

RADICAL TEACHER

A SOCIALIST, FEMINIST, AND ANTI-RACIST JOURNAL ON THE THEORY AND PRACTICE OF TEACHING

The Impact of Loss and Alienation in English Language Learners

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LATINO CLUB STREET ART & BROOKLYN HISPANIC HISTORY FIELD TRIP (2016). IMAGE COURTESY OF AUTHOR.

I said goodbye to another recently arrived immigrant student in the fall semester in a manner relatively common in my years as a high school educator in urban districts both in New York and Pennsylvania. It is common to bid students farewell during certain periods of the educational year, such as the end of a school year and upon graduation. Educators of immigrants and English Language Learners (ELLs) know goodbyes can happen at any moment. Such was the goodbye I exchanged with this young Latinx student. Her ongoing struggle to find both a physical and emotional home since Hurricane Maria displaced her from Puerto Rico is the experience of many recently arrived immigrants to the United States. This all-too-common experience encompasses the arduous challenge for ELL students to find their place while longing for the past and seeking solace in the promise of the future.

Educational institutions have the capacity to support students through their emotional struggles with racial melancholia, dissociation, and cultural assimilation. However, it is my contention that secondary educational institutions routinely neglect the persistent emotional impact of racial melancholia and dissociation while reinforcing oppressive Eurocentric curricula teeming with white privilege that undermines cultural diversity. Moreover, one underlying reason why much modern curricula is devoid of diversity and humanity is because of its subordination to standardized testing leading to rote, ineffectual academic experiences negating the development of critical thinking skills and critical consciousness for immigrant students and English Language Learners. Through a combination of varied academic resources, personal interviews with former students, and accumulated personal experiences as an educator, I intend to demonstrate the negative impacts of these emotional factors and educational policies on immigrant students who are English Language Learners. Additionally, I will suggest alternative educational approaches that validate them and simultaneously develop their intellectual and literacy skills. These concepts will be explored in two sections, the first focusing on racial melancholia and dissociation experienced by immigrant students and ELLs, the second on the hegemony of Eurocentric, white-privilege-laden academic curricula, and the negative consequences of test-driven curricula on students in general, but particularly for English Language Learners and recently arrived immigrants. My hope is this academic exploration will illuminate these overlooked emotional challenges and systemic educational failures substantially affecting one of the most vulnerable student populations in the United States.

Racial Melancholia & Dissociation

"I was in a dark place when I was first here in the United States" is what one of my former high school students, currently enrolled in college, said in a recent interview about her initial experiences in the United States (Interview "Mercedes," 12/22/2020). This former student from my time as an educator in Brooklyn, N.Y., referred to as Mercedes for the purposes of anonymity, had an extremely difficult transition to high school when she and her family immigrated to Brooklyn, N.Y. from the Dominican Republic.

Apart from the obvious challenges of language acquisition, cultural acclimation, and economic survival, Mercedes was dropped down two grades compared to her academic progress in the Dominican Republic. As an incoming student to high school in New York City, she was placed in the 9th grade when she would have been starting the 11th grade in her home country, a practice that happens with surprising frequency. The "darkness" Mercedes felt lingered for months and exemplifies the racial melancholia experienced by many recently arrived immigrant students. In *Racial Melancholia, Racial Dissociation in the Social and Psychic Lives of Asian Americans*, David Eng and Shinhee Han explored this phenomenon among Asian immigrant populations. According to Freud, melancholia is "a mourning without end." Eng and Han state that "Interminable grief is the result of the melancholic's inability to resolve the various conflicts and ambivalences that the loss of the loved object or ideal effects. In other words, the melancholic cannot 'get over' this loss." This complex and lingering sensation of loss and sadness is precisely what my former students express in their interviews. Mercedes recalls how these feelings resurfaced multiple times throughout her high school years. As such, I wholeheartedly agree with Eng and Han that "melancholia presents a compelling framework to conceptualize registers of loss and depression attendant to both psychic and material processes of assimilation" (669-671).

Mercedes recalls that, "These feelings returned when I was alone.... This was my process of adapting to this new country." This experience is applicable to recently arrived English Language Learners from varied racial and ethnic backgrounds. The sensations of loss, grief, sadness, and trauma are comparable among varied immigrant groups, and we as educators must be cognizant of their profound impact. The process of assimilation - a compromise against one's own identity - is complex and cannot be restricted to a particular period to overcome this grief. Compounding this strife is the emotional volatility and fragility experienced by teenagers due to the neurological developments occurring at this time in their lives. Hence the recurring feelings experienced by Mercedes throughout high school.

