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**The Alchemy of Integrated Spaces:
Youth Participation in Research Collectives of Difference**

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It's late Tuesday afternoon, 5:30 to be exact, a half an hour beyond the paid hours we all agreed to, yet no one looks that anxious to leave. Welcome to the Institute for Arts and Social Justice. In the summer of 2003 researchers at The Graduate Center of the City University of New York brought together a diverse group of young people from 13-21, community elders, social scientists, spoken word artists, dancers, choreographers and a video crew to collectively pour through data collected from over 9,000 students in high schools across the nation by the Educational Opportunity Gap Project [Fine et al., 2003]; to learn about the legal, social and political history of segregation and integration of public schools; and create *Echoes* a performance of poetry and movement to contribute to the commemorative conversation of the 50th anniversary of Brown versus Board of Education of Topeka, Kansas. Together we sit a as a radically diverse group, intentionally integrated in our efforts to actively respond to the chilling *resegregation* trends within public schools across the nation (Orfield & Lee). Our bodies have shifted from sitting face-forward giving full attention to invited speakers, into a loose circle. Some of us are in chairs, others are on the carpeted floor of the dance studio where we have spent the better part of the day. The conversation holding our attention is about the Harvey Milk school, an independent public school for gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgender youth that recently received money to expand into a full-fledged high school:

Iralma: *I can understand where they're coming from, but I totally totally disagree with it. Because I feel like the only way you're gonna learn about our society is if you're around different people. You can't be around the same kind of people and expect to learn about everything and anything, you know what I'm saying? Like you can't be in a school with the same people and expect to have whole different varieties of opinions...*

Amir: *Yeah, but when you break someone's spirit, not always will they be able to be strong and be able to get through things—you can really cripple someone like that. I know that being in my school, my grades didn't go up until I started getting into my history and I actually found, you know, about what made me great, you know what I mean? And I had to go out of school to get that. So we should be integrated but there's nothing wrong with going somewhere that will teach you about yourself, because you need to get a sense of self worth.*

Iralma: *But if you learn along with someone who's White, then you can educate them about your history, about what makes you great and then they'll appreciate you a lot more...*

Amir: *Me and my friends we're in this organization, Messengers of Black Cultural Awareness, that we all put together ourselves, with that purpose. But we all had to go back and get these things on our own, you know, and learn about ourselves and now we're bringing it to the table and we're still learning with other people. But at the same time, like I said, I had to go to the Black bookstores, and talk to Black people about our history, you know what I mean? With my own people, and then I can go back out there and share with everyone.*

[...]

Annique: *I come from a historically Black college, basically all Black, and I think that can make you stronger too. I don't think that there's a right or wrong in this situation. I mean the diversity at Howard is crazy. I mean first off you have Black people from all over the diaspora, you have them from all over the world. So you're gonna have different opinions regardless, 'cause we're all different.*

Joanna: *Really if you're talking about learning about yourself, I think that one of the reasons we're so dependent on one another, like as humans, is because we need to learn about the people around us to learn about ourselves. Like, that's necessary. ...I need to see myself through your eyes and like...I don't know its just this back and forth thing—I need to learn about you to make myself a better person. I mean in any context...diversity of thought is just as important as diversity in terms of ethnicity. I mean no matter where you are you are going to be absorbing so much knowledge about the people around you and about yourself.*

Stepping back, The Educational Opportunity Gap Research Project

The above conversation took place during the *Echoes* Institute, the fourth in a series of “research camps” and the most recent effort of The Educational Opportunity Gap Research project. The two year project was designed to build a multi-generational, multiple district, urban-suburban database on youth and elders, tracing the history of struggle for desegregation and social science evidence of contemporary educational opportunities and inequities analyzed by race, ethnicity and class (see Fine, Bloom, Burns, Chajet, Guishard, Torre, 2004). Over 100 youth from urban and suburban high schools in New York and New Jersey joined researchers from the Graduate Center of the City University of New York in a participatory action research design to study youth perspectives on achievement/opportunity gaps. Students participated in a series of “research camps,” each held for two days at a time (except for the week-long Institute), in community and university settings, where they were immersed in methods training and learned about interviews, focus groups, survey design and participant observation as well as the history of the *Brown* decision, civil rights movements and struggles for educational justice. Some received high school credits (when a course on participatory research was offered in their schools) and 42 ultimately received college credit for their research work.

