"Taking It to the Mic": Pedagogy of June Jordan's Poetry for the People and Partnership with an Urban High School
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Published by: National Council of Teachers of English
Stable URL: http://www.jstor.org/stable/40173177
Accessed: 18/07/2011 16:52

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For many youth whom I have encountered, poetry serves as a medium to speak about their experiences in ways often not censored by structures and rules. It is revered as an aesthetic form of expression with freedom to in/exclude elements of grammar and aspects of language. Noted in several National Council of Teachers of English publications, poetry lets students’ imaginations run free while exposing them to a particular genre of writing (c.f., Somers, 1999; Michaels, 1999; Moon, 2000; Jago, 2002/1999). Accordingly, I recall classroom scenarios from my years as a high school teacher and college instructor—students with increased interest in poetry as compared to, say, essay or term papers. How could it be that poetry makes such a difference in students’ interaction with writing? What follows (along with others in this issue) is an attempt to provide some possible answers.

For decades poetry has been a centerpiece of classroom curriculum and instruction. In the humanities it is commonplace to examine poetry as a genre of literature because it is deemed sophisticated, enduring, and revelatory of language use. Though usually more compact than prose, poetry makes intensive use of language and literary devices such as theme, tone, irony, and metaphor to influence its interpretation. More importantly for this paper, however, such use of language is key to the construction of poems as derived from creative differences and democratic engagement (see Kinloch, this issue). At times the relative distinction between “good” vs. “bad” poetry is set apart by criteria adhering to these devices and particular levels of intensity, craft, and precision. As I have found in my own experience as a student and later teacher in U.S. urban schools, the kinds of poetry used in many classrooms have relied heavily on the so-called “classics.” With the
exception of popular works by the likes of Langston Hughes or Maya Angelou, it has not been commonplace to see other poets of color's works incorporated in English reading and composition courses (Reed, 2003). Despite multiculturalism gaining some momentum in schools and inside classrooms over the last three decades, there still stands a hegemonic, hidden curriculum that advances the experience of historically privileged male-dominated whites (Apple, 1995/2000; Nieto, 2000). The focus largely remains, as pointed out to me by former students, on the experiences of "dead white men."

The prolific and most-published African American essayist and poet June Jordan knew about these kinds of limited textual representations. As professor in the African American Studies department at the University of California, Berkeley, she ventured to challenge these institutionalized Ivory Tower traditions and subsequently established a university program called Poetry for the People (P4P) in 1991. Such efforts to integrate literature courses with fresh material on the college level, however, still left many high school students in urban settings receiving traditional “classic” poetry in their English classes. In a joint effort to sustain artistic and political empowerment, Jordan and her students explored means to “democratize” poetry in and outside the confines of the university campus. They drew upon Dewey’s (1916) notion of democracy through education to shape their role and the role of schools to develop a just society, in short, the essence behind illiteracy. It was then that the partnership with Bellevue High School was born, becoming P4P’s premiere educational project since its inception in 1996.

In this article I explore from a pedagogical standpoint June Jordan’s Poetry for the People and its partnership with Bellevue High as one means to innovate the teaching and learning of poetry on the high school level. It is part of a larger qualitative study on poetry and literacy development in the lives of urban youth conducted in 2002. The perspectives I offer center on the “collaborative intervention” between high school English teachers, students, and college student-teacher-poets.

**Theoretical Framework**

Poetry surfaces between the bounds of literacy and pedagogy, and involves one’s ability to read, create, analyze, and criticize. This ability as a formulation of identity influences how we think, feel, and act—or on the basis of everyday interactions, how we live our lives within the very contexts we occupy. Embedded with meaning and experience, this ability is essential in validating as well as building upon knowledge and skills we already possess,
whether we openly claim the title of poet or not. According to Greene (1988), a long-time advocate of the arts and other “spheres of freedom,” it is this kind of ability that reflects our imagination, our exploration of alternative possibilities, in ways that can move us as members of a pluralistic society toward action. She draws explicit connections between education and freedom and notes the importance of “palpability.” She writes, “It would mean the granting of audibility to numerous voices seldom heard before and, at once, an involvement with all sorts of young people being provoked to make their own the multilinguality needed for restructuring of contemporary experience and thematizing lived worlds” (p. 127). Elsewhere, Greene (2000) also suggests that forms of expression such as poetry must exist as part of our lived worlds, in shared as well as public spaces. Poetry, taken from this perspective then, has the potential to defamiliarize or disclose aspects of experience ordinarily never seen, opening possibilities for critical awareness and reflection with self and others.

