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Bringing Light Over: Students' Photographs of Lived Experiences in Their Neighborhoods

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Abstract

Narrative is the primary way human beings make meaning (Bruner, 1986). Students' active participation and agency in their own development and learning have been highlighted as critical components for their success in school (Tigani, 2017; Zhao, 2019; Wiggan & Watson, 2019; Usher & Pajares 2008; Hullerman & Baron, 2016). Yet learning experiences and school activities that are explicitly designed to focus on student narrative self-formation are rare. Students' narratives are shaped by, and in turn, shape their experiences (Holland, 1998). Based on Gubrium & Holstein's (2009) notion of 'reflexive interplay', photo-elicitation and narrative inquiry were used to examine how elementary school students develop their sense of self in their day-to-day neighborhood experiences. Making a photograph is an act (Sontag, 1977). The implications are that the photographing processes students create and share support students' self-formation as a critical democratic agenda for social justice and empowerment (Dewey, 1910; Rancière, 1991).

Keywords: students of color, Black, Latinx, self-formation, elementary school, social justice, poor urban neighborhoods, relational aesthetics, photography, narrative methodology, figured worlds, neoliberal education

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Poverty in the United States is highly concentrated in low-income neighborhoods Black and Latinx children live in, and in the schools where they learn. Students in low-income neighborhoods bear the weight of historic and contemporary discrimination because of skin color; they also bear the weight of the economic stigma of place (Assari et al., 2021; Bowles & Gintis, 1976; Carter & Welner, 2016; Gagnon & Mattingly, 2018; Sonu, 2020). One of the costs of poverty is long-term emotional health issues that can begin as early as preschool (Elias et al., 2022; Yusuf et al., 2022) or pre-adolescence and adolescence (Doan et al., 2022; Lambert et al, 2021; Smith et al., 2022; Trent et al., 2019).

Thirty-four percent of Black and 28% of Latinx students attend high poverty schools in low-income communities (National Center for Education Statistics, 2019). Children living in under-resourced neighborhoods are repeatedly exposed to threatening, frightening, toxic, and stressful experiences (Morsy & Rothstein, 2019). Contentious and disruptive political, economic, social, and environmental policies and practices challenge students' personal, ethnic, and cultural development (Acevedo-Garcia et al., 2020; Opara et al., 2020).

The well-being of poor Black and Latinx children is worse compared to children living in areas with better and more stable economic, housing, and social resources (Barrett et al., 2019; Berliner, 2009; Schmitt et al., 2015). Income, good health, quality housing, access to a wide array of education opportunities, positive relationships, and freedom are some of the factors that contribute to well-being.

Students of color who have strong self-concepts may have more "positive interactions and relationships with peers" (Hoffman et al., 2019, p. 2645). And while local cultural socialization can promote positive self-concept development (Wang et al., 2020), neighborhood

experiences can and do vary depending upon race and ethnicity (Witherspoon et al., 2022). Young students learn to negotiate multiple identities simultaneously.

Families in culturally diverse neighborhoods use cultural socialization to help their 5–6-year-olds learn to navigate racial and ethnic diversity (Wang et al., 2020). Black and Latinx children living and learning in relatively homogeneous neighborhoods and schools may be less prepared for the challenging work of navigating master narratives of white racial domination, social injustice, and economic inequities (Hoffman et al., 2017).

Narrating neighborhood experiences is identity work. Work that could increase positive views of self, optimize well-being, enhance relationships with others, and boost school success. Race and place identity development are emerging areas of research. Little is known about how young Black and Latinx children determine, define, and view their neighborhoods and schools and their positive and negative experiences in them.

Schools should be places that mitigate unfair structured challenges by filtering-out socially and economically imposed burdens, but many are not (Emdin, 2020; Heath et al., 2022; Payne, 2008). Instead, schooling in low-income urban areas can exacerbate inequity and perpetuate generational cycles of poverty for entire families and the neighborhoods where they live. Decades of standardized curriculum content, standardized teaching, and high stakes testing have shifted teachers', students', and parents' expectations of schooling and have narrowed the purposes of education (Nichols & Berliner, 2007; Connell, 2013). Neoliberal education policies myopically identify the skills Black and Latinx students in low-income communities 'need', and mandate standardized curricula, testing, teaching, and learning practices (Ali, 2019). Not only have these efforts failed to meet their own mandates (Benson & Dumas, 2021; Spiess & Cooper, 2020) but they have also obfuscated and undermined efforts to help students engage in socially

produced discourse, knowledge, and truth (Wiggan & Watson, 2019; Foucault, 1980). Neoliberal policies and practices depress efforts to build democratically just ways of living and stifle students' abilities to live full lives as persons who seek to develop work skills alongside social life skills, and most critically, the skills to form, transform, and create themselves as persons who are selves (Brown, 2015; Giroux, 2004; Apple, 2006; Freire, 1998; Au, 2015).

Self-identity is part of being in the world and part of learning (Holland, 1998). Identity is formed through interactions with others in different settings (Vygotsky, 1978). Children construct their identities in the places where they spend most of their time. For poor Black and Latinx children, those places are the low-income neighborhoods where they live and the schools where they learn. Neighborhoods implicitly and explicitly socialize young students (Compton-Lilly, 2020; Rogers et al., 2021).

Challenges to student self-formation are magnified in low-income neighborhoods. Some scholars question whether teachers can hear the voices of students of color (Love, 2019; Delpit, 1995; Dyson & Genishi, 1994). How do Black and Latinx students define, view, circumscribe, and reinscribe their neighborhoods? How do they see themselves? How do they engage in self-creation and self-transformation? How do they engage in the co-creation of other selves?

How young students define and see their neighborhoods and their interactions in their neighborhoods can shed light on what matters to them. Using photo-elicitation (Wang & Burris, 1997) and photo-narrative (Riessman, 2008), the study reported in this paper is meant to add to understandings and discussions on the intersectionality of place, poverty, race, and schooling in the lived experiences of young Black and Latinx students.

Methods

Photo-Narrative

Narratives are more than a "reflection of experience" (Polkinghorne, 2005, p. 139). They represent "a self in conversation with itself" (Josselson, 1995, p. 33). Narrative inquiry was used to gain insight into students' lived experiences of relationships, spaces; time in their neighborhoods (Clandinin & Connelly, 2004; Bach 2007, 2008; Mitchell, 2011).

Interviewing is a common tool for eliciting people's stories of their lived experiences and their reflections on the stories they tell (Gubrium & Holstein, 2012). As data, students' photographs and interviews were inseparable. The meanings in and of students' photographs did not come from the photographs (Stanczak, 2007). Instead, students interpreted and gave meaning to their photographs (Gauntlett & Holzwarth, 2006; Clandinin & Rosiek, 2007) and their photographing experiences by sharing both with the researcher. The researcher looked and listened. Data production was interactive (Taylor, 2008) and co-constructed (Sfard & Prusak, 2005).

Participants

The study was reviewed and approved by the university institutional review board. Public school administrators and students' parents gave their consent. Students read about and discussed the study with their parents and with the researcher on two occasions before giving their assent. I used procedures that maximized and facilitated students' open examination of their neighborhood experiences, while minimizing potential harm and risk. The study took place in an urban community.

Thirty-four fourth grade students were asked to photograph their neighborhoods. Nineteen girls and 15 boys between the ages of 9 and 11 participated; most of the students were

nine years old. Sixteen of the students were 'classified' as special education students, several students were identified as students with learning disabilities, (e.g., ADHD, behavioral, emotional, ESL and ELL). Some of the students were among the highest-scoring standardized-test-takers in their school. Five students were of African American descent, four of the students self-identified as Afro-Caribbean, 23 students identified as Hispanic and/or Latino/a/x, and two students were of Portuguese descent.

