, he actually ended picking on the Hispanic students and positioning them as failing students (Hurtado, Cervantez, & Eccleston, 2010; Rubin, 2007). But Jonah's "passing" in 7th grade, while sufficient to meet promotion requirements for the next academic year, masked the fact that performing at the level of "passing" in high school may still render him ineligible for the fulfillment of his career goals (Knight, 2003) and prevent him from taking advantage of some of the benefits of the accelerated program offered by the school at the high school level.

Perhaps most significantly, Jonah's "passing student" identity kept him on the very edge of his "failing student" identity. Jonah had positioned himself as a hardworking student when he enrolled in NUA. In his interview, Jonah recalled that in 5th grade, when it was time to apply to

middle schools, he had "started focusing more on school" and he was then "a passing student" who "decided that [he] would rather challenge [himself] than just pass with a mediocre school." In the same interview, however, he talked about how at NUA he began to identify as a "failing student" and cultivate friendships with other "troublemakers":

> I had more fun in ASP, seriously, than I had in the whole year… We would learn the stuff that we needed to, but then we'd just . . . you'd have more fun in ASP than anywhere else, and that's how you become friends with people, and those people that were in ASP were basically the troublemakers.

He reasoned that being a failing student worked in his advantage because he could get away with doing less work at home while taking advantage of being in ASP. Being in ASP intersected with being a "failing student" in Jonah's construction of his academic identities. In a second interview, Jonah discussed the "advantage" of being a failing student:

> As a failing student you have a little bit of advantage because you have ASP to help you and you can re-do things, and now like you understand it better, but you can get higher grades. And as a passing student, people would expect more from you...and people start asking you more information and stuff. So, like, I don't like to put pressure on myself because I don't like to be wrong with other people. Like if they ask me something, I … so I just consider myself a failing student even if I have good grades. Like I'm [now] passing with an 80 GPA.

Although quantitative assessment data is often all that "counts" in the current context of high-stakes accountability, Jonah's narratives make evident that grades and standardized assessments paint a very diffuse and/or inaccurate portrait of many students. Nonetheless, they do function to position students in very particular ways (e.g., as achievers or non-achievers).

While he was technically a passing student due to his overall GPA at the time of the interview, and, therefore, less likely to be on his parents' and Mr. Santiago's radar, Jonah resisted the pressure of the figured world of achievement and aligned himself with other "troublemakers" and "failing students" in order to prevent himself from being "wrong" when other students asked him for help. Jonah was very aware of appearances and maintaining particular image(s) among teachers as well as peers was a recurring theme in his narratives (Cousins, 1999; Horvat & Lewis, 2003; Nasir et al., 2009). For example, he shared in an interview that he lost points in more than one assignment because he did not "like to turn in late work" (even though he had completed the assignment) and lowered his participation score because he would not share his opinion if he was not sure of "what he was talking about." In an ELA journal entry in which students were asked to reflect on the meaning of their names, Jonah seems to be performing nonchalance regarding what others think of him:

> I feel that when people hear my name they think of trouble because of last year. This shows that some people don't like me and that doesn't bother me. I get along with the rest of the grades and all the other teachers.

In another journal entry in which students are asked to reflect on their appearance, Jonah comments on the elements, such as his race, height, and scar, that influence how people think of him as a troublemaker:

> The elements that can be seen from the outside are my race my height and if I am talkative or not I feel like you I feel like the scar on my face makes people characterize me as trouble when the scar is just a small accident that happened in the past.

Beyond constructing and negotiating academic identities as a failing/passing student and troublemaker, Jonah journaled and spoke about his grandfather's educational and professional

accomplishments in the Dominican Republic. In his interview, he talked about his participation in his family's social and bilingual literacies, such as taking on the role of translator for his parents. Jonah described his role as a translator with palpable pride:

Jonah:	I'm basically always a translator for my parents and my grandparents, and I'm always dealing with their problems, like if I have to call someplace. So I'm very independent, like, I'm not very timid of like having to do something.
Limarys:	And how do you feel about doing that? About having that role in your family?
Jonah:	It makes me feel, like, important because that means that I'm kind of necessary.