Another former student, Helena for our purposes, explained that when enrolled in high school in North Carolina, "I was always eager to go home from school and would get upset when I knew I had to go back." She continued by stating that there was "No diversity at the school and I didn't really feel that I fit in" (Interview with "Helena," 12/15/2020). There is a longing for the "lost object." Therefore, recollections of one's home, family, culture, language, and personal experiences are newly imbued with one's sense of one's former self as he/she adapts to new circumstances post-immigration. This debilitating emotional "damage" can manifest itself in numerous ways including depression with a "tendency to suicide" (Eng and Han, 670-672). Over the past 15 years, I've had many conversations with recently arrived immigrant students dealing with their thoughts of suicide. The scars on their wrists, arms, and other parts of their bodies purposely kept hidden are the lingering reminders of moments of great despair during their emotional struggles post-immigration. Helena was one of those students. She

cut herself. We discussed those scars and their emotional intensity, their significance. Therefore, my classroom must be a community for my students, a safe space to inhabit like a home. If my students feel safe and trusted in our shared space, then we can explore, mutually learn, and grow.

The intensity of these emotions can be overwhelming as these young immigrant students negotiate the assimilation process. For them, the notions of acceptance and validation are paramount. Recently arrived English Language Learners strive for acceptance yet are frequently ostracized within American mainstream culture. Therein lies the great deceit and cognitive dissonance about the assimilation process. Recently arrived students seek acceptance and stability but are culturally rebuffed because they are not represented in the idealized norms most valued in our country where "whiteness, heterosexuality, middle-class family values [are] often foreclosed to them" (Eng and Han, 670). For them, the sense of belonging supposedly gained through the assimilation process is never truly achievable. Their melancholia can linger perpetually unresolved as assimilation will not provide reconciliation between their dichotomous cultural experiences.

This incessant melancholia and subsequent dissociation, however, can be confronted and partially remedied through acceptance into a community. As Mercedes passionately expressed, "*Having a community is very powerful when you are new to a country.*" The educational experiences she had as a newly arrived immigrant and English Language Learner within a high school community that validated her experiences and cultural autonomy reinforced her self-esteem. Mercedes felt extremely motivated and inspired by the educational and cultural experiences of her high school in Brooklyn claiming, "This is what a community is. To have until you are 60 years old" ("Mercedes," 12/22/ 2020). Here Mercedes refers to the foundational inspiration, celebration of diversity, and academic structures of her former high school that was founded for recently arrived immigrant youth where she always had a voice and felt secure and confident. The significance of establishing these feelings of confidence and empowerment cannot be overstated for immigrant youth. "Having a community is very powerful" precisely because "the experience of immigration itself is based on a structure of mourning." When experiencing great loss and immense mourning, one needs to find an outlet for these emotions. One method to combat this mourning and melancholia is to work towards a specific objective such as "the American dream, for example" (Eng and Han, 679-680).

As an educator working exclusively with English Language Learners and recently arrived immigrant students, I've been repeatedly told by students and their families that their hope is to have a better life. I have heard that phrase, "better life," expressed hundreds of times in multiple languages. To have a better life is undeniably a fundamental aspect of the American dream. Whether immigrant or native born, we all want access to this abstract notion of the American dream that includes financial security, success, acceptance, and prestige. But what if your identity, culture, skin color, or sexuality preclude you from accessing the

American dream? What if your cultural ancestry or ethnic background was previously excluded by American society and culture? Numerous racial and ethnic groups have been demonized throughout American history with some being legally prevented from entering our country. Under former President Trump immigrants who were Muslims were banned from traveling to the US. He also made vitriolic remarks about Mexicans and people from the Global South. Do these individuals have access to the American dream?

I have also taught several students who were DREAMers and DACA recipients prior to that federally funded program's termination during the Trump Administration. These DREAMers were extremely aware of their insecure status and of the constant looming threat of deportation because their parents brought them to the US when they were children without proper documentation. They understand all too well their excluded social status within American society and how the American dream is kept beyond their reach because of their birthplace. They are victims of the duplicitousness of the United States' supposed ideals of liberty, individual sovereignty, and inclusion, and its immigration policy imbued with white privilege. As Mercedes says, "I was not worthy.... It is an ugly feeling that I cannot really explain very well." She explained how she began to think, "I can't do this anymore. Why try?" (Interview, 12/22/2020). These are the potentially life-altering consequences recently arrived English Language Learners confront due to racial melancholia and dissociation.