Data Collection

Data collection occurred in two parts: photo-making and interviewing. Selected participant procedures common to photovoice methodology were used to prepare students for their neighborhood photographing experiences: technical training, ethical photographing, and safety. Students were given the same task, received the same instructions and training, the same opportunities to practice using their cameras, to discuss and practice ethical photographing, and the same safe-behavior guidelines, practices, and requirements.

Making photographs was the first part of data collection. During that phase of the study, students could rightly be viewed as co-researchers (Ohmer & Owens, 2013). Students were asked to photograph people, events and/or activities, and places of their choice in their neighborhoods. Students were not asked to identify a specific need, condition, or concern in their neighborhoods, nor were they asked to present proposed changes or remedies to community leaders or policymakers.

Selected participant procedures common to photovoice methodology were used to prepare students for their neighborhood photographing experiences: technical training, ethical photographing, and safety. All students were given the same task, and received the same instructions and training, safe behavior guidelines, and requirements. They were also provided

with the same opportunities to practice using their cameras and, to discuss and practice ethical photographing.

Two interviews were scheduled. The first interview occurred within a week of the student participants making their photographs, whereas the second occurred a week later.

A subset of 20 randomly selected participants from the 34 who made photographs of their neighborhood was found to be the optimal fit for the study's timeline. Due to school test prep and on-going testing, four students participated in the first interview but not the second interview. The families of two students moved out of the neighborhood. Parents of six students declined to participate in phase two. Eight fourth grade student participants completed both interviews. The interviews of three of the eight were randomly selected and are reported on in this paper. All student names that appear in this paper are pseudonyms.

Open-ended interviewing was used during the second part of data-gathering. Researching students' 'becoming' through their narrativizing of their everyday experiences in their neighborhoods was a co-production of participants and researcher (Pink, 2012). During the interview process students determined which photographs would be discussed and what they wanted to say about each picture. However, in accordance with Gallagher and Gallagher's recommendation (2008), I suggest theoretical perspectives for making the final interpretation of the photographs.

Interviewing was unstructured. No themes were pre-determined. Based on Gubrium and Holstein's (2009) notion of reflexive interplay, students' narratives were shaped by, and shaped their experiences in their neighborhoods. Data collection involved listening to and recording the stories students told about their experiences of making photographs in their neighborhoods, the stories they told about their photographs, and the artistic curriculum content students created

through their photographing work. Semi-structured questions were used to follow-up, clarify, expand, and add details to participants' stories and thus facilitate participants' storytelling.

Although student participants talked about all of the photographs they made, each transcribed in-depth interview was based on three to 12 photographs selected by each student and included the student's own authentic speech. Most interviews were approximately 60 minutes. The following exemplifies how semi-structured questioning and ongoing conversations were performed and used in this study.

Samantha, one of eight students to participate in both interviews, said:

> That house…. It…it. It's on my block. Well, it…it's not on the same side my house is. It's across the street. Kinda down the street. If you stand in front of my house…it not right there…. It's not in front of my house.

Samantha spoke rapidly. Within about four and a half minutes she talked about 12 of her photographs. She focused on the location of each house in relation to her own house. She anchored the photographs she made in terms of her own geographical position. Except for features like numbers on doors or door frames, house color, type of siding, fencing, parked cars, trees, street signs, and power lines; all 12 of her photographs of row houses looked similar. None of Samantha's photographs contained people or animals. Once she finished talking about the location of each house in relation to her own, I pointed to Samantha's first photograph and asked: "Is there something you want to say about this house that can't be seen in your photograph? If there is, can you tell me about it?" Samantha said: "Un huh. Yeah!…I mean, yes.". In a lowered voice, she giggled and said, "They get barbeque in there." Samantha narrated a much longer story about her photograph and her relationship with the house in the photograph, the activities and some of the people connected to the house, and ways she's seen and heard

other people relate to the house. Samantha's slight discomfort, her giggle, her lowered confidential tone of voice led to another researcher question. I asked her, "Can you say more about the barbeque?" Samantha explained that her mother's boyfriend works in the house in her photograph. Sometimes he comes home for lunch. Samantha said:

> And he tell jokes about how they barbeque it,… them. It dead when they do it! I don't know that word. He (mother's boyfriend) say, 'barbeque'. But that's not the word. (I asked Samantha whether the word was cremate.) She said, Yes! That's it. That what they do in that house. It's a secret though.…

Samantha talked for approximately 10 minutes about the house, her mother's boyfriend, and his job. She asked questions about cremation. Samantha told in-depth stories about her experiences with the people and activities related to dwellings and places in all of her 'houses' photographs. Without the use of semi-structured questioning, it is possible that the researcher would have never heard Samantha's stories.

After the primary data collection period the researcher's ongoing relationship with the students offered the possibility to engage in follow-up conversations about their photographs and photo-stories, enabling deeper understanding of students' photographing experiences (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). When student participants spontaneously shared more information about their photographs and photographing experiences, I recorded that information in my research journal, added it to existing data, cross-referenced it with earlier stories, and coded it. Then re-analyzed and coded data again. For the most part, students re-told the stories they shared during their initial interviews. Their retellings were smoother, clearer, with fewer "ums" and pauses. Their retellings sometimes changed the order of storied events and more firmly asserted their photographic intentions, feelings, and thoughts. Their retellings added details like the names of

motorcycles, or extended quotes from the Bible, or the wish to make more and different photographs related to photographs they already made. While these impromptu post-interview conversations did not add any substantially new information, new themes, or codes, they did drive home the point to me that students' photographs and stories were important. And furthermore, our relationship, particularly me listening to students' stories, was valuable and meaningful to them (Clandinin, 2013). Participants reinforced the stories they already shared; further anchoring their being in the narratives they constructed, affirming and reaffirming self, experience, and place.

A few students had more things they wanted to say. Things that were inspired by and went beyond their pictures and their photo-making experiences and into new territories. These were not things they had forgotten to say during initial and follow up interviews. Rather, they seemed to be thoughts that grew out of their own further, extended reflections on their experiences, ideas, feelings, and the world around them. For instance, throughout the school year Samantha periodically sought me out to talk about cremation, scary movies, life, and death. These led us into conversations about zoning, licensing, church, the differences between funeral homes and crematoria, Halloween, the Day of the Dead, people she knew who died, pets who had died, automobile accidents in her neighborhood, The Lion King, Casper the Friendly Ghost, and All Dogs Go to Heaven.

In addition to audiotaped interviews, observations, notes, questions, and concerns were documented in a research journal. This procedure was especially important for making records of students' gestural expressions as they talked about their photographs and their photographing experiences. The research data in this study were students' photographs, audiotaped recordings of students' narratives of their photographs, students' stories of their relational aesthetic

photographing experiences, students' stories of their artistic processes as part of their lived neighborhood experiences, and the researcher's journal.

Analysis

The following questions guided analysis and interpretation: How do elementary school students living in low-income urban neighborhoods narrate, form, and transform themselves in their photographing stories? What curriculum content might students create, discover, reveal through their photographing experiences? And how do urban elementary school students narrate relational aesthetic experiences with others, places and objects in their photographing stories?

Analysis was performed in two parts. First analysis of narrative, then narrative analysis (Polkinghorne, 1995).

Analysis of Narrative

After verbatim transcription, all data were read and re-read several times and coding and re-coding ensued as seen in Table 1.

Table 1
Analysis of Narrative

Analysis category	Analysis process
Raw Data	Recorded and transcribed all participant interviews
	Actively listened to, re-listened to, read, re-read participants' stories
	Checked accuracy of transcriptions
	Wrote research progress notes in journal (thoughts, questions, ideas, assumptions, methodology checks)
Coding Raw Data	Labeled main events, objects, ideas, who, where, when, other contextual features of participants' stories
	Labeled subject/focus of participants' statements
	Identified common, repeated ideas, topics, features, concepts
	Identified emergent themes and/or concepts across all participants' stories about their photographs and their photographing experiences
	Maintained the fidelity of all participants' stories
	Made list of emergent themes across all participants

Similar words and phrases, then line segments and lines were coded. Initial coded data were grouped into categories of what participants named, described, and talked about. Seven categories, listed in Table 2, emerged from 16 one-hour interviews; two interviews from each of the eight participants.