Across the research camps we designed a survey, translated it into Spanish, French-Creole and Braille, and distributed it to 9th and 12th graders in 13 urban and suburban districts. Together, we analyzed the qualitative and quantitative data from 9,174 surveys, 24 focus groups and 32 individual interviews with youth. Teams of youth and adult researchers cross-visited four urban and suburban schools to document structures, opportunities and social relations layered

through a lens of race/ethnicity.ⁱ This essay draws on data collected during the final research camp, from participant observation, pre- and post-interviews with the 13 youth involved in the Echoes Institute, and participant's writings.

In the following pages we will enter into the collaboratively “constructed site” (Weis & Fine, 2000) of the *Echoes* Institute and analyze the experiences of three of its participants, raising for discussion questions of silence and collective voice in integrated spaces, the benefits and necessities of contact across difference (at *and between* the levels of individual, collective, and “space”), and what it means both theoretically and practically to create diverse democratic spaces of inquiry.

As Sonia Sanchez (2003) reminds us, “Integration is not just putting bodies next to each other...” We must think seriously about what happens in such spaces. What are the contexts, conditions, and consequences of contact? In 1954, months before the United States Supreme Court decided that separate was not equal in the case of *Brown v. the Board of Education*, Gordon Allport published the ground-breaking text, *The Nature of Prejudice*, formalizing for the first time the situational conditions necessary for improving intergroup relations. Inspiring generations of research on intergroup contact, Allport outlined four critical conditions: equal group status within the situation; the presence of a common goal; intergroup cooperation; and the support of authorities, laws, or customs. Allport's original hypothesis was concerned about *when* intergroup contact would lead to positive changes in attitude and behavior, and said little, if anything, about the processes—the *how* and *why*—that brings about or sustains the change (Pettigrew, 1998; Fine, Weis & Powell, 1997).

In the years since, researchers have built on the four conditions, demonstrating for example, that intergroup cooperation is more successful when it is free from competition (Aronson & Patnoe, 1997; Sherrif, 1966) and that equal group status is not simply achieved—if desegregated spaces are to thrive, further conditions must be met, including “a sense of community; a commitment to creative analysis of difference, power, and privilege; and an enduring investment in democratic practice” (Fine, Weis & Powell, 1997, p. 249). The collaborative work of the *Echoes* Institute fundamentally embraced the learning of contact theorists from Allport to the present, and provides an opportunity to look inside and extended moment of intergroup contact, paying specific attention to process and power.

Theorizing an educational setting as a Contact Zone

The *Echoes* Institute, brought an intentionally diverse group of young people together—by gender, race, ethnicity, class, sexuality, (dis)ability, ‘track’; by experiences with racism, sexism, homophobia, school administrators, social service agencies, ‘the law’; by (dis)comfort with their bodies, dance, poetry, groups; etc. Youth interested in writing, performing, and/or social justice were recruited for the project from youth groups and public schools in the greater New York metropolitan area including northern New Jersey.ⁱⁱ In doing so, we consciously created what might be called, in the words of Mary Louise Pratt, a “contact zone,” a messy social space where differently situated people “meet, clash, and grapple with each other” across their varying relationships to power (Pratt, 1992, p. 4). Conceptualizing our collaborative as a contact zone, both theoretically and methodologically, allows for a more textured analysis across power and difference. More specifically, it creates an opening for an analysis that lingers in the “space between”—in not only the borderlands (Anzaldúa, 1987)

between differences, but also within a constructed space of “difference”; in not only the multiple intersections within the individual, but also in the collective; in not only the multiplicity of the collective, but also in the collaboratively constructed space itself. Following in the theoretical tradition of Michelle Fine and Lois Weis with conceptual support from Mary Louise Pratt, this chapter asks, under what conditions can we create zones of contact that move us *Beyond Silenced Voices* and into *Extraordinary Conversations*? And once created, how do differently situated young people experience and negotiate these spaces?

