Poetry as Progress:
Balancing Standards-Based Reforms with Aesthetic Inquiry

Laura B. Liu
University of San Diego, USA

Abstract

The meaning of "progress" in U.S. educational institutions has undergone much debate (Tyack & Cuban, 1995). Standards-driven practices have often promoted a search for 'right' answers in place of critical and diverse thinking. Globalization and its impacts compel us to continue revising and articulating the meaning of progress for 21st century students, educators, and researchers (Ball & Tyson, 2011). This aesthetic empirical inquiry (Pinar, 2004; Rancière, 2004) contributes to this process by creatively re-presenting teacher voice via bricolage (Denzin & Lincoln, 2003; Kincheloe, 2001), specifically poetic bricolage (Trueit, 2004). The pursuit of aesthetic approaches to research have the potential for re-shaping national notions of progress to emphasize the cultivation of creativity, understanding, and empathy across lines of difference, and thereby support 21st century global communities in collaborating to address inequity.

Defining Progress in the Past and Present

The meaning of "progress" in the U.S. and its educational institutions has undergone much debate, transforming the aims of progress in educational practice (Tyack & Cuban, 1995). In the 1900s, a policy elite led the U.S. Bureau of Education to enact a vision of educational progress that involved programmatic legislations to standardize critical aspects of schooling, including finance systems, curricula, and teacher certification (Tyack & Cuban, 1995). Yet, it soon became clear that this progress primarily benefited a select group, leaving others behind. Key legislations have since re-directed the focus of educational progress through policies such as the New Deal of 1933, Brown vs. Board of Education in 1954, and Title I of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965 and its subsequent reauthorizations. Moreover, leaders of the multicultural education movement have articulated the imperative for educational institutional reforms in the U.S. that provide students of "diverse racial, ethnic, and social-class groups," as well as "male and female students an equal chance to experience education success and mobility" (Banks, 2006, p. 3).

The meaning of progress for 21st century students, educators, and researchers must continue to evolve in the U.S. (Ball & Tyson, 2011), particularly as globalization's impact on worldwide economic, social, political, and educational systems unfolds (Wang, Lin, Spalding, Odell, & Klecka, 2011). For instance, Apple (2011) observes that "immigration and population flows from one nation or area to another have tremendous impacts on what counts as official knowledge, what counts as responsive and effective education, and what counts as appropriate teaching" (p. 223). Adding tension to the complexity of this diversification process, efforts to standardize education in the U.S. are increasing as well. For instance, the National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education's (2010) Blue Ribbon Panel Report has called for a unified U.S. system of excellent teacher preparation programs. This growing tension between diversification and standardization is articulated by Grant and Gibson's (2011) analysis of how education policy has and has not supported the work of multicultural education. As an example, ESEA's once ground-breaking work is now seen as behind the times by many educators concluding that the No Child Left Behind policy does not address diversity and equity sufficiently (Grant & Gibson, 2011). Novel policies and approaches to educational practice and research are needed to support students and teachers in discovering new ways to problem solve and collaborate with others (Banks, 1999).

While policies and standards play a key role in offering stable guidance for societal development (Trueit, 2004), it is important to note policies and standards also have been blind at times to the diversity in the societies they are intended to support. If not committed to evolving with the needs of the present and emerging generations, policy-driven standardized curricula can fall to promoting "assimilationist" practices (Chapman, 2011, pp. 251), rather

than emphasizing diversity as a formative building block. In such circumstances, standards contribute to a stasis of progress by entrenching educational "discursive practices" in a "reproductive mode," and thus "reform (re-form) loses its meaning" (Trueit, 2004, p. 243). Raising further concerns about such practices, Darling-Hammond (2009) includes the following observation in her letter of advice to the Obama Administration in Education Week's published outline of the administration's plan for addressing education:

Most countries in the world that are high-achieving have assessments that ask students to

> think and problem-solve and investigate and conduct research. We're still having our kids bubble in multiple choice test items, which focus on recall and recognition rather than these higher order thinking skills. (p. 194)

Moreover, standards-driven assessments traditionally have not shown success in measuring "how collaborative, how compassionate, or how respectful students are" (Page, 2005, p. 28).

Reductionist approaches to education often overlook the imperative for educational progress to address institutional inequity (e.g., Darling-Hammond, 2009; Gay, 1997; Gorski, 2009). Such educational efforts must aim to cultivate a more complete understanding of our nation's history and cultural composition (Banks, 1999); advocate for the rights and responsibilities of all cultural groups (Nieto, 2001; Gorski, 2009); and help students, teachers, and researchers move beyond their silence and discomfort in discussing prejudice and its consequences (Nieto, 2001). Darling-Hammond (2009) offers further direction in stating that 21st century students must learn to "frame and solve their own problems, find and manage information, organize themselves in teams, and – with collaboration – to tackle novel issues" (p. 194). It is paramount to examine how standards might confine or silence a curriculum that "attempts to explain the world as it really exists; speaks to the diversity of our society and our students; and aims not only to teach important facts, but to develop citizens who can make the world safer and more just" (Bigelow, 2009, p. 54).

In addressing institutional blindness, Rancière found it may be necessary at times to "disrupt the social order" to help others see how education "as institutionalised practice, orders people into the more and the less valuable, the more and the less significant" (Pelletier, 2009, p. 267-268). This study seeks to understand participant voices that "disrupt the social order" and raise questions about standards and their use in education. While welcoming these voices, the author does not enter this process with a disdain for standards or recommend their abolishment. Rather, standards and their applications need continual re-assessment and revision, and novel means for approaching this assessment and revision process. Poetic

bricolage serves as such a means in this paper, as it welcomes disruption while searching for common ground to salvage.

An Aesthetic Lens for 21st Century Definitions of Progress

Re-conceptualizing Progress via Poetic Bricolage

Bricolage is described as "unembarrassed in its effort to rupture particular ways of functioning in the established disciplines of research" (Kincheloe, 2001, p. 687). A pursuit of bricolage holds potential to enable educators and researchers to understand and interpret progress in new ways. More specifically, *poetic* bricolage has the potential for re-conceptualizing the purposes and approaches of educational progress by engaging the bricoleur in a process of recollecting and re-presenting the past "*with variation*" (Trueit, 2004, p. 247). In Hellenistic "mytho-poetic societies," this re-presentation ("*mimesis*") served as cultural education for society. Via poetic acts involving spontaneous interaction between the poet, the audience, the chorus, and the muse, the poet led the audience in recollecting the past, and thereby standing in new "relation to the future" (Trueit, 2004, p. 247). Akin to multicultural education's aim to cultivate in teachers empathy and understanding for diverse groups as a higher order thinking skill (Banks, 2006), the mytho-poet was seen as a teacher. This educator led the audience to be "drawn out of oneself…and alternately plunged into wrenching tragedy" to feel another's "pain as one's own" to experience "*katharsis*, a moment of clarity, insight and connection" (Trueit, 2004, p. 247-248). In light of the need for 21st century educators to demonstrate understanding and empathy to effectively support diverse student populations (Pang, 2005), poetic bricolage offers new meanings and approaches for progress in 21st century practice and research.