Table 2
Category Coding

Coding category	Examples in category
People	Family, self, friends, younger siblings, classmates, teachers, neighbors, strangers
Places	School, playground, bedroom, kitchen, apartment, houses, stores, laundromat, streets, parks, restaurants, church, movie theatre, ballpark, businesses
Pets and Animals	Dogs, cats, parakeets, fish, hamsters, abandoned dogs, stray cats
Objects	Toys, electronics, games, computers, televisions, bicycles, cell phones, sneakers, clothes, furniture
Environments:	Streets, backyards, trash, plants, flowers, noise, graffiti, music, cars, traffic
Photographing	Close-ups, wide-angles, composition (foreground, background, portrait, landscape), color, angle, timing, subjects, lighting, directing, arranging, posing, semi-candid
Ephemera	Air, smoke, noise, horns, music, yelling, machine noises, smells, rain, wind, time of day, timing and rhythm, weather, work, atmosphere, temperature, action, movement, busy, excitement

Shared social and cultural subjects and topics might naturally be expected to emerge. Patterns within and across seven initial categories were sought. Patterns of how participants interacted with others, with things and places, their actions, thoughts, and feelings emerged from their stories. Participants' engagement, their responsiveness to what, who, when, and where they made photographs were then grouped into categories seen in Table 3.

Table 3
Responsiveness Coding

Responsiveness category	Examples in category
Relationships	Compromising, persuading, controlling, tensions, collaborations, maintaining and/or changing roles, attitudes, identities, supportive, equal, easy

Planning	Deciding, choosing, changing, revising, expanding, accepting, sequencing, managing, modifying, randomness, opportunity, imagining, chance, arbitrary
Affective/Cognitive	Feeling, empathy, surprise, curiosity, belonging, fun, taboo, bad, off-limits, ugly, nice, good, respect, care, like, sad, disappointing, scared, beautiful, fantasy, frustrating, annoyed, right/wrong, vision, memory, mystery, worried, nervous, hopeful, angry, fair, expected, wished

Three primary themes emerged during level three of coding: aesthetic regard, decisive moment, and everyday metaphors. Table 4 shows a sampling of participants' statements that coalesced to form the theme of aesthetic regard.

Table 4

Sample participant responses – aesthetic regard

Response quotes
"I like the way it looks…"
"It looked nice…"
"Looking at that made me feel good…
"I think people like looking at nice things…"
"I just liked how it looked…"
"There's trash and nasty stuff some places. Not everywhere."
"It's good to have nice stuff…"
"I think it's pretty…"
"It makes it more nice…"
"It ugly when there's trash and graffiti and stuff…"
"It's not right because, um, it could um. It makes it bad for someone…"
"I feel happy when it bright with lot of colors…"
"It was like a, like a fun thing…"
"The most beautiful thing is my family…"
"There was a, there was… It's like everybody came out they houses and cooked barbeque. There was music too! Then everybody cleaned up after. It was nice. It was cleaner than before it started!"
"The sky, earth, and dirt, they good things. Trees are beautiful."
"Some people have like beautiful, like um pretty faces, but they not nice. Some people, she, a lady I know, she live on the first floor. She looked um, tired. But she nice. She always smile. And say hello."
"I wanted it to look like…I wanted to take a picture of it. But it didn't look right.
"People act more, um more nice when they plant flowers and stuff."
"After it rain, everything looks and smells nice in my neighborhood."

Themes were not selected, identified, or otherwise predetermined at the beginning of the study. Themes emerged from the stories of the participants. No inferences or interpretations were made during the analysis of narrative phase, thus preserving students' voices (Coulter & Smith, 2009). Care was taken to retain students' narrative sequences of story events, form, content, intent, and expression.

Narrative Analysis and Interpretation

Analysis was a two-phase process (Polkinghorne, 1995). First, analysis of participants' narratives. Analysis of participants' narratives was then followed by narrative analysis and interpretation (Polkinghorne, 1995). In phase one, as data were analyzed, categories emerged, and patterns and themes were identified and created. In phase two, Connelly and Clandinin's (1990) processes of broadening, burrowing, storying, and restorying (Table 5) were used to produce narrative analysis and interpretation of data.

Table 5
Narrative Analysis and Interpretation

Process category	Evidence of processes
Broadening	Reviewed theories and research on self-agency, education, low-income neighborhoods, and photo narrative methods
	Connected theories, research, historical contexts, participants' circumstances, race, gender, language, SES
Burrowing	Considered and integrated: participants' thoughts, comments, concerns, feelings about events, places, people in stories they told, participants' confidences, hesitancies, jokes, questions, physical and behavioral expressions
	Randomly selected stories of three participants for in-depth analysis, and interpretation
Storying and Restorying	Retold three participants' stories while connecting them to research, theories, artistic photographic ideas and practices and literature on cognition, learning and teaching
	Maintained narrative integrity of participant's stories throughout analysis and interpretation
	Provided interpretations of findings in context of theories and research literature

Discussed randomly selected participants' stories in context of emergent literature
Synchronously analyzed and interpreted participants' stories
Produced a report for readers' reflexive consideration

Narrative analysis of the data was aimed at understanding individual participants' photographing experiences and their individual stories about their photographs. Participants' stories were kept "intact by theorizing from the case rather than component themes across cases" (Reisman 2008, p. 53). Direct quotes helped to maintain the integrity of individual student stories (Sfard & Prusak, 2005). Situating students' individual narratives in time and space is a necessary part of narrative methodology as social justice.

Narrative analysis included all complete data sets collected from all eight fourth grade students. Analysis and interpretation were performed on all eight data sets. Detailed analysis limits the number of stories that can be presented in an article. Analysis and interpretation of the photographs and stories of three of the eight participants were randomly selected and are reported on in this section of this paper. The pseudonyms for these three participants are: Melody, George, and Pilar.

In the analysis and interpretation section of this paper students' stories are told and retold in the context of theories, research literature, artistic photographic concepts and practices, teaching and learning practices, and content from my research journal. Students' photo-stories of their lived experiences are real and authentic. Students' direct quotes are framed with quotation marks or presented in block quotation format. Other text is my retelling, meaning my reflexive and scholarly synthesizing, recounting, and/or interpretation of students' photo-stories, students' stories about their artistic processes during their photographing experiences, and students' stories about their lived, aesthetic relational experiences in their neighborhoods.

In this study students' photographs were visual objects that enabled them to think about their neighborhoods and their experiences in their neighborhoods. When students talked about their photographs what they said went beyond what could be seen in the photographs they had made. Student participants' interviews are not presented and described in word for word detail. Main points and essential aspects of students' narratives are carefully presented. Student participants' lived experiences and stories are partial, limited by context and time (Daya & Lau, 2007).

Students made photographs in different ways. There were some common subjects and ways of engaging with people, places, and things. But critically, there were unique combinations of methods, approaches, perspectives, and relational aesthetic issues. Sometimes consciously, sometimes not, making photographs was guided or constrained by social norms and the relational aesthetic practices in students' homes and neighborhoods. This was most evident when students talked about how their mother, uncle, father's girlfriend, or other family member suggested what, why, how, when, where, and who to photograph.

Students began by talking about all the photographs they had made in basic or general terms. They talked about and considered those photographs that "didn't come out" due to under-exposure or obstructions like fingers partially covering the lens. Students talked about things they were "going to make a picture of, but I didn't". They talked about things they did not photograph and did not want to photograph and why they considered such things inappropriate and "bad" subjects. Things like graffiti on neighborhood homes and buildings. Students talked about their attempts to photograph their feelings and ideas. During their interviews, students told in-depth stories about three to 12 of their photographs.