Structuring an integrated setting for democracy and radical inclusivity

In conceiving the *Echoes* Institute as a contact zone, an attempt was made to construct a ‘democratic space of radical inclusivity’— a space where:

- each participant is understood to be a carrier of knowledge and history,
- everyone holds a sincere commitment to creating change for educational justice,
- power relationships are explicitly addressed within the collaborative,
- disagreements and disjunctures are excavated rather than smoothed over, and
- there is a collective expectation that both individuals and the group are “under construction.”

Most significantly, we were organized as a group of adults and youth, intentionally diverse, interested in exploring (not papering over) questions of power and difference, refusing assimilation and consensus, committed to a common goal of understanding, researching and ultimately performing the legacy of the Brown decision.

With this as our foundation, we then designed a week that braided knowledge-building, writing and social movements and dance movement. Youth participated in workshops on the history of *Brown v Board*, civil rights law, the activism of the Young Lords party, and the Opportunity Gap research all of which provided the group with a common language and knowledge to draw from, enabling youth to more equally participate. The racial/ethnic and class diversity of our workshop facilitators matched the diversity of our group and their professional status was recognized, not to reify hierarchy, but to add to the collective potential power of the group. We designed our times together so that youth were learning and creating with resource-filled people dedicated to the collaborative process and the outcomes of the project. We hoped/anticipated that this would reinforce the importance and seriousness in the work, that upon seeing that their efforts had the potential to make a large impact, youth researchers might to take risks they may have not otherwise taken.

Analysis

For this purpose of this chapter, I draw on three data sources – participant observation in the camps and Institute, individual interviews pre and post Institute with 13 youth, and their written drafts of poetry/spoken word. To address the theoretical concerns of *Beyond Silenced Voices*, I have selected material that speaks to the power of integrated educational settings, and analyzed for:

- How youth interrogate their *positions* within schools and the larger society (race, ethnicity, class, privilege and positions of social marginality);
- How youth talk about *silence and speaking out* against injustice;

- How youth find *individual and cultural identities of meaning* within integrated settings; and
- How youth conceptualize *responsibility for social change*, given the evidence of overwhelming injustice within public education.

Welcome to the Institute – an integrated space for education, democracy and critical inquiry

The opening dialogue is an excerpt of what became known as the Harvey Milk conversation, one of the pivotal discussions that took place within in the *Echoes* Institute, where participants began to situate themselves, for the first time, in relation to a more complicated understanding of integration. Simple understandings of “we should all be one, together” matured into layered analyses of how “coming together” can be emotionally, physically and even intellectually costly for some students marked “different” by race/ethnicity, sexuality, etc., when they are without structural support. The way the conversation unfolded—the engaged and supportive body language, the level of listening and respect demonstrated during potentially tense and difficult moments—made a huge impact on the participants, one that was referred to repeatedly. “*The conversation was so thought provoking,*” Joanna, a White young woman who attends a large, tracked, desegregated, wealthy inner-ring suburban high school, later described it, adding, “*We started out facing forward because we were listening to [the presentation] ...but then we morphed into a circle ... sharing our different opinions. ...we didn’t really ever come up with a conclusion, but we didn’t even need a conclusion.*” Individual and collective identities shift with bodies and ideas.