Re-situating the Subject-Object Relationship

Engaging in poetic bricolage entails bridging an "(artificial) distance between the *subject*," in this case, the standard or educator, "and the *object*," in this case, the student (Trueit, 2004, p. 244). By re-imagining the subject-object relationship as one fluidly connected rather than perpetually "split" (Trueit, 2004, p. 243), an aesthetic lens re-situates relationships from a top-down dynamic, to a shifting top-down, horizontal, and bottom-up blend. In other words, students are at times led by, in horizontal dialogue with, or informing and re-shaping educator practices and the content of standards. This fluidity of relationship is critical as globalization burgeons rapidly. Educators and standards must be educated and re-educated continually about the diversity of the students in their classrooms. A similar need is present in the researcher-subject relationship. Thus, it is vital for relationships between students and standards, students and educators, subjects and research, and subjects and researchers to be re-situated in the work of poetic bricolage. Moreover, the meaning and practice of progress must

evolve from the re-production of "certain forms of thought and speech…politics…morality and ethics…and aesthetics" (Trueit, 2004, p. 243), to the integration of diverse backgrounds, perspectives, and abilities, and the re-imagination of what "counts" as valuable (Apple, 2011, p. 223).

Hearing Silenced Narratives

Re-situating the subject-object relationship supports the process of bricolage by strengthening educator and researcher ability to listen to the narratives of individuals and groups that have been silenced, particularly in a nation's march to progress (Tyack & Cuban, 1995). It is a high priority of adept bricoleurs to "explore the different perspectives of the socially privileged and the marginalized in relation to formations of race, class, gender, and sexuality" (Kincheloe, 2001, p. 687). In response to the mis-guided presumption that "tighter control" in education "will compel higher achievement without addressing underlying structural, institutional, and historical inequities" (Cochran-Smith & Fries, 2005, p. 46), the bricoleur examines how multiple factors impact achievement (Kincheloe, 2001), including teacher preparation and resource distribution across socioeconomic levels (Cochran-Smith & Fries, 2005). Such research calls for methods that engages in creative and critical dialogue across disciplines and contexts with the aim of listening for perspectives "silenced in traditional scholastic narratives" (Bigelow, 2009, p. 54).

Methodology

Purpose

Poetic bricolage research responds to domineering effects of standards by listening for and re-presenting participant voices in an aesthetic form. Thus, the often individualized work of education becomes a shared inquiry contributing to society's knowledge production process through insights gleaned from "aesthetic moments" that emerge across "disciplinary forms of knowing" (Pinar, 2004, p. 573). As educators and the researchers recognize the potential for imagination to lift the act of teaching and research from "the private and lowly space-time of labour for sustenance," educational acts create a "new relationship between *making* and *seeing* (Rancière, 2004, p. 44). This paper attends to a loss of this creativity when the educative process is confined to a set of standards. More specifically, this aesthetic inquiry recollects and re-presents "*with variation*" (Trueit, 2004, p. 247) educator perspectives on standardized educational practices found at the P-12 and teacher preparation levels.

Study Context and Participants

The findings in this paper are part of a larger qualitative case study (Yin, 2009) examining how a faculty infused ME across a teacher preparation program in secondary education to prepare TCs to teach diverse student populations, and how the TCs responded to this

preparation. This program was selected as the research site through a purposive selection process (Maxwell, 2005) as an NCATE-accredited program set in a diverse context where preparing TCs to teach diverse populations is a recognized need. Moreover, the program has been described as exemplary in preparing TCs to teach diverse student populations due to its focus on ME program infusion (Anonymous, Year)[1] and its offering professional development for faculty interested in ME program infusion (Anonymous, Year)[2].

While the larger study involved 10 faculty and 250 student participants, this paper focuses on one cohort of 20 TCs, the majority of whom were white, middle-class females in their 20's, who enrolled in a one-unit online Foundations of Education course taught by one white, middle-class faculty member[3]. The primary mode of learning in this course involved TC discussion through written reflection on seven key topics: reflective teaching, the history and purpose of education in the U.S., connections between student background and the curriculum, education and the arts, teacher unions, and assessment practices. This course was selected as the focus of this paper due to the increased and consistent depth of reflection TCs exhibited, even beyond that of most other observed program courses. While it is not clear exactly why this course produced such reflective thoughtfulness and transparency, perhaps the online aspect of the course allowed TCs greater time and convenience to construct thoughtful responses, while also creating a sense of distance and comfort so that TCs might share more transparently.

Data Collection, Analysis, and Presentation

The larger study was approached with a constructivist paradigmatic lens and employed naturalistic qualitative research methods to construct context-specific findings (Guba & Lincoln, 2005). Rich, thick description (Geertz, 1973; Merriam, 2001) via observation was used to create an inductive interpretation of the data gathered. Seven of nine required teacher preparation courses were observed throughout the two semester program. Total observation time amounted to about 130 hours. Interviews were conducted mid-study with nine faculty participants, seven TC participants, and four undergraduate students in an introductory multicultural education course, with the aim to inquire into previous observations and inform future observations. Relevant program documents, course syllabi and assignments, and corresponding student work were examined. Courses and instructors were selected via

---

[1] This citation mentions the research site's name and is not given to protect anonymity and confidentiality.
[2] This citation mentions the research site's name and is not given to protect anonymity and confidentiality.
[3] The gender of the faculty member is not given to maintain anonymity and confidentiality.

convenience sampling (Maxwell, 2005) based on program requirements and the program director's recommendations for faculty who may be available and interested in the study. TC participants were selected based on enrollment in the courses observed and a purposive selection process that involved heterogeneous sampling (Maxwell, 2005) across subject matter taught, gender, and ethnic background.

The larger study involved ongoing (Merriam, 2001; Strauss & Corbin, 1998) data collection, editing, and analysis, as well as ongoing memo-writing, code application, and reflection on emerging findings. Open and theoretical codes were applied at the end of both the first and second semesters with the support of ATLAS.ti 5.5 (1993-2009). The theoretical codes were based on Cochran-Smith, Davis, and Fries' (2004) framework, *Understanding the Multiple Meanings of Multicultural Teacher Education*, Gay's (1997) framework, *A Dual Approach to Multicultural Infusion in Teacher Education,* and Melnick and Zeichner's (1998) analysis of preparing teachers for cultural diversity. Data were assigned to thematic categories via a process of constant comparative analysis (Glaser & Strauss, 1967), followed by the identification of conceptual connections and variations across contexts or conditions (Strauss & Corbin, 1998), as well as evidence that might "illustrate, support, or challenge theoretical assumptions held prior to the data gathering" (Merriam, 2001, p, 38). Experiences in the program and with participants ultimately held greater influence over the findings that emerged than the initial codes, an objective supported by recording memos throughout data analysis to create analytical distance between the researcher and the data (Strauss & Corbin, 1998).