Meaning is best captured in ordinary language (Polkinghorne, 1995). Stories are content and context specific (Polkinghorne, 1995). Narrative analysis privileges participants' voices. The thematic findings of this study represent the search for patterns of meaning that acknowledge, honor, respect, and convey participants' responses.

Findings

Aesthetic Regard

Pointing to her "most" favorite photograph (Figure 1), Melody explained, "This is my uncle, and he lives next to me and I took a picture of him before he was going to ride his motorcycle." Melody said she thought that her uncle next to his motorcycle would "make a good picture". As teachers, we do not often think of young students seeing, seizing, and creating aesthetic moments. Dissanayake (2001) says that the preparation of young children for this kind of engagement begins when they are infants. Schools are expected to continue and support students' aesthetic, social, cognitive development. Executive functioning skills like decision-making; flexibility; knowing, refining, and adapting goals; as well as recognizing and making connections between what is presented and what is sought are 21st Century student learning objectives. These skills come together in aesthetically meaningful ways when students reflect on their thinking and acting behaviors.

Figure 1

Photograph of Melody's uncle and motorcycle

In the instant that she saw her uncle preparing for a ride, Melody created a photograph, first mentally, then physically, that depicted a person important to her, engaged in an activity that was also important to her. In describing 'aesthetic regard' Dewey (1934) wrote that to "*understand* the estheic (sic) in its ultimate and approved forms" (p. 4), we need to start where we are, i.e., with the "raw" material, experiences of the moment, those experiences and what surrounds us, things, people, and actions that we notice, their colors, shapes, light, forms, sounds, and textures. When students notice things, when they regard them, they are engaged aesthetically, artistically, personally, socially, contextually, and cognitively. Students' surroundings become activated and alive to their senses and awareness. Melody's photograph not only shows her favorite uncle and his motorcycle, but it also represents her intangible imaginings and her expressed desire of someday riding alongside him on her own motorcycle. When photographing their neighborhoods, students seized opportunities to consider and validate their dreams.

When talking about the photograph she titled "Me on a Swing" (Figure 2.), Melody said: "Me and my mom went to the park and I told her to take a picture of me on the swings." "Me on

a Swing" is interesting because it seems that Melody is creating an 'image' of what kids do. The shot is clearly staged. Close examination shows that Melody is not swinging on the swing, she is sitting on the swing. She is mimicking what a child would do. In her photograph Melody is not herself. She chose to 'represent' a child playing on a swing. This is noteworthy because until her mother asked her to stop swinging, Melody had retained some level of originality and authenticity. She was herself. And she *was* a child playing on a swing. Melody created a photograph that does not depict 'a child playing on a swing'; nor does it depict 'me playing on a swing'. Instead, her photograph and her discussion of it poignantly captures, depicts, and frames, a tension between Melody's directorial desires and those of her mother. For that reason, her photograph is more like art than a photographic record of a child's everyday neighborhood activity.

Figure 2

Photograph of Melody on a swing

Melody's photographing experience illustrates tension that is natural to genuine collaboration and interaction in the real world. In a somewhat somber tone, Melody said: "At first, I was swinging and she [mom] told me to 'stop, so I [she] can take your [my] picture'." Melody said she wanted to keep swinging. She was disappointed when her mother told her to

stop swinging. Melody said: "So I just sat on the swing instead." As I listened to Melody's narrative, it seemed that Melody was resisting her mother's vision of replacing reality with a symbol of reality. It was not Melody's own intended hyper-realization of children-to-swings in her neighborhood. It seemed that Melody's original idea was to create her interpretation of her own crafted copy of reality. Melody had tried to engage in a real thing, swinging. A real thing that had been available to her in her past, outside of photographing. I found myself wondering whether Melody's mom's 'casting' had resulted in a simulacrum (in the real-world children do not just sit on swings). Or was Melody's idea to photograph such a scene, simulation? In her planned photograph Melody had wanted to construct 'a child swinging on a swing' as if she were really a child on a swing, which she was. Simulation occurs within us.

In her narrative of her photograph, Melody blended reality and representation; idea, attitude, feelings, and emerging thoughts. Melody's narrative truths suggest how she is beginning to consider ways she might shape her abilities to engage with people in different ways in different places at different times. As I looked at Melody's photograph and listened to what she was saying, I found myself wishing I could respond, wondering how I should respond, in what context or pretext I might respond. Should I discuss with Melody the truth that her story and picture revealed to me? What would be the benefit to Melody? Could I help Melody learn to consider multiple and complex truths in images? Discuss with her how truth in images is not always a complete and accurate representation of intent? At least that is the case with art. Something is only art when it surprises or when it surpasses what the artist intended.

We often fail to recognize and nurture students' unfolding potentialities for developing social justice skills. Students offer us many opportunities to support their emerging abilities to

recognize and accept their own unique, multiple, and varied identities, and their recognition of the identities of others.

Staged photographs, or scenes arranged for the express purpose of being photographed, are a standard part of photographic art. Artist-photographers like Cindy Sherman, photojournalists like Gordon Parks with his visual commentaries on racial injustice in America, and documentary-photographers like Matthew Brady during the American Civil War, designed and staged their photographs. Professional artist-photographers may use 'the constructed scene' in their creative photography processes for a whole host of artistic agendas and reasons. They may construct or reconstruct scenes to question what is real, create fantasies, explore anxiety and desire, illustrate minor or narrative backdrop scenes from literary works, make social or political commentary, re-create or interrogate famous works of art, or challenge racism.

Some photographs students created were constructed scenes, co-produced and co-directed with family members and friends. Students' constructed photographs told stories about themselves and their experiences with others and their neighborhoods that were complex, dynamic, stimulating, and affirmative. They created and imaged multiple ways in which they might think and act with others in different settings (Tuck, 2009). Photographing was new to Melody. So was engaging her world with and through a camera. For Melody, a primary approach to making photographs was to recreate or stage activities and photograph them.

Student produced photographs can provide considerable information about some of the ways they view their neighborhoods (Clark-Ibanez, 2007; Pink, 2004). With the goal of 'listening to students' voices, limiting the potential intrusiveness of the researcher is crucial. Minimizing the power relationship between the researcher and the students was initiated at the outset and monitored and checked throughout the project. However, students' photographs

reflected the presence of other relationships that could not be controlled and therefore had to be considered. Parents, older siblings, and classmates influenced and contributed to the production of some of the photographs students made. In some instances, parental and familial involvement was more actively directive than in others.

Like some other parents, Melody's mom drove her around in her car so that Melody could make her photographs. In general, urban children do not explore their neighborhoods and communities on their own. Some students view much or most of urban life from the backseat of their family's car (Figure 3.), from apartment windows, and on their way to and from school, church, stores. Children are almost always in the protective accompaniment of their parents, older siblings, or other older relatives. Since the late 1960s children's outdoor mobility, including their journeys to and from school, have been increasingly supervised and monitored (Dixey, 1999; Huang et al., 2020). From her car window, Melody made photographs of a local performing arts center, a cathedral, schools, stadiums, a park, skyscrapers, large department stores, and other "special" places in her neighborhood. She made more pictures of places than of things or people.

Figure 3

Photograph from backseat of Melody's car

Most students made photographs of the important people in their neighborhood lives. When sharing her photograph of her grandmother Melody said: "I wasn't sure how she would pose. I wanted her to pose like my mom did." Melody's mother had posed like a fashion model, one hand on her hip, a slight twist of her torso, looking directly into the camera and smiling. Melody's tone of voice and careful selection of her words and gestures gave me the impression that grandmother, like many grandmothers, was afforded a good deal of respect. Melody seemed disappointed that her grandmother had struck a serious formal non-playful frontal pose. Melody clearly recognized her grandmother's positional identity. Melody's narrative of her participation in her grandmother's figured world, her grandmother's cultural practices for posing for pictures, is important and contributes to Melody's development of her sense of self (Holland, 1998).