The youth participants uniformly described the Institute was the most diverse group in terms of race and ethnicity that they had ever worked with. As Tahani, a Palestinian American young woman who attends an integrated small school in Brooklyn, put it, “*So many different minds, so many different points of view..just having so many different people, so many ways of thinking...it was intense.*” While we specifically worked to bring together youth with a wide variety of life experiences, we did not realize how unique such a space would be. The post-Institute interviews revealed that the uniqueness of the space was not simply in the level of diversity but also in the way the space was structured. Participants felt a profound level of respect and commitment, in the way their opinions and experiences were equally discussed with those of the workshop presenters, though working side by side with respected artists who shared their desire for social justice, and in knowing that their efforts would be presented before local and national audiences. All of these structures translated into a space where youth demonstrated a tremendous dedication to working through a diverse, challenging set of ideas individually and collectively. This dedication was reflected in near perfect attendance even with several youth working long hours after their 9-5 day at the Institute. It should be noted that after the Institute, one young person stopped participating as he was struggling to meet life responsibilities. All of the other youth have remained with the project, some with free and open schedules, others juggling the rehearsals amid after-school jobs and serving as family translators.

For Whom is Silence a Choice? Relationships to power, the silence of privilege and the vulnerability of participation.

Reflecting on the Harvey Milk and other conversations, Elinor, a White young woman who attends a large, tracked, desegregated suburban high school (80% White, 18% Latino, with

most of the Whites middle and upper middle class, and the Latinos split between working class and middle class; the school is located in a wealthy, largely White and elite county), recalled the strong opinions that were aired, describing the conversation as “constructive arguing,” she noted that the level of respect allowed people to build on each other’s opinions. Elinor remained silent during the conversation, not feeling comfortable with what she perceived as either side of a binary argument, “*I ended up writing about that in a poem, because there were like two distinct sides on it. ...School of thought A and school of thought B ...so I made..[laughs]..myself a third category in the poem.*” Elinor went on to elaborate, “*..my school’s integrated, but there’s a lot of self-segregation, which, I mean, I don’t know, is that unfortunate? Is that the best way for people to handle it?*”

Elinor, with the rest of us, came to learn that one of the consequences of contact is that low-power groups often need segregated spaces *within* larger integrated ones. This was not an easy lesson for some in the Institute, particularly the White youth—and some of the White educators—understanding the simultaneous need for separation *and* integration. Over time, Elinor came to respect and understand individuals’ needs to feel the support of people like them. However, with the same breath she worries about people feeling “pressured” to only hang out within their own groups. Embedded in her concern is a search for self—if everyone stays within their group, where do those who want to live in the borderlands sit? In carving out a third category, she seeks her own meaningful role, in this case as an ally in the struggle for integration and against racism (Tatum, 1994).

For Elinor working with the *Echoes* collaborative provided an opportunity to use parts of her identity not often exercised, and to think through her relationship to power, the silence of privilege and the vulnerability of participation. This process was facilitated by regular group conversations, check-ins, poetry read-arounds and group feedback sessions, in all of which everyone (from youth participants to workshop presenters) had the opportunity comment and contribute ideas. The layering of these activities across the writing, movement and research components, allowed youth to participate differently in different moments—highlighting alternate parts of their identities as they desired.

Well being around a group of people that’s like a completely fresh start, like there wasn’t...I don’t know, I didn’t feel like I was the kind of quiet sarcastic girl, you know, which comes out more in school...[laughs] in the beginning [of the Institute] the things I wrote were kind of like humorous, or like they were [laughs] surrealist. I guess they were a little more like, safe, but they were also more prosy. ...And then as the week went on [I began] writing more in the style of poetry and then writing about choosing to be silent, which was so personal and which is like something that I know a lot of my friends say about me and I’ve never been able to defend that much to them. Well, because we don’t really talk about it. But I know they think of me as quiet or as, not necessarily quiet, but not really sharing like really intimate things with them. And to be able to talk about that and then, think about my own school and tracking was really personal too. And I don’t have too many spaces where I’m really honest about things that are difficult or painful.