Feminist poet Adrienne Rich (1979) claims such disclosure to be instrumental to self-discovery. Making a distinction between fantasy and imagination, Rich describes the latter as being characterized by action. In a 1971 essay entitled “When We Dead Awaken: Writing as Re-Vision,” she shares some pivotal moments in her young life that shaped both her life and poetry.

Most, if not all, human lives are full of fantasy. . . . To write poetry or fiction, or even to think well, is not to fantasize, or to put fantasies on paper. For a poem to coalesce, for a character or an action to take shape, there has to be an imaginative transformation of reality which is in no way passive. And a certain freedom of the mind is needed—freedom to press on. . . . Moreover, if the imagination is to transcend and transform experience it has to question, to challenge, to conceive alternatives. . . . For writing is re-naming. (p. 43)

Similarly, in conceptualizing the complexity of borderlands, feminist poet Gloria Anzaldúa (1987, 1999) places a high regard for naming the realities and using the language of Chicana/os who are neither Mexican nor Anglo-American, but rather a “synergy of two cultures.” She as does Rich puts a premium on imagination to produce poems with “feeling [that] have a palpable energy, a kind of power” allowing her to write “con imágenes domo mi miedo . . . con palabras me hago piedra . . . todo lo que soy, todo lo que algún día seré” (p. 95) [loosely translated “with imagery I dominate my fears . . . with words I become stone . . . all that I am, all that I will be someday”]. Hence, it isn’t so much about what makes up a poem or what a poem may look like, but rather the “palpability” and the “visibility”—that which
is also the (re)naming—of experiences in the process of creating it. Poet Naomi Shihab Nye (2002) agrees and suggests, if necessary, the following evaluative criterion, "If it looks like a poem and you want to call it one, then it’s a poem."

While poetry for some is about practicing one’s imagination, for others it is about gaining voice. hooks (1989), for example, upholds poetry as a place for the "secret voice," a place in which the magic of transformation can emerge through its meaning and form. Poetry becomes the embodiment of the distinctive expression of an individual writer who comes into awareness capable of speaking in many voices. It means having a voice(s) with "a sense of versatility . . . [not] unilateral, monologist, or static, but rather multi-dimensional" (p. 11). Thus, it is through this multi-dimensional arena of poetry that hooks describes wherein lies the possibilities for empowerment; it is wherein lies the voices of a people.

In her essay entitled "For the Sake of People’s Poetry," Jordan (1985) problematizes the notion of democracy in America through an understanding of poetry as a site of struggle. She argues the importance of collective representation as an element of social change, identifying herself as "a stranger trying to figure out the system of language that excludes her name and all of the names of all her people" (p. 5). Her exclusion (and of others) proves useful in challenging and replacing "Old World concepts" about an elitist American literary establishment commonly found in American classrooms. She notes that even Walt Whitman, a White man and "father to American literature," had been punished for moral questions embodied in his poetry. How much more for non White poets like “us”? According to Jordan, Whitman, a bohemian and a homosexual, afforded in his work a representation of "people’s poetry" and "poets of the New World" who like him were condemned to peripheral status. She writes:

New World does not mean New England. New World means non-European; it means new; it means big; it means heterogeneous; it means unknown; it means free; it means an end of feudalism, caste, privilege, and the violence of power. It means wild in a sense that a tree growing away from the earth enacts a wild event. It means democratic. (Jordan, 1985, p. 11)

Calling Whitman’s poetry a “continent of consciousness,” Jordan alludes to the ways in which poems can be used to change the privilege status of self-appointed Euro-centric literature in American society to something more
heterogeneous, something more democratic. She pushes not only for poetry with “diction comprehensible to all,” but also for poetry that is inclusive of “ordinary people.” She reminds us about the ability of words to help embody the meaning of humanity, to enact that which is dynamic and accessible through “reverence for human life... an intellectual trust in sensuality as a means of knowledge” (p. 14). This sensuality between human beings, according to her, is potentially what can build a sense of collectivity to dislodge power from the hands of the privileged and on to the hands of the not-so privileged.

