Humanizing education: Teacher leaders influencing pedagogical change

by

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DEDICATION

To Jude and Luca:
This world is for you.
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ABSTRACT

A humanizing education relies on the pedagogy of educators to influence, navigate, and coexist within the sociopolitical context and practices of teacher leaders, students, administration, and community members. Constructing beliefs and practices around a humanizing education focuses on the cultural, historical, and contextual realities and experiences of the learner. Previous research has explored pedagogical theory and gained attention around humanizing practices that emphasize the student as a valued asset and active member of the learning process. Opposing pedagogy supports the standardization, mechanization, and one-size-fits-all model that emphasizes quantification, measurement, and high-stakes accountability for teachers and students (Salazar, 2013; Giroux, 2001; Lipman, 2011; McLaren, 2003; Chapman, 2004).

The purpose of this qualitative study was to explore how teacher leaders influence pedagogical change toward a humanizing education. Learning environment, instructional design, and leadership practices are highlighted in this study as influences on the characteristics of a humanizing education. The study was focused on the humanizing practices and beliefs of teacher leaders through the context of policy, legislation, and educational structures that influenced pedagogical decisions. This study examined the pedagogical beliefs and practices that existed within the organization RunDSM, which the participants had created. Themes for a humanizing education included: a learning environment reflecting liberating conditions that utilize youth voice as power, instructional design that is problem-posing and coconstructed through transformative praxis and arts-based inquiry, and leadership practices reflective of dialogic leadership and community-based
actions. Additional findings around common characteristics were supportive of these themes through district leadership and other environmental influences.

Existing literature suggests that a humanizing educational pedagogy supports a transformation within public schooling. The influence of teacher leadership with critical scholarship intersects within the existing societal and philosophical framework of public education in this study. Therefore, ideology, praxis, and counterhegemonic actions are some of the overarching practices highlighted throughout the themes of this study, giving purpose to educators in moving toward a humanizing education.
CHAPTER 1. INTRODUCTION

Background

A humanizing education relies on the pedagogy of educators who are navigating, coexisting, or adhering to the sociopolitical practices of their schools. Constructing beliefs and practices around a humanizing education focuses on the current reality, culture, and lived experiences of the learner. One-size-fits-all models for delivering curriculum and instruction cost the economy hundreds of billions of dollars in federal and state taxes each year (Hussar & Bailey, 2013), sacrifices the humanistic nature of learning for students (Freire, 1970; Lipman, 2003; McLaren, 2006; Chapman 2004), and creates tension between policymakers and educators (Salazar, 2013). Educational policy and systemic restrictions limit educators from developing humanistic and culturally responsive approaches to curriculum and instruction; therefore pedagogical practice in relation to policy is an important area for research (Fránquiz & Salazar, 2004; Freire, 1970; Ladson-Billings, 1995; Salazar, 2013).

Education policy, along with state and local decisions linked to educational practices in the United States, can lead to the possibility of an autonomous, humanizing pedagogy or to a marginalized, traditional one. Teacher leaders have influence on this change. When schools have a strong focus on numbers, measurement, and quantification, the beliefs and practices (pedagogy) of the teacher shift to skill sets that favor test taking and leads to practices that “foster memorization and conformity; promote reductionistic, decontextualized, and fragmented curriculum; [and] advance mechanistic approaches that are decontextualized from students’ needs” (Salazar, 2013, p. 124). For example, the Common Core initiative is believed to be a historic opportunity to improve the quality of education in
the United States (Council of Chief State School Officers ([CCSSO], 2010; Loveless, 2012; Schmidt & Houang, 2012). States writing Common Core into policy are taking on new standards that were designed to have higher relevance in the real world (CCSSO, 2010). The standards alone, without a pedagogical shift toward the real world, have the potential for history to repeat itself with the traditional dehumanizing practices (e.g., lecturing, end-of-unit tests, memorized content). With consideration of pedagogical shifts toward humanizing factors (e.g., coconstructed learning, collaboration, growth mindset), the policies related to the Common Core have greater potential for students and schools in the 45 states that have adopted the Common Core State Standards (CCSS) to be implemented through state legislation (CCSSO, 2010). Though states are giving districts local control in unpacking the standards, publishers have redesigned and developed the CCSS into prepackaged and program-based curriculum materials. Many schools and districts have adopted these programs to adhere to the mandated Common Core Standards initiative. Standardized tests and state assessments also have been redesigned to measure student performance aligned to these standards. Giroux (2013), Darling-Hammond (2012) and many other educational scholars have long stressed that a pedagogical focus on generic materials and delivery methods deny students access to a humanizing education. The CCSS could be viewed as another error in the stagnant nature of the system, or they could be a source of educational transformation. The active role of teacher leaders can be influential in determining this outcome. In the cocreation of a humanizing pedagogy, teacher leaders and students have an opportunity to take advantage of the CCSS initiative to reconstruct education for social change. If school standards are to mimic living in the “real world”, commonly referred to as
authentic learning, so should practices related to these standards. This is an intimate progression that should parallel educators’ calling to find humanity within the lines of policy.

A humanizing pedagogy is essential for building academic and social resiliency within students (Fránquiz & Salazar, 2004; Freire, 1970). For example, in addition to the adoption of the reading and math CCSS, Iowa Core (2010) developed a list of competencies identified as the *universal constructs*. These constructs were created by a team of educators and business leaders who studied multiple sources of literature for what it means to be a twenty-first century learner. The universal constructs include: critical thinking, complex communication, creativity, collaboration, flexibility, adaptability, productivity, and accountability (Iowa Core, 2010). Districts and teachers are given local control over the integration of these constructs through content and/or instructional practices. There is no statement that suggests a program or prescribed curriculum should be adopted to meet these standards. This works in strong favor of humanizing an education that is currently decontextualized and mechanistic.

Freire (1970, 1982) defined humanization as “the process of becoming more fully human as social, historical, thinking, communicating, transformative, creative persons who participate in and with the world” (as cited in Salazar, 2013, p. 126). Though humanity has a tradition of telling stories through the arts, its use for academic research has only recently come into consideration. Humans come to an understanding of the world through an aesthetic use of receptive information, whether verbal or through other senses (Barone & Eisner, 2012). This is what engages humans with knowing and understanding what they experience. Educational leaders and students will play an important role in unpacking the
standards and adhering to the *universal constructs* in a way that supports a humanizing and culturally relevant pedagogy.

The intention of this research is to contribute to an understanding of an educational shift toward creating humanizing conditions through pedagogy, one that coexists within the lines of policy while influencing system-wide change.

**Statement of the Problem**

The literature revealed many components of a humanizing or liberating pedagogy. Scholars and practitioners have been utilizing these qualities for over four decades. As they cannot be prepackaged and sold to districts across the nation, they can serve as foundational practices that link theory to praxis in a humanizing pedagogical approach to educating all students. A humanizing pedagogy is centered around students, highly contextualized, relevant and socially driven, and ambiguous and versatile. In addition, a humanizing pedagogy cannot be measured by standardized test scores. Standardized tests erode teacher autonomy and creativity, fail to measure students’ humanizing abilities (e.g., critical thought), and perpetuate a culture of privilege (Darder & Torres, 2004).

Educational policy influences state and district actions that guide the pedagogy of teachers and students. These decisions often create a system of generic and myopic practices that repress and silence students (Giroux, 2013). This is often achieved through district decisions related to state policy compliance, such as purchasing a prescribed reading program in an attempt to raise test scores. With 45 states, four territories, the District of Columbia, and the Department of Defense Education Activity adopting the CCSS, billions of dollars have traded hands in a surge of new materials from educational vendors around the world. These materials and programs are often created with learning objectives, teaching prompts,
and a scripted pacing guide. Rodriguez and Smith (2011) referred to this kind of pedagogical focus as a way to detach from students. This distances educators from the culture, values, and voice that give students their humanity.

Connecting state policy with a compliance measure, such as purchasing a curriculum program, creates systemic constraints. Constraints, such as district-mandated instructional curriculum and state assessments, are restrictive educational policies that “limit educators from developing humanistic approaches” (Salazar, 2013, p. 124).

All Iowa school districts and accredited nonpublic schools were required to implement the Iowa Core by the 2014–2015 school year (Iowa Core, 2010). Districts that remain autonomous have a chance to inspire and enlighten the active search for meaning through authentic inquiry and other mindsets that develop a humanizing and culturally relevant pedagogy. Districts that purchase and comply with commercial programs have a chance to remain stagnant, recycled, and dehumanized. Educational practitioners, scholars, and students have a unique opportunity for creating a world that invests in humanity through liberating people instead of investing in the dichotomy of profit-driven programming.

**Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this study was to examine teacher leaders in Iowa who taught and led students using a critical and humanizing pedagogical lens. Specifically, this study explored the use of pedagogical shifts away from mainstreamed traditional beliefs and practices by providing students with a humanizing education. The study identified the pedagogical influences of the teacher leaders, administrators, and students involved in the RunDSM: Creating Brave New Voices (RunDSM) organization from its conception to its current development. A deeper understanding of policy, specifically the use of CCSS, in relation to
giving students an active voice in cocreating a humanizing education, contributes to further inquiry into the affective domain of this study.

**Research Questions**

The following research questions framed this study:

1. What pedagogical beliefs and practices exist within RunDSM?
2. What conditions and structures were in place for RunDSM to develop?
3. What relationships exist between practice relevant policies and pedagogy?

**Significance of the Study**

The goal of this study was to influence districts, educational leaders, teachers, and communities to work toward a humanizing and culturally relevant pedagogy. The study looked at the influence of two teacher leaders and their shift in pedagogy reflective of humanizing practices and beliefs. The school and district involved in the study had faced sanctions under the No Child Left Behind Act ([NCLB], 2001) compliance timelines. The next step for the school, under the mentioned sanctions, was to close down. A group of students, led and supported by two teachers, transformed their traditional literacy courses into a coconstructed organization that became supported in every high school in the district. The intention of this study was to contribute to an understanding of a pedagogy that can coexist with policy while providing students with humanizing conditions in school. An intended outcome of the study was to provide educators and scholars with a detailed description of the pedagogical shifts within the boundaries of policy from a historical, existing, and impending perspective.

This study analyzed the experiences of two teacher leaders who created and led an organization during a time when the school and district were undergoing policy mandates
from NCLB. These teachers maintained a humanizing and culturally relevant pedagogical approach to teaching literacy and leadership despite the sanctions their school was experiencing. The context of these shifts existed both formally (within the regular schedule of the school day) and informally (an after-school offering for a writer’s workshop). The needs of the students and the community were at the forefront of their pedagogical shifts. While maintaining legal harmony within the parameters of the state sanctions and mandates, the students improved their literacy skills and improved the culture of their school as well as their own community. This study highlights the autonomous, authentic, and outlying characteristics and beliefs foundational to their efforts and success.

Districts and schools implementing program-based, prescribed materials that force teachers into a myopic and dehumanizing pedagogy cannot achieve these goals (Apple & Teitelbaum, 1986; Darder & Torres, 2004). Education has over a century of research that shows that a repetitive cycle of changing policy without approaching pedagogy simply does not work. Instead of using the standards initiative to replicate the past, one can use it to one’s advantage. For example, the Iowa Core State Standards has taken a step in the right direction with development of universal constructs. Interpreting and adding value to these initiatives based on the needs of the community and students will be pertinent in developing a humanizing transformational pedagogy. Placing actions and students at the center of this autonomous approach can link decades of scholarship with a pedagogy that is policy friendly.

The results of this study are intended to add to the understanding of policy and pedagogy among K–12 educational leaders. The intention of the study was to examine a team of educational leaders who experienced success when bridging policy with a humanizing and culturally relevant pedagogy. Understanding how to meet federally
mandated requirements while cocreating a relevant, humanizing, and empowering pedagogical practice is a value to scholars and practitioners.

The findings of this study can potentially influence educational leaders to take a more autonomous approach to curriculum, assessment, and instruction in their state, district, school, or classroom. Although there is a large body of research that supports a humanizing and culturally relevant pedagogy, there have been few shifts in public education that support it as a widespread, contextualized way to educate students. This study attempted to show examples of how this can be achieved while providing further insights into the involvement of school conditions and structures as a part of the process.

The findings of this study may lead to further qualitative studies in this area to support local decisions for promoting an autonomous and humanizing education for students. Additionally, these findings may reduce the reaction of many districts facing sanctions or policy mandates to look at purchasing prepackaged programs and materials and, instead, focus on their teachers and students as valuable resources. The findings may provide new meaning or glean a deeper understanding of how pedagogy is developed through offering guidance around humanizing practices and beliefs. Framing this around the belief that educators, despite harsh sanctions and political turmoil, have a choice in their schools. The study aimed to clarify this choice as critical to the success of students and the educational system. Providing a humanizing or dehumanizing theory is the choice in which one must bring to the forefront of their actions.

**Theoretical Framework and Conceptual Framework**

This qualitative, arts-based inquiry was based on a constructivist worldview. A constructivist philosophical worldview addresses the participants’ socially constructed
understanding of the situation in which they work (Creswell, 2014). Arts-based research is well-suited for this research and analysis as it provides an exploratory means by which the participants and researcher have opportunities to deepen their perspectives while creating curiosity around future research in the same area of study (Barone & Eisner, 2012). By engaging in arts-based research, I was able to interpret and gain perspective on aspects of such inquiry that had gone unnoticed before. As suggested by Norris (2011) in his “great wheel” arts-based research approach, complexities within social and cultural phenomenon added to the quality and merit of this study through emergent meanings.

A critical, humanizing, and culturally relevant perspective on pedagogy guided the research of this study. In order to make sense of the lived experiences of the participants, the use of recent and historical studies from critical pedagogues that were influential to this study were embedded throughout the arts-based research process. The main uses of this framework included Freire’s (1970) indispensable qualities articulated through his own work as well as the interpretation of his work by others. The concepts related to Freire’s (1970) work and other critical pedagogical studies framed the beliefs and practices encompassing the learning environment, instructional design, and leadership practices analyzed for this study. Along with analyzing data through a humanizing and culturally relevant pedagogy lens, critical scholarship also was utilized to analyze the conditions and structures of RunDSM.

Though critical theory surrounding pedagogy provided a lens for this study, the work of many other influential educators, social activists, and critical pedagogues allowed the study to challenge the conditions of standardized practices and provide more insights into shifting to a humanizing education.
Research Design

This qualitative, arts-based inquiry used open-ended interviews, observations, public documents, and audiovisual materials analysis as part of the research design. Arts-based research begins by envisioning a research approach, engaging in inquiry, selecting sources of information and ideas, and then offering interpretations with openness and creativity within the practice (Sinner, Leggo, Irwin, Gouzouasis, & Grauer, 2006). There are no pre-established rules with arts-based research; the rules themselves are determined by the work itself (Diamond, 1998). An arts-based inquiry framework served the exploration of teacher leadership for pedagogical change.

The study focused on an organization called RunDSM: Creating Brave New Voices. This organization was cocreated by two teacher leaders along with students and support from administration in the Des Moines Public Schools. The organization comprises a hybrid of courses offered during the school day as well as after school and on some weekends. Multiple, in-depth interviews were conducted as were numerous hours of observation in the classroom and during RunDSM event performances. The first set of interviews focused on the historical perspective of the participants on their shifts away from traditional and standardized practices with the starting phases of RunDSM. This preliminary data collection determined further questions and the research design among the same participants and observation settings. Ongoing collection and analysis of public documents (i.e., flyers, blog updates, social media communication, etc.) and audiovisual materials (i.e., video footage of events, photos, artwork, etc.) also were utilized in the study. Interviews, observations, and document/material analysis took place over the course of 1 year.
To ensure goodness and trustworthiness, the themes and patterns that emerged from the data were shared with participants for member checking and feedback (Creswell, 2014). Open coding was utilized in analyzing the transcripts from interviews, field notes from observations, and memos from public documents and audiovisual materials. The theoretical constructs of this study contributed to finding themes and patterns among the data.

In addition, arts-based research design contributed to the qualitative field of research while enriching the context of the field and pedagogy of the participants it served. A final product in the form of a spoken word poetry picture book culminated the findings of the research and was incorporated into the work of the school and participants.

Definitions of Terms

The following terms were defined for use in this research:

**Autonomy:** self-directing freedom and especially moral independence (Merriam-Webster, n.d.). Autonomy is described by self-determination theory as a basic psychological need, essential for individuals’ well-being.

**Culturally relevant pedagogy:** practices and beliefs that recognize the sociocultural reality that exists between the teacher and student in developing a “pedagogy that [empowers] students intellectually, socially, emotionally, and politically by using cultural referents to impart knowledge, skills, and attitudes” (Ladson-Billings, 1995, pp. 17–18; see also Bartolomé, 1994).

**Educational leader:** any person or persons, particularly including students, teachers, administrators, scholars and community members, who are actively involved in school improvement efforts.
Self-efficacy: refers to an individual’s somatic and emotional state when taking on a new behavior or challenge (Bandura, 1997).

Humanizing pedagogy: guided by the notion that humans are motivated by a need to reason and engage in the process of becoming (Salazar, 2013). Friere (1970) stated that the only effective instrument is a humanizing pedagogy in which the revolutionary leadership establishes a permanent relationship of dialogue with the oppressed . . . the method ceases to be an instrument by which teachers can manipulate the students, because it expresses the consciousness of the students themselves. (p. 68)

One-size-fits-all: the same product or process for all people despite their differences. Maria de la Luz Reyes (1992) explained this as the marketing concept that would have buyers believe that there is an average or ideal size among men and women. Those who market “one size fits all” products suggest that if the article of clothing is not a good fit, the fault is not with the design of the garment, but those who are too fat, too skinny, too tall, too short, or too high-waisted. (p. 435)

Summary

This study explored the experiences of teacher leaders who cocreated an organization that reflected humanizing and culturally relevant pedagogy despite policy mandates in their school and district. The findings of the study may help states, districts, and individual school leaders shift toward more humanizing, culturally relevant, and autonomous choices for their schools. Readers of this study will critically deepen their understanding and identify aspects and perceptions of a humanizing pedagogy. Specifically, this study may influence teacher
leaders in the areas of learning environment, instructional design, and leadership practices in shifting pedagogical practices while still adhering to and possible influencing changes in policy.

Chapter 2 provides a literature review that highlights and defines a humanizing and culturally relevant pedagogy. It presents literature that promotes the need for this practice, discusses the ongoing dangers of conventional pedagogical approaches, and visits potential benefits of humanizing education for traditionally oppressed groups. The chapter is also supported by a literature map (Appendix A), which features the current and foundational literature around pedagogy. The chapter concludes with recent literature that supports the infusion of arts-based practices as an interdisciplinary approach to humanizing education.

Chapter 3 presents the methodology for this study. The elements of qualitative research implementation for arts-based research design are included. The theoretical constructs of a humanizing and culturally relevant pedagogy are discussed in relation to the methodology. Within the discussion on research design, positionality and trustworthiness are detailed. The chapter concludes with the identification of potential ethical concerns of the study.

Chapter 4 includes participant backgrounds, a description of RunDSM, and a detailed description of findings. The findings are organized around the themes and patterns identified throughout the study. Major themes and subthemes consist of the learning environment, including liberating conditions and youth voice as power; instructional design using problem-posing education with coconstructed learning through transformative praxis and arts-based inquiry; and leadership practices and energetic reciprocity, including dialogical leadership
and community-based actions. These themes emerged from interview, observation, public document, and audiovisual analysis data.

Chapter 5, the final chapter, focuses on the research findings and implications of this study. The chapter includes: (a) a summary of the research and methodological approach, including changes, discoveries and modifications to the approach; (b) a description of the research findings and how those findings tied to the original research questions; (c) a discussion of the implications for educational leaders involved in K–12 policy and pedagogy; (d) an overview of the study in relation to existing literature and future research; and (e) my personal reflection of the research study and the future of my work in this area.
CHAPTER 2. REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Teacher leadership studies have taken on a new ambiance since the CCSS and 21st Century Skills have entered the territory of school reform. Recent scholars have revealed that there has never been a better time for teacher leadership (Barth, 2013; Berliner, 2013; Berry, 2013; Danielson, 2013; Hess, 2013). These studies alluded to current knowledge around leadership and how the current situation in education can fuel the fire of effective change. The teacher leaders making the most difference have been the outliers, the collaborators, and those willing to take bold actions. They have not been afraid to transfer their own passion for learning into the classroom, regardless of what the curriculum guide may suggest they do (Barth, 2013; Wagner, 2012). David Berliner (2013) pushed teacher leadership as a way to move state legislatures and congress toward a more humanizing social system: “Today’s teachers can no longer afford to be pawns” (p. 14). Frederick Hess (2013) viewed the surge of new policies in the United States as a cause of turbulence for teachers. Now, more than ever, teachers are equipped with tools to share this intense eagerness for alternatives with other teacher leaders through networks and social media. Charlotte Danielson (2013), a leading author in teacher evaluations, expressed her belief that a focus on instruction is what teacher leaders can work on to strengthen schools.