While Jonah may have embraced his positionality as a failing student in ELA and other classes, he positioned himself quite differently in context of his role as a translator in his family (Orellana, Reynolds, Domer & Meza, 2003; Saracho, 2007). Indeed, during an interview, when I asked him what motivated him to keep trying in school, his response was immediate—to not disappoint his parents, who expected him to be able to pass all this classes. Similary, he wrote in his ELA journal:

I come from Dominican Republic, [sic] Being a student in [NUA] to my parents is a privilege because not all schools are like this and to blow a chance here would be the downfall of many family members' dreams.

Given to his desire to not disappoint his parents, "blowing" this chance would also be downfall of *his* dreams and hopes.

When prompted, Jonah continued to set explicit goals to help him improve academically. In his statement of goals in ELA class, he stated that he would sit "around all girls that are very intelligent" who would not distract him so that he could "reach [his] goal for the year in English" and keep his "behavior in check." He hoped that associating with these girls in ELA would help keep him focused—his identities-in-practice as a Hispanic male student constructed him as less "focused" than the girls at his table (Lopez, 2003; Youdell, 2003). The dynamic interplay between the multiplicities of Jonah's passing and failing student identities illustrates how he negotiated conflicting pressures and tensions among his parents, teachers, administrators, and peers.

Rather than uncritically internalizing the discourses of achievement that shape their figured world and render their hope(s) less tangible, students found various ways to negotiate and reframe their academic experiences. Jonah and his peers reframed their identity negotiations and experiences of curriculum in ways that ranged from using journaling to comment on others' perceptions of them to co-opting a "failing student" identity as way to subvert expectations about achievement. Students seemed to both embrace and resist how they were positioned in the figured world of achievement—a positioning that often led to the "othering" (hooks, 1990) of their raced, classed, and gendered selves in their academic context.

Assembling Identities, Curriculum, and Achievement in Context

A rhizomatic identities-in-practice in figured worlds lens makes a case for how context matters—how an academic space is shaped and regulated by visible and tangible things like course objectives, classroom rules, and grades, as well as factors that remain beneath the surface.

This study documents how the figured world of achievement at NUA, shaped by discourses of equity, effort, and colorblindness and cultivated by academic and administrative practices at the school, can create invisible walls that alienate minoritized students. The interconnectedness of identities, curriculum, and achievement, as illustrated via an identities-in-practice lens, renders those inequities visible. For example, Jonah *as assemblage* renders visible how restrictive academic discourses, and the conceptions of literacy that they engender, can be for minoritized students. The expectation that students master academic literacies is not necessarily restrictive—what does seem to have a restrictive and marginalizing effect is the uncritical way in which essayist literacies and mainstream academic identities, normalized as associated with White middle-class norms, "other" and position the cultural literacies (e.g. bilingual practices, slang, African American Vernacular English) and identities (e.g. "failing student") associated with some minoritized students, as incompatible with an academic context. This incompatibility reifies the notion of a "gap" in achievement between minoritized students and their White and middle-class peers. More importantly, it prevents scholars, researchers, policymakers, and educators from interrogating the ways in which discourses of achievement and mainstream academic knowledges, among other factors, actually perpetuate the conditions that lead to differential achievement patterns.

Although quantitative and qualitative data are often framed quite separately in identities research, I argue that researchers and educators can begin to "assemble" multiple versions of curriculum and students' narrativized selves-in-practice to illustrate the interrelatedness of identities, experiences, and achievement across multiple literacy practices and content areas. While the social, epistemological, and institutional marginalization of students of color in educational contexts is unfortunately not new, this article emphasizes points of intersection in which multiple discourses, identities, and subjectivities inform what Jonah (and some of his peers) experienced at NUA and how they authored selves-in-practice by reading across and within quantitative data (such as his grades and standardized test scores) as well as qualitative data (student narratives in interviews and a focus group, written assignments, and classroom observations). Similar to the incorporation of interpretive visual analysis as "text" (Riessman, 2008), quantitative data may be conceptualized as yet another type of "text" to be juxtaposed with qualitative data. An identities-in-practice lens thus challenges all of us, educators and researchers alike, to continue to explore how quantitative data may be read as one of the many "texts" that position minoritized students in academic contexts, and to what effects. Thus, building upon research that examines students' identity negotiations as struggles for equity and power in mainstream society (Carter, 2008; Conchas, 2006; Knight et al., 2004; Murrell, 2007; Stinson, 2008, among others), as well as upon poststructural conceptions of multiple and fluid subjectivities (Davies, 1994; Davies & Harre, 1990), framing identities as dynamic and constructed in-practice contributes to a robust critical scholarship on the intersections of raced, classed, and gendered identities. Such a framing of identities renders visible the nuanced ways in which broader discourses of achievement marginalize lower-income students of color in particular schools and classrooms.