As educators it is our professional obligation to acknowledge these challenges and make our immigrant students aware that their voices and experiences matter in the context of their educational community as well as in the US. Her sense of belonging and reaffirmation of her self-esteem and identity, consistently reinforced by Mercedes' community of teachers and classmates, nurtured her achievement. Mercedes was a leader of the National Honor Society chapter of her high school, actively participated in numerous clubs in multiple capacities, and graduated as valedictorian of her class. This from a student who spoke minimal English when she entered high school as a 9th grader. Mercedes and Helena's educational community was an essential support for their success.

Overcoming Alienating Curricula & Standardized Testing

Educators must redress the persistent failures of our curricula across disciplines. It is our obligation to reclaim our autonomy in determining curricular trajectories rather than remain beholden to standardized testing and the homogeneous perspectives they perpetuate to the detriment of our increasingly diverse student population. When discussing her educational experiences while living in North Carolina, Helena stated, "I don't really remember anything from those classes. The classes never sparked anything in me." Additionally, she recalled feeling lost and that the limited interaction with students by teachers made it seem as if there were "no warmth in the community." This was

education through textbooks and handouts, devoid of the humanity necessary to forge a personal connection with students through mutual respect and collaboration. Traditional Eurocentric curriculum imbued with white privilege stifles cultural diversity and undermines the essential humanity of our immigrant and English Language Learner populations (Interview with former student "Helena," 12/15/2020). It is up to us educators to help these students confront these discriminatory educational practices while validating their cultural experiences and fostering self-esteem.

As an educator teaching in Brooklyn, N.Y., at a high school dedicated to educating recently arrived immigrant students, validating their immigrant experience and utilizing inclusive academic materials were fundamental practices implemented in all disciplines. These were not "radical" concepts within that educational community, but fundamental principles of action and equity striving to support students in developing their autonomy and the critical thinking skills necessary to wrestle with the complexities of their identities within American society. As Paulo Freire argues in his book, *Education for Critical Consciousness*, "The education our situation demanded would enable men to discuss courageously the problems of their context - and to intervene in that context; it would ... offer them the confidence and the strength to confront those dangers instead of surrendering their sense of self through submission to the decisions of others" (30).

References to these diverse cultures were often dismissive, implying the inevitable destiny of domination by European colonizers and their cultural legacy, as if these indigenous populations and diverse cultures simply surrendered to European dominance.

My professional educational training in Social Studies, English language arts, and ESL forced me to confront the lack of cultural diversity and resources for these content areas available in the state curriculums of New York and Pennsylvania. As a global history teacher in Brooklyn, N.Y., the textbook we could have adopted had extremely limited references to indigenous cultures, Latinx populations, and people of color - the exact opposite of the diverse demographics of my classroom. References to these diverse cultures were often dismissive, implying the inevitable destiny of domination by European colonizers and their cultural legacy, as if these indigenous populations and diverse cultures simply surrendered to European dominance. I could not teach this one-sided historical narrative to my global history students. My goal was to teach my recently arrived immigrant students how "to reevaluate constantly, to analyze 'findings,' to adopt scientific methods and processes, and to perceive themselves in dialectical relationship with their social reality " because this type of education would allow them "to assume an increasingly

critical attitude toward the world and so to transform it" (Freire, 30).

Consequently, I chose to validate the cultural autonomy of my immigrant students while simultaneously supporting the development of their independent critical thinking skills. It is essential that I engage in a collaborative relationship with my students to develop the necessary trust and "buy-in" required for meaningful academic engagement. In *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, Paulo Freire critically examines the reductive narrative character of the teacher-student relationship in which the content "become lifeless and petrified." This is the education of textbooks and handouts previously described by my former students. Freire postulates that "the teacher talks about reality as if it were motionless, static, compartmentalized, and predictable. Or else expounds on a topic completely alien to the existential experiences of the students ... Words are emptied of their concreteness and become a hollow, alienated, and alienating verbosity" (57).