She continued this line of inquiry in an early version of one of her poems, where she questions what it means to be silent, examining the power silence can hold when it is chosen. An excerpt of her poem reads:

*It doesn't feel good to be silent
 Except for when it does.
 Can't I be my own best friend?
 To keep thoughts and beliefs inside,
 Sometimes means more power to me.*

*I was given two ears and one tongue
 Can't I listen more than I speak?
 Where is the harm in that?
 The 'lent' in silent means that I'm
 Giving that space back.
 To be quiet in public earned me
 The title Self-Righteous Ice Queen.*

*I'm not frozen.
 Nothing is as warm as self.*

Elinor later joined this poem with another written by Natasha, an African American young woman who attends an integrated small school in New York City. Initially grouped together by one of the Poet Educators because their individual poems used similar language, Elinor and Natasha used the writing sessions to make sense of their different experiences and understandings of silence. Each understand silence to be potentially powerful, and use the knowledge embedded in their difference, as well as their writings and relevant data from the Opportunity Gap study to ask questions of each other's positions. What is the difference between *being* silenced and *choosing* silence? When is silence personally powerful for one's own development, and when does it result in complicity or an absolution of social responsibility? When a high-powered person chooses silence is that an active way of providing space for others to speak? The final version of their collaborative poem ends with:

*42% of white American teenagers in public schools speak up
 when they hear racist comments. (E)
 Bold (N)
 Decisive (N)
 Be fierce (N)
 Be confident (N)
 Be honest (both)*

*But what kind of schools do we have
 where 58% of white students don't speak out against hatred? (E)
 Being quiet is a strong choice (N)
 -except when it isn't. (E)*

Working collaboratively with and through questions of position and privilege (topics she had not considered much before), Elinor analyzes, challenges and refines her thinking on silence. This was a crucial educational moment – and important for readers to note – about when and how well-resourced students might critically consider the larger arrangements in which they/we sit (see Burns, 2004). At first Elinor looks for safety and comfort in her silence, finding a form of

protection in her privilege. This comfort shifts to a more complicated *discomfort*, however, as she recognizes it is privilege, *her* privilege, that affords this shelter. She carries this dilemma with her throughout her work with the group. It both informs her participation and creation just as her participation and creation help her clarify her thoughts on the issue. This example illustrates the developmental importance of allowing differences of thoughts and positions to remain ‘unsolved’ and ‘unfixed’ by the group.

The ironies of finding “self” within a diverse collective: Claiming/rewriting one’s history in and along side a diverse collective

Amir, an African American young man from a large, tracked high school in a middle class suburban neighborhood (51% African American, 48% White and “a few in between”; a school that is heavily tracked for core subject areas so that individual classes are very imbalanced with respect to race/ethnicity), came to the Institute after working as a youth researcher with the Educational Opportunity Gap Project. As member of the research team at his high school, he met on an average of twice a month, with myself, another graduate student, and eight of his peers, to research the ways policies such as tracking and discipline were creating different and unequal experiences for students in the school based on race, ethnicity and class. In all the time we met he kept his “classification” [special education] private. He spoke about being in some level two classes [courses at his school are tracked in four levels, four being the highest], but never mentioned his experiences in special education classes. It was not until he participated in the Institute that he “came out” in the Harvey Milk conversation, disclosing for the first time that he was “classified” as “special ed.” Sharing his story of educational marginalization, Amir bridged between his experiences in special education and those of gay male students in his own school who formed their own group in order to support each other through the harassment they face from other students. He spoke of the need for “safe spaces” where one can be nurtured while they grow into their intellectual and emotional skins.

I’m not saying that people should be separate, but I do think if you’re around people, like if you’re ridiculed for something, and get put down for it, [its better to] you put yourself around people just like you, [because] they understand exactly where you’re coming from. So you can build each other up.

