LITERACY IS A CIVIL WRITE:
TEACHING TOOLS FOR SOCIAL RESISTANCE
WITHIN AND BEYOND THE WALLS OF SCHOOLS

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EL LEADERSHIP CONFERENCE
Right now my Hmong people help each other. Don’t go against each other Hmong, Hmong will have to learn to love and care for each other. If we don’t love each other then who will love us?

Don’t go and become a gang member let all that go. All those who are in gangs you guys always bring bad news to our people and our name so please stop all this nonsense and help each other.
• Ethnic Studies

Multicultural Education

• Critical Literacies

Cultural Relevancy

• Community Agency and Action

Neighborhood Knowledges
WHAT DOES SAYS DO?

SAYS engages in four domains of work, all centered around education and empowerment:

1. We train poet-mentor educators from the neighborhood to work alongside teachers and after-school providers, building a critical bridge between the community and the classroom.
2. We provide direct instruction to students: helping youth write and share their stories.
3. We conduct large-scale professional development through our residency programs and training of SAYS teacher leaders.
4. We support a new generation of scholar activists who embody education as a form of liberation.
SAYS Guidelines

1 Mic

Loud-N-Proud

Step Up... Step Back

Freedom of Speech... With Propriety

Create Community... No Snitchin

Standard is Yourself: Be You and Do You

Respect... Self, Others, and the Space

Patience, Perseverance, Participation, and Above All: Love
OUR WRITE TO HEAL:
https://vimeo.com/135921332
BRINGING THE COMMUNITY INTO CLASSROOMS
OUR WRITE TO GO HOME:
PATRICE HILL

“Some of us are facilitating workshops at the same schools that expelled us. These experiences have allowed for an intense understanding of the traditional urban classroom and a deep understanding of the way students are often disengaged in the classroom. At SAYS, we possess a diverse and growing group of educators that are reaching and teaching the very students we once were. We are these young people! We sat in the same classrooms, went through the same experiences! Some of us have experienced the same disconnect with school and educators that has transitioned into an intense connection and deep understanding of urban youth, especially youth of color. It’s a lifelong commitment to the uplifting and empowerment of our babies. This calling is indeed the pedagogy of our lives.”
100% of teachers report an increase in student engagement.

81% of teachers demonstrate that the program helps them encourage students to use their own experiences and opinions in their writing.

92% explain that SAYs helps them understand how to build student literacy skills.

54% of teachers report that students complete class assignments more frequently in their courses with a poet-mentor.
Kajal reads to us out loud:

When I look in the mirror, I cry because a side of me is dead inside.
When I look in the mirror, I hate what I see. I’m not the girl I used to be.
When I look in the mirror, I see a black shadow hovering.
But when I look again that black shadow is me.
When I look in the mirror, I want to break it but I can’t so I sit there looking at the girl that was taken.
When I look in the mirror, I stare at it hoping this reflection would go away so I turn off the light and walk away.
When I look in the mirror, what do I see Is this girl I wish wasn’t me.

Alberto also shares,

When I look in the mirror, I see struggle
Because I’m struggling in school And I’m failing my classes
But I’m trying to get good grades And I’m trying to stay out of trouble.
Although “it might be ‘their culture’ within their small and very limited world...my hope is my students will want to expand their world and learn to survive and thrive beyond [their neighborhood]. ...They need to be taught how the rest of the world behaves” (teacher interview, 2012).
“I share the sentiment of several others that it felt very uncomfortable to be a white person in that room... Even though I rarely see myself as a white person anymore, in that room I felt it stronger than ever before” (teacher interview, 2011).
To the adults that are concerned about students’ use of explicit language, they are trying to avoid a problem rather than deal with it. The problem is not the profanity. The problem is the source. The source is not the youth. We did not make this world, we were born into it just like every other poet, student, teacher, human being. And in many ways, it’s a fucked up world! This is the environment that raised us so what kind of adult criticizes our attempt to release, reshape, and create our own identity? SAYS students cussing is not as profane as an officer pepper-spraying their own college students trying to stand up for their rights, or as profane as a child being murdered by a grown man (Zimmerman), or as profane as the slaughter of Oscar Grant, JFK, MLK, X, Tupac, Diallo…! Is cussing a big deal when our students are starving? Where are the priorities? One of the schools I work at with SAYS looks just like a prison. Is cussing more profane than that?
FINDINGS

We cannot improve professionally, until we transform personally.

What is the pedagogy of your life?
PEDAGOGY

SOUL

ART

"good" teaching

transformational

SCIENCE

learning
IDENTITY:
HOW DO I SEE MYSELF?

I am a Diamond in the Rough.
I am a Miracle in Disguise.
I am the Essence of Time.
I am Unstoppable.
I am the Victorious One.
I am the Blood that Pumps your Main Artery.
I am that Breath of Fresh Air.
I am the Bullet in the Chamber.
I am the Chosen One.
I am the American Dream.
The sickness and solutions are one and the same:

“If the youth are not initiated into the village, they will burn it down to feel its warmth.” -African Proverb
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