

**Hauntings, Palimpsests, and Aesthetics:  
Portraits of Remembering Schools that were Closed**

BY

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DISSERTATION

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This dissertation is dedicated to the artists, educators, families, students, and community members who have been telling stories about schools for years in ways that fight for justice. Your work and dedication to our youth and cities fill me with hope.

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## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS (continued)

A big thanks to all the people who have and will engage in conversations with me about education. I truly believe that's where we make connections and share our stories best.

KUP

## PREFACE

I want folks to be haunted by the stories in this work. I invite you to be. I invite you on my research journey to search for stories about two schools that were closed in Chicago back in 2009 and 2011 and the people connected to the schools. I invite you to engage with the ghosts of these schools, to pause and reflect on the many aspects of school closure.

\*\*\*

I knew from my own experience with school closings and the literature I had read on school closures that *community cultural wealth* (Yosso, 2005)—or the various strengths and assets within a community—is masked over or disregarded when schools are closed. As I started this journey, I decided to take a wealth-based approach when seeking out information about the schools, as I knew the deficit-based view—a lens through which schools are viewed when being closed—had been the normal way of talking about schools.

In the archives, in artifacts, from people connected to the two schools I studied, I expected to find stories that would reveal all the community cultural wealth that had been there and ignored by the district. From my experiences as an educator in Chicago Public Schools, I had seen (and had participated in at times) the negative and deficit approach we take when assessing students, families, schools, and neighborhoods. It is very pervasive and normalized, needing ongoing intentionality to do otherwise.

Once I chose to study Andersen and Schiller, I assumed neither of the closings had happened without a fight of some sort from the parents or community. That was of interest, of course, while I wanted to paint a portrait of the schools as larger than their closings, leaning on Tuck's (2009) idea of refusing the tendency to portray schools as already and always damaged. There's a certain narrative repeated when you only talk about an urban school as being closed and do not work to see what the strengths were before the closing was proposed. The closings were the inroad into my inquiry, my starting point. Yet I hoped to discover stories about the schools that showed connections and details within the recent past that were grounded in goodness, while honoring the complexities. I wanted to historicize the

## PREFACE (continued)

sites where these two school buildings still stand, buildings that are not empty but have another school that opened in the space right after these two schools were shut down. I wanted to complicate the simplified story that I, too, have furthered at times: that a poor, Black, half-full school in the middle of the projects in Chicago was closed. That was my reaction when I started to remember Schiller, my first thought—that of course it had been closed.

And so I set out to gather and hear all the stories I could about the two schools, in the archives and through conversations. Hans Christian Andersen Public School was a school that existed for over a hundred years in the Wicker Park neighborhood and served mostly low-income Mexican and Puerto Rican families. Friedrich Von Schiller Public School was ringed by seven public housing towers in the Cabrini-Green neighborhood and served almost all low-income Black families. Through conversations with people connected to the schools, I recast the stories into a narrative that created a robust and rich story for each that invites you, my reader, to pause and critically reflect about school closures.

The writing process is always a curation of the stories or data gathered; the researcher decides the ways in which it will all be put on display and the tone or voice it will have. Even if it is a quantitative report—it has a tone and voice appropriate to the research story being told.

But the writing is always analysis in qualitative work like this. I leaned into how to be a writer and an artist, reading about art-based research and finding instruction in creative non-fiction writing. It felt right that I heard and read that artists and writers learn to notice the details, stay in the concrete, find themselves on the peripheral. Creative non-fiction writers work to find a balance between their own self-discoveries. Many times, this happens on the page in real-time as the writing unfolds. The larger, universal connection to the reader toggles between observing oneself from afar and a deep introspective exploration from within.

I have heard other scholars and writers repeat the same refrain many times: This isn't the story I thought I was going to tell when I started. Yet I am still intrigued by my own detour as it unfolded during my writing of the narratives. Positioning myself as a writer, as part of the research, and an artist for that

## PREFACE (continued)

matter, left me discovering things during the narrative writing process that ultimately told me what my detour was—these more than stories about Andersen and Schiller. These are stories about *remembering*.

Through the writing process, the story that developed on the page was *a story about remembering* the school, *a story of conversations* about school closure. Yes, I found stories about Andersen and Schiller in the archives. Yes, stories were created, shared as I had conversations with people connected to the schools. And yes, I used my writing voice to recast them into a composite portrait of the school. But I did not end up telling a larger story of the schools or a litany of all the community cultural wealth that was discounted during the closings like I expected to do. That was certainly part of the story, but only part. I could not write the story of the school without retelling the story of how I gathered with others to remember the school or had conversations with teachers about their experiences when the schools were closed. I found stories of community cultural wealth, yes, and I could have foregrounded only that. But there were too many stories that took my attention outside of that concept and that the storytellers wanted me to tell, by what they shared or did not share.

What I encountered were essentially ghost stories, fragments and incomplete pieces of a whole. I had a few concrete details to rebuild the stories that I expected to. I was ok with the scantness and fragmented parts I figured I would find. I thought: the narrative portraits would be like my collages, layered with incomplete details and parts, but a composition nonetheless that resonated. There is plenty of artwork that collages parts to make a whole and that would be the wealth-based portrait I would create with my writing. Yet, the “nugget” of this project was *how* the people who were connected to the school talked with me about the school and its closing. There is an aesthetic to remembering that became important.

I did not end up with a narrative portrait of the schools, even if it could have been collaged or pieced together, as I set out to accomplish. I had vignettes or various moments that were significant that were stories of the schools. But what I ended up collaging together were the rememberings, the bits and pieces of engaging with the ghosts of the schools. I created narrative portraits of *remembering*. The conversations—the act of remembering—and how that played out became the story that needs telling.

## PREFACE (continued)

Through the rememberings, the question of who is the community gets complicated, the signaling that happens between a neighborhood through a school gets named, and the geospatial and historical knowledge that resides in community members gets articulated. As I grapple with all of this, I invite you to as well.

And, so, Chapters Five and Six are not the “Portrait of a Closed School” as I had proposed. They are portraits of “Finding Andersen” and of “Searching for Schiller.” They are *portraits of remembering*.

The stories I encountered are not new stories. These are stories that community members, school activists, parents, families, and educators have been telling for as long as they have had to fight for racial justice in education (forever in the US). *The Color of Law* (Rothstein, 2017) has a subtitle referencing a forgotten history, a history that was well-known and out-in-front at the time of more blatant racial unrest in the US, like during the 1950s and 1960s, but has been forgotten in more recent years. It is in looking back, and remembering, that we bring that history to the present in very concrete ways through storytelling. I argue that we need to remember schools that were closed through conversations about them, with the people connected to them, to be sure the history of the school sites is not forgotten or masked over. In doing so, by taking the time to pause and reflect through remembering, we honor the stories of those who were telling them loud and clear twenty years ago, stories about the disinvestment by the district and the ways in which schools are used to gentrify neighborhoods.

Eve L. Ewing wrote about *institutional mourning* in her 2018 book, *Ghosts in the Schoolyard*. I was very clear when I designed this project that this is not a project about institutional mourning, as the ghosts and hauntings, for me, were very much alive and mourning required the finality of a death. I was certain that the absent-presence (Gordon, 2008) of schools that were closed, that I had started to notice all over the city, were not an indication of institutional death, likely required if there was going to be institutional mourning. But I was wrong. This is about a kind of institutional mourning, as the process of collectively remembering the schools was very much in line with mourning. When people mourn others or things that are close to them, they do so through remembering, through sharing the stories. We often mourn something gone that still has presence in your life, as these schools do for many people. The space

## PREFACE (continued)

taken up by something missing has agency, yes, and can also be mourned and I had mistakenly thought the two were exclusive. I had countered in my own thoughts: How can you mourn something that is still very much present in people's lives? Until I realized through this work that that is exactly how ghosts and haunting do their work: they take up space for the missing, they taunt us to engage, they guide us on detours from the journey we *thought* we were on, and they offer insight to masked over pasts that are very much present.

A large part of this project is the readability, the narrative voice, and the ways in which I hope I have threaded the vignettes together to shift from the "data collection" of research to storytelling. This document is time capsule of sorts, to make sure the institutional memory has some trace.

This work always leads to more questions, more tensions, more complexities. That becomes the work, in many ways. Sara Lawrence-Lightfoot, the writer/scholar who I lean on the most for how I did this work, wrote portraits of good high schools in 1983, offering complex, nuanced, and goodness-based stories about schools that were successful in a variety of settings, and by a variety of metrics. This approach was being published right as Reagan was declaring we were "a nation at risk," a national report of the same title prompted Chicago Public Schools to be declared as the worst in the nation shortly after by our top educator. *A Nation at Risk* set the stage for decades of standards-based teaching, evaluations, and punitive measures being handed down from above, where schools started to be labeled as "failing" and funds were threatened if schools struggled to score well on certain matrices.

Lawrence-Lightfoot was refusing the standardized (and deficit) approach to what makes a good school by presenting eight very different, "successful" schools, leaning into the facets that complicate any formulaic way to build a good high school. These are not Pollyanna stories at all, as Lawrence-Lightfoot centers the goodness *and* refuses a simplified, romanticized view. She depicts a Chicago public high school as the faculty and staff championing high academic standards, then also observes students seemingly unengaged. She asks the reader to reconsider what makes a successful school long before others were doing similar work.

## PREFACE (continued)

I use her exploration of good high schools as a guide to how to approach my inquiry into Andersen and Schiller and how to present my “findings.” I did not have the robust, “complete” data set that Lawrence-Lightfoot collected. I could not; these schools do not exist anymore. This work rests in the liminal, or in-between, space that exists since the schools were closed. This work rests in the remembering. This work rests precisely in the incomplete, scant, ghostlike stories left behind.

I could write an entire dissertation on studying the methodology and methods I chose. And maybe that writing, thinking, and learning will come next. I write about the process I took in general terms in my Process chapter, and in more detail in Appendix D.

I ask you, reader, to go on this journey with me, not the same journey I expected to invite you on, but here we are. I invite you along as I meander, as I detour, as I honor the past that is always and already present. I invite you to pause and reflect, to build a connection to these two schools that were closed in Chicago through the stories told on the pages. I invite you to collectively remember Andersen and Schiller through the conversations and stories curated here, and thus to start noticing, to begin engaging with the ghosts and paying attention to the hauntings that inhabit so much of the educational landscape.

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## LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

ABBREVIATION	EXTENDED FORM
CPS	Chicago Public Schools
US	United States
TFA	Teach for America
WITS	Working in the Schools
PhD	Doctor of Philosophy
FOIA	Freedom of Information Act
IRB	Institutional Review Board
CEO	Chief Executive Officer
SBB	Student-Based Budgeting
SE	Selective Enrollment
CReATE	Chicagoland Researchers and Advocates for Transformative Education
CHA	Chicago Housing Authority
PAR	Participatory Action Research
ABR	Arts-Base Research
CTU	Chicago Teachers' Union

## SUMMARY

*It's in many ways haunted me the whole time... I have so many thoughts and feelings about what I experienced, even the fact that you invited us here today. I'm remembering all the people that I engaged with at the time, like the principal, and then this other person, and just like, I don't have contact with them anymore. And like the fact that I don't have contact with them anymore, and I don't know what they're doing, adds to the haunting quality of it all for me. I wonder what they're doing. Again, it's just really stayed with me this—this whole time.*

*- Olivia, connected to Andersen school, closed in 2011*

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This project focuses on the ghosts and hauntings of two schools that were closed in Chicago: Hans Christian Andersen Public School and Friedrich Von Schiller Public School. Andersen and Schiller were neighborhood public elementary schools that served low-income families. Andersen served mostly Mexican and Puerto Rican families. It was in the dense neighborhood of Wicker Park that has long been gentrifying and was phased out between 2008 and 2011 while another magnet school was phased into the building at the same time. Schiller served mostly Black families. It was in the Cabrini-Green neighborhood where public housing towers have been torn down and was closed in June 2009 with another selective enrollment school opening in the building the following school year.

Using portraiture as the overarching methodology (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis, 1997), I employed archival methods and visual arts-based methods to collect and analyze data about the schools, creating what I call *palimpsest portraits*. Then I had conversations with people connected to the schools, where we shared what we remembered about the schools and the closings. The collective remembering that happened through these conversations, partnered with my analysis of the *palimpsests of school closure*, informed the written portraits I created and worked toward a larger aim of historicizing the

## SUMMARY (continued)

school sites. The *portraits of remembering*—the written narrative portraits—present the essence of our research conversations and have a broader readability than typical research write-ups.

Yosso's (2005) concept of *community cultural wealth* shaped this work, with intentions to refuse to reproduce narratives that describe urban schools, communities, families, and students as always and already broken (Tuck, 2009; Tuck & Yang, 2014). Fine's (2016) theory of *critical bifocality* provided a foundation for the deep dive into the stories about two individual schools while examining the structural contexts and larger historical injustices enacted through public policy at play.

The concepts of *ghosts and hauntings* and *palimpsests* weave throughout this project. Starting from the origins of my own haunts from my time at Schiller and the surreal ways in which my attention was drawn to this work, I use Ewing's 2018 work and Gordon's 2008 work on ghosts and hauntings as a concept to think about the past that is always present, as well as the engagement that ghosts ask of us. I was drawn to the aesthetics of the school's name inscribed in the stone lintel of the building and saw this pattern throughout the city of Chicago on school buildings. The hauntings were asking me to pay attention. The concept of the palimpsest—the traces of stories left behind—has offered a way to think about what else is asking for attention in the stories of the past that have been masked over.

Combining participant quotes as epigraphs vignettes of dialogue, and notes from my fieldwork and site visits, I used a first-person narrative voice to share the stories from the people I talked to who were connected to the schools as they remember the schools and theorize about the larger contexts at play. I borrowed form from the braided essay (Miller, 2021) in the literary world. This choice of form resonates with the fragmentedness of the stories and veers a degree beyond Lawrence-Lightfoot's rich narrative portraits of good high schools from 1983 that initially served as a model for the writing.

The portraits of remembering show how each school fostered countless, meaningful community partnerships to support their students in a district that made them “run on a shoestring budget.” Participants shared stories of individuals at the school that “were the most influential person in my life, besides family.” They explicitly named the “blatant racism” and classism at play in schools when urban neighborhoods gentrify and public housing policies destroy homes and communities. They called out the

## SUMMARY (continued)

broken promises of our elected officials and school district for families who “faced multiple challenges.” They named the hope and commitment that drove their resistance in the face of the inevitability of the closing. They expressed a deep desire in the present to “pause and reflect” on the past, to have time and space to remember the schools and all the complexities in which they existed. They pointed to the “history that was lost” and how the school community members “hold so much history within themselves.”

Olivia named the racism being enacted. Carolyn pointed to the jarring inequity of educational resource distribution for wealthy versus poor neighborhoods that were geographically right next to each other. Jennifer underscored the selective use of data in justifying the city’s urban renewal moves through schools. Ms. Gates presented a connection between education and real estate development. Yessenia outlined the classed deserving/undeserving framing on display through space refurbishment during the phase out. Mr. D illustrated the labor administration takes on to cultivate community connections with the neighborhood. Pearl summarized the longitudinal impact on families of wrap-around services. Gayle highlighted the impact on teacher self-efficacy of school closure. Mr. Patterson reiterated the importance of keeping the history of a school alive.

The artwork and written portraits stand as an archive, giving shape to the stories as we remembered the schools. Their voices are central and invite the reader to think through the interconnectedness of race, class, education, and housing as related to school closure. It is important to note that the school communities told these stories in their fights against the closings at the time it was happening—these are not new stories. The district-designed closing process devalued their voices and experiences. The stories are in the palimpsests of school closure, recorded in the transcripts of public meetings and in the memories of the people connected to the schools. These stories are pointed to by the ghosts and hauntings of the schools if we choose to listen. Participants voiced a desire to tell their stories and their emotions were fresh, this many years later.

I discuss the work that is done through remembering the schools and argue that the stories of school closure are also stories of gentrification, public housing, and urban planning. Acknowledging and



## SUMMARY (continued)

engaging with the present-past (Ferguson & Nichols, 2021) also requires discussing the missing stories from the past. I call on my readers to get haunted, to learn to listen *for* the stories (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis, 1997) through an aesthetic awareness.

By recasting the stories of the schools through artmaking and storytelling, I bring the past into the present. Through remembering, the portraits resist urban school closure and point to the lasting human-level impact of school closure. Through this work, I aim to disrupt the dominant narrative of school closure that is district-driven, historically and geospatially disconnected, and justified through commonsenseness. This act of remembering invites us to reimagine solutions to the persistent inequities that manifest in urban schools.

## **PART I: HAUNTINGS**

## CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

“Being haunted draws us affectively, sometimes against our will and always a bit magically, into the structure of feeling a reality we come to experience, not as cold knowledge, but as a transformative recognition.” (Gordon, 2008, p. 8)

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This project offers a new way of surfacing the stories of schools that were closed in Chicago to disrupt the dominant discourse that masks the harm done to families and communities through paying attention to hauntings and engaging with the ghosts of schools that were closed (Ewing, 2018; Gordon, 2008).

The ghosts of schools that were closed signal histories that have been masked, histories of disinvestment and racism that have affected poor Black and Latina/o communities in Chicago (Danns, 2018; Ewing, 2018; The Chicago Reporter, n.d.). If we view the present as a “living palimpsest of historical currents,” we are forced to acknowledge the “studied and cultivated forgetting” that happens when public schools are closed (Ferguson & Nichols, 2021)<sup>1</sup>.

There is *real* space occupied by something missing (Gordon, 2008), an “absent presence” (Ferguson & Nichols, 2021). Hauntings direct our attention to the absent presence of schools that were closed. These school communities are not gone but rendered invisible by the forces and discourses shrouding their stories. The artifacts from schools that were closed leave behind traces of the stories that beg our attention, telling us that there is more to be done.

The ghosts of schools that were closed also signal the slow violence happening, a violence that echoes the historical racism present in Chicago Public Schools (CPS) (Aggarwal et al., 2012; Danns,

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<sup>1</sup> A *palimpsest* is literally seeing the evidence of an old story on a manuscript page after it has been scraped off to make the animal hide useful for another story to be written. This term has also come to refer to “something that changed over time and shows evidence of that change,” see <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/palimpsest>. This term is also used in the architectural world to refer to evidence of old city structures that can shape the more modern city planning. The concept of a palimpsest is explored more in depth in the section “The Palimpsest.”

2018; Ewing, 2018; McWilliams & Kitzmiller, 2019). The school district that is responsible for providing resources and support uses a deficit framing to declare Black and Latina/o students, families, and the schools they attend them as inadequate—failures—through standardized metrics that deny geospatial inequities related public policies, such as housing initiatives (Ewing, 2018; Lipman, 2011). As is common in urban settings, the district carefully crafts rating systems and utilization formulas that paint portraits of schools that foster a commonsenseness around the inevitability of closing half-filled schools or schools that are repeatedly rated low<sup>2</sup> (McWilliams & Kitzmiller, 2019, p. 8; Syeed, 2019, p. 5).

The ghosts of schools that were closed point to community stories that have been masked over during the closure process. Communities have spoken up against school closings and called out the harm done, attempting to flip the script on the deficit framing by naming the ways in which their schools have constituted places of support and relationships (see Chicago Public Schools, 2008, 2011; Lipman, 2017). Through the closing process, communities engaged in a process and discourse that already and always has dismissed and devalued their voices.

In my pilot study in the Spring of 2021, the data I collected about Andersen told the stories of a school community who had a Spanish language heritage that was not seen as a strength, but as unaccommodatable within the two-minute time limits for public comments at the school closing hearings. I found stories from a community that named specific repeated broken promises from the district. Using charts and formulas, the district painted deficit-based portraits of the school, creating commonsense narratives within the neoliberal discourse to justify closing the school, erasing any context of the gentrifying neighborhood where the school was located<sup>3</sup>.

As researchers, we can be complicit in masking parts of community stories through practices and methods that bound out the historical and contextual factors in the name of objectivity or anonymity

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<sup>2</sup> As evidenced in records from the public hearings from Chicago Public Schools, 2008, 2011.

<sup>3</sup> See footnote 2.

(Ferguson & Nichols, 2021) or by dissecting stories into such minute pieces of data that we remove the agency from the storyteller or witness (Huber, 2009; Lawrence-Lightfoot<sup>4</sup> & Davis, 1997).

“...the task of social researchers is to theorize across levels and resist the common sense explanations by which individuals are the site for analysis, blame, responsibility, and data collection” (Fine, 2006, p. 94).

We need new ways of looking at the stories of school closings in Chicago that invites others to see through the shroud of neoliberal discourse. We need to employ new research methods that shed light on the many tentacles of closing a public school, such as the urban renewal initiatives that contributed to the issues manifesting as half-filled schools (Lipman, 2017) through engaging with a broader audience to disrupt the discourses that have normalized school closings (Battle-Baptiste & Rusert, 2018)<sup>5</sup>.

Communities deserve to be seen through their *community cultural wealth* (Yosso, 2005) that was rendered invisible or cast as a deficit through the school closing process. We need to embrace new ways to tell the stories.

The hauntings indicate that there is *something to be done* (Gordon, 2008), signaling that there is more to the stories of schools that were closed. We, as researchers, can start by listening *for* the story instead of listening *to* the story (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis, 1997). I looked for the palimpsests of school closure through a lens of community cultural wealth when attempting to re-present these stories (Yosso, 2005), produced my findings in forms—art and narrative stories—that hopefully work to disrupt the discourse that has rendered these communities invisible.

There is power in the way aesthetics engage through art and story. Often, the arts are compartmentalized out of the social science research world, understood as subjective and dependent on

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<sup>4</sup> Sara Lawrence-Lightfoot’s name appears differently on her two books: her last name is hyphenated as Sara Lawrence-Lightfoot on *The Art and Science of Portraiture* (1997) but is not hyphenated as Sara Lawrence Lightfoot on *The Good High School* (1983). I have hyphenated throughout unless it is a direct citation for *The Good High School* book.

<sup>5</sup> Even this citation- it is Du Bois’s Data Portraits that I desire to cite as an example of reaching a broader audience to disrupt commonplace discourses, but research and citation practices require that I cite the authors, masking his expertise with theirs.

artistic talent. The work of artists—playwrights, novelists, visual and sound artists, installation artists, musicians—set the stage for others to pause and reflect, embracing the captivating narrative form that research tends to box out. The arts open multiple avenues of accessibility for meaning-making, standing as so clearly interpretive that an invitation is created for further interpretation and multiple truths. The arts offer comfort and disruption, triggering conversations and contemplations. We connect to the universal through specific stories (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis, 1997). Thus, we can connect to the larger meanings made around closing public schools through the specific stories of schools that were closed, using the aesthetics to welcome and listen to the ghosts (Gordon, 2008; Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis, 1997).

Tensions related to my positionality as a middle-class White educator and parent living in Chicago but not being raised in Chicago. As a White person, I benefit from the racism interwoven through our education systems. The portraiture chosen for the research design is one “something to be done” (Gordon, 2008), a way to invite others, such as other researchers, other parents, other educators, other policymakers, and namely other complicit White people (Nuamah, 2020) into this space with me, working to distinguish which stories to listen *for* that have been masked over (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis, 1997). Part II is a collection of portraits—visual-arts-based and text-based portraits—of remembering schools that have been closed from a critical perspective, to resurface the stories that have been masked over by “cultivated forgetting” (Ferguson & Nichols, 2021).

This project builds on current research and conversations about school closings, revisiting the outcomes from closing schools and surfacing the contradictions in schools as they constitute important neighborhood spaces while also remaining sites of racist histories. It is always time for the research community to address the social inequities that manifest in our schools. This project intersects conversations already happening across disciplines such as art, urban planning, and sociology, while making room for future conversations.

Avery Gordon (2008) argues that “haunting, unlike trauma, is distinctive for producing a something-to-be-done” (p. xvi) and that when ghosts arrive, they announce “the something to be done” (p.

194). Eve L. Ewing (2018) argues that ghost stories of schools that were closed indicate that “*something you thought was gone is still happening here*” (p. 154), italics author’s). I argue that, even though we know much about school closings, and there has been resistance, there is *still* something to be done that haunts us. And my conversations with participants and others who engaged with my art and narratives validates this argument. This dissertation aims to be one something-to-be-done, using the aesthetics of the arts and the narrative form.

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It took a bit of time for me to admit that I was going to give attention to hauntings and engage with ghosts in order to understand the school closings in Chicago. It took even longer for me to embrace the idea. This project itself has haunted me for quite some time, in ways that I didn’t recognize until I started to pay more attention. This isn’t my first haunting either, which has helped me to lean into it. That’s the potential beauty of being haunted—it triggers an awareness of things that are not there. Hauntings can tell you exactly where to go with your attention. When hauntings are attended to, ghosts are given more material existences with which we can engage.

By engaging with ghosts or giving attention to hauntings, communities have the opportunity to acknowledge the aftermath and impact of processes, reforms, and happenings in a way that can shed light on casualties ignored by the systems in place. But larger than that, conceptualizing school closings in this way has the potential to reframe the stories told about schools that are closed, making space for stories grounded in more than the harm done. Ghosts and hauntings that linger from the past taunt us to look back—to pause and reflect—to re-think, re-examine, re-evaluate, and re-engage *through the past into the future*.

Avery Gordon (2008) argues that giving attention to hauntings could serve as a promising practice that sits in the in-between spaces of the subjective and the objective:

Could it be that analyzing hauntings might lead to a more complex understanding of the generative structures and moving parts of historically embedded social formations in a way that

avoids the twin pitfalls of subjectivism and positivism? Perhaps. If so, the result will not be a more tidy world, but one that might be less damaging. (p. 19)

Hauntings underscore the notion that things are not always what they seem and that we can imagine better. Although this dissertation did not include an analysis of openness and closedness, and the dichotomy of the two, another notion of ghosts is their being in-between, “the ghost occupies another liminal space, which privileges the language of betweenness” (Trigg, 2012, p. 283). Further thinking through school closure by engaging with ghosts allows us to trouble the absoluteness of the open/closed options (Varga & Monreal, 2021).

The haunting does not diminish if denied attention; in fact, those who have experienced hauntings might argue that ghosts and hauntings often become more intense until there is nothing left to do but to give them attention, as in Morrison’s *Beloved* (2004). Gordon (2008) described her haunting as a “detour,” a shift that informed her methodological choices— “The detour takes us away from abstract questions of method, from bloodless professionalized questions, toward the materiality of institutional storytelling, with all its uncanny repetitions” (p. 40). This project is my detour into the hauntings and ghosts that linger from public school closings in Chicago and the “uncanny repetitions” that kept taking my attention.

Once I acknowledged the hauntings that were begging my attention, I let the palimpsests of the schools that were closed lead my inquiry. While supervising student teachers for UIC at CPS, the aesthetics of old signage on the side of a school building took my attention, telling me that Ariel School used to be Shakespeare School in the past—the signage was the palimpsest of a school that was closed (Figure 1).





**Figure 1:** Shakespeare Public School inscribed in school facade contrasted with plastic marquee for Ariel School

This notion of how the aesthetics took my attention along with a curiosity about that school's stories haunted me until I designed my pilot study. I chose Andersen School for my pilot, through an analysis of demographic data when I was looking for a school that was closed that was mostly Latina/o. It was uncanny when I visited the school site and found the *same* aesthetic draw of the old signage on the side of the building that had taken my attention at Ariel two years earlier (see Figures 1, 10, 11). This palimpsest of a school that was closed compounded my haunting as I realized during this site visit for my research to Andersen that I had been at this school before—I had supervised a student teacher in this building, too, two years before and had not noticed this old signage. I decided it was time to engage with the ghosts and give attention to the hauntings I had been experiencing.

I engage with hauntings and ghosts on two levels through this work. On one level, I have been haunted by the idea for this research project until I could not deny it attention any longer, as it simply would not let me be. On another level, the artifacts left behind—the palimpsests of schools that were closed—refuse to stay hidden and demand a material recasting.

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This project arguably started back in 2003 with my time at Schiller Elementary School in the Cabrini Green neighborhood, where I spent a year as a volunteer in a seventh and eighth grade language arts classroom. I was not examining race and class as related to educational policies and practices then, I

was just, yet again, contemplating becoming a teacher. That does not mean that I was not making meaning around race, class and education. I brought with me years of meaning-making around the subjects, being a White middle-class woman transplanting to the city from a farming community.

Jumping back even further, the first time I almost became a teacher was back in 1998, in the middle of my undergraduate experience at Kent State University. I investigated shifting out of my fashion design program and into a teacher education program. A literature class had dramatically upended my narrow views of the world. But I finished my fashion degree and worked in the industry, in Dublin, Ireland, for a while before moving to Chicago. In mid-2003, I was working at a high-end bridal boutique near the Magnificent Mile, on Oak Street. Fully convinced that the fashion industry was a poor fit for me, I shifted to the world of education, buoyed by my progressive social stance learned during my liberal arts education and living abroad.

The career change required a second bachelor's degree—more than three years of undergraduate-level courses—because a graduate degree in education was not within reach due to my fashion design degree. Naively, I thought Teach for America (TFA) would provide me the short-cut route needed to just get into a classroom. At the time, I was unaware of the way Teach for America fosters the White savior mentality, undermines teaching as a profession, and corporatizes public education. I applied twice and was rejected both times.

My interactions with non-White, non-middle-class people in the US were negligible up to this point in my life. I was worried about my naivety, specifically the White savior mentality after having learned a little more about TFA. Plus, I had never spent much time in a classroom outside of my own schooling. I *thought* I wanted to be a teacher, but really didn't know all that came with it. I decided to spend significant time in a Chicago Public School as a volunteer.

I signed up with WITS, Working in the Schools, a program that placed volunteers in Chicago Public Schools classrooms, mainly designed for corporate folks to volunteer over their lunch hour. I spent a full day every Wednesday—my day off from my retail job—in Room 209 at Schiller Elementary School

in Cabrini Green for the 2003-2004 school year. It was not geographically far from where I worked, but it was socially, racially, and economically worlds apart.

At Schiller, I worked with small groups of seventh and eighth graders who were Black and from low-income families, under the supervision of a young, burned-out White teacher. As the different homerooms rotated through the departmentalized space, I sat to the side waiting for groups to be sent my way to work through vocabulary or other reading assignments. I spent my lunchtime with the teacher, not gathering much insight from her but remembering how she told me she was finishing her master's degree at Loyola and was planning to move on soon. I witnessed few efforts to connect with the students. "I can do better than she's doing," I thought as I found myself arrogantly critiquing her practice with no training or experience of my own. (Years later, I encountered her as a facilitator for a district-level teacher professional development session.)

In the fall of 2004, I started my formal education to be a teacher, maintaining my job at the fashion boutique throughout my teacher education program. I was a CPS middle school language arts teacher by the fall of 2007. I felt woefully underprepared to teach because of all I had explicitly learned about race and class in education, most importantly confirming that this learning would be a life-long process.

Fast forward several years later, during my PhD coursework probably sometime in 2019. I thought one night—I wonder what happened to Schiller? I felt the urge to start digging<sup>6</sup>, wondering about the fate of Schiller. My experience there seemed like a different lifetime. I wanted to see the school through a critical lens, using what I had learned so far about Chicago educational policies and practices. I wanted to re-examine my memories of the school as much as I could, finding whatever sources I was able to dig up. Casually, I thought to myself, "It probably doesn't exist anymore." My meaning-making around

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<sup>6</sup> Grant, Brown, and Brown (2016) use the notion of "digging up" to tell the stories of Black intellectuals in education, intellectuals whose stories are never told, with the intentionality to dig in places that are "not commonly referenced in mainstream educational spaces" (p. 23). I draw upon this notion more broadly for the way in which my initial inquiries into Schiller, and later into Andersen School during the pilot study, required excavation-like efforts to uncover partial details to piece together the portraits.

race, class, and education had been directly informed by the stories told about schools, neighborhoods, and school closures in Chicago. I knew what type of school was slated for closure during the massive school closings in Chicago in 2013 and before, and Schiller was just that sort of school—all Black, poor, right next to the housing projects that were torn down. I suspected that the city had chronically under-supported and under-resourced Schiller and its neighborhood, which abutted geographic areas tagged for high-value real estate development.

I dedicated a quick evening to Google searches about Schiller. What I remember about *that* evening a several years ago now, after searching for any artifacts from Schiller, was that I didn't turn up much. I remember searching for Schiller's name on Chicago Public School's website and finding no active school website in any of the search results. I whispered aloud to myself, "It *is* like it never existed." My hunch that it had been shut down was confirmed but I wanted to know more specifically what happened to Schiller and when—Was there an outcry? Was Schiller's closure connected to the housing projects being torn down? Was it closed before the massive wave of closings in 2013? It seemed like it had been erased.

Then, I started seeing the ghosts through the artifacts left behind in these Google searches, details that were incomplete and unclear, but they were there and asking me to engage. I kept digging. I vaguely remember finding Schiller mentioned in a news article about a school merger with Jenner. Then some information led me to think it had been turned into a selective enrollment school called Ogden<sup>7</sup>. But what about the Schiller students in 2003-2004 in Room 209 that I had known? Wasn't there more left behind about the school or the district actions that closed it? Why didn't *I* remember more myself? Why had *I* not paid better attention?

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<sup>7</sup> When Schiller closed, the students were sent to Jenner and the Schiller building became Skinner North, a selective enrollment elementary school. Later, Jenner merged with Ogden through a pro-active campaign by Ogden and Jenner's principals, motivated by the threat of closure for Jenner and the need for space by Ogden. See <https://www.chalkbeat.org/chicago/2019/6/21/21121076/lessons-from-a-chicago-school-merger-race-resilience-and-an-end-of-the-year-resignation/>

I found some images of a school that night through the Google searching and thought, “Yes, yes, that’s the bright blue front door I used to enter,” but my memories were foggy. But I do remember thinking, “Of course it’s gone. And of course the building now houses a selective enrollment school.” Yet I didn’t trust my layers of remembering.

At that point in my studies, I had read about how race and class in education undergird urban school closings in ways that make poor Black and Latina/o school communities disposable through a variety of mechanisms and claims of equality and equity (Ewing, 2018; Lipman, 2011; Lipman & Haines, 2007; Morales et al., 2016). This is often connected to urban renewal projects, gentrification, and mismanagement at the district level, which have racialized and classed stories (Lipman, 2017; Stovall, 2013; Waitoller & Super, 2017). I had read Eve L. Ewing’s book, *Ghosts in the Schoolyard*, learning about the specific history of Bronzeville and racist educational and housing policies in Chicago.

By the time I was digging for Schiller stories, I had taught in Chicago Public Schools (CPS), had my own kids in CPS, and had experienced a school closure in CPS. I had taught a social foundations of education course to first-year teacher education students at the University of Illinois Chicago as a doctoral student. I had these experiences and observations to fold into my own meaning-making about race and class in education, and later I would add supervising UIC student teachers in CPS to those experiences. I was starting to notice the importance of stories told through the artifacts left behind from schools that were closed. I was becoming keener to the way neoliberal discourse was used to close schools and the racism that this discourse masked. The hauntings were becoming real for me as I became open to my own detour into studying school closure in Chicago, digging into old stories with new methods.

## **Concepts**

The project was guided by the concepts of hauntings and ghosts as well as the concept of the palimpsest because of how they can be used to engage with the past that lingers in the present. Hauntings and ghosts pointed to the agency that the past has and brought an orienting or steering aspect to where my

attention should go. Palimpsests offered a name to the noticings that took my attention and a pathway through the artmaking.

### *Hauntings and Ghosts*

From the beginning, this work was about paying attention to hauntings and engaging with the ghosts of schools that were closed. Avery Gordon (2008) uses the concepts of ghosts and hauntings from a sociological perspective to work through the undeniable, palpable essence of the unfinished business that modern society has rendered invisible. She names the ghosts of sociological happenings—the concrete ways people and living conditions are affected by dispossession, exploitation, repression—as “social figures” themselves, with the agency and power to push us to remember, revisit, and give attention to historical injustice. It is the first third of her book and final reflective chapter that grapples with ghosts and hauntings in a way that provides the conceptual foundation for this study.

Gordon engages with the paradoxes and the demand for attention that define the nature of a haunting, articulating the way something that has been rendered invisible by social forces refuses to give up the space it occupies and is made visible through its absence (p. 17, p. 42). This what makes her work particularly appropriate as a foundation for this study. The process of closing schools in Chicago over the last twenty years has been presented in some settings as colorblind by the district, based on quantitative data around both academic achievement and space utilization<sup>8</sup>, while community and activist groups have countered that these school actions are racist and violent (Ewing, 2018). The colorblind approach refuses to acknowledge the reverberations that come from such actions through communities (Allweiss et al., 2015; Briscoe & Khalifa, 2015; Buras, 2015; Green et al., 2019; Syeed, 2019).

The churn created by school closings, where school communities are forced in and out of the different school buildings, leaves traces of communities on that space. When conceptualized as ghosts and hauntings, these traces pull for our attention, demanding a recognition of the injustices and inequities that

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<sup>8</sup> Evidenced in transcripts from public hearings from Chicago Public Schools, 2008 and 2011, from the closings of Andersen.

are 1) never addressed by such school closings as claimed by the districts and 2) exacerbated by such school closures (Aggarwal et al., 2012). These traces go farther than a harm-oriented portrait of schools as well and invite a rendering that includes facets of community strengths and goodness.

Personally, Gordon's sociological thinking around ghosts and hauntings resonates with my own experience of being haunted. My first experience in an urban school before teaching—my time at Schiller—was haunting me to look back, to recognize the space taken up by something missing, to work against the erasure that had happened. When I allowed myself to “detour” into the world of arts-based methods to study school closure, I was listening to the ghosts and where they were directing my attention (Gordon, 2008, p. 40).

The notions of ghosts and hauntings provide a useful and accessible conceptual framing for the analysis of schools that were closed in Eve L. Ewing's (2018) book, *Ghosts in the Schoolyard*. She tells the story of the fight for Dyett High School in Chicago, connects it to public housing and racial segregation through the history of Bronzeville, and walks the reader through the experience of school closure before launching her theory of *institutional mourning*. In her book, she admits that she has not always believed in them but “first started seeing ghosts” as a “nagging presence” of Douglas school, a school that no longer existed except through ghostly hauntings that inhabited the building where she taught (p. 125-126). Like me, she too noticed the former school's name carved into the stone on the exterior of the building (p. 126), while her hauntings came from the “ghost stories” (p. 153) she heard from people connected to the former schools.

Ewing also connects ghostliness to historical injustice in a segregated city, that affects the past, present, and future of Black Chicago. She writes about the death of institutions like schools: “The unjust death leaves us with a specter—an unsettled ghost, a phantom that is hard to shake off” (p. 142). She names ghost stories as “counterstories” that push against the dominant narrative that suggests erasure, saying “*something you thought was gone is still happening here*” (p. 154). I lean on Ewing's writings about ghosts in the schoolyard to better understand school closings in Chicago, and the ghosts I have

encountered around schools, and to engage with educational research that is accessible to a broader audience.

I did not aim to center the death of the institution, or to explicitly revisit the trauma that comes with mourning an institution, but I aimed to center the wealth—community cultural wealth that is always and already present in that community—that was dismissed, discounted, and devalued by the district discourse when justifying the closings (Solórzano & Yosso, 2002; Yosso, 2005). I looked for evidence of that community cultural wealth and hoped to recast it in a new form, resurrecting the goodness that was never allowed a place in the closure process, as a complement to Ewing’s institutional mourning. This inquiry was not about the process of mourning but the process of excavation and reframing to disrupt neoliberal discourse. This project focuses on stories. And as such, this project became an inquiry into remembering the schools. I believe this only came about by taking an approach informed by Yosso’s community cultural wealth.

This research project acknowledges that the ghosts of schools that were closed have agency as surreal institutional social figures that invite us to engage and give attention to that which has been masked over in the closing process. I went on the detours they took me on, as a way of living with and learning from the ghosts and hauntings (Gordon, 2008). I let them lead, in the hope that the stories that lie in the palimpsests of the schools can prompt me, and others, to imagine a more just future.

### ***The Palimpsest***

The concept of the palimpsest haunted me after I started to notice the traces of schools that had been closed when I was supervising student teachers, specifically through the signage (see Figures 1, 10, 11). I thought back to my literature degree and had to verify my thoughts on what a palimpsest was—yes, the old signage indicating the name of a former school *was* a palimpsest of the school that was closed in a building that now housed a different school under a different name.

I had noticed a contrast between old and new signage at Ariel Community Academy during a site visit. Ariel was formerly Shakespeare School according to the name scripted into the stone lintel (see



Figure 1). Once I noticed the name of the former school in this way, I could not stop thinking: What were the stories of the school that was closed? How had the process happened and what forces were at play, with one school closing and one school opening in the same physical space? What did it mean that I had so easily missed the signage in one space but then could not shake the demand for attention once I did notice? What was it about the aesthetics of the signage that intrigued me so? I started to tune into the *palimpsests of schools that were closed*.

Then I noticed the same aesthetics in the signage and palimpsests at Andersen that I had seen at Ariel/Shakespeare. The aesthetic contrast between the old signage and the new signage seemed significant at both sites. At the Andersen building, *LaSalle II* was named by the large white block letters on a contrasting purple background above the main door but *Hans Christian Andersen Public School* was the former name, still in scripted letters on the stone lintel high up on the outer wall. Now it was hard to not notice these palimpsests of schools that no longer existed (Ferguson & Nichols, 2021).

A palimpsest is literally a term for the visual traces of an old story on manuscript pages made of animal hide that were scraped clean to make room for a new story. The palimpsest has also become an architectural term referring to the evidence of ancient cities in more modern developments. One example would be an oval-shaped road or block pattern in a historic city, evidence of a past temple or structure that no longer exists but still imposes its shape on the movement of the city centuries later.

Considering this geospatial connection, it made further sense to use this concept for an inquiry into school closure. I wondered how neoliberalism has scraped clean the manuscript pages of schools that were closed, priming the pages for a new school, a new story. What parts of the schools are rendered (in)visible through the closing process and the discourses used, or the stories told? I knew there was more to learn by looking for the palimpsest of schools that were closed.

From this concept of the palimpsest came the *palimpsest portraits* which are part of my research methods and reproduced in Part II. Since diving into this research design (see Appendix A: Research Design Summary), I have seen the concept of the palimpsest appear seemingly everywhere. Gordon (2008) uses the palimpsest in her exploration of Toni Morrison's *Beloved* in Chapter 4 of her book (pp.

143-164). Natalie LeBlanc (in Cahnmann-Taylor & Siegesmund, 2018) refers to the palimpsest when writing about her photographic exploration of abandoned school buildings to describe layers of graffiti (p. 174). She uses it more metaphorically to describe the abandoned school building as a space that has layers of things to be reimagined: “Like a palimpsest, it is an invitation to imagine other cracks, crevices, and cavities into (over and under) things that normally go unseen or unnoticed” (p. 181). Ferguson and Nichols (2021) call the present “a living palimpsest of historical events” (p. 2).

Palimpsests have a haunting quality, a quality that invites a revisitation of the past while remaining in the present. They illustrate how the past is always present. All the things that make up the palimpsests of schools that were closed—the signage, the media stories, the transcripts of the public hearings, the photographs left behind—demand attention to and engagement with the stories of these schools.

### **Artistic Inspirations**

Finding a few artists that were doing work that commented on social institutions guided me into artmaking with the initial data I collected from the archives, to engage with my concepts of hauntings and palimpsests. It is important to understand how other artists are engaging with similar concepts since I have chosen arts-based methods and portraiture for this work. The following artwork by Natalie LeBlanc, Maria Gaspar, and Zorka Wollny embrace the notion of hauntings to engage with larger audiences around the ways our society has organized institutional responses to social needs. It needs to be noted that I have not experienced any of these installations but have only uncovered them in my recent research and conversations.



**Figure 2:** Images of *The Abandoned: Spaces of Generative Possibility* by Natalie LeBlanc, 2015, digital photography with site-specific installation and digital slide-projected images (permission to use images granted by artist)  
<https://www.natalieleblanc.com/information/research.html>

Natalie LeBlanc is a photographic researcher and a faculty member at the University of Victoria in Art Education in the Department of Curriculum and Instruction. She names the “aesthetics of decay” as her interest in abandoned architecture (Cahnmann-Taylor & Siegesmund, 2018, p. 174; LeBlanc, 2014). Economic, cultural, and political history is central to her work on school closure, as abandonment “implies a separation or a detachment between people and place, and as such, holds an ability to evoke a powerful source of human anxiety” (Cahnmann-Taylor & Siegesmund, 2018, p. 175). Although she does not name the hauntedness that seems to underscore her work, it is there in the questions she poses:

What will happen to the stories, to the narratives, to the myths, and to the meanings that are attached to [these places]? What will happen to the possibility for exploring some of the complex relationships between these places and the people who (used to) inhabit them? (pp. 175-176)

Her questions also indicate how the stories, narratives, myths, and meanings do not disappear when the school is closed but linger until exploring the relationships between the people and the places is possible.

Even though her images and installations are focused on the abandoned structures, her art removes the emphasis from the physical structure of the building, which has lost its sense of identity, but remains as a reminder of the “space between the past and the future;” a simultaneous quality of de-institutionalization and embodiment that is “perceptually felt” (pp. 186-187):

My arts-based research not only documents what is dis/appearing from the postindustrial landscape, it also actively explores the generativity of loss and the possibilities of art as a form of remembrance, as an exegesis (exhibition and theoretical engagement), rather than a thesis

(argument), the final form moves beyond the traditional boundaries of dissertation research, an invitation for the academy to rethink the nature of dissertation research... (p. 187)

It is in this space of possibility through using art as a form of looking back and theoretical engagement that my research aligns with LeBlanc's.

LeBlanc (2014) emphasizes the multiple opportunities to make meaning for the artist/researcher who produces the artwork *and* for the viewer who encounters the artwork; she is less concerned with answering preconceived questions and more interested with the generation of new insights on multiple levels that art-based research invites (p. 59):

My dissertation entitled, *In/Visibility of The Abandoned School: Beyond Representations of School Closure* (LeBlanc, 2015) was an artistic form of inquiry in which photographs of an abandoned school were enlarged and projected onto its outside walls. Members of the community, who bore witness to the closure of the school, were invited to share their interpretations of the artistic event, allowing me to explore the generative possibilities of a de-commissioned building and its potential for (re)imagining relationships between space, time, place, and memory. <https://www.natalieleblanc.com/information/research.html>

This research is situated in a similar exploration of space, time, place, and memory—but memory as captured through the artifacts left behind as a way to center the narratives and community wealth that was masked through the closure process.



**Figure 3:** Images of *Haunting Raises Specters (by A.G.)* by Maria Gaspar, 2015, digitally printed dye substrate, aluminum curtain-track system, beaded chain, grommets, 10'x160' (permission to use images granted by artist)  
<https://mariagaspar.com/haunting-raises-specters>

Maria Gaspar, an interdisciplinary artist who teaches in the Department of Contemporary Practices at the School of the Art Institute of Chicago, leans into the notion of haunting in many of her works. She explicitly does so with her art installation titled *Haunting Raises Specters (by A.G.)* (2015), as the gauziness of her chosen material reflects the hauntings happening behind the 850-feet of boundary walls around Cook County Jail in Chicago and invites the viewer to think about the specters raised by mass incarceration.

*Haunting Raises Specters (by A.G.)* is an immersive installation in which the entire north-facing wall of the Cook County Jail in Chicago (25' x 850' in size) is scaled and printed onto a seamless, translucent textile and hung on a curtain-track system to create a (re)moveable "wall." The malleable facade contends with the rigid qualities of the actual wall, offering an opportunity for

the viewer to engage with its physical, social, and emotional power.

<https://mariagaspar.com/haunting-raises-specters>

Gaspar uses the aesthetic qualities of the sheer fabric to recast concrete aspects of the jail in a way that draws the viewer into the surreal-yet-very-real spaces inside the walls, spaces and stories that are rendered invisible to many who are on the outside.



**Figure 4:** Images of *Radioactive: Stories from Beyond the Wall* by Maria Gaspar and collaborators, 2016-2018, site intervention, dimensions variable; photo credit: Sarah J. Rhee (permission to use images granted by artist)

<https://mariagaspar.com/radioactive-stories-from-beyond-the-wall>

In a collaborative radio broadcast and digital animation that became a site intervention at the jail titled *Radioactive: Stories from Beyond the Wall* (Gaspar, 2019; Quiles, 2018), Gaspar worked with inmates to investigate “traces, ghosts, hauntings, trauma—all of which were very present for the detainees during their incarceration,” zeroing in on the mundane items that they touched and saw every day to create fictional narratives. By using the materiality of the inmates’ surroundings for creative production, Gaspar and her collaborators engaged with ghosts and gave attention to the hauntings to create “a space of freedom” (Quiles, 2018, para. 5), which then became an invitation to the larger community to reflect and consider.

*Radioactive: Stories from Beyond the Wall* is a series of community-engaged radio/visual broadcasts located between the largest architecture of Chicago’s West Side, the Cook County Jail, and the working-class residential area of the Lawndale communities. Radioactive centers the voices of those currently incarcerated by broadcasting and projecting intimate and creative stories

from inside Cook County Jail to outside its' border. <https://mariagaspar.com/radioactive-stories-from-beyond-the-wall>

The piece here works to undo the clean divisions between the institution and the neighborhood that the wall suggests, acknowledging the interaction between the two using the ghosts and hauntings as a catalyst for art forms—stories—that ask us to pause and reflect.



**Figure 5:** Images of *Overtone Hive* by Zorka Wollny, 2019, 24 channel sound sculpture in abandoned Overton Elementary School, Chicago (permission to use images granted by artist) <http://www.zorkawollny.net/?portfolio=overtone-hive>

Zorka Wollny is a Polish-born artist who is based in Germany. Her work sits between visual arts and performance arts, bound by the architecture (see [http://www.zorkawollny.net/?page\\_id=12](http://www.zorkawollny.net/?page_id=12)). She installed a sound sculpture inside Overton Elementary School in Chicago in the summer of 2019, a school that was closed in 2013. When walking through the building, the viewer experienced haunting noises like “eerie bumps and clangs” from Wollny’s sound recordings, while also being invited to engage with the

ghosts of students through voices that asked “*Why is our education less important than yours?*” and “*We are people as well as you are. Look at yourself. You have flesh. So do I,*” (Wollny, 2019, paras. 2, 5, 6).

In summer 2019 Wollny made recordings at the former Anthony Overton Elementary School, one of fifty Chicago public schools that were controversially closed in 2013 in the wake of budget deficits. The work centers on both the physical memory of the building and the collective memory of the community surrounding it. Presented in a classroom at the decommissioned school, the sound installation takes the shape of a large wasp nest made of tangled speakers and cables. Other speakers integrated into the building’s architecture emit sounds of footsteps and children talking, shouting, and making noise, evoking the school’s former vibrancy.

<http://www.zorkawollny.net/?portfolio=overtone-hive>

Wollny uses auditory senses to haunt the viewer, bringing to light the impact on students when public schools are closed, underscoring how the closings (de)value them as individuals.

The artists above illustrate the multiple inroads of reconsideration that can happen when artistic approaches work through the concepts of haunting and ghosts, inviting a broad audience. These projects serve as conceptual and concrete models for this project.

### **Centering Aesthetics**

A basic definition of aesthetics is the beauty of things. This is insufficient to capture what I mean by aesthetics and what has drawn me into this work and inspired me to do the work in the way I have. I am using *aesthetics* in this work to mean more precisely the texture of things, and not just the feeling-type of texture, but the experiential and sensory texture. Aesthetics is the essence of things that the word beauty starts to get at; beauty has a *valuing* that comes with it from the viewer/experiencer. Things get declared as having beauty, which has a static nature to it. The aesthetic-ness of something, to me, includes beauty, but also includes for a person encountering the aesthetics, a process of being, becoming, interacting, and connecting. Certainly, experiences and connections can be described as beautiful, but there is something about aesthetics that means more than beauty. Aesthetics can make us ponder: what is the story behind that thing that is taking my attention? Aesthetics are more than an imposed value of



being visually or auditorily pleasing but are about the ways in which we get drawn into something.

Aesthetics can serve as a catalyst for noticing, motivating, and remembering. Examples of aesthetics: the smell of powdered rouge taking someone back to their memories of grandma's embrace (aesthetics of memory); the name of a school etched into the stone lintel of a building (aesthetics of texture); a soundtrack to which one does their most productive work (aesthetics of rhythm); the palpable energy in the room when three of us remembered Andersen school together (aesthetics of experience).

As a project that started with hauntings and palimpsests and originated with my attention being pulled by the aesthetics of Andersen's name inscribed in the stone lintels of the school building, I knew this work had to be centered on storytelling and aesthetics—what stories were left behind, how could those stories be recast in artistic ways to elicit conversations about school closure?

## CHAPTER TWO: PROCESSES

Art lets us hold things and interact with ideas through a creative repository that other methods do not. The work on the pages throughout this document stems from a deep belief in the power of aesthetics and storytelling, as well as the hope that an artful approach will invite pause and reflection. An overarching aim that has already been mentioned several times is disrupting the deficit-based dominant narrative that informs school closure and part of that can happen through an artful approach. My hope is that people who engage with this text can pick it up and enter at a variety of points, engage with the ghosts through the stories, and thus reconsider what it means when we close schools. If you want the academic version of my methods, please go to Appendix B: Methodology and Methods. Otherwise, a summary of the processes through which I developed the portraits in Part II follows.

This document is a culmination of a deep inquiry into two schools that were closed in Chicago—Andersen and Schiller. I borrowed aspects from Du Bois’ *data portraits*, Lawrence-Lightfoot’s portraiture, and the tradition of arts-based research methods to develop my version of portraiture to gain better insight into schools I studied. I created *palimpsest portraits* (the visual art pieces) and crafted *portraits of remembering* (the narrative vignettes), which is what makes up Part II. The artwork and written portraits serve as an archive, concretizing the stories that the participants shared with me as they remembered the schools.

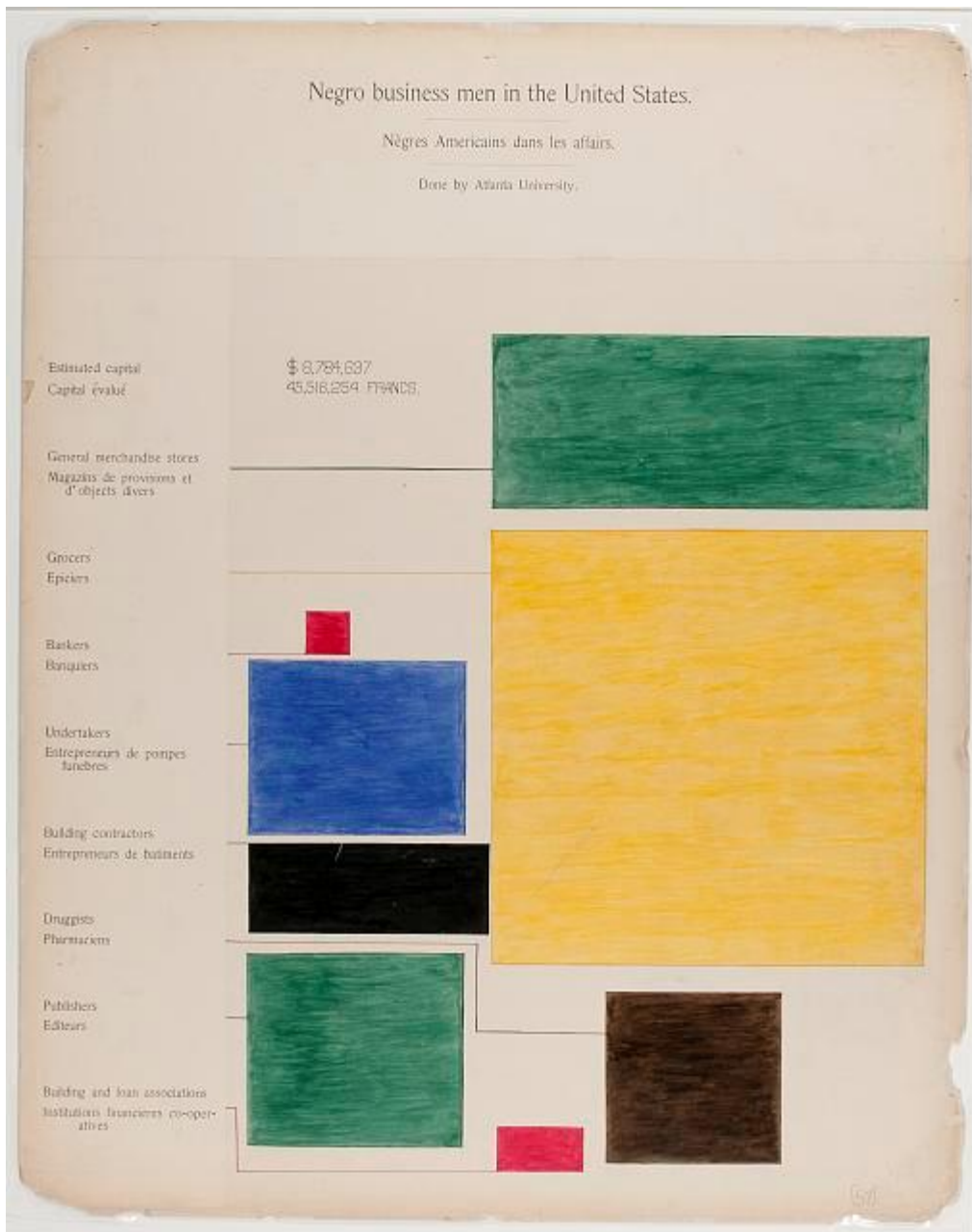
### **Portraiture + Du Bois + Arts-Based Methods**

I used the tenets of *portraiture* as my guide, which is an approach to social research brought to the field by Sara Lawrence-Lightfoot and others (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis, 1997). In this approach, the researcher engages in a deep inquiry into someone or something, gathering all sorts of information to learn as much as they can about the subject from a variety of places. Using all of this data and leaning into an aesthetic approach through a narrative voice, the researcher drafts rich, nuanced, complicated written portraits that attempt to capture the “essence” of the subject. A few key notions of portraiture are that the researcher’s voice and presence weave in and out of the work (in contrast to research approaches that

champion objectivity and/or a distant “gaze” of the researcher as observer), there is a commitment to honoring “goodness” while also embracing complexities, and the final product is an interpretative representation of the findings that engages with a broad audience because of the aesthetic appeal. In portraiture, process is as important as product.