The aesthetic relational photographic tension between photographer and the person being photographed has received considerable attention in different fields. Rugg (1997) reminds us that photographs are autobiographies of a sort. She says that when we are in front of the camera, we construct ourselves during the photographing experience. We consider how we wish to be seen and regarded, we are concerned that people see us in the way in which we wish to be known and understood. Melody had one idea of how she wanted her grandmother to pose, and her grandmother had another. Susan Sontag (1977) says that a quasi-intimate relationship is created between the photographer and the photographed and that people often assume a different kind of demeanor within the photographing experience.

It is unclear whether Melody considered that her grandmother may have her own way of posing, her own posing ritual, or if Melody considered that her grandmother may have thought that the pose she presented to Melody was the one that was called for in the circumstances. Schusterman (2012) suggests that there are possibly "participatory pleasures of snapshots in

everyday popular photographic art" (p. 71). However, in at least two of Melody's photographing experiences her expectations threatened to overwhelm participatory satisfaction.

Melody was not the only student who told stories of tension between herself and others during their photographing experiences. In fact, for one student, photo-narratives centered around tensions between herself and her family members and friends. Nevertheless, for most students, despite differing aesthetic relational experiences, their performative participatory processes of making photographs were social-creative processes in which they received support from family and friends. These processes opened-up contexts and spaces in which they could enact different possible identities (Schusterman, 2012). If students are absorbed in the participatory and performative process of making photographs and not able to attend to the aesthetic qualities of the photographing experience and their evolving self-identity, then discussing their photographing experiences may provide an opportunity for them to consider what they were thinking, how they felt, what they were doing, and who they are becoming.

Decisive Moment: Creating the Aesthetic Experience

Some students immediately recognized their photographing experiences as opportunities for considering and shaping their identities. One student, George, seemed particularly conscious of using photography as a medium through which he could say something about himself, those closest to him, and his neighborhood. George's sense of agency led him to carefully structure his photographing experiences. He was aware that photographing also shaped how he could and might behave and think. George engaged photographing as a means of self-authoring (Bakhtin, 1986).

After selecting and arranging his photographs, George began his interview by saying:

> This is a photograph of me (Figure 4). I posed for this photograph. And I asked my mom to take my picture. I wanted to show myself looking for something and checking for something. I decided that this would be a good background for me, so I moved into that place. It would [have] be[en] too difficult to make, like a different background for all my pictures. Like, to create a background for everything. So, I looked for one that already existed that would fit what I wanted to show. And, I'd have to move to different places to take the pictures, so I thought it would make it a little simpler to make my background the outside the school.

George's creation of this photograph (Figure 4) is informative in several ways. Like other students he had made a list of possible people, activities, things, locations, and events that he might like to photograph. But in the time it took to be dismissed from school and meet his mother on the school's playground (approximately 10 minutes) he had decided that he would not have time to go to all the locations where he wanted to make his photographs. Having decided that he would be the main person in all his 'location-photographs', and that he would not have the time nor the means to go to all the locations he identified and listed, George decided to use the school as the synthesis of all his planned locations. He simply collapsed all locations into one by choosing a specific school location that manifested all the other locations he had written down. When discussing this photograph and his creative conceptualization of it, George used a wide range of gestures to communicate the scope and variety of his locations, and his actions, feelings, and thoughts related to those locations. At one point he brought his hands together interlacing his fingers so that each hand gripped the other making a two-handed fist. Then he quickly opened his hands spreading his fingers wide, suspending them over this one photograph to symbolize the result of his mental distillation of multiple spaces, locations, and ideas into one. George

'performed' his storytelling. He re-enacted his artistic problem-solving with intelligence, thinking, feeling, action, energy, and excitement (Dewey, 1917).

Figure 4

Photograph of George

In his narrative George shared the meta-cognition of his creative process. He also talked about the way he had managed his frustration and disappointment at not being able to go to all the locations he had planned to visit to make photographs. He shared his practical thinking about how to solve his problem of time, distance, and location, and he talked about his ability to persevere in spite of his location and time challenges. He talked about how he had used all his cognitive and affective abilities and strengths to arrive at a solution he found acceptable. George's narrative of his metacognitive thinking was a reminder that students not only come up with creative solutions, but also like retelling how they did it. Sharing creative decision-making journeys to solutions is important to students' creative cognitive development and self-formation.

It offers teachers opportunities to help students reinforce their most effective strategies, while providing guidance for continuing to build new skills, and new dimensions of self.

The kind of thinking George was doing is not the rudimentary thinking that is so often called for in schools. Reporting on the neuroscience of narrative, Mar (2004) notes that frontal lobe and right brain regions are activated when individuals engage in storytelling. Brain activity also increases when individuals take part in visual arts learning (Schlegel et al., 2015). Helping students like George gain disciplinary mastery without the loss of his creative process as he described it, is the work of teachers, schools, and communities. The small beginnings of students' creative problem-solving must be honored and nurtured for their sake as well as our own best possible futures.

George's work, his photograph, may not be epic making for us, but the multidimensional time, space, cognitive, and attitudinal processes he used to make it are highly valued (Anderson et al., 2022; Gardner, 1990; Griffin & Turner, 2021; Jackson, 2000). George used serendipity, chance, and opportunity. He used what he could see immediately around him and turned his observations into knowledge. He made links and connections to what he was seeing and his goals. He developed a plan and exquisitely executed it. These are facets of cognition that support discovery of self and social agency. This is the kind of intuitive and active creative processing and production that we want students to learn, use, and share. However, without the photo-narrative interview process used in this study, it is doubtful that we would have learned about this feature of George's photographing experience and process. A narrative process offers opportunities to see ways in-school and out-of-school experiences intertwine with students' agency of self and social justice (Clandinin, 2013).

George made it clear that the persons most important to him were his friend Charlene (pseudonym), his father, his mother, and himself. He had a strong sense of his neighborhood. However, unlike Melody, who sought to make an almost virtual photograph-travel-log of the places she visited, knows, and likes, George presented a geographically compressed view of his neighborhood with himself at the center. In the following quote, George not only explains what he thinks those who see his photographs might think of the photographer, but also shares some of the social and geographic relational aesthetic experiences he's created within his neighborhood.

> People looking at my pictures might think, hey this person [photographer], maybe…, he's not that bad. That he took these pictures because he loves his family and friends. And he loves his neighborhood. My neighborhood is fun. On the corner of my house there's a playground. And above it there's a shop and a store that sells items like… that sells furniture. And in the shop… it sells food, and some toys… not much. And around the corner is Charlene's house. And she [Charlene] makes me happy. And around that corner is my grandma's.

Student participants often created complex and lengthy narratives when telling their stories. George used language devices (Riessman, 1993) and structures (Jefferson, 1978) to express his agency. He talked about himself in the third person. He stated his wish for how he hopes unknown others will see and judge him. He offered his own insight into how he sees himself as subject and how he sees himself in his role as photographer-storyteller. Without losing the plot of his story, George followed his digression with several self-affirming statements:

> I know lots of people in the neighborhood. These photographs say that these people care about me. Charlene cared about me the other day. I was feeling sad; she makes me cheer

> up. And after school when I'm feeling sad because something bad happened to me, my mom just cheers me up. She gives me hugs and that makes me happy.

In this part of his story George identifies the resources available to him to counter challenges to his sense of self, his sense of well-being. In this story, George's identity construct is in defiance of a negative experience he had had at school. George weaves together backstory and context, and in doing so, adds suspense. As the interviewer, I anticipated, looked forward to his conclusion. He finished or exited his story by saying:

> I can be sad, but I'd rather be happy. And then my dad makes me happy because he just buys me stuff that I like. When my mom hugs me, I feel like life is not a bunch of sadness. It can be like a bunch of happiness. Like butterflies and ice cream. I make myself happy because I can see that life is like butterflies and pizza, and ice cream. It's a bunch of happiness.