Indeed, past and current poets alike illustrate how poetry can be an empowering tool through which voice, access, and dialogue can co-exist, and possibly lead to social transformation. Poetry embraced in more critical ways becomes an arena for integrating “non-canonized” works in ivied spaces and acknowledging those who have been ignored by the dominant culture.

Through the potential power of words, poetry offers a way for unrecognized cultural groups to imagine and (re)name their own experiences and assist in the (re)building of our multicultural understanding of literature. Poetry framed within literocracy in the context of Poetry for the People is one worth examining.

The Partnership and Collaborative Intervention

Bellevue High School is racially diverse with a student population of approximately 35% Black/African American, 37% White, 11% Chicano/Latino, 11% Biracial, and 8% Asian/Pacific Islander and/or Other. At the time of the study, Bellevue had two small learning communities, one of which (CARE) was active in sustaining the partnership. A total of eight English teachers, twelve different classes, and hundreds of students have been involved since 1996. Numerous printed readers and published anthologies including students’ work exist today and reflect part of P4P’s curricula during these years. Before delving into P4P’s pedagogy and what has transpired inside Bellevue’s classrooms, I begin with a definition of collaborative intervention.

What Is a Collaborative Intervention?

Resonating in focal teachers’ retrospective interviews was the inconsistency in applying the term “collaboration” to their experience with Poetry for the
People. These teachers described P4P generally arriving in each of their classrooms with a pre-determined set of topics and poems, with little to no input from them. “Collaboration” had somewhat become a misnomer for what seemed to be more closely related to the term “intervention.” Due to this apparent dissent in naming this experience among teacher participants, I refer to the period of contact between teachers and P4P as a “collaborative intervention”—“collaborative” because several actors were involved in delivering a pre-determined curriculum, and “intervention” because P4P came in for a set period of time and used their own curricular model to ultimately provide a different approach to teaching and learning. P4P basically implemented its curriculum in a shared learning setting for purposes of “intervening,” or rather in hopes of offering a different curricular and instructional approach that would positively influence students’ learning processes and, in turn, writing development (cf. Mahiri & Sablo, 1996). I use “collaborative,” however, with the understanding that actors such as teachers, student-teacher-poets (or STPs, a term which will be discussed more in a later section), and students were involved at various capacities, begging the question of what “true collaboration” in a learning setting means.

The P4P Reader and Curriculum

Included in all course readers is P4P’s “coda”—that is, “Poetry for the People is a program for political and artistic empowerment of students. It is motivated by the moral wish to prevent the invisibility and the imposed silence of those less privileged than we.” This coda is found in the beginning pages of the reader with the “Table of Contents” and “Toolbox” sections, and is followed by three “groundrules that must be respected inside this experimental and hopeful society.” These groundrules as originally conceived by Professor June Jordan consist of defining “the people,” building a “community of trust,” and creating connections among “strangers” (see Muller, 1995; Poetry for the People Reader, 1999, 2000, 2001, 2002; Sutton, 2003). Virtually all classes and workshops begin by reading and having a common understanding and “honoring this belief.” It is intended to set the tone of the collaborative intervention, whether students agree or disagree at the outset.

Located in the first section of the printed reader, the “Groundrules” page is followed by several other pages that provide P4P’s overall teaching approach. They include but are not limited to the following: Poetry for the People Writing Guidelines, Technical Checklist, Examples of Guidelines, Writing Samples of a “Destroyed Martin Espada Poem,” The No-No List or Overused and Tired Cliche Words, What the Heck is a Haiku Anyway???, Line
Breaks, Rhythm + Rhyme + Reason, and Tips for Poetry Readings. The remaining sections in the reader constitute the curriculum and weekly topics. Each section contains sample poems for instructional and writing workshop purposes, sometimes serving as prompts for group discussions and topical assignments. One example is Ruth Forman’s (1993) “Young Cornrows Calling Out the Moon,” which appears under the topic of bringing it home or emulation/self-affirmation; it is also an illustration of a poem with strong sensory details (see Appendix A). A first-time participant as a sophomore in the fall of 2000 collaborative intervention, focal student Damon, a 17-year-old Filipino/African American, remembered “Calling Out the Moon” as being about “the neighborhood”—his “childhood,” his “block”—and added that its portrayal of everyday life influenced him to “be a better person.” Similarly, another focal student Chante, a 17-year-old African American, described Forman’s work as a “cool poem because it was showing different images . . . (like) we used to play this game . . . sit on the steps and get our hair braided, and stuff like that.” She then completed the emulation/self-affirmation poem assignment as a junior in the spring of 2002 with a poem called “Where you from,” notably adhering to the style and details in Forman’s original poem.