In 2008, Tony Wagner presented educators with a list of survival skills students need to be prepared for college, career, and citizenship. Included in this list were some humanizing and culturally relevant characteristics that correlate with this study. The list included: collaboration and leading by influence, agility and adaptability, initiative and entrepreneurialism, effective communication, accessing and analyzing information, and
curiosity and imagination. These served as the foundation for what educators refer to as 21st Century Skills and have led educational change in policy and assessment practices since their conception (Darling-Hammond, 2012). In Wagner’s (2012) recent book, *Creating Innovators*, he profiled and studied the lives of young innovators and found three forces that drove their innovation: play, passion, and purpose. In profiling these individuals, like Ladson-Billings (1995), he identified the teachers, mentors, and major influences in the lives of these young innovators. Wagner (2012) revealed that the common factor in each of these pivotal and influential roles was that in each case the person in the role of “teacher” or “mentor” was considered an “outlier” among their peers. These teachers and mentors were not highly recognized through awards or achievements or any necessary identifiers other than standing out from the norm due to their pedagogical and philosophical differences (Wagner, 2012). Among the shift in education since Wagner’s (2008, 2012) two studies and the foundational underpinnings of Freire (1970) and Ladson-Billings (1995), characteristics of a humanizing education, though not referenced by that term in their studies, have started to surface.

Over the past four decades, researchers and scholars have critiqued the mechanistic and dehumanizing nature of curriculum, assessment, and instruction entrenched in public education (Giroux, 2001; Lipman, 2011; McLaren, 2003; Chapman, 2004) while practices have remained relatively the same. Contemporary pedagogical studies have put forth the claim that a humanizing and liberating education is what our democracy needs to influence society away from the oppressive and conforming educational system currently in existence (Giroux, 2011; McLaren, 2005; Salazar, 2013). For example, the use of military tactics in school safety measures (e.g., video cameras, metal detectors, random searches) mirrors
imprisonment; however these tactics are highly utilized in many urban city schools (Chapman 2004). Pauline Lipman (2011) critiqued the politics of urban restructuring as another source of hegemonic alliances that are economically driven. In relation to initiatives such as the CCSS, standards have been historically linked to the cultural reproduction of class relations in advanced industrial societies (M. Apple, 1990).

A humanizing education, as defined by Freire and Betto (1995), “is the path through which men and women can become conscious about their presence in the world” (pp. 14–15). This path develops the capacity to exist freely in the world. This social responsibility is what will ensure the survival of a democratic society, whose formative culture must be shaped by pedagogy capable of producing critical, morally just, self-reflective, knowledgeable, and critically engaged citizens (Giroux, 2011).

There are many professional journals and publications that educational leaders utilize to gain perspective and inform instruction. Many of these professional resources report methods, strategies, or other philosophical ideas that present a superficial shift in practice. The depth and complexity of the theory and practices at the institutional level are left untouched or misinterpreted at the scholarly level. Though there are movements and buzzwords associated with social justice, culturally relevant teaching, and antimonolithic methods in K–12 resources, there is still a large disconnect among scholars and practitioners when reviewing critical studies and praxis through active shifts in pedagogy. The most critical space for teacher leadership is development between these two worlds. An aim of this study was to translate some of the critical studies on pedagogy along with recent studies on teacher leadership into what a humanizing pedagogy reflects. These connections are an attempt to fill in some of the gaps in the literature.
This chapter synthesizes the conceptual literature on critical pedagogy through a humanizing and culturally relevant lens. This research literature provides a historical overview from the work of theorists and practitioners such as Paulo Freire, Antonia Darder, Henry Giroux, Lia Bartolomé, Maria Salazar, and Gloria Ladson-Billings along with other contributing theorists from around the world. The chapter concludes with a call to educational leaders in K–12 education to move toward a humanizing education.

**Humanizing Pedagogy**

Historically, influential educators, social activists, and critical pedagogues such as Freire (1970), Kincheloe and McLaren (2000), Giroux (2001), Darder (2002), hooks (1994), and Macedo (1994) have challenged educational conditions and monolithic practices (e.g., standardized curriculum) worldwide. For over a century, these educational activists have been placed in exile, experienced political turmoil, and/or received criticism from the mainstream antidemocratic system (Orelus, 2011). Over the years of challenge and unrest, the emancipatory efforts of these leaders and their vision for education surfaced as some of the most influential philosophies in pedagogical and curricular studies.

Paulo Freire, often cited as the father of critical pedagogy, remained true to his vision for humanization up until his death in 1997 (Darder, Baltodano, & Torres, 2009). Freire (1970) attended to this vision as he wrote, “In order to achieve humanization, which presupposes the elimination of dehumanizing oppression, it is absolutely necessary to surmount the limit-situations in which men (and women) are reduced to things” (p. 93). Freire was exiled in Brazil for over 15 years for his writings on education, oppression, power, culture, and grounding the politics of education within the framework of society (Darder et al., 2009). Much of Freire’s foundational work is backed by the current research and
pedagogical practices presented and advocated by scholars, theorists, and social activists today.

Recent research studies have identified pedagogical approaches and practices that lead to a humanizing education (Bartolomé, 1994; Darder & Torres, 2004; Giroux, 2011; Kirylo, Thirumurthy, Smith, & McLaren, 2010; Salazar, 2013; Westerman, 2005). Lilia Bartolomé (1994) identified two approaches in her emphasis for creating a humanizing pedagogy “that respects and uses the reality, history, and perspectives of students as an integral part of educational practice” (p. 173). Her first approach involves a culturally relevant education that avoids generic teaching methods that often objectify students and strip them of their own values and ideals. The second approach discusses strategic teaching practices involved in the relationship teachers form with students through sharing and cocreating knowledge. Her approaches are among those of many others that work to eliminate deficit views of students. Deficit-based thinking or cultural deprivation works against a humanizing education and aids in the social reproduction of academic failure among oppressed groups (Delpit 1995, Scheurich & Skrla, 2003; Valencia 1997).

A historically significant example of a humanizing pedagogical approach to literacy lies within Freire’s early educational experiences in Brazil. In 1964, Freire launched the most successful national literacy campaign in Brazil’s history (Darder, 1998). Though Freire was exiled for almost 16 years, he never lost the capacity to begin anew and held deep beliefs in rebuilding solidarity among educators, as he saw intolerance as an obstacle (Darder, 1998). William Westerman (2005), in his work on folklife studies, contributed to the orality and understanding of critical literacy that bridges radical pedagogies into positive educational and
community change. Freedom, empowerment, and emancipation of students’ action and voice will triumph over the static educational model (Knaus, 2009; Westerman, 2005).

Many scholars refer to these literary stories as counternarratives. Originally, studies through Jean François Lyotard’s model for working against the societal commonalities created through hegemonic narratives, counternarratives have traditionally worked to undo these cultural biases to reveal the history of the individual (Giroux, Lankshear, McLaren, & Peters, 2013). Scholars and practitioners who have transformed their pedagogical priorities to support literacy from a cultural and humanizing stance foundationally have supported literacy as a form of liberation (Westerman, 2005). Freire’s belief in dialogic relationships, in which the experiences of both the student and the teacher create understanding through dialogue, formed the foundation for critical literacy practices. The role of the student in constructing a social reality is crucial to this foundation. The student becomes an active part of the curriculum by living within the educational process of socially constructing the world. Literacy skills are no longer built upon the practice sentences in a prescribed reading program but, instead, are developed through dialogic sentences related to the reality and experiences of the student (Freire, 1970; Westerman, 2005).

As the extant literature has aimed to supply implications for a humanizing pedagogy rather than specific classroom practices, many of the philosophical exigencies, explained through the lens of these educational leaders, can be recontextualized into future educational settings.

**Culturally Relevant Pedagogy**

Foundational scholars confirmed in studies of culturally relevant teaching that rigid methodologies and mechanistic assessment and instructional approaches work to distance the
teacher from the student and further the deficit notions of underserved populations of students (Bartolomé, 1994; Ladson-Billings, 2007; Valencia, 1997). These landmark studies provided insight for pedagogical practices that support a culturally relevant approach to teaching and learning. From among these studies, the following characteristics support but are not limited to such practices: (a) equalizing the power between students and teachers, (b) recognizing the sociocultural reality that exists between the teacher and the student by using a critical lens and eliminating deficit notions of students, and (c) utilizing instructional and assessment approaches that demonstrate and inform teachers of students’ human qualities (i.e., mindsets, dreams, backgrounds; Bartolomé, 1994; Knaus, 2009; Lipman, 2011).

It is important to recognize that these characteristics are not methods or strategies that can be replicated into a prescribed curriculum or program for cultural relevance. They must be authenticated through a contextual and situational experience of the student. Ladson-Billings’ (1995, 2007) research looked specifically at culturally relevant pedagogy in her assertions that encouraged educators to listen to students and to cocreate learning in a contextualized, autonomous environment. Ladson-Billings identified three criteria for a culturally relevant pedagogy: academic success, cultural competence, and sociopolitical consciousness. In addition, she aligned culturally relevant teaching with the following propositions: conceptions of self and others, social relations, conceptions of knowledge.¹

¹ Conceptions of self and others: Teachers with actions and beliefs having a positive conception of self and other showed a belief that all students were capable of achieving success in academics. These teachers believed that pedagogy existed in the art of becoming rather than in a stagnant, predictable process. They also situated their own identity as that from which the community could benefit from and in which they belonged. Teachers who exerted these characteristics never referred to deficit notions of students in their classrooms (such as English as a Second Language or being raised by a single-parent). Social relations: Teachers with positive social relations took a collaborative approach to teaching. The collaborative approach developed by these teachers encouraged the success of the entire class instead of individuals and was often paired with students holding each other accountable instead of the teacher being the primary agent for academic success (Ladson-Billings, 1995). Conceptions of knowledge: Teachers with a positive conception of knowledge viewed learning and knowledge as constructed and shared, not static. Knowledge must be viewed critically and...
Darder (1991) addressed the concept of cultural politics and posited about cultural relevance and critical pedagogy that, “unlike traditional perspectives of education that claim to be neutral and apolitical, critical pedagogy views all education theory as intimately linked to ideologies shaped by power, politics, history and culture” (p. 77).

**Conventional Pedagogical Approaches: Policy and Practice**

Even though Giroux’s (2011) articles in *On Critical Pedagogy* were aimed at higher education, he called on all educators and scholars to promote change locally through redesigning curriculum, assessment, and instructional practices. Giroux (2011) viewed educational policy as one that approaches problems in isolation—a separate entity from the social and political meaning that accounts for authentic learning. American education has adopted policies such as NCLB (2001) that further emphasize the stagnant and dehumanizing nature of curriculum, assessment, and instruction in public education. These three areas contribute to the instructional decisions teachers, schools, and policy make in regard to pedagogy. This area of the research is related to the findings section in chapter 4 on instructional design and as further explained in the discussion in chapter 5.

**Curriculum**

Over 30 years ago, research pointed out the curriculum concerns of prepackaged and policy-driven curriculum. Linda Darling-Hammond (1985) utilized a Rand study to capture the views of teachers on educational policies as related to prescribed teaching practices. The results found the following five observations: (a) Teachers were spending less time on subject areas that were not tested such as writing, science, and social studies; (b) teachers
geared instruction and assignments to the test by lecturing or assigning toward the prescribed objectives as opposed to classroom discussions or authentic learning experiences; (e) teachers felt constrained to the mandated curricula and rarely used materials beyond the prescribed textbook materials; (d) instruction lacked connections to student interests; and (e) teachers were more likely to leave the profession due to the lack of autonomy and increased prescription of content and materials. Other studies from this time offered many of the same critiques. Predesigned and commercialized curricula have a large focus on competencies found on standardized tests instead of on life-long skills developed between the student and teacher such as critical thinking (Apple & Teitelbaum, 1986).

Not much has changed in the pedagogical practices since these studies. Some have expressed the belief that it is worse: “I believe the threat to critical modes of education and democracy has never been greater than in the current historical moment” (Giroux, 2011, p. 58). Closer examination of educational practices has revealed a hegemonic, dehumanizing, and oppressive system (A. Apple, 1995; Darder & Torres, 2004). For instance, Giroux and McLaren (1986) problematized many of the issues addressing educational reform. They asserted that,

at both the local and federal levels, the new educational discourse has influenced a number of policy recommendations, such as competency-based testing for teachers, a lockstep sequencing of materials, mastery learning techniques, systematized evaluation schemes, standardized curricula, and the implementation of mandated basics. (p. 219)

They claimed the curricula often ignored humanizing and cultural features of learning such as the community, the larger social background, and the immediate classroom situation.
Giroux (2011) believed that a curriculum redesign through teacher–scholars has the potential to enact change at a local level.

The testing of students more and more drives the curriculum and prescribes both teaching and the role of students in their learning. This prescriptive teaching hardens and intensifies the discrimination already at work in schools, as teaching of the fragmented and narrow information on the test comes to substitute for substantive curriculum in the schools of poor and minority students. (Darder & Torres, 2004, p. 215)

Assessment

The United States has employed dehumanizing accountability measures for students in public schools for hundreds of years. Standardized testing has been historically and politically linked to a business model for operating schools since the early twentieth century (Darder & Torres, 2004). Corporate leaders have maintained this control for over a century, largely due to the close alignment of standardized test scores to district accountability. Darder and Torres (2005) asserted that businessmen are closely aligned to the idea that schools should now function with the efficiency of a for-profit business. . . . They insist that measurable, scientifically based objectives should be the primary impetus for making decisions, designing curricula, and articulating pedagogical imperatives of the classroom. (p. 209)

The complexities of such influence on “operating” schools from a business model has been identified as early as the 1900s as evidenced in Callahan’s (1964) *Education and the Cult of Efficiency*, where he provides a lens on quality education being better represented by scholarship and philosophy than through a business model that reflects status and power.
School performance, funding, and compliance measures are inextricably linked to standardized testing. There is little movement among public policy to measure academic success beyond a standardized score. The 2001 NCLB legislation required low-performing schools to adopt a research-based reading program. Leading reading publishing companies, such as Houghton-Mifflin Harcourt, Pearson, Success for All, etc., have recently updated their materials into a “common core state standard” edition. With few differences from their earlier materials, these publishers have made billions of dollars on the updated materials. These billions of dollars in profit came from state and federal taxes. Instead of the United States investing in their teachers and within their local schools, the economic stimulation from the Common Core generated revenue into the pockets of big-name education corporations. This financially irresponsible reaction to CCSS is due to the standardized mentality of education. For example, the Los Angeles Unified School District (LAUSD) is the second largest district in the United States, serving over 660,000 students. It recently updated its reading program from its previous Macmillan and McGraw Hill reading series to the Common Core version of Treasures including a pacing and assessment guide (LAUSD, 2013). The New York City Department of Education (NYCDOE) is the largest district in the nation serving over 1.1 million students. Their use of Fundations® and Wilson Language Program® has been recently repacked with the second edition to include CCSS updates (NYCDOE, 2013). Each of these reading programs assures districts that test scores will rise. This gap between educational scholarship and use of funds is evidenced in these multi-million dollar expenditures. School funding, vendor ethical practices, and educational decision-making is political, financially driven, and often leaves aside the input from teacher leaders.
Standardized testing is increasingly used in determining state and district decisions about student learning and teacher practices. This system leads to a limiting education that creates test-driven school cultures and reproduction of socioeconomic class formation (Darder & Torres, 2005). Critical pedagogy scholars have connected NCLB to the mass import and misguided advice produced by prepackaged curricula and programs. Kirylo et al. (2010) suggested that this shift in education not only “diverts astronomical amounts of money away from addressing the needs of their children” (p. 333) but also reinforces poor literacy skills and furthers the achievement gap in oppressed groups. However, the focus on raising test scores has remained the leading factor in leadership and budgetary decisions on pedagogy (Darder & Torres, 2005; Giroux, 2004, 2011; Kirylo et al., 2010).

**Instruction**

The literature reveals many components of a humanizing or liberating pedagogy. Scholars and practitioners have been utilizing these qualities for over four decades. Although a humanizing pedagogy is not intended to be prepackaged and sold to districts across the nation, it can serve as the foundational practice that links theory to praxis through an approach to educating all students. As mentioned in chapter 1 and further detailed here, foundational practices in a humanizing pedagogy lead to shifts within the learning environment, instructional design, and leadership practices within education. The following assert the philosophical underpinnings of a humanizing pedagogy: (a) A humanizing pedagogy is centered around humans; (b) a humanizing pedagogy is highly contextualized, (c) a humanizing pedagogy is relevant and socially driven, (d) a humanizing pedagogy is ambiguous and versatile, and (e) a humanizing pedagogy cannot be measured by standardized test scores.
A humanizing pedagogy is centered around humans. Though the redundancy of this statement may seem straightforward, educational policy and historical practices have failed to serve this purpose for centuries. Though education has made corporate America trillions of dollars in prepackaged programs, there is an even greater deficit in the money spent on those piled high among the nation’s drop-out or drop-in (students still in school but completely disengaged) rate. Money and test scores continue to produce the systemic and myopic practices that have little to no proven success. A humanizing education eliminates the numerical stagnation that accompanies the current system by instead maintaining a focus on the human elements of pedagogical change. Freire believed that as part of a human historical process individuals have an incredible capacity for reconstructing themselves and transforming, reinventing, and becoming is what makes them human (Darder, 1998).

A humanizing pedagogy is highly contextualized and a humanizing pedagogy is relevant and socially driven. Freire’s literacy campaigns were both dialogic and worked against the mainstreamed “top-down” approach, both of which he believed to be the difference in a revolutionary method rather than a reformist one (Westerman, 2005). Freire believed that the social reality of students was best communicated through a dialogic process, one that could emancipate and liberate them from society’s oppressive nature.

A humanizing pedagogy is ambiguous and versatile and a humanizing pedagogy cannot be measured by standardized test scores. Darder and Torres (2004) reported, “In many ways, the politics of testing, along with the prescribed curriculum it inspires, ultimately functions to erode teacher autonomy and creativity, as well as their authority within their classrooms” (p. 213); as well as, “Studies repeatedly show that standardized tests are flawed when used as a single measure of progress, because they fail to measure students’ ability to
judge, analyze, infer, interpret or reason, namely, engage in critical thought” (p. 211); and, “Standardized testing has historically functioned to systematically reproduce, overtly and covertly, the conditions within schools that perpetuate a culture of elitism, privilege, and exploitation.” (p. 89). Educational leaders have been problem-solving a more effective system for assessment for decades. Some districts and schools have placed less of an emphasis on standardized tests and focused more on authentic measurement procedures that focus on competency in 21st century skills. Eliminating the NCLB federal mandate on standardized testing has also been a topic among educational leaders. As laws change and requirements tighten or loosen around standardized testing, it will be essential for pedagogical shifts to occur as a part of that transformation.

Giroux (2011) wrote collectively in response to measurement by only numerical values:

We need to think otherwise as a condition for acting otherwise. Only a pedagogy that embraces the civic purpose of education and provides a vocabulary and set of practices that enlarge our humanity will contribute to increasing the possibility for public life and expanding shared spaces, values, and responsibilities. (p. 58)

**Humanizing Education Through Leadership**

Educational leaders can be students, teachers, administrators, community members, or anyone involved in educational change. Freire believed citizenship was always in a state of becoming and was dependent upon the commitment, political clarity, coherence, and decision that must be fought to obtain liberation (Darder, 1998). It is the responsibility of educational leaders to create localized conditions within their schools and communities for a humanizing pedagogy that coexists with policy. Myles Horton (1973) spoke of this as
experiential learning: “If we are to think seriously about liberating people to cope with their own lives, we must refuse to limit the educational process to what can go on only in schools” (p. 331).

Darder (1998) identified what she believed Freire found to be “indispensable qualities of progressive teachers” (p. 575). It was Freire’s belief that these qualities could help teachers avoid the pitfalls of avant-gardism and educational plutocracy and to understand that they are not in a position of liberating students but instead in a unique strategic setting where students are invited to liberate themselves. She states:

Unlike the traditional pedagogical emphasis on specific teaching methodologies, particular classroom curricula, and the use of standardized texts and materials, Freire’s indispensable qualities focus on those human values that expand a teacher’s critical and emotional capacity to enter into effective learning-teaching relationships with their students. (p. 575)

The Freirean “indispensable qualities” move beyond traditional pedagogical components (methods, curricula, texts, and materials) and focus on human values (critical and emotional capacities for building relationships). These qualities include, but are not limited to: humility, courage, tolerance, decisiveness, security, tension between patience and impatience, and joy of living.

• Humility: This quality represents courage, self-confidence, self-respect, and respect for others. Freire believed this quality asserted the skill to listen beyond opposing views or differences. Darder (1998) explains, “Freire associated humility with the dialectical ability to live an insecure security, which means a human existence that did not require absolute answers or solutions to a problem” (p. 576).
• Courage: Freire referred to concrete fears as those that may threaten a person’s job or hold them back from promotion.

• Tolerance: Rooted in ethical responsibility, respect and dignity, Darder (1998) explains, “Freire adamantly stressed that tolerance is neither about playing the game, nor a civilized gesture of hypocrisy, nor a coexistence with the unbearable” (p. 576).

• Decisiveness: Without the ability to make decisions, teachers’ actions often result in irresponsible practices, blame, or permissiveness, and the inability to make decisions is often linked to lack of confidence.

• Security: Also referred to as confidence, security is linked to a sense of competence, ethical honesty, and the clear vision for political goals.

• Tension between patience and impatience: This concept represents the dialectical nature of too little patience or impatience; not enough patience or impatience can lead to impairment in effective pedagogy.