Additional data analysis for this paper was approached in a significantly different manner. This paper employed bricolage (Denzin & Lincoln, 2003; Kincheloe, 2001), specifically poetic bricolage (Trueit, 2004) as aesthetic inquiry (Pinar, 2004) by re-presenting data through the "mimesis" (Trueit, 2004, p. 247) of poetic language and visuals. This approach enriched and expanded the researcher's understanding and interpretation of the voices and perspectives of the participants. As the complexity of this work cannot be contained by a "step-by-step set of research procedures," the "validity" of poetic bricolage is not found in simply checking off "the researcher's fidelity to procedure" (Kincheloe, 2001, p. 689). Rather, poetic bricolage was employed to "rework the frame" between the data and researcher interpretations to connect more effectively with the emotive significance of participant experiences and reflections. At the same time, this work acknowledges there is "no straight way toward an 'other side' of the words and the images" (Rancière, 2008 p. 14).

The bricoleur researcher is always left wrestling with one's own incomplete interpretations of others. Recognizing this, poetic bricolage does not extract the researcher "from a position in the social order" to a position above his/her participants viewed as objects who "cannot know" (Pelletier, 2009, p. 268). Rather, this work views findings as drafted "maps of the visible,

trajectories between the visible and the sayable" (Rancière, 2004, p. 39) that are then re-considered as the researcher aims to "embrace the poetics of academic discourse and how they performatively constitute the world" (Pelletier, 2009, p. 280). In the end, the final product of the bricoleur, as in the case of this poetic and visual interpretation of the findings, is "a complex, quilt-like bricolage, a reflexive collage or montage – a set of fluid, interconnected images and representations" (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000, p. 9).

While other more "reductionist" approaches to research might view the nuances, ambiguities, and dynamics of bricolage as "irrelevant," the bricoleur "struggles to find new ways of seeing and interpreting that avoid this curse [of reductionism] and that produce thick, complex, and rigorous forms of knowledge (Kincheloe, 2001, p. 689). Thus, listening genuinely and re-presenting voice aesthetically via bricolage necessitates bridging, while *accepting and respecting*, the distance of difference between ourselves and our students or research participants. Only then might difference serve as an aesthetic, interactive, educative experience for a larger community. The use of visuals in this paper enhances this objective of bricolage to listen for and re-present what is heard and not heard, as imagery often can support communicating the inaudible.

Regarding data presentation, the findings in this paper are presented in descriptive prose, poetic verse, and visual imagery. Each word in the poem is drawn directly from the written words of participants in the course examined. The poem and visuals, (intended to be read from left to right across three top-down columns on every ½ sheet of paper) includes four thematic sections that parallel the four thematic sections described in the prose as well. The first section discusses the instructor's views and approach to education, and the second section presents TC reflections on the benefits and limitations of a standards-driven education. Section three presents TC movement toward viewing diversity as a resource, as TCs reflect on forces beyond the classroom impacting their students, strategies employed for connecting curricula to student backgrounds, and steps taken in growing beyond their own fears of difference. Finally, section four discusses the aesthetic approach to data analysis taken in the poem. The imagery parallels the poetic verse, enhancing researcher insights gleaned from the data and reader understanding of those insights.

Findings: Descriptive Prose

The Course Instructor's Stance

The course instructor of the Foundations of Education course described teaching as "a political…moral act based on an ethic of care" (instructor intv). Yet, the instructor often felt alone in taking this approach, as she observed that across program courses, TCs were not reflecting in enough depth and with enough specificity on how race, ethnicity, and gender

impact the teaching and learning process. In contrast, she encouraged TCs to recognize the rich cultural knowledge and traditions that students bring to the classroom, and to observe the societal power structures that do not allow all students to receive a quality education. In addition, the instructor noted concern that an increase in government regulation in education was leading to a decrease in critical, in-depth thinking, as it was becoming more important to "be able to point out the main idea of a sentence…in a multiple choice test than it is to actually write a good paragraph about something that's worth writing about" (instructor intv). The instructor found the increasing specificity of state standards was leading teachers toward a banking mode rather than an inquiry mode of teaching that might nurture critical thought. She advocated for revising the standards to allow teachers "more autonomy and more time to dig more deeply into ideas" and recognize "teachable moment[s]" when students are thinking "critically about something they are interested in" (course online discussion).

The instructor lamented that her social reconstructionist view that "schools can transform society" (instructor intv) had been silenced by other program requirements, including the required preparation of TCs to complete a recently mandated standardized teaching assessment. This loss was disappointing to the instructor as she found the purpose of schooling had served as an anchor for other concepts taught in the program. The instructor described feeling "pushed in a corner to approach this teaching thing not from where I would be approaching it," and found this "ironic because this is what K-12 is going through with standardized testing" (instructor intv). The instructor created many opportunities for TCs to share their beliefs and demonstrate their dispositional stances in the course, though she also acknowledged that "the whole teaching profession is trying to figure out how to actually determine how to measure [TC] dispositions" (instructor interview).

TC Reflections on Standards and Diversity

Considering the Role of Standards in Education. *Standards-driven K-12 education.* In discussing the purpose of education, a number of TCs expressed the importance of supporting students in becoming well-rounded, critical thinkers, while observing that the current trend toward standardized testing did not support this goal. For instance, a music TC shared his feeling that the purpose of education had been lost in this trend, while an English language arts TC noted, "the focus on standardized testing has resulted in conditioning students not to think. They expect the teacher to tell them exactly how to get to the answer and then what that answer is" (course online discussion). Two math TCs shared concerns that their students focus too much on the "right" answer, rather than on how answers are found, and that standardized curricula and assessments leave "less time and fewer opportunities for students to explore what they're interested in and to ask questions about what makes them curious" (course online discussion). A history TC added that such assessments evaluate "how good are your students at taking tests, not how much they have learned" (course online discussion).

In response to the noted concern that teachers feel pressured to have their students perform well on standardized tests, and "tell kids how to answer the tests without teaching students how to think about the questions" (course online discussion), the discussion moved toward alternatives to standardized curricula and assessments. The instructor suggested using inquiry-based learning to solve real-world problems, such as cross-disciplinary questions requiring students to document critical thinking in ways standardized tests do not. Despite this positive turn in the discussion, a history TC expressed dismay that the political weight of standardized testing would ultimately determine the direction of school curricula. A history TC commented that the practice of tracking inhibited inquiry-based learning across the curriculum, as "labeling students as either low or high…does not allow room for a student to transform" (course online discussion). Many TCs observed that a track does exist, "whether it's subconscious or conscious, for 'the laboring and the learned'" (course online discussion), while other TCs expressed a contrasting belief in the American Dream, that "any child from any socioeconomic status can attend school and has the opportunity to rise above their social standing" (course online discussion). Yet, most TCs noted the inequality that many students experience, and how standards can exacerbate this inequality.

Standards-driven teacher preparation. TCs discussed the degree to which they felt the required standardized teaching assessment enhanced their learning and preparation to become teachers. A Spanish language TC found completing the assessment helped him become an "efficient/rational teacher," though a number of TCs expressed focusing more on the "right answer" than on the process of completing the assessment (course online discussion). An English language arts TC related to her students who shut down in critical thinking when they ask for the correct way to interpret a poem, rather than developing their own interpretations. The instructor similarly observed that the TCs seemed "more concerned with what is the right answer," and then added, "that is the fault of the system" (course online discussion). Likewise, a Spanish language TC asserted the assessment was not the "best filter" for ensuring the teaching force is filled with quality teachers (TC intv), while a music TC described the unnecessary stress of the assessment as a "hoop" rather than a support for teacher learning (TC intv). Finally, other TCs questioned if it is effective to strive for a common standard in teaching, as "good teachers come in all different shapes and sizes" (course online discussion).