Where you from
brothas got cornrows
sistas got weaves
we got rap
Nas cappin Jay-Z
Fallin n Alicia Keys
B-high livin in diversity
I got my Auntie’s black eyed
peas n macaroni n cheese
I got Black Eyed Peas
kickin new beats
we got attitude
we fiiiinc sistas

The parallel to Forman’s incorporation of African American cultural referents is evident. Chante uses rap and R&B artists such as Nas, Jay-Z, and Alicia Keys (compared to “Rick James the Bump the Rock”) and in so doing creates rhythm (also through “s” sounds) within and across lines. She even takes Forman’s “black eye peas” to do a clever word play across stanzas, maintaining the “s” sounds throughout; in the third and fourth stanza, she
refers to not only food, but also a musical group by the same name. Though short in length, she felt her ideas were clear, echoing Forman's exact words "we got attitude / we fiinee sistas" and reaffirming "brothas they cool."

Upon a closer examination of other poems reminiscent of Chante's emulation, I found that a mix of poetry written by novice to established poets filled the pages of the P4P reader. This deliberate mixture designated that a range of poems (including poetic styles) could co-exist and would have similar weight in the curriculum. It was also an indication of how P4P establishes grounds for a "safe space" to dialogue about various experiences and, consistent with its programmatic mission based on democratic ideals, to demonstrate that youth's voices are just as valuable as adults'. These poems, I noticed, often contained highly charged tones and differentiated styles, speaking with and to the interests of adolescents.

**Rhythm and Rhyme, Haiku, and Other Sample Poems**

In spite of their incongruent definitions of "collaboration," focal teachers eventually became accustomed to the "collaborative" nature of the intervention. These teachers adopted and integrated P4P material into their own curriculum however it fit. Several of them kept a number of ideas and strategies for future classroom use. Ms. Tanner, for example, admitted that she set aside specific P4P materials from the 1998 collaboration that had been used time and again in her later Freshmen Writing and Senior Poetry classes. She spoke about the most recent 2002 collaborative intervention in her class and noted that what stood out the most for her (and she believed her students too) was a mini-lecture and its accompanying handout on "Rhythm and Rhyme." She was "not into hip hop," but recognized P4P's ability to make connections between poetry and rap and how important that was for students. Another focal teacher Ms. Best who has received P4P in her class at least three times pointed out its most influential effect on her practice:

> ... Two years ago when I taught Haiku, I had pulled all this stuff up off the Internet about Haiku. And nothing was as succinct as the sheet that was in the reader. So I just . . . synthesized it with my own stuff and . . . basically stole Poetry for the People curriculum for use with my freshmen.

From such testimonies it is clear that focal teachers saw the value of some curricular material to adopt and claim them as their own. "Stealing" or not, their re-use of P4P's materials such as *Rhythm + Rhyme + Reason* and *What the Heck is a Haiku Anyway??* in other classroom settings was telling of an implicit kind of professional development that happened during the
collaborative intervention. Curricular ideas were not only exchanged as part of the relationship between teachers and P4P, but also added to teachers' repertoire of literature, augmented their use of poetry in the classroom, and influenced what they did with poetry beyond the duration of the partnership.