• Joy of living: Freire believed that embracing life, despite the challenges, is what defines humanity (Darder, 1998).

It is incumbent upon educational leaders to employ such qualities in creating a humanizing education.

When discussing educating teachers as being at the core of imagining schools as utopic-heterotopic spaces and centers of possibility, Fischman, McLaren, Sunker, and Lankshear (2005) stated, “Teachers and teacher educators must take the leading role in developing a coherent pedagogical, philosophical, moral, and political vision of school reform in such a way that their efforts are connected to the needs of their local communities”
In addition to their work, other educational leadership scholars, such as Scheurich and Skrla (2003) drew upon the work of educational leaders in creating equitable and excellent schools. Central to their analysis on humanizing leaders is that all children must be taught and that to serve just one group, such as White middle class students, in hopes that all children will learn, is a disservice to the profession. They have found in classrooms and studies across the country that

the creativity or excellence of a teacher is not so much about the content of what is being taught, but about the way it is being taught. . . . A good teacher builds on the culture or lived context of his or her children. (p. 39)

Within the field of educational research, it is important to note that the concept of humanizing pedagogy posits the life of the child as being in the center of learning (M. Apple, 1990; Bartolemé, 1994; Freire, 1970, Giroux, 2011; Scheurich & Skrla, 2003).

**Critiques of a Humanizing and Culturally Relevant Pedagogy**

Infusing the work of Tony Wagner (2008, 2012) and a few other trending educational leaders among critical theorists and pedagogues will receive much criticism. Wagner’s work, though well-intentioned around innovation and creativity, has been economically driven. Critical scholars would suggest his work and the work of similar authors, such as Sir Ken Robinson (2011) and Malcolm Gladwell (2008, 2014), support a capitalistic view of education and the world. Critical pedagogy supports a socially constructed stance on education and will push back against the support cited in this study of 21st Century Skills and the use of CCSS to navigate pedagogical change. The goal of the study was to gain access and movement toward a humanizing education within this exact dilemma (gap). This study furthers the support for the need to see these two adversaries coexisting rather than in
constant turmoil and competition. The policy-driven nature behind Wagner’s work is the first of its kind to be included in educational policy at the national level with the integration of 21st century skills. Scholars should pay attention to that kind of influence. Teacher leaders can use that momentum to get at the humanizing ideals situated within this study.

In addition, most of the general critiques of critical pedagogical theories and the practices of such theories in public schooling come from feminist scholars. The main critique is that the leading scholars of critical pedagogy have all been men (Darder et al., 2009). For the purposes of this study, there was intentionality in pulling from the scholarly work of many recent critical pedagogical scholars who are female such as Antonia Darder, Lilia Bartolomé, Maria Salazar, and Gloria Ladson-Billings, among many others. Another possible critique of this work is that I have consistently used “humanizing” pedagogy instead of “critical” pedagogy to support the theory. The term “humanizing” is used often among critical theorists; the term “critical” in terms of this scholarly literature is usually associated with an identified or specified oppressed group. The purpose of this study in identifying a “humanizing” education was to be inclusive of all students and educators in the system, as Freire was well-intended with his view of education for all oppressed groups.

Summary

Critical scholars have long stressed that a pedagogical focus on generic materials, standardized test scores, and myopic delivery methods deny students access to a humanizing education. The literature cited in this chapter provides a historical overview of the theory and research relevant to a humanizing education. A substantial body of research exists in the theories and practices of a humanizing and culturally relevant pedagogy. Additional research is needed in the area of these practices coexisting with educational policy.
CHAPTER 3. METHODOLOGY

Critical Arts-Based Inquiry

Critical inquiry is concerned with relations and interpretations of power, social inequalities, and human agency toward advancing social justice (Carspecken, 1996). Qualitative research suggests exploring and understanding meaning among individuals or groups as a way of inquiring about the complexity of a situation (Creswell, 2013). Denzin, Lincoln and Smith (2008) state, “All inquiry is both political and moral . . . and it seeks forms of praxis and inquiry that are emancipatory and empowering” (p. 2).

Interpretive research practice, such as critical inquiry, “represents inquiry done for explicit political, utopian purposes, a politics of liberation, a reflexive discourse constantly in search of an open-ended, subversive, multi-voiced epistemology” (Lather, 2007, p. x–xi). Critical inquiry seeks to bring scholarship and advocacy together (deMarrais & Lapan, 2004). Critical inquiry seeks to examine practices, artifacts, and words to better understand the culture and identity within the space and context in which these things exist (Miller & Kirkland, 2010). Human experiences are captured through the social and cultural lens of context, linguistic analyses, and language as “critical inquiry seeks to examine and explore our humanity in order to improve it” (Miller & Kirkland, 2010, p. 109).

Like the goals of qualitative research, the participants in this study were seeking to make sense of the world through their lived experiences of educational policy and the intricacies of school reform. This paradigm presents the intention of critical inquiry within the arts-based research methods of this study as a way to look at the complexities of policy and practice in order to add substance to the unknown. As critical inquiry is neither a fixed
entity nor one that has a research process that leads to answered questions, it does highlight the construction of meaning alongside the deconstruction of reality (Miller & Kirkland, 2010). Kincheloe and McLaren (2007) recognized schools as sites of ideological hegemony and social practices of reproduction and that “our educational system is in turmoil” (p. 413). Presenting critical inquiry as part of this study served the voices of teacher leaders and students and provided insights into the theoretical implications of pedagogy.

**Objectives**

There were two primary objectives this critical inquiry attempted to meet in understanding teacher leadership and pedagogical shifts toward a humanizing education within a reform process that is politically tied. The first objective was to analyze how two teachers navigated reform while simultaneously providing a humanizing and culturally relevant pedagogy and what this process entailed. The second objective was to relate the theoretical framework of critical pedagogy to the practices employed by these teachers.

**Arts-based Practices**

Arts-based inquiry inspires and enlightens the active search for meaning. In arts-based research, meaning resides in the simultaneous use of language, image, time, space, objects, and events (Sinner et al., 2006). Traditional practices in education can confuse and displace meaning for those naturally curious about the world. Arts-based research seeks to restore this natural occurrence and instill the practice and theory of the arts as a reputable qualitative method. Greenwood (2012) expressed the appeal of the arts as an investigative tool that researchers know “at a ‘gut’ level as well as a conceptual one just how effective arts processes can be as exploratory, deconstructive, and teaching tools (p. 2).
Arts-based methods and methodology have entered into the scholarly practices of education, social sciences, humanities, and health research as a viable approach to research (Barone & Eisner, 2012; Driessnack & Furukawa, 2011; Lea, Belliveau, Wager, & Beck, 2011; Rollings, 2010). Arts-based research has recently gained acceptance and ground as a useful methodological approach (Greenwood, 2012). This dissertation addresses the contributions of arts-based research along with some of the methodological components according to the literature. As many other methodologies, such as ethnography, are often paired with arts-based methods, some relationships may exist throughout the analysis.

**Contributions of Arts-Based Research**

Arts-based research pushes the envelope on theoretical and pedagogical models of inquiry. The practices involved are worthy of exploration and take the world of education on a divergent pedagogical path. James Rolling (2010) referred to this path as an inquiry model that can take researchers in directions the sciences cannot go.

Though humanity has a tradition of telling stories through the arts, its use for academic research has only recently come under consideration. Humans come to an understanding of the world through an aesthetic use of receptive information, whether verbal or through other senses; this aesthetic is what engages humans with knowing. The arts allow a human to use one’s whole self in that one can communicate in multidimensional ways and, as Greenwood (2012) stated, “the art-based process [is] a tool that [leaves] more power for self-analysis and self-definition in the hands of participants” (p. 6).

Arts-based research can promote the voices of marginalized groups through the effort of fusing critical work with ethnography and other methodologies to support a transformative or constructivist worldview. For example, Bagley and Castro-Salazar (2012) combined
critical race theory with the life histories of undocumented American students of Mexican origin into an arts-based performance called *historias*. This political and cultural context, presented through art, added a dynamic feature that allowed for the publicity of qualitative research findings to be shared with the rest of the world, especially with those without access through academia.

Because aesthetic approaches can address social issues by allowing the audience to re-experience a social phenomenon, arts-based research leads to future inquiry. The ultimate goal of this research was to build “the capacity for inviting members of an audience into the experiencing aspects of a world that may have been otherwise outside their range of sight and to thereby cause them to question usual, commonplace, orthodox perspectives on social phenomenon” (Barone & Eisner, 2012, p. 56). Arts-based research first makes careful observations of the world and then “recasts them into meaningful cultural form,” therefore making the research both practical and productive (Barone & Eisner, 2012, p. 56).

**Arts-Based Collection Methodology**

Arts-based research design begins by envisioning a research approach, engaging in inquiry (questions emerge over time), selecting sources of information and ideas, and then offering interpretations with “intellectual openness and creativity” within practice, within the essence (Finley, 2003, p. 283). There are no pre-established rules with arts-based research; the rules themselves are determined by the work itself (Diamond, 1998).

What kinds of questions does arts-based research seek to answer? What collection techniques are utilized in the field? What relationships are drawn between the research and the pedagogy of teaching and learning? These are all questions arts-based research seeks to understand and apply to the methodology.
The process for arts-based research is a creative, emergent, and dynamic process of inquiry. There are no checklists, templates, or formulas to follow. Though some general frameworks are presented here, much of the research unfolds as part of the process.

According to Greenwood (2012), there are two dominant approaches to arts-based research: (a) The arts themselves can be researched, as many of the arts have complex meanings; and (b) the arts can be utilized as tools for learning. More often than not, they involve both.

Educators often use arts-based research to examine culture and identity. Some even use it as a way to involve community action and advocate politically (Finley, 2005; Rolling, 2010). Many efforts have been undertaken for art activism; the research platform, INTER-Action, is a good example of such efforts. INTER-Action follows Freire’s ideals to explore change for a sustainable future (Torres de Eça, Paridiñas, & Trigo, 2012). These actions can be infused into community settings, offering such practices as educational platforms in and out of the classroom.

Though the emphasis of this chapter is on arts-based research in education, other areas are advancing arts-based techniques for their uses in data collection. For instance, the work of Driessnack and Furukawa (2011) and their arts-based data collection from pediatric nursing adds much to the perspective of what contributions art-based methods can have for any field and practice. The authors explored some arts-based collection methods for working with children. These techniques included drawings, photographs, graphics, and artifacts. These are among many that aid in accessing the internal sensory cues of children prior to interviewing. Integrative methods and arts-based techniques have gained momentum in
accessing the unique voices of children and the contributions they can make to qualitative research.

Some arts-based scholars’ take on structural frameworks such as arts-based educational research (ABER) as described below, whereas others have a loose structure that follows some fundamental values. Barone and Eisner (2012) used the following seven design elements: (a) the creation of a virtual reality, (b) the presence of ambiguity, (c) the use of expressive language, (d) the use of contextualized and vernacular language, (e) the promotion of empathy, (f) the personal signature of the researcher/writer, and (g) the presence of aesthetic form. The range of literary forms of ABER, specifically educational criticism and narrative storytelling are among those being widely utilized (Quinn & Calkin, 2008, p. 2). In more recent studies, Barone and Eisner (2012) have released a list of suggested criteria that arts-based research can attend to but are not limited by: (a) incisiveness, (b) concision, (c) coherence, (d) generativity, (e) social significance, and (f) evocation and illumination. Though some of these values can be recognized or are related to the arts-based methods for research, this study attempted to establish quality and merit through the use of the four quadrants defined in Norris’s (2011) great wheel and detailed later.

Arts-based research incorporates the processes, forms (or structures), and approaches of creative practices in academic scholarship. Therefore, arts-based research draws from the creative arts to inform and shape social science research in interdisciplinary ways, thus redefining methodological vehicles in the field of education (Sinner et al., 2006).

Nisha Sajnani (2012) emphasized improvisation at the heart of the artistic process by placing an emphasis on risk, responsiveness, and relationships. She expressed her belief that
arts-based practices provide openness to uncertainty. This is a necessary researcher practice among an attunement to difference and aesthetic intelligence (Sajnani, 2012). Stepping into the unknown helps researchers grasp the essence of learning and can develop research practices as a way of improving pedagogy alongside humanity.

**Arts-Based Inquiry for a Humanizing Education**

Arts-based research contributes to the qualitative field of research while enriching the context of the field and pedagogy of the participants it serves. As this study took on an arts-based inquiry as a research approach while infusing some critical inquiry practices, the participants in the study also were employing arts-based inquiry as an instructional practice. As this is further explained in the themes of instructional design explored in the findings of chapter 4, it is important to note the relationship between the research approach and the practices utilized by participants as a contribution to the research for the participants. This is a common relationship among arts-based researchers and their participants. For example, a group of teachers in Vancouver, Canada, working with preservice teachers and elementary students, used drama to acquire language. The research and participants from their study examined the pedagogy and results of the study to further this approach as both an epistemological and pedagogical development. The authors integrated theater throughout the research process and explored the impact drama had on the community of multicultural and multilingual learners (Lea et al., 2011).

Another popular arts-based methodology from Canada recently used by others is A/r/tography. A/r/tography emphasizes the process (praxis) by which practitioners draw upon their identities (artists, teachers, scholars) to artistically engage (poiesis) in research and in questioning and requestioning their understandings (theoria). A/r/tographic research has
six renderings that exist throughout the process. These renderings include: contiguity, living inquiry, metaphor and metonymy, openings, reverberations, and excess (Springgay, Irwin, & Kind, 2005). These developments in the practices of arts-based research have started socially engaging practices in universities and schools around the world (Irwin & de Cosson, 2004). The socially engaging approaches to these collaborative efforts are a continued effort to push the arts into the P–20 education world as well as into the communities that support them.

**Abstractions and Projections**

Norris (2011) suggested that arts-based projects take on a postmodern stance with an organic framework for explaining how concepts interrelate. He used the metaphor of a great wheel to assess the quality and design approach to arts-based projects. The great wheel is divided in four quadrants. Replacing the cardinal directions with pedagogy, poiesis, politics, and public positioning, the idea is that these can be moving simultaneously in the same direction instead of separately. As the holistic approach by Norris (2011) interrelates pedagogy and art through the lens of instruction or research, it was the best-suited model for determining the quality and merit of this study. Due to the participants’ involvement in their own arts-based approach (instruction) and the methodology of the study (research), Norris’s (2011) approach presented the best fit in exploring the benefits of arts-based inquiry on research and through his four quadrant approach. Adapted from Paula Underwood’s (2000) use of the traditional medicine wheel to situate learning and knowing, the four quadrants of the great wheel, in which all four dimensions can be happening simultaneously include: (a) pedagogical—intellectual or emotional growth within the context of blending new knowledge (content) with art-making or art-viewing; (b) poiesis—the meaning made from the art both in an aesthetic, moral and intellectual sense and through the art-making itself; (c)
political—the cultural and historical contexts within the art reflective of the political message in the art and within the politics of the process itself; and (d) public positioning—the delivery of the art within the public setting in which it has an aesthetic appeal and delivery effective to the purpose of the art.

Norris (2011), when situating the pedagogical dimension of the wheel within research suggested, “In the case of research, the content (subject) rests with the participants (student/research participant), albeit mediated by the researcher (teacher) and the literature (milieu)” (p. 5), thereby placing the participants and research dynamics of a humanizing pedagogy within the researcher’s own pedagogical approach. As all four quadrants were used to establish quality and merit for the research methodology, they also were used alongside other characteristics of arts-based research to guide and create meaning throughout the process. This model acts much like the artistic process. Much like a prenamed process such as a/r/tography has the elements of artist, scholar, and teacher, much of arts-based research follows the same beat with qualitative autonomy for each creative result.

Arts-based research allows for the living inquiries of the questions being explored and the reflective processes to evolve during the study. For instance, in Lea et al.’s (2011) study, theory and theater were in a continuous cycle. When one aspect was being built upon, it would inadvertently lead and inform the other. Though Drama as an Additional Language project was not able to embrace the six renderings of the a/r/tographic process, the authors were able to expand their research and integrate understanding of research-based theater (Lea et al., 2011). The research functions through the form and content of the art. They are linked, as the content can carry the message through the art or the art itself has potential to reveal the content. This often connects the researcher to the aesthetic decisions of the
product and process. Due to the interpretive nature of art, the aesthetic values can often
distract the message or be misinterpreted (Quinn & Calkins, 2008). Similar to other
interpretations of qualitative research as a methodology, arts-based research seeks to explain
phenomena and add perspective to the world. Though it has an altruistic nature, there are no absolutes to be drawn from the work.

David Pariser (2009) referred to art-based research as a “Trojan horse.” He used the
arts as a form of inquiry in social sciences that conquers new disciplinary territory. He
referred to Eisner’s (1995) model for art-based research as a legitimate quest in assisting fine
arts. Practitioners and educators utilize the research as a discipline that is less constrained
than is a scientific method, which is reliant on evidence. Eisner pushed a hybrid of how the
arts can create the groundwork for breaking into the hard sciences as well.

Arts-based research design begins by envisioning a research approach. It then moves
into an engaging inquiry from which questions emerge over time. From there, sources of
information and ideas develop with “intellectual openness and creativity” and, within this
practice, new understandings are portrayed artistically (Finley, 2003, p. 283). From this
research methodology comes theory, practice, and a reflective process that mirrors individual
lives and humanity. Arts-based research and practice require a creative commitment that can
move qualitative research ahead for those daring enough to go beyond the water’s edge
(Rolling, 2010).

**Research Questions**

This study employed an arts-based inquiry that explored how teacher leaders and
students in the RunDSM organization conceptualized the notion of pedagogy, policy, and
practice into a humanizing education. A critical inquiry framework served as a means to
connect the factors that influenced their decisions and actions related to the formal and informal contexts of their school and their community. This framework also served to connect theory to a critical pedagogy. This methodology, along with an organized research design and methods, addressed the following research questions:

1. What pedagogical beliefs and practices exist within RunDSM?
2. What conditions and structures were in place for RunDSM to develop?
3. What relationships exist between practice-relevant policies and pedagogy?

**Research Design**

This qualitative, arts-based inquiry used open-ended interviews, observations, public documents, and audiovisual materials analysis. Two participants were interviewed and observed over the period of 1 year. Interviews were in-depth and open-ended, and they took place in multiple settings. Some interviews were one-on-one with participants and some were with both of them together. Over 10 observations of RunDSM performances and/or Urban Leadership classes took place. Public documents and audiovisual materials that were shared publicly were also used to gain perspective through this research design. Further details of the research design are described in this section.

**Human Subjects Approval**

Prior to conducting the study, approval for the use of human subjects was requested and granted from the Institutional Review Board. A copy of the approval appears in Appendix B.

**Participant Selection and RunDSM**

Miss Emily Lang and Mr. Kristopher Rollins were purposefully selected as participants for this study. Their leadership efforts at Harding Middle School and within the
Des Moines Public Schools for creating and leading the organization called RunDSM:
Creating Brave New Voices was the reason for their deliberate selection. Both participants were teachers at Harding Middle School and Central Academy for part of the study and were hired as part-time Urban Arts Coordinators for the district midway through the study. Both Emily and Kristopher continued to teach at Central Academy part time as well.

Both participants signed an informed consent form prior to the study and were contacted through e-mail prior to each interview and/or observation session. The form included details of the study including potential risks and is included in Appendix C. Participants agreed to allow their real names to be used; the nature of their work is often in the newspaper and is publicized widely. Both participants encourage the transparent nature of their work and were willing to make this study open to their real identities instead of using pseudonyms and confidentiality. There were parts of the study that participants were able to revise during member checks if they felt the content breached the identities of any of the students or colleagues involved in the study.

These two teachers started the umbrella organization RunDSM. This organization had five subcomponents that support students in different ways, but all were a part of the “creating brave new voices” movement in their district. Each is detailed below with a brief description:

1. Movement 515 meets once a week during the school year to combine the skills of writing and performance in a creative writing community. Students work toward becoming change agents and shed light on the impact of human emotion through their writing and performance.
2. Minorities on the Move examines hip-hop and pop culture to analyze and deconstruct racial stereotypes. Students utilize this opportunity in the summer when they travel to various locations around the Des Moines area and take adjoining classes at a local university to support their voices in the community.

3. Hip-Hop: Rhetoric and Rhyme has been the eighth grade course offering in which students build on their skills of writing, fluency, comprehension, and 21st century skills. Students address the needs of their community in this course and design and maintain projects that address those needs.

4. DSM Teen Slam has been offered to any student in the district. This annual event supports students who want to take their performance with poetry to a higher level. Winners from this event get to travel to the Brave New Voices festival sponsored by HBO television. This partnership provides a safe space for young poets to share the power of their voice with others.

5. The Urban Leadership 101 and 102 courses have been available to all high school students in the district. Courses take place at Central Academy and create dialogue around social movements and the leaders that emerge from such change. This opportunity for students is community based and is rooted in the historical social movements shaping urban settings across the country. Spoken word, performance-based literacy, oral history, and youth and community summits all support this platform for youth leadership development.

Students and teachers have developed each of these offerings from the ground up. For the purposes of this study, the observations were drawn from classrooms, performances, and
social output from the organization. This is further detailed through the methods section below.