Toward Curriculum and Pedagogies of Hope: Engaging the Multicultural Imagination

Conceptualizing students' identities-in-practice in figured worlds as rhizomatic, provisional, and contextual against the backdrop of an increasingly narrow culture of

standardization and accountability broadens the scope of curricular and pedagogical theorizing in urban and multicultural educational contexts. Part of the struggle to sustain the transformative power of research and scholarship on multicultural education and the education of minoritized students involves engaging grand narratives in constant dialogue with counternarratives in ways that impact not just research and scholarship, but also create spaces for curricula and pedagogies of hope. Such hope, however, is not meant to represent or converge into a single, increasingly mainstream (Ladson-Billings, 2004), purpose. According to Giroux (1987), all educators "must develop pedagogical conditions in their classrooms that allow different student voices to be heard and legitimated. This suggests confirming and legitimizing the knowledges and experiences through which students give meaning to their lives" (p. 21). This study points to discursive spaces and sites of possibility (Oesterreich, 2003) in which educators may begin to challenge historically constructed and propagated power relations typically obscured in classrooms, as exemplified by Jonah's role as a translator and knower in his family. As students demonstrate creative and agentic ways to negotiate, resist, and reframe restrictive academic environments and their lives in in-between spaces, lives in the neither/nor (Guerra, 2011), there is a need for the ongoing theorization of contextual approaches to identities, curriculum, and achievement that can lead to greater opportunities and less restrictive academic environments.

More broadly, we must engage the social and multicultural imagination of scholars, researchers, and educators by promoting the development of situated, context-based curricula and fostering new understandings of curriculum and academic achievement that incorporate the narratives and perspectives of students from a wide range of backgrounds in the interest of democracy and social justice in education. The focus on students' narratives, assembled in ways that demonstrate the multiple interfaces of identities, curriculum, and achievement, incites scholars and educators to re-vision the curriculum as a space of opportunity, democratic dialogue, critical self-awareness, and hope. Such meaningful curricula are unlikely to emerge from single reform agenda or the mapping of "best practices" in curriculum. As Heller (1990) proposes, a radical philosophy may be defined as one that "constitutes itself from the tension between what is and what ought to be, between appearance and essence, between opinion and knowledge. Like every philosophy, it understands what is on the basis of its definition of what ought to be" (Heller, 1990, p. 141). A radical approach to education that leads to curricula and pedagogies of hope, therefore, is one that analyzes and criticizes revolutions, initiatives and reforms according to what ideals it privileges and/or sacrifices, what agendas it promotes, and whose interests are served.

Acknowledgements

Notes

1. I use the term "minoritized" as an allusion to the positioning of immigrant students, lower-income students, and/or students of color as "outside" the mainstream.

2. I address colorblind discourses as underlying an increasing trend in US policies and legislation to exclude explicit references to/consideration of race, ethnicity, and gender in education. Examples include the *California Civil Rights Initiative* (also known as Proposition 209; 1996), which outlawed race, ethnicity, and gender, as considerations in college admissions decisions, and *Parents Involved in Community Schools v. Seattle School District* (2007), which deemed racial integration efforts in public schools as unconstitutional. These laws and policies obscure society's discomfort with race, ethnicity, and gender (Caraballo, 2009), and perpetuate the masking of important concerns about race, class, and gender under presumably "neutral" terms such as "diversity" in education.

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