Classroom Schedule and Organization

Collaborative interventions typically lasted about five to six weeks in each class. One unique instantiation was the four weeks in Ms. Tanner's 5th period Senior Poetry in the fall of 2002. P4P was present in this classroom three days a week—on Tuesdays, Wednesdays, and Fridays, a schedule that was pre-arranged to fit Ms. Tanner's curricular and instructional needs. Every Wednesday including P4P's initial arrival, STPs introduced a new topic through an interactive lecture and discussion of poems in the reader. Class time then culminated in an assignment, which students were expected to bring back on Friday. On Friday, a workshop day, STPs and students disbanded into their small groups. Depending on class size and the number of STPs available that particular day, the groups were small enough to have dialogue, share poems, and provide constructive feedback. Below is an excerpt taken from my field notes showing two STPs reminding students of what it means to "workshop":

STP 1: Are we clear on the process of workshop? One reads, we give feedback, so that the poem can be revised, improved if necessary. Look at page 8. Guidelines of how to give constructive feedback. There's also a technical list. The verbs, how do we make them better, stronger? Adjectives, describe by showing, not naming. Keep these in mind when you read each others' poems.

STP 2: Also, feel free to write on the paper. That's why we make copies so we can give comments back to the poet.

To form the groups, P4P relied heavily on a number of STPs available to participate; experienced and novice STPs were paired up to provide balance. In Ms. Tanner's class, which consisted of 52 students, there were a total of 16 rotating STPs (including me). An average of seven to ten STPs showed up per day to facilitate the six small workshop groups, resulting in an average ratio of 1:5. Making copies of students' poems for group workshop became a front-end issue because many students forgot or did not have access to make their own. Ms. Tanner, for example, collected students' poems at the beginning of each class and ran off to the nearby teacher's lounge.
During actual group workshop, exchanges between students and STPs often centered around, or upon digression often connected back to, the topic of the week. At the end of this workshop, students received copies of their poems with sparse to extensive handwritten feedback. On Tuesday of the following week, a second round of group workshop took place. The cycle repeated itself on Wednesday with a new topic and a new assignment (see also Sutton, 2003).

The Role of Student-Teacher-Poets

To better understand the facilitation of the collaborative intervention is to understand the role of a student-teacher-poet. STP is more than a socially constructed acronym created as an element of the P4P program. It is by far one of the most unique multi-layered identity any college student could take on. As students, STPs have access to enroll in the large introductory P4P course (big class) where they begin or continue their exposure to particular kinds of and approaches to poetry while being exposed to P4P’s coda and objectives. Similar to what high school students experience during a collaborative intervention, STPs undergo a learning process that, whether they agree or disagree with P4P’s philosophies, seeks to affirm the poem in them, a kind of socialization process which Fisher (this issue) addresses in her current research on spoken word poetry inside classrooms.

Some of these college students who are convinced to do more proceed to the next phase, that is, to simultaneously take on the T (teacher) identity as members of another course on teaching poetry (small class). As student teachers to each other in this small class and to other peers in the big class, STPs also retain their identity as student-poets and exercise their right to become more seasoned poets under the guidance P4P’s director (and then professorship of June Jordan) in the small class as well as continued exposure to visiting “Hot Shot” guest poets in the big class (see, for example, www.poetryforthecpeople.org). Not without the other, these student, teacher, and poet identities blend into one, propelling for some a rare college experience to greater heights, becoming teachers, activists, authors, and more.

Developing Ways to Democratize the Teaching of Poetry

STPs play a major role in the program. In addition to taking on leadership roles on the university campus, they also utilize their knowledge and abilities to work with and serve high school students. They take on teacher-like responsibilities such as preparing daily or weekly lesson plans, teaching and
engaging in active discussions, and facilitating in-class writing workshops. They also act as mentors and contribute to a college-going culture in the larger school by offering their camaraderie and support, including off-task conversations with students about college admissions, choices, and experiences. As an STP from the spring of 2000 to the fall of 2002, I witnessed and experienced how STPs met to discuss curricular plans and assignments, and used the STP Handbook prior to stepping foot on the high school grounds.