The opposite should be true when working with recently arrived English Language Learners. The content these students engage in should not be "completely alien" to their experiences. Rather, as another former student of mine expressed during her interview, "Classes were about us." This Latinx student, Jadie herein, recalled how "We were representatives of our own culture" and how classes "encouraged us to think about our own story and then reflect back on the world" (Interview with "Jadie," former student, 12/18/2020). This self-examination validates identity and supports self-esteem, allowing for collaborative work on critical thinking skills. Otherwise, educators engage in the "banking" concept of education" where all student autonomy is extinguished (Freire, 58). As educators of recently arrived English Language Learners, we must "embody respect" as Eric Jensen maintains in his influential text *Teaching With Poverty in Mind*. Jensen asserts that educators should "share the decision making in class." Furthermore, he professes the importance of "giv[ing] respect to students first" while acknowledging that for many educators, "It may require a considerable shift in your thinking" (21).

To "embody respect" and "respect students first" I've asked myself these fundamental questions when creating new content materials: Does this material provide opportunities for all of my students to engage and have a voice? How can students lead and collaborate to successfully engage with the material? By creating materials specifically designed for students and providing them leadership opportunities throughout their inquiries, my class is built on a foundation of respect. This is a student-centered curriculum from its inception. Additionally, when conducting class, I maintain a mild tone and an openness to inquiries related to our content materials. Students are encouraged to reinterpret and critically examine what we are reading to develop their own expertise and share with classmates. I acknowledge my own mistakes and don't present myself as an oracle of knowledge. I consistently acknowledge we are learning together.

For instance, as a global history educator I was tasked with providing instruction about ancient civilizations. I purposefully chose ancient civilizations which existed in several of the countries where my recently arrived immigrant students came from. I intentionally chose to discuss the Triple Alliance (Aztec), Inca Empire (Tawantinsuyu), Taino civilization (Caribbean), the Mali Empire, and Mansa Musa as opposed to focusing on Ancient Greece or the Roman Empire because I did not have any immigrant students originally from Europe. Additionally, I focused much of this instruction on the indigenous populations from these regions and past civilizations because this validated the cultural inheritance of my students. As a teacher responsible for preparing students to pass a New York State Regents Examination, a State mandated graduation requirement, the choices made regarding my instructional focus were a calculated risk. After all, I knew that more attention would be given to the Roman Empire and Ancient Greece on the Global History Regent Examination, not the civilizations I chose for my class. This is an example of how white privilege and Eurocentric perspectives directly influence instruction and assessments. However, by focusing on skill development, such as critical thinking, literacy, and argumentative writing, several students were able to pass these exams on their first attempt. Students often expressed amazement about how little they knew of their own countries' indigenous history because this is rarely taught. This motivated most students to perform very well on group projects and assessments such as argumentative essays. Also, creating materials that were thematically based, such as on economic issues like poverty, allowed my extremely heterogeneous classes to discover commonality and begin eradicating some of their previously held ethnic and racial stereotypes.

As a result, my former student Helena stated how classes were "very eye opening" and asked, "I wonder if I would be thinking the same things if I didn't have that class?" (Interview, 12/15/2020). I entrusted my students with as much autonomy as possible to give direction to my course. As Freire puts it regarding educators, "From the outset, his efforts must coincide with those of the students to engage in critical thinking and the quest for mutual humanization.... To achieve this, he must be a partner of the students in his relations with them" (*Pedagogy* 62) partnership has the potential to generate profound academic experiences for my students and legitimize their experiences. Recently arrived ELLs have as much capacity for critical thinking and thoughtful engagement as native

born students if we provide an academic environment that is holistic and suited to their needs. Another former Latinx student, referred to as Elsa, explained that "The struggle with language made me frustrated and sad, especially when I wanted to respond and share information about something that I knew about, but felt that I didn't have all the words to say it." This is one of the great obstacles recently arrived English Language Learners must constantly overcome: limited language proficiency doesn't equate to limited intellectual capacity. Educators are responsible for providing the necessary instructional strategies to allow immigrant students to express their thoughts regardless of language proficiency, and the same should be true for teachers of all disciplines. English Language Learners should have access to some form of translation support to effectively utilize translanguageing to communicate their ideas in class. Instructional materials should offer students at various



LATINO CLUB MEETING - PHOTO CREDIT: LUIS PERUSINA. IMAGE COURTESY OF AUTHOR.

language proficiencies an appropriately complex version of the information necessary to engage in class. If discussing a theme such as discrimination, why can't students use different materials to reflect on the same topic? I've become relatively adept at differentiating materials in my academic classes, and my students have responded positively to these efforts to support their academic abilities while validating their identities. Their appreciation was often expressed by engaging deeply with academic materials that reflected their own cultural identities and personal experiences. An example is our explorations of European colonialism and the resistance of indigenous and enslaved populations throughout the Caribbean and Central America, where many of my students were from. We researched Mayan and Aztec scientific and cultural contributions and emphasized their significance and legacy. We explored historical records of narratives from some of the first enslaved people brought to what is now New York City. I also led my students on a Lower Manhattan walking tour past Trinity Church and Wall Street

to the site of the first slave market established in New Amsterdam to demonstrate the living history of the vast city my students called home.