**Site Selection**

This study took place within the Des Moines Public Schools, specifically at Harding Middle School and Central Academy. The site was pre-selected for the study based on the pedagogical practices implemented in the school and in connection with the RunDSM organization, which supported students in the school and the community.

Harding Middle School was serving a student population of over 575 students in a district of over 32,000. The district had a graduation rate of 67.1%. The demographics reported by the Iowa Department of Education (2012a) included the following racial breakdown: 31% Hispanic, 23% African American, 6% mixed race, 10% Asian, and 30% White. The free and reduced lunch eligibility rate was 86%. Twenty-four percent of the student body was labeled English language learners. The special education program was serving 23% of the total population. The school was Title I eligible, which permits all students in the school to participate in authorized programs.

In the 2011–2012 school year, Harding Middle School received the status of an NCLB Persistently Lowest-Achieving Schools by the Iowa Department of Education (2012b). This meant that the school had to implement one of the four federal intervention models provided by the state if it wanted to receive funding to help the school. The school chose the turnaround model, which replaces the school principal and, through a screening process, rehires only half of the existing staff. The model also requires the school to adopt a new governance structure and provide evidence of other school improvement efforts that must include: curriculum reform, professional development, extended learning time, and
other strategies (Iowa Department of Education, 2012b). The school had until 2014 to finalize the turnaround process.

Data Collection

Data for this study were collected through interviews with the two teacher leaders, observations in classrooms and at RunDSM events, and an analysis of public documents and audiovisual materials. Collection of this data helped meet the objectives discussed in chapter 1 and sought to answer the following research questions:

1. What pedagogical beliefs and practices exist within RunDSM?
2. What conditions and structures were in place for RunDSM to develop?
3. What relationships exist between practice-relevant policies and pedagogy?

Interviews. Qualitative interviews generally have open-ended questions intended to elicit views, opinions, and accounts from the participant (Creswell, 2014). For this study, the first interview session focused on how the participant internalized policy (see Appendix D, Interview Protocol 1). The second interview session focused on how the participants produced and selected curriculum, assessment, and instructional practices to use with students (see Appendix D, Interview Protocol 2). The interview questions following the initial interview sessions emerged from the first two sessions and addressed any gaps in the goals of the research. All interviews were transcribed and reviewed with participants for member checking. Interviews addressed the participants’ journey in creating RunDSM, their own educational experiences, future goals for the organization, and their perceptions of pedagogy and policy. All interviews were coded using inductive coding. Coding was informed by the literature mentioned in the literature review section of this study but was
mostly grounded in the data themselves. Themes, connections, and other emerging patterns from the data were also included in the findings.

**Observation.** Observations followed and were intertwined with the interview sessions. The themes that emerged from the interviews provided the context in which the observations served. Creswell (2013) encouraged qualitative researchers to take on more innovative data collection methods, for example, the need to consider “the possibilities of narrative research to include living stories, metaphorical visual narratives, and digital archives” (p. 161). Public documents and audiovisual materials (including digital archives and visual narratives) were analyzed for this study.

**Materials.** An analysis of information available to the public related to the policy and practices involved in Harding Middle School, Des Moines Public Schools and RunDSM all contributed to this study. This information included audiovisual materials and media output from RunDSM. The policy documents looked specifically at NCLB (2001) sanctions related to the designation of a “school in need of assistance” and Title I requirements. The CCSS, Iowa Core and Iowa Core universal constructs, program offerings, and curricular changes also were analyzed. The website, communications related to performances, community involvement flyers, and other media output from RunDSM were included in the study. The findings of the school-related documents were available for teacher leaders and the district to view.

**Research Methods and Data Collection**

Data for this study came from the narrative interview transcriptions, observational field notes, document and audiovisual materials analysis as well as from the two teacher leaders who taught and created RunDSM. The site was pre-selected for the study based on
the pedagogical practices implemented in the school and in connection with the RunDSM organization, which supported students in the school and the community. These leaders transformed their curriculum to meet the Iowa Core standards while delivering a humanistic and culturally relevant pedagogy.

**Data Analysis**

Data analysis was organized using a multiphase approach. Interviews were transcribed using open coding to identify themes. These themes were shared with the participants in the study during member checks to ensure goodness in the study. Observations were organized through field notes and arranged by theme. Public documents and audiovisual materials were catalogued and arranged to support emerging themes and ongoing memos throughout the data analysis process.

This arts-based inquiry allowed me to generate meaning from the data collected in the field through an inductive analysis process (Creswell, 2014; Crotty, 1998). The following steps were utilized in examining and analyzing the data: (a) organization and preparation of data included typed transcriptions from each interview; detailed descriptions from observational field notes were typed and arranged by date and relevance; documents and audiovisual materials were arranged into initial categories; (b) overview of the data included initial perceptions captured through memoing and organizing data into large categories such as organization, beliefs, and actions; (c) coding the data was completed by hand on the initial transcripts and observational field notes; public documents and audiovisual information were also coded with initial categories; (d) identifying emerging themes, which were organized and arranged for member checking in a follow-up interview that was recorded, transcribed, and used to add description to the findings; (e) a qualitative narrative and learning map,
which were created to provide a detailed account and visual map of the findings; (f) interpretation and research findings with my own reflections on the research process were analyzed as a last step.

**Ethical Considerations**

One of the interview participants in the study was a previous graduate student of mine. Her project to complete her master’s program involved part of the components used in creating RunDSM, which was the central focus of this study. She was no longer a student of mine having graduated from the program 2 years prior to the start of the study. Real names and locations were used in this study. Participants were given the option to change their mind on using their real names in the study at any point in the process. In order to protect the confidentiality of students, there was no identifiable information included in this study. It is important to note that the website mentioned in this study has identifiable information of the students and teacher leaders in the study. All images used in the study are publicly available through the website.
CHAPTER 4. ANALYSIS AND FINDINGS

An arts-based inquiry approach was used for this study. This chapter includes background information on participants, a detailed analysis of the findings as organized by major themes and subthemes, and a discussion of the findings. Major themes identified by the research include: learning environment, instructional design, and leadership practices. Subthemes include: liberating conditions, youth voice as power, transformative learning; coconstructed learning, arts-based inquiry, problem-posing learning; and dialogical leadership, community-based actions, energetic reciprocity. Themes emerged through the use of interviews, observations, and analysis of public documents and audiovisual materials.

Data Analysis Process

Arts-based inquiry can lead to aesthetic experiences allowing others to construct meaning of one’s self and the world (Kræhe & Brown, 2011). The focus of arts-based research analysis is to create insight by illuminating awareness to important social and cultural phenomenon for which the research can serve as “a heuristic [process] through which we deepen and make more complex our understanding of some aspect of the world” (Barone & Eisner, 2012, p. 3) The method of analysis in arts-based research does not follow a prescribed process but, instead, is interpretive, iterative, and creative. Therefore, the analysis process for this study provides scholarly commentary about the major themes and subthemes that emerged from the data while attending to criteria pertaining to the quality and merit of arts-based research. These criteria, such as incisiveness, concision, coherence, social significance, evocation, and illumination (Barone & Eisner, 2012), tie the research
analysis and findings to the culminating creative work shared with the participants. These criteria are further explored in the discussion of chapter 5.

The following steps were used to analyze data: (a) organization and preparation of data, (b) overview of all the data, (c) coding the data, (d) identifying emerging themes, (e) creating qualitative narrative and a learning map, and (f) interpretation of research findings.

**Organization and Preparation of Data**

Data analyzed from the participant interviews consisted of six typed transcriptions from audio recordings for each interview. Included in the data from each interview was a typed, detailed description of the setting and any field notes that pertained to the contents of the interview. Materials that were collected or shared by participants, such as public documents or audiovisual materials, were sorted and arranged into initial categories. Observational field notes were typed and initially arranged by date or relevance. These initial categories included photographs, flyers of events, lesson components, student work samples, website links, etc. Materials collected that were created prior to the study were archived as data that supported the historical context of the participant’s experience.

**Overview of the Data**

Initial exploration of the dataset started while interviews, observations, and data collection were still taking place. These initial impressions of the data were recorded in the margins of transcriptions and on field notes, whereas pictures and audiovisual data were tagged with electronic notes and catalogued in e-files. Initial perceptions were captured through memoing, and larger categories were explored for sorting the data. These initial categories were: background of participants and/or organization, beliefs, and actions.
Coding the Data

All coding of data was done by hand on initial transcripts and observational field notes. Codes and analytic procedures occurred simultaneously and evolved while interviews and observations were still taking place in the field. During this ongoing process, “lean coding,” as described by Creswell (2013) was used to identify five or six categories with shorthand codes to then expand upon as the dataset was added to and re-viewed. Some code labels emerged from the recurring titles and words used by participants, referred to as “in vivo codes” (Creswell, 2013). For example, participants referred to “energetic reciprocity” often in their interviews and in speaking with students in class sessions and public performances. This initial code was a category that eventually led to a subtheme within the larger theme of leadership practices. Most codes emerged from names that best described the information. Codes that described critical categories also emerged through much of the data. These codes were used in conjunction with the other codes. Many of the public documents and audiovisual materials fit into multiple codes. These were tagged electronically and filed in multiple locations by code. For example, the image shown in Figure 1 was from the Movement 515 + Street Art sessions that occurred on Thursday afternoons at the Des Moines Social Club. This picture was tagged and filed with four codes. Three of the codes had previously emerged from other data (cocreation, arts-based inquiry, and student voice), and one was created after analyzing the picture from the dataset (art making as liberation). Codes that related to critical studies were also layered and tagged on this picture and included: racism, class, feminism, violence, sexual identity, immigration rights, body image, and human rights.
Identifying Emerging Themes

Themes were first identified through interviews and observational field notes. Comparisons among the themes from these two data sources were considered for analysis. Public documents and audiovisual materials also were examined to form complex theme connections (Creswell, 2014). All findings were shared with participants through member checking. A follow-up interview to go through each of the themes and subthemes was conducted to get participant comments. This follow-up interview was transcribed and used to add description to the findings.

Qualitative Narrative and Learning Map

The narrative description supports the identified themes and subthemes of the study. Themes were interpreted to present a detailed description of the findings of the analysis.
Descriptive information about each participant supports this analysis as does a learning map that visually represents the themes and subthemes of the study. This will be further discussed in Chapter 5.

**Interpretation of Research Findings**

An interpretation of the research findings is presented as a call for action through transformative leadership change and further questioning for future research. This step also allowed for self-reflection and analysis of positionality.

**Background of Participants**

A benefit of arts-based research as a primary method for collecting and analyzing data is the opportunity to move beyond traditional characteristics of qualitative data and experience aesthetic conditions that change the social dimensions that most researchers use for inquiry. Most of the information interpreted in this section came from interviews and observations from the field. However, it is important to note that I have observed both participants (pictured in Figure 2) multiple times performing spoken word poetry. As an iterative and creative process, interview questions and observation results add to the background of participants in a multifaceted, aesthetically reflective way.

*Figure 2. Study participants (Source: RunDSM, n.d.)*
Miss Emily Lang

Comfortable and confident.
She speaks of her students with pride,
herself with humbled spirit and
of the future with wonder.
Her poems ring sturdy in the backbones of others,
firing up each vertebrae,
of those once quit and quivered.
She rebels with wisdom.
She seeks revenge with forgiveness.
She always leads with love.

The first time I heard Emily perform was when she presented her teacher inquiry project for my class in fulfillment of her master’s degree at Drake University. It was her last class before graduating. The poem she read that day spoke to the vision she had for education. It spoke to the realm of possibility she had set out to create for the students in her project and all other students in the world. The paper she read from that day may be long gone now, possibly crumpled, tossed aside, recycled, tucked in a folder inside a box labeled “grad school” in her garage. The paper may be gone, but her words and vision have lived on.

A few years after reading her poem and presenting her project, Emily stood on a stage in front of over 250 audience members. With a performance lineup of over 20 students, Emily, planted somewhere in the lineup herself (never asking them to do something she was not willing to do herself) shared these words with her “girls” in the crowd:

Dear 15 year old me,

“Hey girl”

I want to whisper sweet words into your ears,

Until the shock waves whittle their way into your warrior bones

And you can truly say, “I love myself.”

I want to look, like really look, into your baby blue eyes reminding you,
Baby, you are bursting with beautiful,
With sight lines of sandcastles on a satin stretched over freshly fallen snow.

That beautiful. Because our kind of beauty stretches far beyond what any man can see, and you see, if you could see years multiplied you would see you found a man, a real man, who melts for your mind, girl, your behind girl.

So no need to go back to mistreating yourself.
Just be beautiful.

Please, speak, because your lips are perfectly pursed and poised for this occasion,
For the wisest of words to be spit from your mouth, you cannot be silenced.
Every time you surprise the broken boy in the back of the class with your heavenly hello, his heart crosses another finish line,

And it’s okay if you never finish in time because ladies like you just need an extra second to shine,

May your words be worn around his neck like frosted wind chimes,
A sudden sign to remind him every time the vicious wind decides to rhyme,

Just keep hanging on.
I swear it gets better.

Take your time girl, it’s okay to shine girl,
You will learn to love every curve on the highway of your hips driving for miles with him, just to pick wildflowers.

And your fifteen year old thunderbird days, Lauren Hill, the gravel road and girls, slow down those days,

The ones who matter most will feel the hollow paint howling at your feet,

Just keep walking.

And keep on loving those sisters, I learned that from you.

Love the girl you always wish to become.

When Emily was 15 years old she attended a school and district much different than the one in which she was currently teaching. A focus of interviewing Emily was how she got
to where she was currently, including questions about her own education and childhood. She grew up loving school. She was the student who had her hand raised constantly, wanting the teacher to call on her. She performed well in school because of her love for it all. Emily’s parents raised her with a positive view of education. Her father was not as much into school as her mom. Her parents divorced when she was in fifth grade, and her stepfather was a teacher at the time and went on to be a successful administrator. Emily was always involved in activities after school. She took a liking to drama and participated in over three shows a year from the time she was six years old until she graduated high school. This level of involvement led her to dreams of being a theater major and wanting to attend an art school for theater in New York City. Her best friend had similar dreams and was accepted into the American Academy for Dramatic Arts. During her senior year, Emily decided she was not ready for a move to New York City but still pursued her theater major at a college in Iowa. After her first year, she started to struggle with her decision to stay in theater.

After a year I knew I did not want to be a theatre major. I also didn’t want to wait tables my whole life or be like the one percent of people who make good money from that. But after that, I struggled. I kind of crashed and burned. I transferred to UNI to become a business major; I guess I picked the thing that was furthest away from theater. I ended up dropping out after a few months. (Emily, Interview)

Emily, a student who grew up loving school, had now quit. If one were to ask her now, she would say she quit out of fear, out of doubt, because of uncertainty of what she wanted out of school and out of life. Though Emily grew up in different circumstances than some of the students she currently was teaching, she certainly has felt pressure, she’s faced failure, and she’s felt out of place in world. Who has not felt this way? Education has a way
of standardizing one’s thinking. Emily could have stayed in school, despite her dislike of being a theater and business major. She could have continued to take classes and spend money on tuition. She could have graduated and gotten a job in business. Millions of people do this every day. The standardized, orthodox, mainstream system tells students like Emily that staying in school is a must, and if you need time to decide what you want to do in life you should feel bad about it. Emily was a good student. She knew how to be good at school. She could answer questions, participate in class, and maneuver through a K–12 system where she was highly involved in activities and had a healthy social environment. She came from a safe home. She had parents who could provide for her. If you asked her, Emily would say she grew up White and privileged. Her biggest struggle at this time, as perceived by her, emotionally, as a failure, was actually her strength. She felt bad dropping out of school, but what she didn’t realize at the time was that she what she was dropping out of wasn’t school—it was a system of conformity.

If Emily had stayed in school, she would not be in this chapter. RunDSM would not exist. The lives of thousands of students would be different. This manuscript and the findings to follow show how that difference would have been a detriment. Emily, as a creator and cofounder for the RunDSM organization, has changed the system. Conformity is no longer a goal of K–12 education. Finding one’s passion and getting educated in order to live that dream has emerged as a pedagogy that is alive and well in the Des Moines Public Schools. Emily utilizes human potential. She finds relevance in education. She works with students who did not grow up White and privileged. Put labels aside. The one common thing her students have is that they are human. They are the center of all things considered. She is a rebel. She is an outlier. She is why RunDSM has been so successful. She has
created a humanizing education for students who someday may have education contribute to their survival instead of their ruin.

Despite Emily’s fear of returning to college, she eventually did. She took a class at Grandview University, then at Des Moines Area Community College (DMACC). While she was at DMACC she discovered she had an interest in sociology and education. She transferred to Drake University where she met a bunch of energetic professors in the English Department. She was working full time at the Drake Diner and attending classes. She ended up taking enough credits to graduate with a degree in Education and English with endorsements in rhetoric and theater. Emily credited the energy of the Drake English Department for everything. They found ways to make the program work for her. They created independent studies that met her schedule. They supported her in school and in her passion for learning. She spent time on things without even noticing the time because she loved it so much. She would meet with her teachers outside of class even just to talk about books. She was motivated. She was in love with it all. It was the perfect storm.

Emily has carried much of this experience into her approach with students. She believes teachers are often put on pedestals and are given way too much power without much accountability. Some of her students have told her she has a perfect life. She has let them know it was not always this way. She has told them how she struggled and how she got through her hardships. She noted:

I think the difference between my experience and our students’ [experiences] is that I had support and a lot of our kids don’t. I think, and especially have been focused on this year, that if there is one thing I can do for kids, it is to provide them with support.
Especially in secondary, providing them a community where they can thrive. I truly believe that is the number one thing that we do. (Emily, Interview)

Emily was supported by a community of teachers that believed in her and gave her an avenue for continuing that support with others. Whether she recognized it or not, she replicated parts of her success story and support system at Drake in her own classroom. Beyond that, she built an organization around similar ideals. The pedagogical beliefs and practices of RunDSM are further discussed through the major themes section addressed later in this chapter.

Emily’s first teaching position was teaching English at one of the five high schools in the Des Moines Public Schools. She found out where she was going to be teaching 2 weeks before school started. Emily showed up to her classroom ready to dig in and start reading the novels and learning the curriculum. She showed up to an empty classroom and three textbooks on her desk. The administration did not know her name. She had no objectives, no standards, no materials for students to read. Despite her lack of support, she still had one thing she absolutely loved—her students:

It was awful, no support, but I feel like that was the point where I just really fell in love with the kids. I knew I needed to figure out how to help them, so I literally learned with them. Sometimes, I had no idea what I was teaching and it was just ridiculous. (Emily, Interview)

Emily got a pink slip and lost her job that year. It was the year that the Des Moines Public Schools had to cut hundreds of teachers. Since she was new, she got cut. She got a phone call on the last day of school saying there was a position open at Harding Middle School. She interviewed with Dr. Tom Ahart. Dr. Ahart was the Harding Middle School
principal at the time and, since then, had been appointed as the Superintendent of Des Moines Public Schools. Dr. Ahart was impressed to hear that Emily had some theater background. Even though she was interviewing for a sixth grade literacy job, Dr. Ahart worked with the Des Moines administration to add a drama/theater course to their school. When Dr. Ahart asked her about the opportunity, Emily admitted with excitement that it was her dream job. Emily would teach the literacy course as well as a drama course starting that August. According to state licensure requirements, Emily was not certified to teach middle school literacy. She could still get hired and start teaching under a class B license. This allowed Emily two years to obtain her reading endorsement. Emily enrolled in the master’s program at Drake. Back at her stomping grounds in a new program, “I was still trying to figure out how to be a teacher. At that point, I didn’t really have any good strategies or know what it took to be a good teacher” (Emily Interview).

The year Emily started at Harding was the year that Harding got reconstituted. Fifty percent of the staff from the previous year had been laid off, and so Emily came on with a large group of new teachers. Kristopher started at the same time. The year before they started (2011–2012), Harding Middle School had received the status of a NCLB Persistently Lowest-Achieving Schools by the Iowa Department of Education (2012b). This meant that the school had to implement one of the four federal intervention models provided by the state if it wanted to receive funding to help the school. Harding chose what the state called the turnaround model. This model replaced the school principal and, through a screening process, rehired only half of the existing staff. The model also required the school to adopt a new governance structure and provide evidence of other school improvement efforts that has to include: curriculum reform, professional development, extended learning time, and other
strategies (Iowa Department of Education, 2012b). The school was given until 2014 to finalize the turnaround process.

In Iowa, 131 schools were on the NCLB Persistently Lowest-Achieving Schools list for the 2010–2011 school year. Harding was the only school in the state to choose the turnaround model. The other options to choose from, according to A Blueprint for Reform: The Reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (U.S. Department of Education, 2010 were:

1. The restart model, whereby a school can close and then reopen if it is converted to a charter school or commits to being under an education management organization.

2. School closure, whereby the school closes down completely and sends students to a higher-achieving school within the district.

3. Transformation model, whereby the principal is replaced but the staff is allowed to stay. The staff goes through a comprehensive curriculum reform process that allows the school to pick from improvement strategies such as more time for teachers to attend professional development or extended learning time for teachers.