STPs ranged in age from their late teens and early twenties. Many, however, seemed to understand that working with high school students raised a new set of challenges than, say, working with college peers. Together, in what I call “pre-service” meetings, we brainstormed and role-played certain situations. For example, we discussed possible meanings of teaching and working with urban students. Pedagogical differences between democratic versus banking education, or implicit versus explicit instruction, became the basis for deriving the kinds of attitudes, expectations, and actions we would adhere to as “teachers.” We built upon the concept of transformative pedagogy to address educational problematic dichotomies such as “saving” versus “making a difference.” To bring it closer to home, we explored complexities in the lives of students who had been historically marginalized and made more evident reasons for the existing relationship between P4P and one of Bellevue’s small learning communities (CARE). We also delved into topics that forced us to examine our political roles as teachers in this relationship. Basic assumptions about urban schooling became important points of departure to incorporate an approach that was not only lined with P4P’s coda, but also was fresh and innovative. Interestingly, some of the suggestions came from our own schooling experiences in urban settings.

P4P’s pre-service meetings also offered STPs a kind of professional development that resembled teacher education courses focused on classroom management. We addressed issues and challenges around classroom dynamic and interaction. One common scenario we used related to students’ possible disinterest or reluctance in writing poetry. The question was, What do we do if/when that happens? Many of us agreed that the best response was usually to ask a personal question and engage students more actively in a conversation about things that interested them (e.g., what’s your experience with writing been like?). In other words, the situation called for a student centered approach that forced us as teachers to pay closer attention to students’ experiences. Another issue we concerned ourselves with had to do with the specific type of language used to respond during small group workshops when students shared their poetry. For instance, how does an STP praise while critiquing student work at the same time? How does one pro-
vide constructive feedback without sounding abrasive? Since we understood its delicate nature from our own writing workshops, we established that language of critique had to be balanced with positive remarks set against a “safe” learning space. We role played different ways of stating such remarks and decided it was best to always begin with praises and then ask students specific questions about ideas or lines in the poem. Added concerns brought up in pre-service meetings related to possible ways of improvising conversations or topic discussions using P4P guidelines and poems found in the reader to supplement the interactions during group workshop. The overall message we went away with was the importance of voice in students’ poetry and to illuminate it whenever possible in our oral as well as written speech, during and outside of group workshop.

Creating a “Safe Space” through Poetic Introductions

Establishing an authentic space for interaction relied on STPs introducing themselves and sharing what I call an “identity” poem in front of everyone on the first day of the collaborative intervention. This initial and quite personal interaction was significant in shaping the kind of “safe” space we hoped to build. Our apparent vulnerabilities became an important and deliberate way to convey our unique stances and views about the world, which we anticipated students would eventually share in their writing process.

STPs usually read from either a piece of paper or a page in a published anthology or reader, a kind of introduction that demonstrated to students that their words had been recorded and that they mattered enough in such a way to be written down, printed, and mass distributed (i.e., readers, chapbooks). The poems that STPs shared also provided model examples of the types of poetry that students would encounter in P4P. In the fall of 2002, one STP chose a poem about an Oakland Police scandal entitled “dancing on the head of a pin called probable cause,” echoing what had been in recent local news media about Oakland homicides that many of the students in the class previously raised in their own conversations.

Preparing to Showcase Student Work

After several weeks of writing, revising, and interacting in small group workshops, students’ efforts to produce polished poems culminated in an anthology and public reading. Students selected their “best” poem for the anthology and submitted a typed version in a timely manner in order to make press. Consistent with activities during the last week of the collaborative intervention, the day of the reading was set aside for final practice. This practice
was, I noticed for many students, an opportunity to set off their fear and anxiety about being in the public eye. According to some experts, this “fear” had been a recurring social condition because youth and children are socialized to be silent (Fine, 1991; Weis & Fine, 1993), not “talk back” (hooks, 1989), or not have authority about what they say and be dominated by adults who do (Giroux, 2000).

Fear of speaking up—for fear of being ridiculed or opening up to vulnerabilities—was a condition that P4P attempted to challenge throughout the weeks of the collaborative intervention. Though oral performance always was second to the written construction of poetry, performing student poetry became P4P’s main focus during the last week. “Taking It to the Mic” was important to calm students’ fright and to practice for a night of successful public reading. Focal student Damon who dreaded the idea of public performance had the following to say about his experience:

I mean people always try to tell me I’m a good writer, but I need a little bit of work . . . I never really took their advice until this time when I had to and was happy with it. My memorable experience (was) reading in front of people. . . . I’ll always remember that night.

That night Damon “busted out” with a poem called “Ode 2 My Moms.” His mother had never heard or seen any of his work before because he never once shared. According to him, she was drowned in tears as he “spit” his ode, “nervous . . . and didn’t want to mess up.”