On the final day of the Institute Amir brought in a poem that directly addressed his personal experiences as well as the larger injustice committed to students who are given a “classification.” An excerpt from his poem reads:

The classification caused me to break into tears. It was my frustration. My reaction to teachers speaking down to me saying I was classified and it was all my fault. Had me truly believing that inferiority was my classification. Cause I still didn’t know, and the pain WAS DEEP. The pain—OH GOD! THE PAIN! The ridicule, the constant taunting, laughing when they passed me by. Told me that community college should be my goal. It wasn’t until Ms. Cooper came and rescued me with her history class. Showed me the importance of my history and told me the secrets my ancestors held. She told me about the Malcolm Xs and the Huey Newtons. She told me to speak out because this is the story of many and none of them are speaking.

And the silence is just as painful.

With a profound understanding the scope of the injustice and a sense of responsibility to others in similar situations, Amir decided to use the *Echoes* Institute to speak out.

I was thinking on the way over [to the Institute] one day, this thing is dedicated to getting people out of problems. ...And I thought about how much it hurt me one day when I [realized] how they were—they were honestly segregating special education kids from the rest of the school. Like there was a constant effort to do so. It wasn't..that blatant, but that's exactly what they were trying to do. And the pain I felt that day..[my friend] Anthony had to calm me down, because I was really angry. It actually brought me to tears. So I'm like, why wouldn't I bring something like that, to the [Echoes] group? I felt that I grew close enough to them to tell everyone...Because it's a really dangerous thing. That's why I said [in my poem] that the silence is just as painful, because like no one, honestly, no one's speaking about it. And that's what's killing us. And so I wasn't just talking on behalf of me; I was talking on behalf of everybody in it.

In a post-Institute interview, Amir further explained why he chose to expose his personal struggles at the Institute rather than before.

I just saw it as an opportunity, you know? ...[I]f I get it out here [at the Institute], it'll go directly where I want it to go. To the people who are doing it. ...[I]f I didn't use this [opportunity], it would be foolish of me, it would be stupid, and I couldn't call myself any type of activist or whatever you want to label me.

Amir understands the space of the Institute as a supportive collective committed to educational justice (including his personal political agenda) and to working across and through power differences. Amir taught us that an integrated space *cannot* insist on assimilation, and that segregation within may be essential to the sustenance of integrated settings. In this instance Amir recognized that as a member of this collective, he can capitalize on the power networks of the higher-powered members—the graduate students and faculty that have greater access to foundations, policy-makers, and publishers. The diversity of the power relationships within the group enabled Amir to further his political concerns beyond his individual means. Seeing this level of possibility, Amir pushed himself past what was comfortable and took a personal risk within the collective.

Things in special education, like anything that makes you feel uncomfortable, that makes you feel like you're less..has power over you. [It] makes you scared to talk about it, and it's powerful. What I was doing in the poem was reducing what special education was to me. The fact that I could tell somebody I was in it, showed that I was actually overcoming it—not just talking about it. Yeah, you know, [it's] like kind of like when someone's really scary, you don't even want to say their name. But once you keep saying their name...it shows that you're not really afraid. I felt uncomfortable reading [my poem] ... And I still kind of do, whenever I read it. Because it still has a little power over me.

In revealing such a personal struggle and making himself so vulnerable to the group, Amir's risk allows for a poignant moment of learning for other participants. The exchange thus repositions him from a student in need of special tutors, to an educator in his own right.