Emily was just excited to have a job, especially a job in which she got to teach middle school drama. With a new staff and a new plan for the building, there were many new things to learn at Harding. They had pieced together a school improvement leader team and had grabbed some local experts to lead the school in some professional development relating to literacy. Emily thought it was the best professional development ever. She reflected on how she was finally learning how to be a teacher and be held accountable for best practices
around writing, comprehension, fluency, formative assessment, etc. She also became friends with Kristopher that year. Working in a new school, “you have to find the people that are positive instead of being around those that talk a bunch of crap about kids” (Emily, Interview). That is how Kristopher and Emily met:

I never liked to go in the teacher’s lounge. We just kind of gravitated to each other . . . us and a bunch of people. That’s how we met. We would share resources all the time. The class was basically a bunch of struggling readers. It was a drama class, but basically a reading class. I would infuse tons of reading strategies to help their fluency and e-mail Kristopher to get ideas about infusing hip-hop. They would practice those as repeated readings and, toward the end of the year, I started doing poetry slams with kids; even though they were not reading their own at that time, they kept practicing over and over again. (Emily, Interview)

That year Emily was serving on a nonprofit committee. The nonprofit was really struggling that year, so she offered to raise money with a poetry show. The nonprofit accepted her offer, and Emily asked Kristopher for his help. They both agreed it should be about giving back to the community and created the name “Share the Mic: Community of Voices Creating Change.” The show was scheduled at Ritual Café a few weeks later. They had standing room only and raised $400 for the nonprofit. All of the kids from class showed up, and over 15 performed. They read stuff right out of books. It was a huge hit. This was in April, and Emily was hungry for more. After the first event, she and Kristopher both agreed they wanted to do this more often. She started studying and researching art and poetry for adolescents. She came across an organization called Brave New Voices:
I researched it and thought, “This is incredible; I want to do this.” So I told Kristopher and [he] said, “Let’s go!” and I said, “What do you mean, let’s go? We cannot afford that, it’s a big deal, it’s out in San Francisco!” He was like, “Let’s ask Mr. Ahart.” I kept thinking there was no way. We set up a meeting, and he said yes. I asked him if he was kidding. This is when . . . we had teamed up on this and were so excited; we were so, “Let’s go do this!” (Emily, Interview)

The weeks and months that followed for Emily and Kristopher were equally exciting. After they were back they kept asking for more. They asked if they could build a summer program for minority students. Dr. Ahart agreed. They asked if they could start a hip-hop literacy class. Dr. Ahart said yes, but that they couldn’t call it that. They asked if they could have more Share the Mic nights. The answer: yes. They applied for a grant from United Way. The answer: yes, for $90,000. Much happened between that first night at Ritual Café and the end of the year following. Emily focused on building the things they knew the kids loved to learn about and were having success with in class. She and Kristopher collaborated on everything. Her stories quickly turned into “we” in the early stages of RunDSM’s conception.

She talked in depth about how they used the building initiatives as a focus to write goals for the summer program that eventually turned into Minorities on the Move and what a horrible job they did that first summer. Their lack of developed curriculum, structure for the program, along with some of the habits a few of the students had both academically and behaviorally were challenges that first year. The vision of how to make it better kept them going. She discussed the hurdles of calling the hip-hop class something different and having a weird code for it as an elective in the course guide. The course is now openly called Hip-
Hop: Rhetoric and Rhyme and is now offered in schools across the district. “As teachers come forward with inventive ideas like Hip-Hop: Rhetoric & Rhyme, we will actively support them in an effort to shift our curriculum resources away from textbooks to providing materials specific to the needs of . . . teachers and students” (Tom Ahart, RunDSM, Hip-Hop: Rhetoric & Rhyme, para 12).

Both Emily and Kristopher had to make sacrifices. Neither of them spoke of their sacrifices with regret. Emily laughed about the harder times or how bad things went with some of their first attempts. She mentioned with sympathy that during that first year that they got the hip-hop class approved, Kristopher had to teach it during his only planning period. This kind of choice and sacrifice is an example of the risk Kristopher was willing to take for his students. The hip-hop class opened the door for more Share the Mic opportunities. By 2014, students were performing in over 10 Share the Mic experiences a year and had raised thousands of dollars a year for the needs of the community.

Emily attributed “the start of it all” to being focused on the school goals surrounding literacy. All of the programs they built were based on the needs of their readers. RunDSM had grown each year from there. The community, the administrative support, and especially the students, all had helped it grow into what it was currently. Her interviews revealed much of the findings discussed later in this chapter.

**Mr. Kristopher Rollins**

The first time I met Kristopher (pictured in Figure 3) was at a Movement515: Share the Mic event. His performance was a favorite among the crowd. His energy and wit carried his passion and message to people with lasting ambitions. It only took meeting Kristopher once for him to leave an impression. During our interviews, it was easy to hitch a ride on his
dreams and visions for RunDSM, as he always spoke with a momentum and passion that left little doubt that he would achieve what he sought in the world. His leadership was compassionate and inviting. Not a minute would go by with Kristopher that you would not learn something new or at least be inspired to—he was in it for the right reasons. For example, he spoke to a group of literacy educators at a local university about the ideas around teachers understanding for how a student’s “life as primary text” is essential to all other aspects of what they learn. He gained the attention of everyone quickly by sharing these connections to literacy to why student voice is what can hook them in (to reading and writing) and hook us (teachers) in with them.

Kristopher grew up in an Indiana basketball house. Basketball was a second language for those who grew up in Indiana. This gained meaning for him with his kindergarten teacher. He had the same teacher for kindergarten as he did for second grade. She had made a strong impact on him. He remembered having a solid connection with her and of drawing pictures of his Indiana guys dunking over her alumni team, Ohio State. Kristopher remembered that a major turning point in his schooling was in his senior year of high school. He was in a cadet-teaching program where students were paired with a mentor teacher. Students helped out in the cooperating teacher’s classroom to gain experience and assist with day-to-day duties. Kristopher was paired with his kindergarten/second grade teacher. He
was able to re-establish his relationship with her from when he was a young child. She gave him a lot of control and let him know that he had a way with young people. Kristopher graduated and went to college as journalism major. His first journalism class was his last. He would tell you that his professor was horrible and that it turned him away from journalism and into teaching:

Kristopher always had had a desire for performance. He grew up writing and had continued to write. He loved writing poetry and always wanted to perform what he wrote. His school system in Indiana did not have any programs that existed for that type of performance. After Kristopher started at Harding and met Emily, he gained more confidence through what they created and felt that it enabled him to engage and inspire students at higher levels. They engaged and inspired him to write and continue to perform as well.

I just loved the feeling I got from it. I like helping others. You know when those light bulbs go off in students’ minds—it was a very empowering feeling to know I was making a difference in somebody’s life. I never wanted to be a cubicle person or somebody entering data into a system. Education allows you to entertain a little bit, to be on stage a little bit, to engage and inspire. But then you can give that energy to your students and they can create from that or be inspired from that . . . which is all really still sticking with me today and the work we do. (Kristopher, Interview)

Kristopher’s account of how RunDSM got its start paralleled much of Emily’s story. He started teaching at Harding the year the school got reconstituted, and he was doing a lot of hip-hop in the classroom. His master’s program and interest led him to study African American culture, specifically surrounding those students who felt less accepted in traditional classrooms.
Emily came to me with an idea for a show. She wanted my help to put it together and give it an edge. Since we are very like-minded, and she knew I wrote and was doing a lot of spoken word videos in class, like she was doing. So it really spawned from there. The first year kids were reading poems by others; we put our heads together over the summer and went to Brave New Voices and saw all of these youth spitting their own pieces and telling their own stories. We went with the intention of bringing the culture back and realized we were going to have to challenge our students when we got back. (Kristopher, Interview)

Early that fall they had a show. The students were moved emotionally and had a natural connection to the work. The audience members were moved and showed strong support for these kinds of shows to continue to happen. Kristopher and Emily continued to push the envelope. They wanted to head more in the direction of this art form and medium to engage and inspire students in hopes they would see some of the academic differences in literacy, and that is what they started to see. There was much more happening with their students than academic growth. Kristopher shared noticeable differences in student confidence, empowerment, willingness to communicate, and many more human characteristics that might not show up on a test score.

Kristopher reflected on the sanctions and NCLB designation at Harding as something that did not impact the decisions he was going to make for students. He always had been someone who was on the edge and pushing the envelope on different approaches to education outside the traditional system. His perspective on the worst answer that they could get was “no” gave them momentum in creating and finding ways to implement more engaging material.
Kristopher had a vision for this group of students and their predecessors that is reflected in the themes discussed in the rest of the chapter. His interviews revealed much of the findings discussed in the emerging themes.

**RunDSM: Creating Brave New Voices**

It was May 11, 2012. Hundreds of chairs were unfolded and arranged in rows on the grass of the outdoor courtyard area centered in the middle of the school. The space was bustling with a collaborative vibe. A small stage and microphone were set up in front of the brick siding of the building. Lights were strung from trees and lined the DJ booth and stage. Music brought an upbeat feel as students, parents, teachers, and members of the community took their seats. Energetic reciprocity took flight as the first poet walked on stage. He stared bravely at the mic. Alongside others, I sat unknowingly, anticipating his first words. Alongside others, I left mesmerized, and changed forever.

This section provides a description of some of the events and actions of the students and teachers from the RunDSM organization. This short chronology demonstrates what happened outside the classroom walls with RunDSM events over the time period of this 1-year study. This section exhibits how learning environment, instructional design, and leadership

*Figure 4. Flyer for one of the RunDSM events (Source: personal communication from RunDSM).*
habits operated to create positive change beyond the school day. The event described above was an open mic public event from the poets of Movement 515 from when the program was first gaining momentum (Figure 4 depicts a flyer from a more recent version of this event). The archived data that follows is a collection from the year 2014. Most of these events took place on weekends, at night, or over holidays. It is important to note that these events were well attended by students, teachers, and community members supporting the students and teachers of RunDSM. Information presented in this chronology was collected from attending events, interviewing participants, looking through public documents, and utilizing audiovisual materials from the RunDSM (n.d.) website. All events detailed here contributed to the analysis and findings of the study. All pictures and flyers included are available to the public via the RunDSM (n.d.) website.

January

On January 10, students in the Urban Leadership 101 course created a video supporting the Des Moines community by sharing what they appreciated about their city and what Des Moines meant to them. Students and teachers made the video public on YouTube for others to view and comment on.

On January 20, in celebration of Martin Luther King Jr. Day, Movement 515 and Urban Leadership 101 students organized and led a march attended by over 75 students and community members (Figure 5). Poets received a standing ovation after opening for the Governor’s speech with some spoken word poetry to commemorate MLK day.
On January 22, students in Urban Leadership 101 collaborated with two local photographers to send a message to the world by writing short self-expressive phrases on their skin. The students were encouraged by Kristopher and Emily to pick messages that would create a dialogue. Because the students were inspired by a similar photo project they had seen done by Syrian refugees, they decided to use messages that reflected prejudice that can come with youth issues. Some of the messages students shared included:

- Love the skin I am in.
- My body is a temple, not property.
- Be what they say you couldn’t.
- 16 and not pregnant.
- I’m a Muslim, not a terrorist.
- Hip-hop is my 2nd language.
- I speak 3 languages; ignorance isn’t one.
- My femininity doesn’t come with shackles.
- I’m 210 pounds and I’m still beautiful.
Ethnicities do not equal enemies.

I will not grit my teeth. I will speak.

Being gay is not a phase.

I’m a teen mom trying to give my son a brighter future.

Too black for whites, too white for blacks.

You don’t need a throne to speak like a king.

I’m not illegal.

Asian, but not Chinese.

On January 27, RunDSM hosted its First Annual Teen Summit. Urban Leadership 101 students and teachers organized and invited students from all five high schools in Des Moines to gather for the 2-day event (see Figure 6). Over 175 students attended and were able to discuss teen issues, challenge each other’s ideas, and create art to express new meaning together. Local businesses sponsored the event. The Des Moines Public Schools (2014) report in For the Record referred to the students as the “new generation of community-minded citizens, educated and practiced in the ways of change agency” (para. 1).

February

On February 21, Movement 515 hosted a Share the Mic event at East High School to help raise money for the father of one of the poets. He had recently undergone a heart transplant. To celebrate the success of the procedure, the poets put on a show about love.
Topics throughout the night’s performances included poetry reflecting experiences with heartache, relationships, suicide, rape, loss, love, life, and death.

April

On April 3, RunDSM hosted the Des Moines Second Annual Teen Poetry Slam. Students competed to qualify for the Brave New Voices International Youth Poetry Festival that would take place in Philadelphia that summer. Six students qualified. Kristopher and Emily were also able to announce that the Des Moines Public Schools were officially adopting RunDSM as a program that would be available in all five high schools. With the help of seven teachers, this change would be official at the start of the 2014–2015 school year. This announcement came four years after the original conception of RunDSM.

May

On May 9, Movement 515 poets hosted an event called Share the Mic: Community Voices Creating Change. Proceeds from the event went to the Hope 4 Africa benefit. Also, throughout the month of May, the Brave New Voices poets were able to travel around and perform at different events, including a performance at Simpson College and the grand opening of the Des Moines Social Club.

June

To fulfill the belief of youth educating youth, Kristopher and Emily, plus 12 of their previous students and four other teachers led a 2-week summer experience “Minorities on the Move,” to over 150 incoming ninth grade students. The students, referred to as youth mentors, led dialogue, and cocreated learning with the incoming freshman. Drake University supported this learning by being a host site for students, giving them the opportunity to be on a college campus while learning and discussing issues regarding minority history. Included
in these experiences was a Stop the Violence Rally at Drake Park, where poets and teachers had a chance to perform spoken word poetry in standing up to acts of violence.

**July**

*DSM Magazine* featured RunDSM in its summer issue. The article and pictures featured the body language photo project from January along with highlights of all five programs within the organization.

On July 16–20, the six members of RunDSM’s Slam Poetry Team traveled to the Brave New Voices Youth Poetry Festival in Philadelphia to share their spoken word poetry with 54 other teams. Students participated in street art, poetry slams, and many other events throughout the festival (Figure 7). Team Des Moines performed at the Opening Ceremony of that event.

*Figure 7.* Image from Brave New Voices Festival, Philadelphia, July 2014 (Source: RunDSM, n.d.).
On July 23, Emily and Kristopher were awarded a $70,000 grant from United Way of Central Iowa to fund Movement 515 + Street Art for the following year. Students would be involved in deciding how the money would be spent in best supporting their artistic efforts and continued education within the RunDSM organization and Movement 515 programming.

August and September

RunDSM started the school year with the new Movement 515 + Street Art format with all five schools and students participating. Movement 515 poets had a weekly writer’s workshop as well as street art sessions to attend. Both teachers, now in coordinator roles for the organization, were coteaching Urban Leadership 101 at Central Campus and were no longer teaching at the middle school due to their promotions to be Urban Arts Coordinators half time and to half time teach Urban Leadership courses for Des Moines Public Schools. Urban Leadership was extended into a 2-year class with Urban Leadership 102 added as an offering. Over 17 students were partaking in internships at three elementary schools, creating and facilitating learning with fourth and fifth graders around the concept of identity. In addition, six youth mentors were hired for the year by 21st Century Programming to lead an elementary poetry program called Half-pints. Their first performance was scheduled to be in 2015.

Jasmine Man and Drake University partnered with RunDSM for a week to inspire leadership and literacy practices in making a difference among students.

October

RunDSM held the first poetry slam among the schools, in which four of the five Des Moines high schools competed. North High School also hosted a Share the Mic event with
proceeds going toward EMBARC to support advocacy and resources for ethnic minorities of Burma.

**November**

On November 6, students collaborated with Douglas Kearney, Drake University and the Coalition of Black Students for a poetry double feature called “Shout.” This event took place on the Drake University campus. The following weekend, Movement 515 poets performed at the Wonder of Words Festival.

**December**

Movement 515 poets collaborated with local partners to perform and support the Des Moines Social Club for a World AIDS Day event. East High hosted the final Share the Mic of 2014 making the number of performances by the poets at over 10 for the year. Proceeds benefitted the Pearls for Girls foundation. The last event of the year was a rally for peace on Sunday, December 14 (see Figure 8). The rally supported those who had lost their lives due to police brutality.
Figure 8. Students rally for peace to celebrate the lives lost due to police brutality, Des Moines, December, 2014. (Source: RunDSM, n.d.).

Themes

The identification of themes in this study came from initial interviews, observations, and document analysis. As a coding system took shape and with careful consideration of all data collected, the following themes emerged: (a) learning environment, (b) instructional design, and (c) leadership habits. All three themes were found in existing literature and were popular among current educational journals and publications. It was important to identify the emerging themes that could relate to existing literature in that the identification of subthemes is what sets the learning environment, instructional design, and leadership habits that shaped RunDSM apart from a standardized system. These subthemes included: (a) liberating conditions and youth voice as power; (b) problem-posing learning, coconstructed learning, and arts-based inquiry; and (c) dialogical leadership and community-based actions (see Figure 9).

1. Learning environment
   a. Liberating conditions
   b. Youth voice as power

2. Instructional design
   a. Problem-posing education
   b. Coconstructed learning through transformative praxis
   c. Arts-based inquiry

3. Leadership practices & energetic reciprocity
   a. Dialogical leadership
   b. Community-based actions

Figure 9. Themes and subthemes that emerged from the study.
The relationship between the pedagogical beliefs and practices that existed within RunDSM as well as the conditions and structures that were in place for the organization to develop is what the themes were aimed to reflect. Ultimately, these themes are interdependent upon one another and, although they are presented here separately, they operate inherently as one entity and any of these pedagogical shifts or practices would lead to a more humanizing education. Within the discussion of each theme there are participant excerpts and related literature provided. A learning map (Figure 10) accompanies these major themes and subthemes.

Figure 10. Humanizing education: Pedagogical shifts.
Learning Environment

Learning environments that reflect liberating conditions, student voice, and transformative actions give students a space to critically deepen their understanding of their own identity while simultaneously situating themselves within their perception of the world. RunDSM teachers were providing an energetic and creative space supportive of a learning culture where this critical consciousness can take place and therefore replace a culture of silence. When Freire (1970) challenged educators with his humanizing pedagogical beliefs, he had come from highly oppressive environments where education, like food, was used as power over those less privileged. Therefore, knowing that education can act as power for or a power against oppression and societal influence, pedagogy around learning environment itself merits being an instrument of change instead of an instrument for a culture of silence (Freire, 1970).

Often educators refer to the school and classroom environment as being a “safe space” for students, given that their basic needs for survival must be met before learning can occur. A positive learning environment releases endorphins into the bloodstream, which contributes to improved learning, whereas a negative environment causes the body’s chemistry to release cortisol, which causes certain brain processes to shut down (Sousa & Tomlinson, 2011). Emily and Kristopher created a feeling of safety, and they went beyond that to get at what they call “brave space.”

![Figure 11. MLK, Jr. Day.](image)

Instead of taking the day off from school, students rally for the King (Source: RunDSM, n.d.).
space, whether in their classrooms, at a venue in downtown Des Moines (see Figure 11), or on a bus ride to Philadelphia to compete in Brave New Voices, was a space where everyone had something of a value to give. This space is where students could share their own perspectives and learn from one another. They could disagree respectfully. This is the space in which energetic reciprocity was living, where teachers and students were always building each other up and never tearing each other down. This space was not about the brick and mortar. This learning environment was a condition created from within each of them.

**Liberating conditions.** Contemporary pedagogical studies have put forth the claim that a humanizing and liberating education is what American democracy needs to influence society away from the oppressive and conforming educational system currently in existence (Giroux, 2011; McLaren, 2005; Salazar, 2013). A standardized system of education wants and expects the same results from every child. A humanizing education appreciates difference, celebrates it, and learns much more about the world because of it. Kristopher reflected on the liberating conditions of RunDSM:

I think one thing this program has really done is prove that everyone has something of value to give. I have definitely seen [students] take more ownership in who they are and in their identity. They realize they do not need to fit a certain mold to be accepted. They can be who they are and people will still lift them up for that, and as a result of them sharing their truth, they are breaking down walls for other students who may feel they have to fit inside a certain box. They are getting rid of the box. They are saying the box does not have to exist. It is a real powerful thing.

(Kristopher, Interview)
Freire (1970) wanted to use literacy to free peasants from the oppression of not being able to learn. Education was their liberation. The United States mandates that states provide free education for all students in the country. Yet, in some areas, the norm of academic conditions comes with high drop-out rates, school violence, and illiteracy. Most districts where these conditions are present are solving problems with more stringent and oppressive conditions instead of the opposite. Students are entering school buildings through metal detectors, are forced to walk in and sit in rows, and are all told to read the same text and take the same tests. Most American high schools have more restrictions and higher security measures placed on students than prisoners and soldiers in the Marine Corps have (Chapman, 2004). Horton (1973) referenced this same parallel over 40 year ago: “The bars must come down; the doors must fly open; nonacademic life, real-life, must be encompassed by education. Multiple approaches must be invented, each one considered educative in its own right” (p. 331).

School must be imagined as a space where placing a child in a learning environment means more than their existence as a number. Through this liberating and indispensable condition, students have opportunities to acquire freedom and fulfill a pursuit for human completion (Freire, 1970). The concept of humanizing education posits the life of the child in the center of learning (M. Apple, 1990; Bartolomé, 1994; Freire, 1970; Giroux, 2011; Scheurich & Skrla, 2003).