Around the same time that I was learning about portraiture, I was introduced to W. E. B. Du Bois’ data portraits (see an example in Figure 6; Battle-Baptiste & Rusert, 2018). Du Bois’ data portraits are a different form of portraiture that uses an aesthetic appeal through visuals. These graphics represent the critical sociological work done by Du Bois and his team at Atlanta University. The beauty in their simplicity and the way visual design aspects help to convey the story being told both became a vehicle for disrupting the dominant narrative of the time. The data portraits tell the stories of the Black experience at the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century by re-presenting research findings in ways that value design aesthetics in the storytelling. There is something moving about the quantitative data being displayed in a way that reveals the hand of the artist through the marker and pencil lines that argues for embedding aesthetics in the stories we tell through our research. More than a century later, the portraits serve as a conduit to learn and converse about that time in history, displaying the data in ways that engage and invite contemplation.

The data portraits were plates exhibited in 1900 in Paris, representing a sociological approach to disrupting the dominant narrative of the Black experience in the US, mainly in Georgia. Figure 6 shows his portrait of Negro Businessmen in the US—with red, green, yellow, blue and black blocks representing the quantity of each type of work, with grocers being the largest in yellow, but also seeing professions like publishers in the bottom green square and bankers in the small top red square. These are not arranged in any other order but one that is aesthetically pleasing to further the engagement. It is in these visual choices that you can see the quantitative differences in professions.



**Figure 6:** “Negro business men in the United States”, W. E. B. Du Bois, 1900, Library of Congress

Arts-based methods are quite varied, but often embrace more questions than answers and work to harness the power of the aesthetics to engage. Braiding portraiture with the inspiration I found in the data portraits along with the examples of arts-based research gave me a foundation for my methods that was grounded in not only informing but inspiring my viewer/reader, working towards disrupting the dominant, deficit-based narrative, and providing an invitation to a broader audience to think about the stories we tell

about schools. These approaches guided the ways I leaned into aesthetics to recast the stories of Andersen and Schiller schools.

### ***Reinventing Portraiture***

I paid close attention to the ghosts and hauntings of the schools that were closed through the material traces left behind using archival methods. I spent time in different places where stories are housed. First, I spent time in the archives at the Chicago History Museum and the Special Collections at the library at the University of Illinois Chicago, collecting dozens of images and news articles. I searched online for any information about the two schools I chose to study. I looked at how the demographics and enrollment have shifted over time. I found more photographs and news articles about the schools and the closing processes, specifically about the ways the community resisted. I requested records from Chicago Public Schools from the public hearings and formal declarations about the closings through the Freedom of Information Act (FOIA). I went to the sites and took hundreds of photographs of the schools and the neighborhoods at different times. Throughout all of this digging and beyond, I wrote about everything I observed, perceived, remembered, and felt, resulting in over a hundred memos in the end (Creswell, 2013; Grant et al., 2016; Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis, 1997). I named and indexed over 700 pieces of data.

Oftentimes, this digging led me down various rabbit holes, some of which I would have liked to have stayed in but I needed to bound each phase of this work to have a dissertation that was finished. I was reading literature on how Cabrini Green became what it was and how buildings change over time (Brand, 1995; Hoag, n.d.; Vale, 2013). I was learning about artistic approaches in general, but specifically around mapping and how others were grappling with the past/present<sup>9</sup> (Fisher & Fortnum, 2013; Harmon,

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<sup>9</sup> Creative pieces that took my attention were the film [70 Acres in Chicago](#), a documentary about Cabrini Green; the film [Let the Little Light Shine](#), a documentary about National Teachers Academy, a school that successfully fought their closure; [Surviving the Long Wars](#), an art exhibit with related events over three sites in Chicago documenting the US's role in multiple conflicts from the point of view of artists of Color or Indigenous heritage, many who served in the military; [The Power of Storytelling](#), a 2022 panel connected to an art exhibit at the National Public Housing Museum; and Tonika Johnson's work, specifically her [Folded Map™ Project](#).

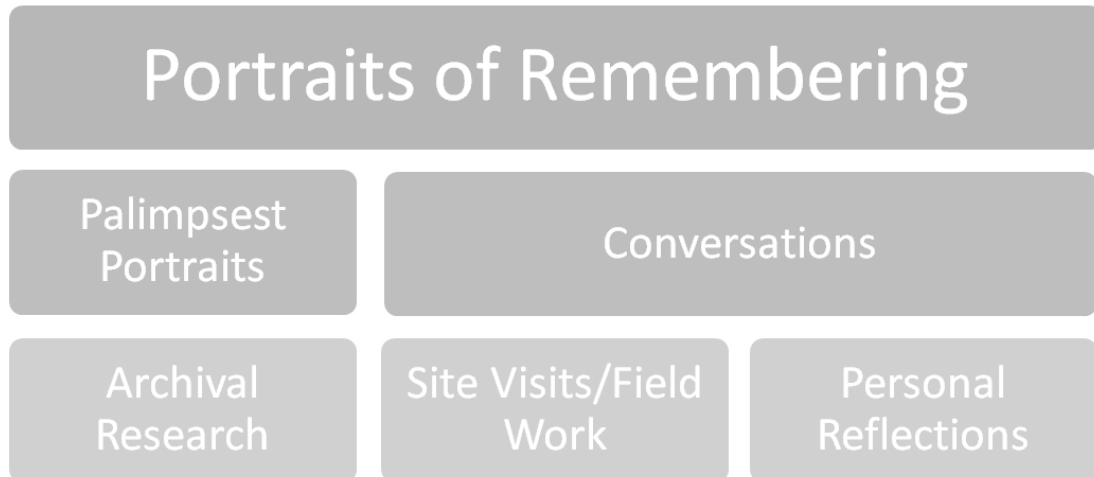
2009; Lucero & Estrada, 2019; Metres, 2020). As much as I was studying the two schools, I was studying how stories are told.

To create the artwork you see in Part II, I blended data visualization and arts-based methods through collaging and photography, inventing my own version of portraiture. I made layered collages and isolated photographs to help me think about the schools and their past and present. I call the visual art pieces in the next part *palimpsest portraits*, which I used as a conduit for conversations with people about school closings (see Appendix C). I wrote about my process all along the way in my memos. The artmaking helped me to make meaning, to organize what I had collected but I also used visual arts as a tool to engage with people in conversations. The art invited others to talk with me about school closure in general, anyone who encountered me in my artmaking space or folks who asked me about what I was working on. So often, the people I was in conversation with would launch into their own storytelling, connecting their past experiences to the stories I was examining.

I reached out to specific folks connected to each school who were listed in the records or otherwise identified as connected to the school. I explained my research and asked them for a conversation to remember the school. These were intentionally framed as conversations and not interviews, although some research gatekeeping places did prompt me to call them interviews<sup>10</sup>. I then compiled the stories I collected from the archives and that were shared with me during these conversations to construct written narrative portraits from the conversations I had, using Lawrence Lightfoot's *The Good High School* (1983) as a model while borrowing the braided essay from Brenda Miller (2021) in the literary world. This is what you read in Chapter Five and Six, where I pull the veil back on the research conversations; these are the *portraits of remembering*.

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<sup>10</sup> After much thought and at the request of the IRB, I billed the process as an interview or a focus group to align more clearly with commonly known research practices but also tried to lace the recruitment material with a tone that invited conversations. There is a tension between making this seem less “researchy” when the IRB’s aim is to be sure folks know that they are participating in research.



**Figure 7:** Structure of Processes

Just as memories are not files on a shelf to be retrieved, but socially enacted “creative engagements” (Anderson & Daya, 2022, p. 1675; Biklen, 2004), I have learned through this work that stories are not sitting there in the participants, waiting to be collected for our research purposes. We breathe life into the stories of the past through having conversations and remembering our experiences with each other.

School closure is a form of historical trauma in cities like Chicago. Simon & Eppert (1997) argue that, as researchers and teachers, we have obligations when we bear witness to stories from people who have experienced historical trauma, which are acknowledgement, remembrance, and consequence. Michelle Fine (2006, 2016) argues for just methods that motivate reader agency and use forms that awaken the reader to upend the comfortable objectiveness of the researcher-reader relationship that often has no obligation attached to the work. Maxine Greene (1995, 2007) asks us to do work in ways that imagine otherwise, offering an opposition to the anesthetic-ness of facts and figures presented in research stories.

With this work, in addition to the invitation to reconsider the commonsenseness of school closure, I argue for research methods that center aesthetics in our research and practices. We need to tell research stories that awaken the reader, meet our obligations of bearing witness, and resist the anesthetic-ness that has masked over the stories from communities.

## Theoretical Foundations

The choices I made about how to do this work are informed by a critical theoretical perspective, or a specific lens through which I approached the research; the critical part means that this lens centers an interrogation of power, specifically here around race and class, and how our society creates and maintains certain structures around those power dynamics. From designing this project, to making it happen, to the thinking about it after the fact, I used Michelle Fine's (2016) notion of *critical bifocality* because it brings into focus the complex and critical considerations needed to contextualize and historicize educational research beyond a surface-level retrospective. The contexts and histories of research stories, of school stories, and of neighborhood stories must include an analysis of the differential power structures that maintain and perpetuate the racialized and classed hierarchies in which we educate our young people and teachers in the US.

Fine calls for a structural and historical analysis to contextualize research stories at all levels through critical bifocality, "a theory/method for interrogating history, structures, and lives that are often occluded by downstream analyses of outcomes, especially disparate outcomes used to demonstrate social inequality" (p. 350). One key obligation of critical bifocality is re-inscribing the historical and structural causes that have been erased from how we frame social inequalities—like urban school closures—to "revive the sense of possibility for those who still believe in lost causes including redistribution, recognition, and radical transformation" (p. 362). Using arts-based methods, I worked to "re-view the past, reframe the present, and reimagine the future" through my reinvention of portraiture (p. 350).

Yosso (2005) points out that "one of the most prevalent forms of contemporary racism in US schools is deficit thinking" (p. 75) and offers the idea of *community cultural wealth* as a lens through which we can view urban schools and communities. Hers is a response to common thinking that uses Bourdieu's idea of cultural capital from the 1970s to say that "some communities are culturally wealthy while others are culturally poor" with White middle class culture as the standard (Yosso, 2005, p. 76). "Centering the research lens on the experiences of People of Color in critical historical context reveals accumulated assets and resources in the histories and lives of Communities of Color" (Yosso, 2005, p.



77), such as aspirational, linguistic, familial, social, navigational, and resistant capital. Several educators collaborated to use Yosso's community cultural wealth to reframe, recast, and reclaim the narratives of their schools and neighborhoods that were written from a deficit lens in Kozol's *Savage Inequalities*, a book that has been used in teacher education for decades. Their book is called *Reauthoring Savage Inequalities: Narratives of Community Cultural Wealth in Urban Educational Environments* (Patton et al., 2023).

Yosso's concept of community cultural wealth informed the way I designed the research and approached the conversations, wanting to highlight stories that refused a deficit lens of the schools and people. Michelle Fine's idea of critical bifocality helped me to think about how my deep dive into two particular cases was part of a critical assessment of the structures in which school closure happens *and* educational research is carried out. The core of this work is stories—stories we tell about schools and using the power of stories to disrupt dominant narratives around school closure.

### **Embracing Not Knowing**

There is a special aspect of this approach that requires that the researcher become comfortable with the discomfort of *not knowing* throughout the process. Of course, in educational research, we often do not know things or are in search of answers to things we do not know; yet this is not what I mean by *not knowing*. I lean into Fisher and Fortnum's (2013) collection of essays by artists—*On Not Knowing: How Artists Think*—to unpack what it means to *not know* while doing this type of inquiry. Oftentimes, artists start a process without knowing what the end will be and sometimes not reaching an “end.” I find myself colloquially calling this dissertation “a true experiment,” while Fisher and Fortnum name it as “thinking through doing” (preface). I am referring to the abyss that artists (and others) often jump into when starting their work, framing the not knowing as a generative and productive space versus a problem to be solved or a space in which to fill with knowledge found. The authors' collection of essays points to the “largely negative lexicon” associated with not knowing.

Where knowledge is positive, the *unknown* is often simply its opposite: it is *uncertain*, *invisible*, *incomprehensible*. *Not* knowing represents a lack or absence, inadequacy to be overcome.

However the essays, conversations, and case studies gathered together here describe a kind of liminal space where *not knowing* is not only not overcome, but sought, explored and savoured; where failure, boredom, frustration, and getting lost are constructively deployed alongside wonder, secrets, and play. (preface)

The editors name a gendering that happens, too. “Historically, even the knowing subject has traditionally been gendered as male, thus aligning not knowing and its negative connotations with the other, female” (p. 13). Flipping this on its head, the artist embraces a “pedagogy of the not known” that demands a rethinking of normative learning and “brings to light gaps in our understanding” (pp. 136-140); it is not a quest to fill those gaps with knowledge but *to be* or *become* within them.

James Baldwin (1962) writes about using creativity to uncover the questions that our answers have masked. This notion of embracing an approach that does not work toward clearer or better answers, but refuses a path toward a defined answer, underscores the ways in which research “answers” might neglect paths towards ways of knowing, thus covering up valuable insights, experiences, and stories through a quest for that which is recognizable in the research world (Fisher & Fortnum, 2013).

Although the institutional re-inscription of art as a form of learning and research has become a way of recuperating art’s commodity value in terms of a knowledge economy (with standardised and measurable learning/experiential outcomes), the true value of art in this context lies in its capacity for revealing and hosting the activity of not knowing. (p. 12)

The quest can be for different questions when embracing the unknown. Art approaches can be an “invitation to untether what is ‘known’... Art as a form of research or a way of thinking provides the means to engage with the unknown, but it also questions the quest to know” (p. 8, 11).

Braiding Du Bois, Lawrence-Lightfoot, and arts-based methods to reinvent portraiture through my palimpsest portraits aligns with welcoming the abyss of the unknown, conceptually and materially. Conceptually, palimpsestuous work starts with incomplete remnants of the past that have agency in the

present and often require us to be open to the aesthetics that might beg our attention, like old signage on the facade of a school building, if we learn to listen for the stories. There are only shadows, traces, parts with which to work and yet they hold a presence in the present, bringing with them a larger absent-presence that takes up space (Ferguson & Nichols, 2021; Gordon, 2008).

Throughout the processes, I quipped that this experience felt like a little kids' soccer game: sometimes it looked like a recognizable game, oftentimes it looked like a cluster of not knowing what was going on. Wins felt accidental but were the (culmination of) learning, interactions, practices, and dedication to the process. It was always inventive or playful, if infused with frustration. It was nonlinear and imbalanced while in process but seemed to even out by the time my art or writing sessions wrapped up. All of it could only advance by doing what was being done. Using art methods that are inexact and temperamental also helps to "...recontextualize art as 'a place where things can happen' rather than 'a thing in the world'" (Fisher & Fortnum, 2013, p. 12). Incorporating visual arts methods into educational research questions what we measure and how and what knowledges we value and why. "Increasingly recognised as a valid mode of enquiry, art offers ways of approaching and articulating knowledge that are not utilised in other disciplines" (p. 11). The *not knowing* is not a lacking but an invitation to reassess the ways in which we pursue educational research.

### **Ethical Considerations**

Before presenting the stories from Andersen and Schiller, I want to offer some ethical considerations that I have grappled with and continue to think about.

There are stories—data— that I have that I chose to not recast here. I presume all researchers are selective in some way like this. There are a variety of reasons for this. Just as storytelling can be insightful and a way to connect with others, it can also be damaging and harmful, as my next chapter highlights. This is where theoretical foundations help to guide researchers, as I can lean on the theories to inform these research moves.

Additionally, as much as I believe that the conversations and stories represented in Part II are a product of the social interactions between the participants and myself as we remembered together (Anderson & Daya, 2022), there is still the underlying tension to be considered that in some ways these were stories that belong to someone else that I did collect. This deserves more unpacking and conversations, actually. I had a connection with each school prior to this study but because so much of what I offer are not stories that originated with me, or within me, I hope I have taken enough care in recasting them that the participants see the essence of what they share with me on the page. It is but one representation.

During the conversations, I heard stories about people other than the person I was talking with. Some of these were recast and some were not; these were ethical decisions I made. I talked with people about school closure and about the current schools—LaSalle II and Skinner North—who were not participants, again, for a variety of reasons. Although our conversations are not cast here, this is all part of the fabric of the storytelling and informs what I chose to narrate explicitly on the page. There is no bracketing out in this work (Miles et al., 2020; Tufford & Newman, 2012) or removing the researcher for some distance to prevent preconceptions “tainting” the research, but a layering, a metaphorical collaging if you will, created by ongoing encounters with people, mostly through conversation as is consistent with portraiture (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis, 1997).

There was a process of collaboration, as well as negotiation and reconciliation, where the written portraits were shaped by feedback from participants. Sometimes this is called member checking, sometimes triangulation (Creswell, 2013; Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis, 1997; Miles et al., 2020). I had envisioned this as continued conversations and reconciling some of my decisions with the participants, but logistics made most of these interactions post-first-draft happen over email.

As researchers, we tell stories about schools and people (and I talk more about this in the next chapter and in the last chapter). There is a wake left after documenting someone else’s stories (Bilbrough, 2014; Clarke, 2023; Hauser, 2023). We have obligations to our participants as well as to the stories themselves as we navigate our methods and approaches for what this looks like, what is negotiable, and

what is not for the research stories we are creating. For me, it was important that the participants could affirmatively say they saw their stories on the page (Harrington et al., 2023). I was not only researcher, or even participant-observer, but I was witness. I was witness to their act of remembering (with me) and their stories as they told them to me. I was witness to school closure in 2013. I was witness as a teacher the years I was in my CPS classroom.

There are also the racial and class tensions that I narrate and other tensions that arise in the stories. I interpreted my choice of taking a community wealth perspective (Yosso, 2005) as balancing the need to take tough topics head-on when my participants did not want me to with letting them lead through their own choice of what to share within my asset-based framing. I cannot be confident that the participants who did not respond after I sent them a draft are satisfied with the way I recast their stories. I trust that they trusted me as much as they needed to, revealed what they felt comfortable with, and those are the stories I share onward with you, the reader.

One other ethical obligation that needs mentioning with portraiture, and when centering remembering as I have in this project, is the notion of accuracy (see Appendix B for further explorations on accuracy and generalizability). In my approach, I have an obligation to honor the participants' remembering, their memories, and the essence of their stories. I have little interest in knowing if the stories they tell me are accurate in a conventional sense; it is more important to me that they remember the schools in the ways they did, shrouded in a sense of community and justice. It is important to explore why the participants remembered the schools the way they did, the intangibles that they name, that the district did not authentically engage with them (or the perception of), and less important to map out quantitative facts or figures to tell a research story around any bounded, singular "truth." I have an obligation to their stories, and their rememberings, as truths.

I would venture to say that none of these considerations get reconciled, but they get continually attended to along the way and after the fact too, through the research moves I make. I think taking an artistic approach allows for this to happen in a way that feels the most appropriate. Anderson and Daya

(2022) articulate some of the ways this happens in their work around memory and art-based research that resonates with my approach as well.

We were acutely aware throughout the process that as memory researchers, we elicit and give a particular form to other people's stories, and that representing these carries the potential to cause pain. The ambiguous and soft materiality of 3000 knots [their art exhibit] was therefore intended to align with the ways in which stories were told to us, as well as to symbolise the key elements of life in Lower Claremont that had been important to participants. (p. 1689)

I chose approaches that examine power around race and class while also choosing research moves that are, for me, embedded with care—conversations, storytelling, and artmaking.

My methodological and theoretical choices for this project also have ethical components. It felt like an ethical obligation to not do this research in more mainstream ways, because of what I explore in Chapter Two and the stories we tell about schools. As much as art spaces have been historically exclusive, artists are often at the heart of resistance and reimagination. “At the same time, as Boal (2006:46) suggests, the production of an artwork is a way of imagining alternatives, of creating the future as we want it, and a way of restructuring the world” (Anderson & Daya, 2022, p. 1690). If one of the aims of this project is to prime folks to reimagine alternatives to school closures, then a creative approach seemed the best medium through which to present my “findings.” By engaging with the images or narratives, the viewer/reader cannot avoid the confrontation of the past with the present. Part of the ethics of doing critical work that potentially disrupts is to provide these moments for rupture. As with Anderson and Daya's (2022) work:

For those who did attend to it, even minutely, 3000 knots [their art installation] demanded a degree of labour. Choosing to look, even to glance towards the work, meant having to process the past, or a rupture in the present, and deciding how to respond to it. (p. 1690)

After reading the portraits in Chapters Five and Six, my readers will have to decide if they will turn away from the invitation to engage or will get to know the schools through the stories presented in ways that upend the commonsenseness of school closure.

Simon and Eppert (1997) present the obligations of bearing witness to stories—or testimonies—that involves historical trauma, such as a project like this on school closure. “Testimony is thus always directed toward another. It places the one who receives it under the obligation of response to an embodied singular experience not recognizable as one's own” (Simon & Eppert, 1997, p. 176). I found myself receiving stories being offered, being witness to the tellings and making decisions about what to do with the testimonies, while also being a co-creator of the stories through offering my own experiences or other research stories I had encountered. Throughout it all, the stories my participants offered up—either to me as a receiver or with me as a co-creator—were the “vital personal supplement to impersonal documentary evidence” that makes the narrative even more powerful and important to the stories of school closure (p. 177).

I knew that this work would be heavy and have some major considerations, ethically, artistically, and academically. Simon and Eppert articulate what I think collectively was happening through remembering for the group of people who responded to my recruitment calls: “commemorative ethics” and the claim that the participants made to the past for the present.

This claim is not just a matter of enacting some form of retribution or providing material redress as compensation for an oppressive and deadly violence inflicted on families and communities. Nor is it an empty nostalgia or mourning for a lost portion of one's own identity. The claim of past generations made through the call to remembrance requires something more than an egoism which predefines remembrance as that which confirms who one is and what one knows. It requires a commemorative ethics that acknowledges and assesses the indexical character of testimonial practices while recognizing the impossibility of fully narrating the experiences to which such practices refer. (p. 177)

In our conversations, it did not feel nostalgic and there was a layer of retribution and redress. And it is impossible to fully narrate what I experienced while in conversation with the people connected to Andersen and Schiller. I speak in Chapter 7 about the surrealness of the group conversation we had.

Although some participants responded to say I did well to capture the *essence* of what they told me, it cannot fully capture what they are remembering.

And so I invite you, reader, to come on this journey with me, as much as you can with what I am presenting in this document. I am guided by the obligations of bearing witness—acknowledgment, remembrance, and consequence (Simon & Eppert, 1997, p. 181).

We argue that "bearing" witness to historical trauma demands (but does not necessarily secure) acknowledgement, remembrance, and some indication that the provision of the testimony has been of consequence. One must bear (support and endure) the psychic burden of a traumatic history, and acknowledge that memories of violence and injustice press down on one's sense of humanity and moral equilibrium. As well, one must bear (carry) and thus transport and translate stories of past injustices beyond their moment of telling by taking these stories to another time and space where they become available to be heard or seen. Finally, through words, images, or actions, one must indicate to others not only why what one has seen or heard is worthy of remembrance but also how such remembrance may inform one's contemporary perceptions and actions. Thus, witnessing is completed not by merely enduring the apprehension of difficult stories but by transporting and translating these stories beyond their moment of enunciation. Central to witnessing is either the re-presentation to others of what one has heard or seen, or the enactment of one's relationship with others so as to make evident that one's practice has been informed by the living memory of prior testimony. (Simon & Eppert, 1997, p. 178)

I invite you to get to know Andersen and Schiller as bigger than their closings while also learning what it meant to people for these schools to be shut down by the district. If you knew the schools before, I invite you to remember with us. As a consequence of my bearing witness to these rememberings, I ask you to be part of the time and space to which I transport and translate the stories shared with me. I worked to honor what was being marked, beyond something merely stated—I worked to include the *saying* as much as the *said* (Simon & Eppert, 1997, p. 182). In Chapters Five and Six, you'll notice the silences that I narrated,



or the shift of a gaze that I noted, or even the lump in my own throat that I detailed as I am overcome by emotion.

By going on this journey, there is the responsibility of naming “a story as important to pass on”—the *portraits of remembering* are the “concrete form” that I share with you (p. 188). And a consequence of that may be, hopefully, through pause and reflection, a reconsideration of school closure when the district inevitably encounters similar challenges as school populations and demographics shift over time, often in response to public policies.

If we know what happened [in the past], we might be able to use this information to inductively infer regularities in the way our environment works and therefore form appropriate expectations about what will happen. On the other hand, however, knowing about the past can be important because some past causes have effects that manifest only after some time in the future (e.g., infections). In this way, knowing what happened might allow one to predict what will happen or what is the case. (Mahr & Csibra, 2020, p. 431)

We would do well to heed Greene’s ask of “How could it be otherwise?” and her call for research, literature, art, music, and dance “that ‘fights the numbness of oppression’” (Fine, 2006, pp. 100, 101; Greene, 1995). Anderson and Daya (2022) call for more work around “the less tangible but no less meaningful dimensions of life in such spaces, such as memory, storytelling, and memorializing” (p. 1674).

There are two chapters I lay out, before you encounter the portraits: Chapter Three walks you through the literature that I read in preparation for this work and while I was writing this document. I have framed and organized the literature as stories we tell about schools. Chapter Four offers multiple contexts that matter when considering stories of schools that were closed. I hope both chapters offer insights for the readings of the portraits in Chapter Five and Six while I also think that those two chapters can stand on their own to tell the layered and complex stories about schools that were closed.

### CHAPTER THREE: STORIES WE TELL ABOUT SCHOOLS

This study of two schools that were closed in Chicago requires an examination of the stories told *about* and *by* neighborhoods and school communities. I offer here a meandering through the literature on schools and neighborhoods that I hope is helpful to read before reading the portraits of remembering in Chapters Five and Six. The organization of the stories we tell about schools goes like this: I start with the importance of the histories and contexts of stories, then move to the stories told about schools through neoliberal discourse, the research stories that point to what that neoliberal discourse masks, and stories of resistance immersed in the complexities of histories and contexts. I then examine tensions around complicity in reifying the stories told about schools. Circling back to hauntings and ghosts, I offer literature that guided the work by thinking about remembering through research. This first half provides a broad view of the stories we tell about schools.

The second half of this chapter pivots deeper into the literature about remembering, specifically the role that artifacts and place play when we remember, resisting through remembering, an exploration of collective remembering, and the absence of remembering. Understanding the ways in which remembering has been theorized and analyzed by sociologists; psychologists; philosophers; writers and artists; and urban planners, architects, and theorists offers the opportunity to read the portraits with a perspective larger than an individual school that was closed and remembered.

The purpose of providing this literature review is to provide a primer on the research conversations in various fields that inform my thinking, to offer a glimpse of the interdisciplinary and complex ways remembering and stories go together. First, though, it is important to note the work that stories do and differentiate the ways in which stories *do* the work they do as an introduction to this chapter.

Stories are powerful entities that can impact quality of life, such as medical care outcomes (de Leeuw, 2014) and educational opportunities (Gorski, 2008). Stories are at the heart of making meaningful connections and honoring identities (de Leeuw, 2014). Stories get cultivated over time for a variety of

purposes—some rely heavily on remembering and recounting while some depend on masking over through a *cultivated forgetting* (Ferguson & Nichols, 2021).

In doing the multi-level work that stories do, stories can be outward-facing descriptors that project meaning. Stories can also pivot to be inward-facing invitations for reflection. Both have agency that can be used to connect through the human experience. And as such, they also can be agents for disconnection. Stories are both crafted with certain intentions (implicit or explicit) and then received by others who may or may not be aware of the intentions (Allweiss et al., 2015).

Digging deeper, stories as outward descriptors create narratives about a place or people that casts a certain image or picture about that place and/or people through which meaning is made (by the storyteller and by others). Many teachers in the classroom intimately and explicitly know the power a story can have, while many of us are unaware of the power that stories have in shaping educational policy and practices (Aggarwal et al., 2012; Allweiss et al., 2015; Waitoller, 2020). Some stories have a narrative sequencing, while numbers and quantitative data representations, as well as other images, also tell stories about the subject being represented without such sequencing.

Considering stories as inward-facing entities, de Leeuw, a critical medical scholar, writes the “narrative, or story, allows for humans to truly understand each other” while allowing practitioners to “critically reflect on their own practices by understanding events relationally, over time, and across different spaces, to learn from other professionals about expanding skill sets, to effectively communicate about the ‘wickedly’ complicated issues so often involved in clinical interactions” (2014, p. 66). I would argue the same is true in education—stories allow educational stakeholders, from practitioners to researchers to policymakers to families, to learn from each other and communicate about the similarly “wickedly” complicated issues within the educational world.

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Woven into the complex realm of urban school closings are powerful stories—stories about neighborhoods, stories about schools, stories about students, families, and teachers. In each section below,

I offer literature to show how scholars theorize about the stories told of schools, including in each section stories of specific school closures.

### **Historicizing and Contextualizing**

All stories have contexts and are situated in histories, including research stories. I start here with exploring the calls for historicizing and contextualizing our research lenses. I continue, then, with examples of how researchers have done this with selected cases of school closure studies. Scholars have called for prioritizing the histories and contexts that shape the stories that are told, stories that have heavy implications for reproducing, maintaining and preserving racial inequities specifically through school closings.

Ferguson and Nichols (2021) argue that qualitative research conventions need reconsideration, namely that of anonymizing school sites, to uncover what exactly gets masked when sites are de-identified and disconnected from their “material histories of places, communities, and cities” because the present is “a living palimpsest of historical events” (p. 2). The authors look at two previous research inquiries they made into school sites, centering the histories upon re-examination, to understand the happenings in the present-day schools. They call for using histories as central to inquiry, instead of treating histories as a backdrop (p. 2), a shift that impacts the resulting research story that gets told.

Ferguson and Nichols’ ideas of *cultivated forgetting* and *selective remembering* offer ways to think about stories that are told about school closings and openings. When acknowledged as practices that happen through school reforms (and research on those reforms), these concepts serve to guide qualitative research inquiry into the present-past (p. 8). Cultivated forgetting is “required to produce places and practices as ‘innovative’ or ‘new’,” which is then extended as a proxy for educational equity as the new offerings are targeted at supporting low-income families of color, while failing to look at the history of innovations spun in the same fashion (p. 10). The layered significance of how the past and present were intertwined could not be dismissed once the histories around “innovation” were uncovered and

acknowledged by Nichols, one of the researchers affiliated with their university-neighborhood-related school site.

For me, this recognition [of the history] unsettled the observable field-site, conjuring the absent-presences embedded with its associated people, places, and practices. It became difficult, for example, to hear claims of ‘innovative’ organizational arrangements or instructional methods without being pulled back to those that prefigured them, and their uneven implications for students, families, neighborhoods, communities, and the city itself. Even more, it unsettled my positionality in the site: given the history of universities in the city leveraging the discourse of ‘innovation’ in their own interests, what did it mean to be a university-affiliated researcher working in a school of students for whom ‘innovation’ is not a buzzword or research topic, but a last resort in a district that had otherwise gutted the commons of public education? These hauntings, in other words, impacted more than sites being studied; they provoked forms of reflective nostalgia that extended even to the act of research itself. (p. 11)

The hauntings are manifold: traces lingering at school sites were also embodied within the researcher. The way in which Ferguson and Nichols reflect on the centering of histories had implications related to their own positionality and their relationship to the school site. The multi-layered ways in which the absent-presence and histories at school sites informed the research inquiry mattered, from researcher reflections on positionality to driving the analysis of the present-day initiatives.

Fine (2016) calls for a structural and historical analysis to contextualize research stories at all levels, with a focus on the “social psychological consequences” of what de Leeuw et al. call the “causes of the causes” (2010, p. 285) through *critical bifocality* (Weis & Fine, 2012; also see Chapter Two). “I believe psychology as a discipline, social psychology in particular, has been complicit in severing outcomes from history and structures; that we have contributed to the erasure of lost causes; and that we have marginalized voices at the rim...” (Fine, 2016, p. 350). Fine argues that historicizing and contextualizing micro-level social issues through a macro-level critique is necessary to “reattach the severed limbs of bodies to history, and structure,” acknowledging that neoliberalism works to “dissect,

distribute, and re-visualize disposable bodies as if they were autonomous from history, freed from political or social constraints, marinating in circumstances of their own making” (p. 351).

By exploring history, structural arrangements, the (un)intended impacts of policies, and the vibrant creativity and interdependence of lives in dispossessed and also privileged communities, we interrogate the accumulation of dispossession and privilege as human-made processes that can be unmade (Fine & Ruglis 2008 [sic]). (p. 358)

Using Fine’s concept of critical bifocality is useful when thinking about school closure and studying individual schools as part of a larger system.

This places the inquiry into a specific site, as Ewing (2018) and others have done, in a structural and historical critique through a critical lens and connects school choice to accumulation of privilege (Fine, 2016, p. 358). Fine names one key obligation of critical bifocality as reinscribing the historical and structural causes that have been erased from how we frame social inequalities—like urban school closures—in order to “revive the sense of possibility for those who still believe in lost causes including redistribution, recognition, and radical transformation” (p. 362). The portraits presented in Chapters Five and Six and my subsequent discussions and thoughts work to “re-view the past, reframe the present, and reimagine the future” (p. 350) through storytelling about the particular schools while placing the schools in a structural context.

de Leeuw et al. (2010) offer from the medical world how stories of tragic occurrences can be framed in historically situated ways that cause harm while masked in needing intervention. Within Indigenous communities in Canada, stories of tragedy have been situated in a larger story maintained and constructed through colonial discourses that cast Indigenous peoples as deviants in need of saving. The tragedies “must be understood as historically informed, as socially produced, and as linked to broad conditions of health and wellness, including mental health and addiction realities” over generations (p. 283). They argue for a social determinants perspective that accounts for the historical discourses that linger in present-day policies and practices.

Understanding people's health through a social determinants lens means thinking about systems and structures in which people live as opposed to privileging inquiries about individuals as separate from their social contexts (Marmot et al. 2008). It has been described as research that moves thinking from 'the cell to the social' and as a practice of investigating 'the causes of the causes.' (p. 285)

de Leeuw et al. highlight how the addiction or abuse that trends through certain populations who have been stripped of their culture through colonialism has been used as further justification for contemporary state intervention as related to child protective services; this echoes the same discourse used to create and maintain residential schools. "These discourses also produced and reinforced the very problems and pathologies they targeted" (p. 288).

The logic behind the discourse examined by de Leeuw et al. seems parallel to the logic used by school districts when schools are slated to be closed: students' poor academic performance is proof that they need state intervention. Or, when the schools cannot attract enough students to fill their seats sufficiently, this is proof that they need actions against them (on their behalf) as determined by the state. The authors call into question any programs or interventions that isolate the issues facing Indigenous peoples' health concerns, naming colonialism as the "cause of the causes," where seemingly individual tragedies are events "shaped by long histories of undermining the ability for Indigenous families and communities" to care for their children. The same can be said of the school closings in places like Chicago: these are not isolated tragedies or sad circumstances that befall low-income communities, but situations created by long histories of undermining the ability for communities to educate and care for their youth in the face of generations of resource deprivation (Clark, 2022).

To examine the importance of context, specifically as related to racialized histories in schools in the US, Lewis et al. (2015) illustrate the contested notion of integration as an answer to "persistent racialized hierarchies" through the study of Riverside High School—a racially desegregated school that is a "highly racialized educational terrain" (p. 22, p. 23). Although this study is certainly set in the history of segregated schools, the analysis focuses on the intentions of integration *in the context of* present racialized

hierarchies in the US society. School spaces through academic tracking and social interactions work to reproduce the racial inequalities that the school expressly worked against (p. 23).

A teacher in the study spoke about the “nature of things,” telling the story of a seemingly benign coincidence of segregation within the school. Putting this in a context of socialized racial hierarchies, the authors assert, “It is certainly not the *nature of things* but rather the *structure of things*—how classes are organized—that generates these patterns” (pp. 30-31, emphasis authors’), naming the *institutional* and *everyday discrimination* (p. 27) at play, where no individual actors can be blamed for the racialized outcomes. Theirs is not a simplified argument that history matters, but that even when history is considered with good intentions—Riverside had intentional policies and practices in place related to racial integration *because* they took into account the racialized history of schools. Good intentions did not overcome the ways in which racism and classism functioned on an everyday basis at the school. They argue contextualization becomes an additional necessary consideration, as the question becomes one of how integrated a school can be in our society that fosters and maintains racial hierarchies (p. 23, p. 31). “[T]rying to implement integration within a context of deep inequalities in wealth and resources, entrenched race-based status beliefs, and wide-scale disinvestment in public services presents many challenges” (p. 34). Taken broadly, theirs is an argument for contextualizing of any educational research, and thus any research stories we tell about schools.

On a more local level, scholars have investigated the cases of school closures illustrating the importance of historicizing the stories of individual schools during the closure process to value the counterstories from the community. Good (2017) offers an analysis of the stories of two school closures in Philadelphia, stitching together history and place in a way that reveals important implications around belonging.

I argue that the telling of history in this context [to protest a school’s closure] must be understood as a dimension of the production of place and that, as such, it carries assertions not only about the historical value of a school, but also about the identity of a neighborhood and those to whom that neighborhood belongs. (p. 862)



Through calling up the history of the school, the community claimed the institution and the neighborhood, contesting the academic and operational metrics that the district used to justify the proposed closures, metrics that erased historical claims to place. This echoes the case I include below set in New Orleans, where administrators taunted the community through an accusation of being too attached to the building at the cost of a quality education (Buras, 2015, p. 154).

Good (2017) details the production of place through the stories told about the Philadelphia schools by the invocation of different kinds of histories—a history of the schools being a pillar of the community for generations, where alumni proudly recalled memories as well as a history of discrimination and disinvestment for generations. Families connected the school closures to yet another move by the state against poor African American communities.

By rooting school closure processes within the particular histories of the neighborhoods where schools were slated for closure, stakeholders revealed the consequences of closures to be continuations of historic place-based inequities... As institutions intimately intertwined with the lives of local communities over generations, schools can come to signify communities' own histories in place and their ongoing claims to their neighborhoods. (p. 880)

This call for listening to the ways communities historicize the stories of their schools becomes more important when considering the neoliberal agenda that tells seemingly a-historical stories that drive many of the urban school closings of the last thirty years. (I explore the a-historical notion of the neoliberal discourse in the next section.)

Buras (2015) argues for the importance of both knowing the history of a school and accurately looking back on that history when making policy decisions. Buras tells the story of Frederick Douglass High School in New Orleans that was closed post-Katrina, tracing its history to reveal a school founded on a former plantation for White students with a White Supremacy foundation, that shifted to become all Black by the 1970s with robust cultural and educational work happening within the walls (pp. 147-148). Ignoring the counterstories offered by the school community where folks asked for support, named persistent inequities, and recalled the strengths in their histories (pp. 151-154), the district offered the

building up to charter operators after Katrina. Louisiana state superintendent of education, Paul Pastorek, derided the community for being too attached to the building at the cost of their education: “My question to you and your coalition—are you tied to the school building or to creating a world class academic school for the students?” (p. 154). This is a familiar story of a school that was closed as a result of “state abandonment, not community indifference” (p. 146), where the state actors devalue and discard any contextual or historical, which can be cultural, attachments to the building and place.

Buras warns of the danger in moving forward with school closings without examining and acknowledging their histories, much of which is “racially targeted disinvestment” that points to the challenges that many urban schools face (p. 145). The community, however, knew the histories—student writers asserted that to understand post-Katrina, it is necessary to understand pre-Katrina (p. 151).

This history is important to consider, especially since charter school advocates in New Orleans criticize traditional public schools, especially black ones, for their alleged “failure” without connecting racism and inequitable state education policies to the problems experienced by those schools... Situating the school’s struggles within a history of white supremacy would have suggested a different set of actions. We must continue to insist that policymakers put the history of racial inequity front and center when accounting for current educational challenges as well as envisioning genuinely transformative policies. Policymakers who strategically ignore the racial past and present only serve to usher in a perilous future, where ongoing closure of “failing” schools in black neighborhoods substitutes for more substantive remedies that address the accumulative effects of targeted state disinvestment. (p. 146, pp. 156-157).

Stories that account for racialized histories and contexts demand different paths forward than the neoliberal discourse allows, paths that are explicitly informed by the contexts and histories.

### **Normalizing School Closings through Neoliberal Discourse**

School closings have become normalized as a response to persistent challenges that society fails to address in urban settings. This normalization happens through the stories that are told about schools,

stories that are shaped, informed, and justified by neoliberal discourse. Looking at Chicago, neoliberal discourse also cultivates the demand for policies such as school choice and student-based budgeting that cannot be separated from the discourse that justifies school closures. The stories of school closure, as rendered through neoliberal discourse, decouple the issues at hand from the patterns of inequity that are part of the material histories of the schools slated to be closed, and mask over the *community cultural wealth* that is often referenced in the counterstories told by those who resist the closures (Yosso, 2005). Neoliberal discourse provides the crisis-framing that makes school closings a viable solution (Buras, 2015; McWilliams & Kitzmiller, 2019; Yosso, 2005). Neoliberal discourse tells stories about schools that absolve the district and city of the resource deprivation that has happened in very specific neighborhoods over generations (Clark, 2022; Wilson & Linares, 2019). All of this fosters a dominant narrative around school closings that is deficit-based and decontextualized.

The threat of school closures in cities like Chicago looms large today, where schools have been closed based on space utilization and public school enrollment has been declining for the past twenty years, with a starkly disproportional amount of low income Black people leaving the city (Wilson & Linares, 2019). In Chicago, a five-year moratorium on school closures expired in 2018 while local scholars at the University of Chicago Consortium on School Research published reports that detailed how the hoped-for outcomes did not materialize for many families, concluding that the closures were not worth the harm done (de la Torre et al., 2015; M. F. Gordon et al., 2018). In 2021, almost a decade after the district's announcement that hundreds of schools were being considered for closure, the then-pending Elected School Board for Chicago Public Schools legislation was debated on terms of whether it would or would not include another moratorium on school closures:

The bill, which was long championed by the city's teachers union but criticized by Mayor Lori Lightfoot for being "deeply flawed," includes a moratorium on school consolidations and closings until at least 2025. That could limit options for [Chicago's next schools CEO](#), who will oversee a public school district that is [annually losing enrollment](#). (Smylie & Belsha, 2021, para.

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The call for school closures as a solution to persistent budget and space issues continues in Chicago, highlighting the normalization of school closures through neoliberal discourse<sup>11</sup>.

The dominant narrative that normalizes school closure is deficit-based, telling a story that casts schools and the students inside them as failures, localized schools as spaces that cannot adequately educate the student population—spaces that are not being chosen by families in the city (McWilliams & Kitzmiller, 2019, p. 23; Phillippo, 2019). This leads to the logic that school closings make good sense, are inevitable and a necessary pain for the better good as a viable solution for budget and space utilization issues<sup>12</sup> (Bierbaum, 2021; Briscoe & Khalifa, 2015; Conner & Monahan, 2015; de la Torre et al., 2015; Garry & Uchitelle, 2020; M. F. Gordon et al., 2018; Syeed, 2019).

The dominant narrative that normalizes school closure is decontextualized, from the justification to the implementation and process. Grounded in neoliberal discourse that valorizes market-based approaches and devalues experiential knowledge and community cultural wealth (Yosso, 2005), neoliberal discourse relies on a historical approach that requires the cultivated forgetting and selective remembering that Ferguson and Nichols (2021) name. This can feel like an a-historical or a-racial perspective, one in which histories around structural racism are masked and data is viewed through an “objective” lens in a way that ignores the racialized histories and contexts of the city. Decisions to close schools are justified through data and numbers, labeling the impact on communities of color as an unfortunate overlap when school closures happen more in low-income Black and Brown neighborhoods (Bierbaum, 2021; McWilliams & Kitzmiller, 2019). Neoliberal discourse is not a-historical or a-racial (Green, 2017, p. 5), as there isn’t an absence of history or race, but a very specifically cultivated, short-sighted racialized history that is invoked when districts claim that this jarring reform move will finally direct more resources to the students who need it most (Ahmed-Ullah, 2013; NBC 5 Chicago, 2013), a

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<sup>11</sup> see <https://news.wttw.com/tags/school-closings>

<sup>12</sup> I reflect on my own conversations with friends in various spaces, White middle class (often urban) spaces that are infused with progressive thinking. When I talk about my storied approach, I almost always get a skeptical response, and a little push to make sure I consider the budget constraints that come with space utilization challenges, making sure that I look at “the numbers” to be truthful.

claim that scholars and journalists have debunked in a variety of ways (Conner & Monahan, 2015; de la Torre et al., 2015; Gordon et al., 2018; Lipman et al., 2014; Lutton et al., 2018; Robinson, 2015).

Within neoliberal discourse about school closure, history and race are operationalized in very specific ways that hide the “ever-morphing endurance of racism” (Briscoe & Khalifa, 2015, p. 746). For example, Barbara Byrd Bennett, a Black woman as the CEO of Chicago Public Schools during the massive school closings in 2013, argued that any claim of racism enacted by the district through the closings was an “affront to me as a woman of color” (NBC 5 Chicago, 2013) and that *not* closing schools was arguably racist because it was a refusal to challenge the status quo (Ahmed-Ullah, 2013; also see Gutierrez, 2022 for related work on Janice Jackson as CEO and the neoliberal racial education project). Consider the case of two schools in Philadelphia:

While acknowledging the racialized implications for particular communities, officials leveraged the power of this language [neoliberal discourse] to trump concerns over social inequities resulting from their actions... [clinging] to the narrative of inefficiency and crisis, ultimately making decisions independent of community input. (McWilliams & Kitzmiller, 2019, p. 24)

Here, as in many cases, the neoliberal discourse was not absent of race or history, but claimed a racial and historical position that legitimizes the school actions and delegitimizes community claims of racial discrimination.

The normalizing of school closure through neoliberal discourse happens in a variety of ways. One way is through images in the media. Allweiss et al. (2015) critically examined media images during the massive school closings of 2013 in Chicago to understand how media influences the framing of school reforms. The authors name the neoliberal discourse underlying media and policy frames currently, and specifically examine how this has targeted poor communities of color in Chicago through education, (pp. 613-614). The media is a key player in perpetuating neoliberal framing that pathologizes urban educational spaces and students within them, contributing to the normalization of school closings as a logical school reform move (p. 614).

The neoliberal agenda is advanced through images and texts in the media... positioned and defined as normal by constructing [the] opposite as irrational and abnormal. The visualization of education in urban spaces that operates in neoliberal discourses, thus, employs a variety of visual codes and conventions... [where] Latinos and African Americans in urban spaces along with ‘urban education’ are constructed as problematic and need of a saving solution... Neoliberal policies tend to look at these responses [such as school closings] as ‘solutions’ to what is framed as the communities’ problems in the here-and-now, but they lack a consideration of the historical and structural context from which these ‘problems’ have emerged. In Chicago, there are deep histories of exclusion, marginalization, exploitation and resistance that influence the way these policies play out and are experienced by those affected. (pp. 614-615)

From this study, I take away two things: 1) the authors’ findings around how and where neoliberal discourse works, as related to school closings through images and 2) a caution for my own use of images in my research and art, and the potential to inadvertently advance the discourses I often critique (also see the section on reifying stories of harm later). It is also important to note the challenges that these authors encountered in their analysis of images: “the multiple ways each image could be read and the fact that at times the images spoke differently to each of us based on our own social, cultural and historical experiences and knowledge” (p. 621). Images have potential to create multiple avenues of access.

The neoliberal discourse that shapes stories told about school closings extends its tentacles into other facets of urban education, such as student-based budgeting models and school choice policies. These are not just another “part” of the neoliberal educational agenda, parallel to school closings, but are tangled together in a way that, arguably, does make the school closures inevitable from a structural perspective.

Farmer and Baber (2019) use a geospatial lens to look at the implications of student-based budgeting (SBB) in Chicago Public Schools, a shift made in 2014 to the way schools would be funded in conjunction with other market-based reforms that included the massive school closings of 2013. Although

not the focus of the report, the authors contextualize the declining school enrollments that sometimes lead to school closings, arguing that the SBB model does not account for the “unevenness” in neighborhoods:

Declining school enrollments are not just a result of student-consumers choosing the best school-product. Instead, neighborhood factors external to what happens inside schools can also lead to low enrollments that go on to impact school budgets.

Many lower-income and predominantly Black neighborhoods are experiencing distress caused by: a low wage labor market and poverty; cuts to the public sector (i.e. public housing and school closures); displacement caused by gentrification and growing housing unaffordability; and crime coupled with racially motivated policing. These factors form the context in which approximately 250,000 Black people have moved out of Chicago between 2000 and 2016, according to U.S. Census data. (p. 2)

Schools with high budgets were clustered on the north and southwest sides of the city, geographic spaces that have historically had White and Latino/a communities, while schools with low budgets were clustered on the south and west sides of the city, geographic spaces that have historically had Black communities (pp. 2-4). It is noteworthy that there was “no clear overlap between where children live and where high and low budget schools clustered,” meaning that differences in SBB across the city cannot be attributed to differences in school-aged populations (p. 4). I include this diversion into student-based budgeting to underscore the hovering threat of closure for many urban schools in low-income Black communities because of how this funding structure maintains the resource deprivation.

School choice does not exist without school closures in urban settings (McWilliams & Kitzmiller, 2019; Waitoller, 2020; Wright-Costello & Phillippo, 2020) thus, I include this short dive into school choice literature because it directly relates to the stories told about schools that are closed and their neighborhoods. Collins and Coleman (2008) name the way neoliberalism severs the “spatial contract” that connects schools to their immediate neighborhoods, which is being “re-written” through the decentralization of schooling through this decoupling of the school and the neighborhood, and the labor involved in school choice participation (p. 292).

Under the neoliberalism of the last few decades, grounded in individual opportunity that offers the illusion of equality through choice (Phillippo, 2019; Waitoller, 2020), many districts developed a “portfolio” of schools that they argue is in response to demands for highly coveted seats in uneven districts. School closings are a requirement of the portfolio management model for urban districts, as “school closure and consolidation represent a culmination of the school choice promise” driven by parents selecting some and not selecting others, leaving some schools to struggle and others to thrive and grow (Wright-Costello & Phillippo, 2020, p. 1373). School choice illustrates the neoliberal discourse at work that drives school closures.

This exacerbates a hierarchy of schools in predictable geographic locations as related to race and class in historically segregated cities, that leaves schools in low-income neighborhoods of color at risk of school closure (Farmer & Baber, 2019). Although the intersection of choice and closure manifests at the district level, federal and state level educational policies encourage school choice, specifically No Child Left Behind (Aggarwal et al., 2012; Conner & Monahan, 2015). Illinois and Pennsylvania have state-level funding formulas that push school choice as an “educational failure antidote while also divesting in public education” (McWilliams & Kitzmiller, 2019, p. 36). McWilliams and Kitzmiller warn that “if districts continue to expand ‘choice’ without the injection of more resources and funds, they will have to close district schools and other charter schools alike or risk fiscal collapse” (p. 36). So although districts argue they are responding to parent demand with school choice policies, state and federal funding sources use school closures and school choice as accountability mechanisms.

The connections between neoliberalism, education, and race have been made (Lipman, 2017; Stovall, 2013). This informs such signaling around schools that casts schools as desirable or not, which perpetuates racialized perceptions around safety and school quality. In Chicago, this converges with the declining population in low income and Black neighborhoods (Phillippo, 2019; Waitoller, 2020) to perpetuate the justifications made for closing schools.

Phillippo (2019), in her study on the high school student experience of selective school choice in Chicago Public Schools—what she calls “competitive school choice”, noted that her participants



“overwhelmingly shunned South and West side SE [selective enrollment] schools for less selective or private schools in neighborhoods that they saw as more attractive” (p. 81). This perception of schools *shapes and is shaped by* the surrounding neighborhoods’ “racial geography.” School actions that disrupt neighborhoods, like school closures, and policies that contribute to low enrollment like student-based budgeting (Farmer & Baber, 2019), make “schools less attractive to prospective students and their parents” (Phillippo, 2019, pp. 83, 88).

Neighborhoods—as much if not more than formal school choice guidelines—shaped their school choices, and in turn, students’ neighborhood-driven school choices shaped schools and the neighborhoods in which they stood. Specifically, these neighborhoods’ racial and economic segregation influenced the choice process. The competitive nature of school choice policy in Chicago meant that ‘winners’ disproportionately selected schools in the city’s most affluent, least Black and Brown neighborhoods. (p. 89)

This signaling that happens for neighborhoods through school choice influences factors that lead to school closure, through the neoliberal discourse used to tell stories about neighborhoods and schools.

Waitoller (2020), in his study on charter school choice from a (dis)ability perspective in Chicago, points to the signaling that happens about neighborhood schools through choices made for safety.

Ironically, CPS’s efforts to make schools safe (such as metal detectors and a security presence) signaled to parents living in areas of serious economic decline that the schools were in fact unsafe, and reinforced deficit discourses about Black and Latinx students attending such schools. (p. 33)

This deficit discourse, perpetuated through images and symbols, shaped the perception parents had of their neighborhood schools. The author notes that these were schools that the families did not attend in areas of economic decline and gentrification; parents were both victims of the dominant deficit discourse and participants in maintaining it by drawing from such discourses to inform their school choices (p. 32).

School choice is about shaping perception and experiences of Spaces through discursive means (i.e., pathologizing some schools and neighborhoods and using marketing strategies to appeal to

certain kinds of parents) and through investing or disinvesting in some communities and schools over others. It is about how school choice policies... close neighborhood schools and open other forms of schooling... In addition, school closings and deficit-laden school accountability labels (for example, “failing school” and “school on probation”) have pathologized not just schools but the students and families of color attending them and, by extension, the urban spaces they inhabit, shaping parents’ perceptions of the academic quality and safety of the schools in their neighborhood... Thus, it is not possible to understand parents’ perceptions of a school or neighborhood without understanding how those spaces are produced through discourse, policy, and practice, and it is not possible to understand how space is produced without understanding how the people who are producing and shaping such spaces perceive them. (pp. 131-133)

Neoliberal discourse both informs and works through these market-based mechanisms, like school choice and student-based budgeting, to maintain the dominant stories of schools that are slated to be closed. This, in turn, normalizes school closures through the zero-sum game that creates a push-pull factor that culminates in financial crisis stories, where yes, school closures are framed as inevitable.

### **What Neoliberal Discourse Masks**

After exploring above how neoliberal discourse shapes stories of schools that in turn normalize school closures, it is important to state what those stories mask through neoliberal discourse. As mentioned before, discourse used at the federal level through legislation like No Child Left Behind (Conner & Monahan, 2015) and reports like Nation at Risk (Aggarwal et al., 2012) and at the district level mask the violence, exclusion, and “real” costs that school closures bring (Aggarwal et al., 2012; Conner & Monahan, 2015; Kirshner & Pozzoboni, 2011; Lipman, 2017; McWilliams & Kitzmiller, 2019). Other scholars describe the way neoliberal discourse masks the social connections between schools and neighborhoods (Ayala & Galletta, 2012; Bierbaum, 2021; Collins & Coleman, 2008; Kearns et al., 2009; Witten et al., 2001).

Lipman (2017) argues that school closures enact racialized state violence that weaves through urban spaces. “It is about race and capital, state violence, claims to urban space, and political power” (p. 4). Racial capitalism drives the neoliberal agenda, using urban education as a political economy, placing racial justice in the center of the resistance (p. 5). This ongoing resistance has created a “crisis of political legitimacy,” where urban education in Chicago is a political “battleground” as hopeful grassroots organizing has fractured the “racialized neoliberal narrative” that was once hegemonic (pp. 18-19). My two-case study of schools that were closed in Chicago sits in a past-and-presently contested, racialized historical context.

Aggarwal et al. (2012), who name the slow violence of neoliberal school reform, connect the neoliberal discourse and policies in education to the 1983 Nation at Risk report, which set some schools on “a trajectory toward closure” decades later (pp. 156-157). The violence enacted upon communities through school closures often captures headlines through the resistance that develops especially when such closures are part of a massive movement of school reform in response to the crisis of budget holes, empty seats, or repeatedly being measured and labeled as inadequate or sub-standard. The violence began decades earlier, however, through the fracturing relationships within the school community, urban renewal initiatives, and school choice policies that resulted in the schools being labeled as failures (pp. 162-163).

Yet a part of the story that gets lost amid the echoes that surround this seemingly inevitable “drop” [referencing participants saying they’ve been waiting for the other shoe to drop for years] is that the closing of Brandeis, and hundreds of other schools like it, reveals a moment in the “slow violence” of education reform, marked by a decades-long project of abandonment. (p. 162) When schools have been dispossessed, with populations that are treated as disposable, “closure appeared to be a foregone conclusion” (pp. 159-160).

Framed as a commonsense solution through neoliberal discourse, school closures are treated as an isolated event, a harsh-but-needed intervention, which allows the state actors to absolve themselves of any connection to the lineage and legacy of the persistent resource deprivation that Aggarwal et al. point to.

Some scholars have categorized the disruption to public school systems, and thus to the lives of those who live through school closures, as an “expected outcome” of neoliberal school policies, part and parcel for the agenda to dismantle public education through privatization (Green, 2017, p. 3; Lipman, 2011, 2017; Stovall, 2013).

Neoliberal discourse masks the anti-Blackness that McWilliams and Kitzmiller (2019) attend to that “permeates neoliberal policy processes like schools [sic] closures” (p. 7). Like Aggarwal et al. (2012), the authors name school closings and subsequent selling off of public buildings as a slow violence (p. 3). Their comparative case study focuses on how neoliberal discourse shrouds the disposability of Black students through racial politics that contrasts with the positioning of Asian students as a “valued racial niche” that represents needed political capital when schools are slated to be closed (p. 33).

Further, in encouraging schools to compete by carving out market niches—brands built upon perceptions of selectivity and race—policymakers sacrifice an opportunity to reimagine neighborhood schools as democratic spaces worthy of all the students who walk through their doors. (p. 36)

The stories told using neoliberal discourse when schools are closed further the racial inequities present and lingering from the past.

Thinking through what gets masked by the neoliberal discourse about school closures points to stories that are told about neighborhoods. School closings are part of the neoliberal agenda to remake urban spaces (Lipman, 2011) and closing schools shape place and space in a neighborhood. Ayala and Galletta (2012) point to this macro-level consideration:

erasure not only removes bodies, space, and memory, but it also decenters neighborhoods and detaches youth and their families from buildings that hold meaning and tradition. However underresourced and troubled many of these school buildings have been, their closing denies communities a public institution and space that holds the capacity for rebuilding and redefining oneself... (p. 152)

The stories centered on place, space, and school closings cannot be removed from urban districts' moves to develop a portfolio of “desirable” schools through school choice policies. Looking to perspectives from social geography and urban planning, neoliberal discourse and the resulting policies have masked the social connection between schools and their neighborhoods (Bierbaum, 2021; Collins & Coleman, 2008; Kearns et al., 2009; Witten et al., 2001).