Moving from comfort/denial to contact/Recognizing privilege and one's responsibility to justice

In the beginning of the Institute, Joanna, who described herself as "*feeling totally comfortable, and totally allowed to be myself in every situation*" still felt, like many of the participants, a little unsure about her writing. "*On Tuesday morning when we had our first read around, I felt like my piece kind of stuck out as like a kind of la-la fluffy piece. ...Everyone else's poems were so powerful and kind of hard, like with sharp edges. That night I remember being like so frustrated that I couldn't get any hard edges out of myself to put on paper.*" However after one of the read-arounds when one of the Spoken Word mentors pointed out the value in Joanna's point of view, she began to see her contribution to the whole. "*That was like the moment where I realized that I can't doubt my own contribution to the project, because I was contributing a lot and so was everyone else. That all of us together made up the whole thing, not just any person, or any one writing.*"

On the last day of the Institute, a reading of the youth spoken word was held at the Nuyorican Poets Café. Joanna's family came to the performance and later took her out for a celebratory dinner. Part of the ensuing family conversation was a challenge, echoing Amir's concerns, that sometimes integration is implemented on the backs of particular populations. In recalling the discussion, Joanna resists this argument,

I can't think of it that way, because that's not.. a constructive way to look at it. It's not like, I'm not..we're not sacrificing a certain group of people by keeping ourselves integrated ... its not like minorities are outside looking in or inside looking out at this whole fight for social justice, because we're—what I learned this week, even though I'm not Black, or I'm not a minority, racism is still my problem, because its affecting me. And so its affecting everybody. So how could it be a sacrifice of just one group of people if we're all in the same situation? ...[T]hat's the only way we can do this ... it really is a together movement.

Refusing a language of sacrifice, she continues on, learning from Amir about the importance for people who have been marginalized to "*hold on..or live in, your amazing culture, and, like Amir did, be so proud of your history, or start a club to find more about your history.*" But she questions that effort when it takes place in separate spaces. "*Removing yourself from like..I don't know, I just don't think that's forward thinking, or moving as we need to get to where we want to go.*"

While Joanna talks about an understanding of one's history and culture as something valuable, there is a sense of this knowledge as something 'extra' to pursue, like an extracurricular "club." Amir on the other hand, talks about this knowledge as life sustaining, describing his learning about his history and culture as an essential part of his education. However, for Joanna to share a similar articulation, she would have to sit with what it might mean practically—on emotional, physical, and academic levels—to attend a school that at best

ignores, and at worst derogates, her history and culture. While she comes to recognize that racism and inequality negatively impact her even though she is not a person of color, and therefore the struggle to end segregating school policies is her's as well, she slips into a position that shies away from how these policies differentially impact students, based on their race/ethnicity, gender, class, sexuality, etc.

In the opening conversation Joanna talks about creating a sense of self through learning about others. She later adds another layer asking how to understand oneself not only in relation to others, but to injustice. Locating herself within the struggle for social justice was central for Joanna throughout the Institute. It is, in part, what informs her resistance to anything but a “together movement.” If individuals choose to separate themselves, even for vital reasons, where does that leave the integrated space that she is fighting for? Where does that leave White students from well-resourced communities, like her?

[I came to the Institute] being really accepting of everyone else, and then coming out [at the end], I felt like I was really accepted. ...[T]hrough the week I thought, wow, I'm really lucky that these people are as open as I'm being, because I technically was, like me coming from where I am from, and being [a] White person, could have been..strange.

A critical shift for Joanna came when she moved from understanding herself as working for justice *for* others to working *with* others for justice. In an interview she stated that working with “*the most diverse group in terms of ethnicity and ‘diversity of thought’*” made her “*more of a genuine person.*” For the first time she had the opportunity to work, fully supported, through complex thinking about integration, privilege, and social movements, and begin to articulate her role and responsibility to the larger struggle for educational equity.

[W]hen you're all fighting for the same thing having such different experiences and such different world views, and you're all coming together to work for the same goal. ...[I]t just adds ...so many different levels. [You] ask more questions and come up with more solutions when you're coming from different experiences.