George marked his awareness of himself as the teller of his own story by embedding a digression, a detour (Laslett, 1999), and spatial and relational milieus. He provided nuance, background, and context for the primary focus of the story he wanted to tell. In doing so he identified places, locations, people, and their real, and his own hoped-for attitudes toward him. The effect was to structure his story in a way that heightened the researcher's uncertainty about his story's conclusion. His use of digression in his storytelling created a sophisticated interactive process between storyteller (student participant) and listener (researcher). At the time I wondered why George was telling his story in that way. Was he aware that he was telling his story in a particular way? Was he intentionally telling his story in a particular way? I never asked George these questions. Students' stories can tell us a great deal about social, cultural, educational, and

historical processes. George's story shapes the history of school climate and student well-being; social interactions in school and in neighborhoods (Morgan et al., 2023).

George's photograph (Figure 4) is almost alchemical in its presence of absence. The experiences of places that George would have visited, created, and photographed are not visually available in his printed photograph. However, they do exist as part of his photographing experience and his photo-narrative. During his interview George conjured them in his stance and disposition, and in his descriptions of how he considered then chose the angle and place to stand. He embodied the traces of the experiences in places he had wanted to go and had wanted to photograph. While discussing his photograph, George shifted his body and facial expressions to match each location-transition, kaleidoscopically tracking his imagined, attitudinal, and conceptual movements and stances from one neighborhood location to another. His physical tracings, his bodily gestures, connected to the places he had wanted to photograph. Susan Sontag (1977) wrote: "Photographs depict realities that already exist, though only the camera can disclose them. And they depict individual temperament, discovering itself through the camera's cropping of reality" (p. 122).

When talking about another of his photographs (Figure 5), George said: "This is supposed to be the morning sunlight and of course I have…. It's supposed to be like…." Unable to find the words to express what he wanted to say, George hummed the leading notes of the music at the opening of the film "2001: A Space Odyssey". George continued:

> I was just standing in front of the window, and I made this picture. I like that it's a morning sunrise instead of a cold dark light, that's freezing and cold. Instead, it's a morning sunrise that's melting snow and bringing light again… over.

In George's verbal remarks about his photographing experience and his photograph he was sometimes challenged to find the exact words to best explain his intent, his feelings, and the sensations he had attempted to capture. Listening to George and looking at his photograph reminded me of Cartier-Bresson (1952) who described how he excitedly walk city streets, acting spontaneously, forming connections and experiences with what he saw to "…capture the quintessence of [a] phenomenon in a single image…" (p. 14).

Figure 5

Photograph of morning

George's photograph of the rising sun and the feelings it evoked in him functioned to create for him a holistic, yet fleeting sensation. So much so that he linked it to the rousing music of Richard Strauss's "Also sprach Zarathustra". George's verbal recounting of his synesthetic photographing experience may be his way of describing some part of what Cartier-Bresson (1952) calls the decisive moment and John Dewey (1934) refers to as the 'art of the experience'. It seems to have happened instantaneously for George; he had not planned to make the picture. He said, "I was just standing in front of the window, and I made this picture."

The contrast in George's "Morning Sunrise" photograph is low. But George's mental

image of the photograph he wanted to create was very strong. He was only slightly disappointed with the fact that his sunrise photograph had not come out exactly as he wanted it to. While looking at his photograph, George talked for quite a while about location, specifically the location of the sun in relation his house, the location of buildings photographed, and the location of buildings that were casting shadows. In an extensive monologue, George talked about what he would do next time to get the picture to "come out the way I see it".

Because single use cameras have several drawbacks, it may be that George would have had a different kind of experience with a digital camera. Digital cameras allow for rapid multiple shots within a single minute, as well as a wide range of exposure options and adjustments. It is possible that using a digital camera, George could have made multiple shots of the sunrise outside his window and that one of them could have been something like the equivalent to the one in his mind's eye. However, it is more likely that without disciplinary education in the mechanics of photographing extreme lights and darks in the same scene, George would not have had the opportunity to consider how to solve lighting, exposure and timing problems using either type of camera. Still, with the use of a digital camera, George may have had a better chance of creating the photograph he saw, felt, and imagined. What is clear, what is not in question, is that the 'moment' (i.e. George's feelings linked to what he was sensing, his connectedness to his physical environment, and his effort to photographically record that moment), would have been quite similar whether he was using a single use camera or a digital camera or a SLR.

It is George's viewing of his photograph combined with his story of the making of his photograph that is decisive, informative, and insightful. The development and use of digital photography may make the 'decisive moment', as a concept, of less concern for some contemporary professional photographers, particularly that part of the concept that relies on

timing. Master photographers like Cartier-Bresson capture decisive moments of the everyday and make them come alive for viewers through photographs alone, by means of expertly arranged compositions that create a sense of unity, harmony, and cohesion. Art in the creation of an object (a photograph). What George's photographing experience tells us is that decisive moments are everywhere, that what is needed is the ability, willingness, and presence of mind to engage with the art of creating, of engaging in an aesthetic experience. In a way, the interaction between George and me was a kind of relational art, the social reality of the interview context created a point of relational contact; storyteller and listener. In other words, George's discussion about his photograph and his experience, and my listening coupled with my thoughtful consideration of what he showed and said, is a kind of relational aesthetics (Bourriard, 1998/2002).

Everyday Metaphors

Like some other students, Pilar liked the busyness of her neighborhood. She talked about a photograph she had made that she said showed how "there's lots of stuff going on in my neighborhood". She talked about the way kids hang out on the street and play basketball, which she herself likes to play. When I asked Pilar about her photographing experiences, she explained:

> I liked making photographs in my neighborhood. I like[d] the action, drama, and a lot of things. I feel happy when I take pictures. But my neighborhood need[s] cleaning up because it's dirty. A neighbor screams. And every night there was a noisy party. But my neighborhood is peaceful.

Pilar "planned" some photographs more than others. She said that it was the first time she had used a camera, but now she thinks she is pretty good at making photographs. Pilar's interest in photography led her mother to purchase a cell phone for Pilar so that she could make pictures of her baby sister and other family members.

Pilar began her narration about her photographs by telling me the backstory of a photograph she had made of her friends just as they were leaving the school building. Pilar said that she had "arranged" a group of girls, who are her friends, and just as she pressed the shutter button something unexpected happened. She explained:

> I wasn't, I wasn't going to take that picture. But I didn't really know that the boy was coming out, so…. When I took the picture, the boy came out. And I clicked the button, and I was like 'huh' and then…. I didn't know it was going to come that funny.

Pilar was surprised when a boy suddenly appeared on the edge of her viewfinder. She said she had wondered how her picture would "turn out" but was delighted with her resulting photograph. She also said that she had had a similar experience while making another photograph. She said that there had been another "pop-up" boy in another of her photographs and explained that she did not know that he was there until she saw the developed photograph. Discovering unexpected people and things in photographs long after they were made is one of the "charms of photography" (Talbot, 1844, p. 40).

Pilar liked the surprise of boys "coming out of nowhere" whom she had not invited to be in her photographs. She was both mildly annoyed and somewhat pleased that they had somehow suddenly popped into her photographic frame. Contingency, chance, or the accidental and unforeseen intrusion of someone into her planned photographs was an important aesthetic relational aspect of Pilar's photographing experience and an important feature of her photographs. Unintentional unplanned occurrences became for Pilar, happy accidents. Contingency made the act of photographing an exciting activity. Contingency is part of Pilar's emerging photographing art (Zuromskis, 2008) and part of her social aesthetic agency.

Pilar had important things to say about all 12 of her photographs and much of what she had to say went beyond what could be seen in them. Pilar told me a story about her picture of a frog, a doll, and the Bible (Figure 6). In her narrative of this photograph, Pilar said that the frog cares about the Bible and that's why the frog is looking at it. But the doll does not care and it is looking away. Pilar went on to tell me that she knows people who care about the Bible and people who do not, adding:

> Like there are some children I know, and some… they [are] students too!, who don't care about the Bible. Um, the Bible teaches you things like the Ten Commandments. And one of the Commandments is to honor thy mother and thy father so that their days may be long. And that your days may be long as well.