Learning to Approach Difference as a Resource

Discussing forces beyond the classroom. As TCs discussed the impact of outside forces on the teaching and learning process, they demonstrated growth in seeing their student backgrounds as sources of learning in the classroom. TCs reflected on the gravity of life experiences that their students brought with them to the classroom, including "death, abuse, divorce, money, or drugs," even religious persecution, as in the case of one TC's student who "was thrown into a
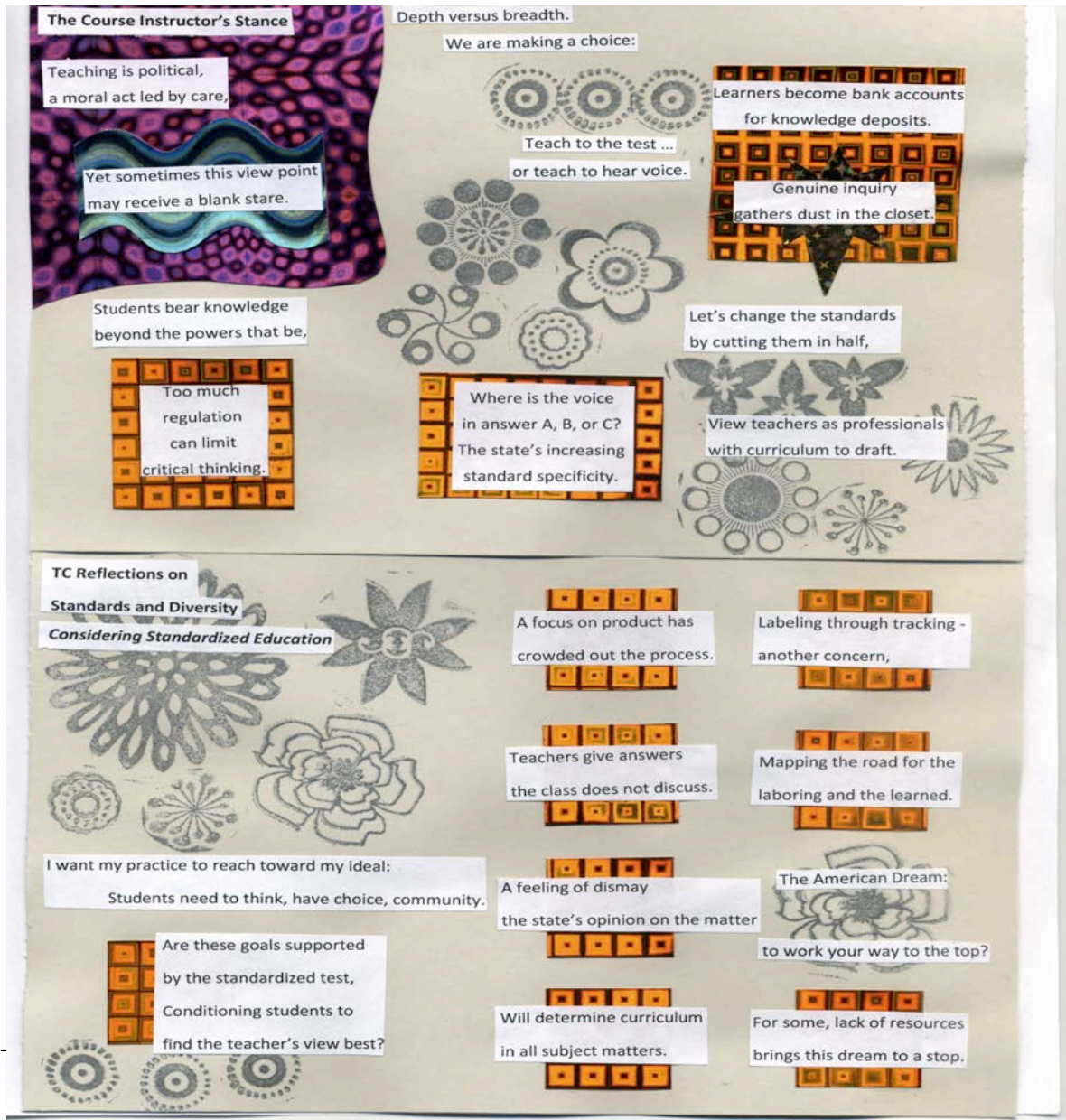
frozen lake and nearly drowned" and "forced to watch his sister be buried in snow, nearly freezing to death" (course online discussion). In their reflections, TCs recognized the need to "understand important societal factors to students' behavior and academic achievement," as socioeconomic background is strongly correlated to academic achievement (course online discussion). The instructor affirmed this observation by further noting the achievement gap is evidence that "we are still dealing with educational inequality around race and ethnicity" and need to address outside obstacles to learning, particularly for those who "come to school…hungry" or tired from being "up all night taking care of a sick brother or sister, or taking the mother who does not speak English to the emergency room" (instructor intv). TCs resonated with the instructor's acknowledgement that schools cannot solve all problems for all students, and that more professions need respond to inequality.

Drawing upon student backgrounds. Reflecting on the tough experiences some of their students had endured, TCs realized they could not change their students' lives, but could make curricula relevant by connecting course content to students' backgrounds and interests (course online discussion). TCs shared about learning to connect curricula to students' daily lives and allow students "to have a voice as well as to teach us, the teachers, something" (course online discussion), particularly students labeled at-risk, low-achieving, or disadvantaged. Applying this belief to practice, a math TC asked students to solve math problems based on their families' monthly bills and the interest rate for their dream cars. A Spanish language TC intentionally did not assign homework requiring the Internet so that students without Internet access would not be unfairly penalized (TC intv). Finally, an English language arts TC encouraged demonstrating understanding in a variety of ways, enabling one student intimidated by written assessments to perform well for a speech.