Parental choice disturbed the relations between schools and their geographic communities, recomposed them in a voluntaristic, self-interested terms, and undermined devolution. The promise of opportunities to escape place, especially its enduring and embedded class-based disadvantages embedded in place, proved alluring to parents... the schools from which parents flee cannot be dismissed as simply ‘poor performing’. The local can be a resource for local schools, rather than a set of conditions to be transcended wherever possible. (Kearns et al., 2009, p. 133)

Kearns et al. (2009) name schools as “placed” while shaped by governmental designs and educational norms, which elicits community attachment informed by their histories and characteristics (p. 132). Neoliberal discourse (through neoliberal restructuring) has impacted rural schools in New Zealand over the last two decades, speaking to the broad reach of neoliberalism: “An ethic of spatial efficiency... stripped the spatialised identities of communities from policy rationalities. Place became distant—to be priced by the market and borne by individuals” (p. 133). While falling enrollments demand a response, schools with enrollment drops “reflect a social reality composed of a wider pattern of winners and losers tied to neoliberal governmentalities” (p. 133). Contexts and histories must be more critically included in searching for ways to work with dropping enrollment numbers, as failing to recognize how schools are often central to communities and closing them impacts community well-being, both during the closure process and as an outcome of the process (p. 139).

Witten et al. (2001), a research team similar to the study above, provide a geospatial perspective around public health in New Zealand and connect schools to the perceived health-wealth of the community. School community members cited the “community goodwill” that had accumulated over

generations that gave value to the school, value that the district did not acknowledge (p. 311) that was masked through the stories told of the schools. “Experiences of inclusion and exclusion are central to people’s sense of belonging and their perceptions of the cohesiveness of their community” (p. 314). School communities in low-income neighborhoods in other places, similar to the Surrey Park families in Witten et al., point to the school closing process as another form of exclusion where their sense of belonging to a community is taken away by the state, resulting in a loss of control over something that is important in their lives (Briscoe & Khalifa, 2015; Collins & Coleman, 2008; Garry & Uchitelle, 2020; Kirshner et al., 2010; Kirshner & Pozzoboni, 2011; Pazey, 2020; Syeed, 2019; Walker Johnson, 2013; Witten et al., 2001).

The death of an institutional identity, whether it is a school or a hospital through closure or merger, may represent financial gain to the state. This formulation does not, however, take into account the wider societal costs that may arise as a consequence of social exclusion. (Witten et al., 2001, p. 315)

Social cohesion is an outcome of social investment by the government, not in spite of, and this social cohesion—fostered by the social role schools play in communities for which “there appeared to be no substitute for the local school”—is fragmented when schools are closed (p. 316). The disruption to the social cohesion that happens through school closures is disregarded through the neoliberal discourse.

Bierbaum (2021) names the role that school districts play as urban planners, in the context of Philadelphia’s school closings, when schools become “redevelopment sites” and are “deeply engaged in the racialized and politicized making and unmaking of spaces” (p. 203), parallel to the remaking of urban spaces that Lipman (2017) discusses. “Narrative or discursive constructions” underlie policy happenings and power relationships: “Discourse is meaningful because it contributes to the material conditions, meaning-making, and lived experiences of the city... In the context of city planning and urban policy, these understandings and engagements reflect social, political, and emotional dimensions of place...” (Bierbaum, 2021, pp. 203–204).

Identifying three narrative frames around school closures, two of which were counternarratives, Bierbaum offers her own counter to the neoliberal stories of school closures as common sense based on the numbers that some participants reiterated in their interviews. “This explicit reliance on quantitative metrics is not a neutral choice... It also divorces schools from any social, cultural, or spatial context; if the value of the school is not quantifiable, it literally and figuratively does not count (Caven, 2015)” (p. 207). The market-based rhetoric that comes with a real estate approach to school closings obscures, or masks, other meanings that schools have for people, the racialized politics around schools and neighborhoods, and histories of discrimination (p. 208).

These stories articulate the ways that losing a school changes daily rhythms of neighborhood life, obliterates neighborhood social resources, harms spaces of belonging, and perpetuates state-sponsored racial discrimination in the name of urban revitalization... [Closing schools based on quantifiable metrics focused on efficiency] perpetuates an ahistorical approach to urban change and sits in sharp contrast to the historically sensitive lived experience of schools and their closure at the neighborhood level. (p. 212)

Neoliberal discourse masks the district and city leader roles in perpetuating the social inequities through school closures as they take on the role of urban planners.

Conner and Monahan (2015) work to counter the neoliberal stories about school closure that mask the “real” costs when Philadelphia shuttered twenty-four neighborhood schools. The law scholars name the closure of neighborhood public schools as “a corollary” of the neoliberal charter school movement. Neoliberal discourse, by absorbing the market-based rhetoric around efficiency and choice, and treating school closures as a linear, if difficult, solution to budget and space issues framed as crises, fails to expand the story to include the actual costs associated with closing schools.

Conner and Monahan tell the story of school closures from a “real costs” perspective. The costs of closings included: no “statistically meaningful differences” to student academic outcomes, higher rates of violent incidents after the closure, lower revenue and higher costs than expected from real estate sales and holdings, related costs of supporting students at charter schools as they expand in the district, and the

complicated political costs associated with community disenfranchisement, underscoring the “fundamental flaws in the logic of school closure” (pp. 826- 835, p. 836).

If instead of seeing students as trapped by the system [as argued by school choice logic] we saw them as shunned by society, as betrayed by a government willing to turn its back on them and simply ‘outsource’ the problem they represent, then we might begin to recognize our own complicity in this situation.... The students in public neighborhood schools have dreams—dreams of becoming productive, contributing members of society, citizens, and change agents—dreams that for many years our society has sabotaged by neglecting, starving, threatening, punishing the schools they attend, and then throwing up our hands and asking why they are not improving... It is time to rework our calculus so that we see it is the costs of derailing the hopes and dreams of our youth—not the costs of improving their schools—that are truly unsupportable for the long-term health and well-being of our economy and our democratic society. (p. 838)

This possibly provides a new way to consider the “ahistorical” aspect of neoliberal discourse as it does not look back on its own outcomes, but temporally considers closing schools as a contained event with minimal reverberations. Conner and Monahan argue against the neoliberal discourse that justifies school closings, connecting closings to charter schools, as others have (Buras, 2015; Lipman, 2017; McWilliams & Kitzmiller, 2019; Pazey, 2020; Waitoller, 2020), contextualizing the closings in a way that works toward removing the responsibility for our social ills from the students, families, and teachers and placing it back on the state.

Like so many of the research stories told, Kirshner and Pozzoboni (2011) note the “contradictory stories” told about schools that are closed (p. 1638). Centering the voices of youth who experienced the school closing directly, through participatory action research, the authors point to the role of narratives in educational policy. In order to counter a policy, it is necessary to counter the narratives around which those policies are made, specifically the assumptions that the narrative requires and the construction of target populations (p. 1638). In this case, the district told the story of school closure as a “rescue mission” (p. 1650, p. 1657) and the students told the story of school closure as an act of racial discrimination (pp.



1652-1653). “Students’ statements contributed to a portrait of Jefferson as a community institution that supported their social and emotional development. Students felt cared for and known” (p. 1655).

Neoliberal discourse masked the way in which the students viewed their school and their own experiences, refusing space for any acknowledgment of the resources needed to support better academic outcomes or factors that students and families valued outside of the way the district measured achievement.

Jefferson students’ narratives about the closure resist reductionist, either/or story lines—that their school was either good or bad, that students’ desire to keep Jefferson open meant they wanted to maintain the status quo, or that student voice is at the expense of adult roles. (p. 1662)

Because the neoliberal discourse shapes how schools are rated and measured, based on market-based ideologies, it is not surprising to read that student voices were discounted, dismissed, and discarded.

### **Reifying Deficit Perspectives through Stories of Harm**

There are important ways in which stories of school closure illustrate the harm done, which can sometimes reify the deficit-based narratives without intending to. For example, Allweiss et al. (2015), mentioned earlier, studied the images in the media around the 2013 Chicago school closings. By focusing on images that record students’ emotions, noting that neoliberalism often frames emotions as irrational and in need of controlling, the authors found that “the discourses and frames employed around and through these images show that media images are not neutral, rather they reflect various ways of thinking and have the capacity to create and reinforce particular ways of thinking,” specifically influenced by neoliberalism (p. 627). This is a direct illustration of how neoliberal discourse can be reified through the images captured to document the emotional toll of school closure.

In a more subtle illustration, I include the work by the University of Chicago Consortium on School Research on the impacts of the massive school closings in Chicago in 2013 with trepidation. The reports explicitly counter the broad hoped-for outcomes that the district put forth as justification for closing 50 schools at once, adding nuance through naming the complications that came to families, as

well as receiving schools (de la Torre et al., 2015; Gordon et al., 2018). This is helpful in speaking back to the district claims in similar terms, certainly, and thus it also gives credibility to the district's claims and justifications by attending to them as valid. The research works with an assumption that the closings would be acceptable if the Consortium had not found the discrepancies in the outcomes. This does nothing to highlight the structural histories and contexts that other scholars call for (as explored in the beginning of this literature review).<sup>13</sup>

That considered, their findings are insightful. The massive school closings in Chicago brought significant disruptions without delivering the hoped-for advantages or solving the ongoing budget and space issues (Gordon et al., 2018). The research team calls for action because of this:

More must be done to address these stark inequalities. Closing under-enrolled schools may seem like a viable solution to policymakers who seek to address fiscal deficits and declining enrollment, but our findings show that closing schools caused large disruptions without clear benefits for students. (p. 60)

The trauma that comes with closing a public school reaches wide, including negative effects on student academic performance during the year of the announcement at the school slated to be closed (prior to the actual closure), as well as negative effects on the sense of community and academic performance at the welcoming schools (Gordon et al., 2018). A third of the schools during the massive school closings in Chicago had special education cluster programs—concentrated specialty programs that provide more intense support for diverse learners that cannot be found at typical neighborhood public schools or at

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<sup>13</sup> I think on bell hooks (1994) here, who articulates the problematic sexism in Freire's work as grounds for critique, not dismissal, arguing for complex understandings that refuse a binary approach to conversations and theorizing (p. 49). hooks also discusses theory that works to divide but still has valuable insights to use (p. 65). Here, I offer the Consortium's work as valuable insight while noting the arguable shortcomings (while no one study can do it all). To quote Fine (2016), the stories presented in the Consortium's work is "of course true and not at all adequate" (p. 360).

selective enrollment schools—creating an extra burden for a student sub-population who all-too-often has to advocate for educational rights (de la Torre et al., 2015)<sup>14</sup>.

The two research reports published by the Consortium echo trends from other cities such as New York City (Kretchmar, 2014), Philadelphia (Bierbaum, 2020, 2021; Conner & Monahan, 2015; Good, 2017; McWilliams & Kitzmiller, 2019; Steinberg & MacDonald, 2019), Detroit (Green et al., 2019), Washington, D.C. (Roseboro & Thompson, 2014) and Austin (Walker Johnson, 2013).

This work by the Consortium has a deficit ring to it and engages in rhetoric that potentially reinforces the neoliberal paradigm in which this is all happening. The Consortium acknowledges the history as a backdrop, not as integral, which is what Ferguson and Nichols (2021) warn of, noting the way in which the closings had a greater impact on populations that always seem to take the brunt—the low-income families, Black and Brown families, families who have diverse learners, or any intersection of those labels. I question how this implicitly gives validity to the rating system that CPS used as a metric to rank schools and their worth, which has since been called into question by communities and CPS itself (see Koumpilova, 2022) or how this contributes to the normalization of school closures, even though the research names the ways in which the closures did not work as expected.<sup>15</sup>

There is a tension to attend to here that I grappled with throughout my inquiry: a tension between leaning into this complex research world that thoroughly and necessarily documents the harm done to communities when schools are closed and my desire to honor the richness and strengths that have been rendered invisible both through the closure processes *and* oftentimes through the research stories told. There is a plethora of research on schools that have been closed in the US and beyond, documenting

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<sup>14</sup> For law review of the denial of special education rights related to the 2013 school closings in Chicago, see Toren, 2014.

<sup>15</sup> At the time of this writing, Chicago Public Schools was redesigning their School Quality Rating Policy (SQRP). This seems to be a move by board members who understand the harm that has been done by how the rating system has been used (often cited in school closure proceedings). Some of my experience as a teacher was in a school that made certain decisions to achieve the highest rating. This seemed to be a buffer against closure and a way to market themselves for higher enrollment with student-based budgeting, and, I felt, at the cost of other decisions that could have been made about learning that would not have been tied to the rating system.

various perspectives and fall-outs from closing schools. Tuck (2009) calls for researchers to refuse damage-centered research perspectives, and some of the work cited in this review further paints a portrait of the neighborhoods and school communities where school closure is imposed as damaged populations.

The literature explored in this review presents stories that are “of course true and not at all adequate...” (Fine, 2016, p. 360), as they are steeped in harm. I cite work that names the disruptions to students’ educations (de la Torre et al., 2015; Gordon et al., 2018), the anti-Blackness at play (McWilliams & Kitzmiller, 2019), the slow violence that happens when schools are closed (Aggarwal et al., 2012); these are necessary parts of the research story but these are inadequate. Through repetition and citation, the portrait painted of school communities who experience school closure becomes so familiar, there is often only stories of harm told. What meaning is made when scholars equate the resistance to school closures with war terminology (Lipman, 2017; Pazey, 2020)? That seems accurate but it also seems to reify the crisis framing in some ways. What does it mean when we constantly define school communities by the harm done to them? Maybe the stories of resistance are enough to counter this, but the essence of the body of literature on school closings seems to cast school communities as always and already damaged, even if scholars are intentional to offer glimmers of hope.

I turn to Kumashiro’s (2000) ideas around oppression being furthered through the participation in harmful discourse and contemplate if research stories that illustrate the harm done through school closures constitutes participation in some way. “Oppression originates in discourse, and, in particular, in the citing of particular discourses, which frame how people think, feel, act, and interact. In other words, oppression is the citing of harmful discourses and the repetition of harmful histories” (p. 40). What work is being done through research that, while naming the anti-Blackness or slow violence done through school closures, keeps the stories of communities where schools have been closed steeped in stories of harm?<sup>16</sup>

My hope is that through my research for this project, I can add a new way of looking at school

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<sup>16</sup> One could argue I am complicit in this practice here, even if I add my disclaimers and contemplations.

communities who have experienced this harm and shed some light on facets of their stories. New ways of telling the stories of schools that were closed might suggest a different set of actions (Buras, 2015).

### **Stories of Resistance and Remembering**

Considering the above contemplation of how documenting the harm done potentially reifies discourse that is based on deficit perspectives, it is important to note the work done to document the resistance to school closings. Many of the stories of resistance are laced throughout larger research stories, but some scholars have centered their work on the stories of resistance. Districts claim that closing schools represents greater accountability and a more efficient use of resources, and these claims have been repeatedly challenged during the closing process and after, with many of the resistance stories centered on the discourse that underlies the actions (Aggarwal et al., 2012; Briscoe & Khalifa, 2015; de la Torre et al., 2015; Ewing, 2018; Gordon et al., 2018; Green, 2017; Gutierrez & Waitoller, 2017; Kirshner & Pozzoboni, 2011; Lipman, 2017; Pazey, 2020; Stovall, 2013; Syeed, 2019). These stories of resistance circle back to the call for historicizing and contextualizing. These are not stories of victory, nor do they provide a clear model of how to move forward. These stories represent a way of considering school closures that is not the dominant story shaped by neoliberal sensibilities, oftentimes through remembering that can honor the identities of school communities (de Leeuw, 2014).

Stovall (2013) connects Chicago school closings to race and justice, exploring the resistance to neoliberal school policies. Citing the work of the Chicago Teachers' Union and CReATE, a Chicago-based alliance of researchers who organized to push back on the everyday rhetoric swirling around school reform measures, Stovall's work to connect urban renewal policies and the displacement of poor Black families to school choices and school closings provides an example of the critical contextualization called for in the beginning of this literature review.

Syeed (2019) focuses on a school district in Washington, D.C., where, like Chicago, there was a wave of massive school closings in 2013. The author found that resistance logic "actively and intentionally" worked to disrupt the dominant narratives of inevitability and accountability that shrouded hidden agendas and interests (p. 3). The author underscores the dominant narrative around school

closures: the inevitability, data driven validity, and seemingly political neutrality (pp. 6-8).

*Counterframes* use knowledge of system-level critiques to net broad support for resistance to closures and the community, which garnered broad support for the community's counterframes in a way that included folks who did not have direct experience with school closures (p. 19).

Green (2017) names two main stories that attempt to explain urban school closure: one is the story of fiscal responsibility and underutilized space that justifies the free market intervention to close “failing” schools—which is the dominant story created and maintained through neoliberal discourse—and the other is the story of the political economy of urban education (Lipman, 2017), where racialized neoliberal policies restructure urban spaces in ways that privatize public education through disenfranchisement and displacement, constraining resistance (Green, 2017, p. 5). Community networks were utilized to reopen one school and the author calls for the story of school closures to be claimed as detrimental in the “national education discourse,” while acknowledging that this would require “policymakers and reformers to truly value the lives, communities, and educational experiences of children of color in urban neighborhoods” (p. 23).

Pazey (2020) tells the story of resistance at a school—CHS—that “appeared destined for closure,” involuntarily enduring three versions of repurposing, or reopening under a new name, structure, and administration, over a three-year period in response to five consecutive years of “academically unacceptable ratings” (p. 1869). The final, fourth intervention was turning the school over to a charter network. Naming the neoliberal discourse that was used to tell the story of CHS by the district, Pazey works to “interrogate the disabling terminology used by district leaders to mark a school, its personnel, community, and students” which is grounded in a deficit perspective that labels schools and communities as “damaged and broken” (p. 1870). Centering the study on the resistance, the author documents the counternarratives from the school community throughout all the turnaround actions that culminated in a “battle-like scene” at a board meeting between community activists and those who supported the reform movements by the district (p. 1888). Students fought to shape their own narratives, arguing “We are

acceptable,” “I am *not* a failure!”, pointing out the successes at the school to contrast the way the district perpetuated a negative perspective of the school (pp. 1891-1892).

Pazey concludes with a call for “those interested in equity” to do something, to look to the students who resist the neoliberal discourse as a model.

As a nation and society, we cannot continue our obsession with measuring and discussing the worth of others, whether it be an individual, a group, a culture, or an organization, according to a predetermined set of standards that discursively creates specific norms for acceptance and assigns those who deviate from the so-called norms as unacceptable... The actual fallout that occurs when a school receives a designation of academically unacceptable remains hidden and the lived experiences of the students who attend those schools go unnoticed. (pp. 1901-1902)

Pazey’s work, using a DisCrit lens, underscores the power of the “master narrative of neoliberal reforms” that further highlight the performances of White students while assigning “deficit labels of inability and inadequacy to minoritized schools...historically situated in a low-income neighborhood” and the promise of resistance as students and the school community repudiated those labels (p. 1897). Pazey’s study provides nuanced insight into a school that the district ironically did not close but certainly dismantled. The slow violence (Aggarwal et al., 2012; McWilliams & Kitzmiller, 2019) of a phase out or repurposing without addressing the structural (i.e., contextual) and historical forces at play that the neoliberal discourse masks, resulting in more of the same.

One way to resist is through remembering schools that districts intended to erase through their actions. Ayala and Galletta (2012), educational scholars publishing in a psychology journal, examine two different school closings in the US—one that was called for by the community and one that was imposed by the district—through the concept of erasure. They found institutional memories haunting the new schools that were functioning in the same space as the schools that were closed. There is value in studying “these disappearing spaces” (p. 150) and the authors conclude that “having a fresh start in school reform is an illusion” (p. 154). Ghosts of the past schools echoed through the discourse and stories told about students, “the ghost of a tainted past that floated in the building memory” would surface when tensions

ran high or there was a conflict (p. 152). Remembering becomes a “counterresponse and a form of resistance” when closures are contested, a way to reclaim the stories of schools by the community (p. 152). The authors call for research designs that “allow us to see this history in process,” arguing for “participatory approaches that can offer a means through which communities and youth can recover and reconstruct this history,” noting that remembering supports individual and collective well-being (p. 154). “Our studies of erasure in the context of school closings underscore the importance of locating stories once erased and those now undergoing erasure” (p. 154).

Ayala and Galletta’s work justifies research that looks back at the stories of school closure, using remembering as a way to work against the erasure imposed on communities and neighborhoods. Specifically, though, their work also examines the artifacts left behind in the wake of erasure. For them, erasure is “the uprooting of a particular space, in this case a public high school, to make room for a new entity, a renewal or overhaul of the existing space,” that includes a “deeply psychological response to failure and conflict” (p. 150). Interestingly, they claim that the erasure process erased all artifacts and evidence of the school being phased out in one case, and that ten years later “there are no traces of the remnant school<sup>17</sup>” while also pointing to “rubblings left behind, some evidence of the remaining conflict... that can appear as ‘ghosts,’” citing Gordon (2008). It is around these rubblings, to which I apply the term palimpsests (see Chapter One) that I shaped this study, as a way of remembering and further understanding the history in process that has been masked over through erasure when schools are closed.

Hauntings can direct our attention back to stories, or histories, that have been masked or rendered invisible (Ferguson & Nichols, 2021; Gordon, 2008). Giving attention to the hauntings that point to such stories serves as an acknowledgment that something from the past deserves our re-examination—a

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<sup>17</sup> This term deserves more attention at another time—remnant school. It was used by the researchers to name the “Senior Institute” created for the remaining juniors and seniors in Edison Memorial School in the case where the community called for the school to be closed and reopened. They had an intention of building a new school with the old still intact, making sure the students who were already there did not “suffer.” This, however, did not happen, as the Senior Institute had a two-year life-span, there was resistance to its closing as well when the time came, and the new school community members worried about how the Senior Institute, as a continuation of the old school being closed, would “taint” the new schools being opened.



remembering that requires a new perspective (de Leeuw et al., 2010; Tuhiwai Smith, 2012) through storytelling that is historicized and contextualized (Ewing, 2018).

Gordon (2008) and Ewing (2018)<sup>18</sup> use the concepts of hauntings and ghosts to sociologically understand the way that something that is gone can hold agency, not only through actively taking up space through absence, but by driving further inquiry into the context of the absence. For Gordon, she offers as an example her own haunting as a result of noticing that a woman scholar in psychoanalysis—a colleague of Jung and Freud in the early 1900s—is prominently missing from a photograph at a male-dominated professional conference, a woman who should have been present according to other evidence leading up to the conference (Gordon, 2008, Chapter 2: distractions, pp. 31–62). For Ewing, her own presence in a Chicago Public School as a teacher and as a Black woman allowed her to tune into the ghost stories within the walls of the school building, stories of all the children who used to move through the space (2018, p. 126). Both Gordon and Ewing connect their hauntings to the present as a call to action: the ghosts from the past not only direct their attention for deeper inquiry into the past but solicit interventions on behalf of that past. Gordon (2008) names this as “something-to-be-done” that the haunting announces (p. xvi) and Ewing (2018) identifies it as “*something you thought was gone is still happening here*” that is indicated by the ghosts (p. 154, italics in original). This requires remembering in critically cultivated ways.

I looked to Tuhiwai Smith’s (2012) notion of remembering as a research approach when working toward this inquiry into schools that were closed and what haunts me about them through their palimpsests, understanding that my research design must be responsive to the community.

The remembering of a painful past, re-membering in terms of connecting bodies with place and experience, and, importantly, people’s responses to that pain... In these experiences the

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<sup>18</sup> In Chapter One, I explore Avery Gordon’s (2008) sociological book called *Ghostly matters: Hauntings and the sociological imagination* and Eve Ewing’s (2018) sociological study of schools that were closed in her *Ghosts in the schoolyard: Racism and school closings on Chicago’s south side* from a broader conceptual perspective.

obliteration of memory was a deliberate strategy of oppression. (p. 147)

The harm needs to be named, but in a way that “re-members.”

Tuck and Yang (2014) also further the notion of refusal, which I bring up in my methods section. “Using art to think/feel through theory—to decode power and uncode communities—trains our intuition. Refusal is not just a no, it is a performance of that no, and thus an artistic form” (p. 814).

And there are tensions in the calls for historicizing school closings and remembering, as the history of segregated schools reminds us of the calls *for* continued segregation in Chicago schools, in the name of preserving neighborhood schools in the 1970s—this was a call for considering the history of the neighborhoods as racially segregated and a desire to keep them that way, to continue the explicitly racist practices by the school district (Danns, 2018). Good (2017) echoes this cautionary consideration:

In the context of deeply racialized space, invoking place history can serve as a means through which to name histories of racial oppression and to contest their reproduction. Conversely, claims to historical tradition can likewise be used to justify ongoing racial exclusion. (p. 864)

This is where Fine’s notion of critical bifocality (Weis & Fine, 2012) brings into focus the complex and critical considerations needed to contextualize and historicize educational research beyond a surface-level retrospective accompaniment to the stories. The contexts and histories of research stories, of school stories, of neighborhood stories must include an analysis of the differential power structures that maintain and perpetuate racialized and classed hierarchies in which we educate our young people in the US.

Remembering and affirming one’s connection and one’s narrative is connected to community cultural wealth (Farmer-Hinton et al., 2013; Rivers et al., 2022; Yosso, 2005); this is evident in *Reauthoring Savage Inequalities* (Patton et al., 2023). By remembering their experiences, offering their testimonies in contrast to Kozol’s deficit framing, the authors reimaged a present-future in which their stories of community wealth from Black neighborhoods in St. Louis are used to teach educators.

Throughout this body of literature, there is justification for more work that contextualizes and historicizes the stories of schools that were closed, with a need for approaches that feel more nurturing.

This work becomes a call for *textualization*—or bringing texture through aesthetics to the stories of the schools, which includes the previously called for historicization and contextualization.

I circle back to Ewing’s (2018) work to note the way she cites the harm done through her writing while also highlighting the strength within communities, and the aesthetic richness that bubbles through her research. When one reads of her sitting at Peach’s in Bronzeville to conduct her interviews, articulating the connection between community and food in her culture, there’s a nurturing gesture to her research, an intention to not center the harm done, but to paint a fuller portrait of the communities where schools have been closed (2018, p. 177). One aim of this work was to do similar, using arts-based methods.

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I now shift to the second half of this literature review, diving deeper into what others say about remembering. I highlight the role that artifacts and place have in remembrance, explore what it means to resist through remembering, unpack what collective remembering is, and offer some ideas about the absence of remembering, pondering if that is forgetting or not. By understanding how others conceptualize and write about the various facets of remembering, Chapters Five and Six can be read in the context of the research conversations happening about what it means to remember institutions like public schools that were closed.

Remembering is more deeply explored in relation to what my participants and I experienced through our conversations in Chapter Seven: Remembering. Before reading the portraits of remembering, however, it is important to note that remembering throughout this project is conceptualized as honoring, holding space, and reconnecting with the past. Urban scholars have named the cause-and-effect relationship between remembering and forgetting—one remembers only after they forget. That is one form of remembering, but not the form that is central to this project. These differences are included in the path I present below that centers on remembering with the stories we tell, what obligations we have when we bear witness to stories of trauma, and how these overlap with remembering schools that were closed.

## What is Remembering?

Fenster and Yacobi (2010) present remembering as being in tandem with forgetting as related to how urban spaces are shaped. For example, we remember so we do not forget, as an intentional act against forgetting; you cannot have one without the other. Or we remember in response to forgetting, as in we remember something after we have forgotten it. These are not the specific ways in which I see it play out in the conversations I share about school closure. This is not to say that forgetting does not play a role in remembering (see the section, The Absence of Remembering in this chapter and Missing Stories from the Past in Chapter Seven). Remembering for this project was an act of remembrance, similar to what is often referenced in spiritual contexts. Religions use remembrance to honor, to hold space for, to reconnect with a figure from the past. The figure has not been forgotten, surely, but doing a ritual act “in remembrance of me” maintains and strengthens the connection to the past that is very present for many people practicing the ritual.

“The act of remembering is always in and of the present” even though what it references is past and absent (in Fenster & Yacobi, 2010, p. 197; Huyssen, 2003, p. 4). As related to the ghosts and hauntings already explored in the Introduction, remembering and engaging with ghosts go hand-in-hand. The specters of schools, the palimpsests we notice in the material objects and buildings of schools that were closed, invite us to remember:

the materiality of the ghost attests to the act of remembering, and indeed remains implanted in the very notion of reprising and reexperiencing an already-extinct event. Time and again, remembering has proven itself to be at home amid spooks and phantoms, both those of the past and those of the future. (Trigg, 2012, p. 284)

The act of remembering, as is illustrated with the *portraits of remembering* in Chapters Five and Six, is one way to engage with ghosts and pay attention to hauntings of schools that existed in the past and whose absence is very much present. It is one way to bear witness to the historical trauma experienced (Simon & Eppert, 1997).

Witness accounts, presented as remembering, sit in the contradictory space of being held as the most credible (first-person accounts validated as “I was there!”) while also being discredited due to the science behind the malleability and social aspect of memories over time (see Henry, 2022; *Myth*, n.d.; Wixted et al., 2018). “Remembering (both individually and collectively) does not necessarily only or even primarily function to produce an accurate representation of the past” (Mahr & Csibra, 2020, p. 438). Remembering is not about an objective, emotion-less “factual” retelling of a happening (while multiple participants in this study pointed to quantitative data they used to refute the justifications by the district for closing Andersen). This becomes an important distinction that often does not get articulated and allows stories (and stories of experiences) to be viewed as not credible or accurate, thus casting stories of experiences or personal retellings as less valid than quantitative data<sup>19</sup>. This project is centered on stories and storytelling, as a form of testimony and offering a platform for witnessing past injustices. When we tell stories, we often do it in a way that works toward the essence of the experience, much like Lawrence-Lightfoot’s portraiture approach values (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis, 1997, p. 4).

Remembering is part of bearing witness to historical trauma, which often evokes “a specific set of experiential dynamics (Caruth, 1995). Most importantly, historically traumatic events simultaneously summon forgetting and remembering” (Simon & Eppert, 1997, p. 176). Simon and Eppert argue that when stories are told or experiences are remembered that are traumatic, the witness may embellish or manipulate researchable facts to underscore the enormity of the experience and that is a valid representation of the experience, as remembering is not a historical retelling of an event but a representation of the experience. I paraphrase a specific, powerful example they cite from Laub (see Felman & Laub, 1991). A Holocaust survivor gave testimony about her experience, remembering among other things the explosion of four chimneys with the researcher recalling the heaviness of the silence

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<sup>19</sup> This is precisely the valuation that happened at the district’s public hearings as part of the school closing process that is evidenced in the transcripts and broader literature on school closings (see Bierbaum, 2021; Briscoe & Khalifa, 2015; Kirshner & Pozzoboni, 2011; Kretchmar, 2014; Syeed, 2019; Walker Johnson, 2013). This also reifies the ways neoliberal discourse rationalizes numbers and irrationalizes experiences or emotions.

between moments of remembering by the survivor. At a conference, when Laub presented this narrative as part of the data, historians in the audience refuted this account—noting other discrepancies, they pointed out that there were not four chimneys that exploded at that site and that this had been documented. Her witness account was inaccurate and discredited.

Laub argued both the historians' account and the researcher's representation of the witness's account are "correct"—historians retell specific details that can be (ac)counted for, while witnesses formulate their memories into stories or testimonies that represent their experience through interactions with others (Simon & Eppert, 1997, pp. 180–181). The difference is that historians and the researcher bearing witness have *different ethical obligations*.

When bearing witness to testimony as a researcher or designing research that elicits such, we must explicitly consider our ethical obligations.

An ethical practice of witnessing includes the obligation to bear witness—to re-testify, to somehow convey what one has heard and thinks important to remember. Communities of memory are locations in which such obligations can be worked out. More specifically, they are productive spaces in which to name, distribute, produce, and practice expressive resources that enable a witnessing which establishes living memories and admits the dead into one's moral community. In this sense, communities of memory are locations in which one can: (a) work through the difficulties of responding to the symptomatic questions elicited by testimonies of historical trauma, and (b) decide which testimonies, and what aspects of them, should be retold to whom and in what ways. (Simon & Eppert, 1997, p. 187)

Stories of school closure are often stories of historical trauma and as such, I attempt to lay out the obligations I have in research like this project.

Simon and Eppert (1997) present three obligations when researchers bear witness to remembering, which align with the ethical considerations I had when designing and implementing this project (as discussed in the Introduction): acknowledgment, remembrance, consequence (p. 181). The

stories presented in Chapters Five and Six come from my judgement and artistic interpretation of “what is being marked, beyond something merely being said” over any countable accuracy (p. 182).

### ***The Role of Artifacts***

I want to speak to the role of artifacts in remembering. Although this warrants further inquiry, I noticed in this work that artifacts foster remembering in a way that betrays our common sense of time and space, much like ghosts and hauntings. I think of artifacts as two- or three- dimensional objects or tangible pieces of things that are related to stories of the schools (or whatever is being remembered). Examples would be photographs, newsletters, texts, clothing, items once belonging to a person or place. These artifacts become concrete entities that may or may not be in the memories produced while remembering but can be a representational of part of a story, experience, or moment of the past. The artifact can also take on its own “phantom” version of the person or place or time it is attached to, as Trigg suggests.

It becomes possible to mount a case for experiencing immaterial things through the medium of material objects. This is possible if we take seriously the idea that lived memory can detach itself from the experiencer, establishing a phantom appearance receptive only to the living body that reciprocates and recognizes that immaterial presence. (Trigg, 2012, p. 299)

For example, we can experience a deep emotion attached to a lost one once we hold, smell, feel their clothing left behind. Oftentimes this is an experience that is surreal and has a quality of transferability<sup>20</sup>. So many stories of returning to one’s childhood home echo this same sentiment, and there is an argument for buildings to be considered as artifacts (I separately address the role of place next, which is different, while related to buildings). For the purpose of this project, the school buildings and the traces of the

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<sup>20</sup> Note if you are thinking of something from your past as you read this and how your senses are triggered by an artifact. It is also interesting to think how the artifacts get handed down or become part of the present through which we can connect others who did not know that past. I have my own stories of remembering through artifacts and the connections made through the object, such as a small Christmas tree that was a wedding gift from my mother-in-law who died in 2008. My children did not meet her but can “remember” her through the tree as we tell her stories each Christmas when we put it on display.

schools that were closed are artifacts. When thinking about the buildings themselves as palimpsests, Trigg suggests: “In treating the built environment as something to be ‘read,’ both the structural and the symbolic values of place are brought to the fore” (Trigg, 2012, p. xviii). We need to read the palimpsests of school closure in this way—as places to be read—as we remember, treating the built environment as an artifact.

Artifacts become a link to memories that bring the past to life. The artifacts are not the memories, but also a palimpsest, where the past is still visible in the present. Blokland (2001) presents the idea of memories becoming public representations through city or town newspapers, for example, when they publish old photos and tell stories about the past, while troubling this notion of which pasts are invoked with such publicity. The nostalgia and the racism that can be reproduced by a longing for “the way things were” is something to notice as well when thinking about remembering. For the purpose of this project, artifacts play an important role in remembering, while noting that “such publications may provide the raw material for producing collective memories, but cannot be said to *be* such memories. Human agents interpret the images according to the social importance they have today” (Blokland, 2001, p. 275). It is when we interact with the artifacts that the interpretation of the past happens in relation to the present.

### ***The Role of Place***

Just as artifacts play an important role in remembering, the role of place is significant too. Space and place figured into the remembering of Andersen and Schiller, as well as into the research process itself, with an acknowledgment that investigating schools as placemakers in neighborhoods warrants a much deeper commitment at another time. For now, there are two prongs I will consider around place for this project: the generative space/place of where the group conversation happened and the school as a memory place. The latter overlaps with my previous exploration of school buildings as artifacts.

Just as material objects can embody the past, places do too, where an attachment happens to a place through our memories of it.

Each of us is held captive by a series of memories, which in their intensity and depth return us to a specific place and time. Consciously or otherwise, the places we inhabit and pass through come



back to us in the present, sometimes affording a sense of familiarity in the midst of uncertainty.

At other times, disturbing the course of everyday existence. However cryptic these memories are, they nevertheless attach themselves to us, just as we attach ourselves to the places in which those events occurred. (Trigg, 2012, pp. xv–xvi)

Going back to the experience of visiting a place from our past—a childhood home, a school, a park—the connection between place and memory is palpable. Hatuka explores how space gets modified through collective memory, finding that “places became the concrete sphere of negotiation over meanings” that allow people to challenge how future places were represented (in Fenster & Yacobi, 2010, p. 195). This gets more layered when public places, like school buildings, are considered. “The value we confer upon certain public places is open to a plurality of contested meanings, all disposed to political, aesthetic, and ethical dimensions” (Trigg, 2012, p. xix).

The role of place is significant when remembering schools that were closed, as the conversations presented in Chapters Five and Six illustrate the contested nature of the schools as place in neighborhoods and memories. Remembering the place constitutes an emotional response:

The memory of place forces us to return to the immediacy of our environment and to all that is absorbed, both familiar and strange, within that environment. In doing so, not only do we *feel* the measure of time pass through our bodies, but through attending to the phenomenon of place, we catch sight of how memory forms an undulating core at the heart of our being. (Trigg, 2012, p. xvi)

I spoke with an educator at a conference recently, someone who had taught in Chicago and then became a superintendent elsewhere. When sharing drafts of Chapters Five and Six at a roundtable, he told me his own story of school closure. Years later, he drove his children past the school. “It felt like I had been kicked in the gut as I pulled up to the building... it was like seeing a dead friend laying there,” he told me. “The sense of a place coming alive before our eyes depends upon the bind between spatiality and hauntedness” (Trigg, 2012, p. 298), and, I would argue, our willingness to be haunted. The bind between

spatiality and specters is one that works through our relation to the place as the ghosts and hauntings point to what a place meant.

The relational part between schools that were closed as place and remembering asks us to consider the buildings as more than containers through which people move in and out, but are places created through relations and kept alive through remembering. Although Blokland is speaking of class formation, they urge us to consider “places as articulations of relations”, and, as such, “...the sites themselves, the bricks and mortar, are not treated merely as context” (2001, p. 281).

That environments as diverse as supermarkets, castles, airplanes, and childhood homes have the ability to haunt us testifies to the multifarious relationship between hauntings and place. The ghosts that frequent places do not consign themselves to abandoned asylums on the edge of a city, nor is their sole haunt lonely and rugged landscapes far from civilization. (Trigg, 2012, p. 321)

It is through the human connection to a place that the hauntings take hold and demand our attention and the emotional or physiological response in our bodies to our emotions are the manifestation of that connection.

There is an important emotional component to remembering—the feelings, the way we recall moments, the affective part of the storytelling. This speaks to the emotional attachments on display throughout the conversations—the tears that welled up, the lumps in the throat, the downcast eyes that did not appear in the words said aloud. Simon and Eppert’s (1997) propose a double attentiveness, where researchers need to be intentional about the *said* and the *saying*. In the portraits in Chapters Five and Six, the narration includes the “saying” part along with what the participants said to me to bring the stories to life on the page but also to acknowledge these parts of remembering, connecting, and storytelling.

### **Resisting through Remembering**

The act of remembering can serve as an act of resistance. By conjuring the memories of what happened in the past, or by visiting the places of the past through remembering, we resist forgetting. When we enact agency over the past by remembering, we resist the power structures that mask over narratives, such as happened with the closure of Andersen and Schiller. When people remember a school

that was closed and present their narrative in contrast to the commonsenseness presented by the district that permeates popular thinking, their testimony is a counternarrative (McWilliams & Kitzmiller, 2019; Solórzano & Yosso, 2002; Syeed, 2019).

The fight against forgetfulness and destruction of communities in the contemporary capitalist world must originate in the very places that are at such a disadvantage in terms of resources and leadership. And yet, an effort comprised of active advocacy and organising, with doable demands and a powerful ideology, can make some headway. It has happened before. (Markusen, 2004, p. 2312)

There is hope in remembering, hope that when we share our stories, the past can inform the future. The remembering and the related hope stand in contrast to the neoliberal moves to dehistoricize spaces and places, of which one move is to brand and franchise school openings.

### **Collective Remembering**

I present what others have written about *collective remembering* and circle back to what collective remembering looked like in this project in Chapter Seven. Collective is a malleable term that gets taken up related to remembering in a few ways.

Blokland (2001) declares that “...collective remembering is an *act*” (p. 280, emphasis author’s) that centers on the process of sharing memories and using the social interactions to piece together parts, not any specific event.

Secondly, collective memories can be seen as a collective ‘mind’—a container of stories about the past that one does not necessarily need to have lived through personally (cf. Merton, 1949: 370)... It is through the process of collective remembering that places and identities can be (re)constructed, for people and for neighborhoods (pp. 272, 281).

This underscores the ability for collective remembering to bring the past into the present for a broader population than those directly connected to the entity.

Simon and Eppert (1997) name the “shared significance” of collective remembering through stories, acknowledging that what is being remembered is worthy of the act.

In the formation of collective remembrance, such occasions may engender communities of memory, moments of social life wherein practices of remembrance are contested, shaped, and deepened by consideration of the shared significance of what has been heard, seen, or read. (p. 186)

The social practices of remembering and the worthiness that is signaled for what is being remembered requires work on behalf of the community. Anderson and Daya (2022) explore the role of power relations in collective remembering, noting that the work being done through collective remembering can be cultivated toward specific aims.

Acts of collective memory which, as Said notes, are often aimed at establishing national, cultural, or ethnic identities, are always shaped by relations of power. It requires agency, capacity, and labour to render memory legible or tangible, whether through stories, images, rituals, objects, names, or costumes. Just as the victors write the history books, so they are able to determine, to a significant degree, who or what is worthy of remembering in extra-textual forms. This power is spatialised, too: establishing identity-memories is an act of storytelling about who belongs in certain places, while also taking up physical and imaginative space with those stories. p. 1677)

Because of this agency related to collective remembering as a form of storytelling, communities can reclaim agency against unjust systems through the act of collective remembering. Collective remembering also can be conceptualized as a form of resistance, as people share their stories together as a counternarrative, as Chapters Five and Six offer.

Fenster and Yacobi (2010) explore the designing, planning, and experience of urban spaces in relationship to collective memory. Hatuka (in Fenster & Yacobi, 2010) claims "...performing collective memory could also be used as a tool of resistance" (p. 197) as space has the potential to be modified through testimony and collective remembering, in response to spatial injustices of the past and present. "Public memories give concrete affirmation to otherwise abstract ideals" (p. 194), and the collection of rememberings in Chapters Five and Six stand as now-public memories. The testimonies laying in the

publicly available archives of the public hearings give concrete shape to the stories that school community members offered, collectively, as stories of community cultural wealth.

Hatuka relates collective remembering to citizenship, and it begs the question of how closing public schools implode features of a democratic political system? Closing schools and reopening them as other school models (as happened for both Andersen and LaSalle II) modifies public spaces in ways that lean toward private and individual interests and mask over the collective histories present in the buildings. Parallel to Vale's (2013) research on "purging the poorest" through public housing initiatives over time (see Chapter Four), public spaces—like public schools—that serve the poorest and are revamped through market moves to purge them out of the spaces erodes the democratic ideals underlying public education. However, just as school closures can erode democratic ideals through moves to remake public spaces, resisting these moves can preserve and uphold democratic ideals.

Anderson and Daya (2022) point to the connection between space and memory as related to spatial justice: "the relationships between space and memory, shaped by collective, public acts of remembering and forgetting, can expand our understanding of what constitutes spatial justice in our cities" (p. 1673). In historically segregated cities like Chicago, with historically segregated schools, spatial justice can be thought of at the school and neighborhood levels, as the interplay between schools and neighborhoods (Phillippo, 2019; Waitoller, 2020). Making the remembering of Andersen and Schiller "public acts" through storytelling can play a role in shaping future spatial justice. This storytelling is one way of developing a collective spatial-historical understanding of Chicago that can help inform collective action toward future spatial justice.

The collective remembering that happened through this project was made in conversations between the participants and me as the researcher, as elicited for this research project. Anderson and Daya (2022) understood that oral histories they collected in a similar fashion "are not 'objects' to be collected... [this] understanding ensured not only a degree of reflexivity on the part of the researcher, but also acknowledged the fact that these interviews were themselves creative engagements" (p. 1675),

produced through social interactions. The rememberings in Chapter Five and Six were creative social interactions that cultivated memories and connections through sharing stories.

### **The Absence of Remembering**

While I have argued that the remembering on display in Chapters Five and Six was not an act of forgetting-induced remembering, but an act of remembrance, it is necessary to think through what it means when people do not remember much about the school closings, as one teacher stated to me. Is the absence of remembering forgetting? Anderson and Daya (2022) reflect on “...forgetting as bound up in—and just as political as—remembering, though inevitably harder to analyse” (p. 1677), and argue that “‘forgetful histories’ (Jonker and Till 2009) are both as political as public memories and memorialisations, and in fact part of them” (p. 1678). In this context, the authors are talking about people being forced to remember constantly by being confronted with injustices through their daily existences while others can put aside the things they do not want to remember—this is not what I am talking about. I cannot say why any of my participants did not remember “better,” but possible theorizing around it could be normalization, the slow violence associated with school closures (Aggarwal et al., 2012), coping with trauma, among other things. And although Anderson and Daya have a different context in which they are unpacking forgetting, their notions of attending to forgetting and the role of power relations seems relevant.

But of course, power and resistance go together, and geographers have also unpacked how “different communities ... struggle to legitimize their identity and diasporic memories through spatial practices” (Fenster and Yacobi 2010:2; see also Roux 2018) and “commemorative narratives” (Trotter 2009:73). Such contestations and coping strategies highlight the fact that any project aimed at understanding collective memory must also be attentive to the processes of forgetting, which are equally structured by power relations operating at multiple scales. (Anderson & Daya, 2022, p. 1678)

For this project, whether the “I don’t remember much” from one teacher is indicative of any type of forgetting is unclear but presents the reader with a moment to think about what it means to not remember much about a school closing in the context of a teacher who experienced multiple closures.

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After reviewing through the literature on the stories we tell about schools and pivoting to literature on remembering, my hope is that you found a way through the research in preparation for reading the narratives of what people connected to Andersen and Schiller remembered. This literature also invites a consideration of what work is done by remembering a school that was closed, as well as what significance that work has in the context of Chicago and school closures.

Before the narrative portraits, I offer one more detour into the complicated contexts in which these stories were created and reside on the page, with Chapter Four: Contexts for the Portraits.

## CHAPTER FOUR: CONTEXT FOR PORTRAITS

“In Chicago, for instance, a major new civic group devotes the energy of its managers and analysts to convincing Chicagoans that they are world citizens, downplaying their commonalities and conflicts as residents of a single region. Others celebrate community and create oppositional visions of communitarian and democratic societies, fighting the trend towards forgetfulness.

This war of ideas and visions is on-going and, as we shall see, presents opportunities for remembering and valuing particular places.” (Markusen, 2004, p. 2310)

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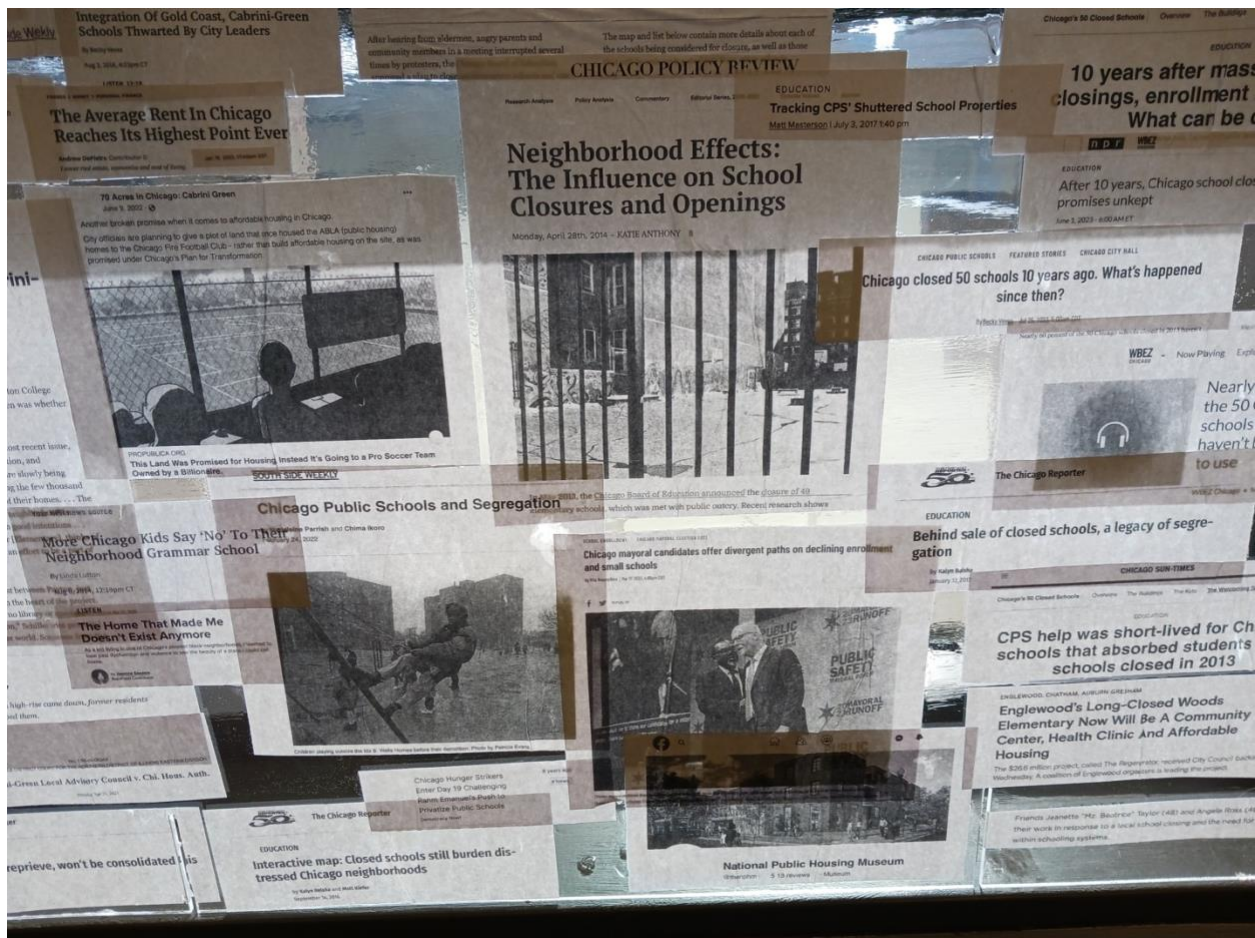


Figure 8: Detail of collage of media headlines related to school closure in Chicago

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I found an association between the density of the neighborhood, the racial composition of Chicago Public Schools over time, and my ability to connect with people who had a history with the schools. Andersen was in a dense neighborhood that stayed dense, with rent becoming more and more expensive as it gentrified. It was (relatively) easy to find participants who were in or near the city and were eager to talk with me. The population of Chicago and CPS has seen an increase of Latino/a families, which is the demographic Andersen served, over the last several years.

Schiller was next to public housing towers that do not exist anymore and the density around the school building has slowly increased over the last decade, with abandoned construction sites contrasting tightly packed new townhomes. There are still empty lawns where the towers stood. The original Cabrini rowhouses are still there, with only a fraction of them occupied at the center of the complex. The outer units are boarded up with fences and face \$1 million homes directly across the street. I struggled to find people from Schiller and it took much longer to secure conversations with them. Low-income Black families, which Schiller and the projects served, have left the city, and CPS, at a higher rate than other demographics.

This geospatial analysis serves as an introduction to this contextual chapter that precedes the chapters on remembering Andersen and Schiller. This chapter works to paint a contextual portrait, if you will, in which Hans Christian Andersen Public School and Friedrich Von Schiller Public School existed and were closed. The purpose of doing so is to present the written and artistic portraits presented of the two schools in Part II as situated in their layered and complex contexts. These contexts are not a backdrop for the schools' stories, but an integral—a concentric—part of the stories.

The stories of Andersen and Schiller need to be told with the stories of gentrification and public housing demolition. The stories of the schools need to include the neoliberal agendas that have driven school openings and closings in tandem with urban renewal plans at the federal, state, and local levels. These contexts make Yosso's (2005) concept of community cultural strength even more important as we tell stories about schools because of the proliferation of othering, deficit-framing, and systemic resource

deprivation that has shaped how we talk about the schools and the neighborhoods and families connected to them.

To organize the chapter, I start at the school level for each school and zoom outward to include details of the changes in Chicago over the last thirty years or so that impact both schools' stories. The larger federal and state trajectories are explored after. This should in no way suggest that there were not forces at play prior to the turn of the twenty-first century. The stories presented in this entire project exist in the present-day context of US society that has developed from 400-plus years of racial violence and segregation (Leiter, 2023; Spring, 2022; "The 1619 Project," 2019).

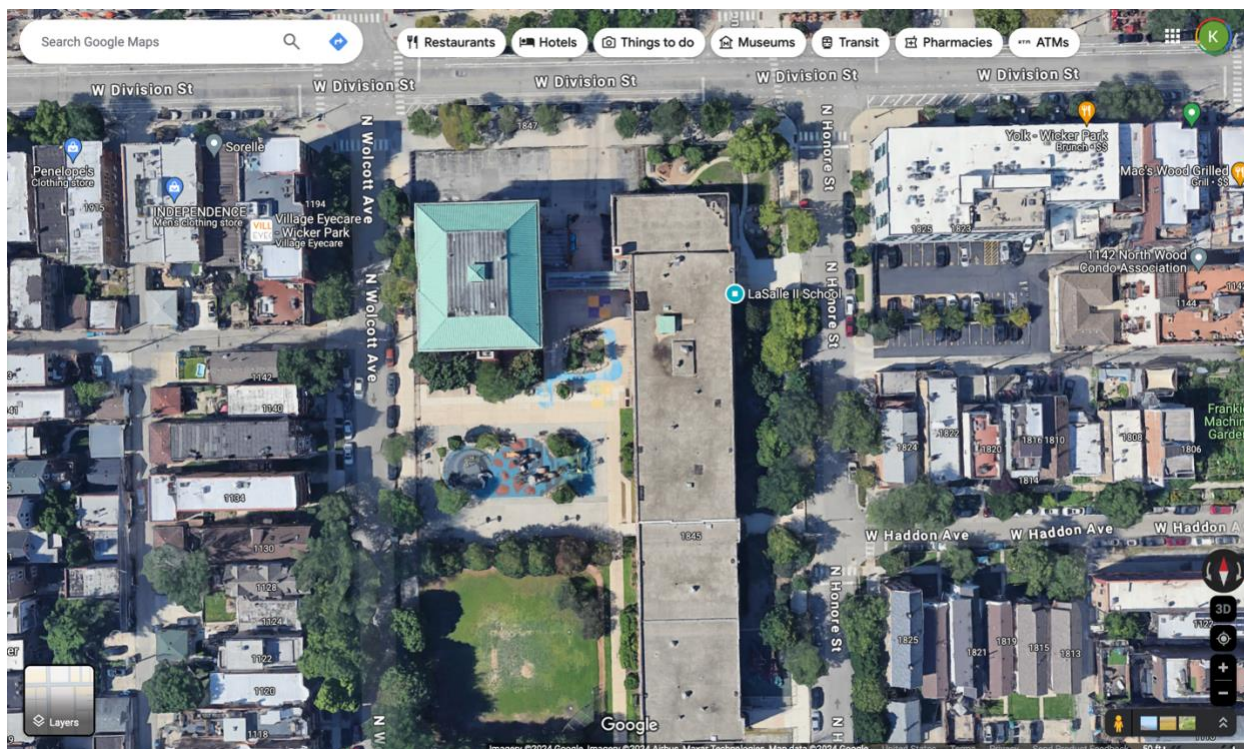
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### **Hans Christian Andersen Public School**

**1148 N Honore St, Chicago, IL 60622**

Chicago Public School – public neighborhood elementary school

Hans Christian Andersen Public School was opened in 1884 and named after the Danish fairytale author. A tall three-plus story red brick building with narrow windows and a green roof, it faces West Division Street in the West Town neighborhood in a part that is now more commonly known as Wicker Park (see Figure 9). The grandness of the architecture reflects the trends of the time. At some point, likely mid-twentieth century, the school expanded into a second building that sits to the east. The two-story orange brick building has shorter proportions and the lack of ornamentation is consistent with mid-twentieth century architecture. This lower building stretches south along North Honore Street. The buildings are connected by a bricked-in hallway and create an "L" on the block in which the playground and outdoor space for the school is fenced in.



**Figure 9: Hans Christian Andersen Public School**

In Figure 9, the lower building on the right and the taller, green-roofed building on the left were Andersen and are now LaSalle II. The top of the photo is West Division, the street to the right is North Honore and the street to the left is North Wolcott.

For over 125 years, Andersen served elementary children as a public neighborhood school. Between 2008 and 2011, Andersen school was phased out by the district and another school, LaSalle II, was phased into the same space at the same time. The district held the required public hearings that gave the public two-minute increments in which to argue for or against the closing. These hearings were held in 2008 when the phase out was announced and again in 2011 when Andersen was closed ahead of the promised 2012 date. Fifty individuals gave testimony against the closing and no individuals spoke in favor of the closing at the 2008 hearing<sup>21</sup>. The school community, including the aldermanic office, fought

<sup>21</sup> As evidenced in public hearing records from Chicago Public Schools, 2008.

against the closing<sup>22</sup>. Parents camped in tents to protest and staff cited data in their testimonies that refuted the data the district presented<sup>23</sup> (Gutekanst, 2009).

LaSalle II is a public school that is designated as a language magnet school, admitting students from a lottery drawing. Families must apply for the lottery by December in the school year before their child wants to attend, with letters of notifications of lottery winners and losers being sent the following April. A portion of the seats at the school are reserved for a proximity lottery of students who live within 1.5 miles of the school<sup>24</sup>.

Currently, LaSalle II uses both buildings with the main entrance to the school being on North Honore Street, on the north end of the lower building. Above the main entrance doors, large block letters announce “LaSalle II” with white letters on a purple background. This is echoed on a stand-alone digital plastic marquee in the yard near the front entrance. If you look upwards above the main entrance doors, “Hans Christian Andersen Public School” is etched into the stone lintel of the east façade of the lower building.