Elsa eloquently discussed this concept when recalling her high school experiences in a recent interview: "What I loved the most about this class was exploring what we are going through including gender roles, our reality. It was important to learn these terms and the specific language for them." These academic experiences had a profound impact on her self-esteem and personal identity. She claimed that "everyone has the capacity to do the same things as others. I learned that a Latinx woman like myself can achieve much more than the societal expectations based on stereotypes." Elsa described this experience as "the light in the darkness." (Interview, 12/28/2020).

Educators need to create meaningful and empowering educational experiences by focusing their academic inquiries on the issues that directly impact their students. "In problem-posing education, men develop their power to perceive critically *the way they exist* in the world *with which* and *in which* they find themselves ... and thus establish an

reflection, and critical consciousness for recently arrived English Language Learners. Tragically, in these academic courses students routinely read the literary works of "dead white men." How is literature of this kind relatable to students who, upon arrival, are quickly codified within our society's racial hierarchy? Limiting the number of literary works written by people of color is a form of cultural hegemony through exclusion. As an English Language Arts and ESL educator, I was troubled to discover that high school students in this predominantly Hispanic school district were exposed to only one novel written by a Latinx author. Clearly the four-year English curriculum does not reflect the demographics of this school district. Excluding the literary works of people of color, whether intentional or not, reinforces the students' sense of cultural inferiority and devalues the intersectionality and complex identities of our immigrant students and ELLs.

In response to this dilemma, my Communication Arts course entitled "Literature About Our Lives" features intersectionality and diversity while simultaneously examining the social justice issues relevant to our immigrant students and English Language Learners. The novels I've featured in my "Literature About Our Lives" course include the following texts: *Gabi, A Girl In Pieces* by Isabel Quintero, *The Book of Unknown Americans* by Cristina Henríquez, *The Hate U Give* by Angie Thomas, and *The Absolutely True Diary of a Part-Time Indian* by Sherman Alexie. Additional novels I intend to teach are *The Thing Around Your Neck* by Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie, *How Dare the Sun Rise* by Sandra Uwiringiyimana, *Their Eyes Were Watching God* by Zora Neale Hurston, *Breath, Eyes, Memory* by Edwidge Danticat, *The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao* by Junot Díaz, *When I Was Puerto Rican* by Esmeralda Santiago, *The Poet X* by Elizabeth Acevedo, and *Aristotle and Dante Discover the Secrets of the Universe* by Benjamin Alire Sáenz. These varied texts share beautiful and poignant expressions of intersectionality and the struggle to reconcile complex identities with commentaries on social injustices from the perspectives of the individuals who suffer them.

Unfortunately, these alternative texts can be dismissed and vilified for their stance on social justice issues. While *Gone with the Wind* by Margaret Mitchell is considered a literary and cinematic classic, Angie Thomas' contemporary novel, *The Hate U Give*, is considered controversial because it includes some explicit language in the character dialogue and critically portrays police brutality in the United States. This stark contradiction demonstrates the challenges of including alternative texts within a literature curriculum



LATINO CLUB OPENING FIESTA (2017). PHOTO CREDIT: LINDA PONCIANO. IMAGE COURTESY OF AUTHOR.

authentic form of thought and action" (Freire, *Pedagogy*, 70-71). When considering which high school experiences shaped her perspective when she became a college student, Jadie said the "encouragement to write about her own story" and "consistent reflections back to her own experiences" (interview with "Jadie," former student, 6/18/2020). This student-centered educational approach empowers immigrant students to embrace and critically examine their complex identities within the context of their lived experiences.

The high school discipline of English Language Arts provides many opportunities for validation, experiential

beholden to traditional narratives, primarily from white, male authors. I've taught my curriculum focused on *The Hate U Give* twice, and on both occasions the response from students was overwhelmingly positive. This was reflected in their overall class performance through daily engagement and final grades. Class discussions often demonstrated the nuance and complexity of the central issues explored in *The Hate U Give*. Routinely our discussions returned to issues of policing and the violence that minority communities face. Heated debates occurred between students with differing views on who is to blame for Khalil's death in the novel. Some vehemently believe the police officer in this novel is guilty of homicide while others claim Khalil brought on his own demise. Whatever their individual opinions may be, these English Language Learners are readily exploring a relevant topic that may impact their own lives and is reflected constantly in our media culture.