Pressing forward beyond fears. In many cases, TCs expressed fear and evidenced resistance to learning about and building supportive relationships with their students. For instance, a history TC questioned how he could expect his students to be interested in school when they are facing issues of life and death outside of school. A math TC expressed fear for her life after hearing about a number of school fights. She questioned if she might be "ill-equipped to build strong relationships" with her students, as she had not experienced "anything remotely similar to what those students have (death, poverty, sadness, being looked down upon by teachers and other students, etc.)" (course online discussion). Furthermore, a music TC described her aim to disregard student background, as she feared differences across cultures would be an obstacle to building caring classroom relationships. Despite these fears and concerns, TCs demonstrated pressing beyond them to support their students. For instance, the TC who feared for her life continued integrating student interests into the curriculum and building relationships with her students, including reaching out to a depressed student who had attempted to cut her wrists in class. The TC who initially aimed to ignore student
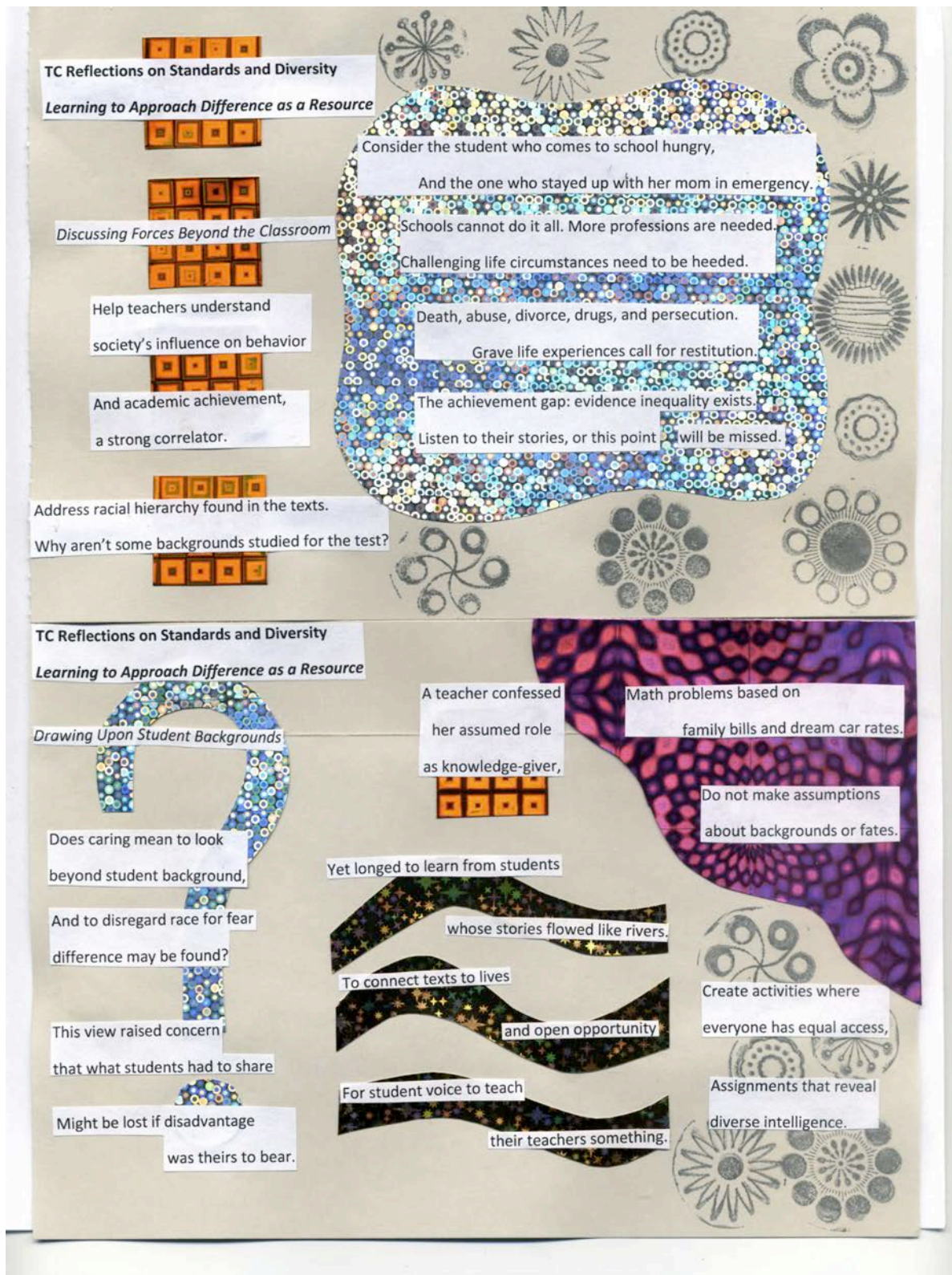
background later reflected on learning about the different life experiences of her students and integrating them into her curricula. In yet another case, after a student shared with a math TC that her father had been killed, the TC chose to share her own life experience of losing a parent when she was young to allow the student "to know that I am human and have had to face these feelings" (TC intv)

Findings: Poetic Bricolage[4,5]

The Course Instructor's Stance

Teaching is political,
a moral act led by care,

Yet sometimes this view point may receive a blank stare.

Students bear knowledge beyond the powers that be,

Too much regulation can limit critical thinking.

Depth versus breadth.
We are making a choice:

Teach to the test ...
or teach to hear voice.

Where is the voice in answer A, B, or C? The state's increasing standard specificity.

Learners become bank accounts for knowledge deposits.

Genuine inquiry gathers dust in the closet.

Let's change the standards by cutting them in half,

View teachers as professionals with curriculum to draft.

TC Reflections on Standards and Diversity
Considering Standardized Education

I want my practice to reach toward my ideal:
Students need to think, have choice, community.

Are these goals supported by the standardized test, Conditioning students to find the teacher's view best?

A focus on product has crowded out the process.

Teachers give answers the class does not discuss.

A feeling of dismay the state's opinion on the matter

Will determine curriculum in all subject matters.

Labeling through tracking - another concern,

Mapping the road for the laboring and the learned.

The American Dream: to work your way to the top?

For some, lack of resources brings this dream to a stop.
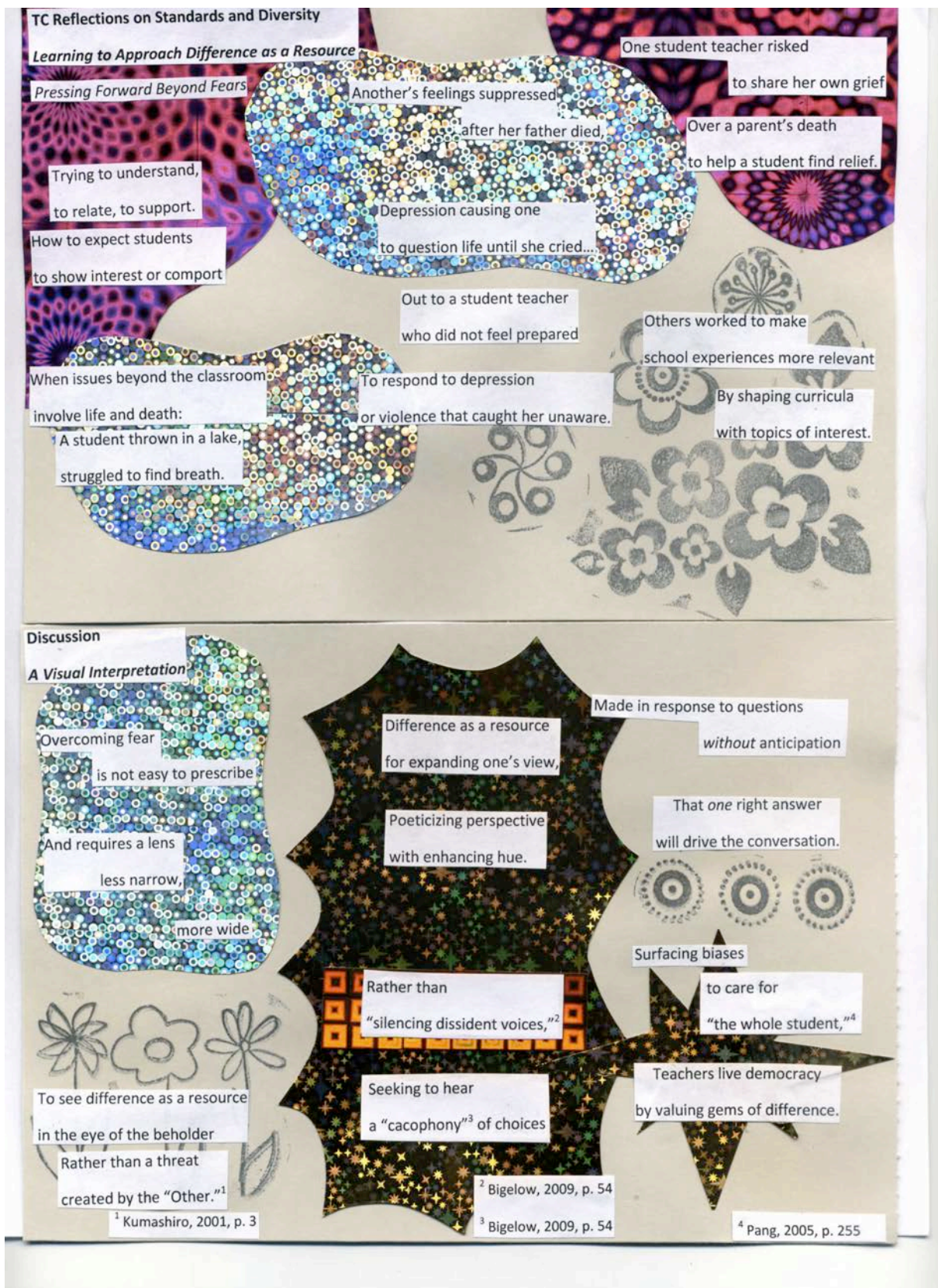
[4] Kincheloe, 2001; Trueit, 2004
[5] The poem is to be read left to right, across three top-down columns of text displayed on each ½ sheet of paper. It is suggested to read the poem first to glean the text's meaning, and then again to ascertain the imagery's meaning.