The promise of racially inclusive educational spaces for intellectual & social development

With the Institute and the creation of *Echoes*, we witnessed the enormous potential of democratic spaces of radical inclusivity. Employing and building on Allport's original four conditions, and paying strict attention to power and process, a space was produced that set the stage for young people to come together across difference with adults, artists and academics; to actively interrogate and engage power relationships; and to collaboratively work through diverse ideas and experiences of educational (in)equities with the aim of creating a performance of art and social justice for the anniversary of Brown v. Board of Education. We saw that when the cooperatively strived for ‘common goal’ is a matter of justice and equality, a profound level of respect and commitment is engendered among the group which then translates into high levels of individual and collective engagement—critical listening, learning, imagining and creating. And that when differences and power are explored, rather than ignored, individual identities can flourish alongside collective identities.

As witnessed in Elinor, Amir and Joanna, youth pushed beyond that which felt comfortable, inhabiting parts of their selves different than those used in their everyday lives. In

engaging in this more individualized activity of identity play youth in turn set off actions and reactions within the collaborative, challenging others to push their own ‘selves,’ evoking new thinking on both the individual and collective level. Youth were able to try out new political positions, for example, and in doing so prompt others to clarify their own thoughts on the topic as they worked their ideas through, positioning and repositioning themselves. The interactive and improvisational dimensions of the space not only served to collaboratively create new subjectivities, (“I’ll never be the same after this experience”) but also to produce new knowledge that each subject, as a situated individual, would not likely come to on her or his own. This new knowledge was then woven into the larger political agenda of the collective, broadening the depth of the inquiry and the expanding the breath the *Echoes* performance. With the Institute, an infectious energy was witnessed, the kind that accompanies the experience of having one’s ideas, creativity, and capacity not only taken seriously but respectfully challenged, stimulated and encouraged. Beyond working within a movement with a deep sense of purpose, the youth were working as leaders and inventors. Over the course of *Echoes* rehearsals after the Institute was over, we heard youth yearn for the creation of similar spaces in their lives, where constructive power negotiations, trust and the struggle for social justice are given, places where their selves, passion and ideas can continue to grow.

While the *Echoes* Institute took place outside of schools, the promise of such spaces should inspire our continued efforts to dismantle segregating policies and maintain the precious few integrated spaces remaining in public schools. At a time when integrated schools are in jeopardy (Orfield, 2001; Frakenberg & Lee, 2002), the experiences of these youth underscore the necessity of these schools for realizing the democratic promises of public education for *all students*—for youth of privilege and poverty; of European, Asian/Pacific Island, African, Central/South American, and mixed decent. The loss of these schools, the withdrawal from desegregation decrees that Orfield and Lee detail, is not simply a matter of a retreat to segregationist politics and educational inequity, but a loss of academic and intellectual growth for us all.

The youth in the Institute demonstrate well the possibilities within radically inclusive spaces for intellectual and social development. The development of new ways of thinking and being in the world; of new subjectivities—subjectivities that having experienced the intoxicating intellectual, social and political potential of such spaces, desire more. Whether or not Elinor, Amir, and Joanna continue to collaborate, they will bring their new ideas, understandings of self, others, and the promises of diverse collectives into what ever they do next. They are part of a growing community of researchers, artists and activists, that has great expectations—expectations of a world that understands the profound importance of equal opportunities and resources for all people. Emily, a young Latina, who started her first year of college after the Institute, eloquently describes how she realized that she was now part of such a community during the last writing assignment of the Institute:

[E]veryone was really quiet and everyone was really thinking. I thought it was so cool to sit and hear the scratching of other pens and pencils besides my own. I thought that my pen was the only one moving to the rhythm of social justice. But now its defiantly apparent that other pens and pencils are listening to the same beat.

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ⁱ Youth researchers took up (and published) research studies of finance inequity, tracking, community based organizing for quality education and the unprecedented success of the small schools movement. See <http://www.thebrooklynrail.org/poetry/fall02/moneyfornothing.html>;
http://www.rethinkingschools.org/archive/18_01/ineq181.shtml.

ⁱⁱ Out of the 13 that applied, all but one was accepted. Three young women applied from the same school. In our attempt to create as diverse a group as possible we decide not to have more than two students from the same school.