**Youth voice as power.** At spoken word poetry events, it is common to hear the words “get free” shouted from the crowd. This encouragement gives the poets some momentum heading into their performance and reminds them that, in their few minutes on stage, they have a voice and can share words without boundaries. They are free. This same
concept is applied to the classrooms and spaces where they work. Their voices are woven into the landscape of their learning environment (Figure 12). RunDSM has evolved into a reflective process of listening to students, allowing students the power to have a voice, not just as a poet on the stage but as a student in the classroom. Student leadership develops through these opportunities and the students use their power in positive and influential ways beyond the classroom. Students feel safe to challenge thinking related to what they are learning. From Freire’s (1970) anthropocentric view of the world, he stated, “Authentic thinking, thinking that is concerned about reality, does not take place in ivory tower isolation,

*Figure 12. Youth voices speak (Source: RunDSM, n.d.).*

but only in communication” (p. 77). Emily commented about the students:

We ask them everything. Ask kids what they think. They teach us in college how to be reflective, but there needs to be more of an emphasis in giving students the power
to give us feedback. We have to make them feel safe to disagree. My kids need to feel safe to challenge my thinking. That’s really where trust comes in. (Interview)

Students in RunDSM were using their voices in performances, classroom dialogue, community action, coconstructing learning, and many other components described within this chapter as contributions to conditions of a humanizing pedagogy. It is important to note how these themes and subthemes heighten and depend on one another to be successful. As Freire (1970) emphasized, “Human activity is theory and practice; it is reflection and action. It cannot be reduced to either verbalism or activism” (p. 125). This is of great importance when looking at how teachers embed student voice as power within the learning environment as students create a parallel with how voice exists as a powerful tool in the world.

Students would list several teachers that they feel are there to truly advocate for them and that has shifted the culture tremendously. We have found ways to remix the way they look for negative power by giving them opportunities for positive power. For example, before, you act up and you get punished. Now you act up, we process with you; we treat you like a human. . . . We are not talking at them anymore; we are talking with them and listening to them. (Kristofer, Interview)

Students in RunDSM are given opportunities to use their voice to influence the community and the world around them as well as to influence their own learning conditions and culture within the school. This dynamic occurrence emerges as creative power for pursuing the world with an active means for communicating a greater transformation and change.

Freedom, empowerment, and emancipation of students’ actions and voices will triumph over the static educational model (Knaus, 2009; Westerman, 2005). Voice, as a powerful tool for students to become acting members of society, is a contributing factor to
their humanization. Counternarratives have traditionally worked to undo cultural biases that reveal the history of the individual (Giroux et al., 2013). In addition, the freedom, empowerment, and emancipation achieved through student action and voice will triumph over the static educational model and status quo (Knaus, 2009; Westerman, 2005).

**Instructional Design**

RunDSM designs instruction around a problem-posing education and coconstructed learning with students through transformative praxis and employs an art-based inquiry approach to learning. These components of the instructional design support the learning environment and leadership practices where other contributing factors of a humanizing pedagogy coexist. Emily and Kristopher both recalled accounts of their risks and transformation with their instructional design process historically and where they were heading.

**Problem-posing education.** Freire (1970) used the term “problem-posing education” as the antonym for the “banking concept of education,” which is at odds with the practice of a liberating, creative, and transformative pedagogy. The banking concept is subject to instructional decisions based on the belief that the teacher has the information that the student must receive. The instructional design often falls subject to tactics that support memorization, recall, and cyclical processes. The teacher’s role is to then make “deposits” and the student role is to adapt to the knowledge the teacher imposes on them. “Banking” education is still an issue in current teaching practices. Though teachers may not realize they are using a banking approach, they are still making a choice. As students are the recipients of knowledge within this practice, students are therefore further oppressed and marginalized (Bartolomé, 1994; Freire, 1970; Ladson-Billings, 2007). Conversely, a “problem-posing
education” recognizes the students as beings, as individuals who can critically consider reality and therefore pursue their ontological vocation to be more human (Freire, 1970). RunDSM approached instructional design with problem-posing ideals.

A focus on measurement and quantification in U.S. public schools results in pedagogical practices that favor high-stakes test-taking skills; foster memorization and conformity; promote reductionistic, decontextualized, and fragmented curricula; advance mechanistic approaches that are disconnected from students’ needs; and reinforce one-size-fits-all scripted practices (Salazar, 2013, p. 124). Iowa adopted the CCSS in composing the Iowa Core Standards, which is what is required by law for all schools to implement in the areas of literacy, math, science, and social studies. RunDSM was not focused on standardized tests but, instead, maintained a focus on what is best for students. This included asking permission to do things differently and writing its own curriculum guides. Both Emily and Kristopher built the program around determining what students love, what they are interested in, and where their passions lie, and then make the learning fit:

You have to round out the whole person and focus on the human elements. We write our own curriculum guides that fit the needs of the students and their lives. These guides are fluid, always in revision, and always improving. (Emily, Interview)

The Iowa Core provides standards for learning but does not tell educators how to teach the content. This is a strength for RunDSM, which created opportunities for a problem-posing education that still abided by legislated policy around standards for learning. For example, RunDSM provided authentic literacy experiences that had both historical and present day contextual relevance. Reading, writing, speaking, listening, and experiences drove the learning. RunDSM teachers read, wrote, and performed alongside their students.
Resources were often sought from outside the norm. They found reading materials that were interesting and controversial to support students in writing and voicing their thoughts. This process was iterative to their literacy cycle in that the more the students read and wrote about topics of controversy and interest, the more genuine interest in reading and writing was created and the more they explored and deepened their critical understanding of the world. This process also fed into the performances, which led to further reading and writing. RunDSM teachers updated, created, and changed the curriculum throughout the year to support this process.

Scholars and practitioners who have transformed their pedagogical priorities to support literacy from a cultural and humanizing stance foundationally support literacy as a form of liberation (Westerman, 2005). RunDSM engaged in multiple attempts to get things right; by eliminating a fear of failure, there was a culture that supported risk taking. Teachers admitted when things were not working and tried something new. This often was based on student feedback from within a coconstructed design that supported a problem-posing education.

**Coconstructed learning through transformative praxis.** RunDSM was built on the vision of two teacher leaders but with the partnering actions and contributions of a cocreated approach. Teacher leaders in RunDSM engaged and inspired students to take ownership in the process of building the program alongside constructing learning experiences that were meaningful to them. RunDSM placed this coconstruction as an emphasis for a humanizing pedagogy. Cocreating knowledge through the use of reality, history, and the perspectives of students and providing a culturally relevant education avoided generic teaching methods that often objectify students and that can strip them of their own values and ideals (Bartolomé,
Decisions around curriculum, learning, and assessment were created through active feedback sessions with students and with input on upcoming learning. Teachers were receptive to the ideas and opinions of students. In Ladson-Billings’s (1995) study on teachers with a positive conception of knowledge, she reported that teachers viewed knowledge as constructed, not static, and constructed critically, and with passion and shared responsibility with students. Kristopher noted:

We tell them all the time, “I learn as much from you as you learn from me.” That approach has really shifted the perception of education at school as well as in any of our programs. They have just as valuable stake in it as I do. I am White and privileged. I think it is important for them to know that there are some things that they go through that I am never going to identify with, but if I learn from them and they teach me what it is like, then we can create a dialogue to actually bring about change. That has been very powerful because we are giving their stories credence. We are not saying your life has to sound and look and feel like mine and that we are trying to get you where we are culturally; because we are not denying the culture they grew up in, we are giving it credence and giving it merit, and by having the conversation, we are all moving forward. (Kristopher, Interview)

Educators often refer to metacognition as a goal for students to be reflective of their own thinking. When teachers and students approach learning together through a committed involvement to understand the world, it goes well beyond metacognition. Freire (1970; 1998) discussed cointentional education as putting students into the act, alongside the teacher, as reflecting and re-creating knowledge to better achieve critical consciousness about
reality, therefore putting students into the equation of their learning outcomes, which in turn shifts them from the objects of education to the vocation of becoming human.

One-size-fits-all models for delivering curriculum and instruction sacrifice the humanistic nature of learning for students (Freire, 1970; Lipman, 2004; McLaren, 2006; Chapman, 2014). Many other educational scholars, such as Giroux (2013) and Darling-Hammond (2012), have long stressed that a pedagogical focus on generic materials and delivery methods denies students access to a humanizing education. Unfortunately, many districts are scared to take risks when faced with government sanctions, and so they decide to order a solution—one that literally arrives in a box with a teaching guide included. They usually end up, a year later with the same problem. RunDSM used authentic materials based on issues that are prevalent in the media and the world to create a transformative praxis wherein students use actions and reflections to think critically about the world.

Freire (1970) defined pedagogy in two stages: “In the first, the oppressed unveil the world of oppression and through praxis commit themselves to its transformation” (p. 54). This stage can be recognized within the pedagogy of teacher leaders in RunDSM. Their lessons brought in the historical context of issues that had relevance to current events and tensions within the world. For instance, during one observation, students in Emily and Kristopher’s Urban Leadership 101 class were studying the influence of Baynard Rustin on the March on Washington. Rustin was a pacifist, he was a key strategist for Dr. King’s march, and he was gay. Being a gay Black pacifist at the heart of the March on Washington was the focus of the lesson. Students were reading material in small groups, discussing questions around Rustin’s influence and situating LGBTQ rights of today around the historical context of Rustin’s time period. Students used quotes by Rustin to relate to the
LGBTQ movement as a barometer of how far society has come with civil rights since that time period; the quotes used included: “We need, in every community, a group of angelic troublemakers” and “The only weapons we have is our bodies, and we have to tuck them in places so wheels don’t turn.” Students discussed the readings and the quotes in the context of history and today. They came to a class consensus that Rustin’s choice to keep his sexuality a secret at the time was the right choice for the time period. Students recognized how civil rights have to be an inclusive act for all people involved. Critical studies and other intellectual traditions (postcolonial and feminist theories) recognize this problem as well. One cannot stand up for the civil rights of LGBTQ without standing up for the civil rights of all oppressed groups.

Kristopher and Emily encouraged students to push this transformative praxis into their other areas of study even if the teacher was not involved. They both wanted students to talk with them, to build with them. They were involved and active and participated at the same level as the students did. Some of the students took this learning into their performance at the teen summit, which is discussed later in relation to how transformative praxis can be achieved through arts-based inquiry.

The creativity or excellence of a teacher is not so much about the content of what is being taught, but about the way it is being taught. . . . A good teacher builds on the culture or lived context of his or her children (Scheurich & Skrla, 2003, p. 39).

Foundational scholars confirmed in studies of culturally relevant teaching that rigid methodologies and mechanistic assessment and instructional approaches work to distance the teacher from the student and further the deficit notions of underserved populations of students (Bartolomé, 1994; Ladson-Billings, 2007; Valencia, 1997). This coinvestigation is
closely aligned with the problem-posing educators’ instructional design. The influence of this pedagogy from teacher leaders is transformative in and of itself for the authenticity of not accepting the world as static but, instead, as a world that they can change.

**Arts-based inquiry.** In utilizing an arts-based methodology to conduct this study, I was quick to recognize the arts-based inquiry approach used by the RunDSM teachers. Without formally identifying arts-based practice during interviews or as the process used in the program, there were many parallels with the instructional design process they were following. For instance, Emily and Kristopher brought about change and raised public awareness of what students were learning through spoken word poetry. The performance aesthetically connected well with audiences on issues related to social justice, equity, and youth issues such as suicide, body image, identity, love, etc. This process is interdependent upon the other two themes within instructional design in that meaning made through art is a reconceptualization, interactive, and reflexive practice of problem finding (Kraehe & Brown, 2011). The simultaneity in which students in RunDSM used problem-posing issues from both a historical and modern-day lens to create spoken word poetry, among other art forms, supported their cultural and social knowledge about the world. Their actions of performing art within this context of relevant cultural competence, in which they re-created this knowledge for the world, are what embodied the transformative praxis of such inquiry. In reflecting on the great wheel, student work could be viewed with quality and merit through all four quadrants: pedagogic, poiesis, politics, and public positioning. Take any of the events described earlier from the overview of the year in RunDSM, and these four quadrants would be applicable to each and any event.
Utilizing instructional and assessment approaches that demonstrate and inform teachers of students’ human qualities, such as mindsets, dreams, and backgrounds (Bartolomé, 1994; Knaus, 2009; Lipman, 2011), is what can move education away from standardized tests that erode teacher autonomy and creativity, fail to measure students’ humanizing abilities (i.e., critical thought), and perpetuate a culture of privilege (Darder & Torres, 2004).

Arts-based inquiry often is used to examine culture and identity through aesthetic appeal. Students in RunDSM were actively involved in examining what they were learning among what was happening in society and within their own identities. Students then reimagined and created transcendence within the materials into their spoken word poetry (Figure 13). Whether a poet on stage or an audience member, there was an aesthetic connection with the learning that was explained well by Ellsworth (2005), who situated these experiences that “invite the sensation of mind/brain/body simultaneously in both suspension and animation in the interval of change from the person one has been to the person that one has yet to become” (p. 17). This aesthetic experience often is used to get the community involved in actions and political advocacy (Finley, 2005; Rolling, 2010). Similar to research design for scholarly work, stepping into the unknown allows one to grasp the essence of learning and develop research practices as a way of improving pedagogy alongside humanity. The arts allow individuals to use their whole self in that they can communicate in...
Figure 13. Chalk art on the street to express vision of Movement515. (Source: RunDSM, n.d.).

multidimensional ways (Greenwood, 2012). Kristopher commented:

Teaching kind of allows you to entertain a little bit and be on stage to engage and inspire, but then you can kind of give that energy to your students and then they can create from that or be inspired from that themselves. That is the power of energetic reciprocity. That energy keeps us going, that is why it is a movement. The kids grow as artists and learners by being in that. (Interview)

When considering the spoken word poetry performances, collaborations, and practices of the students involved in RunDSM, there were strong connections to the mention of living inquiries in Chapter 3. As in this study, the inquiries of student in RunDSM evolved during the study, and as in Lea et al.’s (2011) study, when one aspect was being built
upon (such as a poem reflecting LGBTQ rights and Baynard Rustin), another aspect was awakened in either an audience member or the poets themselves.

**Leadership Practices and Energetic Reciprocity**

Humility, as one of Freire’s indispensable qualities, represents courage, self-confidence, self-respect, and respect for others. Freire believed this quality asserted the skill to listen beyond opposing views or differences. He “associated humility with the dialectical ability to live an insecure security, which means a human existence that did not require absolute answers or solutions to a problem” (Darder, 1998, p. 576). Emily and Kristopher both displayed humility. Students learned from this quality by interacting with teacher leaders while also emulating, developing, and leading with this same quality from within. This peer influence impacted their growth as leaders in their peer groups as well as leaders in their communities. Both the Urban Leadership 101 and 102 courses were built upon the theory and practices detailed in this chapter. It is important to know that all other aspects of RunDSM operated within the same beliefs and principles mentioned here. It is through both dialogic leadership and community-based actions that RunDSM has intentionally formed positive relations with students and the community.

**Dialogic leadership.** Dialogic leadership is a belief and practice that cannot be replicated as a stand-alone method or predispositional set of strategies. Much like the other characteristics mentioned within a humanizing pedagogy, there is a complex system or symbiosis, as one

*Figure 14. Building each other up before a show through energetic reciprocity (Source: RunDSM, n.d.).*
characteristic cannot survive long without the other. In the case of dialogic leadership, it is important to note, without theorizing about the dialogic process, that removing it “from the problematics of power, agency and history” should not be used as “a mere tactic to involve students in a particular task” (Freire, 1970, p. 17). Much of RunDSM was focused on building others up as well as challenging each other through use of dialogue and energetic reciprocity (Figure 14). Energetic reciprocity was a term often used at spoken word poetry performances, in class discussion, and in conversations around the program as a foundational premise for how students and teachers in RunDSM continuously “lead with love.” Students and teacher leaders in RunDSM surrounded themselves with positive people that were also moving forward. Movement^515 was intentionally named as such because RunDSM was very goal driven and involved in connecting closely to the problems in its own community and to the tensions around topics in the world. Students were able to engage in a dialogic process for both learning and knowing.

Reflective of Freire’s (1970) belief in dialogic relationships, in which the experiences of both the student and the teacher create understanding through dialogue; students and teachers in RunDSM took ownership of their ideas and formed their own identity as well as a collective identity as a group. One did not have to fit a certain mold to be accepted in RunDSM. Students led by holding each other accountable in positive ways and this formed an equal trust among the members. This trust and energetic reciprocity built the foundation for critical literacy practices and the leadership role of the student in constructing a social reality through dialogue. Students were into slam poetry instead of their friends. Through peer influence, authentic inquiry, and building an extended family, RunDSM supported students in developing the social aspects changes within their own lives while
situating those changes with social changes in the world. Self-efficacy was built collectively among the peers and mentor teachers.

Often, the initial days of school or new workshop sessions started off with what may have seemed to be a mismatch of students. They had come from different circles of friends and had a diverse look and lingo that they brought to the collective discernments of the group. After a few months as a crew, they would take on their own dynamic reflective of a family. It did not take long for them to realize they all had some of the same interests, ideas, passions, and struggles in common. Stories often emerged in class that the workshop crew had gone over to someone’s house where they stayed up late writing poetry. These are the same students who would come to an all-day event on a Saturday and march at the capital on their day off from school.

Ladson-Billings (1995) referenced that teachers who had “positive social relations” with students often took a collaborative approach to teaching. The collaborative approach developed by these teachers encouraged the success of the class instead of that of individuals, which was often paired with students holding each other accountable instead of the teacher being the primary agent for academic success. The teachers and students in RunDSM took on this collaboration for the collective success of the group. They went beyond the encouragement of academics as they were actively and socially challenging the problems of the world. They were politically charged and concerned only in the secondary that the standardized system of education as the oppressor would also be changed. RunDSM, through the act of dialogic leadership and energetic reciprocity was a transformative force within the system and for the community.
Educating teachers is at the core of imagining schools as utopic-heterotopic spaces and centers of possibility (Fischman et al., 2005). The study referred to dialogic leadership of the practice of educating students as the teachers of this utopic-heterotopic space by giving them rigorous opportunities to participate in the dialogic process. This “epistemological curiosity” that goes beyond dialogue as a mechanism moves students into “critical coinvestigators in dialogue with the teacher” (Freire, 1970, p. 81). The challenges that students and teachers faced within the classrooms and workshops of RunDSM assisted them both in developing a sense of efficacy and in responding to other challenges that arose.

In Ladson-Billings’ studies (1995, 2007) about a teacher’s conception of self and others, she found that teachers with actions and beliefs, in having a positive conception of self and others, showed a belief that all students were capable of achieving success in academics. These teachers believed that pedagogy exists in the art of becoming rather than in a stagnant, predictable process. They also were situating their own identity as that from which the community could benefit and in which they belonged. Teachers who exerted these characteristics never referred to deficit notions of students in their classrooms (such as English as a Second Language). These characteristics were easily identified not only in the actions and words of Emily and Kristopher but also in the actions and words of the students. In one open dialogue about demonstrations in Washington, DC, two students were sharing their opinions about freedom rides as nonviolent acts. Two girls were in disagreement and were challenging ideas through references back to some quotes from the text. Even though the students were challenging each other’s ideas, they were both very respectful of each other in giving space to talk. One student apologized for interrupting at one point, and both girls laughed when helping each other through the pronunciation of “egalitarian” from the text.
Helping each other while pushing each other was a regular occurrence within the culture of their classrooms. They used their voices to lead and, therefore, as students and teachers, encompassed dialogic leadership as their vehicle to learn and to know.

They often had group reflections around these interactions and referred to their class commitments, which were painted on their walls. Honesty, respect, ritual, and energetic reciprocity framed their beliefs that “reading is sacred,” “writing is sacred,” “listening is sacred,” and “speaking is sacred,” which were also painted on the classroom walls.

Emily and Kristopher constructed things around their school and district initiatives by constructing around what the kids would love. They both believed in effective change coming from the ground up. “All inquiry is both political and moral . . . it seeks forms of praxis and inquiry that are emancipatory and empowering” (Denzin et al., 2008, p. 2). The leadership of the teachers and students in RunDSM brought dialogue and energetic reciprocity to a community and system ready to engage in inquiry and, through spoken word poetry and other artistic means, creatively transformed fixed forces and fulfilled their ontological vocation in becoming fully human (Freire, 1970).

You have to round out the whole person; you cannot create an assembly line of people. You have to find out who they are first—knowing your students and what will engage and inspire them, then getting them into collaboration with like-minded people. (Kristopher, Interview)

Community-based actions. “Politically provocative” and “emotionally awakening” would best describe a spoken word poetry event put on by members of Movement 515. All proceeds from RunDSM events supported the needs of the community or related needs in the world. Events were sponsored, attended, and supported by local businesses and the families
and friends of the poets. RunDSM teachers built relationships with students and the community through their art and spoken word poetry. They used social media as a main source of output for communicating their events, experiences, and learning. David Berliner (2013) pushed teacher leadership as a way to move state legislatures and Congress toward a more humanizing social system: “Today’s teachers can no longer afford to be pawns” (p. 14). McClaren (2003) went on to say, “Teachers and teacher educators must take the leading role in developing a coherent pedagogical, philosophical, moral, and political vision of school reform in such a way that their efforts are connected to the needs of their local communities” (p. 343).