TC Reflections on Standards and Diversity

Learning to Approach Difference as a Resource

Consider the student who comes to school hungry,

And the one who stayed up with her mom in emergency.

Schools cannot do it all. More professions are needed.

Challenging life circumstances need to be heeded.

Discussing Forces Beyond the Classroom

Help teachers understand

society's influence on behavior

Death, abuse, divorce, drugs, and persecution.

Grave life experiences call for restitution.

And academic achievement,

a strong correlator.

The achievement gap: evidence inequality exists.

Listen to their stories, or this point will be missed.

Address racial hierarchy found in the texts.

Why aren't some backgrounds studied for the test?

TC Reflections on Standards and Diversity

Learning to Approach Difference as a Resource

A teacher confessed

her assumed role

as knowledge-giver,

Math problems based on

family bills and dream car rates.

Drawing Upon Student Backgrounds

Do not make assumptions

about backgrounds or fates.

Does caring mean to look

beyond student background,

Yet longed to learn from students

And to disregard race for fear

difference may be found?

whose stories flowed like rivers.

To connect texts to lives

Create activities where

This view raised concern

that what students had to share

and open opportunity

everyone has equal access,

For student voice to teach

Assignments that reveal

Might be lost if disadvantage

was theirs to bear.

their teachers something.

diverse intelligence.

TC Reflections on Standards and Diversity

Learning to Approach Difference as a Resource

Pressing Forward Beyond Fears

Trying to understand,
to relate, to support.
How to expect students
to show interest or comport

When issues beyond the classroom
involve life and death:
A student thrown in a lake,
struggled to find breath.

Another's feelings suppressed
after her father died,
Depression causing one
to question life until she cried...

Out to a student teacher
who did not feel prepared
To respond to depression
or violence that caught her unaware.

One student teacher risked
to share her own grief
Over a parent's death
to help a student find relief.

Others worked to make
school experiences more relevant
By shaping curricula
with topics of interest.

Discussion

A Visual Interpretation

Overcoming fear
is not easy to prescribe
And requires a lens
less narrow,
more wide

Difference as a resource
for expanding one's view,
Poeticizing perspective
with enhancing hue.

Made in response to questions
without anticipation

That *one* right answer
will drive the conversation.

Surfacing biases
to care for
"the whole student,"[4]

Teachers live democracy
by valuing gems of difference.

Rather than
"silencing dissident voices,"[2]

Seeking to hear
a "cacophony"[3] of choices

To see difference as a resource
in the eye of the beholder
Rather than a threat
created by the "Other."[1]

[1] Kumashiro, 2001, p. 3

[2] Bigelow, 2009, p. 54

[3] Bigelow, 2009, p. 54

[4] Pang, 2005, p. 255

Discussion

This aesthetic inquiry has aimed to creatively re-present teacher voice as a means for understanding educator perspectives on a deeper level and the implications they hold for the teaching profession. The pursuit of such aesthetic approaches to research have the potential for re-shaping national notions of progress to emphasize the cultivation of creativity, understanding, and empathy across lines of difference. This pursuit also encourages greater collaboration across 21st century global communities to address issues of institutional inequity.

Bricolage: Insight via Re-presentation with Variation

As a researcher, I was able to glean a more nuanced and empathetic understanding of the participants' experiences by re-presenting their words as both poeticized text and visual images. In this way, this work practices the kind of bricolage described by Kincheloe (2001), that which "does not simply *tolerate* difference, but *cultivates* it as a spark to researcher creativity" (p. 687). The sincerity and commitment with which the participants worked to understand their students and adjust as teachers (including the course instructor) served to spark this creative work, thus demonstrating that the cauldron of difference offers the "synergy" (Kincheloe, 2001, p. 686) for bricolage to achieve moments of insight. This synergy emerged in differences encountered between TCs and their students, across participants' encounters with students, and researcher explorations of a method that might enhance understanding and empathy for study participants.

Insight gleaned from cultural difference was found primarily in the context of TC relationships with their students, whose ethnic, linguistic, and socioeconomic backgrounds often differed from those of the TCs. As TCs learned to engage with and to *see* their students in new ways, TC reflection contributed to Rancière's (2005) "aesthetic revolution" by which the teacher as worker, "who has no time to do anything but his own work" (p. 14), is able to "reframe the space-time of their 'occupation'" (Rancière, 2005, p. 14). In this case, TCs reframed their work beyond daily teaching tasks by creating space to reflect upon and empathize with their students. The researcher's use of poetry and visuals to interpret participant reflections allowed engaging in bricolage across the disciplinary boundaries (Kincheloe, 2001) of research and teaching. Such border-crossing is key to making progress in "rigorous and innovative research," if "the cutting edge of research lives at the intersection of disciplinary boundaries" (Kincheloe, 2001, p. 690).