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<sup>22</sup> See footnote 15. Also evidenced in the public hearing records from Chicago Public Schools, 2011.

<sup>23</sup> See footnote 15, also Jennifer and Olivia told this story of presenting data to the district to me in separate conversations, see Chapter Five.

<sup>24</sup> [https://lasalle2school.com/apps/pages/index.jsp?uREC\\_ID=525278&type=d&pREC\\_ID=1006184](https://lasalle2school.com/apps/pages/index.jsp?uREC_ID=525278&type=d&pREC_ID=1006184)  
<https://www.cps.edu/sites/cps-policy-rules/policies/600/602/602-2/>

It is noted that the Alderman at the time of Andersen’s closing and LaSalle II’s opening negotiated this to be 50% for proximity but CPS implemented 40% for proximity despite community members working to hold the district accountable to the 50%. My reading of the above policy is that after currently enrolled students and their siblings are accounted for, 40% of those remaining seats are reserved for a separate lottery for students who live close to the school. It is unclear if the students who live close to the school are included in the lottery-at-large initially with all other applicants or if they are only included in the proximity lottery (and, if they do not get a spot through the proximity lottery, are they then included in the at-large lottery?). This matters because I cannot get a grasp of the ways in which students who live in proximity can attend the school or not.



**Figure 10:** Digital marquee at LaSalle II with Andersen inscription on wall behind



**Figure 11:** Detail of inscription of Andersen name on LaSalle II's east outer wall



When the buildings were Andersen, the school was the neighborhood public school. This meant that it did not have any enrollment lottery or requirements; any child that lived within the attendance boundaries was entitled to a seat at the school. I found no evidence that Andersen operated otherwise in the 100+ years that it existed. LaSalle II is not a neighborhood school, meaning families living nearby are not entitled to a seat at the school<sup>25</sup>.

At the time of Andersen's closing, it had five programs designated for diverse learners and served a higher percentage of children with disabilities than the district at large<sup>26</sup>. In the last ten years, the district's percentage of diverse learners has gone up while LaSalle II's percentage of diverse learners has trended downward.<sup>27</sup>

### *Socioeconomic Changes*<sup>28</sup>

Racial and ethnic data from the last thirty years shows that Andersen served a majority Mexican and Puerto Rican immigrant population. Since 1999 until it was closed in 2011, Andersen's student population was between 70-80% Hispanic, as labeled on the Chicago Public Schools' (CPS) racial and ethnic survey. Andersen's White population topped out at almost 8% in 2002-2003, but typically was between 3-5% of the school population. For reference, since 1999, the entire CPS district's White population has been around 9-10% of the total, increasing slowly.

Since LaSalle II opened in 2008, its White population has been consistently between two and three times the district's White population. In the 2021-2022 school year, LaSalle II's population was almost one-third White. The demographic of the student population at the school after LaSalle II was

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<sup>25</sup> [https://lasalle2school.com/apps/pages/?type=d&uREC\\_ID=528761&pREC\\_ID=1011574](https://lasalle2school.com/apps/pages/?type=d&uREC_ID=528761&pREC_ID=1011574)

<sup>26</sup> This is noted by how many students have IEPs, or individual education plans. What is noteworthy about Andersen is the amount of 'cluster' programs it had, which is a term for classrooms that only serve students with special needs. These rooms often have a lower number of students than general education classrooms because of the care and attention needed for the students to learn. An example would be a pre-k autism classroom, which may have an enrollment of 5-10 students, with room needed for occupational therapy and physical therapy. This matters because the district used 'utilization formulas' when arguing that schools were underutilized when closing them and communities argued that the district did not sufficiently allow for the space needed to house the cluster and other special needs programs.

<sup>27</sup> Gathered from data sets listed in Appendix C.

<sup>28</sup> See footnote 26.

phased in has become more White, at a much faster pace than the district. This is consistent with gentrification, along with the following data trend around income levels.

Economically, Andersen served a large majority of low-income families. The data available shows it had a higher percentage of low-income families than the district; almost all its families in the last years it was open were low-income. In contrast, LaSalle II's percentage of low-income families has consistently, and significantly, dropped since it has opened. In 2021-2022, almost 2/3 of LaSalle II's population was not designated low-income by the district.

Andersen consistently served a higher percentage of diverse learners, low-income families of Mexican and Puerto Rican descent than the district. The LaSalle II student population in the building is now more White, less poor, and serves a lower percentage of diverse learners than Andersen did. This happened in the context of the Chicago Public Schools district becoming slightly more White and significantly less poor over the last thirty years.

### ***Neighborhood Changes***

Wicker Park, the neighborhood in which the Andersen building is located, is part of a larger area more historically known as West Town. It is situated in the near-northwest part of Chicago, sitting just west of the Kennedy Expressway (I-90). The school building is just around the corner from a very busy strip of restaurants and shops on Division Street. As long as I have been in Chicago (since 2002), Wicker Park has had an artsy reputation with plenty of music venues and lingering stories of displacement from ongoing gentrification. The West Town area was mostly ethnic Europeans in the 1950s and shifted to be mostly Latino/a and low-income in the 1970s and 1980s, all part of redlining, suburbanization, and displacement of Latino/a families from nearby Lincoln Park and Old Town, as well as disinvestment through slum landlords in the neighborhood (University of Illinois at Chicago et al., 2001).

The gentrification in Wicker Park really began in the mid-1970s. The white artists moving into the community helped raise the rents. It used to be West Town, but that had a bad reputation —

that was a “Puerto Rican community.” So then it starts to be called Wicker Park. (Sisson, 2021, para.11)

By the 1990s, White professionals and higher-income households moved in, which invited more development and further pushed out low-income families (University of Illinois at Chicago et al., 2001).



**Figure 12:** Streetscape of restaurants on Division just north of Andersen building

### ***Gentrification and Schools***

Schools have been part and parcel of urban renewal initiatives and neighborhood gentrification, in Chicago (Lipman, 2011; Stovall, 2013) but also elsewhere in the US (Bierbaum, 2021; Dorner et al., 2021; Molina, 2015). Bierbaum (2021) names the role that school districts play as urban planners and calls schools “redevelopment sites” that are “deeply engaged in the racialized and politicized making and unmaking of spaces” (p. 203). In Chicago, the Renaissance 2010 Plan that the city put forth was a plan to close dozens of neighborhood schools and open charter or otherwise non-neighborhood public schools. Renaissance 2010 was an extension of the Plan for Transformation, a plan that demolished public housing



complexes and replaced them with mixed-income housing that did not sufficiently replace the quantity of low-income housing that was destroyed (Dumke, 2022; Lipman & Haines, 2007; Lipman & Hursh, 2007; The Chicago Reporter, 2021; Resseger, 2018).

People who testified against the closing of Andersen named the gentrification at play through school actions while the district did not name gentrification as playing a role (as evidenced in Chicago Public Schools, 2008, 2011).

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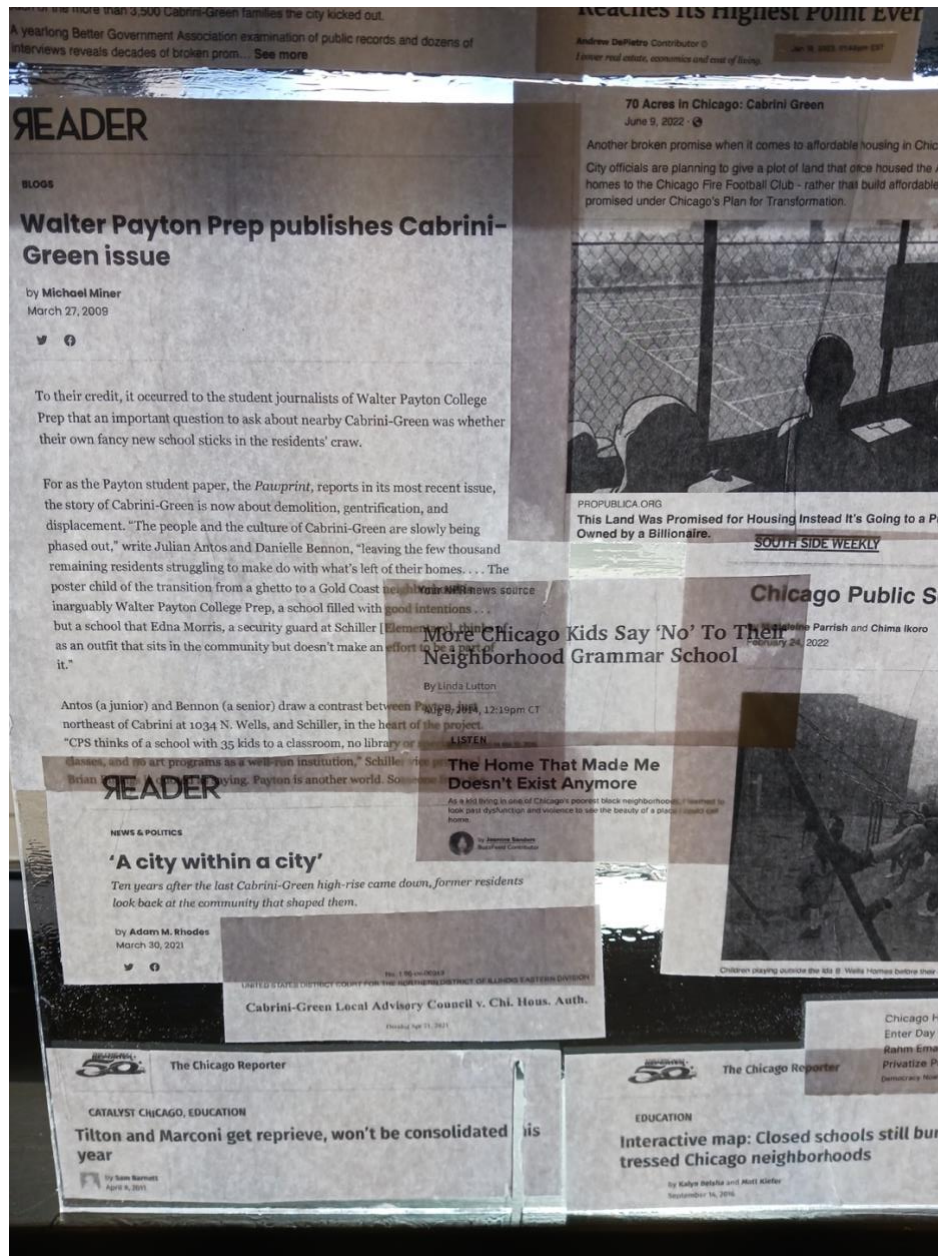


Figure 13: Detail of collage of media headlines related to school closures in Chicago- Cabrini Green

## **Friedrich Von Schiller Public School**

640 W Scott St, Chicago, IL 60610

Chicago Public School – neighborhood elementary school

The lineage of schools named Schiller in Chicago is hard to track down, which echoes the ways in which the stories about Schiller have been masked over (or erased, as some argue). Schiller is a school that weathered many actions against its stability over the years.

The name Friedrich Von Schiller was given to a school building in 1893 when a twenty-year-old, post-Great-Chicago-Fire building was added onto, at the address of 700 West Scott Street, just west of the current building's address. Schiller school had 500 students between 1960-1962 and put on an addition to serve 700 families shortly after. There was also a modern school building built nearby in 1962, which is likely the current building at 640 W. Scott Street. A Chicago Tribune article announced a new Schiller building would be completed in 1967 but it might have been completed in 1970 as there are discrepancies in the stories left behind. Likely, this 1962-building along with the 1967/1970-building became the “campus” built at Ogden and Clybourn to house the pre-K to second grades. That expansion happened because, by 1966, 2,000 students were being served at Schiller, almost all coming from the surrounding public housing towers. This was a four-fold increase since the early 1960s.<sup>29</sup>

By 1971, these two newest buildings at Ogden and Clybourn were named after Sojourner Truth and no longer called Schiller. Truth, a neighborhood public school, was closed by the district in 2004 to make space for a charter school (Sustar, 2013) and the student body from Truth was shifted back to the Schiller building at 640 W. Scott Street. All of this illustrates the dynamic nature of population shifts related to housing that can relatively quickly impact public school enrollment.

The most recent Schiller building, the school that closed in 2009 at 640 W. Scott Street that is the subject of this inquiry, is a low, two-level mid-twentieth century brick building, painted white and blue.

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<sup>29</sup> These data were gathered and pieced together from copies and remnants of Chicago Tribune articles and other records I took photos of at the Chicago History Museum archives.

The main entrance is on Scott Street facing south, where the driveway provides a pull-up with the entrance covered by an angular structure. On the north side of the building, there are raised garden beds, two full-sized, red-topped basketball courts, and playground structures that are adjacent to the Stanton Park District building. Large, empty lawns surround the building and a two-story Target sits caddy-corner to the southeast.



**Figure 14:** North playground of Schiller building, now Skinner North

In 2004, when Schiller absorbed students from nearby Truth, Schiller shifted from being a fourth through eighth grade school to a pre-K through eighth grade school. Partway through the 2008-2009 school year, CPS announced that Schiller would be closed by that June. The district held the required public hearings, where teachers, administrators, students, and volunteers from a nearby Jewish temple testified against the closure. The school community named the destruction of the nearby public housing towers, which was still happening, and the multiple times they asked the district for resources.<sup>30</sup>

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<sup>30</sup> As evidenced in public hearing transcripts from Chicago Public Schools in 2009 and also brought up in the stories in Chapter Six.

In fall of 2009, Skinner North, a classical school<sup>31</sup>, opened in the same building. Skinner is a selective enrollment school that does not have neighborhood boundaries and does not have any sibling preferences; all students must score high enough on an entrance exam and complete a central application with preferences to be admitted<sup>32</sup>. Schiller's closing was finalized after the deadline for this testing and application process, which meant that Schiller families could not apply for Skinner admission<sup>33</sup> after finding out that Schiller was closing for sure<sup>34</sup>.

Zip code data shows that 200 students attended Schiller in 2008-2009 from the surrounding area (60610) and that two students attended Skinner North the following year from the same zip code (see Appendix D for zip code data). In other words, almost all the families who lived in the neighborhood and attended Schiller in 2008-2009 did not attend Skinner North for 2009-2010 but shifted somewhere else.

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<sup>31</sup> <https://www.cps.edu/gocps/elementary-school/es-explore/#ElementarySchoolTypes>

<sup>32</sup> [https://www.skinnernorth.org/apps/pages/index.jsp?type=d&uREC\\_ID=563134&pREC\\_ID=1083495](https://www.skinnernorth.org/apps/pages/index.jsp?type=d&uREC_ID=563134&pREC_ID=1083495)

<sup>33</sup> It is unclear how they filled the first seats opened at Skinner in the fall of 2009 and if Skinner North was on the list of choices for the GoCPS application in Dec of 2008 when families apply and take the exam. Skinner North is a replication of Skinner West, so one assumption is that overflow families from Skinner West were funneled into Skinner North once its opening was announced. I did read in an email provided to me that Skinner North's location was up for discussion until very late in the spring of 2009 because the school did not want to be located in the projects. I have not been able to locate more definitive information about the gap between the enrollment process for the opening of Skinner North and the closing of Schiller but it was a repeated complaint in the records that families at Schiller did not get to apply to stay at Skinner North.

<sup>34</sup> See footnote 23.



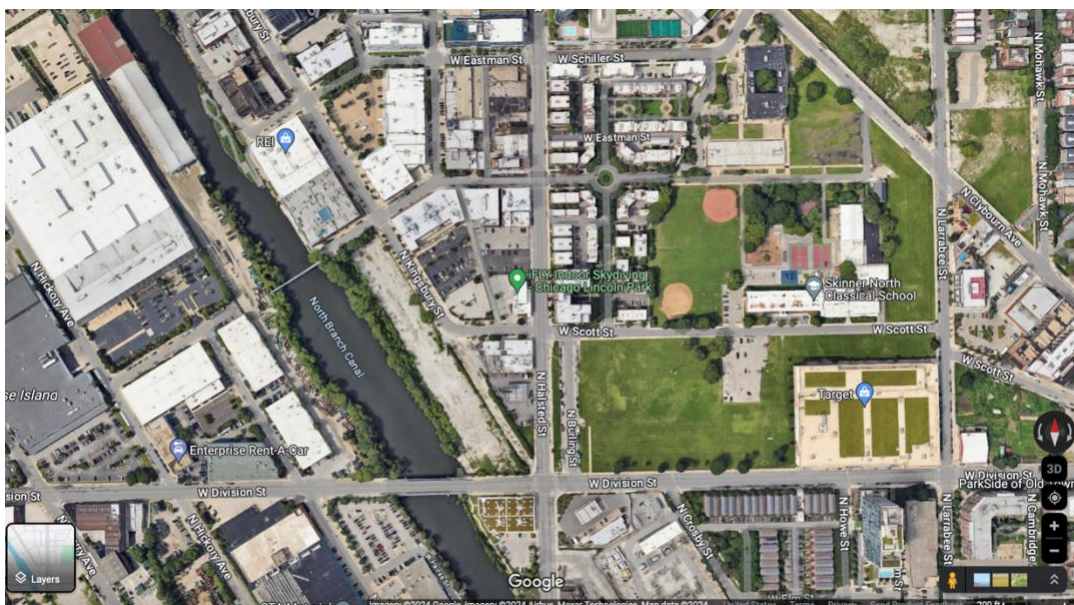


**Figure 15:** Mural on the side of Skinner North, We All Live Here

Skinner North boasts a beautiful mural on its side, declaring “We All Live Here” with the zip codes of Chicago organized in columns (see Figure 15). My artwork has pointed to the irony of this inclusive statement while the school is selective and does not serve the neighborhood.



**Figure 16:** Friedrich Von Schiller Public School, center  
<https://www.loc.gov/pictures/item/il0840.photos.318369p/resource/> dated “after 1968”



**Figure 17:** Friedrich Von Schiller Public School site, labeled as Skinner North Classical School in right-center.

In Figure 16, Schiller is the low building in the center, with a ball diamond to the left, surrounded by the seven high-rises. West Division Street runs left-to-right with the smaller bridge and North Halsted Street runs from bottom right to top left.

A news article from Crain's Chicago Business in 2017<sup>35</sup> noted that the grassy area next to the Target across from the school building in Figure 17 was to be developed but was delayed. At the time of this writing, it was not developed yet. The school building, labeled Skinner North Classical School, is in the right-center with red basketball courts above it, the same ballfield to the left of the school is in Figure 16. Target is toward the bottom right corner. "North Branch Canal" is the same waterway shown in Figure 16 for reference.

### ***Socioeconomic Changes<sup>36</sup>***

Schiller served almost all Black students who were low-income from the surrounding public housing complexes. Available data for the ten years between 1999-2009 lists the racial breakdown for Schiller as 100% Black or African American, minus two years where it is listed at 99.4% and 99.5%.

Skinner North<sup>37</sup>, the school that replaced Schiller, is currently almost half Asian and about a quarter White. 5% of the student population is Black. Only 11% of the student population is low-income and only 6% of the population is diverse learners. Less than 2% speak limited English. At the time of this writing, CPS had not published or provided longitudinal data for populations that they label as Limited English Proficiency, Special Education, or Low Income for Schiller as that data set online starts with the 2009-2010 school year, the year after Schiller was closed<sup>38</sup>.

### ***Neighborhood Changes***

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<sup>35</sup> <https://www.chicagobusiness.com/article/20170831/CRED03/170839976/cabrini-green-redevelopment-plan-delayed-by-city-chicago-housing-authority>

<sup>36</sup> Gathered from data sets listed in Appendix C.

<sup>37</sup> [https://www.skinnernorth.org/apps/pages/index.jsp?uREC\\_ID=560965&type=d](https://www.skinnernorth.org/apps/pages/index.jsp?uREC_ID=560965&type=d)

<sup>38</sup> I requested this information twice through a FOIA request, only to be told that all the data they have compiled to share is already published online.



Vale (2013) tells the story of the rise and fall of Cabrini-Green in Chicago, which is the neighborhood context for Schiller school. In the 1940s, row houses were built near West Chicago Avenue and North Larabee Street as public housing, known as the Francis Cabrini Homes while the Chicago Housing Authority (CHA) was young. Suburban living for White families was incentivized and redlining and urban property disinvestment created tenant living conditions that the city needed to address. The need for public housing increased and the CHA experimented, with families at the crux, with public housing towers to remedy the problems created by racist housing policies and practices. By the 1960s, an extension to the Cabrini row houses—red brick mid rises known as the Reds—was completed to the north and the William Green high-rise towers—known as the Whites—were built around Schiller school, just a short distance from the original row houses. Officially in 1962, the entire set of projects became known as Cabrini-Green (p. 224). By the 1980s, the experiment with public housing towers was considered a failure and plans were made to gradually tear them down and launch a new experiment with building mixed-income housing (Chapter 7). In each of these phases of public housing building and tearing down, the poorest families were never intended to be served, but were expected to go elsewhere (Chapter 1).



**Figure 18:** Cabrini Green townhomes with more recent development as a backdrop

As the transition between the public housing towers and building mixed-income houses is being completed presently, the Chicago Housing Authority (CHA) has demolished and (not) rebuilt public housing for families for a net loss of 16,000 homes since the early 2000s (Dumke, 2022, para. 33). The

mixed-income housing did not fulfill the promises made about the number of units that would return to the area, and in the time between demolition and rebuilding equivalent housing, families had no choice but to go elsewhere (Cancino, 2021; Dumke, 2022).



**Figure 19:** A glimpse into the occupied courtyards at the center of the Cabrini rowhouses

The original Cabrini row houses are still there, with about 1/4 being rehabbed and occupied (Cancino, 2021, caption). The outer units are boarded up and fenced off, while the center units are fully in use. Across the street from the row houses are new townhouses, one of which is listed at over \$1 million in the spring of 2022. Large lots around the area show evidence of development, stagnated building sites, and signs advertising luxury housing to come. The Cabrini row houses are hemmed in by high-rise apartment buildings likely built in the last twenty years.



**Figure 20:** Panoramic site photo of Cabrini row houses (left) and new development (right)

### ***Public Housing and Schools***

During the 1950s and 1960s, CPS schools in Black neighborhoods were rapidly becoming overcrowded due to an in-migration and racist housing restrictions (Leiter, 2023). The district built temporary ‘wagons’, mobile units, to deal with the overcrowding (*History of Chicago Public Schools*, n.d.). There is evidence that public housing construction corresponded to school overcrowding and the building of some new school buildings in Black neighborhoods, such as Schiller school when its population grew drastically in the 1960s, when the Cabrini-Green projects were completed.

With the demolishing of public housing in neighborhoods like Cabrini-Green in the late 1990s and onward, the poor were pushed out and the connected schools lost enrollment. These patterns happened over several years because of housing and educational policies that catered to middle class families and business interests over the public good (Lipman, 2008, 2011). Market-based ideologies drove these housing and educational policies, and failure to provide public services were reframed in business-like terms, and school closures dominoed after the demolition of the housing towers (Allweiss et al., 2015; Lipman, 2011; Lipman & Hursh, 2007). Families who moved into neighborhoods with schools that served low-income students, like Andersen and Schiller, wanted the same urban renewal that was happening in the housing sector to happen in the educational realm (Reh, 2016). School actions like closures, consolidations, and phase-outs made way for new iterations of schools, like selective enrollment and magnet programs at the elementary level.

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## **Chicago as a City of Resistance and Reform**

Chicago's educational histories have been fraught with racial and class tensions and injustice. Plenty of scholars have documented analyses and discussions around these histories, telling the stories I do not need to tell at length here (see Danns, 2018; Farmer & Baber, 2019; Lewis et al., 2015; Lipman, 2011; Lutton et al., 2018; Stovall, 2013; Todd-Breland, 2018; Vaughan & Gutierrez, 2017). Institutional racism of the past is active in the present, as the resource deprivation (Clark, 2022) between Black, Latino/a, and White schools and programs that is pointed out by the participants in Chapters Five and Six has a legacy playing out through school choice and selective schools being more White in CPS (De Voto & Wronowski, 2019). Racism in Chicago Public Schools has taken on various forms and been couched in anti-racist terminology which masks the ever-present systemic inequities (Ahmed-Ullah, 2013; Gutierrez, 2022; Lewis & Diamond, 2015; Melamed, 2011; NBC 5 Chicago, 2013). In the face of this, grassroots community groups and the Chicago Teachers' Union have fought to reduce the impact of racism on students and to dismantle racist structures in the schools (Lipman, 2017).

In 2019, the Chicago city council historically had six of 50 council members come from the Democratic Socialists of America party, including Jeanette Taylor who had participated in a hunger strike to save Dyett, a neighborhood high school that was being closed (E. L. Ewing, 2018; Lutz, 2019). In 2012 and 2019, the Chicago Teachers' Union went on strike, putting social justice issues at the forefront of their picketing, like housing and mental health (Ashby, 2016; Blanc, 2019; Maass, 2019). Between those years, teachers went on strike across the US in waves unseen in the past, looking to Chicago as a model (Hertel-Fernandez, 2019; Potter, 2022; Scott, 2019). In 2023, the city elected Brandon Johnson for mayor, a former teacher who was active in resisting school closures, who narrowly defeated Paul Vallas, a former CEO of CPS who had gone to New Orleans and Philadelphia to implement controversial reforms that included massive school closings (Dixson et al., 2015; Peña et al., 2023).

Multiple scholars have named Chicago as being at the forefront, or more as a laboratory for, educational reform, with multiple research articles on Chicago and its educational landscape available (a Google Scholars search for "Chicago educational reform" returns 3 million results). From the mayoral

takeover of the school district, granted by the state in 1995, to the charter school movement, to the massive school closures in 2013, Chicago as a district has stood at the intersection of elite business interests and communities' demands for racial equity through education. The Renaissance 2010 Plan served as a blueprint for charter school proliferation and the demise of education as a public good, driving the direction of the district toward privatization and market-based ideologies (Lipman & Haines, 2007; Lipman & Hursh, 2007; The Chicago Reporter, 2021; Resseger, 2018).

Other educational moves by CPS that play a role in how enrollment patterns manifest in different neighborhoods include student-based budgeting (Farmer, 2019; Farmer & Baber, 2019) and school choice ideologies that drive competition between schools within the district (Phillippo, 2019; Waitoller & Super, 2017). Additionally, the portfolio of schools that the district has prioritized over neighborhood schools in the name of providing parents the most information possible with which to choose<sup>39</sup> and the School Quality Rating Policy (SQRP) that rates schools with a complex formula (and has recently been scrapped by the district<sup>40</sup>) have impacted enrollment in neighborhood schools in direct and indirect ways. All these policies and accompanying structures work together to create a paradigm in which neighborhood public schools in poor Black and Latino/a neighborhoods are cast as undesirable and thus always threatened with closure, which also makes them less desirable for building any sustainable enrollment numbers. The trends explored in this chapter are not benign happenstances, but outcomes of policies put in place (Lewis & Diamond, 2015, pp. 30–31) .

### ***A Snapshot of Population Changes<sup>41</sup>***

It is important to point out that the enrollment crises that most of the school closings were addressing were 1) not crises, but predictable trends over time that housing and educational policies had a role in driving and 2) were not solved by closings schools as the enrollment trends in many schools

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<sup>39</sup> See <https://www.cps.edu/strategic-initiatives/annual-regional-analysis-ara/> ; <https://www.cps.edu/gocps/> and <https://www.cps.edu/about/departments/portfolio-management/>

<sup>40</sup> See <https://www.cps.edu/about/district-data/metrics/sqrp/> and <https://www.cps.edu/sites/cps-policy-rules/policies/300/302/302-6/>

<sup>41</sup> Gathered from data in Appendix C.

continues (Gordon et al., 2018; Lewis & Diamond, 2015). This can be understood more by looking at population changes over time in the city and district.

Chicago is a city that provides much to study around school reform (Ewing, 2018; Lipman, 2011; Phillippo, 2019; Stovall, 2013; Waitoller, 2020) and it's ever-shifting demographics interact with school initiatives in very explicit ways around race and class (Briscoe & Khalifa, 2015). In Chicago, the overall student population in Chicago Public Schools (CPS) has declined the last two decades disproportionately to the decline in the city's population<sup>42</sup> (Wilson & Linares, 2019), with CPS experiencing a 21.8% drop in total population as compared to the city of Chicago experiencing a 5.2% drop in total population between 2000 and 2020.

When disaggregated by race, this picture of the overall population of Chicago and CPS shifts quite a bit. CPS has seen significant shifts in the make-up of their student population since 2000, with a decrease in the percentage of low-income students, a large decrease in the proportion Black students, and an increase in the proportion of White and Latino/a students in the district<sup>43</sup>. In other words, the district is becoming less poor and less Black than it has been in the last twenty years. Scholars have connected this shift to the racialized displacement that comes with urban renewal initiatives and gentrification (Gutierrez & Waitoller, 2017; Lipman, 2011, 2017; Posey-Maddox et al., 2014; Reh, 2016; Stovall, 2013).

It is in this context that CPS has embraced and encouraged families to engage in school choice options within the district by opening more city-wide choices through developing a “portfolio” of schools and closing neighborhood schools. These district decisions have negatively impacted low income Black students more than other demographics (Ewing, 2018; Lipman, 2011, 2017; Lutton et al., 2018; Phillippo, 2019). In this contentious context, specifically with schools being shuttered, Bierbaum (2020) notes that although there may be shrinkage in physical infrastructures, “the social and political purposes that [the

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<sup>42</sup> See Chicago Public Schools demographics published online at <https://www.cps.edu/about/district-data/demographics/>.

<sup>43</sup> See footnote 40.



infrastructures] serve do not disappear” and argues for understanding “the politics of place as intertwined with the politics of education” (p. 467). Vaughan and Gutierrez (2017) argue:

Race is central to these processes as coded racialized meanings of failing or underutilized schools and the communities in which they are housed shape the political and economic policies that have destabilized and segregated communities of color throughout our city (Lipman, 2011, 2015; Stovall, 2013). (p. 7).

In Chicago, where a handful of poor, Black neighborhoods had the largest loss of population over the last two decades (Wilson & Linares, 2019), those same neighborhoods, like Englewood, have had multiple neighborhood public schools closed and charter schools opened nearby (Kunichoff, 2019). These population patterns are part of a bigger story of racism and classism in the city of Chicago.

### ***Neoliberalism in the City and Schools***

Generally, since the late 1970s and 1980s, there has been a movement, economically and politically, across the globe toward neoliberal thinking that has directly impacted schools. School closings are part of the neoliberal school reform movement.<sup>44</sup> Neoliberalism embraces market solutions, which often include the privatization of public services and goods by applying business-like structures to entities like education (Lakes & Carter, 2011). This is evidenced by the shift in vocabulary used (Saltman, 2009), such as the shift from Superintendents of school districts to CEOs. Chicago hired its first CEO in 1995 and the move to more school choice options through creating a portfolio of schools is a product of neoliberal thinking.

Neoliberal ideology subscribes to the notion of individual achievement through meritocracy, opportunities through competition and choice, and race-neutral language and policies (Lipman, 2011, p. 104). Solutions to seemingly scarce resources are often sourced through foundations, philanthropy, and

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<sup>44</sup> For analyses beyond Chicago but in the US, see Aggarwal et al., 2012; Briscoe & Khalifa, 2015; Conner & Monahan, 2015; Deeds & Pattillo, 2015; Ferman, 2020; Green et al., 2019; Kretchmar, 2014; McWilliams & Kitzmiller, 2019; Pazey, 2020; Syeed, 2019; Walker Johnson, 2013; for international perspectives on neoliberalism and school closings, see Irwin & Seasons, 2012; Kearns et al., 2009.

corporations. In education, neoliberalism manifests as the charter movement, heavy reliance on standardized testing and accountability, using these for school ratings, working under mayoral-appointed school boards, and innovating with organizations like the Gates Foundation (Au, 2016; Lipman, 2011; Saltman, 2009). Under neoliberal structures, financial capital is hoarded: the wealthy have become mega-wealthy and the middle class and poor have become more poor (Waitoller & Radinsky, 2017, pp. 148–149), legislation and court rulings have weakened labor unions (Kamenetz & Turner, 2018) and urban neighborhoods have been gentrifying (Lipman, 2008). Neoliberal ideology is embraced by Democrats and Republicans alike in the US (Lipman, 2011, pp. 8–10).

There is a direct line between Chicago's then-Mayor Richard M. Daley's "Renaissance 2010" plan for schools and neighborhoods, noting the "intimate relationship" between housing and education and the massive school closings in CPS through 2013 (Lipman, 2011; Stovall, 2013). In 2003, the Commercial Club of Chicago's Civic Committee, a group of elite businesspeople, issued a report that served as a response to the lagging standardized test scores in Chicago Public Schools that included charter schools, more choice, closing "failing" schools, and creating more competition to motivate struggling schools (Lipman, 2011, pp. 41–42, 2017; Stovall, 2013), based on market-based solutions. A year later, "Renaissance 2010" was announced, which was a plan that preceded the massive closings of 2013.

[It] called for closing 60 to 70 public schools and opening 100 new schools by 2010, two-thirds to be charter or contract schools (similar to charters) publicly funded but privately operated by outside vendors with nonunion teachers and without mandatory LSCs [Local School Councils, the only elected body in the Chicago Public School system]. (Lipman, 2011, p. 42)

Allweiss et al. (2015) cite the lack of historicity that accompanies neoliberal school reforms in their study of Chicago school closings through media images.

Neoliberal policies tend to look at these responses as 'solutions' to what is framed as the communities' problems in the here-and-now, but they lack a consideration of the historical and structural context from which these 'problems' have emerged. In Chicago, there are deep

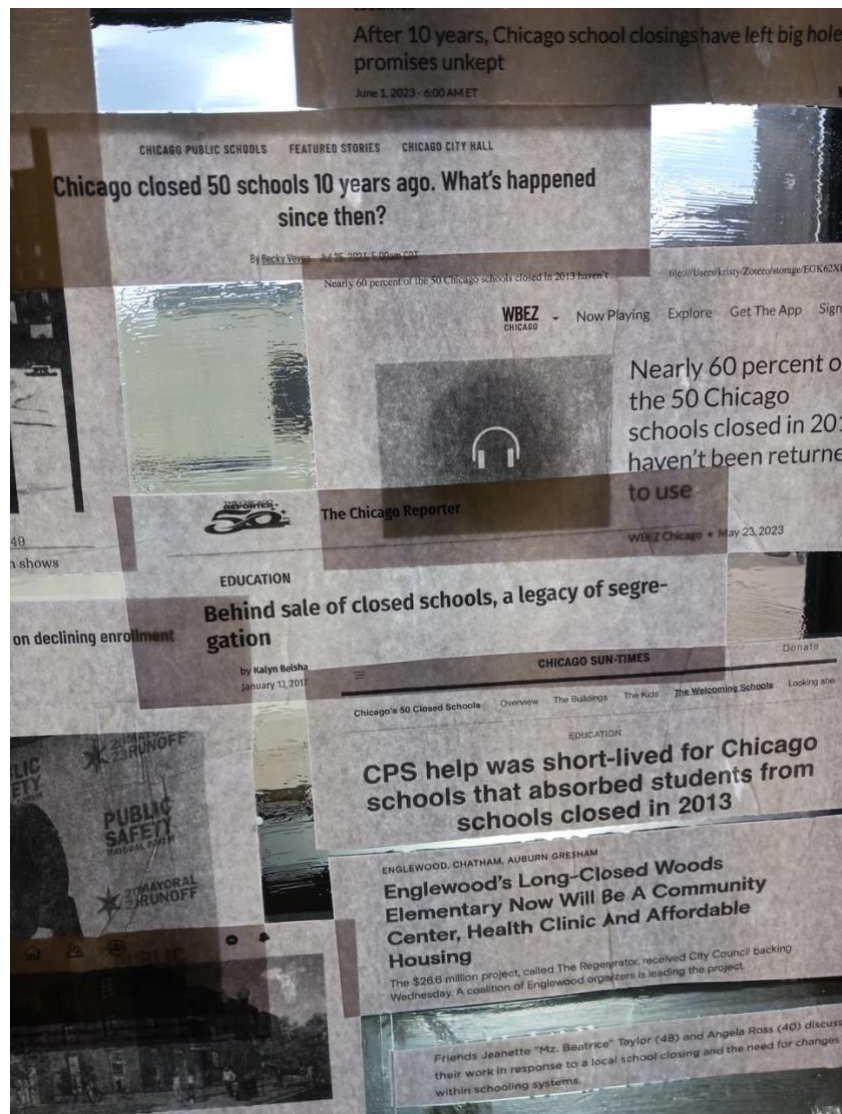


histories of exclusion, marginalization, exploitation and resistance that influence the way these policies play out and are experienced by those affected. (p. 615)

As a result of those histories, Lutton (2014) reported that Chicago Public Schools lost around 50,000 student enrollment between 2004 and 2014, with the Black population in Chicago dropping (para. 24; Wilson & Linares, 2019). By the 2012-2013 school year, the relatively new Mayor Rahm Emanuel announced a list of over 200 schools that could be closed due to underenrollment, a list that was reduced to a final number of 50. Most were traditional neighborhood public schools in Black and Latino/a neighborhoods, while the district continued to open city-wide schools, like magnet or charter schools. “Chicago’s opening of 193 schools came as the student population was declining, a problem that has only accelerated since the closing of 50 schools in 2013 — the largest intentional mass closings in recent U.S. history” (Lutton et al., 2018, sec. A generation of school shakeups and school openings).

### **Tenth Anniversary of Massive School Closings in Chicago**

The massive school closings of 2013 in Chicago are situated in the context of urban renewal, racism, and neoliberalism that has been explored above (Ewing, 2018; Lipman, 2011, 2017; Stovall, 2013; also see Lutton et al., 2018, for a more comprehensive review of the school closings). Chicago Public Schools have been under a leadership strategy of the mayor being the head of the school district and appointing a CEO since the mid-1990s. Throughout the early 2000s, the district closed a handful of schools at time while also opening charter and other choice schools while the overall city population and district population consistently declined (see the parts on Renaissance 2010 and population shifts earlier in this chapter). In February 2013, when Mayor Rahm Emanuel published the list of over 120 schools that were being considered for closure by the end of that school year and narrowed it over 50 by March that year, most of the schools were on the south and west sides of the city. Many communities had histories of resisting such school actions. As with Schiller, multiple actions against schools by the district and the historical practice of resource deprivation for schools that served low-income and families of Color continued a deep distrust of the district from the communities and educators.



**Figure 21:** Detail of collage of media headlines related to school closings in Chicago- Ten Years On

It is significant that I am completing this project during the tenth anniversary of the massive school closings in Chicago in 2013. From the spring through the summer this year, the local media headlines have explored many facets of the massive closings, from tracking which buildings were repurposed (or not) to telling the stories of individual students who experienced the closings. The closings were massive and the fall-out that has been documented, the stories that have and are being told are important. And just as with other reforms, cities throughout the US looked to Chicago to see how it was being done, as New York City and Philadelphia closed several schools in a similar fashion (Bach et al., 2019; Caven, 2019; Morris et al., 2022).

Neither of the schools in this study were closed in the giant sweep of 2013 and they are located on the north side of the city. WBEZ has done so much work to tell the stories of school closings since 2002 (Karp, 2023; Lutton et al., 2018; Vevea et al., 2013). That is one of the reasons that I wanted to profile Andersen and Schiller—the school closing I experienced was part of the 2013 ones, and I wanted to learn more about the stories of schools that had already fought the process without the momentum of dozens of others happening at the same time. These two schools were closed under the same justifications just years before the city made the historical move to close 50 in one year. I am studying them in a time when much is being examined and many stories are being (re)told about schools on the public front ten years on.

The stories told by the media document the impact on neighborhoods when a school is closed as well as the impact on individual families (Karp, 2023; Karp et al., n.d., 2023). It is devastating to see headline after headline appear, examining different facets of the stories, new angles that might shed more light on what school communities witnessed and experienced at the hands of the district that is charged with providing a just and resourced education for all children in the city. Artists and community activists continue to fight for what communities have said they need for generations<sup>45</sup> (Rivers et al., 2022; Sanders, 2016).

Rahm Emanuel is no longer mayor, his people who gave promises during the hearings are not here to be held accountable<sup>46</sup>. Ten years on and the crises that framed the justification from the district are long-term trends that are the result of generations of racist disinvestment in neighborhoods where Black and Latino/a families live. Even when research stories name schools as community anchors, as central to the perceived health of a neighborhood (Phillippo, 2019, pp. 58, 72, 147; Waitoller, 2020, pp. 32, 47–48)

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<sup>45</sup> See footnote 9. Also see [Voices of Cabrini](#).

<sup>46</sup> My experience at the closing of Canter Middle School in 2013 was that the district personnel, specifically Denise Little, promised that students who would have gone to Canter (but would be shifted to a handful of surrounding elementary schools that had to build on 7<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> grades) would be offered the same programming around Algebra, a gatekeeping math course for advanced tracks in high schools. I know from my connections to the local schools that this promise has not been fulfilled by the district, but has been figured out in various levels of success by local leadership and teachers. This is but one example.

and have explicitly named the harm done when schools are closed (Bierbaum, 2021; Conner & Monahan, 2015; de la Torre et al., 2015; Ewing, 2018; Gordon et al., 2018; Karp et al., 2023; Syeed, 2019), the contested utilization numbers that warranted forcing students to cross gang lines and shutter school doors still dominate the narrative around school closings. My White friends still say to me in conversation, “Well, what else can you do with a school that’s half empty in a district that is broke?”

It is with consideration of the various Chicago contexts—deeply racist educational histories with a more recent neoliberal framing of school reform that denies these histories—that this inquiry was crafted.

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It is within this complex set of contexts that I present the following chapters about Andersen and Schiller (see Appendix E: Procedures for the research steps I took). After re-orienting myself with the schools through visiting archives, going back to the school sites, sifting through news articles about their closings, I took the stories and data I found about the schools and worked to understand it myself through artmaking. I call these *palimpsest portraits*, where I take images and texts and layer them in a ghost-like way to honor the essence of the traces left behind of the schools. I then use this art as an inroad for conversations about school closures. More specifically, over several months, I reached out to people connected to the schools and had conversations with them about what they remembered. It was important that I treated the conversations as just that—a time for us to talk about school closure and what they remembered about the school, a time to share stories. From all those phases, I organized what I had experienced to compile narrative vignettes, which I braided with quotes and notes from my fieldwork and site visits. In presenting these stories in the next chapters, I oriented the artwork around the written portraits to add another layer to my storytelling. (See Appendix B for Methodology and Methods.)

Chapters Five and Six pull back the veil on my research conversations with people connected to the schools, people who were part of the school community. My focus was on the school communities’ stories and voices that were left behind in the records, in the traces I could find of the schools; therefore I did not search out conversations with any central district employees.

As I usher you into the portraits, it feels important to note that I set out thinking I would tell the stories of each school, stories of community cultural wealth (Yosso, 2005) that were masked over by the closing process. Knowing that this work is centered on fragmented parts and pieces that don't always fit together neatly, I anticipated that my narratives would still be pieced together parts of a larger whole that would be an impressionistic portrait of the school, maybe a puzzle with a few pieces missing but the picture was still there. I did not expect the portraits I would write or the art that I would make to ever be a complete story, yet I did hope for them to work toward a larger gestalt, like Lawrence-Lightfoot urges in her portraiture approach—a whole that is more than its parts. Although the stories that I found in the records and that my participants shared with me are part of the narrative whole in the chapters, the stories do not make an overarching story of the school—the participants did not point me to only stories of the schools, but to stories of remembering the schools.

### **Introduction to the Portraits**

I invite you to get to know Andersen and Schiller as you read Chapters Five and Six. Not much of the back research I did appears on those pages—most of that has been in these first few chapters and I mostly reserved the narrative portraits space for the conversations we had. The contextual and quantitative parts did not aesthetically belong on those pages; I assume you'll see why as you read.

I gave pseudonyms to the participants but not to the schools. Ferguson and Nichols (2021) argue for an “unmasking” of sites when we do research on schools because of the histories that are so present at school sites. Moves that mask the school names fail to bring the reader into the complex and layered pasts that should inform the moves we make in the present (Buras, 2015). One person who saw my art pieces immediately connected to the site, noting how he used to live nearby and frequent the Target. After having a conversation with him about the school that used to be there, and the art on the façade (see Figure 15), he said that he would never look at that space in the city in the same way as he had in the past. The history was now inscribed on the site for him. That is what I intend by using the school names and addresses—that my readers will think about these sites differently, bringing the stories and histories into

their present thoughts when they move through the geographical spaces or hear stories told about the schools.

I also chose a present verb tense with which to tell the stories to put you in the moment and to underscore the presentness of the past in the remembering. I framed the narrative portraits with the palimpsest portraits, or the visual art I made and included broader commentary about the images to help you understand how I am thinking about the visuals while leaving openings for your own interpretations.

The narrative portraits are three parts braided together: participants quotes, field notes or reflections, and dialogue between myself and participants. I feel the vignettes and participant quotes speak so loudly on their own, I wanted a form that laid them on the table as whole units themselves, while also being curated as part of a larger composition. I hope this elicits consideration from a variety of angles and allows you to move in and out of the stories as you like. I also think this form resonates well, aesthetically, with the fragments and layers of the artwork and overall conceptual approaches to this work.

The conversations you will read in the next two chapters show how each school fostered countless, meaningful community partnerships to support their students in a district that made them “run on a shoestring budget.” Participants shared stories of individuals at the school that “were the most influential person in my life, besides family.” They explicitly name the “blatant racism” and classism at play in schools when urban neighborhoods gentrify and public housing policies destroy homes and communities. They call out the broken promises of our elected officials and school district for families who “faced multiple challenges.” They name the hope and commitment that drove their resistance in the face of the inevitability of the closing. They express a deep desire in the present to “pause and reflect” on the past, to have time and space to remember the schools and all the complexities in which they existed. They point to the “history that was lost” and how the school community members “hold so much history within themselves.”

And so, I present *portraits of remembering* the schools from the conversations I had in the next chapters, with this chapter as context, as that is the overarching story to which my participants pointed

me. Through the remembering of the schools, through storytelling, the participants theorize about school closure on a structural level and critically analyze racial and class inequities that have historically been at play in urban public school districts.



Figure 22: Collage of media headlines related to school closure in Chicago- Context

## **PART II: GHOSTS**

**Hans Christian Andersen Public School**

**Friedrich Von Schiller Public School**



## PALIMPSEST PORTRAITS

### Plate 1: Resistance (Ulrich Papczun, 2023b)

12" x 12" x 0.12", 2021, two clear acrylic plates layered with image transfer, acrylic medium.

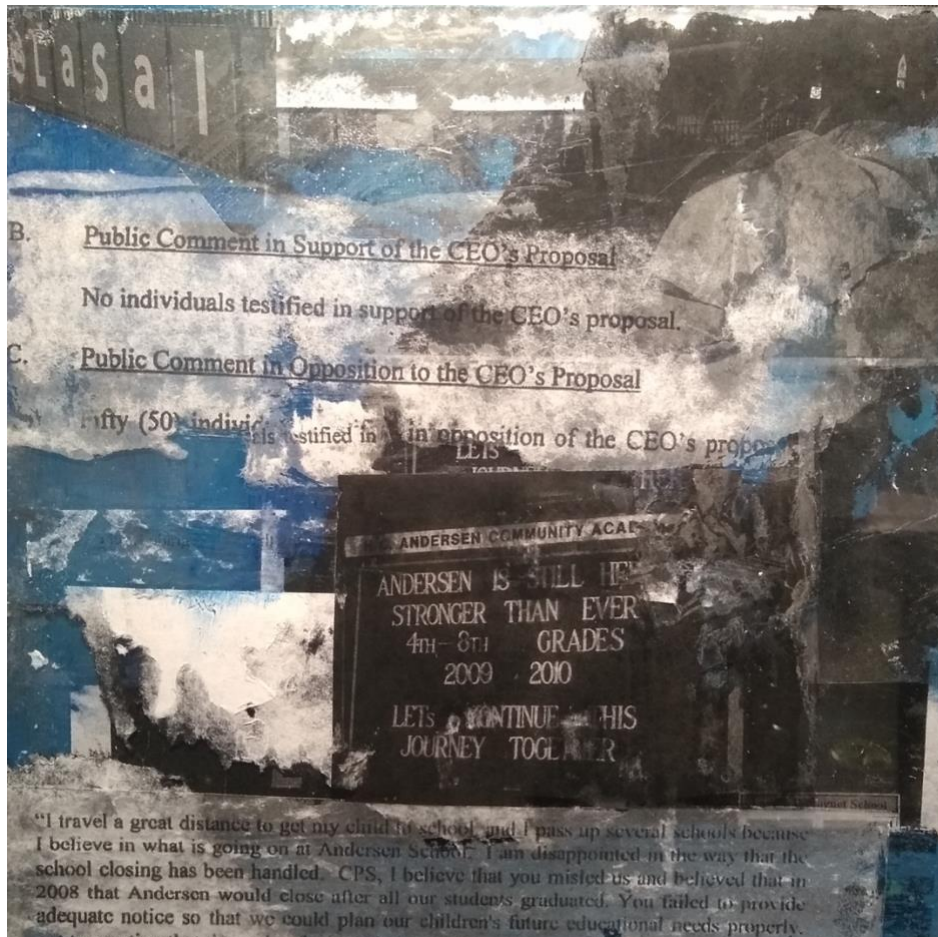


Figure 23: Plate 1- Resistance

Central to this piece is the black Andersen sign, insisting that the school is “still here, stronger than ever” during the phase out. LaSalle II, the language magnet school that replaced Andersen was being phased in. Resources were routed to the new school to renovate and improve the spaces, but the Andersen spaces did not

receive the same resources. This is resistance; this sign comes from within the school, posted outside for others to see. People were fighting, insisting on the coherence that a school provides, acknowledging the ways in which they had been impacted. The sign states that Andersen is 4<sup>th</sup>-8<sup>th</sup> grade now (the lower grades had already been phased out at this point). Andersen was closed in 2011, one year after this sign was posted. As part of the process, CPS promised Andersen families that students could graduate and 1) reneged on that promise and 2) put things in motion that accelerated the closing process.

At the top left corner, the LaSalle II sign image inserts itself into the composition with a train-like force, getting bigger and bigger as it enters the collage. It is not a complete image of the name, however,

and collides in the collage with images of the parents' tents and the public comment excerpt. In the top right corner, the images of the tents are a bit hard to make out but lead the eye from the LaSalle II sign toward the public comment revealing no support for the proposal.

The public comment excerpt layers on top of the Andersen sign detail that "no individuals testified in support of the CEO's proposal" and that "Fifty (50) individuals testified in opposition of the CEO's proposal". The broken line parallels the broken ways in which the 2-minute public testimony limit impacted the stories told by the community.

The centered black sign is on both acrylic plate layers, to reinforce the solid stance behind the way in which the school chose to portray itself while being phased out.

As a foundation for the composition, at the bottom, a parent testimony addressed the promised dates that were betrayed. She called out CPS in misleading them, not giving sufficient notice. The timing drove the demise of the school. She named her belief in the school and the labor she committed for her child in commuting, noting the other schools she did not choose along the way. The resistance was there, vocal and clear, intellectual and logical, while having an emotional tone of accountability and betrayal. The parent was aware of the Options for Knowledge deadlines, engaging in the systems created in the name of opportunity by the district. According to the parent in the records, the accountability lands squarely on the district for any and all actions that negatively affect the families.

The other parts of the composition add texture and color. They also reveal the process of rubbing off the layers of paper within the image transfer method, serving as an introductory piece to the collection. The incomplete images and layers evoke an ethereal essence, echoing the ghosts of the school.

*2022 Image of Research Award Submission*<sup>47</sup>:

*My research at UIC pays attention to hauntings and engages with the ghosts of closed schools in Chicago, building off Ewing's (2018) work. I document the traces left behind from schools that no longer*

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<sup>47</sup> Submission published: <https://grad.uic.edu/funding-awards/the-image-of-research/ior-winners-hm-22/>

*exist and create palimpsest portraits, or collages of archival data through a photo-transfer method. This serves as a way to analyze the data while reflecting on my experiences as a parent, an educator, and now a researcher connected to Chicago Public Schools. The arts-based methods afford unique insight and an invitation for others to pause and reflect. I argue that closed schools seem to be erased, but linger as palimpsests, permeating the present-day educational spaces in material ways that require re-examination. These palimpsest portraits constitute one stage of my dissertation (portraiture-as-process), will serve as a catalyst for community conversations, and ultimately aim to inform the writing of aesthetically rich portraits (portraiture-as-product) of the closed schools, modeling off Lawrence-Lightfoot's work (1983; 1997). Includes news images and excerpts from public hearing transcripts when Andersen School was closed and LaSalle II Language Academy was phased into the same building in 2008-2011.*

## Plate 2: Doors

12" x 12" x 0.12", 2021, clear acrylic plate with image transfer, acrylic medium.



There is something that takes my attention with doors in CPS schools. Maybe in any school. The doors are often numbered, regulated, with certain doors being the ones that the community and parents are invited to use. Other doors get labeled with directions to the main entrance. Doors have become portals to life and death, as it is always the focus of school

**Figure 24:** Plate 2- Doors

shootings- was the door open and accessible? Who propped the door open? What meaning is made in the shifts to keep school doors locked? Who are we keeping out and at what cost? What forces are driving this move? Do families feel safer with locked doors or less safe because of what the threat is that is motivating the locked doors?

Certain doors are for insiders and certain doors are for outsiders. Sometimes it is hard to find the main entrance to a school. What is the relationship between the school doors and the community?

This collage of doors represents the past, present, and future of schools and their buildings. This collage starts with a door on the left side that is an older-looking door on the west building of Andersen, with no identifying factor—this could be the door to any school and does the typical “visitors go to the

main entrance” sign. This is the same door that is isolated as a single image in *Plate 11, Door 7*. The black and white aspect of the collage refuses temporality, layering the old with the new without any guidance as to what is what. Moving clockwise through the collage, the next set of doors that are layered are the doors to new loft condos around the corner on the busy, dense stretch of Division Street, across from cafes and restaurants with outdoor seating. These condos were advertised with words like “boutique” and “luxury” and the rent was on the high end. The composition shifts from the doors of the school to the doors of the gentrifying neighborhood, to represent the connection between the two. Who is entering those loft doors and impacting who gets closed out of the doors at the school?

The collage ends with the main doors of the current school, LaSalle II, with the bold letters above the door that are not complete in the image. The railing leads the eye off the bottom, as if the viewer is entering the school but having to negotiate the other hovering, haunting images of the old school and the neighborhood changes. There is a trinity-like effect in the piece.



## Plate 11: Door 7

12" x 12" x 0.12", 2022, clear acrylic plate with image transfer



**Figure 25:** Plate 11- Door 7

This is Door 7 of Andersen, on the west building. It represents so many CPS doors that do not invite in, but direct folks to the main entrance. The beat-up façade and painted over sign above the door signal the past lives of this building. This door is part of the collage in Plate 2. The colors are drab and generic. The stenciled '7' nods to the systems and lack of identity — the institutionalization. This door could be a functioning school or an

empty building—it is unclear if it has life inside or not from its ghost-like quality. If you enter this door, you are not sure if you would encounter children's voices and everyone going about school-day activities or an empty, deserted space that feels haunted, left behind. This door as a single image evokes the questions

from the door collage (Plate 2) while pivoting back to the community of the former school. The image is inviting, I am not sure if the door is or not.

## **CHAPTER FIVE: FINDING ANDERSEN**

### **Hans Christian Andersen Public School - 1148 N Honore St, Chicago, IL 60622**

Chicago Public School – neighborhood elementary school

closed June 30, 2011

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Olivia, an employee for an elected official during Andersen’s closing

Pearl, a student at Andersen, graduated 8<sup>th</sup> grade in 1991

Yessenia, an 8<sup>th</sup> grade student at Andersen in 2011 when it closed

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Gayle, a teacher at Andersen for 16 years and transitioned to LaSalle II

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Jennifer, a teacher at Andersen for 6 years until it closed

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**“Makes me think about all the others, so many other schools now that I visited at the time that I don’t think are around now.” - Olivia**

On a Saturday morning in April 2023, four of us who previously did not know each other but all had a past connection to Hans Christian Andersen Public School gathered over breakfast in my art-making space on campus. Our previous email exchanges and now in-person introductions exuded gratitude. I am extremely grateful for their dedication to making this group conversation happen. This opportunity to come together with people connected to the school is the pinnacle of my research design and I have high hopes and higher nerves, buoyed by the quick response from multiple people following my recruiting efforts. In turn, all three had separately expressed a deep appreciation for having the platform to share their memories and thoughts about the school and its closing. My anxiety is as heightened as my many first days of school I had had as a teacher.

Wanting this time to be conversation-based, resisting the researchy moves that had turned me off a previous project path, I am ready with an activity from my time in middle school—a ‘silent conversation’ designed to ease folks into safe spaces for sharing and connecting. I have piles of post-it notes, bundles of markers, and pads of chart paper with guiding questions, just in case no one talks or awkwardness takes over. I also know from previous interviews how hard it is for people to remember details from years before on the spot, and that a bit of time and a bit of scaffolding helps them to lean in and dig up the stories. I am learning that remembering needs nurturing and care.

I have been hesitant to host this conversation on campus, worrying about the power dynamic that is inherently present between the university researcher and the researched, but the few public library meeting rooms I found were not central locations and needed a three-month reservation time. I did not want to lose the momentum of three strangers willing to gather to talk and they were all open to the maker’s space on campus as our common ground. With the colorful murals looming large on the walls, the space has been generative for me and I hope will be for our conversation. During our introductions, I learn that Pearl traveled in from the west suburbs, Yessenia came from Humboldt Park, and Olivia took

the train in from a northwest neighborhood. I express my gratitude to them again, self-conscious that maybe my thanks is venturing into an annoying amount, but then Olivia echoes with her own appreciative sentiments.

“For me, I was really grateful that you reached out... You mentioned the word haunting in your description... I was like yes. It's in many ways haunted me the whole time, like ever since working in the area and you know, even in job interviews and whatnot, people ask me about challenging work situations. That's almost always one that I bring up because it was just... I have so many thoughts and feelings about what I experienced, even the fact that you invited us here today. I'm remembering all the people that I engaged with at the time, like the principal, and then this other person, and just like, I don't have contact with them anymore. And like the fact that I don't have contact with them anymore, and I don't know what they're doing, adds to the haunting quality of it all for me. I wonder what they're doing. Again, it's just really stayed with me this—this whole time.”<sup>48</sup>

This sets the tone for our remembering, sharing, and connecting through Andersen stories and other stories of school closure. The ghosts of Andersen have been patiently impatient, demanding our attention over the past twelve years since the school was closed, waiting for us to listen, then pause and reflect. I never turn to my post-it notes or chart paper. I intentionally make a move to end the conversation at the two-hour mark to honor their time. I leave the space exhausted, connected, feeling like I have a million things to process on a million levels but wanting to let the experience we all shared just be out there, taking up the space it needs.