Equally oppressive to the exclusion of alternative texts within English curriculum is standardized testing. As Dianne Ravitch contends in her compelling book, *The Death and Life of the Great American School System*, "No Child Left Behind (NCLB) changed the nature of public schooling ... by making standardized test scores the primary measure of school quality." More pointedly, due to the implementation of the No Child Left Behind program enacted in January 2002, standardized testing "... became the purpose of education" (17). In explaining how the No Child Left Behind program directly changed instruction, she states that "In light of punitive sanctions, states were incentivized to lower their standards so that most students would meet 'proficiency,' however, it was defined." This was because of NCLB's mandate that "test scores go up every year until 100 percent of students were 'proficient.' It was an impossible goal, but it was the law" (Ravitch, 23). I've witnessed the implications of these federal policies on recently arrived English Language Learners throughout my educational career. While teaching Global History in Brooklyn, N.Y., I had two annual cycles of after-school Regents prep for my 10th grade students who needed to pass their Global History Regents Examination to graduate. In the fall my Regents prep "class" was two days a week after school from 3:00-4:30 PM beginning six weeks prior to the dreaded Regents week. In the Spring semester, it was the same. All my students were recently arrived ELLs, but no exceptions were made for testing at that time. They were all required to pass the same five Regents Examinations as their American born peers with limited testing accommodations including only word-to-word translation dictionaries, translated versions of the Regents Exams depending on which languages were available, and additional time. As such, we faced several instances where students passed all their required classes but still could not graduate because they lacked one or more of the required Regents Examinations.

Unfortunately, the experience for my immigrant students in Pennsylvania is even worse. The immigrant ELLs I teach are subjected to at least six different standardized testing sessions per year including the Pennsylvania Keystone Exams, WIDA (World-Class Instructional Design and Assessment) Exams, and school district mandated

writing assessments. There are multiple Keystone, WIDA, and school district writing assessments throughout the school year, resulting in immigrant students sacrificing vital instructional time in six out of the ten months of the school year to comply with the standardized testing schedule. As Ravitch declares, "The gains in test scores at the state level were typically the result of teaching students test-taking skills and strategies, rather than broadening and deepening their knowledge of the world and their ability to understand what they had learned" (Ravitch, 116). Standardized testing reinforces the implementation of academic curriculum that is increasingly divorced from student experience. This is the antithesis of "problem-posing education" (Freire, 70-71). The prevalence of standardized testing is doubly dehumanizing because it hinders the autonomy of both educator and student. Educators responsible for a "tested course" are beholden to a curriculum purposely aligned to their academic discipline's standardized test leaving limited time for additional academic materials to be introduced during the school year. As such, their students have limited exposure to academic materials supporting the development of additional intellectual skills and offering varied perspectives. Consequently, students lose opportunities to engage in empowering and validating educational experiences that speak to their daily struggles.

Education should be uplifting for our students. As Jadie reminisced, English classes were like "looking at your soul." She explained this by stating that "The books in English class were somehow related to our history and culture. They always had something to do with us so they were always interesting and we were motivated to read them" (Interview "Jadie," 12/18/2020). This is why I chose the novels above in my literature courses. I want to provide my current students in Pennsylvania the same academic experiences my colleagues and I previously offered Jadie and her classmates in Brooklyn. The implications are far greater than just intellectual preparedness and the development of skills necessary to navigate the complexities of our world.

My intent here is to illuminate the emotional struggles experienced by recently arrived immigrant students and English Language Learners as well as their potential impact on academic performance. This can be done by implementing curricula that are student-centered and relevant to their cultural identities and experiences. Throughout my career I have worked with wonderful young immigrant students and English Language Learners. These young people arguably taught me more than I taught them. I am grateful for the educational collaboration and positive relationships we shared. Had my teaching of these recently arrived immigrant students and English Language Learners been driven by traditional curricula and overlooked their emotional needs, I doubt we would have accomplished as much together as we did. What is at stake for these students and educators is meaningful collaboration for mutual learning that validates diverse identities while addressing social injustices relevant to the lives of these remarkable young people.

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