In regards to the poem's visuals, each image holds an intended meaning. To describe in detail, the blue waves express movement induced by questions raised by participants. The orange boxes show confinement, denoting suppression of voice and exploration of the initial

questions. The playful and expressive nature of the purple collage of diamonds brings relief from this state of confinement. The blinding haze of silver circles, set next to the playful diamonds, emote a state of confusion that may be experienced in the midst of new experiences and perspectives. The gold stars, offering a softer, less blinding light, (and serving as a kind of transformed haze of silver circles), present moments of clarity reached upon engaging in critical, empathetic inquiry. This process *may* begin with a pressing question that moves the inquirer to an exploration that meets a point of realized confusion, and then ideally leads to some kind of insight (though this insight may differ from that which the inquirer initially sought). However, the use of visuals does not follow a linear path in the poem. Rather, the use of collage acknowledges that this growth process typically is not linear, but a blend of these different described stages. Finally, the stamps communicate further the message of these visuals, specifically noting the freedom of expression encountered in diversity, as well as the confinement that may be experienced in homogenization.

Beyond the Standard: New Notions of Progress

The findings gleaned from this bricolage-oriented empirical work demonstrated the participants wrestling with their construction of a new meaning of progress that looked beyond definitions set by standards and policy makers, and that was contextualized by the lives and the learning of the students they were coming to know in their classrooms. The course instructor and TCs both articulated key dilemmas raised through the use of standards-driven curricula and assessments, specifically that this use emphasizes the "right answer" over critical thought and conflicts with the notion that "good teachers," and good students, "come in all different shapes and sizes" (course online discussion). Participant reflections express the notion that the dominance of standards in curricula and assessments conflicts with multicultural education's objective to hear voices that have been silenced by traditional, standards-based curricula and instruction (Bigelow, 2009; Chapman, 2011).

Through their words, participants worked to take hold of a professional freedom to construct meaningful lessons that engage students in critical thought, rather than becoming puppets for standards that prescribe right answers and thereby diminish education to a set of facts (Bigelow, 2009). TCs questioned the effectiveness of standards-based teaching assessments as "filters" identifying quality teachers (TC intv). TC resistance toward the assessment reflected Martone and Sireci's (2009) assertion that disconnects emerge among standards, standardized assessments, and instruction if educators are not included in developing curricular objectives, but are constrained by prescribed standards that conflict with their professional approaches.

Progress as Learning from Difference

In addressing their questions on the use of standards in education, TCs crafted new notions of progress, contributing to the "aesthetic revolution" of educators by reframing the "space-time of their 'occupation'" (Rancière, 2005, p. 14). Specifically, TCs were discovering the need in their classrooms to reflect on and "understand important societal factors to students' behavior and academic achievement" (course online discussion). Likewise, the course instructor asserted the need for multiple professions to address outside obstacles to learning, as schools cannot solve all problems for all students (instructor intv). Participants expressed their desire to step beyond their fears of difference, and emoted compassion for tough life circumstances faced by their students. Such understanding and empathy reflect a higher order thinking skill (Banks, 2006) vital to teacher preparation, particularly as 21st century classrooms become richer and more complex in their diversity, requiring teachers to refine a practice of caring across difference (Pang, 2005). This refinement calls for achieving a balance in both bridging and respecting a distance of difference (Rancière, 2008; Trueit, 2004) while learning from one's students, as all students "have a voice…to teach us, the teachers, something" (course online discussion).

Learning to draw upon difference as an educator involves more than releasing fear of difference, but also embracing an attitude of discovery and moving toward a greater investment in the "Other" (Kumashiro, 2001, p. 3). TCs demonstrated this movement by building personal relationships with students, reflecting on student backgrounds and learning needs, connecting curricula to the real lives of their students, and employing alternative methods of assessment to support diverse student strengths. TCs recognized the rich backgrounds students brought with them, and thereby realized the myth that teachers hold the key to knowledge. TCs collaborated with students to build classroom communities where teachers and students practice "reciprocal relationships of respect and compassion" (Pang, 2005, p. 255). These findings illustrate TCs engaging in the processes of deepening their "ethical commitments to themselves and their students" by moving beyond fear and capitalizing on difference as a resource, thereby empowering a wider body of students (Pang, 2005, p. 255).

Conclusions and Implications

This paper recognizes the important role that standards play in the development of a nation, including in institutions of K-12 and teacher education. At the same time, this paper finds many standards as inadequate to prepare a nation's students and teachers for the complexity of their work in the 21st century (Ball & Tyson, 2011; Darling-Hammond, 2007). New meanings and understandings of progress are needed for education to help students and teachers develop standards that cultivate understanding and empathy across lines of difference, rather than

causing some groups to be alienated from the benefits of progress (Tyack & Cuban, 1995). Educational institutions in the U.S. must work to move beyond prescribing 'right' answers that eclipse critical and aesthetic approaches to education, and that muffle non-dominant voices and perspectives (Bigelow, 2009). 21st century standards and curricula must re-imagine their role and content, and evolve to "evaluate how people can think and problem-solve and invent and create and use knowledge in new ways and continue to learn independently" (Darling-Hammond, 2009, p. 194).

The intent of this paper is not to dismiss standards as a critical component of our education system. Rather, this study asserts that greater integration of aesthetic inquiry in education and education research, particularly the work of bricolage in all of its various artistic expressions, has much potential for responding to the limitations and unintended pitfalls of standards, and for guarding the teaching and learning process from being reduced to a set of standard questions and answers that may fail to nurture the creative elements of understanding and empathy. Such aesthetic inquiry (Pinar, 2004) entails an attitude of discovery, rather than fear, when encountering difference, calling the educator and researcher to merge the mundane of work with the anticipation of artistic ingenuity. "A new relationship between *making* and *seeing*" (Rancière, 2004, p. 44) emerges in re-discovering difference as an educative gem that expands one's perspective, rather than as a point of either intimidation or insignificance. Such inquiry should identify aspects of education and research that tend to alienate the "Other" (Kumashiro, 2001, p. 3), and then seek to "empower" rather than "isolate" (Pinar, 2004, p. 575)

This work speaks to policy makers by suggesting that more significant input from education practitioners and researchers would lead to the creation of standards and standards-based curricula and assessments that are more meaningful and effective for students, teachers, and teacher educators. Moreover, policy-supported standards must make room for and invite a wider expression of teacher practice and student learning. If a "system is built to accommodate teachers who follow directions, then that is the sort of teacher the profession will attract and retain" (Smagorinsky, 2009, p. 526). Investing greater trust in teachers as professionals *will* lead to greater variety across classroom curricula and instruction. These distinctions are welcomed, as student backgrounds and classroom contexts also vary significantly (Smagorinsky, 2009), and as no single assessment is appropriate for all learners (Pang, 2005).

As the trend toward standards-driven reform across levels of education is projected to continue (National Research Council, 2010), teachers must be prepared to do more than depend on standards-based templates (Smagorinsky, 2009) to teach students "to bubble-in the truth with a number two pencil" (Bigelow, 2009, p. 61). Rather, educators must be supported

to exercise professional judgment via a reflective practice involving "careful and systematic observations" (Smagorinsky, 2009, p. 526), and to engage students with "critical questions, complexity" and "multiple perspectives" in developing the "social imagination" (Bigelow, 2009, p. 61). Finally, such teacher preparation must cultivate a value for diversity, recognition of the impact of societal inequity on the teaching and learning process, and responsibility for the diverse students in one's own classroom (Melnick & Zeichner, 1998).