Pilar explained that this Commandment is important.

Figure 6

Pilar's photograph of a frog, doll and the Bible

Baudrillard (1998, 1996) says that objects are social codes. A way of communicating with others about who we are, what we think and feel, and as such, the material world is part of self-formation. We use objects to expand ourselves and share meaning with others. Pilar created

a tableau of ready-to-hand, everyday objects in her room to represent her ideas about her faith and the fact that she has learned that some others suffer from a lack of Christian faith (Csikszentmihalyi & Halton, 1981; Ziller, 1990).

Pilar's still life photograph of the frog, the Bible, and the doll comes directly from her day-to-day experiences in her neighborhood. She created an almost theatrical vignette that is scripted with her lived experiences. Combining the roles of set designer and director, she carefully arranged characters and contrived their motives and wrote their lines to convey her own lived experiences. The photographic image Pilar created and the narrative she constructed appear seamless as she considers her beliefs, religion, obedience, hope, plush toy frogs, and dolls. Her visualization of the visually imperceptible, of sensation, thoughts, and faith seems to affirm aspects of her emerging worldview. Pilar was happy with her photograph. For her it conveyed exactly what she intended. While narrating her photograph, Pilar did not convey any awareness of the sense of irony I saw in her photograph. She did not say why she had chosen the frog to represent those who are interested in the Bible and the doll to represent those who are not. Pilar was a child using photography to make a statement about her lived experiences. She was not using photography to explore the faithful and the faithless. She seemed to simply want to point out that her environment contained people who held, not just different beliefs, but a lack of beliefs which for her seemed to be almost an opposite way of thinking about Christianity.

Narrative inquiry involves an "ethics of care" (Clandinin, 2007, p. 30) and "relational responsibilities" (Clandinin & Murphy, 2009, p. 600) that include being attuned to and critically responsive to students of color in urban communities. As researcher and interviewer, talking with Pilar about her photograph and her narrative was challenging. I wanted to engage in a deeper conversation with her about her photograph and the thoughts, feelings, and ideas she had linked

to her photograph as a conversation in which I could ask questions and make comments. I listened to her carefully. When she had finished talking about her photograph I asked her if there was anything more she wanted to say and she said, " No".

I did not ask Pilar follow-up questions that threatened to send us both into interviewer-interviewee roles, teacher-student roles, or a direction that would include the researcher as part of the story of the frog, the Bible, and the doll. For instance, I would have liked to ask Pilar about her critique of others who did not believe as the plush frog believes. I would have liked to ask Pilar why she assigned the role of "believer" to the stuffed frog instead of the doll. I wanted to discuss her use of metaphor to convey her observations, but I was concerned that such questions would 'direct' any responses Pilar offered.

During her interview, Pilar's body language, her general sense of self-assuredness, suggested that she was contented with our roles, she as storyteller and me as listener. Pilar was forthcoming and relaxed as she showed her photographs and narrated them. These observations and thoughts had the effect of pulling my attention to the complexities of storytelling in narrative research. Georgakopoulou (2007) says:

> It is not just tellings or retellings that form part of the analysis: refusals to tell or deferrals of telling are equally important in terms of how the participants orient to what is appropriate…in a specific environment, what the norms for telling and tellability are (p. 151).

The fact that Pilar had created such an eloquent photographic metaphor of Christian faith and non-faith, gave me pause to consider the photograph she had created, the narrative she produced, her demeanor, and the appropriateness of questions that could have been asked then, as well as those that might better be asked in a post-study conversation or introduced in a teaching and

learning context. Alone, Pilar's photograph is disarming, inviting, funny, intriguing, unsettling, and artful. Coupled with the narrative she told of complex human relationships and religious beliefs, both photograph and narrative comment on and reflect her lived experiences.

Children work hard to make sense of the world and Pilar's photograph and narrative, each enhancing the other, are examples of that effort. Pilar externalized an internal drama of making meaning. Whether or not Pilar accepts the differences she's drawn from her lived experiences or will seek ways to resolve those differences is not known. However, we do know that creative acts and real experiences of making moral choices stimulate self-formative experiences (Menaker,1998).

Pilar issued imperatives. She clearly valued the Bible and ably quoted Commandments. She nevertheless seemed to be at the beginning of trying to understand the otherness of others, and herself as another, and of trying to understand how it is possible that people she knows, some of whom she likes, do not also value the Bible as much as she does. Susanne Langer (1957) wrote:

> …if we want to name something that is too new to have a name […] or want to express a relationship for which there is no verb or other connective word, we resort to metaphor […] sometimes our comprehension of a total experience is mediated by a metaphorical symbol because the experience is new […] (p. 23).

Pilar saw something about how she thinks people relate to the Bible. Using the photographing process; including stage crafting and photo-making, she made meaning of what she knows. She did not use ordinary discursive ways to express what she sees or what she has learned. Students create and use stories to make sense of and to act in their own lives. Pilar created and used an ontological narrative to define who she is, and as a means for considering and knowing how to

be. She engaged in what Ricoeur (1992) calls "emplotment" (p. 141). She configured characters; assigned roles for them to play and events for them to take part in and assembled all of these into a visual image and a story. Pilar is both the interpreter and creator of the story. Emplotment is more than categorization. Polkinghorne (1988) writes that "social actions should not be viewed as a result of categorizing oneself […] but should be seen to emerge in the context of a life story with episodes" (p. 47). In this way, emplotment is critical to narrative. Students create themselves, identify and re-configure themselves, through stories, locales, interactions with others, with things, and across time. Students' photographing experiences, photographs, and the stories they tell about them are expressions of day-to-day life, social being, and identity.

Everyday life is political, economic, social, cultural, relational, and aesthetic. Everyday life shapes the way people understand and behave. In turn, people modify, change, and use the ideas, images, rules, beliefs, conditions, and practices they encounter every day, making them into something new and different (deCerteau, 1984). We may increase our "awareness of future possibilities to engage with and form the communities in which we live […] in ways that call forth a more socially just world" (Caine et al., 2018, p. 143).

Discussion

Participants were three Black and Latinx fourth grade boys and girls between the ages of nine and 11, living and learning in a low-income inner-city neighborhood. Age, gender, culture, ethnicity, and experiences in their school and community were advantageous; participants were experts in their own lives.

To develop an understanding of the meanings participants gave to their photographs, their photographic experiences, and the stories they told, data were analyzed and interpreted in light of theories, research literature, and artistic photographic concepts and practices. Analysis of stories

revealed some common recurring patterns across data sets. Relationships among categories coalesced to form themes. Three themes emerged from analysis of participants' narratives: aesthetic regard, decisive moment, and everyday metaphors. *Aesthetic regard* was produced when participants focused on quality, esteem, and value of objects, places, experiences, relationships, self, others, and ideas, beyond functionality. *Decisive moment* was created when participants attended to their awareness of time, place, people, things, and experiences that formed interlocking potentialities that they noticed. Participants created decisive moments when they focused their attention on their experiencing of what was already there. Participants produced *everyday metaphors* through their efforts to create, explain, define, or redefine nuanced, juxtaposing, or ambiguous intersecting feelings, experiences, and ideas.

The purpose of the study was to consider how photographs young students make, what they have to say about their photographs and their photographing experiences, and how they create highly varied and multi-sensory narrative constructs of self, place, and becoming in low-income neighborhoods.

Ethical issues and concerns are a natural part of all research and become even more critical when research participants are Black and Latinx elementary school students. Power relationships between student participants, their families, school faculty and staff, and the researcher, as well as representation and privacy of those who appeared in students' photographs, and location anonymity (Wiles et al., 2012) required careful and thoughtful consideration and response. The researcher posed ethical questions at every phase of the study.