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<sup>48</sup> Due to the narrative choices I have made as a researcher using portraiture as my methodology/method, I use dialogue and quotations for my participants as characters instead of standard APA formatting when creating the narrative portraits. This includes removing text that might identify the participant, adding a few words to clarify their statements, or slight editing to maintain and craft the narrative flow, without using ellipses or brackets to indicate the minor changes I have made to the exact quotes. I use ellipses to indicate pauses in speech as well as removal of larger chunks of speech if I am consolidating words. These are editorial moves that I decided are appropriate for the methodology and are used to maintain the meaning of what the participants said. It honors the essence of the stories versus using distracting formatting to give the participants' exact words. I also take the liberty to rearrange the quotes, grouping them as needed for the narration and themes that I identified through coding, rather than keep them in the sequential order as the conversation happened. My research approach is about recasting their stories, not reporting precisely exact words, while the bold quotes are verbatim and the dialogue is simply a cleaned up version of what they said.

*I visited the school several times before I noticed the ghosts of Andersen that are present and demanding attention. As the plastic signage announces the school as LaSalle II, the name Hans Christian Andersen Public School hovers high, etched elegantly in the stone lintel at the top of the brick façade. Andersen was closed in 2011 and its stories linger in the physical site, in the artifacts left behind, and in the remembering by school community members; these are the palimpsests of a school that was closed.*

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**“It's all like real estate and tax driven. I mean, it's all, it's—*that*. Certainly not for the teachers of Andersen, the students of Andersen, the families, nothing was gained. Unless... you know what? Here's what I'll say. Maybe there were some students that decided to, you know, go through the process of attending another school if they got in. Maybe they wound up with a great education, right? I mean, I don't know. That is my hope that they all received what they needed. So perhaps it helped a few people?” – Jennifer**

Olivia worked for an elected official. Her job included keeping up with the various schools, advocating for their needs and serving as a community liaison of sorts to the district. She visited schools, talked to the principals, and attended Local School Council meetings<sup>49</sup>. Her stories reveal her own deep, heartfelt commitment to the school communities that were feeling the pressures from the district due to the gentrification in the neighborhood, when schools were reshaped to reflect the interest of incoming

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<sup>49</sup> Local School Councils (LSCs) in Chicago Public Schools are an elected governing body at each school in the district. Typically it comprises positions for six parents, two community members, two teachers, one staff member (non-teacher), and three students for high schools, and one student for elementary schools. The principal of the school is an automatic member of the LSC. LSCs do a variety of things, but primarily they oversee the school budget and hire the principal. One move that happens when the district takes action on a school that is struggling is to appoint the LSC instead of holding an election. Since 1995, central school board members have been appointed by the mayor and the only democratic part of the school district was the LSCs. In November 2024, the central school board will also shift to a partially elected body. See <https://www.cps.edu/about/local-school-councils/> and <https://chicago.chalkbeat.org/2023/5/4/23711633/chicago-school-board-of-education-elections-faq-guide>

residents. The hip and happening neighborhood both implicitly and explicitly demanded a school that did not look like Andersen looked. Andersen was populated with Brown-skinned children who had generational ties to the school, resources went to wrap-around services, and Spanish was part of the cultural heritage. The stories I had collected to this point show Andersen fighting for its existence in very real and immediate ways, such as parents camping out in tents and signs declaring “Andersen is still here” as the phase out was in process.

As Olivia, Pearl, and Yessenia open up about their histories with Andersen, the room is tense with emotion. It is a shared emotion; everyone is silent as Olivia tears up when describing her connection to the school and its closure. “It was a very moving experience for me. And I always think of it as the most stark example of racism I’ve ever I’ve like seen in my life of just... it was just... it makes my heart sink when I think about it.”

Pearl and Yessenia and I nod, offering quiet, unspoken gestures of solidarity. Olivia mutters an apology for being emotional and Pearl responds with a soft-spoken “Thanks for sharing...”, giving Olivia permission to share more.

“I attended a lot of LSC meetings, parent meetings, I felt fortunate. I got a feel for the community and each school and I would see all these really cool things they were doing— oh, art and music, all this stuff that was happening. And one of the things we often tried to do with the schools was helping them kind of, not exactly market, but like helping the community know more about the schools so that they would, you know, want to go in the doors and go to those schools. I remember, of course, thinking about that and about Andersen and how all the sudden once they announced it’s going to be LaSalle II, all these residents calling me about how they can get into the school. And I was like, Well, it’s funny, you never seemed interested in going to Andersen before. Like, Andersen is a great school, and now you just don’t seem to care... could it be because of the kids who go to Andersen versus your kids and what your kids look like? You know, that’s clearly what it seemed like to me. There was just sort of this internalized racism that people have and... and classism, and I just remember thinking like, but don’t you see everything else that’s happening here that you’re missing?”

Later in the conversation, she brings up the tensions she had in thinking about who the community is, who she was charged with serving for her job. Just as the families of Andersen turned to her for support in saving their school, the people moving into the community also demanded support for what they wanted as a quality school option. Previous to this conversation, I read about White, middle-class parents wanting “the urban experience” and making strong moves, collectively and individually, to invest vast amounts of capital (as in time and money) to “reclaim” neighborhood schools that did not have a high percentage of White or middle-class families, to “make the school better” for their children to attend<sup>50</sup>. I remember listening to the podcast called *Nice White Parents* and other personal conversations I have had with parents in Chicago Public Schools. I am also a White middle-class parent who “chooses” their neighborhood public elementary school in Chicago, so this tension is familiar, fresh and personal.

I am grateful for Olivia putting race on the table in the very beginning of our conversation, which catches my attention because she and I are White while Pearl and Yessenia are women of Color. I have teased out in my own mind how to do that move as a researcher, knowing I will likely be working to cross the racial and class boundaries between myself and my participants throughout this work. Later, this is a move that I struggle with when I talk to teachers from Andersen and Schiller over the phone in the next months.

I am constantly processing race and class internally while I am having conversations, deciding how explicit to be about the racism and classism that is a part of the school closings or how coded to be about it, always assessing what will lead my participants to tell more of their stories. Olivia has done some of this work for me this morning.

Our in-person presence seems so crucial to the connections we make through remembering Andersen. The shared space, this making of our own community of sorts to remember is an important component that I am not able to replicate during later conversations with others.

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<sup>50</sup> See *Nice White Parents* at <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/07/23/podcasts/nice-white-parents-serial.html>; Reh, 2016.

This idea of who is the community seems pervasive through all my conversations and Olivia comes back to the tensions that she faced from her position when Andersen was closed.

“I remember when we got the announcement from central office, that they were going to be phasing out Andersen and putting in a selective enrollment school. And at the time, I didn’t know a lot about Andersen, there were so many schools, we would do quick visits to all of them. And we get the downlow from the principal, they tell us—these are all things I need. And I would take notes of all the different capital issues, like capital improvements, and I would compile a list and then we would go to Central Office and try to advocate for these different capital improvements and playgrounds—lots of just various kinds of structural improvements that were needed. So what my role ended up kind of being within the context of the Andersen situation was, I guess, a few different things. One was understanding what the Andersen folks were wanting throughout the phase out. And then also talking with some of the newer residents of the area, what they were saying they wanted out of LaSalle II and then pushing with central office for different things.”

Olivia tells her stories with a pacing and word choice that is thoughtful and intentional, her voice sometimes faltering with the emotions that well up. I feel the three of us leaning in and listening hard. There is an intensity to her retelling, a present tense to the past. Her perspective and unpacking of these happenings from twelve years ago ring with a freshness and rawness that acknowledges the harm and impact on people who were not directly part of the school, but were in roles secondary to the families, staff, and students at Andersen. A secondary ripple to the impacts of school closure maybe. She brings up the fact that the closing was a “done deal” and any engagement that the district formalized through public hearings or meetings with the community did not seem to matter. She says this definitively before I can even ask about it. This same notion is echoed in all my conversations about school closings—the notion that people who spoke up against or otherwise protested the closing did so wholeheartedly but also likely knew it was not going to matter in the end. This pattern is so pervasive in the literature and in my own experience with a school closing that it seems uncanny.

“But at the same time, it sort of felt like this too late kind of thing,” Olivia says. “You know, it felt like the central office had already made their decision. And I didn’t know how much lobbying them was going to do. And it turned out, I don’t think it really did a lot. But I do remember people saying it was a racist action that they were doing and so it was just a move to encourage the district to pause and listen to the community, to kind of stop and pause, mostly, I guess. That was some my first experiences going to board meetings and it was so like—you’re allowing space supposedly for people to air their experiences and their feelings. But by the same token, it felt like, you’re not really listening. It was like, let’s get through this, blah, blah, blah, and then we’re done.”

No one seems to be eating their breakfast sandwiches and I make a mental note to get up and get more food at an appropriate point to both break the heaviness and to make sure they know they can too. Pearl lets a pause take hold in our conversation after Olivia shares and before she voices her own remembering. Pearl was a student at Andersen back in the 1980’s, graduating eighth grade in 1991. Almost two decades later, she says she did not hesitate when she got a call informing her that Andersen was going to be closed and was asked if she would come to speak at the hearing to testify about what the school meant to her. She has clearly prepared for this conversation since I contacted her, walking in with a manila folder full of newsletters from her student days that help her remember the school. She also is ready with three words that summarize the school for her: compassion, community, and promise. With this sort of preparation and argument ready, I am hardly surprised when she mentions in passing that she is a lawyer.

Pearl agrees with Olivia about how performative the community engagement process was and felt a tender obligation to honor the school by speaking out.

“I think we already knew the writing was on the wall. But if there was a way that we could, because of, you know, how important of a role Andersen played in our lives, if there’s a way for us to take a moment to try to reflect on the potential, the promise of what it could be by keeping it open, we were there to lend that voice, to do our part.”

*Once I notice the tracings of Andersen left behind, I cannot stop noticing the same in other sites across the city as I encounter other public schools that have ghosts begging for our attention, hauntings that ask us to engage with the stories of schools that have been closed.*

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**“It’s just very interesting to see the complete difference when you see kids playing on the playground, how they used to look and how they look now, the cars in the pick-up line, how that looks... the food being provided, the after-school activities being offered, it’s very different.”**

**- Yessenia**

Olivia sets the stage well for unpacking the memories of Andersen. Each of these folks have come to this space with stories, taking part in this common space and time through which they can remember the school. Pearl takes another turn to share her memories, pulling out a folder full of school newspapers.

“I’m not sure if anything I have is a new perspective, because even as you were talking, Olivia, you know, there were themes I was hearing that resonated with me in terms of what I remember about Andersen. I was trying to think, okay, — I like to simplify things—what are three key words I think of when I think of Andersen? I think compassion, community, and the third, maybe promise. I feel like these three words do justice in terms of summarizing my experience that I had there. And I have in my folder with me, we were talking about— Yessenia and I were talking earlier about finding things and I found some of the school newspapers that I had back then. So I have them with me...”

The group leans in as Pearl pulls out half a dozen, semi-glossy, slightly yellowed booklets with multiple pages, stapled in the middle, each one about 12 pages. She spreads them over the wood tabletop, and it is almost as if the group gasps at the ways in which the stories of Andersen have been preserved.



Most of the newspapers look as if someone had access to more formal publishing processes than just dittos stapled in the corner; they look like someone has paid attention to graphics in a basic way, but with care and intention to balance the page layouts with photos and text. One of them clearly was hand-typed on a typewriter and another has that MS-DOS look.

“Can I take pictures of them?” I ask, knowing I will want to spend much more time reading through them after our shared conversation is over.

“Yes. Let me show a few things...”

Conscious that we have all been eating, I say, “I don’t want to get food on them.”

Pearl seems less worried about giving the newspapers the white glove treatment as she gestures for us to interact with the stories.

“Oh, these are old, so I don’t mind. Go ahead!” She starts to organize them by date on the table and the ones that are dated contain stories from 1987, 1988, and 1990. The one from 1988 has student writing honoring Harold Washington a year after his death. “These were just stuck in an old bin in one of my closets and I was like, oh, I need to find a couple of things just to help me remember...”

Yessenia has picked one up and is flipping through, reading intently. This is the history of her school on display, stories from two decades before she attended Andersen. “Oh wow...” she whispers. “Look at this... ‘Andersen Elementary, yesterday, today and tomorrow.’ What an appropriate title.”

“Wow,” Olivia says. She looks over at the one Yessenia has in her hands. I pick one up and immediately get sucked into the teacher profiles, student-drafted editorials, and classifieds.

“And this one— we were trying to figure out the date. The very first few don’t have a year.”

“Mind if I look closer? What year does that one say?” Olivia reaches forward for one of the earlier ones.

“I don’t mind at all ... I don’t even know what year these would have been, my husband told me maybe 1986, so I think I was in fourth grade.”

“Oh... Wow,” Olivia says. All our attention is focused on the newspapers, engrossed in the history on display.

“Just seeing these reminded me then of just how much the technology has advanced, look at the fonts and such,” Pearl says.

“These look like magazines, how they are published! Do you mind if I touch one too? I should figure out how to capture these,” I say. Even though Pearl has given the go-ahead to handle them, I notice that we are touching them lightly and turning pages gently.

“Look. There’s poetry by the students,” I say.

Olivia looks across the table at the page I am reading. “That’s incredible.”

“So feel free. I mean, there’s like here, someone put this article of what they thought Andersen could be in the future.”

“Oh, like, wow!” Yessenia says as she picks up another. Clearly we are struggling to process beyond the wow factor for the time being.

“Deep in this very first article in this one, it goes through the history of Andersen. And I guess at the time I was going there, it was about 1000 students and I spent my life in the smaller building. And then that large one, at least at the time was the EVGC. And it was, for us younger students... this was where older students went who needed support but... for those like me, just in typical grade school, we were purely in the smaller building. I’m sure that has that probably, maybe that changed by the time you went to school?”

“Yes,” Yessenia confirms. “It was preschool through a fifth grade in the long building. Then when you were essentially middle school, which would be sixth through eighth grade, you would be in the taller building— the older one. And I think it’s still set up like that.”

We keep repeating the word “wow” under our breaths as we encounter detail after detail about Andersen through these preserved stories.

“So when you said that, Olivia,” Yessenia offers, “about Andersen deserving awards, not closure, I was like, yes, they do deserve awards; I know the work the teacher in the autism room does with families. And I think it’s still the same setup where the older kids are in the annex building.”

“I recall the staff, the students or families, a lot of which came from immigrant families,” says Pearl. “And I was first generation. I mean, there’s at least, for my family, maybe 10 of us that went to Andersen, and I’m including my sisters and cousins. And so it’s always been near and dear to me. Just even seeing these different... look, there’s Mrs. Dolma!”

Pearl flips the newsletter around to show us the teachers showcased in print.

“But it’s very clear through these newsletters, like the three words I mentioned, the compassion that the staff had for creating something like this and helping maintain and keeping the stories. For the most part, they did try to really, you know, inspire students to contribute to these.”

Yessenia nods affirmatively.

“Then the community involvement, and then really the promise... you’ll see snippets from different high schools to know what high school life would be like. So we would get inspiration, because at the time I went to school, it wasn’t guaranteed that you would be going to high school or even graduate. It was a truly an accomplishment when we had graduation. And how proud families were to even just get through to eighth grade. You know, a lot of the families, my classmates came from very challenging situations, including myself, sometimes we were just really proud to even have made it through to that day, so... But it was never a question when you were a student at Andersen that, of course, you could, you would... you could continue to go on, no matter your family circumstance or financial situation. There were people who wanted to create a safe environment for you, to at least give you a chance to continue to go. It was very, very difficult at a time where there are a lot of gangs and a lot of violence... So, thank you for listening...” Pearl’s voice trails off as she lets her gaze fall onto the newspapers.

“This is amazing,” Olivia says, almost under her breath.

“Thank you for sharing,” Yessenia says.

*In the spring of 2020, I walk through the main doors of the school to supervise one of my student teachers. Bold, block letters announce the school’s current name—La Salle II—in a very fresh way, one white letter per purple window square over the main doors on the northmost end of the lower building. A*

*stand-alone plastic digital marquee is positioned midway to the corner of the street, announcing the latest events and naming LaSalle II as a “language academy”—a magnet school where students have extra resources dedicated to more language instruction and support than in a typical neighborhood school. In Chicago, families have to apply for magnet school spots through a lottery process using an online central application system, where the 652 district and charter schools and programs are listed with their special designations, or structures. The deadline to apply is early December, nine months before the start of the school year.*

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**“What do children need? What do children need to be able to grow, to learn? You can say all kinds of things, like they need to meet this standard of reading, this standard of math and so on, in order to be successful and go to college or whatever the case may be. But if a student doesn’t feel safe, if a student doesn’t feel at home, if they don’t feel like they can go to someone with a problem, that other stuff’s kind of out the window in a way, or how long will it even last? You know, if a person is making straight A’s, but inside they’re struggling so much, what is it going to matter in ten years how well they’re going to do on a job if they don’t feel like they have supports in their life?”**

**– Olivia**

When my own local middle school was slated to be shuttered in 2013, I attended the hearings and meetings in various living rooms to craft our counternarrative to the district’s story of Canter. My partner taught math there—it was his first year of teaching. The board phased out the school, which let the 7<sup>th</sup> graders finish 8<sup>th</sup> grade there and graduate. During our group conversation, I find myself remembering the palpable power dynamics on display in the gymnasium during one of the public hearings for Canter, where the spatial layout underscored so much of the inevitable—we were fighting the closure but it didn’t seem to matter.

I share parts of my story with Olivia, Pearl, and Yessenia.

“I remember the structure when Canter was closed—there was a stage and the district people were on the stage. And then the podium for the speakers, for the community, was on the ground with the security guard next to them, right? And just again, that formatting was clear. There’s a power differential there on display, right?” I lay my own memories on the table to invite them to share what they remember about the spaces.

“I remember people calling out who also wasn’t in the room. I was looking for Duncan, he wasn’t there at the hearing,” says Pearl. “And there were district people there. But it almost just felt like they were just taking seats and being in the room.”

“Stoic,” Olivia says.

“Yes, they were just like, just blank stares,” Yessenia says. “And when you would walk up to the podium, so nervous to speak to these people that are deciding your life that’s already been decided. So you feel like your efforts weren’t good enough. And then you come back feeling like, wow, I didn’t argue well enough. What did I say?” Yessenia was only in eighth grade when she spoke at the hearing for Andersen.

“I was thinking the same thing!” Olivia says.

“It’s like someone putting a big foot on you...” Yessenia’s voice trails off. This isn’t the only time that school community members explore this feeling of personal responsibility connected to resisting school closure.

“I feel like there was a railing or something that the board members would go behind, they’d sit down and sit very stoic, very—just like, no emotions on their faces,” Olivia says. “And you know, each person had their time limit. Get up to the podium. Speak. Yes, the power dynamic was set up right away.”

This notion threads through the literature on school closure across the United States and is reiterated in an instruction manual of sorts on how to close urban public schools that I found published by the Broad Foundation<sup>51</sup>. The recommendations in that publication are very parallel to what we all

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<sup>51</sup> <https://www.scribd.com/document/127292372/1344-schoolclosureguide>

experienced with school closings in Chicago: The district gets 30-40 minutes of uninterrupted time to show polished presentations that represent data in a very selective, quantitative way, data that they have had access to and staff with which to analyze it over four to six months prior. After the district's presentation, the public—meaning the teachers, the staff, the parents, the students—gets two-minute increments to speak with no repeat speakers, slots which can only be reserved the hour before the hearing. The public likely have had one to two months of notice with which to scramble and organize the stories they will tell, if there is any collective capacity to do so.

I share with the group my memory of a friend arguing at the podium, pushing past the “Please conclude” prompts that pepper all the transcripts I read. He challenged the district representative on the opportunities for the youth who would no longer attend our local middle school but would be scattered back to the five elementary schools in the surrounding area. The district official verbal promised that yes, the district would ensure that students would have Algebra in eighth grade, and college field trips, and the other middle-school specific programming that Canter had prided itself on. My friend demanded accountability and questioned how that would happen without the economy of scale, in an elementary school setting? Ten years later, no one knows if middle school students scattered to those five elementary schools indeed get their Algebra opportunity or are getting college field trips. There is no mechanism for longitudinal accountability.

Olivia shares her version of a similar issue around a district promise that local students would be able to attend the magnet school that was taking over Andersen's building.

”And then the local, the new residents wanted rules or provisions of such to allow for people that lived in the area to be able to go to the school. And I think I remember we did even have something in writing that some central office people had signed. And then later they're like, Oh, we never really promised that. And then I showed them this letter, and they're like, Oh, I guess we did promise that. But I don't think it mattered. Later on, somebody actually contacted me when I was not at the job anymore. And she was like, do you know anything about this? I had already sent her what I had, the letter. She said

they weren't really going by that. I said, I don't know what else to do. But it was in this letter, you know, so..."

*LaSalle II is modeled off another Chicago Public School—the nearby LaSalle—that the district tapped as a success that should be essentially franchised, replicating the application process and curricular or social focus that designates the school as a magnet school and not a neighborhood school. CPS has done this same move with other schools, like Disney and Disney II. Often this is what is listed on the school's website as its history or lineage.*

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**“With Andersen, when you say it’s bigger than the school, it is. It’s almost like these intangibles in a way. It’s like this—the feel of community, the feel of all the people who genuinely care about each other and hold so much history within themselves.” – Olivia**

Yessenia gets a glimmer in her eye when she thinks about the name of the school, Hans Christian Andersen. Her mouth curls up in a grin as she practically embodies her little girl self again.

“I used to be so proud of going Andersen because the author of that book, *A Little Match Girl*, it was named after.”

“Hans Christian Andersen,” I say.

“Yes! I remember being like, oh my god, I can’t wait to read this book. It was like, we’re named after an *author*,” she says.

Pearl hints that she had similar sentiments, or at least was also aware of the significance of the name of the school. “Yes. The Denmark author.”

When Olivia, Pearl, and Yessenia talk about Andersen, they use words like “heart” and “community” and “family” and “safe.” When we talk about the school that was phased in when Andersen was phased out, LaSalle II, words like “choice” and “brand” are used. Later, when I talk to a reporter who

covered school closings, they use the word “franchise” to describe LaSalle II. I know that school closings are closely related to, actually a requirement for, school choice and market-based ideologies<sup>52</sup>. Chicago Public Schools advertises their various schools as a “portfolio.”<sup>53</sup>

I decide this a good time to bring out the piles of images and maps I have in the art space.

“I do have some pictures and some maps, I don’t know if you want to look at anything and if that makes you think of more things,” I say. I push the piles I organized to the center of our table—color maps, black and white maps, street-level images of the school from various angles, and images from the news stories when the community was resisting the closure.

“That’s a picture I got from the Chicago History archive, the History Museum. It was in the archives of some maintenance file of who needed new roofs or something, right? And I was like, Oh, here’s the school, a picture of the school from like the 70s or something.” The landscaping around the front entrance and the railing is different now.

“But I was trying find the black sign that I used in my collage... Oh, here’s where it says ‘Andersen still here’. Yes,” I say.

“Oh, wait,” Olivia says. “You said it says Andersen is still here?”

“That’s this one here,” I say as I find the image I want. “This was from a newspaper article. It was a big black sign that was put up. ‘Anderson still here stronger than ever.’ And that was when LaSalle II had started to come in.”

“Oh... I think I remember that sign?” Olivia says.

“And then this is the tents that the parents camped out in,” I say. I shift to one of my art pieces, where the images of the tents and school signs are collaged and layered. “And then the testimony at the bottom talks about the broken promises that parents named at the hearings.”

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<sup>52</sup> See McWilliams & Kitzmiller, 2019; Waitoller, 2020; Wright-Costello & Phillippo, 2020

<sup>53</sup> <https://www.cps.edu/about/departments/portfolio-management/>



“Yes! I remember this sign now,” Olivia says as she engages with the images I have put on the table, picking up the photocopy of the sign that is in my collage.

“And I specifically remember there being just chatter or conversation to insist Andersen is still here,” she says. “It was when we would talk about the schools in the area, and everything happening, or when people would talk about what’s going on in LaSalle II. Some people would continue to insist, myself included, that Andersen is still there. It’s not gone yet, you know, or even may never fully be gone. But I remember that intention to make sure it wasn’t erased...”

“One of the other things that I put here,” I gesture to another art piece, a collage of text, “There was this phrase that came up so often in the records—‘in the best interest of the children’—from the district and from the people fighting for the school. The people fighting for the school would say things like, ‘The district doesn’t know what’s in the best interest of the children or else they wouldn’t be doing this!’ Right? And it just, it was this repeated phrase— ‘in the best interest of the children.’ And it was this echoing thing.”

“Seeing these pictures just brings up emotions,” Olivia says. “I feel like I have to keep taking deep breaths. And just like seeing LaSalle II on there next to Andersen is...” She doesn’t complete the thought.

“It was the contrast in the signage that was really took my attention, the bold, purple, white, plastic of LaSalle II, but then there is this stone version of Hans Christian Andersen that’s not going anywhere, right? Even if it’s changed, this name in stone is always going to be here,” I say.

*Situated on the corner of Honore Street and Division Street in West Town (also known as Wicker Park), the Andersen school building, now housing LaSalle II, displays a vibrant and sparkling mosaic that wraps around the northeast edge and intricately nestles images together that signal multiculturalism and multilingualism. The neighborhood is on the northwest side of Chicago, west of the interstate and has long been known to be gentrified, if still gentrifying. On a brisk Saturday afternoon early in the COVID*

*pandemic, nearby cafes had overtaken the sidewalks with outdoor seating, portable heaters and planters. At a glance, I see no empty seats and find myself a little jarred with the hustle-bustle, as I realize that my own neighborhood seems more shut down, or at least a bit slower to find the work-arounds to make gathering outside to eat feasible. The density of the neighborhood is evident by the people eating, shopping, and using public transport. The apartments just steps from the school building are advertised as “the definition of boutique luxury,”<sup>54</sup> where a studio apartment rents for the overall average rental price in Chicago<sup>55</sup>.*

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**“There are real factors that come into play with neighborhood school versus selective enrollment school and just kind of like the vibes there, that I feel are a bit different.” - Olivia**

During a different conversation, I talk on the phone with Gayle, a veteran teacher whose tone and descriptions allude to that evenness and coolness that I remember envying as an early teacher. She taught at Andersen for sixteen years, mostly in the middle school grades and transitioned to LaSalle II. It’s later in the evening and I’m grateful she told me to call yet that night. As we talk, she points to the parallels between Andersen and LaSalle II, pointing to the ways in which schools are marketed and branded in the recent decades.

“At Andersen, you had a tight knit community, teachers with parental involvement. And everything revolved around the needs of the children. From making sure they ate breakfast, to making sure that they were well in the afternoon, however that looked. You know? Making sure that if they needed to talk in the morning, before we got started doing whatever it was that we're doing, making sure

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<sup>54</sup> “The Definition of Boutique Luxury” is at 1819 W. Division Street, Chicago, IL 60622, where in February 2021 a 524-square foot studio apartment rented for approximately \$1700/month and a 1200-square foot two-bedroom apartment is rented for approximately \$3200/month (see <https://www.rent1819.com/>).

<sup>55</sup> See <https://www.forbes.com/sites/andrewdepietro/2023/01/18/the-average-rent-in-chicago-reaches-its-highest-point-ever/?sh=423efdc1507d> ; in November 2021, average rent in Chicago was \$1773.

that if something happened the previous night—we wanted to make sure that they could voice it and talk to us. Because it was focused on the well-being of the child, that was the strength of the school. The children were able to thrive just because of our concern for them.”

In remembering, she highlights the ways in which this approach was threaded through everything that happened at Andersen. And that this has also very much been her experience at LaSalle II.

“One of the hardest things for me was that LaSalle II was doing some of the same things that Andersen was doing. There was the community, everybody, you know, that family feeling. Everyone is valued. And we want to make sure that everyone’s—as much as possible, the needs are met. That was at LaSalle II. And then the understanding of—well, we *were* doing this, but we were closed as Andersen. Why is that?”

She tells me very plainly how inadequate she felt as a teacher when she transitioned to LaSalle II, even with her sixteen years of expertise in the building. She’s very matter-of-fact as she recalls the emotions. It was difficult for her to fit into LaSalle II as an Andersen teacher for two reasons: she was seeing the same values of community that the old school had as central in the new school and because she was coming in as a teacher from the school that was closed. This, too, is echoed in the literature<sup>56</sup>.

“When it first happened, because they closed us, I felt really insecure. I didn’t feel like I fit into the LaSalle II family, you know? I felt like, I felt inadequate. You closed us because...” Her voice pauses as if there is no logical phrase to fill in the blank. “So I guess that was the residual idea that I received from their closing us. Because when we went into LaSalle, LaSalle had some of the same structures that we had, but they allowed them to open.”

Her voice is even, she has reconciled the past with the present. “I think I’ve come to grips with it. I’ve come to terms with it... I’m not stuck at that school. It was difficult to go through and I had to fight feelings of inadequacy. But that’s in the past, now. You know, I’ve met equally great students. I enjoy the

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<sup>56</sup> See Roseboro & Thompson (2014)

kids. I enjoyed the Andersen kids too. And that was just like an end of an era. Let's open up another chapter and that's how I felt when I went to LaSalle II in the end.”

Gayle circles back to the importance of the name of the school, just as Yessenia did in our group conversation months before. These refrains that repeat, and point back to the things I was noticing, like the names on the signs, adding to the haunting quality of this collective remembering experience for me.

“Even to the point where Hans Christian Andersen as the author of children's books— the school's name is no longer valid, you know? And even though it's still on the outside of the building. Nobody really looks at Hans Christian Andersen. The children probably still read his books. The legacy— looking at who he was, that was lost—the history in the building itself. You know, all the children that came to the building and said, ‘Oh, I went to the school when we were Andersen.’ I think the older building was 1899?”

*There are two buildings on the school site, referred to as “the lower building” and “the taller building” that sit only yards apart to create an “L” shape as a boundary to two sides of the schoolyard in the back. The playground is frequented by other people on off-school hours, parents with strollers, toddlers in tow. A sign up reminds dog owners to clean up after their pets. Grassy areas butt up to play structures and more mosaic art adorns a brick hallway that separates the dumpsters from the playground space, serving as a connecting structure between the buildings. Tightly situated, multi-level townhomes and deciduous trees line the side street behind the school.*

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**“What are you measuring? How are you, how are you evaluating what a successful school is?”**

**– Olivia**

Pearl mentions in our conversation how much individuals at the school were instrumental in her being as successful as she is. More than once she describes moments of how, even though Andersen was

very full in the 1980s and 1990s, the teachers and staff knew each child and their needs, and the meaning this had for her family.

“And even when my family moved, my parents had to move us out west closer to Humboldt Park,” she says. “We still kept going to Andersen because I had grandparents who still stayed in the same building I had grown up in. And you know, it reminded me of what you were saying about people who moved away from communities doing their best to still try to go to Andersen and that’s what my sisters and I went through. No matter what, it was not even a choice, my mother would not have even thought about us moving us to closer school, we just stayed at Andersen because of the community, because the compassion, because of the family that we had there. It was very important to her for us that we had the safe environment that we felt we had there, it was very important for her to have us continue, to finish there.”

Then she remembers the details of two particular people—one teacher and one community member. She says that these folks are directly responsible for her ability to overcome some of the “very challenging” parts of her childhood. Her voice is measured and even. I just notice that her sweater and pearl necklace coordinate; she has dressed for a memorial service.

“There was a man by the name of Perry Maxine who adopted Andersen. And at the time that I was there, he created an extracurricular program... He made it very easy to try to join but not very many families or students had joined it, but I was one who was very fortunate to be a part of it. He was able to offer Andersen a lot of resources, financial support, and also extracurricular staffing to create a program to help, really help kids. Just give them more resources and an opportunity to expose themselves to different things. They took students on college trips or even on a ski trip, or maybe got a tutor to help you get better at math and reading. I’m not doing any justice to what this program had done for students at Andersen. It started at Andersen and it’s been something that is always been near and dear to me. My sisters, my cousins were a part of it, and you’ll see references to it throughout the newspapers, but Mr. Maxine was just really, truly, this driving force in creating this program.

“I think, in combination with the staff and the community of Andersen, is what helped me become who I am today. I’m sure there’ll be lots of people who would say the same thing about how important that was all together. I still group all that as part of Andersen, but I did want to attribute the importance of that organization, what that was to Andersen, which probably led to the creation of these newspapers. I’m sure Perry was behind that. His organization is who I stayed in touch with after I left Andersen. They reached out to me to come to the closure hearings, and his program eventually expanded to include other institutions.... I was on the board of his organization, eventually. But it’s been some time now since I’ve been part of that. And so I just wanted to mention that organization, because you might have seen that name.”

Pearl then shifts to talking about a very special teacher. Her details and explanations tell me that she came here wanting to be sure to honor both Mr. Maxine and Mr. Guy through sharing her memories of them.

“There was one particular teacher that I had who was probably one of the most influential people in my life. And he has since passed away. When I reconnected with him after I left, I could also see the pain in his eyes, that was a struggle for him to continue to be able to make as much impact, to be as influential as he was at the time I was at Andersen. He described to me the group when he started when I was there as being very energetic and just really in need of people like him to help mold them. But then over time, he started seeing that change. And I’m not sure if that was also impacted by the community shifts, maybe the nature of the families that were in the area. I’m not sure.”

My teacher brain goes into the decoding mode of how we often describe students as “energetic” and I can understand what she means. But before any time ticks by, Yessenia, who I am guessing is twenty years younger than Pearl, leans into the table and interjects.

“Was your teacher Mr. Guy?”

“Yes!” Pearl says.

“Oh my God. I *loved* Mr. Guy!” Yessenia says.

“Oh my, I’m going to cry now, all that just...” and Pearl takes a moment to collect herself. I awkwardly whisper an apology for not having thought of tissues, this being the second or third episode of tears.

“Yes, I was heartbroken when I found out he had passed. He was...yes. So special,” Yessenia says.

“Yes. To have someone like him, I felt like he could have taught anywhere, done anything, right? But what kept him then at Andersen? I’ve often wondered about that,” Pearl says.

“Yes. The best teacher. Him. And Miss Sanders. And Miss Nevil,” Yessenia says.

“Oh my gosh. Yes. Probably the most influential person to me, maybe aside from my own family... what a teacher,” Pearl says.

“I think when I was there, he taught us honors Math in small groups.” Yessenia sighs and seems to be picturing her memories playing in her mind as her gaze veers to the upper corner of the room. “He would have his, it’s not a projector, but those ones that would magnify what you have on the camera...”

“A document camera?” I offer.

“Yes. And his demeanor, he was always calm. He *wanted* to teach us, like he didn’t *need* to be there, but he *wanted* to be there. That’s what you felt.”

“Right! Yes!” Pearl says.

We are all moved to near tears by this time at the magical display of love and gratitude we are witnessing. And the connections happening through remembering.

“So beautiful,” Olivia says.

“It is, it is so beautiful,” I agree softly.

“Even though we had wide ranging spectrum of abilities, of family situations, across the student population at Andersen, I always felt like the staff really tried to make sure, yes, we each felt like we had a home there. They took the time to try to teach us consistently across the board important values. For me, Mr. Guy saw things in me that he felt could be nurtured a little bit, he took the time for me and other students, to create other opportunities to kind of challenge us a little bit. At the same time, he always

taught that it was important to make sure that we respected one another and understood and accepted that, while we were coming from different families, and different circumstances, there was things we could still all do together to help one another.

“He would put me in situations then to help other students, too,” Pearl continues. “I think that’s what helped foster in me the spirit to volunteer as I grew older and to do other things like that. It was those intangibles. I’m not really sure how you find that now, that’s hard to find in a school. I would love for my daughters to have that type of influence. They are at great schools but they don’t quite have the relationships just yet with the particular teachers. I feel like I need to make sure we do what my husband and I can to help them learn, to have experiences to learn the same values, right? Just in a different way. I just wanted to take a moment to talk through that, as to what maybe made Andersen different for me.” Pearl bows her head as she finishes.

The group pauses to allow the remembering of Mr. Guy to linger in our space.

*As with many old school buildings in Chicago, there is a sense that the two Andersen buildings have had different iterations over time, possibly serving as two separate schools at some time in the past. “Door 7” on the taller building has a presence like it was a main entrance at one point, bordered with inset columns. A wood sign over the door is now painted solid in a dull brown color, masking whatever was declared by the sign previously. A smaller sign at shoulder height directs visitors to the main entrance around the corner in the lower building. In the 1990s, the taller building was for upper grade students and the lower building was for the primary and intermediate grades when both buildings were Hans Christian Andersen Public School. Hans Christian Andersen Public School was opened in 1884<sup>57</sup>.*

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<sup>57</sup> <https://www.eastvillagechicago.org/2011/03/andersen-to-merge-into-lasalle-ii-next.html>



**“I would say like, yes, it just felt safe there. Felt humble.**

**Really like, I don’t want to be dramatic and say for the first time, but  
that’s what it kind of felt like— hopeful. Complete safety.” -Yessenia**

Both Olivia and Yessenia talk about the ways in which the “phase out” of Andersen and “phase in” of the new school happened spatially. Olivia leans back on her stool with a rigid posture and Yessenia crosses her arms; these are not pleasant memories. They remember the renovations of the building that the district started to make way for LaSalle II students to move in, during the phase out years of 2008-2011. The phase-in and phase-out had a structure of adding one grade for LaSalle II each year, while removing one grade of Andersen, starting at kindergarten. The two schools occupied the building simultaneously, having different spaces identified as “LaSalle II” or as “Andersen.”

“I think, for me, one of the starkest things that still sits with me, that bothers me, was that the central office insisted on making all these improvements to the building,” Olivia says. “They were literally doing it just to the side that was going to be LaSalle II and leaving the Andersen side until the kids had left and then they would upgrade the side that was Andersen afterward. It was just the most disgusting thing. And it just, it felt like, you know...” She pauses and takes a deep breath.

“We would say, hey, just do the whole school, if you’re going to be making improvements to the school, do the whole school at once,” she says. “And then I don’t remember what reasons they gave us...” Yessenia nods and her face has taken a downturn from the spark it had when she was remembering her favorite teacher. I, too, nod, as I have read this story in the records.

*The Andersen building stays there, but the people move in and out of it, making up the identity of the school. The building is what folks often identify with. It represents the ways in which schools make place and shape (and are shaped by) neighborhoods. Much of my study points to the buildings and the restrictions placed on imagining solutions or different options because CPS is ‘stuck’ with specific*

*building sizes from the past. Why do these buildings and their utilizations seem to limit and be limiting? That is a large part of the slow violence- the shifting of families and people around to accommodate buildings that adapt poorly. Or, is it more that we adapt buildings poorly?*

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**“But what sticks with me more than anything is just that heart, you know, of the community and how much people felt for the community.” – Olivia**

Jennifer and I connect through Zoom one evening. She and I have similar pasts—both White women who went into teaching after a short career elsewhere and neither of us are still teaching in a public school classroom. She narrates her trajectory through White educational spaces before landing in Chicago Public Schools and her joy in teaching at Andersen. She explicitly brings up race as playing a role in the closings, while adding a disclaimer that she does not want to offend anyone by doing so. I assure her, I am not offended and encourage her to talk freely.

She has a lot of thoughts to share about Andersen’s closing, but she starts right away with mentioning her experience at another school after and the glaring differences between the schools. Acknowledging that this is not what she thinks I want to talk about, she pivots back to telling me about her time at Andersen. She taught there for six years and made a very deliberate decision to not continue working at LaSalle II when offered the chance. It felt wrong to her to work in a space that was central to the closing of the school that she loved and her anger is still very present.

“Still talking about this gets me kind of fired up because, I mean, I just remember all the passion. We were all doing it for the kids, we were all doing it for these families,” she says. She talks fast—I can hardly keep up and mentally give thanks for the recording. I start to realize that my questions will not be needed because she does not need any prompting to talk.

She actively participated in fighting the closing. “I remember going to one of the hearings downtown, it went later into the night and we were supposed to be heading to Galena to meet some

friends. We were like, we're not leaving until this is over. I remember speaking at that meeting.

Somebody else presented the data that I put together. I don't remember why I didn't want to, I felt like for whatever reason, I wasn't comfortable with sharing the numbers. I think maybe because of the some of the questions that I might get or whatever, but I cited all of where I got it from.”

Her bringing up the data takes my mind back to the group conversation with Pearl, Olivia, and Yessenia a month earlier. Then, when I brought up the idea of what quantitative data the district valued over experiential or community knowledge, I think it was Olivia who pushed back on me. She told me that the data was simply wrong, that this wasn't about the district presenting quantitative data about the school struggling and the community rallying against that with an emotional plea only, but that the community presented equally valid quantitative data to refute the district's claims. This was about using data in a very specific way to cast the school in a way to serve the district's ulterior motives. Jennifer tells me a similar story.

“Yes, I spoke at the hearings,” she says. “I pulled data because there was all this data that was showing that it was an underperforming school and things like that. They were pulling stuff out of—I don't even know where they got it from, but out of the woodwork and it was like, well. Actually, you know, I put a whole...I think it was a PowerPoint slide together showing, ‘Okay, well, this is what our test scores are showing. And this is what you're saying and this doesn't match up.’” She offers to try to dig through her email for any of the data to share with me, but that's over ten years of emails.

Jennifer stands firm on her decision to not teach at LaSalle II when offered a job but also presents the idea that “sticking around” would be another way to fight the system from within. It was stance she took against the district, that she would not be a part of the closing process besides to fight against it. To me, it is apparent that she is still grappling with so many emotions connected to the closing process.

“Maybe I was at fault for not like sticking around and fighting more, but I was like—I'm not teaching there, at LaSalle II,” she says. “The reality was that where I would like to teach was closing so I decided I'm going to go somewhere else. So maybe there's some self-reflection that I need to do as far as that goes, because at a certain point, I clearly knew that it was going to not matter, like we were done

fighting, they had made their decision and that was that. So yeah, there's probably a lot of self-reflection that I need to do on that.” The pace of her speech has slowed as she seems to be contemplating her role as we talk.

And a long pause interrupts her talk altogether. I let the silence sit as she swallows and takes an audible breath. She wipes her eyes. She is not the first one I talk to who have had their tears interrupt the stories and she will not be the last. A sympathetic lump in my throat appears.

Our conversation has shifted from forthright anger to sad reflection and then it shifts to broader examinations of real estate tax properties. We get back to comparing her experience at Andersen to her experience at the next school where she taught, which was much higher income and more White. She tells me about how the “generation thing” at Andersen offered something valuable.

“I just think the generation thing is really interesting to me. I had students whose grandparents went to school there. I just think there's that history and that generational... like having that pride, right? There was a lot of pride from these families that grew up in that area,” she says. This notion is echoed in the literature and in my study of Schiller.

“Do you think there was anything gained by closing the school?” I ask.

“I think, more than anything, it helped open my eyes even more to inequality in the education system and in Chicago and in our country, I guess,” she says. She had previously told me how she knew of the inequalities in education as a naïve young teacher but that it was so much in her face as she taught at Andersen.

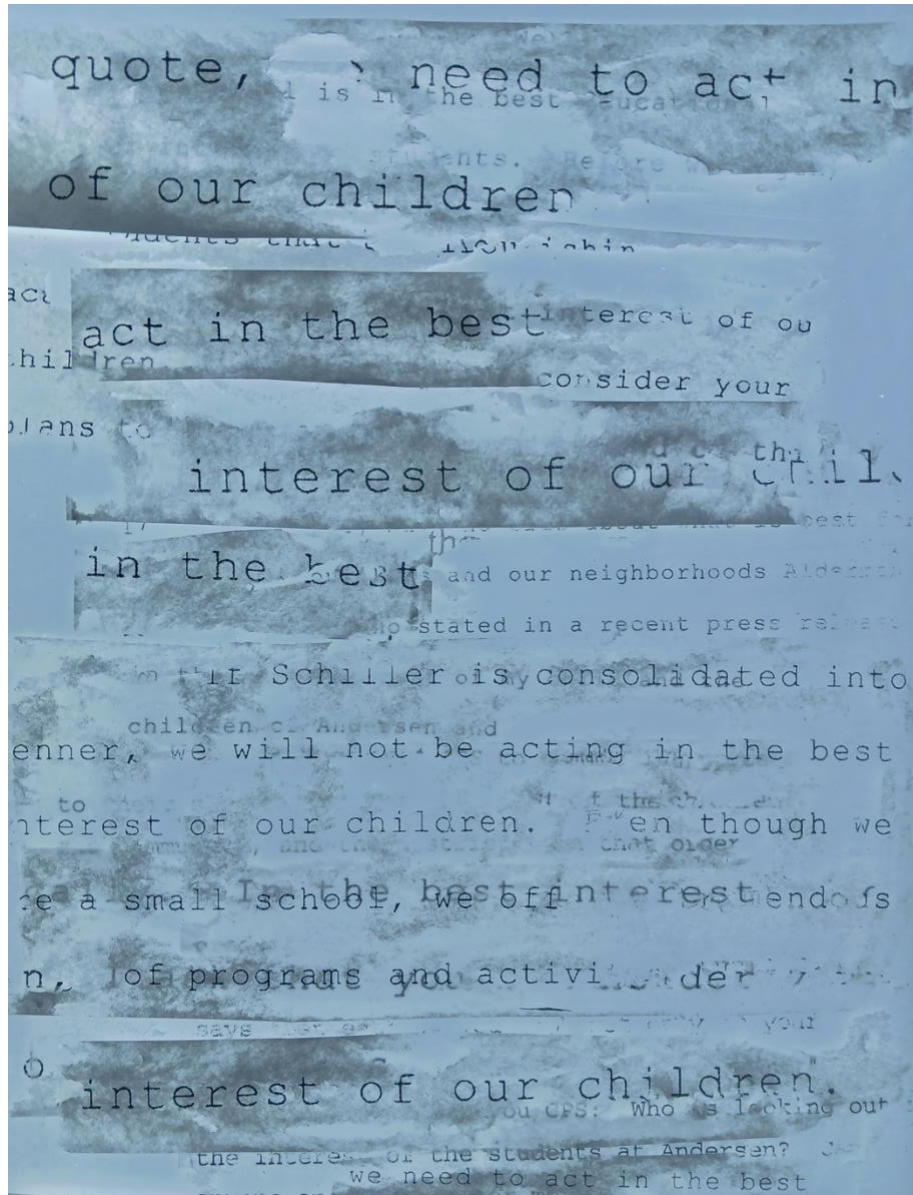
As our time approaches an hour of talking, we both steer the conversation to a close. She expresses gratitude for the opportunity to share her stories and I voice my thanks for the time she has given.

“Sorry for my, like, break down,” she says when we are saying our final goodbyes. I offer what I hope is solace that other participants have also had tears and deep emotions well up.

## PALIMPSEST PORTRAITS

### Plate 13: In the Best Interest of the Children

12" x 16" x 0.12", 2023, two clear acrylic plates layered with image transfer, acrylic medium.



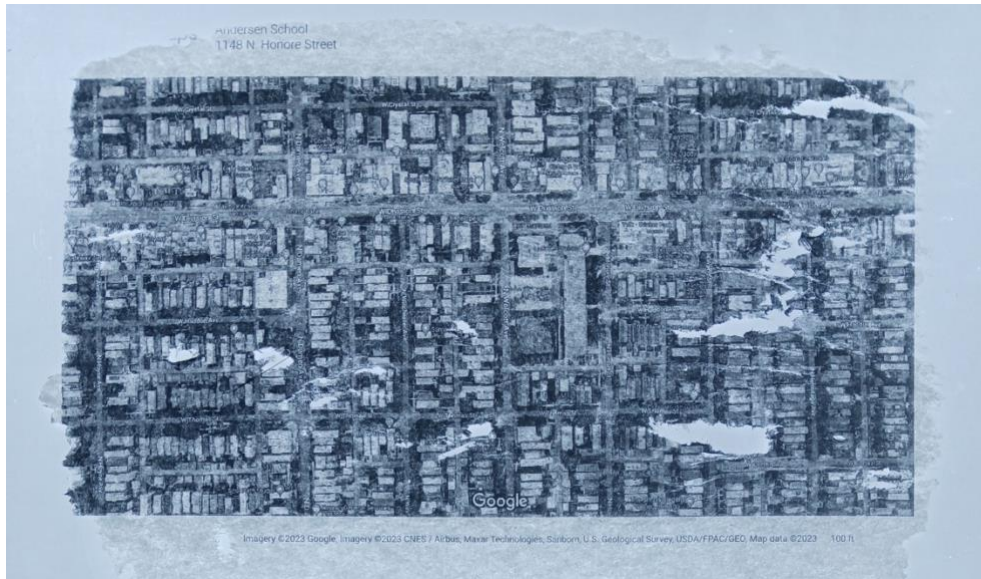
**Figure 26:** Plate 13- In the Best Interest of the Children

Throughout the transcripts from the public hearings and other records found in my inquiry into Andersen and Schiller schools in Chicago, the phrase “in the best interest of the children” was used numerous times. The district used the phrase to justify the closings, arguing that they were making difficult decisions to distribute resources more equitably across the city schools. The community used the phrase to resist the closings, specifically

naming the ways in which this phrase masked the injustices happening. The repetition of this phrase is an example of how discourse is used to frame the moves by the district as altruistic while the school community members reframe the closing and call out this use of discourse by the district explicitly.

**Plate 15: Density Study of West Town Neighborhood Andersen School**

12" x 8" x 0.12", 2023, clear acrylic plate with image transfer, acrylic medium.



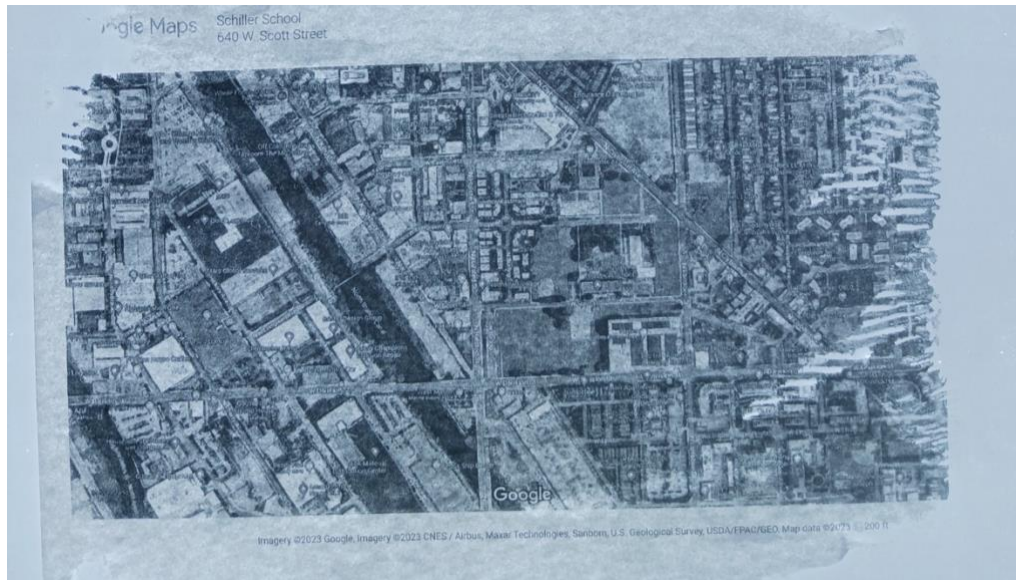
**Figure 27:** Plate 15- Density Study of West Town neighborhood Andersen

This Google satellite map serves as a density study for the streets around Andersen school at 1148 N Honore Street in the West Town, neighborhood. The vertical rectangle in

the center is Andersen school, a Chicago Public School (CPS), which once served a large Mexican American population. This area is part of what is now known as Wicker Park. The school building now houses LaSalle II Language Academy, which is a magnet school that enrolls students from an application and lottery process, still part of CPS.

# Plate 14: Density Study of Cabrini-Green Neighborhood Schiller School

12" x 8" x 0.12", 2023, clear acrylic plate with image transfer, acrylic medium.



This Google satellite map serves as a density study for the streets around Schiller school at 640 W. Scott Street in Chicago, near the Cabrini Green

**Figure 28:** Plate 14- Density Study of Cabrini-Green neighborhood Schiller

neighborhood. Schiller was a Chicago Public School (CPS) that served the surrounding public housing towers. The building now houses Skinner North, which is a selective enrollment school that admits students from an application and testing process, still part of CPS.

## CHAPTER SIX: SEARCHING FOR SCHILLER

### **Friedrich Von Schiller Elementary School - 640 W Scott St, Chicago, IL 60610**

Chicago Public School – neighborhood school

closed June 30, 2009

Shirley Clark- hired by temple to help with social action work at Schiller<sup>58</sup>

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Derick Davidson (Mr. D)- administrator at Schiller when it was closed

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Carolyn Stevens- volunteer at Schiller

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Maliah Gates (Ms. Gates)- teacher at Schiller when it was closed

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William Patterson (Mr. Patterson)- teacher and coach at Schiller, 1993-2005

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<sup>58</sup> Although Shirley's words are not recounted in the vignettes, her conversation corroborates the details given by others.



**“Now to be honest, this might be the most that I talked about it outside of my close family.” – Mr. D**

Throughout this whole project, I admittedly have had in mind some conversations that would feel “more valuable” than others. That is not fair to anyone connected to the school, of course, because any conversation is going to help to remember Schiller. But if I get to talk with an elected official, an administrator, a known name in Chicago, it will feel like a big deal. I feel like these folks occupied that in-between space of having to navigate the district directives while also being called on by the teachers, parents, and families to support any resistance and I want to hear their stories.

I find out later that Jesse White, the former Secretary of State for Illinois, graduated from Schiller and periodically visited the school. Back in 2008, he initially promised, in conversation with people involved in the fight for the school, that Schiller would not close. I have been unable to reach him for a conversation, but this is the type of person I mean.

More than two months have passed since I first started blasting out my recruiting blurbs and PDFs to anyone I found connected to Schiller. No responses. I expect nothing while I send out routine pings through social media to follow up with folks I have already sent recruiting information to. But my heart lurches into my throat when I read a “sure, here’s my number and email, call me after 4:30p tomorrow” response. A real response from someone who was in that administrator-leader-official group. I quickly send to this potential participant the link for my consent form.

I scramble to print my guiding questions. I curse myself for having no protocol (or institutional approval) for phone conversations because I was so set on in-person connections and using my artwork as a visual. How could I have not thought about the fact that some people connected to schools that were closed would not be in Chicago anymore? I vow to figure out that part later and troubleshoot my recording snafu through a test-run. Now hopefully I can sleep while I eagerly anticipate this conversation.

The phone call happens with little fanfare. Derick Davidson, or Mr. D, was a school leader at Schiller. He just wants to hear more about the project before he talks further, but I am excited because other people have given me his name as someone to talk with. I give my extended elevator speech, share

my connections to the school, and we schedule a future time to have our official conversation in early June. It is the end of the school year and I am aware of the demands of any educator during May and June. I extend my gratitude and calm myself down until our next conversation. Already I can tell any conversation over the phone will lack the personal connection I value when I get to talk with folks in person, but it is a connection if in-person is not going to happen.

And then, he provides me with a gem at the end of our short phone call: he tells me, almost in passing, that they left a time capsule behind at Schiller.

“Where did you bury it?” I ask<sup>59</sup>.

“Oh, we didn’t bury it, we left it in the school somewhere. It was like a six or eight foot long pipe, I think.”

Wow. Just wow. I thank him for the information and say goodbye until our next phone conversation a few weeks later.

I immediately decide to give a valiant effort to finding this time capsule, while knowing it is likely nowhere. I fire off a quick email to Mr. D. “Any specifics about where the time capsule was left? I would love to go looking for it in the school!”

He sends an email response within a few minutes, “I thought it was left in the basement. That’s all I really know. It was like a 8’ long white pvc pipe (6” diameter) w caps on both ends and signed by all the kiddos.”

I respond with a thanks, that I hope to have a good look for it soon. I add as a follow-up email: “And just to mention my intentions- if I happen to find it, I would not want to open it without someone from Schiller doing so with me. I’ll keep you updated.” The hope is there even if marginal. My brain, sometimes on overdrive, imagines putting out an offer to folks I have contact information for but have not reached, inviting them to gather with Mr. D to open the capsule, revealing the archives it preserved for the students and staff back in 2008—a concrete moment to collectively remember. I imagine warm

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<sup>59</sup> See footnote 45.

connections rekindled, tension-laden recollections, shared histories, all preserved through the stories encased in that eight-foot pipe.

I am intrigued about being in the building again, as the last time I was there was the 2003-2004 school year, when it was still Schiller. I email the current administration and make an appointment to talk with them.

The morning of my appointment, I get dressed like I'm teaching. I pack my notebook and copies of my consent forms, put my recorder in my bag (just in case), and head to Skinner North a few minutes before 8am. When I arrive, parents are walking children through the front doors and two employees are holding the door, greeting each person cheerfully. I let others go before me, and then tell the men at the door that I am there to meet with the assistant principal. They gesture for me to walk right in. I notice that the security desk is pushed to the farthest wall from the door and is not occupied. No metal detector, but those are not as common in elementary schools in Chicago. I make my way to the main office and tell the clerk the same: I have an appointment with the assistant principal. The AP comes out within minutes, along with the principal.

I notice that both administrators are White women. I am reminded by the hustle-bustle of a school at 8am on a weekday just how demanding an administrator's job is and become even more grateful that they made time for me. As I start to explain my project to them, it is evident that they read what I emailed them and had even looked up the website I made for recruiting. I tell them what Mr. D told me.

"He said it was an eight-foot long PVC pipe," I say. "Capped on both ends. And that the kids had signed the outside. It's kind of hard to miss something like that... so I don't have my hopes up but I knew I had to try."

They reiterate that in their years at Skinner they have not seen anything like that and would be surprised to find it at this point. They mention that my project sounded interesting to them. They tell me the name of the principal who opened Skinner after Schiller closed in 2008, maybe he saw something when he moved into the building.

I think to myself: “Well, it had to have gone somewhere, but I have no idea what CPS does with those things. Surely this is not the only school that left a time capsule behind. I wonder what the policy is around those sorts of things?”