Summary

My study explored the pedagogical beliefs and practices of the teacher leaders who created, taught, and led the RunDSM organization. The study was designed to look closely at the pedagogy of the participants by analyzing data from multiple in-depth interviews, public documents, and audiovisual materials as well as by spending time observing the participants in the field. The study took place over the course of one year. By studying the historical and ongoing conditions and structures that were in place for the two teachers/co-creators of RunDSM allowed me to look closely at the relationships that existed between practice-relevant policies and pedagogy. The following key themes were identified: (a) Teacher leaders in RunDSM created a humanizing pedagogy through creating a learning environment with liberating conditions that place high value on youth voice as power; (b) the instructional design of the teachers in RunDSM reflect a problem-posing education, with co-constructed learning through transformative praxis and approached through arts-based
inquiry; (c) leadership practices and energetic reciprocity were demonstrated through dialogical leadership and community-based actions.
CHAPTER 5. DISCUSSION

This chapter provides a discussion of the research findings from this study and the implications of those findings for education. The chapter includes: (a) a summary of the research and methodology; (b) a discussion on methodological discoveries; (c) a discussion and summary of the findings and themes; (d) strengths and limitations of the study; (e) a discussion around the implications of the study for K–12 education, pedagogy, and teacher leadership; (f) contributions of this research within the existing literature and implications for further research; and (g) my personal reflections on this study and area of research.

Summary of Research and Methodology

This qualitative study explored how teacher leaders influenced pedagogical change toward a humanizing education. The purpose of the study was to examine the characteristics of pedagogy within learning environment, instructional design, and leadership practices. The study was focused on the beliefs and practices of teacher leaders who created the RunDSM: organization. This study addressed the following research questions: (a) What pedagogical beliefs and practices exist within RunDSM? (b) What conditions and structures were in place for RunDSM to develop? and (c) What relationships exist within practice relevant policies and pedagogy?

Theoretical Framework and Perspective

This qualitative arts-based inquiry was based on a constructivist worldview. This philosophical worldview provided support for the study as it addressed the participants’ understanding and socially constructed meaning of the situation in which they work (Creswell, 2014). An arts-based inquiry and analysis was well-suited for this research study,
as arts-based research is an exploratory means in which the participants and researcher can
deepen their understanding and perspective of the world while creating insight and future
inquiries within such studies (Barone & Eisner, 2012). The aim of studying such social and
cultural phenomenon is to allow such complexities to bring awareness to aspects of inquiries
unnoticed before. Arts-based research added to the quality and merit of this study as it
looked closely at the pedagogy, politics, public positioning, and poiesis outlined by Norris’s
(2011) great wheel design. I was able to interpret what the participants were describing as
their lived experiences by: (a) carefully observing facets of the world and (b) recasting them
into a meaningful cultural form (Barone & Eisner, 2012, p. 56). This artistic approach
addressed the social issues of RunDSM and the implications for education and future
research with a practical and productive outcome. As the researcher, I was able to re-
experience the perspectives of the participants through artistic engagement and culminating
experiences of poetic storytelling. This sociopolitical context and aesthetic experience of art
as a form of inquiry led to essential openness and constructed meaning of what influences
teacher leaders have on pedagogical change.

A critical and humanizing pedagogy and culturally relevant perspective was utilized
in guiding the research and analyzing the data for this study. While making sense of the
lived experiences of the participants, the influential studies of historical and recent critical
pedagogues were situated within the context of the arts-based research process. The
pedagogical approaches and practices that framed the study were: (a) the use of Freire’s
(1970) indispensable qualities in relation to learning environment, instructional design, and
leadership practices; (b) examining a culturally relevant pedagogy with the practices of
RunDSM; (c) interpreting themes through the lens of a humanizing pedagogy; (d) examining
critical scholarship with practice relevant policies and pedagogy; and (e) analyzing the conditions and structures of RunDSM with teacher leadership as agents of change. The use of studies from influential educators, social activists, and critical pedagogues, such as Freire (1970), Kincheloe and McLaren (2000), Giroux (2001), Macedo (1994), and many more allowed my study to challenge the educational conditions of monolithic and standardized practices and provide guidance and insight to a pedagogical approach that aims to humanize education.

**Summary of Findings and Discussion of Themes**

**Research Question 1**

Research question 1 was: What pedagogical beliefs and practices exist within RunDSM? The goals of RunDSM aimed to “support and empower students on their journey to becoming community-based activists, providing them a platform to be heard” while “shifting the perception of youth by fighting illiteracy, discrimination, and silence, allowing them a greater part in the conversation for change” (RunDSM, n.d., *About*, para. 2). The following themes and subthemes from the study were identified in answering the question of what beliefs and practices existed within RunDSM: (a) learning environment that has liberating conditions and utilized youth voice as power; (2) instructional design that supports a problem-posing education, coconstructed learning through transformative praxis, and arts-based inquiry; and (c) leadership practices that encourage energetic reciprocity through dialogical leadership and community-based actions. These themes worked together to create humanizing conditions for RunDSM students. These same humanizing conditions have the potential to influence and change the pedagogical beliefs and practices of classrooms and schools in reaching such ideology.
Learning environment. The teacher leaders and students of RunDSM operated as family. Despite the contrasting differences in backgrounds among the group of over 150 students, they formed relationships that ignited unity. These relationships were built upon the trust, sincerity, and values instilled in the program. Learning environments that reflect liberating conditions, student voice, and transformative actions give students a space to critically deepen their understanding of their own identity and their own power to change the world. Emily and Kristopher protected the space in which they worked with students as sacred ground. The “brave space” that they provided for student to “be free” was one of the contributing factors of their success.

Much of this environment worked to position students in the center of their learning. Oftentimes, when educators use the term “student-centered learning,” they are referring to individualized instruction, differentiation strategies, and social–emotional curriculum such as Character Counts education. The liberating conditions of RunDSM positioned students at the center of their education by contextualizing their learning around their own identities and the identities of others (cultural relevance). In other words, this learning environment could not have existed with a scripted or generic teaching program. A teaching manual cannot achieve this sort of environment; it must be present in the pedagogical beliefs of the teacher leader involved with the learning. Current day teachers who claim to have a “student-centered” classroom are often still operating from a banking system where they, knowingly or unknowingly, are imposing knowledge of a prescribed curriculum onto students (Freire, 1970). Teachers in these conditions are marginalizing the experiences of students though their experience may look similar to that of others. This inequity is at the heart of a standardized education and materializes out of the decontextualized and measurement-driven
learning environment. The humanizing pedagogy embraced by Emily and Kristopher moves beyond anything a publishing company or program can replicate and sell. The learning environment emerges from those within it. Their revolutionary practices are only transferrable through experiences lived through such liberating conditions.

Pictured in Figure 15 are Emily and Kristopher’s expressions of truth communicated to their students. Students use their “voices as weapons” to “speak responsibly” and to “lead with love.” Both Emily and Kristopher created a learning environment where the voices of the students were welcomed and centered on the authentic use of communication as power to make change in the world. Students used art and spoken word poetry to learn, speak, and inhabit the creative power to make change. Voice was used as a powerful force against illiteracy, discrimination, and oppression.

*Figure 15.* Emily and Kristopher’s expressions of truth communicated to their students (Source: RunDSM, n.d.).

**Instructional design.** The habits for moving toward a humanizing pedagogy within the instructional design process for Emily and Kristopher developed over time for RunDSM.
For their first performance, students were reading the poems of famous poets and musical artists out of books. As they gained trust and momentum in moving further and further away from the mainstream norm of a typical classroom, the collective efficacy of the group gained a similar momentum. Students were recognized as beings in the classroom, recognizable as what Freire (1970) would have considered a problem-posing education. Often the materials and ideas explored in class surrounded societal issues (i.e., civil rights, youth suicide, gang violence) that the students were simultaneously facing in their lives. The idea of using current events as a part of instructional design is not a new concept for education. However, embracing these events, situating them within social context of the student, and using creative expression to enact community actions and change is what makes for a problem-posing education.

Emily and Kristopher cocreated learning with their students by listening to their issues, getting feedback on their lessons, and going through the experiences side-by-side with their students. Teacher leaders are not afraid to transfer their own passion for learning into the classroom, regardless of what the curriculum guide may suggest they do (Barth, 2013).

**Leadership practices and energetic reciprocity.** From the commitments painted on the walls of their classrooms to the open dialogue sessions around politically charged issues in the community, Emily and Kristopher pushed the notion to always try and lead with energy and love (Figure 16). The collective efficacy of the program was built upon that energetic reciprocity that was always lifting up instead of tearing down. This was established in the dialogic relationships both leaders had built with students. The leadership qualities of humility and joy, as described by Freire (1970), alongside the drive for liberating conditions for students, themselves, and the community and the practices of these leaders is unmatched
by any effect size. It was hoped that, from this study leadership could be defined from a humanizing lens using the qualities and descriptions provided about these two teachers.

*Figure 16.* Urban Leadership crew in Des Moines with Kristopher and Emily (Source: RunDSM, n.d.).

**Research Question 2**

Research question 2 was: What conditions and structures were in place for RunDSM to develop? Emily and Kristopher would not have had the opportunity to develop a program such as RunDSM without the trust and respect of their administrator at the time. In fact, at the start of it all, teachers in similar conditions were heading toward a more structured and standardized pedagogy. The school in which Emily and Kristopher taught during the initial stages of the RunDSM vision as it came to life was in a critical position because of NCLB sanctions. It had recently undergone restructuring, and half of the staff, including the school principal, was fired. Most schools in this situation were turning to academic programs or systems that were “researched based” and widely used. This sort of system is usually
adopted alongside strict accountability measures that show how students are performing through ongoing progress monitoring and extra measures around test scores.

Emily, Kristopher, and their principal, Tom Ahart were all hired new at the school. Dr. Ahart supported Emily and Kristopher in their efforts to work toward a pedagogy that was focused on the interests of students. This freedom and trust eventually led to a pedagogical change in the learning environment, instructional design, and leadership practices of both teachers in their classrooms and within their after-school program initiative. Due to the success of these changes, Emily and Kristopher were able to gain more support from administration at the district level and gain access to funding through large grants in support of the work they were doing for inner-city youth. There were no accountability measures, such as a mandated curriculum, that were in place to get in their way. As a result, the measures the school was taking at the time to stay in compliance with NCLB were favorable to the changes Emily and Kristopher employed. Achievement scores in reading and writing of students their classrooms were the top scores in the school. Behavior referrals went down. Attendance rates went up, higher than ever before.

From the outset, it could be said that the restructuring led to this success. However, after analyzing the data from interviews, public documents relating to NCLB, and other sources, the true nature of this phenomenon lies with the bravery of the two teacher leaders and the school principal. They went against the norm of how other schools were typically responding at the same time to similar governed sanctions. They were outliers among their peers. They, in fact, went against the direction the local advisors of schools in need of assistance and NCLB (2001) would have steered them. Their pedagogy was a shift away from the practices and theory of others around them. The support of their administrator at a
time when most would be scared to venture outside the norm and during a time when anyone could be removed from the school was, instead, their biggest asset.

Kristopher and Emily were given a lot of autonomy to learn on their own, discover new material, and explore the boundaries of their freedom while remaining fervently committed to supporting reading and writing engagement with all learners. They built a curriculum around a group of students. While putting together the pieces of reading lessons, writing prompts, engaging materials, and assessment that mirrored their same ideals, they inadvertently created a movement—a movement that each day was gaining more momentum, more community support, and more attention from educators around the state (Figure 17).

Their journey has not been without shortcomings. They have faced many disjunctions, tensions, and contradictions along the way, some of which came from within their own school. The support of some of their colleagues changed shape when the program gained a lot of positive attention. This was a disappointment for both of them but not much of a setback, as at the same time, the organization had been elevated to be included in all five high schools in the district. Emily and Kristopher were going to be able to continue teaching part time while being promoted to program coordinators for RunDSM as it become a district-level organization. This rapid success did not come without sacrifices. Emily and Kristopher had to adhere to some rules along the way. For instance, Kristopher had to teach a class during his planning period in

\[\text{Figure 17. Words as inspiration and art to support students in RunDSM. (Source: RunDSM, n.d.)}\]
order for it to be offered for students. They also were not allowed to call the course “Hip-Hop: Rhetoric and Rhyme” at first. They had to name it something obscure in order to get it approved for course credits.

There were many obstacles and hurdles that they both had to overcome. They remained a stable support to their students along the way, and some members of their first class of poets, now in college, were returning to perform with the high school students. The family they created had no expiration; graduation from high school for these students was not a goodbye from being a part of the RunDSM organization. In fact, a major goal of the program was to have students return, after earning teaching or other degrees, to run the program and support the movement. A poem from a former poet in the program, now in attending undergrad at the University of Iowa pursuing spoken word poetry in the Iowa Writer’s Workshop, reads:

Vaporously sovereign
we are the highest form of political authority
Planted deep beneath the soil of expansion by our founding fathers
Watered with new beginnings of hope.
Sprouting the seed of independence, growing from a revolution.
Our roots expanding a doctrine written along the coastal outlines of the western hemisphere, a people so strong other's bend in fear of our freedoms sprawling out underneath federalism and suffrage.

Research Question 3

Research question 3 asked: “What relationships exist between practice relevant policies and pedagogy? Standardized and orthodox decisions are made every day in school
districts across the nation. Humanizing and culturally relevant aspects of education are present in the practices of teachers but are rare in a full pedagogical approach that encompasses the ideals mentioned in this study. Recent studies have suggested that the teacher leaders who are making the most difference are the outliers, the collaborators, and those willing to take bold actions (Barth, 2013; Wagner, 2012). Policy in the United States usually leads to more control, more standardized measures, and more accountability systems that are inundating the education with more numbers but fewer opportunities to analyze pedagogy. These such policies and initiatives that mandate programming and assessment systems move education only further away from a humanizing education. The pedagogical practices highlighted in this study will never be in a scripted practice that legislation can mandate.

One purpose of this study was to encourage legislation that allows for more local decisions to take place. Allowing schools to have autonomy can lead to a system built on trust instead of accountability, which leads to the same liberating conditions mentioned within this work. Schools with such autonomy can then trust teacher leaders to make pedagogical shifts toward a humanizing education without fear of failure and without the harsh conditions of test scores teachers rely on to keep their job. Frederick Hess (2013) viewed the surge of new policies in the United States as a cause of turbulence for teachers. Now, more than ever, teachers are equipped with tools to share this intense appetite for alternatives with other teacher leaders through networks and social media. The RunDSM (n.d.) website provides a platform for sharing their mission and their vision for the community and for education. This study also encourages teacher leaders to take more risks
and support students through some pedagogical shifts in learning environment, instructional design, and leadership practices.

**Strengths and Limitations**

During each phase of my research, I safeguarded the findings and data collection process to ensure trustworthiness and goodness. Careful consideration of the context of the study was taken to ensure validity along with the following validation strategies: (a) member checking was utilized by taking back the analyses and interpretation of the data to participants to review for accuracy (Creswell, 2013); (b) writing with detailed, thick descriptions was used to describe the participants, setting, and details of the study so that readers would be able to make decisions about the transferability of the findings (Creswell, 2013; Merriam, 2002); (c) the use of a variety of different data-collection techniques, including interviews, observations, public documents, and audiovisual information, functioned as the main sources of data for the study; detailed field notes and transcriptions from audio recordings and coding were undertaken to ensure reliability of the study. Positionality was clearly stated with participants at many stages throughout the study. Though the themes as outlined in Chapter 4 and further detailed in the discussion are habits and pedagogical shifts that teachers can take on or transfer in their own classrooms and schools, this study is not generalizable to all because of the singularity of RunDSM and its conception. Not every teenager or youth will have the same experiences as this group.

Though great care was taken to ensure trustworthiness and goodness, there are some limitations that must be considered for this study. The size of the study was small in scope. Though I spent a year in the field with the participants with in-depth interviews, observations and document analysis, there were only two participants in this study. The unique nature of
RunDSM was built by the leadership efforts of just the two of them. Though many others influenced or supported their change in pedagogy, they were the primary subjects of the research because they were the creators of the organization and movement. Due to the detailed, rich descriptions of their backgrounds and settings involved in the study, this also may be considered a strength of the study.

Both participants being located in a specific metro area in Iowa was another limitation of the study. However, this also may have been a strength of the study, as the intended outcome was to show an example of a contextualized, local, and authentic pedagogical change from traditional and standardized practices. Another limitation of the study was that both teacher leaders were White, middle class citizens who were teaching with students of various racial backgrounds, socioeconomic statuses, and undetermined citizenship statuses.

One more limitation of the study involves the document analysis of student poetry. Interpretation of art has a history of complex and abstract understandings. Internal validity was established through member checks, peer review, and use of multiple data sources. In addition, the interview approaches could have led to unasked questions, and observations were limited to the time spent in the field.

**Implications for Education**

Entering this study, I was hoping that the results would give educators a perspective on shifting from standardized educational practices to a humanizing educational pedagogy. Teachers, administrators, policy makers, community members, students, scholars, practitioners in higher education, and many more can benefit from putting theory into practice from such relevant examples and studies. The teacher leaders of RunDSM, Emily
and Kristopher, added tremendous momentum to such educational transformation, specifically among schools that were facing political turmoil. The following details aim to inform theory and practice and serve as implications for educators everywhere.

**K–12 Education**

There is a phenomenon that exists among public educators: an ongoing quest for the “next best thing” or the “silver bullet” that will somehow solve all the problems of education. Much of the difficulty that this phenomenon presents is also where much of the problem lies. The findings of this study allude to the many reasons why one cannot simply order a literacy program as a solution to illiteracy any more than one can throw spare change to a homeless person hoping to end homelessness. The implications of this study go well beyond a quick fix to ending oppression, illiteracy, hegemony, etc. Additionally, with respect to all critical pedagogues and to the hundreds of scholarly influences of this study, by no means are these implications reflective of step-by-step processes or procedures for creating conditions of a humanizing education. Instead, they are reflective of a call to action for educators and educational policymakers.

Ideology, as the innermost presets to the social and political world of education, presents K–12 educators with a recursive pattern of unrecognized hegemony and system of oppression. If there are any implications of this study, it is a push toward a better understanding of this statement. In order to put in place a counterhegemonic practice and liberating conditions for students, educators first must have a transformation of their own ideology around such matters. This call to action for teachers as life-long learners must extend into more scholarly reading and discussion around theoretical work. Darder et al. (2009) represented this thinking around the belief that, “as a pedagogical tool, ideology can
be used to interrogate and unmask the contradictions that exist between the mainstream culture of the school and the lived experiences and knowledge that students use to mediate the reality of school life” (p. 11). K–12 scholars follow many trends in education by attending conferences; following twitter feeds; and reading articles, blogs, and books by popular authors. However, there is less discussion around the philosophical underpinnings of critical pedagogy for practicing teachers. As this study aimed to bridge some of the scholarly literature into practice, there is also an implication that more scholarly work needs to be embedded in the work of K–12 educators and their professional learning. Only then, can a true ideological shift occur.

**Policy and Pedagogy**

Because teachers and schools operate within the ethical constructs of society, these hegemonic practices and systems of oppression are somewhat unrecognized by practitioners. For example, a state policy recently passed in Iowa requires all schools in the state to administer an assessment for early literacy. The test is called a “universal screener”; all students in grades K–3 are given the same assessment to provide early indication of which readers will struggle and which will most likely succeed. The students who do not pass are given the label “substantially deficient.” Yes, even kindergarten students are given this label, a label whose synonyms—faulty, incomplete, defective—are equally demoralizing. The state then requires teachers to use weekly progress monitoring tools (often not matched to the reader’s area of need) and a “research-based reading intervention” for ongoing instruction. The educators in this situation are forced to purchase reading materials that have been deemed “research-based”; however, most educators would respond that, because each child and reader is different, there is no one solid reading program that can work for all students.
Yet, teachers are unsure of what to do in cases such as these in which there are policies tied to their actions. It shifts the power of doing what is best for students into the hands of policymakers, who more often than not, were never teachers.

This is an example of the conversations and discussions happening in public education right now, among many others tied to more testing, labeling, and mandated curriculum and instruction. Major parts of the equation that are being left out include the teacher, the student, and the context in which the child is learning. One implication of this study is that educators need a transformation in their pedagogy—one that breaks free from the policies that are instilling more standardized, controlled, and capitalistic processes. Schools and policy need to allow education to invest in developing people, not programs. The above-mentioned transformations can happen through support and trust for teachers and through giving states and districts local control.

**Teacher Leadership**

At the rate of change of the accountability and measures at the state and national level, the pendulum appears to be swinging toward more standardized measures politically while scholars and practitioners are studying, writing, and implementing practices on the other side with a strong push for creativity, critical thinking, and other 21st century skills. The pedagogical shifts mentioned in this study are obtainable through scholarly studies to build beliefs and shifts in classroom practices. Humanizing practices are in the best interest of students in any classroom and with any demographic characteristic. Teacher leaders, with or without administrative support (but preferably with), must be willing to be outliers (at least at first). These actions and practices may make their classrooms look different than those next door. With the right conditions, such as that of humanizing pedagogy, educational
actions will soon change those mindsets as well. Teacher leaders are necessary for this change, as the very nature of such pedagogy must be constructed from within.