To better assist students, STPs shared moments of their own “scared” beginnings and carried out silly skits to illustrate that sometimes mistakes were inevitable but could be alleviated by adequate preparation. In a humorous way, several STPs in Ms. Tanner’s fall of 2002 class (including myself) acted out different scenarios such as reading too fast or too slowly, reading while chewing gum, reading behind a piece of paper or book, reading while fidgeting or playing with one’s hair, among others. STPs reminded students what the most important aspect in the whole public reading experience was—to own their words, deliver them with an air of confidence, and have fun with them. Spitting a poem on the mic with poise on the night of the reading finale, to be “in the moment,” was what the week of preparation was all about. So students practiced “taking it to the mic”—in class, with each other, at home in front of the mirror, and other places.

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On the day of the public reading in Ms. Tanner's class, the front of the classroom was transformed into a makeshift stage with a makeshift podium and microphone. Students and STPs randomly dispersed to the corners/sides of the room to project a standing-room-only environment, role-playing and creating an ambiance that consisted of wide-eyed audience members. Loud applause, cheery welcomes, and enthusiastic outbursts filled the room, in anticipation for what was to come that night.

Conclusion

In this article I have discussed the ways in which P4P carried out its artistic and political project in partnership with Bellevue High School. Using archival materials such as class readers and anthologies between 2000-2002 as well as interviews with teachers, I identified aspects of the program that revealed the complexities of what I call a "collaborative intervention." What became clear in laying out P4P's pedagogical practices inside several English classrooms was that different teachers had different experiences within the partnership. Moreover, the presence of P4P in the classroom, the implementation of its curriculum as a collaborative intervention model, the role of student-teacher-poets, and the program's culminating events together created a kind of learning environment that students, whether to their liking or not, were a part of. The finale, *vis a vis* the culmination of the collaborative intervention, was not so much about how poetry as a writing and learning process came to an end in the public reading; rather, it was about how a culminating experience both for teachers and students created possibilities for newer beginnings in and outside of the classroom. For some students, this unique experience further grounded their eventual participation in other youth poetry communities.

P4P's teaching practices and use of curricula reflected a kind of imagination that as Greene (1988) suggested explored alternative possibilities. For English language arts teachers and teacher educators, particularly in urban multicultural settings, P4P as a pedagogical model provides helpful ways of re-thinking the potential of poetry for invigorating classroom practice. For researchers and advocates of poetry, P4P and the collaborative intervention at Bellevue High School offers an instantiation that re-conceptualizes the value of university-school partnerships in order to better serve all students. It also demonstrates ways of bridging school and non-school literacy practices, tapping into the power of multiple voices, and bringing in both human and material resources to extend current pedagogies.
Appendix A

*Young Cornrows Callin Out the Moon*
we don have no backyard
frontyard neither
we got black magic n brownstone steps
when the sun go down
we don have no backyard
no sof grass rainbow kites butterflies
we got South Philly summer
when the sun go down
cool after lemonade n black eye peas
full after ham hocks n hot pepper greens
corn bread coolin on the stove
n more to watch than tv
we got double dutch n freeze tag n kickball
so many place to hide n seek n
look who here Punchinella Punchinella
look who here Punchinella inna zoo
we got the ice cream man
we got the corner store
red cream pop
red nails Rick James the Bump the Rock
n we know all the cheers
we got pretty lips
we got callous feet healthy thighs n ashy knees
we got fiine brothas we r fiine sistas
n
we got attitude
we hold mamma knees when she snap the naps out
we got gramma tell her not to pull so hard
we got sooo cleeen cornrows when she finish
n corn bread cool on the stove
so you know
we don really want no backyard
frontyard neither
cuz we got to call out the moon
wit black magic n brownstone steps

Ruth Forman

*From We Are the Young Magicians, Beacon Press, 1993. Used by permission of the author.*
Author's Note

I would like to thank the contributors to this volume for an opportunity to dialogue, in particular guest editor Maisha Fisher for her earnest feedback. I would also like to thank the University of California All-Campus Consortium on Research for Diversity (UC ACCORD) for providing mentorship and financial support.

References


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