I am trying not to be overtly researchy, and I want to feel some nostalgia for the school as I stand in the office. I am hoping my memories are triggered a bit. I want to feel haunted, spooked, connected. I spent a lot of time here back in 2003-2004. I can’t remember the teacher’s name in Room 209, but I remember seeing her at a district professional development meeting years later when I was a teacher.

I have few explicit memories of my time at Schiller, scant images and moments that became barely more clear months ago when I found in my files the homeroom newsletters created by the language arts classrooms where I had worked with small groups. I remember racial tensions I witnessed as the White teacher failed to connect with the Black students. I feel guilty that I don’t remember more specific moments while I am present in the building. Twenty years have passed and hundreds of students of my own take up my memory space. I wish desperately I remembered more.

I think back to my teaching time. CPS used to open their storage facilities for supplies and furniture from schools that were cleared out a couple times a year and let teachers come gather whatever they needed. Then I remember a news article I read once about an artist selling furniture on Craigslist from schools that had been closed in Chicago<sup>60</sup>. I search for the article, looking for some other lead, and I quickly realize that the artist made an installation with the furniture and other materials<sup>61</sup> in which I had hosted a community meeting at our local arts center ages ago<sup>62</sup>. This makes me think that surely the facilities department at CPS had a place where they would stash any quirky items like time capsules. What person encounters an eight-foot PVC pipe, signed by students, when they are clearing out a building and just tosses it in the dumpster? But I know that’s probably what happened.

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<sup>60</sup> <https://www.wbez.org/stories/furniture-from-closed-cps-schools-ends-up-in-surprising-places/0bfdea64-4317-4167-8db5-9ea308ff1a26>

<sup>61</sup> <https://www.hydeparkart.org/exhibition-archive/john-preus-the-beast/>

<sup>62</sup> [https://www.hydeparkart.org/events/list/?hide\\_subsequent\\_recurrences=1&tribe-bar-date=2014-06-22](https://www.hydeparkart.org/events/list/?hide_subsequent_recurrences=1&tribe-bar-date=2014-06-22)

When I get back to my desk, I email the folks I know at Chicago Public Schools in Family and Community Engagement (FACE) and my friends who know more CPS people than I do, trying to find a person in facilities.

I follow up on a few names that folks offer in responses to my emails with no luck. “That’s left up to local school administrators,” was the most robust response I got besides the multiple versions of “No, never seen it.” No luck with the former principal who started when Skinner North opened either; he had no recollection of a time capsule being found.

Three weeks later in early June, I talk with Mr. D for our “official” conversation. Toward the end of our hour conversation, he asks about the search for the pipe.

“Any luck with that time capsule?” There’s a hesitance to his question, like he knows if I found something, I surely would have already told him. But there’s still hope laced in there, like he has to ask, just in case.

I give him a run-down of my hunt and leave the search open for now with my description. “And so yeah, I’m going to keep on it and I’ll keep you updated.” I have hit plenty of dead ends, I know it’s nowhere, but my hope for these stories to surface takes priority over practicalities. I keep hoping someone else will bring it up or have a lead about where it might be as I have more conversations. Our hour-long conversation wraps up quickly after that.

*I am primed to find palimpsests in signage on schools throughout the city. I keep looking for where there is evidence left behind of Schiller. There seems to be no evidence left behind in the signage at all on the school building. I walk around the front entrance, heading west along Scott Street, taking photos along the way. And there is a ghost I’ve been looking for. I gasp. Schiller Street. Immediately I assume that the street is named to pay homage to the erased school but quickly realize my naivete and my outsidership, as surely people from this neighborhood decades ago would know Schiller Street was here before Schiller School. But in all reality, I don’t know that history yet. On Schiller Street is a large retail complex with Saks Fifth Avenue painted on the window. There is a ton of development over here. What a*

*contrast to the empty grassy areas around the school building. There's an AMC theater and retail, all called "New City."*

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**"I would love to see an opportunity for people who had a strong connection to the school to remember it, to reflect on it, I don't know, maybe reconnect? I'm not sure what the kids or community would most need or most want but yeah, I don't know..." – Mr. D**

So much comes from my conversation on June first with Derick, or Mr. D. He is eager to share his stories but indeed, he wanted to vet me first through that initial shorter phone conversation. Mr. Davidson is named by almost all the other people I talk with about the school as someone I should be sure to have a conversation with. A White man in leadership at an all-Black school in the projects, a school that was closed as public housing emptied out—race is central to the stories of this school but does not explicitly get discussed in our conversation.

Our hour on the phone is rich with joyful memories and heartbreak, and I can hear the tiredness in his voice as he narrates the ways in which he invested in the students and school in the face of systemic disinvestment. He tells story after story of community partnerships that he brokered, connections that are validated by the list of organizations that spoke up at the public hearings back in 2008. I remember making a separate list of these organizations because it was so extensive when I was doing my archival work. I rarely look at my guiding questions because his sentiments just pour forward.

"We also partnered with DePaul University and their early childhood program, which helped bring in preservice teachers to work with our students, primarily K to three," he says. "We also enlisted reading buddies through the Chicago Sinai temple. We had over 30 volunteers that would come in, spend 20-30 minutes with students reading one on one, sharing a love of literacy which not only the kids but the volunteers, you know, really enjoyed during that time. So I had a lot of great momentum going. A lot, a

lot of positives. A lot of positive things that were really improving the culture and climate at the school for everyone involved. Then we got notice that we were also going to be closed within the next year.”

“Nothing but love for them...” he says, followed by a long pause. His stories are stories of securing supports, making connections, striving to give the students “everything the suburban schools have.” And, from the stories I heard, he did so much of that.

Over the phone, it is hard to read into some of his expressions, but there is a tone of defeat simultaneous with a tone of tenderness in his voice.

“It was extremely devastating. Staff, students, community members. I mean, not only was their community being torn down and family members being relocated but now their school was closing. Everyone having to move, the community that they knew and loved, that they grew up in. The school was being ripped away, too. So it was... it was tough. We had a retired CPS principal that was placed with us that final year to oversee the transition of the school being closed.”

I wonder about the timeline. Some of the literature I read found significant impacts on the students the year before the closing happened, as the threat of closure hovered while the school continued to function with continued resource deprivation<sup>63</sup>.

“Do you recall when in the school year you got that notice? Like approximately—beginning, middle, end?” I ask.

“It was, I believe it was before the beginning of the last year we were in operation, so we had about a year's notice,” he says.

“So a year that the school community knew it was threatened with closure,” I say.

“The threat of it, yes,” he confirms.

“Okay.”

“I know we didn't have a final word for a while, so there was the threat of closure for a year. That was our opportunity to speak out and to appeal and advocate to for keeping ourselves open. And I know

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<sup>63</sup> See Shannon Clark's dissertation from 2022 at University of Illinois Chicago.

the final word didn't come through till like in the spring of that last final year. The final notice came really late, right? It came at a point where the selective enrollment window had already been closed. We were notified late in that school year that our doors would be closed as Schiller and that, you know, a new selective enrollment school will be coming in. And so our families, our Schiller families never had that opportunity to apply with full knowledge of this, you know, for the new school that was coming in. They had opportunities to apply for selective enrollment schools earlier in the year, but by that time they knew there was a new school coming in and there's an application process for it, that window had closed. Our families really had no choice but to consolidate to Jenner. Unless they had plans to transfer into a selective enrollment elementary school before all that took place,” he says.

“So they would have had to make that decision to apply to the new school prior to the actual final decision,” I say.

*The school building looks like it is from the 1960s, but I wonder because that would be about when the public housing towers were built, too. It is a low profile, three-story mid-century modern structure, painted brick and cinder block, no stone lintels. The name of the school is announced by a sign flat against the front façade, above the entrance. The entrance makes me think of the angles of a 1960s car dealership for some reason.*

*Stanton Park, part of the Chicago Park District, is situated on the same grounds as the school, in an adjacent building. There is a boarded up old church on the north end of the block, not too far from the school. It is not decrepit but certainly closed, its entrance facing away from the school. There is an eerie, familiar “empty” space notion of the old projects missing. Where were the public housing towers exactly? I have a strong sense from the space without actually knowing.*

*The absence of the Cabrini-Green public housing towers looms large over the empty space on three sides of the school building. The urban Target on the southeast end of the space is a funny nod to density in contrast to these large, open lawns. The lawns are mowed and kept, but they make me think of a scar. A dozen or so Canadian geese have made the lawn their stopping ground, getting a sip from the*



*puddles. This contrast with the wilderness may need my attention later. They look comfortable here, unbothered because there are not many people around mid-day.*

*Even the sidewalks are grappling with the past and present. The southside of West Scott Street has terrible sidewalks that are broken and crooked, the kind that are always a struggle with a baby stroller. Remnants of what was here before. The cracked sidewalk creates a boundary between the large lawn and the school. The sidewalk on the northside of the street, the one that runs directly in front of the school, is newly poured and smooth.*

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**“We had the right setup. And some of the pieces together to really help begin to try to level the playing field for some of these kids and the individualized education that they needed. I think we were just scratching the surface at what we could have done there.**

**Within a smaller school model, given multiple community partnerships, it would have been awesome to see what could have transpired there.” – Mr. D**

Before coming to Schiller, Mr. D tells me that he started teaching in Chicago in 2002 at Byrd Elementary in the same neighborhood. His second year there, Byrd was closed by the district. When I talk with a teacher from Schiller later, she has similar stories of moving through multiple schools that were closed by the district.

“Let me take a look here at my teaching timeline, might jog some memories,” he says. He has prepared for our conversation. “I started in CPS in 2002 at the Richard E. Byrd Community Academy in one of the pre-K to eight schools that serviced the Cabrini Green neighborhood. I moved to Chicago from a small town in Upper Michigan named Ishpeming. Got my teaching degree at Northern Michigan University, taught for a year in southern Wisconsin, teaching middle school math and science in a small farming town in Wisconsin and had a friend moving to Chicago. I had an interest in trying to work in a, you know, inner city school, a more diverse school and landed in Cabrini at Byrd. I was a PE teacher

there, started an athletic program and was there for two years. Actually, I had my first year and then year two got notice that we were closing due to under enrollment.

“The 2003-2004 school year was our last year at Byrd. Now I believe it's a private school in that same building? Kind of connected to Seward Park right there,” he says.

Before he transitions into his time at Schiller, he tells me about fighting to keep Byrd open. I make a note to go back and learn about Byrd.

“Got through the whole process of trying to stop the school closure,” he continues. “We went to all the meetings, participated in all the things. I felt like we had a really good case for staying open. At the time, we were the highest performing of the Cabrini Green K to eight schools, you know, on paper. Had a lot of positive things going for us. Our building wasn't in the worst condition out of all of those schools too. Fought the good fight, but at the end of the day, we were still closed. Once we were notified of that school closing, I was able to land at another job at another Cabrini Green school, which was Schiller in the 04-05 year.

“Schiller was a place, just like Byrd, where mothers, fathers had graduated from, there was a strong history of their grandparents who were connected to the school, the buildings were their community,” he says. He has not paused in talking yet since he started telling me his stories. “And just to have all that torn down, dispersed, and dismantled was tough. And there was a strong group—because I also coached football and track at Walter Payton, while I was working in that area, and they would have community picnics every Sunday. People would drive back from whatever neighborhood they moved to and the old Cabrini crew would get together and barbecue and dance and music. Super good vibes. I couldn't tell you how many elders in that community would talk to me, just tell me about what Cabrini was like when they were younger, when they used to live there, when the projects were newer and first built.”

“That sense of home,” I say.

*In this “New City” complex (the signs all over bombard you with that phrase repeatedly), there’s a large parking garage and an advertisement for the amenities. Just east of the complex is a Mariano’s. There is a condo development underway. The sign is on the construction fence and is labeled “Schiller Place” with condos listed for rent as \$1650 for one bedroom, \$2400 for two bedrooms.*

*[www.schillerplace.com](http://www.schillerplace.com). I will look up this website.*

*I hear the train, distant, through a grate in the sidewalk as I walk on the diagonal street, North Clybourn Street, toward the church, toward my car parked on Larabee Street. The wind bellows out the green plastic tarps on the fence that runs all along the sidewalk. The tarp looks like it was supposed to be temporary but clearly it has been there a long time. The wind’s movement of the tarp allows me a look inside—a large, abandoned construction site, this is a huge site with piles of gravel, weeds growing over them. It really looks like someone just stopped a project one day and never looked back years ago. What is this rubble? What was it supposed to be? Development that dried up with the 2008 mortgage bubble bust?*

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**“The boys were city champs in basketball. We had champions in track and field, we started a wrestling program. The kids, the school definitely excelled athletically—that was a big part, basketball was a huge part of that community.” – Mr. D**

“I started working in Cabrini Green without really knowing any of the history behind it,” Mr. D. admits. “I didn’t really even know where it was. When I first started in that community, my first year ever, I asked if I could take the kids outside. The admin told me it’s 100% your decision but understand the safety factor involved, like you’re going to take your kids outside and put yourself outside that you could potentially be putting yourself at risk because of some of the violence in the neighborhood. Once I got into that community, and earned the trust of the kids and the community there, I mean, it was a wonderful, wonderful place to be, a wonderful place to work. The community and kids—you know,

anything you did for them, they show love back to you. They really appreciated it. Also, I built athletic programs that weren't in place before. Things that kids didn't have access to. One of my main goals was trying to bring in the same things that would be at a suburban school. We offered the kids the same opportunities that someone in Wilmette might have access to. You know, thinking how do we bring these things to these kids and these families? When I'm talking to the community members and families and kids and just you know how their home was being ripped from them, ripped away from their community, not knowing where they're going to end up. Not knowing what school they are going to be shifted into. I had, I don't know, 10 to 15 kids that ended up near the west side and came to my next school where I landed in North Lawndale, who stayed at my school through graduation.”

“Was that another elementary school?” I ask.

“Yes, it was an AUSL<sup>64</sup> turnaround—Johnson. James Weldon Johnson in North Lawndale. We had three schools consolidate—or close and consolidate into our school while I was there,” he says.

“You've not known much different, have you?” I say.

“I've not known much different,” he says.

*New housing fills the northeast corner of Halsted and Scott, directly adjacent to the school property. A man walks a baby stroller on the terrible Scott Street sidewalk and a seemingly homeless person pushes a shopping cart full of belongings across the street on Halsted. The large, bold billboard on the side of a building advertises AirPods. There are not many people around in the middle of a weekday. In the first housing complex I come to, the landscaping is very manicure; it oozes high rent or*

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<sup>64</sup>AUSL, Academy for Urban School Leadership, is a non-profit hired by Chicago Public Schools to “turn around” schools that were struggling. The model was to fire all the staff and rehire under new AUSL leadership. The Chicago Teachers’ Union has fought against these reforms. In 2021, CPS shifted their contract with AUSL to run a teacher residency program and gradually shifted any AUSL-operated schools back to the district. AUSL is not a charter model, but is similar in the autonomy it has to operate schools in the public district while it hires union teachers and staff. <https://www.chalkbeat.org/chicago/2021/5/26/22455568/chicago-officially-winds-down-academy-for-urban-school-leadership-contract-ends-turnaround-effort/> <https://www.wbez.org/stories/north-lawndale-residents-resist-further-school-privatization/bd32116f-c8a9-42d4-bd34-65f717c7f56d>

*property value. I find no way to get through the complex back to the school, but it is literally right next to the school baseball field. I can see the school grounds but I cannot get there because a tall, black, decorative iron fence separates the housing from the school and there is no entrance between the two entities that I can find. The housing is mostly 3-4 story townhouses but some are split by a ground-level unit and then an upper 2-3 levels as another unit. I'd say these were built in the last 10 years. "No outlet" is posted everywhere. This feels comical or ironic.*

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**"The city gained what they wanted in the end, they wanted that land. They wanted to push a certain demographic of people out. That's what they gained." – Ms. Gates**

"We also worked closely with Urban Initiatives," Mr. D tells me.

"Ok. Was that an athletic thing—like a soccer program?" I ask. I think I remember it from the records of the hearings.

"Yes, it's a soccer program. And the two founders started at Byrd as substitute teachers who saw this great need. They started their nonprofit based on their experiences there but they ended up being housed on site at Schiller to run grant programs in the mornings, after school for the kids, and summer camps," he says.

"They used the building too, like Open Books?" I say.

"Yes, and another cool thing about that building is that we were connected to Stanton Park which has a full aquatics facility, so as the PE teacher, we had five weeks of swim lessons every kid," he says. His remembering reveals a sense of pride as he recounts what was offered to the students.

"Really?" I say. This is not something I have seen at other elementary schools in the city.

"We'd go over there for PE class and they staffed it," he says. "They had lifeguards and instructors. That was awesome, it was pretty special to walk next door and provide kids with swimming lessons."

I wonder if the pool is still open and if Skinner uses it.

“You know we had a mix of staff at Schiller,” he says. “When I became an administrator, we had a mix of teachers who had been there their whole career, twenty years plus, and we also had the opportunity to bring in a bunch of fresh new teachers. We had a really strong, first-second year group of teachers who were super passionate, super engaged. And they just, you know, bought into all the new initiatives we were bringing in. We had so much good positive energy moving in the right direction at that time. That school closing just killed us. Even me in my own career like you know, I saw myself never leaving there.”

I later think about this “mix of staff” and wonder what the racial mix was. I wish had asked but I hesitate to talk openly about race or ask participants about their racial identity and I need to keep examining the multiple reasons for that, implicit and explicit reasons.

“Wow,” I whisper.

“We had lots of good things going. So many good things in place. So many strong partnerships. You know, Jesse White Secretary of State was a former PE teacher at Schiller,” he says.

“Is that the connection?” I say.

“That's the connection,” he says.

“Because I saw photos from the 1970s of the Jesse White Tumbling Team in one of the archives I dug into, of them performing out in front—when the towers were still next door—of them performing in that courtyard between the school and the towers. There was the color guard performing. It was something that I didn't just find once, I found it mentioned elsewhere too, and I was like, wow. I didn't realize that was the connection. Okay,” I say.

“When I started there as a PE teacher,” he says, “he'd come through once, twice a year. See how things were going. See if we had any needs, come through with some new basketballs. He was still heavily connected to Schiller. He had a strong love for the school, the community. And you know, when we first got wind of the school being closed and we were on that list, I personally spoke to him on the phone. He assured me that it will never be closed.”

“Oh my,” I say. The Jesse White Tumbling Team is legendary in Chicago and Mr. D tells me that former students of his work for the team still.

“The program gave so many students in Cabrini access to work, travel, and performance opportunities,” he says. “Always an advocate of Schiller, him and Alderman Burnett.”

*The open land is like a scar. I search my brain for which architect embraces this in war-torn cities when rebuilding, embedding the history of the space in a scar-like intervention in the building design. Later I look him up—Lebbeus Woods. Then I stumble into a blog “A Building that Recalls: Memory, Housing, and Politics of Living On” and I know there is so much more I need to explore...*

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**“We lost a lot of good educators. From what I understood, not too many of the teachers from Schiller actually went over to the new school. And some of the students were too scared to go over to new school as well. And then once they started closing and started tearing down the projects, a lot of the students, a lot of their families actually moved out towards the suburbs, or out further south, in the city. So that whole community was just gone.” – Ms. Gates**

Mr. D describes the feeling of inevitability when Schiller was facing closure, a common theme in the literature on school closings, too.

“I participated in everything but after going through my experience at Byrd, you know, 100% fighting the fight with Byrd, where we thought we had a chance, thought we had a great case to stay open and to keep us open and keep our doors open. After going through all of that and seeing that it was still closed, you know, I just kind of had this feeling like doesn't really matter what we do, it is still going to be closed,” he says.

“Other people have talked about this feeling that it was already decided,” I say, thinking about my conversations with Andersen people.

“Yes. I thought we can fight this tooth and nail,” his voice seems to catch but maybe it is the phone connection we have. “I thought we had even a better chance at Schiller to stay open—but you know, in the back of my mind, I was a realist about it. Like this thing's going to be closed. It didn't waver the efforts I put into it, but I kind of knew the writing was on the wall. I was just through this at another school again. If the wheels are in motion this far, it's going to be tough to stop that momentum.”

I think back to my experience with school closure during the 2013 massive closings in Chicago and remember the ways in which schools positioned themselves against other schools to argue their value. I also remember this underlying relief and gratefulness that floated through the air for the schools that were taken off the original list of 120+ schools, as if the district was benevolent by sparing that many and only closing 50 at once that year. Mr. D recalls the politicians they had hoped would have some pull.

“There was Jesse White, and I’m trying to think of the alderman’s name. But the Alderman at the time was a Schiller graduate or a Schiller student. He also assured us that they weren't going to let us be closed, advocating as much as he could, something Schiller did not have a lot of over the years. You know, initially when the news came out, everyone's upset, everyone's emotional about it. Some political players felt like they could also stop it or prevent it but that political machine is just too strong...” his voice trails off.

*There is housing that is so new that the signs are temporarily put up with blue painter’s tape to indicate the street address. “749 Schiller Street” is printed on copy paper, taped above the main entrance door to a condo complex. I’m taking more photos of housing than schools it feels like.*

*My sidewalk ends because of new construction happening. More housing being built.*

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**“The neighborhood was changing. I think mainly it was because they wanted that building for other reasons. It wasn't because they wanted to combine schools and they wanted that building for other reasons. And it's obvious, now that you go over there and see what the neighborhood looks like now.”**

**-Ms. Gates**

I notice a developing trend in my recruitment responses. The later the conversations are in my project, the more coordination it takes to land a conversation and the less connected I feel to the participants. The racial barrier between Black people connected to the school and myself as a White researcher is there as I reach out to people and there when I get to talk with people; we talk about race in certain ways but not in explicit terms. I continue to walk the line of being too pestering and letting folks be if they do not respond. I try one more round of recruitment, four months after I started, and land my last two phone calls with Black teachers—Ms. Gates and Mr. Patterson. They taught at Schiller at different times and my conversations with them are brief yet rich in remembering<sup>65</sup>.

Maliah Gates knew of Schiller before she started teaching there because her aunt had worked there for years. She taught in the younger grades the year it was closed, this being the first of three school closures she experienced.

“I don't really remember much, to be honest,” she says.

“It's been a long time,” I say.

“I just don't really... yes, it's been a long time,” she says.

“You alluded to experiencing this before. Did you experience other closings besides this one?” I ask.

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<sup>65</sup> It is worth mentioning, again, that these vignettes are not told in chronological order. They are braided together, collaged in a sense, to create a larger portrait of remembering that is not linear.

“I did. After leaving Schiller, I was a cadre sub for about a year and a half.” She rattles off the schools she has taught at with an even tone to her voice. “And then I ended up teaching at CICS Loomis primary, it was a charter school. And then I ended up going back to CPS at Betsy Ross. And then once again, I was in a situation where I was at Betsy Ross for just one year. And that was when Rahm Emanuel was mayor. And that was when he closed about 50 schools and my school was one of those schools.” When she mentions the mayor, there’s an upward inflection in her tone, making me think of course she was at a school that was closed in the massive sweep in 2013.

Ms. Gates remembers bits and pieces as we keep talking. She was part of the fight for Schiller, attending at least some of the public hearings or gatherings to protest the closing.

“We took the kids, it was a busload of kids, we took them downtown. We did that. There was another one where it was at a church, I believe. I remember that. It was a church and it was a lot of different schools. And we went to that one as well. We had the signs with a lot of kids. It was about two different events we went to.”

Her experience echoes Schiller’s lineage. The school had experienced multiple actions, absorbing students when nearby Truth closed, changing from a 4-8<sup>th</sup> grade building to become a K-8<sup>th</sup> grade building, transitioning through various periods of enrollment swells and ebbs at the intersection of racist housing and educational policies as part of its history.

*It is early May in 2023, and, once again, I am sitting at my desk, scrolling through my spreadsheet of the folks I have found connected to Schiller in the meeting records from 2008-2009 and from other archival work. I periodically follow up on any loose ends like this, always wondering what the line is between being annoying and working hard against the blackhole of email inboxes that became the normal, maybe only, way of reaching out during the pandemic. Sending a cold email is an inroad, but one that is so easily ignored. As one of my professors said, “Emails are great... for the sender.” I know the fliers I posted in the neighborhood months ago will not net any responses, but it seemed like a recruiting method I had to do anyway. Usually when I do this process of going back to my spreadsheet, I net one or*

*two responses or stumble upon more names of people attached to Schiller. I then try to find an online presence of any sort, holding onto hope that I will have some conversations at some point. I have responses from people through email solicitation and through LinkedIn messages, but I have had no conversations about Schiller yet. A few bites, but nothing scheduled. I started reaching out to the people connected to Schiller four months ago.*

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**“I'd be interested in seeing some data on what happened to all these families. Where are they?**

**Where did they end up? How are they doing?” -Mr. D**

My conversation with Ms. Gates is the briefest one I have for this project. Her most detailed story is about the police and the school. She recalls what stories they used to argue for keeping Schiller open during the public engagement period.

“We did bring up the fact that—because the police station was across the street from us—How many times we have said that the police have literally come to our school and said that if our kids were to cross the street and go to the other school that they will be arrested. So if our kids are saying they were to be arrested if they were to interact with those kids from the other school, then why would you want to have them go to that school now? How's it safe now to go to that school, if you're telling them a month ago that they're going to get arrested if they go to that school?” Ms. Gates has an incredulous tone to her voice.

“I've heard that story,” I say. More accurately is that I have read that same detail in the records I obtained from CPS. “I think it was at one of the hearings—about police and saying that about students being arrested.” All I can think about as she tells this story are the flashing cop lights at the border of the Cabrini homes both times I drove around in the last few months. Nothing was happening, just a signal that this is a policed community. Fourteen years ago, too, through the schools.

“I feel like because I've been through this before,” she continues, “that I know now. But this was that was the first time I went through a closing. I feel like they just said whatever they want to say to keep

the peace. They basically was like, well, we're going to listen to you and we're going to have these meetings. But to be honest, they had already decided what they were going to do. Because it wasn't official, quote unquote, official that our school was going to close until I want to say like February. But people were already coming into our building in December and marking stuff and looking into classrooms.” Another echo of the already decided factor that others have told me about.

“It was already done,” she says. “It was already a done deal. So the fact that you're saying, Well, we're going to listen to you, we're going to have these meetings that community can come on and say their piece and everything. That's what they're not being truthful about. They're saying, ‘Oh, we're going to allow you to speak your piece’ and it was already a done deal what they're going to do.”

*I just drove through the Cabrini Green townhouses. Those are the white row houses that are mentioned by the community members in the transcripts of the hearings. I have not been in this area of the city that much, but I've been over here enough and it's crazy that I had no idea these townhouses were right here. This immediate area of the townhomes is very different than the area around Schiller and it's not that far away. It's surrounded by tall, new buildings, condos, urban development, and it's like the old project complex is hidden away. Maybe a third or a half of the townhouses are occupied. The rest are boarded up and have chain linked fence in front of them. This whole area just feels like a little pocket that has been protected, preserved, while neglected, ignored.*

*I saw people out and about and it felt wrong to try to take any photos of their homes and so I did not. I saw two police, both cars had their blue lights on. One cop was out and had a dog with her. It was very hard to see the functional houses because they are in the middle and the ones on the outer rim seem to be the closed down ones. Right across the street is luxury condos. This is contested space. I don't usually feel inherently unsafe in the city but the cop presence signals that to me—a policed community. The echoes of “this isn't where White people go” I feel in my body as I drive my car through here. I did feel unsafe feelings and I don't know if that's my Whiteness and what space I typically occupy in the city coming through. I don't normally have that feeling in spaces that aren't white or low income in the city. I*

*assume that's a bit of racism coming through my perception. I've read about the projects and some of the violence and dangers that happened there, but I've also read the opposite, the community and support folks gave each other. Today, I saw evidence where people were enjoying the courtyard, grills, tricycles and other evidence of small children once I drove by the occupied units. The streets are lined with cars, enough that quite a few folks live here.*

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**“That’s the kind of energy that was coming from these people that were there—  
when they saw something, they did something for them.” - Carolyn**

I start to think about how little I remember from my time at Schiller in 2003-2004 and wonder aloud if Mr. Patterson and I interacted at all in my time there as we talk on the phone. A Black teacher who connected with the students, he taught there for years and retired in 2005.

I chuckle inside when he says he “actually” enjoyed his time there, enjoyed the kids, as if the assumption would be that teachers did not. His remembering feels more summary-like, but he expresses the desire that Schiller’s history not be lost.

“I would just like the story to be told about the kids—what they lost by closing the school. It was because of the adults who were in the building... how they bonded with the kids. So I just wish that would be told,” he says.

“The bonding,” I say.

“Yep.”

“I kept a couple of school newsletters that the students put together,” I say, remembering my own time at Schiller. “You know, they did horoscopes and they did poetry and I mean, that was the classroom that I was in but the kind of those stories help me remember the school. One of the big aims of my project is to kind of make the story of the school bigger than the closing because everything kind of gets painted in a certain way once a school is closed. So I'm happy that you had such a long time there to

be able to say that about the school,” I say. His answers are short, without elaboration so far and I hope my sharing causes him to share more, too.

“There's a lot of research out there about how the school closings have had a heavier impact on low-income Black communities,” I say.

“Correct,” he says.

“Do you do you have any thoughts about how that plays a role?” I ask. Here we are, talking about racism but not explicitly and I realize I don't have good tools yet, or any relationship with him to be more explicit.

“Ah yes, I do,” he says. “It definitely played a role because like I said, the bonding the kids and the adults had with each other because you know all the teachers of the course was from different, different environments. They was raised differently, you know, and to share their stories with these kids, showing them and letting them know that there's something better, that Cabrini isn't the only area in America. You know, that was, to me, very important for the kids to know that.”

The conversation is starting to tilt toward him talking more than me now, which I had hoped for.

“By me being of course the basketball coach, the boys and I, we used to travel a lot,” he says. “When I said travel, we would go to different communities, like we would go out to Saulk Trail, to be in basketball tournaments. This gave them an opportunity to hang out in other places and know that there's other kids that just like them and play basketball, just stuff like that. It involved my whole family, my wife and I, and even my daughter, because we used to provide access to transportation—of course with the parents' consent—which I thought that that was great.”

“I know with the way CPS is structured, with so many smaller neighborhood schools, it's hard to get those middle school sports to get any feet,” I say. The lack of an economy of scale in the schools where I taught was always a challenge for middle school sports.

“Yep,” he says.

“I mean, they've got that organized in the high schools but, I tell you, pulling that off in a middle school—it's like you're inventing it all yourself. Or at least that's what it felt like to me,” I say.

“Correct. And you know, it was great. I had a great rapport with the kids so you know, within school that worked out even better. I automatically gained the respect from everyone,” he says.

*Then I came home from driving through the Cabrini townhomes and talked about it all with Pat, my partner (former architect now CPS teacher). I dug back into my Purging the Poorest book to find dates and context. 1940s and it felt like you were back there, when the rowhouses were built, except everything was run down. The center core was upkeep for sure, but it was crazy how much it was surrounded by closure. What meaning is made from my Google maps asking if this place should be marked as closed? I came home with more site photos.*

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**“I guess some of the kids that moved on like one of our students who ended up going to Latin, some of other students who had landed other opportunities. I guess you could see some benefit there but for the vast majority, no.” – Mr. D**

“I’ve seen, I’ve gotten the transcripts of the hearings. I’ve seen all the people from the Sinai temple who testified and were fighting for the school and the Open Books people. I mean, you had an amazing amount of community partners, it seemed like on paper,” I say to Mr. D.

“We did,” Mr. D says.

“That’s a lot of work, to organize all that.” I can’t help but remember all the labor required as a teacher to create programs, assemblies, fundraisers.

“Yes. That was all stuff that we helped to bring in when the administration change took over. We had a lot of people heavily invested in the school, heavily invested in the kids, in the community. It would have been phenomenal to see play out, you know, over four, five, ten years, to see the progress that we could have made,” Mr. D says. “Our class sizes were awesome, right? It was ‘underutilized class sizes’ or you know. They were small, 15 to 18, somewhere around there, but it was optimal for teaching and learning. Right?”

I think to my years of teaching with 34 students and think how idyllic this sounds while I am cognizant of the tendency to romanticize the schools in hindsight. “That was the same thing that my husband’s school that closed. He was hired to split the math classes in half, right? He had 17 people in his math class and it was brilliant,” I relate.

“We had a lot of one-on-one tutoring and reading support,” he says. “Open Books had their dedicated room, dedicated space. It was like a second library. But it was a library where kids can just take books to keep. They opened every morning before school. Thirty minutes before school for kids who were wanting to come in and hang up their stuff and read and share books. And it was utilized by kids coming in early to school. Yes. And then, you know, the partnerships that formed—the volunteers from Chicago Sinai were just tremendous. Building the relationships not only with the kids but with their families.”

His storytelling is flowing, he wants to remember the school, share his stories. I secretly want to unpack with him all the nuances of running a school on volunteer labor, but I don’t dare detour him. There is a shift in the stories after Schiller closes, where the framing goes from the collective to the individual. He tells me about the individual students they were able to navigate into different educational paths than the district had set out, precisely because of the partnerships and relationships built. It seemed everyone utilized their networks for a select few.

“When Schiller closed, a couple of the volunteers helped to get kids into different schools. I know one specifically helped secure a scholarship for a girl to go on to Latin and followed her throughout her high school diploma at Latin,” he says.

“Wow,” I say. I know of Latin, I presume most folks in Chicago do. It’s one of the most prestigious and expensive private schools on the northside of the city.

“They made sure she had the scholarship needed to stay there, which was which was awesome,” he says. I later learn that this support extended to college scholarships too.



When Schiller closed, the district routed students into Pritzker, a nearby neighborhood school that has also become a magnet school at some point since. Mr. D. did his own networking to situate students as they were pushed out of Schiller. He had connections at Daniel Hale Williams Medical Prep School.

“Hale was part of the old DuSable High School—they broke it into three schools at the time, but it was a college prep selective enrollment school with a seventh and eighth grade program. I was able to get our two top seventh graders in over there, which was a great opportunity for them.”

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**“It is just showing the way that the city is going, which I don't like. The fact that you have these schools closing and look exactly where they're closing. And the effects that it's having on the children in certain demographic of students who are being most affected. And then it still shows in other ways when it comes to those students. When we have the schools that are open, and when it comes to school budgets, when you have budget cuts, and they have those budget cuts for certain schools and you realize what schools are receiving those budget cuts, and then those schools that are receiving more money. And it's still happening. It's still happening.” – Ms. Gates**

Before I can even schedule a phone conversation with Carolyn Stevens, a volunteer at Schiller when it was closed, she sends me photos and other contacts from my initial recruitment outreach. She is eager to share her stories of Schiller. Once we are on the phone, she explains her connections to the school, including the years after the school closed when she stayed in touch with one family. Her initial connection to Schiller was through her father-in-law, who had left money to a nearby Jewish temple to be used for music programming. Her husband arranged for the money to pay for a music teacher at Schiller, and in the same communication was a plea for volunteers. Carolyn signed up to help.

“I was in the first grade classroom with Ms. Z, and just had a really great experience and felt that it was very rewarding. But then at the same time, it was confusing because of seeing how the school was

actually being operated by the temple and not CPS. I was just like, thinking these kids are like so.... I mean, it just didn't feel right in some ways,” Carolyn says.

“What do you mean, the temple was operating the school?” I ask.

“The temple—they were contributing books. They were the library. I mean, a music teacher. My husband gave them money to hire a music teacher through the temple,” she says. “There were a lot of volunteers helping out and grandmothers from the projects were there, helping out as well. It just seemed like that school was running on shoestrings. And I just thought it was just odd, that you know, being just right next to the Gold Coast, how could this happen?” Although we’re talking on the phone, as she has since left Chicago, I can picture what her facial expressions are—eyes wide, jaw firm, maybe a pause in her gate as she walks her dog during our talk.

Carolyn has very fond memories of being at the school as a volunteer and gushes about her engagement there. “I think everyone should do it, I really do.”

She shares some specific stories about specific students that are laced with tenderness and racial tension, her being a high social status White volunteer in an all-Black low-income school. Later, she follows up on her promise to me that she will share more information after she finds it. Her volunteerism did not stop with her time at Schiller, but she continued on at the school where Schiller students were assigned after it closed—Jenner.

“I also had volunteered at Jenner after a period of time, and that still reminded me so much of Schiller,” she continues. “They were under provided, too. I was like, What is going on? I mean, here we're in the wealthiest neighborhood and the schools are so under resourced and the teachers not having enough aides, you know, getting volunteers. It just struck a different chord in me and I've always been so upset with the CPS of Chicago because of these neighborhoods and not getting what they deserve or what they should get. I don't know if deserve is a good word for it, but it just, I still feel it today when anybody brings it up about Chicago and how segregated it is. You know, and it has a lot to do with the education, I think they want to keep people where they're at perhaps? I don't know. What do you think? You're very involved in CPS and you must have some ideas.”

Her remembering the school reveals her deep commitment to philanthropy at the local level while she grapples with the inequities she recalls.

*Pat described what he saw at Skinner when he biked by. He said there were about 40 grade-school kids who were at a summer camp there, he wasn't sure if they were Skinner students or not. But they were using the ball field that belongs to the school. There was certainly racial diversity present, but he couldn't recall one Black kid in the group at a glance. I mean, he noticed no Black kids. He asked me about the conditions of the school inside from my scavenger hunt for the time capsule. My 14-year-old proceeded to ask, after we told him it was selective enrollment starting in kindergarten—"How do you have a percentile for a kindergartener? Like they can read Thomas the Train before the kid next to them?" he quipped.*

*We also talked about the timing of the closings and how the students at Schiller did not have the time to apply to even stay in the building once the closing was finalized. I remembered reading, a hearsay account, that Skinner did not want to move into the building, but they were threatened by the district with no money for renovations if they stayed in their current location (I'll have to see where that was, I thought Skinner was invented for that location... this is the first I've read that part of the story); they did not want to move to the site of the projects.*

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**"I just want to say that I loved the school, I loved the opportunity that I had there, being able to spend time with them, even though it was a tough, tough time to transition. I'm thankful for getting to know the kids and the communities. And I'm thankful for all the hard work that they put in, the kids put in. Yes. The relationships that I built with the kids and staff.**

**Nothing but love I guess." – Mr. D**

“When we saw that they had opened up this new school—I forgot the name of it. It was like, What?!! And you know, most of these kids couldn't even go to that school. But I mean, it's the new school that's there now,” Carolyn says.

“Skinner North,” I say.

“Yes. That was like a slap in the face for these kids to see this school open up, the money that it was, I don't know if it's a private school or what,” she says. It is clear from our conversation that she only knows CPS through her volunteerism.

“It's a selective enrollment school, which means it's a public school, but you have to go through a process of taking a test and applying to get in,” I explain.

“Okay, I mean, I just don't get it,” she says again. “Why wasn't Schiller paid attention to like that school, being a CPS? I guess I have a lot of—it is just upsetting to know what these kids needed and then to see what happened at Jenner. Finally Jenner teamed up with the Newberry school, I think it's called, on State Street? They partnered finally which supposedly has helped them, but I do know that a lot of parents at Jenner didn't want their kids to go there any longer because they didn't want their kids to be a part of it. I mean, it's so complicated, that world. With Schiller, it just felt like they were operating on a shoestring you know? There were things happening towards the end that were really good, but, you know, the families were moving out. They weren't getting those townhouses or some of the families were moving, but I would say a majority of them moved to the Austin neighborhood or the south side. I don't know how many families really stayed nearby.

“To open up that new school like they did, why wasn't Schiller as good as the school that is there now? Why didn't they have that attention, you know?” she asks.

*This is the second time I have driven to the Cabrini townhomes. Some units are well-kept and occupied in the center of the complex, but the outer ones are boarded up. Both times I have gone, in the middle of the day, as soon as I see the townhomes I see police presence. This time when I pulled up, within a block, there were two police cruisers on separate corners. One was on the street that cuts*

*through the middle of the townhomes, the blue flashers on, just sitting there with nothing apparently happening. I remember the same the last time I was here. It made me hesitate to turn down the street although I saw no other signals of things to make me feel unsafe. I'm here collecting the flyers today to get rid of them since I left them up 6 months ago.*

*In my on-the-spot decision to not photograph people and their homes if they were inhabited, I realized I am only recording the run-down images that reinforce some of the narrative that I am trying to work against. How do I reconcile that?*

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**“She was learning to swim. She learned to swim from that school.”- Carolyn**

“The kids lost their school,” Mr. D says. “They lost their community. They lost their friends because... I don't know, with the school closed, they were forced to move.”

“Are you saying they were forced to move because of the school closing or because of the housing being torn down?” I ask. I can't recall on the spot when exactly the towers came down in relation to when the school was closed.

“Well, I mean it happened at the same time,” he says. “There were some families that were still there as the last of the projects were coming down. No one was moving into the mixed income houses, or very few of them. We hired a former Schiller student as a kindergarten teacher, fresh out of college that last year. She was one who was able to move into the mixed income houses but she said there's barely anyone that's going to be staying here. There were a lot of promises that they would have housing in these new developments. So there was a lot of distrust felt by the families and by the kids and losing their home, losing their school. Losing their community. A lot of uncertainty. Kids didn't know where they are going to be going to school next year, they didn't know where they're going to living next year. All of that added stress and strife.”

*The playground is extensive. The basketball court is new and pretty nice, full court with proper lines and black/red top. A fountain is on. It feels a little unclear if I am walking through the school playground or the park district playground, maybe it's both. There are one or two folks playing or hanging out. I wonder if students have free reign here for recess or what spaces get designated (policed?) for park district versus school.*

*There are raised garden beds between the playground and the school building, on the northside. The Stanton Park buildings look closed or not used, but maybe it is still open? There is a Natatorium, at least by the old signage in the stone façade. I'll have to look up if the kids at Skinner get swim lessons.*

## PALIMPSEST PORTRAITS

**Plate 4: We All Live Here** (Ulrich Papczun, 2023c)

12” x 12” x 0.12”, 2022, clear acrylic plate with image transfer, acrylic medium.



**Figure 29:** Plate 4- We All Live Here

houses a selective enrollment school—Skinner North. This inclusive statement of the mural is packed with irony. The students were shifted out by the district, but the ghosts linger around the school. In the collage, the street signs of the intersection are almost unnoticeable as they fold into the edge and rest on top of Door 2. These doors have a similar industrial feel to other school doors, neither inviting nor welcoming. To the left of the doors, the “New City” parking garage underscores the shift from public housing to market-based housing. The small address sign on the front of the parking garage slips into the rip in the image of the school’s doors.

A mural on the exterior of the building declares in bold, white letters on a black background: “We all live here” with Chicago zip codes in orderly columns. Schiller was a neighborhood public school that was closed. The building, situated near the public housing community of Cabrini-Green, now

Description for National Art Education Association 2023 Member Exhibition<sup>66</sup>:

*This collage layers photographs from a public school site and its neighborhood. The school was closed in 2009 and served the public housing projects. The school that was opened in the same building in 2009 only accepts students through a selective process but declares, through art, “We All Live Here.”*

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<sup>66</sup> Submission published at <https://www.arteducators.org/community/articles/1250-2023-naea-member-exhibit?slide=37#gallery-101>



**Photograph: East Façade** (Ulrich Papczun, 2023a)

2022



**Figure 30:** Photograph of Schiller, east façade

*2023 Submission for The Image of Research Award<sup>67</sup>:*

*This research aims to historicize school sites where schools have been closed and reopened. I work to restory the narratives I find in the archives and gather from community members with collective remembering strategies. Using a critical perspective, this work honors and examines the “absent-presence” (Ferguson & Nichols, 2021; Gordon, 2008) of closed schools in Chicago.*

*This site image shows a school building that used to be a neighborhood school for the surrounding public housing in Cabrini-Green until it was closed in 2009 and reopened as a selective enrollment school. The large green lawns adjacent to the school serve as scars where the public housing towers once stood,*

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<sup>67</sup> Submission published at <https://today.uic.edu/capturing-the-essence-of-research-in-a-single-image/>

*but only if one knows the site's history. The benign nature of this photograph betrays the contested history of the site that I argue is masked over when schools are closed. Noting the unsettling symmetry and lacking any distinct identifiers, this image could stand in to represent any of the hundreds of neighborhood schools in Chicago that have been closed. Throughout my research, I use the methodology of portraiture, including images like this to have conversations about school closings as a way to reconsider how the past is always present.*

**Plate 9: East Façade**

12" x 12" x 0.12", 2022, clear acrylic plate with image transfer, acrylic medium.



**Figure 31:** Plate 9- East Façade

There is no room for context in this image, no indication about the school or the political-geospatial context. The blue is a broken ribbon of brick around the middle, almost the same blue of the sky of that day. Geometric repetition happens from the shape of the building to the blue

brick insets, from the fence to the portion of the yard. Similar fences separate a private development to the west from the school grounds, but here the fence may indicate where a public housing tower had loomed for decades. The grass is mowed, the building has new, bright white roof edge. There is no landscaping or trees, besides an overgrown bush on the left side. Access is unclear, restricted. The doors peer out from each side but are not the focus of this piece as in some of the other plates. A symmetrical austerity creates visual balance in this static piece, reading as if a still from a moving filmstrip.

### Plate 10: Schiller Lawn with Target

12" x 12" x 0.12", 2022, clear acrylic plate with image transfer, acrylic medium.



**Figure 32:** Plate 10- Schiller Lawn with Target

district building.) The glass tower in the background adds to the layeredness of the space itself and the visual composition.

This piece builds the context of the school and the neighborhood changes. The urban Target is indicative of density and development yet a walk through the neighborhood reveals that development that has stagnated. The lawn could be a scar from the public housing towers, and it takes up majority of the photo as something missing.

As a single image, the Target being so much larger than the portion of the school shown in this photo reveals the largeness of the urban renewal initiatives.

Similar to Plate 9, the repetition of geometric shapes helps the viewer to travel over the image, even though there are no additional images to draw the attention from one part to another. The Target bullseye

This plate serves as a complement to Plate 9. In this image, the school falls into the composition as a small detail, shrinking in this perspective while Target and the lawn loom large. (The school façade of Plate 9 is the small brick wall next to the two garage doors, which are part of a park

serves as the full stop for the viewing, the only indication of identity in the composition. The static nature of the piece, with no people, invite contemplation of who this school serves—forces that are created by corporate ideologies, absent of the individual humans who move through the space.



## Plate 8: North Façade

12" x 12" x 0.12", 2022, clear acrylic plate with image transfer, acrylic medium.



**Figure 33:** Plate 8- North Façade

Being a single image, this shot of the north façade of the school building uses symmetry to draw the viewer in. This piece focuses more on the aesthetics to engage than the representation. For me, when I was digging into my own memories of working at Schiller as a volunteer back in 2003-2004, it was this blue that was etched in my memory. I remembered the door I entered being blue, but I did not find a blue door recently, two decades later. But the blue was a big part of my memory for

some reason, and it surfaced when I was looking for images about the school at the origin of this project. So this blue became part of my own hauntings with Schiller and it took my attention again when I visited the site in August 2022.

Although the blue is distinct for me, the façade, like the doors in the other plates, could be any variety of Chicago Public Schools. The windows are a typical institutional style from the 1960s, when the building was built. The sign in the center reads that the grounds and playground are closed at certain times and violators are subject to arrest, printed discreetly on a small plaque-like material. The blue adds more vibrancy than the drabness that the doors portrayed in other plates, a color that likely demands more upkeep than a brown or gray. This side of the school reveals activity through the playground and gardens. The lines

and orientation of the shapes in the photo abide loosely by the rule of thirds in visual compositions but push against the edges of those guidelines.

### **PART III: TO BE DONE**



## CHAPTER SEVEN: REMEMBERING

Remembering has power. Remembering has agency. Remembering points to the space taken up by something missing. Remembering allows us to pause and reflect. Remembering acknowledges how the past is in the present.

Remembering engages in memory work, a conjuring and socially enacted process that sits in the etherealness of ghosts and hauntings.

Neither beginning at one point nor ending at another, memory surrounds us from all sides. *To approach memory*. Repeatedly, we must rephrase and return to this advance. At no point does a linear gateway open in which memory's attributes can be laid out for detached scrutiny. Instead, an approach to memory can be drawn, which relies less on linearity and more on a constellation of different perspectives, mutually edifying one another. Alongside the concept 'place,' ...memory diffuses itself in several different pathways simultaneously, all of which are experienced from the inside out. (Trigg, 2012, p. xvii)

The portraits in the previous chapters approached the memories attached to school closings from all angles, asking the reader to go along on the journey of remembering the schools from the inside out.

Remembrance is an obligation of bearing witness to historical trauma, along with acknowledgment and enacting a consequence of being a witness to someone's testimony of that trauma (Simon & Eppert, 1997). The previous chapters—the *portraits of remembering*—serve as part of the consequence of my bearing witness to the stories of Andersen and Schiller. This chapter works to unpack the significance of this remembrance and how it unfolded.

The purpose of this chapter is to discuss why the people connected to Andersen and Schiller remembered the schools in the way that they did with me. What are the implications for school closure when we remember the schools, especially collectively? How can remembering shed new light on school closure?

This chapter on remembering is about the significance of the remembering that happened in Chapters Five and Six—the people connected to the schools did not remember the schools as an action

against or in response to forgetting (Fenster & Yacobi, 2010); they had not forgotten the schools. They expressed a desire to honor, hold space for, and reconnect with the past through remembering.

One other noteworthy aspect is the surreal experience of remembering collectively (Blokland, 2001; Trigg, 2012). As I experienced the group conversation with Olivia, Pearl, and Yessenia, our remembering had an energy about it that I have struggled to articulate on the page. “It is not surprising that testimonial accounts, in their attempts to convey a tangible sense of prior catastrophic events, often have a surreal quality” (Simon & Eppert, 1997, p. 185). Beyond surreal, the other names scholars have given this are the uncanniness of the absence-presence (Gordon, 2008) and the nagging presence of that which is not there (Ewing, 2018). If I am honest, there was a séance-like energy in the room. The energy of the specters of the past schools was palpable; it is hard to name it as otherwise. As we shared our stories and leaned into the collective remembering, we embodied the archives in which the stories and memories are also held, giving access to others through the testimony and witnessing.

### **Acknowledging the Present-Past**

Drawing on Simon and Eppert’s (1997) obligations of bearing witness to testimony about historical trauma and Fine’s (2006) “fictional” methods textbook centered on bearing witness through critical research, the conversations in the previous chapters create a present-past (Ferguson & Nichols, 2021) about school closure that has importance and needs centering.

Why is it important to acknowledge and engage with the past in the present? When I think about the importance of stories from the past, I think about teaching my students when I had my own middle school classroom. No teacher simply teaches the student as a being only in the present, but teachers work to learn the stories that are embodied in the beings in front of us. We find out about past accomplishments, we go “Oh, that makes so much sense” when we have parent-teacher conferences, we attend their sporting events or musical concerts. Sometimes we apply our experiences with older siblings to the student in front of us. We look back in the archives for school-based measurements of achievement. We layer the stories and experiences of the past that belong to that student and hopefully, by seeing them

more wholly, we teach them more wholly. The past matter because it shapes the present and is part of the present in real ways.

There is an argument for not viewing students solely through their past, while it is true that we teach students differently when we know some stories about their past, for the good and the bad. When we know more about the stories that come with people, that live in them, we can view the past as a way to be more connected, empathetic, to understand them as the complex humans that they already and always are, moving through a world and an educational system that has historically denied too many students important connections to their stories and histories.

Through remembering, we make ourselves and others more whole by connecting the past with the present<sup>68</sup>. Through remembering, we keep the past present and acknowledge the agency that the past has in the present. We are also cognizant that we *experienced* an event or moment and can both share that experience with others and bear witness for others through remembering.

When we remember a past event, we not only recall the event, we also know that we experienced it. In other words, episodic memory<sup>69</sup> allows us to become witnesses of the past and thus give testimony about it. (Mahr & Csibra, 2020, p. 428)

Through sharing testimonies or stories with others through remembering, we make connections with others.

Remembering facilitates an opportunity to connect with a past that is not necessarily ours personally, but ours collectively. The rememberings offered by the people connected to the schools, including not remembering much, offers an opportunity for people not connected to the schools to connect to the larger story of school closure in urban settings. Through the act of remembering Andersen and Schiller, the stories of these schools are offered up as a collective past that, I argue, we have an

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<sup>68</sup> This gets troubled with trauma and things intentionally not remembered, yet an argument for wholeness resonates there as well. I explore Promises and Limitations in Appendix E.

<sup>69</sup> Episodic memory refers to remembering an event or something happened, the ability for our brains to recall an episode, versus other memory brain functions like semantic memory used for language skills.

obligation to engage with as we tell stories of schools that are presently open. There is no LaSalle II without closing Andersen. There is no Skinner North without closing Schiller.

When we remember a school, and remember what came before, we view the present in a different light. If we learn the past of a building, the stories about the school that came before the school that is there now, we can view the present in more whole and authentic ways that honor community voices. The school that is presently open is not an individual, isolated entity, but comes from what was before. LaSalle II is there *because of* what happened to Andersen. Skinner North is there *because of* what happened to Schiller. Each does not exist without the past school and the actions that happened against it and the district policies that drove such actions. We can acknowledge the connection of the past to the present, of how the past is present, through remembering. Buras (2015) asserts that if we know the past, we treat the present differently, and perhaps different solutions to the problems posed could be imagined by those in power.

### **Engaging with the Present-Past**

Acknowledging the present-past begins the obligations that Simon and Eppert write about, while engaging with the present-past moves into an interaction with memories and stories. Ghosts and hauntings ask us to engage with the past and this can happen through collective remembering, getting to know the past through the stories others share (what I am thinking of as concentric connections), and through paying attention to the semantics embedded in our stories.

One way to engage with the present-past is through *collective remembering*. Blokland (2001) asserts that “it is through the process of collective remembering that places and identities can be (re)constructed, for people and for neighborhoods” (p. 281). When schools that were closed are remembered collectively, the identity connected to the schools and neighborhoods are shared.

The collective remembering for this work takes on two forms: one is the remembering that happened during the group conversation about Andersen, where collective refers to our joint occupation of space and time, and the other is the larger remembering that has happened across all the conversations

as a whole, where collective refers more to thinking about various individual moments of remembering compiled together as a composite whole.

My first research conversation was the group conversation with Olivia, Pearl, and Yessenia. The intention of the research design was to facilitate as many group conversations as possible, to gather folks and share stories about the schools. Remembering Andersen with three other people over two hours as a group conversation was an experience that is best described as surreal (Simon & Eppert, 1997; Trigg, 2012). It was part memorial service for specific parts and people of the school, part protest against the damage done through racist actions, part therapy, part solidarity, part holding space for each other and ourselves. By sharing space and time while we remembered, we created a reciprocal offering of bearing witness to the stories—a place where we offered testimony, received it from each other, and carried the experience with us as a consequence.

There are three aspects of that group conversation that I want to give attention to. One is the eagerness that the participants brought to the interactions, after they had vetted me and decided to be a part of the work, all three of them. They spoke during our time together about wanting a space through which they could process what was haunting them. They expressed a desire to engage in remembering the school in a way that was more public, or less private, and more collective. This less individual opportunity was significant as it allowed their stories of the past to be held in the present.

Additionally, the storytelling that happened through a shared past at a school creates a bond between people. After sharing the space and time in the Make Good Lab in April, a connection formed through our remembering. None of the participants, including myself, knew each other prior. I do not foresee us staying in contact as friends or colleagues, but this shared experience bonded us together. I think calling this a transformative experience is too strong and I cannot speak for their experiences, but the trajectory of the storytelling, the emotional expressions, the silences, the pauses, all suggest that this was, at the least, a very moving experience of sharing stories for all of us. The *saying* of what was said was part of the witnessing happening, something we offered each other (Simon & Eppert, 1997). In our

group conversation, we all had a connection to Andersen and collectively remembered the school and our experiences there through the same space and time.

Another aspect of collective remembering is the concentric effect of getting to know a person or place through someone else's stories. The story below illustrates how *collective remembering* allows people to give testimony and bear witness (Fine, 2006), ultimately creating complex connections *through others* to an entity—a place or person—that they were not directly connected to previously.

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It's been a few years, surely, since I attended the funeral of a friend's mom. I did not know Stephanie's mother; I had never met her. I taught with Stephanie through a summer academy years ago. We would connect for lunch here and there and talk shop. I knew that Stephanie had been her mother's caregiver for years and that this loss would reverberate in very specific ways for a long time for her. I arranged my schedule to attend the funeral service, anticipating the new experience for having never attended a Black funeral or a Black church service for that matter.

I arrived early to navigate parking and took a seat midway back, to the side. I quickly shifted from my seat to the back overflow room, taking a seat deep in the corner as the church sanctuary became packed to standing room only. I did not need to take up a seat on the main floor. I was unable to get Stephanie's attention through the crowd of family, friends, neighbors, and supporters to give a gesture of sympathy, to show my presence. She was with her siblings and when the moment never appeared for a quick wave, I settled for a text to her on my way home to say I had been there, sending love.

During the service, neighbor after neighbor, family member after family member, even the alderman stood at the front of the church, declaring and claiming their connections to Stephanie's mother through stories. It was through testimonies and the stories of how each was connected to her that I, too, became connected to her—through this collective remembering. And this matters because we are human through our connections. The stories shared did not paint a picture of a stereotypical sweet old lady. This was a woman who did not bite her tongue. The stories shared portrayed Stephanie's mother as a stern woman who parented the entire block—a mother figure sought out for advice on all things. Her firmness

was a deep dedication to her Black community. They collectively described her as compassionate, caring, and always willing to help those in need.

Today, I do not remember the specific details, but my text that day to Stephanie said something like, “I feel like I know your mother now, through the stories.” Although I had not met her, I have with me the essence of Stephanie’s mother which resonated so strongly through the act of remembering and was collectively extended to those of us who did not know her personally. This collective remembering was not about *not* forgetting, but was about providing a venue through which we could bear witness to the person’s life through the stories.

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This vignette of my not having been at a Black funeral before and making room for others who knew Stephanie’s mother better put me in that concentric outer circle of connection. Relating to bearing witness, the listener seeks an appropriate closeness or distance from which to hear, from which to receive the testimony. Through these moves of proximity, we acknowledge and negotiate who we are in relation to the stories that we hear and ultimately become a part of, even if peripherally. As a White researcher engaging with people connected to schools that were mostly Black or Latina/o, part of my experience in creating these portraits was being a part of other people’s rememberings while navigating racial lines. The portraits invited me on an ongoing journey of connections over racial and class lines through my research, writing, and sharing. In turn, you, the reader, are invited to get to know the schools as well as invited to grapple with your own classed and racialized proximity to the stories.