Students made photographs of family, friends, parks, pets, etc. However, these commonly used signs held different meanings for different students, many of which could only be understood through students' subjective narratives. Melody's, George's, and Pilar's stories offer

glimpses into how they considered and produced self, social, and artistic agency. Their actions and "undergoing" (Dewey, 1934), offered potentiality for self-expansion and self-transformation.

Self-agency is a creative process (Bourriaud, 1998/2002). Through photographing, students positioned themselves in relation to their families, society, environments, cultures, their inner-city neighborhoods. They challenged, accommodated, affirmed, renewed, and sometimes asserted mastery in their social interactions. They manifested and created relational aesthetic agency. For example, Melody wrestled with yielding her own aesthetic vision to that of her mother. George asked and answered his own question about what people viewing his photographs might think of him as a person. Pilar considered the differences between her own thinking about religion and the way she thinks some of her classmates think about religion.

In different ways, each student narrated self as another (Ricoeur, 1992). Self-agency involves acting and being acted upon. Through staging, acting, coaching, directing, and the making of photographs, Melody presented and re-presented places, the concept of childhood, and people she knows in ways she imagines them. She photographically contextualized experiences, linking actual lived ways of being to imagined places, spaces, and possibilities. George anchored himself and "collapsed time" (Iverson, 2011); by grounding himself in what was paradoxically a ubiquitous location. He claimed his subjectivity and amplified his self-agency during interviews. Pilar positioned herself in ambiguity, questioning how her classmates and friends could be so like her, yet so different, and she wondered how despite their differences, she considered them to be her friends. Internal and external, self and other, and self as other, she invited tensions and dynamics of experience she could not immediately harmonize. Nevertheless, she was willing to dwell in, to undergo, these incongruities and to allow them to become an axis for possible future transformative experiences. Relational aesthetic agency is never complete.

For all three student participants there were instances when their interactions with their photographs were cathartic (Vygotsky, 1925/1971). The stories of their photographs affected students and students transformed their photographs. Students talked about, with, and through their photographs to me, and it seemed at times, to themselves.

All students talked about creating, discovering, and performing photo-making processes and procedures. Artistic process was a critical concern and one that students easily wove into their talk about their photographs and photographing experiences. In their own way, Melody, George, and Pilar discussed the ideas and production processes they had created in their photograph-making experiences. They expressed pleasure with their abilities to generate ideas, and excitement about the different ways they had devised to implement their ideas. They also talked about how they liked the feeling of anticipation they had when they thought about acting on these ideas. Finally, they described the eagerness they felt when enacting their ideas on themselves,-- and with people, places, events, and objects in their neighborhoods. Their photographing experiences, including the ideas they generated and their anticipation, were all educative experiences that created possibilities for future rich experiences (Dewey, 1938).

Interviewing students not only offered a glimpse into their narrative identities, but also facilitated students' work toward constituting their aesthetic relational experiences. Imagination affects reality; and selfhood is not separate from imagination (Sartre, 1940/2004). Through photo-narratives students constructed themselves (Holland, 1998) and their emerging worldviews (Goodman, 1978).

Students' narrativizations of their photographs and their neighborhood photographing experiences were not just descriptions of what appeared in their photographs or merely retellings of their experiences for research purposes. These aspects of the process were essential to

students' constructions of self (Ricoeur, 1991). Students' aesthetic relational practices are important means for constituting and developing students' identities. Recognizing, understanding, and creating meaning from experiences is not an automatic process. Instead, they are abilities that must be nurtured and requires pedagogical guidance and support. Thus, identity work is curriculum work. Self and knowledge are created through social discourse (Foucault, 1980; Vygotsky, 1978). Students configure and reconfigure themselves in the presence of others, both in school and outside of school, and through their interactions with others, students co-create figured worlds.

Scripted curricula and teaching, as well as prescribed student behaviors, act on and through students. When self-formation and self-transformation are ignored, misunderstood, or otherwise depressed, it occurs at the expense of the students, for all those around them, and for society as a whole. Consequently, student self-formation and self-transformation must hold a critical place in every curriculum that seeks to advance democratic and socially just living.

The creativity, self-formation, and social agency of Black and Latinx students has not been the focus of scholarship in education or elsewhere. Self-formation is not a concern of neoliberal educational agenda. Neoliberal educational policies and practices promote self-efficacy and self-care practices that result in the development of a self that is independent of others and wholly self-reliant, regardless of circumstances and constraints (Martin & McLellan, 2013).

David Berliner (2011) cautions us about our pervasive and almost exclusive focus on testing. Our preferences for easy to measure and easily quantifiable modes of student performance diminish aesthetic, cultural, and individual aspects of learning (Ambrose, 2012). Experiences, feelings, and emotions support cognition (Goodman, 1968). Schools and teachers

play crucial, yet difficult roles in student self-formation. Student self-formation and self-transformation cannot be supported and assessed through typical school measures and accountability systems. Teaching student-agency in schools raises the question of whether and how teachers ought to and whether they can engage in the work of facilitating student self-formation.

We can offer students who live and learn in low-income neighborhoods more than just a serviceable neoliberal education. We can provide them with a remarkable education. Students' on-going interactions between themselves and the world ought to be at the center of what we are doing in schools. The world is not already fixed, absolute, and pre-determined. Black and Latinx students' neighborhood photographs, their talk about their photographs, and their photographing experiences were student produced narratives with embodied points of view and spatial positionalities (Merleau-Ponty, 2004/2008).

I cannot claim that my analysis and the interpretations that emerged are the only possible ones, but they are the ones that fit the stories, time, contexts, content, and neighborhood experiences participants shared. Throughout this research process I reflected on how I could feel close to participants' photo-narratives, photographing experiences, and photo-stories, but could never catch or receive their fullness in their entirety. Pelias (2011) says that researchers "understand that they can never say everything about anything (partial) and that everything that they say carries ideological insight (partisan)" (p. 664).

Limitations and Recommendations

Students' family, cultural, social, racial, ethnic, economic, environmental, and housing relationships in their neighborhoods and schools influence their development and learning (Vygotsky, 1978). In this study, participants did not explicitly reference their own or others'

racial, cultural, or ethnic identities, nor did they directly address economic and educational inequities. Some participants made implicit references to the quality of their housing, schooling, and their overall neighborhood. Several participants mentioned neighborhood experiences they consider negative, such as noise pollution, trash, abandoned houses, speeding cars, and graffiti. Participants hinted at their neighborhood social, cultural, racial, and ethnic identities by tacitly linking these to their own personal efforts at what they called "stylin". Without risking confirmation bias, participants could have been asked to say more through use of nonleading questions. The authenticity of photo-elicitation and narrative inquiry is in the participant's control of her/his/their photographs and the stories she/he/they wish to share. Investigating participants' experiences in their neighborhoods and schools over a longer period of time could provide further insight into their relational aesthetic thinking and behavior, creativity, well-being, caring, identity formation, self-agency, race, ethnicity, culture, and place. Photographs and narratives collected over a two-to-three-year period could provide participants with opportunities to reflect on their past, present, and future selves, their agency, and identity. Despite limitations, the current study provides insight into how neighborhood experiences may be connected to self and other formation and relational aesthetics among Black and Latinx students. Although this report shares findings generated from the analysis of photographs and stories of three Black and Latinx students, it nevertheless has implications for a broad range of culturally diverse students and living and learning settings. Findings regarding Black and Latinx students' aesthetic relational and creative engagement in their neighborhoods are important and warrant pedagogical consideration. Findings from this study suggest that children living in low-income neighborhoods not only have pedagogical agendas but can craft them as well. George's photographs and stories are exemplary of students' abilities to reorganize, relate, reimagine,

create, shape, act-on, hypothesize, validate, and contextualize (Vygotsky, 1978) their own learning goals, experiences, challenges, and products. Best practices require teachers to understand and engage student self-agency and relational aesthetics as critical aspects of access to knowledge.

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