References

Apple, M. W. (2011). Global crises, social justice, and teacher education. *Journal of Teacher Education, 62*(2), 222-234.

ATLAS.ti Scientific Software Development GmbH. (1993-2009). ATLAS.ti (Version 5.5) [Computer software]. Retrieved January 30, 2008 and updated in 2009 from http://www.atlasti.com/

Ball, A. F., & Tyson, C. A. (2011). Preparing teachers for diversity in the twenty-first century. In A.F. Ball & C.A. Tyson (Eds.), *Studying diversity in teacher education* (pp. 399-416). Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers.

Banks, J. A. (1999). *An Introduction to Multicultural Education*. Needham Heights, MA: Allyn & Bacon.

Banks, J. A. (2006). *Cultural diversity and education: Foundations, curriculum, and teaching,* (5th ed.). Boston: Pearson Allyn and Bacon.

Bigelow, B. (2009). Standards and tests attack multiculturalism. In W. Au (Ed.), *Rethinking multicultural education* (1st ed.) (pp. 53-61). Milwaukee: Rethinking Schools, Ltd..

Chapman, T. K. (2011). A critical race theory analysis of past and present institutional processes and policies in teacher education. In A.F. Ball & C.A. Tyson (Eds.), *Studying diversity in teacher education* (pp. 237-256). Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers.

Cochran-Smith, M., & Fries, K. (2005). The AERA panel on research and teacher education: Context and goals. In M. Cochran-Smith & K.M. Zeichner (Eds.), *Studying teacher education* (pp. 37-68). Washington D.C.: American Educational Research Association.

Cochran-Smith, M., Davis, D., & Fries, K. (2004). Multicultural teacher education: Research, practice, and policy. In J. A. Banks & C. A. M. Banks (Eds.), *Handbook of research on multicultural education* (2nd ed.) (pp. 931-978). San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

Darling-Hammond, L. (2007). The flat earth and education: How America's commitment to equity will determine our future. *Educational Researcher*, *36*(6), 318-334.

Darling-Hammond, L. (2009). Advice for the president. In Education Week's (ed.) *The Obama education plan: An Education Week guide* (pp. 194-195). San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

Denzin, N. K., & Lincoln, Y. S. (2003). Introduction: The discipline and practice of qualitative research. In N. K. Denzin & Y. S. Lincoln (Eds.), Strategies of qualitative inquiry (2nd ed.) (pp. 1-45). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Gay, G. (1997).Multicultural infusion in teacher education: Foundations and applications. *Peabody Journal of Education*, *72*(1), 150-177.

Geertz, C. (1973). *The interpretation of cultures: Selected essays*. New York: Basic Books.

Glaser, B. G., & Strauss, A. L. (1967). *The discovery of grounded theory: Strategies for qualitative research*. New York: Aldine.

Gorski, P. C. (2009). What we're teaching teachers: an analysis of multicultural teacher education coursework syllabi. *Teaching and Teacher Education, 25*, 309-318.

Grant, C., & Gibson, M. (2011). Diversity and teacher education: A historical perspective on research and policy. In A. F. Ball & C. A. Tyson (Eds.), *Studying diversity in teacher education* (pp. 19-62). Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc.

Guba, E. G., & Lincoln, Y. S. (2005). Paradigmatic controversies, contradictions, and emerging confluences. In N. K. Denzin & Y. S. Lincoln (Eds.), *The Sage handbook of qualitative research* (3rd ed.) (pp. 191-215). Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications Inc..

Kincheloe, J. L. (2001). Describing the bricolage: Conceptualizing a new rigor in qualitative research. *Qualitative Inquiry, 7*(6), 679-692.

Kumashiro, K. (2001). "Posts" perspectives on anti-oppressive education in social studies, English, mathematics, and science classrooms. *Education Researcher, 30*(3), 3-12.

Martone, A., & Sireci, S. G. (2009). Evaluating alignment between curriculum, assessment, and instruction. *Review of Educational Research, 79*(4), 1332-1361.

Maxwell, J. A. (2005). *Qualitative research design: An interactive approach* (2nd ed.). Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications Inc..

Melnick , S. L., & Zeichner, K. M. (1998).Teacher education's responsibility to address diversity issues: Enhancing institutional capacity. *Theory into Practice*, *37*(2), 88-95.

Merriam, S. (2001). *Qualitative research and case study applications in education*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass Inc..

National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education. (2010). *Transforming teacher education through clinical practice: A national strategy to prepare effective teachers*. Retrieved from http://www.ncate.org/LinkClick.aspx?fileticket=zzeiB1OoqPk%3d&tabid=715

National Research Council. (2010). *Preparing teachers: Building evidence for sound policy*. Committee on the Study of Teacher Preparation Programs in the United States, Center for Education. Division of Behavioral and Social Sciences and Education. Washington, DC: National Academies Press.

Nieto, S. (2001). *Language, culture, and teaching: Critical perspectives for a new century*. Philadelphia, PA: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates Inc..

Pang, V. O. (2005). *Multicultural education: A caring-centered reflective approach*. (2nd ed.). New York: The McGraw-Hills Companies, Inc..

Pelletier, C. (2009). Rancière and the poetics of the social sciences. *International Journal of Research & Method in Education, 32*(3), 267-284.

Pinar, W. F. (2004). *Understanding curriculum*. New York: Peter Lang Publishing.

Rancière, J. (2004). *The politics of aesthetics*. (G. Rockhill, Trans.). Bodmin, Cornwall: MG Books, Ltd. (Original work published 2000).

Rancière, J. (2005). From politics to aesthetics. *Paragraph, 28*(1), 13-25.

Rancière, J. (2008). Aesthetic separation, aesthetic community: Scenes from the aesthetic regimes of art. *Art and Research: A Journal of Ideas, Contexts, and Methods, 2*(1), 1 15.

Smagorinsky, P. (2009). The cultural practice of reading and the standardized assessment of reading instruction: When incommensurate worlds collide. *Educational Researcher, 38*(7), 522-527.

Strauss, A., & Corbin, J. (1998). *Basics of qualitative research: Techniques and procedures for developing grounded theory*. Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications Inc.

Trueit, D. (2004). A pragmatist approach to inquiry: Recuperation of the poetic. *2004 Complexity Science and Educational Research Conference* (pp. 241-252). Chaffey's Locks, Canada.

Tyack, D., & Cuban, L. (1995). *Tinkering toward utopia*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

Wang, J., Lin, E., Spalding, E., Odell, S. J., & Klecka, C. L. (2011). Understanding teacher education in an era of globalization. *Journal of Teacher Education, 62*(2), 115-120.

Yin, R.K. (2009). *Case study research design and methods* (4th ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage
    Publications.

About the Author

Laura B. Liu is an adjunct faculty member at the University of San Diego where she instructs
a teacher preparation course on the Philosophical and Multicultural Foundations of Education,
and is a doctoral graduate in curriculum and instruction from The George Washington
University's Graduate School of Education and Human Development. Her current research
interests include multicultural teacher preparation in the U.S. and international contexts,
teacher preparation policy, standards-based teaching assessments, and arts-based education
research.

International Journal of Education & the Arts