The other collective version of remembering Andersen and Schiller is the larger remembering that has happened across all the conversations as a whole, where collective refers more to thinking about various individual moments of remembering compiled together as a composite whole. Engaging in portraiture is to engage in work toward a gestalt, or something that is bigger than the sum of its parts (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis, 1997, pp. 244, 248, 280). Collectively, the vignettes in Chapters Five and Six create portraits of remembering that offer a multifaceted composition of how people connected to the

schools remembered Andersen and Schiller. This collective remembering gets extended to the reader through an invitation to remember the schools with the participants, carrying on the past in the present.

Through this work, I have shifted to calling the schools that I studied “schools that were closed” instead of “closed schools.” This semantic shift represents the conversations I had about the schools and an important distinction I witnessed through the stories. These were schools on which the closing was imposed as a slow violence over time (Aggarwal et al., 2012), social institutions for our youth that were used to remake neighborhoods (Bierbaum, 2021), and community hubs that resisted under the relentless anti-Blackness and racism of the school closing processes. The closure is the fulcrum through which I came to know the schools, while the schools are bigger than their closings to those who were connected to them. The closing was a top-down decision that curates a forgotten history<sup>70</sup>, while the school stories reside in the people connected to the schools, in the stories left behind in the archives. The histories might feel forgotten but they can be brought back to the present through remembering. Remembering resists forgottenness.

These certainly are stories of school closure, however. Embedded in the stories of each school are stories of school closure as a practice. It is worth remembering the schools to analyze the neoliberal moves in new ways, apart from the exploration of individual schools themselves. Greene (as cited in Fine, 2006) calls for research that provokes generalization from the reader from the unique, particular stories often presented through qualitative research (also see Appendix B). There is worth in shifting from the individual to the collective in analyzing school closure when neoliberal moves in education value the individual over the collective. These are stories of Andersen and Schiller, but these are stories of school

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<sup>70</sup> The websites for LaSalle II and Skinner North name them as opening when they did, as an extension of the successful model of other CPS schools—LaSalle and Skinner West. The websites do not mention any history of the building before the opening of the school; there is no reference to Andersen or Schiller respectively. There are no sections on the website for that history, but there are sections for branding. See [https://www.skinnernorth.org/apps/pages/index.jsp?uREC\\_ID=560965&type=d](https://www.skinnernorth.org/apps/pages/index.jsp?uREC_ID=560965&type=d) and <https://lasalle2school.com/>



closure that are echoed in the literature and experiential stories told, stories that get masked over through the closure process.

When we tell stories of schools that were closed, when we remember the school through storytelling, we extend the connections to the school and its past. This historicizes the school site in ways that are critical to resisting urban shifts that push low-income families out of schools, schools where they often have a generational history. You may not know the school, but when you hear the stories of the school, you can get to know the school. If you know of the school, you're invited to view the school site in a new light.

### **Missing Stories from the Past**

Missing stories from the past mean something too, and we make meaning from that absence of stories. Missing stories could represent parts of the past that are forgotten, protected, avoided, or marginalized, among other possibilities. If experiences are benign or mundane enough, maybe we don't remember them. Possibly the "I don't remember much" or not-memorable experience of school closure for some speaks to the mundane nature of how school closings have become normalized in urban settings, something that "just happens" as cities ebb and flow, something that gets repeated in the stories we tell about schools, similar to what Lewis and Diamond (2015) write about regarding segregation in schools. Additionally, there are missing stories from people I did not talk with.

And what of the people connected to the schools whom I did not talk with? The stories shared in the portraits of remembering were certainly masked over in the process of school closure, effects of which linger far longer than the material closing and reopening of any school; that is evident by the haunting nature and the desire to give testimony so we can bear witness to what the participants spoke of. The stories that reside within people whom I did not talk to, for whatever reason, are likely all or some of those categories—stories that are forgotten over time, moments that are consciously or subconsciously protected, memories that are avoided and histories that are marginalized. To be clear, I am not advocating that the stories that are missing from my pages belong and are missing, yet to be found and presented.

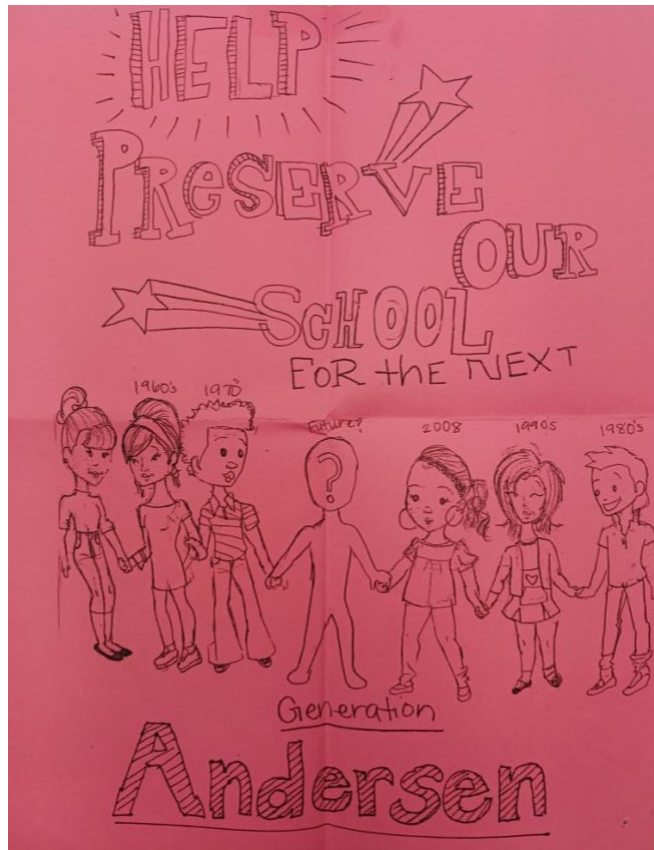
They are left out of this one something-to-be-done for a variety of reasons that I may not know. I made research decisions based on the scope and sequence of my project that were to pause the efforts to find conversations at a certain point as well<sup>71</sup>.

## **Artifacts**

In the remembering that happened as a group with Olivia, Pearl, Yessenia and myself in Chapter Four, the artifacts that we interacted with—the newsletters that Pearl brought, a flyer that Olivia brought (see Figure 34), my art pieces, and the photos and maps that I provided—all served as conduits for remembering at the very basic level. Yet these were more than conduits or a trigger for further remembering (as I understand methods like photo elicitation facilitate) but served as an embodiment of the experiences and memories. Pearl’s newsletters that she brought to our conversation prompted more asking and storytelling that brings the memory to life through the interaction with the artifact. Then, that was extended to the rest of us as part of the collective remembering. There was a rhythm, a cadence, almost as if an engine of the past was turned on. The experiences were quilted together in real time, with everyone contributing through testimony and bearing witness, offering moments for engagement and corrections through collective remembering. The artifacts lent a solid surface from which our remembering could reverberate.

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<sup>71</sup> See Appendix F: Promises and Limitations; I did not reach any parents and stopped recruiting after seven months of efforts.



**Figure 34:** Protest flyer made by students when Andersen was closed, brought to our conversation by Olivia

Interacting with artifacts also underscores the temporal shifts that accompany conceptualizations around ghosts and hauntings, when thinking about the past through remembering with others, that seems to be parallel to the tangibility of art that often draws folks in. To illustrate this, I share another story.

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We shared a rental house with two of Pat's (my husband) siblings and their families who had also traveled in a couple summers ago when we all converged near his father for a visit. Grandma Marcia, Pat's mom, died in 2008 and his only aunt, Maryann, on his maternal side is very dedicated to keeping up with all our kids as if they are her grandkids. Maryann brought to the rental house bins of old photos for us to sort through. One of Pat's sisters offered to take them home, sort them, and bring them back at the next visit.

The pictures were of everything from baby pictures of Pat's mom and that generation, to trips with distant cousins we've never known or heard of, to our own weddings and graduations twenty years ago. My children were born after Pat's mom died, so they only know Grandma Marcia through our stories, mementos, and photographs—the artifacts help us to tell the stories. Pat, his two sisters, myself, my two children, and two of their cousins (all the kids were about 8-12 years old) sat on the carpeted floor around the square coffee table after dinner one night. The bins were put on the coffee table and each of us started grabbing handfuls, looking for familiar faces. When we found a photo that we recognized, we called out to the others, filling in whatever the kids needed to know or telling whatever story corresponded. We made a side pile of those photos that directly meant something to us. The kids recognized certain people and joined in, calling out, "Hey, is this Grandma Marcia?" or "Mom, look! Is this your graduation?" Most of the images, though, were of people whom the kids did not know and would never meet.

We sat there, sifting, sorting, sharing. Before we realized it, it was 11:00p.m., way past the kids' bedtimes. Everyone was present in this moment where time took on a different dimension, where the past and the present melded into one, through the images, through the shared experience, through the remembering. Through interaction with the artifacts. The kids had not gotten restless, the adults were not needed for supervision—everyone was immersed in this shared experience of collective remembering. It felt magical, significant, a moment that required presence with others to hold space for the past.

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Thinking back to Chapter Three and the role of place in remembering, places get inscribed with histories and memories that speak to the meaning of place to people. The school buildings are part of that place and have a double role as place and artifact. Our pasts are embodied as we (re)visit a place in the present through the building and the emotions attached to our experiences associated with that structure. Ewing (2018) points to her hauntings when she was teaching and how she realized so many other children had been in those hallways as part of the school that was there before. The superintendent that I spoke to

at a conference felt the kick in his gut as he became present at the school building again, years later. My fellow student will never see the school site the same again after the history was inscribed onto it as he experiences everyday movement through the places. The art installations detailed in Chapter One point to the aesthetics of place that ask us to engage with the stories embedded there.

### **Work Done through Remembering**

There was work done through the participants' remembering in Chapters Five and Six. I theorize and discuss what work that is on a variety of levels, but first I want to name the theorizing and connections that the participants did explicitly as they shared their memories with me.

Olivia named the racism being enacted. Carolyn pointed to the jarring inequity of educational resource distribution for wealthy versus poor neighborhoods that were geographically right next to each other. Jennifer underscored the selective use of data in justifying the city's urban renewal moves through schools. Ms. Gates presented a connection between education and real estate development. Yessenia outlined the classed deserving/undeserving framing on display through space refurbishment during the phase out. Mr. D illustrated the labor administration takes on to cultivate community connections with the neighborhood. Pearl summarized the longitudinal impact on families of wrap-around services. Gayle highlighted the impact on teacher self-efficacy of school closure. Mr. Patterson reiterated the importance of keeping the history of a school alive.

Through sharing with me their stories about the schools, the participants offered macro-level thinking about school closure, using their personal and professional experiences as foundations for theorizing. The role of co-theorizing with participants has been explored in a variety of ways (see Tuck et al., 2014; and work on PAR) and while authentic community engagement is a recurring theme throughout this project, I use Chapter 8 to dig deeper into what this means for educational research more broadly.

The further work done through remembering that I would like to discuss below centers on holding space, reimagining more just futures, resisting injustices, and shaping consequences from the remembrance of schools that were closed.

Mr. Patterson, one of the Schiller teachers I talked to, was not at the school when it closed. He taught there for years before and he, among others, voiced the desire to just remember the school through the stories we tell. Simply put, to him, it was worthy of remembering. He wanted the history preserved. When we remember something that is no longer here, we declare that the stories matter, that what the story is *about* matters. By remembering, we make space and time for the stories of schools that were closed to be considered.

Holding space through storytelling recognizes the absence-presence of something that is gone (Ewing, 2018; Ferguson & Nichols, 2021; Gordon, 2008) by making that absence present for others. And through the moves to hold space, we honor the first obligation of bearing witness: we acknowledge what was past and is still present (Simon & Eppert, 1997). Holding space with others, such as the participants did with me, honors the second obligation of bearing witness that Simon and Eppert argue for: remembrance.

The act of remembering reclaims agency over a past in which the participants felt that they “fought the good fight” but it mattered none in the end. Twelve or fourteen years later, offering their stories of the school to me in conversation not only records those moments but allows me, as a researcher, to bear witness and offer the stories in a new form for others to bear witness as well. The remembering I witnessed spoke back to power. Participants spoke at the time of the closings against the inevitability of their schools being closed. At the time of our conversation, they named the power on display at the hearings spatially and expressed a desire to have the stories concretized through this work. Not all participants expressed a desire to resist through remembering, but their act of giving testimony was an act against forgetting, against erasure.

The narratives that the participants shared with me remembered the community partnerships, the caring teachers, the generational connections at the schools. This served as resistance to the deficit-based dominant narrative of low-income schools that are half-empty and cannot possibly provide an adequate

education for the children<sup>72</sup>. The “heart” of the school or the “heart” the community had for the school was spoken about in the conversations I had with participants. These intangible parts of the school related to families, community, and care were things that participants often described with emotional terms. In all the conversations, there was an air of hope lingering among the angst, the sadness, the wistfulness. When I asked the participants about their hopes and desires related to engaging with me and sharing their stories, they wanted the schools to not be forgotten.

Through remembering the schools, the participants offered a way to reimagine the future. This can happen via conversations or storytelling, using our research, our art, our writing, our connections to others as a conduit. “Minty (2006:421) suggests that even ephemeral or process oriented creative works can help us to rethink monuments, memorialise ‘hidden histories’, prompt engagements with racism and the abuse of power, and reimagine the city” (Anderson & Daya, 2022, pp. 1679–1680). Because these schools are remembered in a way that asks people to engage with the injustices presented, the act of remembering demands a reconsideration when similar circumstances are created by educational and housing policies. It is through the looking back, bringing the stories into the present, that the future is presented with possibilities that seemed impossible before.

The incompleteness of the narratives I collected and recast, the questions of this entire project being about the research process, about the schools, or about the memories of the schools—these are the ways of ghosts and hauntings and do not diminish the work being done. When the ghosts from the schools that were closed demand our attention, ask us to engage with the stories from the past, they are asking us to remember, to reimagine what will come from the connections we make. Adding these stories to how the stories from the school that were closed are told, we open up dimensions of history and space and time that are missing from not only the dominant narrative about school closure, but become part of our obligation in bearing witness.

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<sup>72</sup> As evidenced in public hearing records from Chicago Public Schools, 2008.

Often, the stories have been told and told and told; it wasn't uncommon for someone in my conversations to remind me of that. Versions of the stories were in the hearing records from twelve years ago and they were retold when we gathered to remember. When the stories are told at the public hearings or as part of the protests against the school closure, the district recorded the stories, transcribed them into the records, responded with a hearing officer's recommendation and the Chief Executive Officer's recommendation to the Board of Education. The opportunity—or obligation—of those who hear the stories to bear witness is truncated by the denial of the injustices named by the community. Anderson and Daya (2022) name this as “static memory markers” (p. 1690) that fail to do the consequential work that we are obligated to do when bearing witness to historical trauma (Simon & Eppert, 1997). The rememberings in Chapters Five and Six retell some of the same stories, unearthing them from the district records and embodying them in the present through conversations and storytelling. This becomes the consequential work—putting the stories in the present, asking the reader to engage with the ghosts that linger—that the stories in the vignettes do.

Fine (2006) calls for researchers to fold in the arts so that the reader generalizes from specific stories through a consideration of what is to be done. She also calls for researchers to “move readers to think through implications, actions, collusion, social responsibility, and social imagination” (p. 102). The consequence stands as an invitation to you, the reader, to not only bear witness, but to get to know the schools in ways that were not possible prior.

The stories I heard point to a rich, critical geospatial and historical knowledge residing within the people connected to the schools that were closed, where the participants opened an opportunity for people who read their stories to imagine otherwise. What might a future look like where a district does not close schools, where low enrollment trends are identified as “ideal class sizes” as Mr. D pointed to and open classrooms are reinvented as second libraries, as Schiller did through their partnership with Open Books? Indeed, this reimagining is also resistance, a challenge to the dominant narratives that drives school closures.



Spatially, remembering presents an opportunity for memory work to have a role when imagining future directions of city and neighborhood spaces, which includes opening and closing schools. Anderson and Daya (2022) point to how this might inform future thinking:

... we seek explicitly to emphasise and to validate the ordinariness of people's memories even in the context of city- and national-scale events. It is in these interlocking spaces of remembering and forgetting, we suggest, that the possibilities for memory to play a role in projects of urban spatial justice may most productively be realised. (p. 1680)

Further, the authors point to how “residuals” create a direction through the pasts, toward futures, to make different—more just—presents (p. 1679). These residuals become evident through palimpsests and ghosts.

The ghosts of schools that were closed are demanding our attention precisely because we can reimagine something better through sharing testimonies and bearing witness through remembering. Imagine a district that does not leave schools functioning on volunteer labor and donations, as Mr. D and Carolyn leads the reader to do, where the community partnerships serve enrichment instead of operations. Imagine a school population of low income Mexican American and Puerto Rican families receiving renovations to a building in ways that underscored the deservingness and worthiness of each child in the district, as Olivia and Pearl's stories project.

Sometimes the essence of memorials tends to say, “Here stands a marker of something that happened, we acknowledge it.” This chapter should stand as a strong warning against the inadequacy of this approach. Patricia Nguyen, the artist who is designing the memorial to the John Burge torture survivors in Chicago (along with architect John Lee), underscores the “unmonumentalness” of designing such a monument, wanting the spiral design to represent the continual remembering and revisiting that is needed to keep the testimonies alive, to ask others to bear witness to what happened.<sup>73</sup> We cannot call on

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<sup>73</sup> Patricia Nguyen spoke at the University of Illinois Chicago Jane Addams's Hull-House on October 18, 2023, on the design of the memorial as part of *Endured/Chosen Communities* Symposium. <https://villa-albertine.org/events/endured-chosen-communities-communautes-choisies-communautes-subies/>

institutions to do this memory work because “when living memory is replaced by its institutionalized form, we can come to rely on the marker to do the memory work for us, allowing ourselves to forget” (Anderson & Daya, 2022, p. 1679).

Frango delineates the approaches to community engagement in Chicago around the opening of a high school in the South Loop area, where the district designed community engagement to be representative and the coalitions designed community engagement around solidarity<sup>74</sup>. The archives on school closings in Chicago that I studied showed community engagement to be a contested space with asymmetrical power structures. Policy cannot include remembering through institutions; it must reside with the communities.

Monuments, plaques, and mass events in central city spaces have a role to play in public remembering and memorialising, but they neither tell nuanced stories nor address the many sites characterised by political forgetting. By definition, they embody state sanctioned, often sanitised, and always partial narratives, and they are too easily mistaken for singular historical truth. In fact, such static memory-markers and the ossification of certain stories, such as those that have emerged from District Six and the TRC, can create wounds themselves, negating the persistence of the past into the present, and de-legitimising experiences and emotions that continue to contour life for those who experienced violence. (Anderson & Daya, 2022, p. 1690)

The work that is done through the remembering of Andersen and Schiller is community work, and the consequence of bearing witness to the stories in Chapters Five and Six is that the stories hold space, point to reimagining, resist injustices, and carry the stories forward. We have an obligation to get to know schools that were closed through remembering as a way to resist the injustices of school closures.

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<sup>74</sup> Andrew Frango spoke on this at the University of Chicago on November 7, 2023 as part of *The Other Side of Closure: Contexts & Controversy in School Creation* hosted by the Colloquium on Race, Education, and Social Transformation (CREST) at University of Chicago.

## **The Consequences**

What happens when we remember a school? We conjure the past, we connect to others in the present, we challenge future school actions. If remembering helps folks realize that there are different ways to view schools and the complex systems in which they exist, that opens other options for when we face crises that get cultivated around budgets and space, and performance. Can remembering schools, collective remembering, help us to pause and reflect on the stories we tell about schools? This can in turn challenge the assumptions we make about neighborhoods and schools as we all navigate, resist, participate in this school choice paradigm.

Remembering makes a past visible and a different future possible. It complicates the ease with which stories are told about schools.

When memory and history are brought together in these aspirations, testimony imposes particular obligations on those called to receive it - obligations imbued with the exigencies of justice, compassion, and hope that define the horizon for a world yet to be realized. (Simon & Eppert, 1997, p. 177)

With all the research stories about the harm done through school closings, we have an ethical obligation to do better and remembering can be one way to do so.

## CHAPTER EIGHT: RETHINKING STORIES WE TELL ABOUT SCHOOLS

My hope is that artwork and written portraits in Chapters Five and Six will serve as an archive of their own. The stories I tell here are borne from participants remembering the schools with me. I have made their voices central, inviting the reader to think through the interconnectedness of race and class as related to education and housing, through a study of school closure in Chicago. The stories of how the communities fought against the closings are not new stories. The district-designed closing process devalued their voices and experiences while the traces linger in the records and sit within the people most impacted. The stories are hidden in the palimpsests of school closure and revealed by the ghosts and hauntings of the schools if we choose to listen. Participants voiced a desire to tell their stories and their emotions were fresh, this many years later.

Presenting counternarratives through remembering and storytelling, such as in Chapters Five and Six with the participants, invites others to think about school closure differently and to examine the “trueness” of the stories we tell about schools that are closed. The rememberings illustrate community cultural wealth *in the face of* district, city, state, and federal educational policies and practices that reproduce uneven distribution and declare low-income, students of Color as not worthy of the educational resources they need to thrive. This systemic racism manifests in schools serving public housing students that are “run on a shoestring,” with generations of disinvestment and neglect. And when patterns are evident of enrollment shifts in Black and Latino/a neighborhoods over time and align with housing policies and urban renewal initiatives, it is time that we acknowledge and remember the stories communities have told for years and the demands made for a seat at the table. Kirshner and Pozzoboni (2011) offer suggestions for engaging youth and reframing the narratives put forth by the district when schools are faced with closure, underscoring the need to authentically partner with those most affected by such school actions.

By recasting the stories of the schools through artmaking and storytelling, I acknowledge the past that is always and already in the present. Through remembering, the participants point to the lasting human-level impact of school closure. These stories work to disrupt the dominant narrative of school

closure that is district-driven, historically and geospatially disconnected, and framed in commonsenseness. These acts of remembering can help us reimagine solutions to the persistent inequities that manifest in urban schools. They ask us to rethink the stories we tell about schools—how we tell them, what stories we listen for, which stories we value, and what influence haunts have in our storytelling. And by we, I mean fellow researchers, fellow educators, fellow parents, fellow White people. As we continue to take up places of power in a variety of spaces, how does our storytelling matter?

People who live in urban spaces in the US move through neighborhoods in ways interrelated to schools and school closure whether we are directly involved in a particular school or not. We rent or buy property, move from one living space to another, travel through neighborhoods on our way to work or events. We engage (or not) in politics in ways that relate to school closings. And as we talk with others about all of this, we often tell stories about schools, even if we do not know that we are storytelling. These are stories that we curate from what we notice, meanings we make, our own personal experiences, as well as stories that we have heard from others. We know from other research stories (Phillippo, 2019; Roseboro & Thompson, 2014; Waitoller, 2020) that the stories we tell about schools and neighborhoods are powerful things that influence the choices families make about schools.

I wrote in the introduction about researchers being complicit in the stories of harm told about schools. I provided a literature review in Chapter 3 on the stories we tell about schools. Tuck (2009) speaks to this notion of researchers casting schools where majority marginalized families attend as always and already damaged. This is certainly the ways in which Andersen and Schiller were understood by the district—spaces filled with people who were not worthy of investment or resources. Outside partnerships filled in the gap to the success stories of some, but also on the premise that the schools and people were broken.

From this work, I ask how we can rethink not only the stories of school closure through the rememberings offered by the participants and my work, but how can we rethink the stories we tell about schools in a larger sense, the stories that inform what meanings we make about schools and urban education. What responsibilities do we have as researchers to do better storytelling and what might that

look like in different spheres? How can the stories we tell through research practices inform larger conversations outside of academia in more effective ways?

French social psychologist Erika Apfelbaum suggests that public intellectuals turn our attention to ‘awaken’ a sense of injustice in those with material and cultural power; those who do not feel the pain of injustice in their bellies; those who often refuse the knowledge and dare not listen. To this end, she invites social researchers to tell: ‘{T}he imperative to tell—the vital urge to not forget—... contains an injunction to the ‘awakening of others’. (Fine, 2006, p. 86)

We certainly do a lot of research on school closure; these are not new stories nor is this a gap in the literature. It does beg the question: why are we still (considering) closing schools with so much research pointing to the harm and unfulfilled hopes of such moves? There are so many stories (research and otherwise) that speak to the harm done when the fibers between neighborhoods and schools are severed.

I do not think that the gap between research and practice or policy is an unfamiliar issue nor do I think that the research world holds the answers to difficult, complex issues. I argue that one lever we have is to shift our storytelling and that requires us to learn to listen differently. As much as this argument rests in the academic world, my presentation choices and form in this dissertation examines the stories about schools we—parents, community members, policymakers and enactors—tell about school. How might we become more aware of the racialization of those stories? What are the different conversations about race that we can join? What histories are present in the stories we tell that we may or may not be cognizant of engaging with?

Most research is written with an “as if” contract assumed between researcher and audience—I’m objective and you’re objective; we’re both “watching” society in the making; I won’t discomfort, only inform, you. As with some pieces of art or performances, we may think about writing research in ways that move readers to think through implications, actions, collusion, social responsibility, and social imagination (see Roberts, 2004 on the IOSJ website). (Fine, 2006, p. 102)

With this project refusing that distant gaze and by inviting you on this research journey, I hope you feel any discomfort needed to reconsider the commonsenseness of school closures. And by considering Anderson and Daya's (2022) argument that "questions of memory, and memories themselves, should take up more space in the discourses of inclusive and just cities that are currently, and rightly, animating urban studies" (p. 1690), these portraits of remembering present an invitation into the hauntings all around us in Chicago and elsewhere.

So much of educational research rests in bearing witness to historical trauma, even if that is not the intended focus of the work. With the obligations of bearing witness—the acknowledgment, remembrance, and consequence (Simon & Eppert, 1997, p. 181)—we are asked to think beyond the academic exercise of our research, but to think about what are the implications not only of our findings but of how we tell our research stories and to whom? What agency do we encourage or hope for from our reader? One consequence of bearing witness is telling our research stories, the ones that are to be told, in ways that engage with the power of aesthetics, or partner with people who tell stories in ways that are accessible—journalists, artists, writers, teachers, people who engage with storytelling in very deliberate, and creative, ways. Another possible consequence of researchers bearing witness is that we open ourselves to the hauntings and ghosts asking us to engage with the past in the present. This means thinking about hauntings as a *relationship* we have with places, such as schools that have been closed, versus the places simply being a primed space for specters.

If the haunting of place is less a question of the particular attributes of a place and more a question of the sort of relation we have with those attributes then we can begin to sense an alternative to the reading of hauntedness as assuming a particular aesthetic...(Trigg, 2012, p. 324)

Our humanness is the conduit for hauntings—it is through the places and memories attached to those places that we feel the supernatural at work. And isn't it relations to a place that the portraits of remembering lay bare, the meaning of the schools to the people and community that was never accounted for by the district?

## **Beyond School Closure**

There was a period of time as I was developing the proposal for this project when I would say, both out of clarity and confusion, that this project was not really about school closings. I got sideways looks and nods of understanding, with not much more advancement with what this really means. I was grappling with a few things that I will lay out in this next section, important considerations for this work and things with which I continue to grapple.

I have become deeply committed to the storytelling and the remembering, with the detours I have taken. Considering all the insight provided through the conversations and the other research that built up to writing the portraits, this is also a story of gentrification. This is a story of neoliberal urban renewal. This is a story of dedicated teachers and administrators in education. This is a story of community partnerships. This is a story of heart and soul, of building relationships. This is a story of the political machine. This is a story of a lineage of school actions against schools that serve low-income families. This is a familiar story of historical racial and class trauma. This is a story of generational roots in schools. This is a story of ebbs and flows in cities, and the policies that drive that movement. This is a story of the Great Inversion<sup>75</sup>.

Lawrence-Lightfoot points to the importance of particular stories as avenues through which we make meaning about the world more generally (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis, 1997). Fine (2006) cites other scholars in a call for methods that have data collection at the individual case level and data analysis at the structural level. As we dive deep into the particular stories, we must understand them in the contexts and structures and include that in our analysis and storytelling. Stories of schools that were closed are also stories of so many other aspects of urban fabrics and racialized histories; they cannot be separated.

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<sup>75</sup> See [Ehrenhalt, 2012](#).



## Learning to Listen

How might learning to listen for stories in particular ways meet the obligations we have to families who have taken the brunt of our broken, always, already damaged housing and educational policies?

We need to learn to listen *for* the stories (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis, 1997) from communities and those connected that are directly influenced by the educational policies that lead to actions like opening and closing schools.

We need to be open to the power of the aesthetics within those stories to further understand the impacts of school closure and this requires a reading of spaces, of buildings that is more than space utilization numbers and budget lines and school ratings.

Learning to listen for the stories requires practicing and developing a keen sense to notice things like the traces left behind when a school is closed. But it is also more than that, it is about being open and noticing the liminal spaces between what is being told, the words that are said. Simon and Eppert (1997) describe this as “double attentiveness,” differentiating between the *said* and the *saying*. When we listen to what is said, we are limited to the words, the transcripts we make, the seen record. When we learn to listen *for* stories that are masked over or learn to notice the traces of something that is absent, it is also about noticing the *saying*. When we listen *for*, we note the weight of a silent pause, we feel the heartbreak of a sigh, we see the angst behind unfinished sentences. We include the aesthetics of what is said through the act of saying. “Apfelbaum asks us to theorize not only the speaking but the listening; to think through the conditions under which relatively privileged people are willing to hear and act on oppression” (Fine, 2006, p. 87).

## Get Haunted

I write this chapter to put forth a call to get haunted. As much as ghosts and hauntings demand our attention, it is up to us—researchers, policymakers, community members (however that gets defined or bound), and educators to learn to listen in different ways when the specters tap on our shoulders. We

have choices when we are haunted—we can refuse to believe in ghosts and essentially turn away from the traces we might see if we were more open. Alternatively, we can lean in and recognize the haunting and engage with the ghosts. Doing so conditions us to notice more (which takes practice), taking cues from artists and writers. It is in being open to the agency extended through the hauntings that we hone our listening and noticing skills.

*“To be haunted... An agency takes over, whose powers are visible only through the trembling of nearby walls and yet wholly felt within the depths of our bodies... We feel the room slowly vibrate with its own past, the tension in the walls exhaling within our chest cavities. It is as though a voice becomes nearer, felt in the present, and manifests indirectly through being lodged in space. But the voice speaks inaudible words, and its desires cannot be resolved. Can we speak of things still being ‘here’ in this visitation? The room speaks, yet no one speaks behind it. The chairs rattle, yet nothing is moving them. And then there is the nothingness. Silence... Only then, in the brink of an incipient absence, do we realize that, all along, we were never alone. (Trigg, 2012, pp. 288–289, italics are author’s)*

What stories have we missed all along when we have not been open to noticing that tension in the walls, the ways in which a room speaks? What classrooms speak and we only hear the present-silence when we do not know the history of the school actions that have been enacted over time on a school within a particular building?

This is not an ask that is out-of-this-world, but one that is bound in a belief that the everyday spaces are already and always haunted, if we choose to notice and engage. Trigg (2012) names the “multifarious relationship” between hauntings and place, pointing to the ability for mundane places, such as supermarkets and childhood homes to haunt us (p. 321). They note that ghosts do not relegate themselves to the spaces stereotypically connected to spooks but follow humans into their everyday lives: “... the experience of being haunted, of sensing ghosts, and communing with the undead is a particular manner of being-in-the-world rather than an abnormal deviation from the world” (Trigg, 2012, p. 295).

We do not need to enter scary spaces to find the ghosts, they will (and have) come to us and tell us that there is work to be done (Ewing, 2018; Gordon, 2008).

Thus, the ghost occupies a particular relationship with the place it haunts, in the process of articulating its desires in and through space. In this way, the ghost's dwelling-in-place shatters the linearity of time, its legacy one of repetition and returning. Beyond the ambiguity of its presence, the very sighting of the ghost makes one thing clear: *Its work is not yet done*. (Trigg, 2012, pp. 319–320)<sup>76</sup>

The ways in which the participants in this study remembered the schools says there is something to be done, the hauntings tell us that the stories of the schools matter in a way that there is work to be done through the ghosts.

What happens when we value the aesthetics of both place and of the stories being told? What stories are told through artwork and images, maps and charts?

For me, for this project, the texture and nature of the signage at Andersen was one of the first hauntings that took my attention. Additionally, as I remembered my time at Schiller, that medium blue hue was lodged in my brain and seemed to be an anchor for traces of my experience there. I ask you—what have you noticed (or not noticed) that might be a ghost engaging with you? “When our everyday experiences are disturbed by an agency from another time and place, then the thing that comes to us does so deliberately” (Trigg, 2012, p. 289). What stories linger behind the hauntings you have yet to notice in your everyday movements through different places and spaces?

Fine (2006) urges us to do research that “positions the readers as audiences of responsibility and agency” (p. 102). I argue we are all complicit in the dominant narrative around school closure as long as we do not work to disrupt it.

I revisit my invitation in the Preface to go on this research journey with me as much as you have through my writing about it. “In a word, we are already in the midst of what haunts us long before that

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<sup>76</sup> also see Ewing, 2018, p. 154; Gordon, 2008, p. 194.

effect vibrates through us” (Trigg, 2012, p. 289). I put forth this call to get haunted—to engage in conversations about school closure in ways that draw from the large body of research and look to those who center the aesthetics in their work. How are we historicizing the present to make more critical sense of the present-past?

## AFTERWORD

I have been haunted by the task of doing right by my participants with this research, as we should be as researchers. Despite my intentionality and thoughtfulness, I made mistakes—there are parts that I would do differently—and mistakes that I am not even aware of yet but will come to light as folks engage with this work in the future. The ethics of critical research are heavy and sometimes telling a story does more harm than good, while sometimes not telling a story does more harm. I took a risk to tell these stories in this way because it felt like the right way to pay attention to the hauntings and engage with the ghosts that were taking my attention.

But I am also haunted by doing this work in a way that does right by all the children yet to move through our educational systems. None of this has a clear path. I have done a lot of “inventing” along the way, while there are many who have provided heroic and bold models in the research world and the more creative realms like where artists and writers do their work. By laying bare the conversations I had with my participants, I took risks that rested on my intention that I was framing this work in a way that speaks to racial and class justice, with certain assumptions. Sometimes I think I need to be more provocative, which I do not think I am very good at, while other days I feel like this work does well to engage in the ways I had hoped. I am not sure how it will be taken up and by whom. That is part of the not-knowing with any creative work, actually.

It also feels important to talk about transparency and the different ways in which community engagement happens, whether by design or not. That gets examined in this work a little and by others with whom I am discussing my research. I am eager to have future conversations about community engagement and future engagement with communities. The defining of who is *the community*? That needs more attention too.

No one from Andersen or Schiller schools came to me and asked me to do this research, my participants came to me through my recruitment moves. I have grappled with why I did not design more of a “pure” PAR project (and why I feel the need to grapple with that), what it might look like if I did.

That type of participatory action research (PAR) work is crucial in so many ways, work like Michelle Fine and others do. But this is not that. This started from my tangible haunting, an insistence for my attention, both artistically and academically. I felt a pull that I needed to do this project in this way. It became participatory once folks responded to my call.

I am accountable to my participants in this work, while the audience—those who I hope will read it—is much broader. I wrote these stories for people who are not attached to the schools to read, to disrupt what they may too easily accept as the stories of school closure from the dominant narrative. I hope I have complicated their thoughts a little with these stories. I hope others get to know Andersen and Schiller through the stories remembered and curated here, specifically people with power who make or influence policies that close schools.

This project worked largely how I had hoped it would, so far, and I am satisfied with the feedback I received from participants to date. Those who engaged in further conversation about what I wrote were critical and encouraging, voicing satisfaction as well. I am grateful for the feedback they gave that led to important changes to the narratives and details. Yet I still hope that I did right by my participants and the children, families, staff, teachers, administration, and school community members of Andersen and Schiller. As with any rendering of a portrait, no matter how collaboratively created, this work is but one way to tell the stories of the schools.

I am left with a lot of wonderings around how this all went down and will reverberate further. As a White person searching out people connected to schools that served mostly children who were Black or Latino/a, did my nervousness in connecting with someone of another race whom I did not previously know hinder the process? Did I do ok talking about race with my participants and others? In contrast to the positive feedback I received from the participants, what meaning can I make from not hearing back from others? What did I learn with how I navigated the race and class boundaries in Chicago? I have so much more to learn and think about.

I feel honored and humbled to have had the conversations we did and to learn more about Andersen and Schiller through my participants' willingness to share space, time, and stories with me. I

hope I have used my privileged position to bear witness in a way that has some consequence for the future of our public schools.

Stories are so very powerful.

# APPENDICES

## APPENDIX A: RESEARCH DESIGN SUMMARY

The research design for this project is very briefly summarized below. For a more detailed exploration of data collection and analysis, please refer Appendix E: Procedures.

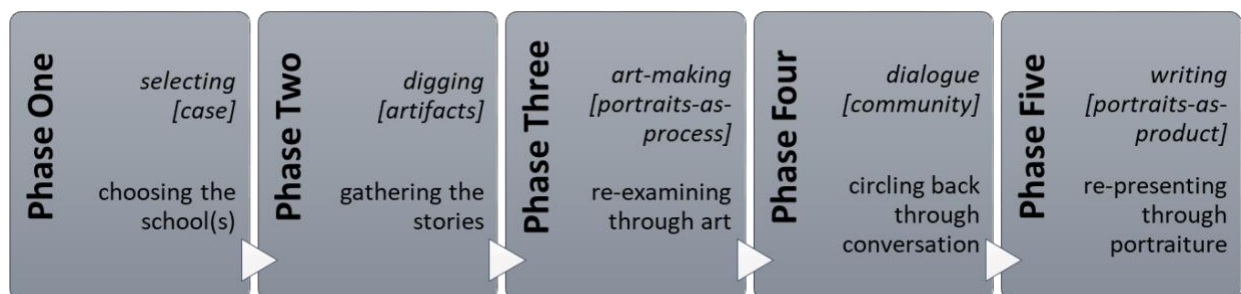
### Research Questions

This study addressed the following research questions:

1. What new insights about school closings could be inspired through restorying with a focus on aesthetics?
2. How can artistic research approaches serve to trouble the way we frame what it means to close a public school?

### Research Design

I organized this study into five phases that build from one another. Each phase employed different methods, while the entire research design was informed by portraiture as a methodology. The detailed accounting of what I did can be found in Table 13 in Appendix E. The final product was a written portrait of the participants and me remembering each school, foregrounding the community's perspective derived from the first four phases. Phases One, Two, Three, and Four draw from portraiture's consideration of context, relationship, and emergent themes, while all of the phases work toward the aesthetic whole of the final portraits.



**Figure 35:** The five phases of the study



The first phase of research centered on choosing two schools for the study and preliminarily looking at longitudinal demographic data of the schools. The second phase focused on gathering the narratives in historical artifacts from each of the chosen schools, which included time spent in the archives, news articles, and site visits. The third phase incorporated the art-making process as a way to recast the narratives gathered into a visual form for my own meaning-making and to use as a catalyst for conversations about school closure. The fourth phase circled back to the school communities for conversations with people who were a part of the schools. The fifth phase synthesized the research from the first four phases to result in rich, written portraits of remembering each school using a narrative writing voice. Each phase attended to data collection and analysis in ways that blurred together. The project started with digging into the past that is very present, with a *process+product* that invited a reconsideration and re-examination of what it means to close a public school.

## APPENDIX B: METHODOLOGY AND METHODS

This appendix is a working draft of a journal article with an aim of articulating an argument for my methods, pointing back to the theoretical underpinnings that inform my research choices. Because it is a draft of an article, you will read repeated phrases and sections from the main body of this dissertation.

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Working Title-

Consequential Methods: Reinventing Portraiture as “something to be done”<sup>77</sup>

This work has been supported by a dissertation grant from the Institute for Research on Race and Public Policy (IRRPP) at the University of Illinois Chicago (UIC), a dissertation fellowship from the National Academy of Education (NAEd) and the Spencer Foundation, the Graduate College Dean’s Scholar Fellowship at UIC, the Graduate College Image of Research Awards at UIC, and the Ann Lynn Lopez-Schubert Fellowship at UIC. I am thankful for the support.

(Introduction)

*It's in many ways haunted me the whole time...*

*I have so many thoughts and feelings about what I experienced, even the fact that you invited us here today...it's just really stayed with me this—this whole time.*

*- Olivia, connected to Andersen school, closed in 2011*

This methodological paper extends from my dissertation project where I engaged with the stories of two schools that were closed<sup>78</sup> in Chicago, Andersen and Schiller. I draw from Ewing’s (2018) and Gordon’s (2008) texts that illustrate the way in which something missing takes up space and has a presentness, guiding my engagement with the ghosts of the schools that were closed and my own

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<sup>77</sup> Gordon (2008) and Ewing (2018)

<sup>78</sup> Throughout this work, I shifted from “closed schools” to “schools that were closed” because the former seems to identify the school primarily with its closure, masking over the asset-based stories about the school and placing the locus of closing on the school itself, while the latter more accurately identifies the closing as an action enacted upon the school by another force, like the district.

hauntings. As a project that started with hauntings and palimpsests and originated with my attention being pulled by the aesthetics of Andersen's name inscribed in the stone lintels of the school building, I knew this work had to be centered on storytelling and aesthetics—what stories were left behind, how could those stories be recast in artistic ways to elicit conversations about school closure?

I want to note, though, that I put my methods in an appendix in my dissertation as a move to honor the narrative voice and flow of a creative non-fiction piece that my dissertation document has a whole product. I felt this unconventional move honored my aims more than placing my methods, which had a very academic tone, in the body of the work. It is as if my methods themselves dictated this subordinate placement because of the broader aims of the project, which included a commitment to sharing the stories of the schools with a broader audience than academic articles solicit. So although the methods are crucial, they are not central to the research story I aimed to tell.

It matters what took my attention first, and continued to haunt me until I could no longer ignore this work. I visited one of the schools several times before I noticed the ghosts of Andersen that are present and demanding attention. As the plastic signage announces the school as *LaSalle II*, which is the magnet school that was phased into the building as Andersen was being phased out, the name *Hans Christian Andersen Public School* hovers high, etched elegantly in the stone lintel at the top of the brick façade (see Figures 10 and 11). Andersen was closed in 2011 and its stories linger in the physical site, in the artifacts left behind, and in the remembering by school community members; these are the *palimpsests*<sup>79</sup> of school closure.

But furthermore, it was the **aesthetics** of what was left behind that took my attention—the contrast between old and new, the textures, the colors, all revealing the essence of the past in the present,

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<sup>79</sup> A *palimpsest* is literally the evidence of an old story on a manuscript page after it has been scraped off to make the animal hide useful for another story to be written. This term has also come to refer to “something that changed over time and shows evidence of that change,” see <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/palimpsest>. This term is also used in the architectural world to refer to evidence of old city structures that can shape the more modern city planning.

if we learn to notice. This origin of my hauntings through the aesthetics indicated that I needed to engage with methods that centered aesthetics to have conversations about school closure and to invite others to engage with my research stories.

Through creating visual art pieces from the archival data and using a narrative voice for the written portraits, I invited folks to pause and reflect on the power of storytelling and to reconsider the stories we tell about schools. Using Lawrence-Lightfoot's *portraiture* as a methodological structure, I took inspiration from Du Bois' *data portraits* and leaned into arts-based research traditions. Portraiture argues for stories that more than inform, but inspire (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis, 1997). The data portraits worked to disrupt the dominant narrative of Black Americans (Battle-Baptiste & Rusert, 2018). Arts-based methods invite meaning making through multiple inroads, for the reader/viewer and for the researcher (Barone & Eisner, 2012; Cahnmann-Taylor & Siegesmund, 2018). Through a braiding of these approaches, I created my own form of portraiture that values what all three hold important: telling a research story that is engages a broader audience through centering aesthetics.

Doing research with participants about school closures is doing research on historical trauma and injustices that are justified through a commonsenseness that drives a dominant deficit-based narrative about urban schools that are low-income and Black or Latino/a (McWilliams & Kitzmiller, 2019; Syeed, 2019). Simon and Eppert (1997) offer three obligations of bearing witness to historical trauma through testimonies—acknowledgement, remembrance, and consequence. Fine (2006) addresses the “questions of *methods*; to consider how we research injustice—what we study, with whom, how, and for what” through imagining a methods textbook that encourages researchers to tell research stories that “awaken” the reader as we bear witness (p. 84, italics author's). Greene (1995) calls for “imaginative capacity” in order to see things as they could be otherwise, arguing that “encounters with the arts have a unique power to release imagination” (pp. 19, 27). Although these scholars offer suggestions of what this might look like in their respective fields, I build on their arguments for “just methods” (Fine, 2016) by calling for consequential methods. I argue for methods that center aesthetics in our research and practices so we can tell research

stories that awaken the reader, meet our obligations of bearing witness, and resist the anesthetic-ness (Greene, 2007) that has masked over the stories offered up by the community.

I invite you to meander with me through the methodological lineage that I leaned on for my dissertation project, where my reinvention of portraiture is consequential to the testimonies I bore witness to. Some scholars I read in depth in preparation for the research design while others I encountered in the writing phase, finding validation and clearer articulation through their thinking. Through this meandering, I invite fellow researchers to reflect on the consequentiality of their methods and research design.

I have organized the paper to give a brief overview of the project and how portraiture, Du Bois's work, and arts-based research braided together to inform my work. I then engage with broader theoretical perspectives on what it means to do consequential work that inspires imaginative thinking. I end with my thinking on what centering aesthetics in our methods can do to engage imaginations around more just futures and what consequences that has for the research stories we tell. But first, I want to explore what I mean by aesthetics.

### **Aesthetics**

A basic definition of aesthetics is the beauty of things. This is insufficient to capture what I mean by aesthetics and what has drawn me into this work and inspired me to do the work in the way I have. I am using aesthetics in this work to mean the texture of things more precisely, and not just the feeling-type of texture, but the experiential and sensory texture. Aesthetics is the essence of things that the word beauty starts to get at; beauty has a value that comes with it from the viewer/experiencer. Things get declared as having beauty, which has a static nature to it. The aesthetic-ness of something, to me, includes beauty, but also includes for a person the process of being, becoming, interacting, connecting. Certainly experiences and connections can be described as beautiful, but there is something about aesthetics that means more than beauty. Aesthetics can make us ponder: what is the story behind that? Aesthetics are more than an imposed value of being visually or auditorily pleasing but are about the ways in which we get drawn into something. Aesthetics can serve as a catalyst for noticing, motivating, and remembering. Examples of aesthetics at play are: the smell of powdered rouge taking someone back to their memories

of grandma's embrace (aesthetics of memory); the name of a school etched into the stone lintel of a building (aesthetics of texture); a soundtrack to which one does their most productive work (aesthetics of music); the palpable energy in the room when three of us remembered Andersen school together (aesthetics of experience).

### **Portraiture + Du Bois + Arts-Based Methods**

*"I would just like the story to be told..."*

*- Mr. Patterson, teacher at Schiller school years before it closed*

My study was a two-year, multi-phased project in which I conducted a deep inquiry into two schools that were closed in Chicago. Leaning into the power of aesthetics, I paid close attention to the hauntings of the material traces left behind of the schools, and I also used visual arts as a tool to engage with people connected to the schools. Using the tenets of portraiture as my guide, I blended data visualization and arts-based methods through collaging and photography to reinvent portraiture. I created visual art pieces—*palimpsest portraits*—which I used as a conduit for conversations with people about school closings. I then compiled the stories I collected from the archives and the conversations to construct written narrative portraits—*portraits of remembering*—modeled after Lawrence Lightfoot's *The Good High School* (1983).

Lawrence-Lightfoot's portraiture is a way of approaching research that "bridges" the aesthetics of art with the empiricism of science (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Hoffmann Davis, 1997). The researcher systematically works through an inquiry that aims to develop a "probing, layered, and interpretive" *portrait* of their subject, produced as text or otherwise, that represents the subject's "essence," focusing on emerging themes and using the narrative form (p. 4). Key methodological questions for researchers using portraiture are: "How does this line of investigation inform (give shape to) the product—the developing portrait?" and "How does this mode of representation inform (clarify) the process—the developing understanding?" (p. 60). Throughout the research, the process and product shape each other as the researcher uses an aesthetic way of looking at their subject, such as an artist uses, while empirical

understanding drives the inquiry. I indicate this merging of process and product in my work as one term: *process+product*.

Portraiture includes the practice of “listening *for* a story” which positions the researchers as one who is actively searching for a story, not as a heavy-handed director of a scene but as someone who “participates in identifying and selecting the story, and helps to shape the story’s coherence and aesthetic” (pp. 12-13) while being receptive to the participants and their stories. The portraitist focuses on the narrative, in data collection and data analysis, as related to process and product. Because of this, and considering the use of metaphors and symbols that often appear in portraiture, the audience of the work is broad and “eclectic,” moving beyond “academy’s inner circle, to speak in a language that is not coded or exclusive, [developing] texts that will seduce the readers into thinking more deeply about issues that concern them. Portraitists write to inform and inspire readers” (p. 10).

The portraitist seeks to document and illuminate the complexity and detail of a unique experience or place, hoping that the audience will see themselves reflected in it, trusting that the readers will feel identified. The portraitist is very interested in the single case because she believes that embedded in it the reader will discover resonant universal themes... The reader—the perceiver—makes sense of the subject that is portrayed through his or her active interpretation of the portrait. This new interpretation of the subject on the part of the reader or perceiver can be thought of as a kind of reinterpretation. With each reinterpretation, it is as if the portrait is being recreated” (p. 14, p. 30).

Du Bois’ data portraits (see example in Figure 36) are a different form of portraiture that inspired my work because of the aesthetic appeal of his visuals. These graphics represent the critical sociological work done by Du Bois and his team at Atlanta University and put on display in 1900 in Paris. The beauty in their simplicity and the way visual design aspects help to convey the story being told both become a vehicle for disrupting the dominant narrative of the time. The data portraits tell the stories of the Black experience at this time from not only Du Bois’ perspective but re-present research findings in ways that value design aesthetics in the storytelling. There is something moving about the quantitative data being

displayed in a way that reveals the hand of the artist through the marker and pencil lines, a juxtaposition that argues for embedding aesthetics in the stories we tell through our research. More than a century later, the portraits serve as a conduit to learn and converse about that time in history, displaying the data in ways that engage and invite contemplation.

Du Bois' research is mostly quantitative in his data portraits, yet his understanding of aesthetics and storytelling through his graphic representation of the research left me in awe. In his portrait of Negro Businessmen in the US (see Figure 6) with red, green, yellow, blue and black blocks representing the quantity of each type of work, with grocers being the largest in yellow, but also seeing professions like publishers in the bottom green square and bankers in the small top red square. These are not arranged in any order but in one that is aesthetically pleasing to further the engagement and it is in these visual choices that you can see the quantitative differences in professions.

Using numerical data, visualization techniques, and an "artist's eye," Du Bois worked to upend the dominant narrative of Black folks in the US at the turn of the century through his portraits on a worldwide stage in Paris in 1900, understanding that his work to create a counternarrative was deeply political in nature (Battle-Baptiste & Rusert, 2018, pp. 19, 22, 43). His thoughtful design and sequencing of the plates that he and his team created speak to the macro and micro levels of consideration that he gave to context: the importance of the broad historical and cultural context of the US that informed the data collection, data analysis, and data presentation, but also the contextualization of the plates themselves within the exhibition.

Du Bois also understood the importance of the writer's voice and the power of the narrative form, venturing into lyrical writing (p. 33) and science fiction (pp. 7-8) beyond his academic writing. This also speaks to his motivation to expand the readership of his ideas, being "among the first great American public intellectuals whose reach extended beyond the academy to the masses" (p. 33). His work showcases the delicate balance so many arts-based researchers and portraitists strive for—a balance between the aesthetic and the science (Battle-Baptiste & Rusert, 2018, p. 34; Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis, 1997, p. 95). It was his own lived experience that motivated him to steer his work to tell a



particular story, an experience that was impossible to capture with standard quantitative scientific practices and presentations of the time.

Learning more about the traditions around arts-based methods and finding a few artists that were doing work that commented on social institutions guided me into artmaking with the initial data I collected from the archives, to engage with my concepts of hauntings and palimpsests. The art pieces I made—the palimpsest portraits—have a ghost-like appearance and offers a palimpsest-like layering of images and texts that are incomplete and fragmented (see Figure 37). Like hauntings and the “present-past” (Ferguson & Nichols, 2021), the artmaking often took on a life of its own, being truly experimental and falling into compositions that I could not plan out. I would start with a plan and had to embrace the not-knowing in so much of this work (Fisher & Fortnum, 2013).

Arts-based methods are quite varied, but often embrace more questions than answers and work to harness the power of the aesthetics to engage. Braiding portraiture with the inspiration I found in the data portraits along with the examples of arts-based research gave me a foundation for my methods that was grounded in not only informing but inspiring my viewer/reader, working towards disrupting the dominant, deficit-based narrative, and providing an invitation to a broader audience to think about the stories we tell about schools.

Arts-based research (ABR) is an approach to qualitative research that incorporates art-making into the research process. The art-making is more than a novel way to do things creatively, but speaks to the importance of the role artists play in our world through questioning and unmasking, according to Baldwin:

Society must accept some things as real; but he must always know that visible reality hides a deeper one, and that all our action and achievement rest on things unseen. A society must assume that it is stable, but the artist must know, and he must let us know, that there is nothing stable under heaven. One cannot possibly build a school, teach a child, or drive a car without taking some things for granted. The artist cannot and must not take anything for granted, but must drive to the heart of every answer and expose the question the answer hides. (Baldwin, 1962, p. 2)

Arts-based research provides more insight into the subject being studied than mainstream methods can. When we make research design choices that include arts-based methods, we do so because there is a higher value in choosing methods that are arguably more suited to calling into question the power dynamics persistent in both research approaches and the content being studied. These choices implicitly or explicitly disrupt traditional, positivist methods, while simultaneously complementing other critical research methods as both another piece of the larger puzzle and as a call to reconsider the shape of the puzzle pieces.

Barone and Eisner (2012) articulate the motivation to resist truth claims when engaging with arts-based methods:

the promotion of (at the least, momentary) disequilibrium—uncertainty—in the way that both the author/researcher and the audience(s) of the work regard important social and cultural phenomena. Instead of contributing to the stability of prevailing assumptions about these phenomena by (either explicitly through statement, argument, portraiture, or implicitly through silence or elision) reinforcing the conventional way of viewing them, the arts based researcher may *persuade* readers or percipients of the work (including the artist herself) to revisit the world from a different direction, seeing it through fresh eyes, and thereby calling into question a singular, orthodox point of view (POV). (p. 16)

When an inquiry is sensitively working into those spaces of human experiences, in my project on school closures, it is imperative that the research methods allow room for the “immeasurable.” Art often affords that.

The nature of the portraiture processes specifically designed for my project invited the self-reflection, narrative, and aesthetic approach to the inquiry of ghosts and hauntings from schools that were closed. The iterative, cyclical process of researching, studying, thinking, and analyzing, all while creating, reflecting, and organizing by centering the aesthetics underscores the notion that ABR scholars “do not *only* record data, they also *make it*” (Cahnmann-Taylor & Siegesmund, 2018, p. 5, italics authors').

## Theory and Imaginative Thinking

*“It was a very moving experience for me. And I always think of it as the most stark example of racism I’ve ever I’ve like seen in my life of just... it was just... it makes my heart sink when I think about it.” - Olivia*

These methodological approaches guided the ways I leaned into aesthetics to recast the stories of Andersen and Schiller schools. School closure is a form of historical trauma in cities like Chicago. Simon & Eppert (1997) argue that, as researchers and teachers, we have obligations when we bear witness to stories from people who have experienced historical trauma, which are acknowledgement, remembrance, and consequence. Michelle Fine (2006, 2016) argues for just methods that motivate reader agency and use forms that awaken the reader to upend the comfortable objectiveness of the researcher-reader relationship that often has no obligation attached to the work. Maxine Greene (1995, 2007) asks us to do work in ways that imagine otherwise, offering an opposition to the anesthetic-ness of facts and figures presented in research stories.

Specifically, I use Michelle Fine’s (2016) notion of *critical bifocality* because it brings into focus the complex and critical considerations needed to contextualize and historicize educational research beyond a surface-level retrospective. The contexts and histories of research stories, of school stories, and of neighborhood stories must include an analysis of the differential power structures that maintain and perpetuate the racialized and classed hierarchies in which we educate our young people in the US. Fine (2016) calls for a structural and historical analysis to contextualize research stories at all levels through critical bifocality, “a theory/method for interrogating history, structures, and lives that are often occluded by downstream analyses of outcomes, especially disparate outcomes used to demonstrate social inequality” (p. 350). One key obligation of critical bifocality is re-inscribing the historical and structural causes that have been erased from how we frame social inequalities—like urban school closures—to “revive the sense of possibility for those who still believe in lost causes including redistribution, recognition, and radical transformation” (p. 362). Using arts-based methods, I worked to “re-view the past, reframe the present, and reimagine the future” through my reinvention of portraiture (p. 350).

With this work, in addition to the invitation to reconsider the commonsenseness of school closure, I argue for research methods that center aesthetics in our research and practices. We need to tell research stories that awaken the reader, meet our obligations of bearing witness, and resist the anesthetic-ness that has masked over the stories from communities.

### **Centering Aesthetics**

*“Now to be honest, this might be the most that I talked about it outside of my close family.” – Mr. D*

The concept of the palimpsest dovetailed with the hauntings framework that created the larger frame for my project. Although serving as a conceptual foundation, thinking through what a palimpsest was and what it was doing for my thinking, my methodological approach became infused with a concrete application of the palimpsest as well.

The idea of the palimpsest started to nag me after I noticed the traces of school closure when I was supervising student teachers, specifically through the signage. I thought back to my literature degree and had to verify my thoughts on what a palimpsest was—yes, the old signage indicating the name of a former school *was* a palimpsest of the school in a building that now housed a different school under a different name.

I reflected on my noticings through writing: at two school sites I was familiar with, I suddenly noticed a contrast between old and new signage. Ariel Community Academy was formerly Shakespeare School and LaSalle II was formerly Hans Christian Andersen, according to the names scripted into the stone lintels. Once I noticed the names of the former schools in this way, I could not stop thinking: What were the stories of the schools that were closed? How had the process happened and what forces were at play, with one school closing and one school opening in the same physical space? What did it mean that I had so easily missed the signage on previous visits but then could not shake the demand for my attention once I did notice? What was it about the aesthetics of the signage that intrigued me so? I started to tune into the *palimpsests of schools that were closed*. It became hard to *not* notice these palimpsests of schools that no longer existed (Ferguson & Nichols, 2021).