**Recommendations for Future Research**

Future studies are needed to support such pedagogical shifts. As mentioned in the section on limitations, this study was limited in scope to the RunDSM program. More research is needed in areas outside the confines of a program or organization. As this study calls for K-12 teachers to be more involved in scholarly reading, see literature map (Appendix D), there is also a need for more research among other educational contexts. What is the scope of change outside an isolated program or organization within or outside a district? Further studies in higher education lending themselves to teacher preparation around humanizing educational pedagogy and creating supportive educational offerings that get at Freire’s (1970) indispensable qualities is needed. What would higher education programming look like if it were designed around learning environment, instructional design, and leadership practices as described in this study? Future studies are needed to support what this looks like at the primary and elementary level. RunDSM supports its English as a Second Language population and immigrant students new to the country with opportunities to perform at RunDSM events. For example, a group of students performed at a Share the Mic event with a choreographed routine in which seven boys with limited English were able to express their support for the movement with their dance moves. They received a standing ovation from the crowd and continue to practice their moves as a group today.

What do these findings mean for immigrant students? What do these findings mean for rural Iowa schools? How do the findings of this study relate to students with limited movement or with physical or cognitive disadvantages? All of these areas are important for
future studies. The RunDSM program also continues to grow. It recently added a teacher and poet mentor to each of the five high schools in Des Moines. How does pedagogical change look when hiring new teachers to support a similar vision and mission? Is there professional learning that supports this change? What aspects and qualities of teacher leadership are shaped by scholarship? By peers? By experience? Longitudinal research calls for long-term studies of such organizations as RunDSM and on the success of returning graduates to the community as well as the effects on community improvement.

**Personal Reflection**

As a recovering student from a standardized education, this study reflected much of what were my own oppressed memories of school. In addition to being a student, my actions as a former teacher often reflected mechanistic approaches. Through my innocent compliance as an unknowing oppressor, I also had some humanizing practices. My own pedagogy developed and mirrored that of an outlier in some respects, as well as that of a teacher “archetype,” on another. Following compliance initiatives was expected, including the use of test prep strategies and materials with third graders. As a child, I had varied experiences ranging from a highly prescribed basal reader to a student-centered learning environment. The monotonous and automatous nature of my schooling became clear only through having a few teacher leaders who were the outliers of their time. I had experiences as a talented and gifted (TAG) student in a program that provided me with very few opportunities for creative autonomy. The programming was reduced to packets of puzzles, some computer games and a few inquiry projects. Dropping out of the TAG program my sixth grade year of school led to further speculation surrounding the inadequacies of the entire system. It became all too clear to me, as a sixth grader, that something was faulty within the organized monotony and
obedience of the school day. I started to see people, authority and the institute of learning differently. Those committed to following rules and those who could conform to the nuances of elementary school, a trained thinker so to speak, were left unscathed or unbothered by such a system. I was devastated by it. I loved learning as a child. My parents had provided me the creative childhood that all kids deserve. Instead of taking those experience with me to school and taking control of my own learning and making the most of it, I rebelled. My 4.0 potential, which was easily achieved in college, became my adversary. I viewed spending time on schoolwork as wasting away precious time to explore the world. My own education had officially started. Skipping school, leading a crew of troublemakers, finding ways to enjoy weeklong suspensions, and caring little about graduating high school were among my many creative outlets.

Eventually, I had to make my way. So, about two years into high school, I started conforming again. I was actually pretty good at playing school. If you smile and nod in class, turn in your homework, and, quite simply, just show up to class, it is an easy A. This was still, no remedy for a devastating GPA freshman year. I did graduate and was accepted into community college where I found my career calling. Logically, I became a teacher. It was the perfect solution for my angst toward school. I would infiltrate as a double agent (former student & teacher) and make school better for all students. As fate had it, I fell in love with teaching right away. I was distracted from my mission by a complete adoration toward teaching, toward learning, and absolute respect toward my colleagues and others involved in the system I had once so mournfully despised. My view of the problems shifted. It became political. My angst resurfaced and I was still set on doing more. This call for action
eventually led to becoming a district administrator (double agent again) and an adjunct college instructor.

Essentially, I am still infiltrating. In a sense, I am still rebelling, even with this study. I have learned to make my troublemaking a bit more angelic and scholarly than that of my former practices. I have also learned that there are many of us, many teacher leaders, wanting change and who are devastated by the conformity and standardization of the system. Because of this deeply rooted anguish toward the system, there were times during the interviews and observations when my bias may have played a role in my follow-up questions and field notes. I would like to see a similar study repeated by someone who truly believes in a standardized pedagogy.

There is a time in everyone’s adult life when they are asked to name a teacher that made a difference in their life. A teacher gets asked this many times. I always wondered what all of the teachers who people mentioned had in common. I was pleased when Tony Wagner researched some of these similarities. However, I always wondered what would happen if these qualities were the qualities thread within the culture and ideology of the entire school. What if the educational practices of these teachers were to be the moral imperatives of the school? Would this make for a humanizing education? I instantly took a liking to both participants. As teachers, I would have wanted to have as my own. This may have influenced some of my field notes and data analysis.

It was life-changing to study RunDSM for a year. I am not sure I will ever be able to remove the context of seeing Freire’s work come to life with such awakening and critical thought—what might seem to be the end of a study, is instead just the beginning of an active
pursuit of such ideals. It is my ontological vocation to pursue these liberating conditions and continue to lead with love as I influence future educators to do the same.
APPENDIX A. LITERATURE MAP

Humanizing Education
Lindsay Law

Pedagogical Theory
Freire, 1970

Opposing & Conventional Pedagogy
Salazar, 2013
McLaren, 2005 & 2006
Darder et al, 2009
Rodríguez & Smith, 2011
de la Luz Reyes, 1992
Apple, 1990

Teacher Leadership
Darling-Hammond, 2012
Danielson, 2013
Wagner, 2008 & 2012

Learning Environment
Ladson-Billings, 1995 & 2007
Bandura, 1997
Bartolomé, 1994
Knaus, 2009
Horton, 1973
Sousa & Tomlinson, 2011
Scheurich & Skrla, 2003
M. Apple, 1990

Instructional Design
Freire, 1970
Bartolomé, 1994
Ladson-Billings, 1995 & 2007
Giroux, 2013
Ellsworth, 2005
Rolling, 2010
Denzin, Lincoln & Smith, 2008
Westerman, 2005

Leadership Practices
Freire, 1970
Darder, 1998
McLaren, 2003
Ladson-Billings, 2007
Westerman, 2005
Knaus, 2009
Fischman, McLaren, Sunker & Lankshear, 2005

Humanizing Pedagogy
Freire & Betto, 1995
Darder, 2002
Ladson-Billings, 1995 & 2007
Salazar, 2013
hooks, 1994
Kincheloe & McLaren, 2000
Macedo, 1994
Bartolomé, 1994
Barone & Eisner,

Policy
Hussar & Bailey, 2013
Lipman, 2011
Darder & Torres, 2005
Giroux, 2004 & 2011
Kirylo et al, 2010
McLaren, 2005

Opposing & Conventional Pedagogy
Salazar, 2013
McLaren, 2005 & 2006
Darder et al, 2009
Rodríguez & Smith, 2011
de la Luz Reyes, 1992
Apple, 1990

Teacher Leadership
Darling-Hammond, 2012
Danielson, 2013
Wagner, 2008 & 2012

Learning Environment
Ladson-Billings, 1995 & 2007
Bandura, 1997
Bartolomé, 1994
Knaus, 2009
Horton, 1973
Sousa & Tomlinson, 2011
Scheurich & Skrla, 2003
M. Apple, 1990

Instructional Design
Freire, 1970
Bartolomé, 1994
Ladson-Billings, 1995 & 2007
Giroux, 2013
Ellsworth, 2005
Rolling, 2010
Denzin, Lincoln & Smith, 2008
Westerman, 2005

Leadership Practices
Freire, 1970
Darder, 1998
McLaren, 2003
Ladson-Billings, 2007
Westerman, 2005
Knaus, 2009
Fischman, McLaren, Sunker & Lankshear, 2005
APPENDIX B. HUMAN SUBJECTS APPROVAL

IOWA STATE UNIVERSITY
OF SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY

Institutional Review Board
Office for Responsible Research
Vice President for Research
1138 Pearson Hall
Ames, Iowa 50011-2207
515 294-4566
FAX 515 294-4267

Date: 1/9/2014

To: Lindsay Law
900 67th St, Unit 202
West Des Moines, IA 50266

CC: Dr. Larry Ebberts
N256 Lagomarcino Hall

Dr. Joanne Marshall
N229D Lagomarcino

From: Office for Responsible Research

Title: Humanizing Education: Teacher Leaders Influencing Pedagogical Change

IRB ID: 13-524

Approval Date: 1/8/2014

Date for Continuing Review: 12/16/2015

Submission Type: New

Review Type: Full Committee

The project referenced above has received approval from the Institutional Review Board (IRB) at Iowa State University according to the dates shown above. Please refer to the IRB ID number shown above in all correspondence regarding this study.

To ensure compliance with federal regulations (45 CFR 46 & 21 CFR 56), please be sure to:

- Use only the approved study materials in your research, including the recruitment materials and informed consent documents that have the IRB approval stamp.

- Retain signed informed consent documents for 3 years after the close of the study, when documented consent is required.

- Obtain IRB approval prior to implementing any changes to the study by submitting a Modification Form for Non-Exempt Research or Amendment for Personnel Changes form, as necessary.

- Immediately inform the IRB of (1) all serious and/or unexpected adverse experiences involving risks to subjects or others; and (2) any other unanticipated problems involving risks to subjects or others.

- Stop all research activity if IRB approval lapses, unless continuation is necessary to prevent harm to research participants. Research activity can resume once IRB approval is reestablished.

- Complete a new continuing review form at least three to four weeks prior to the date for continuing review as noted above to provide sufficient time for the IRB to review and approve continuation of the study. We will send a courtesy reminder as this date approaches.

Please be aware that IRB approval means that you have met the requirements of federal regulations and ISU policies governing human subjects research. Approval from other entities may also be needed. For example, access to data from private records (e.g. student, medical, or employment records, etc.) that are protected by FERPA, HIPAA, or other confidentiality policies requires permission from the holders of those records. Similarly, for research conducted in institutions other than ISU (e.g., schools, other colleges or universities, medical facilities, companies, etc.), investigators must obtain permission from the institution(s) as required by their policies. IRB approval in no way implies or guarantees that permission from these other entities will be granted.

Upon completion of the project, please submit a Project Closure Form to the Office for Responsible Research, 1138 Pearson Hall, to officially close the project.
APPENDIX C. INFORMED CONSENT

INFORMED CONSENT DOCUMENT

Title of Study: Humanizing education: Teacher leaders influencing pedagogical change

Investigators: Lindsay Law

This form describes a research project. It has information to help you decide whether or not you wish to participate. Research studies include only people who choose to take part—your participation is completely voluntary. Please discuss any questions you have about the study or about this form with the project staff before deciding to participate.

Introduction

The purpose of this study is to gain insight and learn more about teacher leaders who have influenced pedagogical change in their school and community. Educational practices involving curriculum, assessment and instruction will be a primary focus. Other elements that pertain to the purpose of the study involve policy changes relevant to the district and the impact of the organization RunDSM.

You are being invited to participate in this study because you are currently in a classroom teacher and you are in a teacher leadership role for the organization RunDSM. You should not participate if you do not teach in the school or have a leadership role in the after school organization.

Description of Procedures

If you agree to participate, you will be asked to participate in one-on-one, semi-structured interviews. Your participation will involve scheduled interview sessions and classroom observations spread over the span of six-twelve months.

- There will be 3 interview sessions scheduled for 75-90 minutes each. Protocols will lead each session.
- The first two interviews will focus on educational practices and mandated policies specific to the school and RunDSM. A follow-up interview will be determined by the emerging themes from the first two sessions.
- Interviews will be audio recorded and transcribed. You will have the opportunity to look through the transcriptions to check for accuracy.
- Publicly available information about your school and the RunDSM program will also be analyzed for the study. This information will be gathered from websites for the school. The RunDSM program, and the Iowa Department of Education.

Risks or Discomforts

While participating in this study you may experience the following risks or discomforts:

Interview sessions may lead to discomfort in answering sensitive questions related to the mandated policies involving the district.
Benefits

If you decide to participate in this study, there may be no benefit to you. It is hoped that the information gained in this study will benefit society by advancing our knowledge about teacher leadership efforts related to specific pedagogical shifts. Interview data will be analyzed through transcription (typed recall of your interview) with open-coding (categories identified and described by the researcher) and member checking (you review your statements for accuracy). Public documents related to the data (i.e. NCLB requirements, school and community socioeconomic statistics, Title 1 requirements, Iowa Core Standards) will be analyzed through a social and political lens.

Costs and Compensation

You will not have any costs from participating in this study. You will not be compensated for participating in this study.

Participant Rights

Participating in this study is completely voluntary. You may choose not to take part in the study or to stop participating at any time, for any reason, without penalty or negative consequences. During interview sessions you can skip any questions that you do not wish to answer.

You will have a chance to review the interview transcripts and request removal or redaction of any information you prefer not to have shared in the results of the study.

If you have any questions about the rights of research subjects or research-related injury, please contact the IRB Administrator, (515) 294-4566, IRB@iastate.edu, or Director, (515) 294-3115, Office for Responsible Research, Iowa State University, Ames, Iowa 50011.

Confidentiality

When you sign this consent form, you will be asked to indicate your willingness to allow the study to directly identify you by your real name instead of a confidential identifier (pseudonym). Your choice to share your real identity can be reversed at anytime during the research process. If you decide you would prefer to have your identity kept confidential, the following actions will take place: I will not use your real name or the name of your school or the RunDSM organization in any study results. You should know that even with these measures, there are no guarantees that you can be fully protected as your unique role as a teacher leader within the RunDSM organization is highly recognizable in the local community.

There are two teacher leaders participating in interviews for the study. If at any point, one of you decide that you would like to pursue the above mentioned actions for protecting confidentiality, all participants and the school will have to follow the same precaution. In the case of this option, all participants and the school will be informed of the change in confidentiality plans.

Though the school may agree to participate using their real name in the study, it is important to protect third party participants (those who are mentioned by interviewees) who may become indirectly involved in the research (i.e. the principal, other literacy teachers, district administrators). Measures to protect these people may include omitting certain aspects of your
interview details in the study data and using generalizable terms that are harder to trace to specific individuals (i.e. “staff” instead of “8th Grade Teachers”).

The interviews will be audio recorded and transcribed for you to read through before the use of any of the information is used in the study. Regardless of your choice about the use of your name, you may specify information that you would like removed from the study data during member checking.

Records identifying participants will be kept confidential to the extent permitted by applicable laws and regulations and will not be made publicly available. However, federal government regulatory agencies, auditing departments of Iowa State University, and the Institutional Review Board (a committee that reviews and approves human subject research studies) may inspect and/or copy study records for quality assurance and data analysis. These records may contain private information.

To ensure confidentiality to the extent permitted by law, the following measures will be taken: The audio recordings and interview transcriptions will be stored on password-protected files and kept confidential.

Questions
You are encouraged to ask questions at any time during this study. For further information about the study, contact:

Principal Investigator: Lindsay Law
lawl@iastate.edu
515-360-0313

Supervising Faculty: Dr. Larry Ebbers
lebbers@iastate.edu
515-294-8067

Consent and Authorization Provisions
Your signature indicates that you voluntarily agree to participate in this study, that the study has been explained to you, that you have been given the time to read the document, and that your questions have been satisfactorily answered. You will receive a copy of the written informed consent prior to your participation in the study.

Option 1: Sign below if you agree to the above statement and grant the study permission to use your real name when results of the study are disseminated. Note: If the school or any of the other participants choose Option 2, confidentiality measures explained in the confidentiality section will be used for all participants.

Participant’s Name (printed) ________________________________

Participant’s Signature ________________________________ Date ________________________________
Option 2: Sign below if you would like the study to try and protect your identity by taking the actions mentioned in the confidentiality section.

Participant’s Name (printed) ________________________________

_________________________  ______________
Participant’s Signature       Date
INFORMED CONSENT DOCUMENT

Title of Study: Humanizing education: Teacher leaders influencing pedagogical change

Investigators: Lindsay Law

This form describes a research project. It has information to help you decide whether or not you wish to allow the research participants to use their real names and the school district they work in for the study. Please discuss any questions you have about the study or about this form with the project staff before deciding to agree to the use of the research participant’s real names and the name of the school in the study. You will not be a participant in the study.

Introduction

The purpose of this study is to gain insight and learn more about teacher leaders who have influenced pedagogical change in their school district and community. Educational practices involving curriculum, assessment and instruction will be a primary focus. Other elements that pertain to the purpose of the study involve policy changes relevant to the school and the impact of the organization RunDSM.

Teacher leaders from your school have opted to use their real names in this study. In order for the study to use their real names, it is important to obtain consent in identifying Des Moines Public Schools as the district in which they taught for the duration of the study.

The study has a positive intent in shedding light on the organization RunDSM that resulted from policy changes and teacher leadership actions that Des Moines Public experienced over the past few years. The study hopes to identify characteristics and leadership qualities that add to the research efforts and practices of teacher leaders in the field. This consent document recognizes your willingness to allow the study to use Des Moines Public Schools as an identified site where these teacher leaders work.

Consent and Authorization Provisions

Your signature indicates that you voluntarily agree to allow the real names of the teachers and the district to be used in this study, that the study has been explained to you, that you have been given the time to read the document, and that your questions have been satisfactorily answered. You will receive a copy of the written informed consent prior to the start of the study.

Sign below if you agree to the above statement and grant the study permission to use the real name of the district and district program.

Superintendent’s Name (printed) ________________________________

Superintendent’s Signature ___________________________ Date _______________
Questions
You are encouraged to ask questions at any time during this study. For further information about the study, contact:

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APPENDIX D. INTERVIEW PROTOCOLS

Interview Protocol #1

Interview Protocol Project:

*Humanizing education: Teacher leaders influencing pedagogical change*

**Time:**                    **Date:**                       **Place:**                           **Interviewee:**

(Brief introduction)

*Today I would like to ask some questions related to your journey as a teacher. I would also like to discuss the turnaround model and other related policies tied to your school. As agreed in the informed consent, your real name will be used in the study. This interview will be audio recorded and transcribed for you to read through before use in the study. If at any point during the interview or member checking you would like to change your mind and have your identity protected, we can take measures toward protecting confidentiality. There are no guarantees that you can be fully protected as your unique role as a teacher leader within the RunDSM organization is highly recognizable to the local community. If you decide you would rather remain anonymous and have confidentiality in your responses, the following actions will take place: I will not use your real name or the name of your school in the study. To protect third party participants (i.e. colleagues at your school, district administration, etc.) general terms will be used along with pseudonyms (i.e. staff, administrators, students). Any information that you would like removed from the study is at your discretion during member checking.*

Questions:

1. Discuss your journey as a teacher. At Harding Middle School? How did you get where you are with students and the school?

2. What has been the impact of the Common Core State Standards with your curriculum? Assessment? Instruction?

3. What has been the impact of the NCLB designation of your school as a persistently lowest-achieving school?

4. What has been your role in the actions related to the turnaround model?

5. What changes have you seen in the school since the model was put into place?

6. Do you feel that the policies through NCLB have improved student achievement at your school?

7. Describe the culture of your school and any changes in the culture since the policy changes have taken place.

8. What are your responsibilities as a teacher in the school in fulfilling the turnaround model?

Adapted from Creswell (2013) p. 165 (Figure 7.4)
Interview Protocol #2

Interview Protocol Project:

*Humanizing education: Teacher leaders influencing pedagogical change*

Time:                    Date:                    Place:                           Interviewee:

(Brief introduction)

*Today I would like to ask some questions related to RunDSM and the practices related to that organization and your classes taught during the school day. As agreed in the informed consent, your real name will be used in the study. This interview will be audio recorded and transcribed for you to read through before use in the study. If at any point during the interview or member checking you would like to change your mind and have your identity protected, we can take measures toward protecting confidentiality. There are no guarantees that you can be fully protected as your unique role as a teacher leader within the RunDSM organization is highly recognizable to the local community. If you decide you would rather remain anonymous and have confidentiality in your responses, the following actions will take place: I will not use your real name or the name of your school in the study. To protect third party participants (i.e. colleagues at your school, district administration, etc.) general terms will be used along with pseudonyms (i.e. staff, administrators, students). Any information that you would like removed from the study is at your discretion during member checking.*

Questions:

1. Tell me about *RunDSM*. How did it get started? What was your involvement?

2. How does *RunDSM* help students?

3. Describe the support you have received from the district. How about pushback?

4. How much autonomy do you have with the organization?

5. How has *RunDSM* impacted the school? District? Community?

6. What is the difference between the course offerings through the school and the offerings through *RunDSM*? How do you go about deciding what to teach in each?

7. How much autonomy do you have with your courses taught during the day?

8. What are your goals for your school? What are your goals for *RunDSM*?
REFERENCES


Norris, J. (2011). Towards the use of the ‘great wheel” as a model in determining the quality and merit of arts-based projects (research and instruction. *International Journal of*


ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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