The aesthetic contrast seemed significant and underscored the decision to use a methodology that reflected such: *Ariel Community Academy* was signed through a stand-alone block marquee with blue basic letters at the corner of the lot sitting parallel to the building facade while *Shakespeare Public School* lingered high on the building's front facade, stamped into the stone in capital letters, sandwiched in the middle of tall windows on the second and third floors. *LaSalle II* was signed by an electric marquee, but more intimately by large white block letters on a contrasting purple background, one letter per rectangle, above the main door while *Hans Christian Andersen Public School* still showed in a stylized font on the stone lintel high up on the outer brick wall. Ariel was not one of the schools for this study but highlights how the palimpsests of school closure took my attention throughout the city at various sites beyond the two I chose to study.

From this concept of the palimpsest, I developed *palimpsest portraits* through a pilot study in early 2021. Palimpsests have a haunting quality, a quality that invites a revisitation of the past while remaining in the present. All the things that make up the palimpsests of schools that were closed—the signage, the media stories, the transcripts of the public hearings, the photographs left behind, the memories within the people connected to the schools—demand attention to and engagement with the stories of schools that were closed.

### ***Palimpsest Portraiture***

In the middle phase of my project, I took the data I collected from my demographic and archival inquiries into the schools and created *palimpsest portraits*. This process was a way to make sense of what I had found and to prepare for the conversations I was going to have with people about the schools. Artmaking became both process and product—*process+product*—to tell the stories through a different medium, working towards a gestalt (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Hoffman Davis, 1997, p. 244, p. 280).



**Figure 36:** Thumbnails of Palimpsest Portraits (Ulrich Papczun, 2023b; 2023c)

I organized, combined, selected, and sorted the scant, incomplete, often shadowy images and descriptions of the schools I found in my digging to prepare for building the visual-art portraits. I recast the palimpsests of the schools to create compositions using collaging, photography, and image transfer techniques. I layered images and text excerpts onto acrylic plates using acrylic medium to create the *palimpsest portraits*— visual compositions I devised to present the traces and evidence left behind of the schools in aesthetically pleasing ways that were consistent with my choice to frame this work around the concept of the palimpsest and hauntings.

The archival data I gathered included narratives that played a role in the school closing process, as well as other narratives I dug up about the school in other contexts, which are racialized and classed stories (Ahmed-Ullah, 2013; Allweiss et al., 2015; NBC 5 Chicago, 2013). The choices I made for selecting text excerpts and images for the art compositions serves as a coding process, or a way of breaking down the data collected into smaller, more manageable “bits” that can be analyzed, organized, and categorized (Miles et al., 2020), while the choices I made for the art composition also drove the organization and categorization of the data.

Using aesthetic sensibilities (an “artist’s eye,” Lawrence-Lightfoot & Hoffman Davis, 1997) to filter the data during the artmaking created a product that has opportunities to engage with an audience beyond academics and welcomes meaning-making around the narratives collected (Barone & Eisner, 2012, p. 16, p. 56; Cahnmann-Taylor & Siegesmund, 2018, p. 248, p. 255). I used the visual art I created

as a catalyst for conversations with people who were connected to the schools, but also as a visual component of the final written portraits. When viewing art, we often connect to our own stories, our own experiences, and engage with our own schemas to make meaning (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Hoffman Davis, 1997, p. 213). As the artist-researcher, I continually make meaning as I make art, constantly reflecting and re-examining my own ever-developing understandings as a parent, an educator, a researcher, an artist, and a Chicagoan, in addition to my racial and class positionality as a White middle-class woman, living in an urban setting.

The process of *palimpsest portraiture* engages the methods of portraiture described earlier, while also relying on art-based research methods, to create artistically rendered portraits from the fractured, disjointed, incomplete evidence left behind—the palimpsests—of schools that were closed. These pieces of evidence of schools that have been closed, such as the scripted names on the stone lintels, are the ghosts and hauntings which linger after the school is closed. The concept of a palimpsest is a micro-level way to understand how the aesthetics of these ghosts and hauntings appear. By investigating, digging, gathering, and recompiling the narratives from these palimpsests connected to the school closings, the art is translucent, imperfect, layered, and nebulous both in the process of making and as the resulting product—process+product.

I encountered the process of making art this way through a blog titled Instructables, from an artist going by “leftmusings.” She calls her approach to art “sculpting the unsettling,” which is a fitting way to describe the temperamental quality of the process and product. This art process requires multiple steps of capturing and recasting images and texts: I found the images or texts, printed them, scaled and cropped them for the composition, photocopied them, and then transferred them to the acrylic plates. The technique is imprecise and inconsistent, as well as iterative, and results in a layered collage that is consistent with the metaphor of a palimpsest.

The art pieces are imperfect, imprecise, temperamental, unpredictable, and inexact, leaning into the nuances and complexities embodied in this research. The essence of the art reflects the ghostly and palimpsest concepts of the project.

### *Narrative Portraiture*

The final phase of my project was to craft narrative portraits informed by the data collected in the previous phases— the longitudinal demographic data, the archival data, the site photos, and the artwork. I searched out people who had been connected to the two schools I was studying to have conversations with. I focused this part of my research design on convening group conversations<sup>80</sup>, working to bring people together to remember the schools and share their stories. I included myself in the conversations as more than a participant-observer, readily sharing my perspectives and experiences with school closure.

I spoke with five people connected to Andersen and five people connected to Schiller. Additionally, I spoke with a host of other people not connected to the schools directly but who filtered through my art-making space on campus and intentionally or unintentionally talked with me about the schools through the art. For the group conversation, I hosted three people from one school— a student from the 1990s, a student who was attending the school during the closure in 2011, and a staff member from an elected official’s office over breakfast in my art-making space on campus for a two-hour conversation.

This group conversation was the most in line with the hopes for the project. Participants expressed a deep need to revisit their memories of the school, two of the three brought artifacts to share unsolicited, and they engaged with each other in a way that was very moving and emotional. Methodologically, the larger design of the project seemed to be successful in finding and honoring the stories from the group conversation participants. Each expressed a deep appreciation for the shared space to surface their memories and a haunting desire to attend to their experiences with the school. Some of these sentiments appeared in the phone and Zoom conversations, but this seemed to be a particularly poignant part of the in-person group conversation. Majority of the phone and Zoom conversations were

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<sup>80</sup> It is interesting to note that I shifted from “community conversations” to “group conversations” as part of this work has troubled how I was using the term “community.”



shorter than my in-person conversations. The participants seemed more distracted<sup>81</sup> and the conversations were not nearly as generative in general. Two key parts of two of the in-person conversations I had contributed to the richness when compared to the shorter phone conversations— the artwork as a conduit, as I had hoped, and hosting the conversations in my art-making space, which was the Make Good Lab<sup>82</sup> in the College of Education at the University of Illinois- Chicago.

While talking with participants, I was very intentional to frame these as conversations, differentiating between the moves made in an interview versus a conversation<sup>83</sup>. This intentionality worked to build trust and provided a platform to be very open about my theoretical and conceptual framing. It also kept the work centered on stories. As the researcher, this directed micro-level decisions while I was facilitating the conversations, where I would make internal decisions about how to move the conversation forward if it stagnated, such as sharing a bit of my own experience with school closings or by offering up some piece of information that displayed my understanding of teaching in Chicago Public Schools. Another move I would make would be to validate what they had shared with what I had read in the literature. Conversations also allow for a variety of avenues and further connections, and all participants agreed that they would be open, most eagerly interested in reading the drafts of my narratives at a later date. Interviews certainly can be reciprocal interactions, but using conversations as a structure worked toward disrupting the power dynamic between the researcher and the researched, as well as allowing a moment for me to ask them what they would like out of our conversations.

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<sup>81</sup> One participant admitted to shopping on Amazon during our conversation on the phone, but curiously shared then that the school address from 2011 was still one of her addresses in her Amazon account and used the interjection to further lament the loss of the school.

<sup>82</sup> The Make Good Lab is a makers' space that opened in 2019. I express my appreciation for being granted a space there throughout 2022-2023 in which to create and think and converse. I did offer my participants the option of a public library meeting room to avoid the power dynamics of hosting on campus Logistics and schedules put us on campus, and I was unaware, prior to the conversation, of just how much of a role the art-making space played in the generative nature of the connections. I hope to write about that in the future.

<sup>83</sup> The terms interview or focus groups were used in recruiting after the IRB required the terms.

I then coded the conversations according to the patterns and themes that resonated throughout, consistent with portraiture (see the section on Lawrence-Lightfoot's portraiture) to prepare to draft the narrative portraits. Lawrence Lightfoot does not describe any explicit coding, but I use the term to broadly describe how I sorted and organized the stories I collected, to compile the composite written portrait of the two schools.

After several drafts, revisions, and sending a draft to my participants, I crafted the narratives using Miller's (2021) braided essay form from the literary world, weaving together field notes, participant quotes, and dialogue of our research conversations.

### **On Generalizability**

In qualitative social science research, researchers-in-training (doctoral students) are warned to not generalize from specific cases. We dive deep into the particulars and are told to be sure to state that that is what it is—a particular story that we can learn from, but not scientifically available to be applied to any general statement about the world. We argue for the importance of context and situate each story in their unique set of circumstances. We are to leave the generalizing to larger sets of data, more quantitative studies that have control groups to which outliers or norms can be connected. Leave that work to the people who design protocols where other scientists can replicate the methods and procedures, make sweeping claims, tell the broader research stories of schools with validation built in.

And I thought through what part of this larger research world these stories became. I included in my proposal a justification for the “scientific-ness” of my approach, a critique of the methodology, and the ways in which this work is considered credible against normative ideas of research (like validation and generalizability). There is always tension between creating a claim of credibility by using conventional, traditional research approaches as a standard and arguing how experiences and memories—remembering—are credible knowledges, and having that credibility be an assumption that then needs no justification because it is a given belief of the work.

But what of these specific stories about Andersen and Schiller? These are stories of the particular schools and particular rememberings by a handful of people connected to the schools. I explored in

Chapter Three the stories we tell about schools and the uncanny patterns throughout the literature—school closure has become a generalizable approach to universal challenges that manifest in particular—urban, low-income—schools. Do I expect that others can replicate this project in any way? Do I think I can make general statements about school closure from this particular inquiry into two schools?

In my proposal, I skirted around this idea that others could borrow a similar approach, get similarly aesthetic results versus the same “findings.” I look to Lawrence-Lightfoot (1997) who points out that we turn to unique stories in fiction, film, and art to understand more generally the world in which we live. We often generalize from the particular in ways that positive science would frown upon. And I want to propose more thinking around what generalizability has done for educational research and what it can do if we think about it in qualitative work like this, around particular stories. We are not to generalize and yet the stories I heard in the rememberings do seem to sum up a familiar experience around school closures, from my own experience and conversations I had, and from the literature I read.

Fine (2006) suggests we turn to Greene’s notion of “provocative generalizability” when leaning into work that embraces the aesthetics. In arguing for work that provokes an aesthetic experience, provocative generalizability refers to researchers’ attempts to move their findings toward that which is not yet imagined, not yet in practice, not yet in sight (see Roberts, 2004). This form of generalizability offers readers an invitation to launch from our findings to what might be, rather than only understanding (or naturalizing) what is. (p. 100)

This becomes work that is reflective and open, work that is in opposition to “the numbing pain produced by anesthetic” facts and figures, and what gets generalized is the standard of moving readers to act (p. 100).

### **On Accuracy**

After thinking through generalizability, it feels necessary to discuss the idea of accuracy with this work. In my dedication to storytelling and remembering, I want to at least address this notion. This work is simply not about checking any accounts for accuracy, but about the connections and memories about the experiences of the participants. It is important for the stories to be true according to the tellers. Simon

and Eppert offer an illustration of what any verifiable distortion in remembering means. They suggest that we do not discard judging testimonies for authenticity but that we use the “double attentiveness” to ensure that we are not discounting or discarding stories that have inaccuracies in them as invalid.

The story goes that a survivor of the Holocaust recounted her experience at a concentration camp with specific details, recalling explosions from multiple chimneys, and naming elements that put the memory during a documented uprising or resistance by Jewish people. Her story was presented at a conference by Laub (the researcher), and then was refuted as inaccurate, and thus not credible, by historians in the audience who knew the details of such an event. The number of chimneys remembered were wrong and the uprising was a failure in which no one survived. The historians insisted facts must be reported accurately or revisionists would discredit stories of the Holocaust; the woman’s account of the event was inaccurate enough to be refuted considering the historical facts available. Laub’s view was in opposition to the historians, as her recounting of it spoke to the “totalizing experience” of being at Auschwitz (Simon & Eppert, 1997, p. 181).

At issue here is not simply that there are two different responses to the women's testimony, but rather that witnessing her testimony gives rise to serious and incommensurate claims integral to the instantiation of her testimony within the formation of historical memory. This incommensurability is an irresolvable conflict, as no rule of judgement applies to both arguments; it is a difference (or "differend" [Lyotard, 1988]) that marks the topography of obligation required to witness testimonies of historical trauma. (Simon & Eppert, 1997, p. 183)

### **Consequences for Research Stories**

*“Andersen is a great school, and now you just don’t seem to care... could it be because of the kids who go to Andersen versus your kids and what your kids look like?” - Olivia*

And so I go back to these obligations of bearing witness to stories of historical trauma from Simon and Eppert, where they ask us to acknowledge the past, remember it in a variety of ways, and to have some sort of consequence to the bearing witness. I have thought a lot about this, and, honestly, I

need to think more about it- the consequences of this type of work in relation to the obligations that come with it. What are the consequences of leaning into the aesthetics with research like this?

For me, the consequence comes in a few ways, maybe implications can get substituted there. One consequence of these methods is that a broader audience is reached, giving more reach to the historicization of the schools sites. More people out in the public can be prompted to rethink the stories that we tell about schools, the stories that directly impact how neighborhoods are perceived and schools are chosen in this paradigm of school choice.

Another consequence through the artmaking, which I have called palimpsest portraiture, is that I, as a researcher, found new ways of categorizing and organizing the data I collected through an artistic lens. This taps into the psyche in ways that non-artistic approaches do not and as being so interpretive, invite further interpretation without any single truth claims from findings.

The consequence of culminating this work as narrative portraits, or portraits of remembering is also one of detours and learning to listen. By taking on this work through these methods, I detoured into portraits of remembering, not portraits of the schools as I intended. I set out to find stories about the schools, made the artwork with a form of coding, had a dozen conversations, coded the transcripts to name the stories within the conversations. Through this process, all the stories came back to remembering. I considered what work is done through remembering something that is no longer here, but is still very present, like a school that has been closed.

I don't think I would have encountered the same detour or learned to listen for the stories of remembering if I had not centered the aesthetic nature of the work. Simon and Eppert talk about the importance of the saying versus what is said—the aesthetics of the act of saying the words. So when we collect data as researchers, we can train ourselves to listen for the pauses, the unfinished sentences, the downcast eyes as the saying, the aesthetics of what is said. As I transcribed the conversations and relistened to the audio recordings, the essence of the remembering could only be reproduced with a narrative writing voice where I could narrate the pauses and unfinished sentences, giving shape to the aesthetics of our conversations.

## ***Embracing Not Knowing***

There is a special aspect of this methodological approach that requires that the researcher become comfortable with and welcome *not knowing* throughout the process. Of course, in educational research, we often do not know things or are in search of answers to things we do not know; yet this is not what I mean by *not knowing*. I lean into Fisher and Fortnum's (2013) collection of essays by artists— *On Not Knowing: How Artists Think*— to unpack what it means to *not know* while doing this type of research. Oftentimes, artists start a process without knowing what the end will be and sometimes not reaching an “end.” I find myself colloquially calling my dissertation “a true experiment,” while Fisher and Fortnum name it as “thinking through doing” (preface). I am referring to the abyss that artists (and others) often jump into when starting their work, framing the not knowing as a generative and productive space versus a problem to be solved or a space in which to fill with knowledge found. The authors' collection of essays points to the “largely negative lexicon” associated with not knowing.

Where knowledge is positive, the *unknown* is often simply its opposite: it is *uncertain*, *invisible*, *incomprehensible*. *Not knowing* represents a lack or absence, inadequacy to be overcome.

However the essays, conversations, and case studies gathered together here describe a kind of liminal space where *not knowing* is not only not overcome, but sought, explored and savoured; where failure, boredom, frustration, and getting lost are constructively deployed alongside wonder, secrets, and play. (preface)

The editors name a gendering that happens, too. “Historically, even the knowing subject has traditionally been gendered as male, thus aligning not knowing and its negative connotations with the other, female” (p. 13). Flipping this on its head, the artist embraces a “pedagogy of the not known” that demands a rethinking of normative learning and “brings to light gaps in our understanding” (pp. 136-140); it is not a quest to fill those gaps with knowledge but *to be* or *become* within them.

James Baldwin (1962) writes about using creativity to uncover the questions that our answers have masked. This notion of embracing an approach that does not work toward clearer or better answers, but refuses a path toward a defined answer, underscores the ways in which research “answers” might

detour avenues towards ways of knowing, covering up valuable insights and stories through a quest for that which is measurable and standard in the research world (Fisher and Fortnum, 2013).

Although the institutional re-inscription of art as a form of learning and research has become a way of recuperating art's commodity value in terms of a knowledge economy (with standardised and measurable learning/experiential outcomes), the true value of art in this context lies in its capacity for revealing and hosting the activity of not knowing. (p. 12)

The quest can be for different questions in an embrace of the unknown. Art approaches can be an “invitation to untether what is ‘known’... Art as a form of research or a way of thinking provides the means to engage with the unknown, but it also questions the quest to know” (p. 8, 11)

Braiding Du Bois, Lawrence-Lightfoot, and arts-based methods to reinvent portraiture through my palimpsest portraits aligns with welcoming the abyss of the unknown, conceptually and materially. Conceptually, palimpsestuous work starts with incomplete remnants of the past that have agency in the present and often require us to be open to the aesthetics that might beg our attention, like old signage on the facade of a school building, if we learn to listen for the stories. There are only shadows, traces, partial parts with which to work and yet they hold a presence in the present, bringing with them a larger absent-presence that takes up space (Gordon, 2008; Ferguson & Nichols, 2021).

Materially, the process of transferring the images and texts that represent the stories of the schools through palimpsest portraiture was always unpredictable and temperamental. I was unable to control the process in a way that I wanted and learned to lean into the unknown. Almost always, I would start with a vision and it would turn out differently. I was frustrated a lot when the image or text transfer was incomplete or when the paper tore, or when I could not manage to pinpoint the perfect combination of materials and time to approach the next step with more accuracy. Rodrigo Abd<sup>84</sup>, whose art works with and through palimpsests, references a similar lack of control over which images are superimposed with which other ones. I had control over my choices for my compositions, but only in that I created a pile of

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<sup>84</sup> <https://rodrigoabd.com/trabajos/palimpsestos/>

options to have at my fingertips once I had an art session planned. The way in which the pieces layered or transferred revealed a quality of unpredictability, as there was very little control over how the images transfer and layer; there was a temperament to the art itself. To me, this honors the essence of the palimpsest.

For a concrete example, I experimented with putting the acrylic medium on the image first or on the acrylic plate first, then on both. Once joined, there is a wait time until the medium saturates the paper enough that it will separate from the ink and leave the image transferred onto the plate. This timing seemed dependent on just how thickly the medium was applied, even though I consistently squeegeed the paper for excess before starting to rub off the layer of paper. There seemed to be a variable of what type of paper was used in the copy machines as I manipulated the images in preparation for the collaging, as some of my sessions were more successful than others. Oftentimes, the paper would simply rip while I was rubbing or lift off as I was removing pieces, without leaving any of the ink behind. I also experimented with colored prints versus black and white, with varying degrees of success. And yet, always the essence of the haunting quality of the schools came through. The compositions were largely successful, visually pleasing, while I had no real plan for how the images would interact or layer on the plates.

Throughout the process, successes felt accidental but were the culmination of learning, interactions, practices, and dedication to the process. It was always playful, if infused with frustration. It was nonlinear and imbalanced while in process but seemed to even out by the time the sessions wrapped up. All of it could only advance by doing what was being done. Using art methods that are inexact and temperamental also helps to “...recontextualize art as ‘a place where things can happen’ rather than ‘a thing in the world’” (p. 12).

The other part of not knowing in this type of portraiture, and arguably many arts methods, is the lack of agency over the viewers’ perceptions, which is not a negative aspect, but might be seen as part of that “negative lexicon” of not knowing until it is embraced. The ability for the viewers to layer and manipulate the plates reveals the unknown of how art is received once it is shared and what meaning is



made by folks other than the artist. It was very intriguing to watch a group gathered for conversation with the artwork to change the order of the plates from how I had thoughtfully curated the collection.

The ability of art to invite and defy interpretation simultaneously, to reflect the artist's and viewers' experiences and yet exist independently, is what sets it apart from other disciplines. Art pursues knowledge and yet resists the assimilative urge to know. (p. 8)

Incorporating visual arts methods into educational research questions what we measure and how and what knowledges we value and why. "Increasingly recognised as a valid mode of enquiry, art offers ways of approaching and articulating knowledge that are not utilised in other disciplines" (p. 11). The *not knowing* is not a lacking but an invitation to reassess the ways in which we pursue educational research.

### **Significance**

*"It's like someone putting a big foot on you..." Yessenia*

Drawing inspiration from DuBois and Lawrence Lightfoot for this type of portraiture denotes four prongs of significance: 1) historicizing the design of our research, 2) citing BIPOC thought in educational research, 3) underscoring the power of aesthetics and 4) expanding educational research to a broader audience. All these aspects are crucial when considering the multi-layered racial, gender, and class hierarchies that permeate both the educational realm and the research world.

By reaching into the past for inspiration and technique from DuBois and Lawrence Lightfoot, we bring history into the present research practices. In other spaces, I argue for the importance of historicizing our research as related to topics and content of what we study about education, that the historical context needs to be central to the work because the past is always present. My study on two schools that were closed in Chicago argues for the histories of the school sites to be foregrounded, through the stories we tell and the decisions we make.

Buras (2015) argues that the historicizing of a school site will change the trajectory of "solutions" offered to challenges that develop and Ferguson and Nichols (2021) point out that once that history of a school site is inscribed, the research changes drastically and the trajectory cannot be undone, for the research and the researcher. If we expand this to the meso level of our research practices, one way we can

historicize our research is through drawing inspiration from folks like DuBois as a researcher. As a career-changing pre-service teacher about fifteen years ago, I learned about DuBois in my history of education class as half of the DuBois vs. Washington dichotomy. I encountered his work again in a course on Black Intellectual Thought in Education during graduate school in a much more nuanced and in-depth way, reading excerpts of his writings and studying the context in which he was working. It wasn't until I audited an urban planning course as a graduate student, to gain a broader geospatial understanding of neighborhoods that I encountered his data portraits. I was immediately enthralled by the visualization and how DuBois used them to disrupt the dominant narrative internationally around the Black experience in the US at the turn of the twentieth century. This incites a call to reach back to historical educators when designing our research for inspiration and methods.

In looking to the past to inform the present, this methodological approach cites BIPOC thought in educational research to build a research design inspired by DuBois and Lawrence Lightfoot. Bhattacharya (2017) argues for the importance of citing BIPOC researchers and authors as an obligation in doing justice-centered work in a colonized space that is academia. If we are not more intentional on this front, we further the invalidation of BIPOC thought and scholarship.

This methodological montage underscores the power of aesthetics. Why was I so enthralled by DuBois' data portraits? His use of color, line, and composition to tell quantitatively based sociological stories drew me in more than any of his other work, often coming from a stance of community wealth and resilience. As researchers, we have been complicit in furthering the racialized deficit framing of schools and the commonsenseness of school closures with the stories we tell. What meaning is made when powerhouse research stories paint a portrait of poor and Black or Latino/a neighborhoods as lacking and harmed? Always and already damaged, as Tuck (2009) warns against? What stories are masked over that challenge the "studied and cultivated forgetting" that happens when public schools are closed (Ferguson & Nichols, 2021)? By leaning into aesthetics, my approach through arts-based methods presents the palimpsests of schools that were closed in new and engaging ways that harness the power of the arts to invite recognition, remembering, and re-imagination.

This approach expands educational research to a broader audience in very tangible ways. Between the end of 2022 and the spring of 2023, this work was recognized through the support of three research funding sources— one that centers on racial justice and public policy, one that is an educational research foundation nationwide, and one that was an interdisciplinary award at the university level. An image of one of the schools was recognized through a competition called “The Image of Research” at the Graduate College at UIC. I note this out of gratitude for those who have generously supported this work, but also to point to the ways in which the project has, indeed, used the aesthetics of visual arts and storytelling to captivate a readership at the research design level. The arts have always provided a space through which we can critically analyze social issues; this methodological approach brings that legitimate knowledge to educational research and educational research to a broader readership through the arts. For my inquiry, it allowed a presentation of an alternative discourse that upends the logic that school closures are a viable solution to the social issues that manifest in schools. Aesthetics have the potential to engage in ways that more traditional research does not, with the potential to round out what has been missing from the research and policy conversations about school closures. The concepts and methodology promise application beyond my present study of school closure precisely because of the power of aesthetics and the broadened readership through the methodological choices made.

## APPENDIX C: INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD APPROVAL LETTER



### IRB APPROVAL

February 27, 2023

Kristy Ulrich Papczun  
kpapcz2@uic.edu

Dear Kristy Ulrich Papczun:

On 2/27/2023, the IRB reviewed the following submission:

Type of Review:	Modification / Update
Study Title:	Conversations about Closed Schools in Chicago
Investigator:	Kristy Ulrich Papczun
Study ID:	STUDY2022-1602-MOD001
Expedited Review Category(ies):	6,7
Funding:	Name: Institute for Research on Race and Public Policy
IND, IDE, or HDE:	None
Documents Reviewed:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Consent Email Text, Category: Recruitment Materials;</li><li>• Consent Email Text Spanish, Category: Recruitment Materials;</li><li>• Informed Consent Form Spanish, Category: Consent Form;</li><li>• Letter from Translator, Category: Other;</li><li>• Recruitment Flyer Andersen Spanish, Category: Recruitment Materials;</li><li>• Recruitment Flyer Schiller Spanish, Category: Recruitment Materials;</li><li>• Recruitment Texts Spanish, Category: Recruitment Materials;</li><li>• Translator Qualifications, Category: Other;</li></ul>

The IRB approved the Modification on 2/27/2023.

In conducting this protocol, you are required to follow the requirements listed in the Investigator Manual (HRP-103), which can be found by navigating to the IRB Library within the IRB system.

Sincerely,

Office for the Protection of Research Subjects

#### Office for the Protection of Research Subjects

201 AOB, M/C 682  
1737 W. Polk St | Chicago, IL 60612  
Phone: (312) 996-1711  
Email: [uicrb@uic.edu](mailto:uicrb@uic.edu)  
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## APPENDIX D: DATA TYPES AND MANAGEMENT

Each of the five phases of this project attended to different data. This section lays out what types of data I collected. I also provide here some of the quantitative data for reference. To manage my data, I used an Excel spreadsheet to index my data. There were 723 entries over eight sheets, post proposal defense, listed below with the quantity.

- Memos- 125
- Maps- 29
- Reports from Chicago Public Schools- 13
- Site Photos- 187
- Transcripts- 10
- Art- 117 (photos of, 16 original pieces)
- Archives- 205 (photos of news articles, photos, etc.)
- Miscellaneous Data- 37

Additionally, I kept track of my recruitment efforts, of who I reached and what outcome and follow-up was needed during Phase Four on a separate Excel spreadsheet.

Table 1 details the quantity of each data type. Some are not indexed, such as school websites. I used the following naming conventions: P#\_000\_item\_school\_description, where P#= phase, such as P3 (with PP representing any items from the pilot project), and 000 became a running tally of items. An example of a site photo would be: PP2\_072\_Site\_Photo\_Andersen\_North\_West\_Playground\_Mosaic. The photo named here was taken at Andersen during the pilot project and was part of Phase Two and is an image of the northwest playground mosaic.

<b>Type of Data</b>	<b>Quantity/Type</b>	<b>Phase</b>	<b>Notes</b>
Memos	133 word docs	All	Includes pre-proposal defense memos
My artwork	16 art pieces	Three	105 index entries for the multiple images of the art
Names of people connected to schools in records with credible online profiles	93 names	Four	Initial recruiting efforts, additional people found through snowballing 66- Andersen 27- Schiller
Participant Conversations	10 (12 people)	Four	1 group conversation with 3 participants, see Participant Table below
Other Conversations	6	Dissertation writing	People not directly connected to schools, scholarly conversations, conferences
Archival pieces	205 photos of images, texts	Two	
Longitudinal Demographic	4 spreadsheets	Two	
Site Photos	187 photos	Two	
District Reports and Transcripts	13	Two	
Media Headlines	68 articles or links	Dissertation writing	For context chapter
Maps	29	Two	
Misc	6	Four	Employee info from CTU, emailed information from participant
School Websites	2		

**Table 1:** Data Sets

After obtaining reports from Chicago Public Schools from the closing process and recruiting participants, I had conversations with twelve people detailed in Table 2. The portraits of remembering are derived from these conversations.

Participant(s)	School	Connection	Conversation Type	Length	Date
Participant 1	Andersen	Aide to elected official	Group Conversation in person	2h	4/8/23
Participant 2		Student in 1980s-90s			
Participant 3		Student at closing (2011)			
Participant 4	NA	Chicago reporter Covered school closings for 10+ years	Individual Conversation in person	1h35m	4/26/23
Participant 5	Andersen	Teacher	Individual Conversation on phone	20m	5/9/23
Participant 6	Andersen	Teacher	Individual Conversation on Zoom	1h	5/10/23
Participant 7	Schiller	Hired by synagogue to run Open Books program	Individual Conversation in person	38m	6/1/23
Participant 8	Schiller	Administrator	Individual Conversation on phone	1h	6/15/23
Participant 9	Schiller	Volunteer	Individual Conversation on phone	37m	6/21/23
Participant 10	Schiller	Teacher	Individual Conversation on phone	12m	7/12/23
Participant 11	Schiller	Teacher and Coach	Individual Conversation on Zoom	17m	7/12/23
Participant 12	NA	Teacher at receiving school after 2013 closures	Individual Conversation in person	58m	9/24/23

**Table 2:** Participant Conversations

In Phase One, I created spreadsheets of longitudinal data about each school from the demographic data provided online by the district, found at <https://www.cps.edu/about/district-data/demographics/> . Tables 3-8 are my compilation of the CPS data. This data was used to write Chapter 4: Context for Portraits.

It is noted that district data provided online titled *Limited English Proficiency, Special Ed, Low Income, IEP Report* starts with the school year 2009-2010, which is the year after Schiller was closed and mid-phase-out for Andersen. The district data provided online titled *Racial/Ethnic Report* starts with the school year 1999-2000. I requested through the Freedom of Information Act data from any reports detailing Limited English Proficiency, Special Ed, Low Income, IEP status for Schiller and Andersen prior to 2009 and was denied twice, saying that what they have available is published online.



Limited English Proficiency, Special Ed, Low Income, IEP - School Year 2009-2010

Unit	School	Area	Total	*Bilingual		IEP		Free Lunch	
				N	%	N	%	N	%
8040	LaSalle II Learn	54	402	34	8.46%	77	19.15%	239	59.45%
2060	Andersen	6	171	18	10.53%	26	15.20%	166	97.08%
District			409,279	51,292	12.53%	49,186	12.02%	355,543	86.87%

Limited English Proficiency, Special Ed, Low Income, IEP - School Year 2010-2011

Unit	School	Area	Total	Bilingual		IEP		Free Lunch	
				N	%	N	%	N	%
8040	LaSalle II Magn	54	486	73	15.02%	93	19.14%	266	54.73%
2060	Andersen	6	103	9	8.74%	19	18.45%	97	94.17%
District			402,681	57,415	14.26%	48,920	12.15%	338,418	84.04%

Limited English Proficiency, Special Ed, Low Income, IEP - School Year 2011-2012

Unit	Networks	School Name	Total	Bilingual		SpED		Free Lunch	
				N	%	N	%	N	%
8040	Fulton Element	LaSalle II Magn	609	86	14.12%	102	16.75%	365	59.93%
No Andersen listed									
District			404,151	63,895	15.81%	49,419	12.23%	347,229	85.92%

Limited English Proficiency, Special Ed, Low Income, IEP - School Year 2012-2013

School ID	Networks	School Name	Total	Bilingual		SpED		Free/Reduced Lunch	
				N	%	N	%	N	%
610520	ES Network - F	LaSalle II Magn	630	81	12.86%	101	16.03%	355	56.35%
District			403,461	65,142	16.15%	49,560	12.28%	341,595	84.67%

Limited English Proficiency, Special Ed, Low Income, IEP - School Year 2013-2014

School ID	Network	Educational	Total	Bilingual		SpED		Free/Reduced Lunch	
				N	%	N	%	N	%
610520	Network 6	LaSalle II Magn	623	59	9.47%	91	14.61%	327	52.49%
District			400,545	65,274	16.30%	50,469	12.60%	340,468	85.00%

Limited English Proficiency, Special Ed, Low Income, IEP - School Year 2014-2015

School ID	School Name	Networks	Total	Bilingual		SpED		Economically Disadvantaged	
				N	%	N	%	N	%
610520	LaSalle II Magn	Network 6	605	54	8.93%	90	14.88%	310	51.24%
District			396,683	66,381	16.73%	51,426	12.96%	341,243	86.02%

Limited English Proficiency, Special Ed, Low Income, IEP - School Year 2015-2016

Networks	School ID	School Name	Total	Bilingual		SpED		Free/Reduced Lunch	
				N	%	N	%	N	%
Network 6	610520	LaSalle II Magn	591	47	7.95%	85	14.38%	265	44.84%
District			392,285	67,326	17.16%	52,231	13.31%	316,731	80.74%

20th Day 2016-2017				Bilingual		SpED		Free/Reduced Lunch	
Network	School ID	School Name	Total	N	%	N	%	N	%
ISP	610520	LaSalle II Magn	595	44	7.39%	82	13.78%	230	38.66%
District			381,349	66,204	17.36%	52,093	13.66%	305,900	80.22%

20th Day 2017-2018				Bilingual		SpED		Free/Reduced Lunch	
Network	School ID	School Name	Total	N	%	N	%	N	%
ISP	610520	LaSalle II Magn	590	29	4.90%	74	12.50%	207	35.10%
District			371,382	67,834	18.30%	50,917	13.70%	288,572	77.70%

20th Day 2018-2019				Bilingual		SpED		Free/Reduced Lunch	
Network	School ID	School Name	Total	N	%	N	%	N	%
ISP	610520	LaSalle II Magn	586	56	9.60%	69	11.80%	204	34.80%
District			361,314	69,282	19.20%	50,772	14.10%	276,836	76.60%

20th Day 2019-2020				Bilingual		SpED		Free/Reduced Lunch	
Network	School ID	School Name	Total	N	%	N	%	N	%
ISP	610520	LaSalle II Magn	583	59	10.10%	72	12.40%	186	31.90%
District			355,156	69,012	19.40%	51,691	14.60%	271,179	76.40%

20th Day 2020-2021				Bilingual		SpED		Free/Reduced Lunch	
Network	School ID	School Name	Total	N	%	N	%	N	%
ISP	610520	LASALLE II	574	47	8.20%	76	13.20%	183	31.90%
District			340,658	63,313	18.60%	49,655	14.60%	217,392	63.80%

20th Day 2021-2022				Bilingual		SpED		Free/Reduced Lunch	
Network	School ID	School Name	Total	N	%	N	%	N	%
ISP	610520	LASALLE II	580	62	10.70%	75	12.90%	173	29.80%
District			330,411	69,268	21.00%	48,749	14.80%	230,496	69.80%

**Table 3:** Limited English Proficiency, Special Ed, Low Income, IEP district data per school

Racial/Ethnic Survey - School Level 1999-2000													
Reg	Unit	School Name	Total	White	African American	Native American	Asian	Pacific Isldr	Hispanic	Mexican	Puerto Rican	Cuban	Other Hispanic
	2, 2600	Anderson Com At	824	29	115	14	0	2	674	81.8	214	26	26
	2, 2760	Schiller	355	1	353	99.4	0	0	1	0.3	0	0	0
		District	431,799	42,970	228,611	52.5	733	3.2	147,705	34.2	24,890	5.8	9,143
Racial/Ethnic Survey - School Level 2000-2001													
Reg	Unit	School Name	Total	White	African American	Native American	Asian	Pacific Isldr	Hispanic	Mexican	Puerto Rican	Cuban	Other Hispanic
2	2060	Anderson Com	845	26	148	17.5	5	3	683	78.5	221	26.2	1.9
2	5760	Schiller Middle	356	0	356	100	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
		District	435,470	41,890	226,600	52	802	3.2	152,031	34.9	23,972	5.5	9,684
Racial/Ethnic Survey - School Level 2001-2002													
Reg	Unit	School Name	Total	White	African American	Native American	Asian	Pacific Isldr	Hispanic	Mexican	Puerto Rican	Cuban	Other Hispanic
2	2060	Anderson Com	766	37	132	17.2	8	5	584	76.2	189	24.7	2.9
2	5760	Schiller	373	0	373	100	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
		District	437,618	41,476	224,494	51.3	897	3.2	156,566	35.8	23,685	5.4	10,199
Racial/Ethnic Survey - School Level 2002-2003													
Area	Unit	School Name	Total	White	African American	Native American	Asian	Pacific Isldr	Hispanic	Mexican	Puerto Rican	Cuban	Other Hispanic
5	2060	Anderson Com	774	60	140	18.1	2	7	565	73	163	21.1	29
6	5760	Schiller	360	0	360	100	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
		District	438,589	40,520	223,302	50.9	792	3.2	159,738	36.4	23,175	5.3	10,419
Racial/Ethnic Survey - School Level 2003-2004													
Area	Unit	School Name	Total	White	African American	Native American	Asian	Pacific Isldr	Hispanic	Mexican	Puerto Rican	Cuban	Other Hispanic
5	2060	Anderson Com	802	47	136	17	2	5	612	76.3	174	21.7	32
6	5760	Schiller	349	0	349	100	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
		District	434,419	39,323	218,330	50.3	909	3.2	161,837	37.3	22,699	5.2	10,719

**Table 4: Racial/Ethnic Longitudinal Data from district- A**

Racial/Ethnic Survey - School Level 2004-2005																								
Area	Unit	School Name	Total		White		African American		Native American		Asian/Pacific Isler		Hispanic		Mexican		Puerto Rican		Cuban		Other Hispanic		Male Hispanic	
			N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
6	0	2060 Anderson	687	4.8	34	4.9	109	15.9	0	0	8	1.2	535	78	332	51.2	149	21.7	0	0	35	5.1	0	0
		5760 Schiller	527	0	0	527	100	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
		5760 Schiller CTC	706	0	0	73	103	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
		District	426,612	37,593	8.8	215,092	49.8	764	0.2	13,849	3.2	182,194	38	129,222	30.3	21,449	5	770	0.2	10,793	2.5	0	0	0
Racial/Ethnic Survey - School Level 2005-2006																								
6	0	2060 Anderson	572	4.5	32	4.5	91	15.9	0	0	6	1	418	73.1	31	5.4	243	42.5	82	14.3	2	0.3	10	1.7
		5760 Schiller	527	0	0	527	100	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
		5760 Schiller CTC	706	0	0	73	103	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
		District	470,822	39,945	8.1	201,664	48.2	692	0.1	13,261	3.2	158,270	37.2	10,139	2.4	110,589	26.4	17,090	4	629	0.1	7,441	1.8	
Racial/Ethnic Survey - School Level 2006-2007																								
6	0	2060 Anderson	553	4.6	27	4.6	87	14.9	0	0	7	1.2	431	73.9	31	5.3	222	38.1	81	13.9	1	0.2	18	3.1
		5760 Schiller	527	0	0	527	100	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
		5760 Schiller CTC	706	0	0	73	103	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
		District	473,694	33,564	8.1	198,205	47.2	547	0.1	13,359	3.2	156,369	38.3	9,030	2.3	114,210	27.5	15,659	3.8	525	0.1	9,415	2.3	
Racial/Ethnic Survey - School Level 2007-2008																								
6	0	2060 Anderson	539	4.5	28	4.5	79	14.1	0	0	7	1.3	417	74.6	28	5	205	50.7	94	17.4	1	0.2	15	2.7
		5760 Schiller	527	0	0	527	100	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
		5760 Schiller CTC	706	0	0	73	103	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
		District	408,001	32,788	8	189,975	46.5	778	0.2	13,518	3.3	159,892	39.1	11,951	2.9	97,382	23.8	13,633	3.3	461	0.1	9,726	2.4	

**Table 5: Racial/Ethnic Longitudinal Data from district- B**

**Table 6:** Racial/Ethnic Longitudinal Data from district- C

Racial/Ethnic Survey - School Level 2013-2014																																						
Network	School ID	Educational Unit	White				African American				Asian/Pacific Islander (Retired)				Native American/Alaskan				Hispanic				Multi-Racial				Asian				Hawaiian/Pacific Islander				Not Available			
			No	Pct		No	Pct		No	Pct		No	Pct		No	Pct		No	Pct		No	Pct		No	Pct		No	Pct		No	Pct		No	Pct				
610520	LaSalle I Magne'	Skinner North District	623	170	27.3	131	31	21	0	0	0.3	2	0	0	279	44.8	21	3.4	18	2.9	2	0.3	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0				
610534	Skinner North District		368	152	41.3	55	14.9	37	0	0	0.0	1	0.3	42	11.4	25	6.8	91	24.7	2	0.5	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0				
			400,545	36,690	9.2	159,134	39.7	53	0.013	1,277	0.3	101,169	45.2	4,223	1.1	13,924	3.5	507	0.1	3,289	0.8																	
Racial/Ethnic Survey - School Level 2014-2015																																						
Network	School ID	Educational Unit	White				African American				Asian/Pacific Islander (Retired)				Native American/Alaskan				Hispanic				Multi-Racial				Asian				Hawaiian/Pacific Islander				Not Available			
			No	Pct		No	Pct		No	Pct		No	Pct		No	Pct		No	Pct		No	Pct		No	Pct		No	Pct		No	Pct		No	Pct				
610520	LaSalle I Magne'	Skinner North District	605	171	28.3	115	19	0	0	0	0.0	1	0.2	269	44.5	24	4	23	3.8	2	0.3	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0				
610534	Skinner North District		416	172	41.1	60	14.4	0	0	0	0.0	1	0.2	51	12.2	28	6.2	105	25.1	3	0.7	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0				
			374,443	39,663	9.4	155,932	39.3	31	0.01	1,103	0.3	180,790	45.6	4,202	1.1	14,228	3.6	623	0.2	2,389	0.6																	
Racial/Ethnic Survey - School Level 2015-2016																																						
Network	School ID	Educational Unit	White				African American				Asian/Pacific Islander (Retired)				Native American/Alaskan				Hispanic				Multi-Racial				Asian				Hawaiian/Pacific Islander				Not Available			
			No	Pct		No	Pct		No	Pct		No	Pct		No	Pct		No	Pct		No	Pct		No	Pct		No	Pct		No	Pct		No	Pct				
610520	LaSalle I Magne'	Skinner North District	591	176	29.8	113	19.1	0	0	0	0.0	1	0.2	253	42.8	25	4.2	21	3.6	2	0.3	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0				
610534	Skinner North District		476	184	38.5	69	14.4	0	0	0	0.0	1	0.2	51	10.7	27	5.7	141	29.5	5	1.0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0				
			392,285	37,748	9.6	152,113	38.9	14	0	937	0.2	180,206	45.9	4,192	1.1	14,540	3.7	639	0.2	1,605	0.4																	
20th Day 2016-2017																																						
Network	School ID	School Name	White				African American				Asian/Pacific Islander (Retired)				Native American/Alaskan				Hispanic				Multi-Racial				Asian				Hawaiian/Pacific Islander				Not Available			
			No	Pct		No	Pct		No	Pct		No	Pct		No	Pct		No	Pct		No	Pct		No	Pct		No	Pct		No	Pct		No	Pct				
ISP	610520	LaSalle I Magne'	595	181	30.4	120	20.2	0	0	0	0.0	1	0.2	240	40.3	29	4.9	21	3.5	3	0.5	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0				
ISP	610534	Skinner North District	488	197	40.4	62	12.7	0	0	0	0.0	0	0.0	58	11.9	27	5.5	142	29.1	2	0.4	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0				
			381,349	37,951	9.9	143,849	37.7	14	0	786	0.2	177,492	46.5	4,183	1.1	14,935	3.9	644	0.2	1,775	0.5																	
20th Day 2017-2018																																						
Network	School ID	School Name	White				African American				Asian/Pacific Islander (Retired)				Native American/Alaskan				Hispanic				Multi-Racial				Asian				Hawaiian/Pacific Islander				Not Available			
			No	Pct		No	Pct		No	Pct		No	Pct		No	Pct		No	Pct		No	Pct		No	Pct		No	Pct		No	Pct		No	Pct				
610520	LaSalle I Magne'	ISP	590	173	29.3	130	22	0	0	0	0.0	1	0.2	235	39.8	32	5.4	16	2.7	3	0.5	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0				
610534	Skinner North District		494	193	39.1	60	12.1	0	0	0	0.0	0	0.0	56	11.3	28	5.7	157	31.8	0	0.0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0				
			371,382	37,933	10.2	137,495	37	13	0	1,144	0.3	173,790	46.8	4,185	1.1	15,113	4.1	627	0.2	1,882	0.3																	

**Table 7: Racial/Ethnic Longitudinal Data from district- D**

20th Day 2018-2019		White		African American		Asian/Pacific Islander (Retired)		Native American/Alaskan		Hispanic		Multi-Racial		Asian		Hawaiian/Pacific Islander		Not Available	
Network	School Name	Total	No	Pct	No	Pct	No	Pct	No	Pct	No	Pct	No	Pct	No	Pct	No	Pct	
ISP	610520 LSALEII MAGNE	586	163	27.8	118	20.1	0	0	0	0	248	42.3	30	5.1	22	3.8	0	0	
	610534 SKINNER NORTH	523	194	37.1	55	10.5	0	0.0	0	58	11.1	32	6.1	183	35.0	0	0		
	District	361,314	38,016	10.5	132,194	36.6	20	0	1,051	0.3	168,888	46.7	4,333	1.2	14,933	4.1	616	0.2	1,253
20th Day 2019-2020		White		African American		Asian/Pacific Islander (Retired)		Native American/Alaskan		Hispanic		Multi-Racial		Asian		Hawaiian/Pacific Islander		Not Available	
Network	School Name	Total	No	Pct	No	Pct	No	Pct	No	Pct	No	Pct	No	Pct	No	Pct	No	Pct	
ISP	610520 LSALEII MAGNE	583	164	28.1	112	19.2	0	0	0.2	245	42	37	6.4	20	3.4	4	0.7	0	0
	610534 SKINNER NORTH	537	187	34.8	51	9.5	0	0.0	2	0.4	56	10.4	41	7.6	199	37.1	0	0.0	1
	District	355,156	38,480	10.8	127,601	35.9	14	0	1,054	0.3	165,578	46.6	4,451	1.3	14,961	4.2	599	0.2	2,408
20th Day 2020-2021		White		African American		Asian/Pacific Islander (Retired)		Native American/Alaskan		Hispanic		Multi-Racial		Asian		Hawaiian/Pacific Islander		Not Available	
Network	School Name	Total	No	Pct	No	Pct	No	Pct	No	Pct	No	Pct	No	Pct	No	Pct	No	Pct	
ISP	610520 LSALEII	574	162	28.2	113	19.7	0	0	1	0.2	243	42.3	36	6.3	14	2.4	5	0.9	0
	610534 SKINNER NORTH	510	169	33.1	40	7.8	0	0.0	2	0.4	54	10.6	41	8.0	204	40.0	0	0.0	0
	District	340,658	37,198	10.9	122,116	35.8	8	0	996	0.3	159,163	46.7	4,488	1.3	14,810	4.3	537	0.2	1,342
20th Day 2021-2022		White		African American		Asian/Pacific Islander (Retired)		Native American/Alaskan		Hispanic		Multi-Racial		Asian		Hawaiian/Pacific Islander		Not Available	
Network	School Name	Total	No	Pct	No	Pct	No	Pct	No	Pct	No	Pct	No	Pct	No	Pct	No	Pct	
ISP	610520 LSALEII	580	168	29	112	19.3	0	0	2	0.3	243	41.9	36	6.2	15	2.6	4	0.7	0
	610534 SKINNER NORTH	493	153	31.0	31	6.3	0	0.0	2	0.4	46	9.3	45	9.1	216	43.8	0	0.0	0
	District	330,411	35,649	10.8	119,025	36	10	0	859	0.3	153,931	46.6	4,592	1.4	14,383	4.4	479	0.1	1,483

**Table 8:** Racial/Ethnic Longitudinal Data from district- E

In order to assess how many students from the neighborhood zip code attended each school after it became a non-neighborhood school, I requested zip code data for the attendance years of 2007-2008 (Andersen and Schiller), 2011-2012 (LaSalle II and Skinner North) and 2019-2020 (LaSalle II and Skinner North) through the Freedom of Information Act. Highlighted in Tables 9-12 is the zip code for the neighborhood where the schools are.

- LaSalle II had 216 students from the neighborhood the year it opened (zip code 60622) and dropped to 162 eight years later. Andersen had 263 students from the neighborhood the year before the phase out started.
- Skinner North had 2 students from the neighborhood two years after it opened (zip code 60610) and 24 eight years later. Schiller had 204 students from the neighborhood the year before it closed.

SCHOOL_YEAR	SCHOOL_ID	SCHOOL_NAME	ZIP	COUNT
2007-2008	609776	Hans Christian Andersen Community Academy ES	0	3
2007-2008	609776	Hans Christian Andersen Community Academy ES	60608	1
2007-2008	609776	Hans Christian Andersen Community Academy ES	60609	1
2007-2008	609776	Hans Christian Andersen Community Academy ES	60610	6
2007-2008	609776	Hans Christian Andersen Community Academy ES	60611	3
2007-2008	609776	Hans Christian Andersen Community Academy ES	60612	12
2007-2008	609776	Hans Christian Andersen Community Academy ES	60614	1
2007-2008	609776	Hans Christian Andersen Community Academy ES	60617	1
2007-2008	609776	Hans Christian Andersen Community Academy ES	60618	10
2007-2008	609776	Hans Christian Andersen Community Academy ES	60622	263
2007-2008	609776	Hans Christian Andersen Community Academy ES	60624	2
2007-2008	609776	Hans Christian Andersen Community Academy ES	60625	3
2007-2008	609776	Hans Christian Andersen Community Academy ES	60629	2
2007-2008	609776	Hans Christian Andersen Community Academy ES	60630	1
2007-2008	609776	Hans Christian Andersen Community Academy ES	60632	2
2007-2008	609776	Hans Christian Andersen Community Academy ES	60634	43
2007-2008	609776	Hans Christian Andersen Community Academy ES	60635	3
2007-2008	609776	Hans Christian Andersen Community Academy ES	60637	1
2007-2008	609776	Hans Christian Andersen Community Academy ES	60639	80
2007-2008	609776	Hans Christian Andersen Community Academy ES	60640	1
2007-2008	609776	Hans Christian Andersen Community Academy ES	60641	7
2007-2008	609776	Hans Christian Andersen Community Academy ES	60644	8
2007-2008	609776	Hans Christian Andersen Community Academy ES	60646	2

2007-2008	609776	Hans Christian Andersen Community Academy ES	60647	38
2007-2008	609776	Hans Christian Andersen Community Academy ES	60649	1
2007-2008	609776	Hans Christian Andersen Community Academy ES	60651	55
2007-2008	609776	Hans Christian Andersen Community Academy ES	60657	1
2007-2008	609776	Hans Christian Andersen Community Academy ES	60661	2

**Table 9:** Zip code data for student attendance Andersen, 2007-2008

SCHOOL_YEAR	SCHOOL_ID	SCHOOL_NAME	ZIP	Count of ZIP
2011-2012	610520	LaSalle II Elementary Language Academy	60605	3
2011-2012	610520	LaSalle II Elementary Language Academy	60607	1
2011-2012	610520	LaSalle II Elementary Language Academy	60608	13
2011-2012	610520	LaSalle II Elementary Language Academy	60609	3
2011-2012	610520	LaSalle II Elementary Language Academy	60610	14
2011-2012	610520	LaSalle II Elementary Language Academy	60611	3
2011-2012	610520	LaSalle II Elementary Language Academy	60612	32
2011-2012	610520	LaSalle II Elementary Language Academy	60613	1
2011-2012	610520	LaSalle II Elementary Language Academy	60614	7
2011-2012	610520	LaSalle II Elementary Language Academy	60615	2
2011-2012	610520	LaSalle II Elementary Language Academy	60616	4
2011-2012	610520	LaSalle II Elementary Language Academy	60618	14
2011-2012	610520	LaSalle II Elementary Language Academy	60619	3
2011-2012	610520	LaSalle II Elementary Language Academy	60620	3
2011-2012	610520	LaSalle II Elementary Language Academy	60621	3
2011-2012	610520	LaSalle II Elementary Language Academy	60622	216
2011-2012	610520	LaSalle II Elementary Language Academy	60623	7
2011-2012	610520	LaSalle II Elementary Language Academy	60624	8
2011-2012	610520	LaSalle II Elementary Language Academy	60625	3
2011-2012	610520	LaSalle II Elementary Language Academy	60626	1
2011-2012	610520	LaSalle II Elementary Language Academy	60628	2
2011-2012	610520	LaSalle II Elementary Language Academy	60629	9
2011-2012	610520	LaSalle II Elementary Language Academy	60630	3
2011-2012	610520	LaSalle II Elementary Language Academy	60632	2
2011-2012	610520	LaSalle II Elementary Language Academy	60637	5
2011-2012	610520	LaSalle II Elementary Language Academy	60638	8
2011-2012	610520	LaSalle II Elementary Language Academy	60639	38
2011-2012	610520	LaSalle II Elementary Language Academy	60640	3
2011-2012	610520	LaSalle II Elementary Language Academy	60641	23
2011-2012	610520	LaSalle II Elementary Language Academy	60642	24
2011-2012	610520	LaSalle II Elementary Language Academy	60644	9



2011-2012	610520	LaSalle II Elementary Language Academy	60647	65
2011-2012	610520	LaSalle II Elementary Language Academy	60649	7
2011-2012	610520	LaSalle II Elementary Language Academy	60651	52
2011-2012	610520	LaSalle II Elementary Language Academy	60652	2
2011-2012	610520	LaSalle II Elementary Language Academy	60653	4
2011-2012	610520	LaSalle II Elementary Language Academy	60654	1
2011-2012	610520	LaSalle II Elementary Language Academy	60657	3
2011-2012	610520	LaSalle II Elementary Language Academy	60659	3
2011-2012	610520	LaSalle II Elementary Language Academy	60660	2
2011-2012	610520	LaSalle II Elementary Language Academy	60707	1
2011-2012	610520	LaSalle II Elementary Language Academy	60827	1
2019-2020	610520	LASALLE II	60601	1
2019-2020	610520	LASALLE II	60605	1
2019-2020	610520	LASALLE II	60607	6
2019-2020	610520	LASALLE II	60608	20
2019-2020	610520	LASALLE II	60609	3
2019-2020	610520	LASALLE II	60610	10
2019-2020	610520	LASALLE II	60611	2
2019-2020	610520	LASALLE II	60612	31
2019-2020	610520	LASALLE II	60614	4
2019-2020	610520	LASALLE II	60615	7
2019-2020	610520	LASALLE II	60616	7
2019-2020	610520	LASALLE II	60617	2
2019-2020	610520	LASALLE II	60618	18
2019-2020	610520	LASALLE II	60619	9
2019-2020	610520	LASALLE II	60620	1
2019-2020	610520	LASALLE II	60622	162
2019-2020	610520	LASALLE II	60623	6
2019-2020	610520	LASALLE II	60624	10
2019-2020	610520	LASALLE II	60625	1
2019-2020	610520	LASALLE II	60626	5
2019-2020	610520	LASALLE II	60628	4
2019-2020	610520	LASALLE II	60630	7
2019-2020	610520	LASALLE II	60632	2
2019-2020	610520	LASALLE II	60634	11
2019-2020	610520	LASALLE II	60637	5
2019-2020	610520	LASALLE II	60638	14
2019-2020	610520	LASALLE II	60639	16
2019-2020	610520	LASALLE II	60640	4
2019-2020	610520	LASALLE II	60641	25
2019-2020	610520	LASALLE II	60642	25
2019-2020	610520	LASALLE II	60643	2
2019-2020	610520	LASALLE II	60644	6

2019-2020	610520	LASALLE II	60645	1
2019-2020	610520	LASALLE II	60646	1
2019-2020	610520	LASALLE II	60647	75
2019-2020	610520	LASALLE II	60649	6
2019-2020	610520	LASALLE II	60651	49
2019-2020	610520	LASALLE II	60652	1
2019-2020	610520	LASALLE II	60653	10
2019-2020	610520	LASALLE II	60656	1
2019-2020	610520	LASALLE II	60659	4
2019-2020	610520	LASALLE II	60661	1
2019-2020	610520	LASALLE II	60707	6

**Table 10:** Zip code data for student attendance LaSalle II, 2011-2012 and 2019-2020

SCHOOL_YEAR	SCHOOL_ID	SCHOOL_NAME	ZIP	COUNT
2007-2008	610162	Frederick Von Schiller Elementary School	0	21
2007-2008	610162	Frederick Von Schiller Elementary School	60607	1
2007-2008	610162	Frederick Von Schiller Elementary School	60609	2
2007-2008	610162	Frederick Von Schiller Elementary School	60610	204
2007-2008	610162	Frederick Von Schiller Elementary School	60614	2
2007-2008	610162	Frederick Von Schiller Elementary School	60617	2
2007-2008	610162	Frederick Von Schiller Elementary School	60619	1
2007-2008	610162	Frederick Von Schiller Elementary School	60620	1
2007-2008	610162	Frederick Von Schiller Elementary School	60622	5
2007-2008	610162	Frederick Von Schiller Elementary School	60624	3
2007-2008	610162	Frederick Von Schiller Elementary School	60626	2
2007-2008	610162	Frederick Von Schiller Elementary School	60636	1
2007-2008	610162	Frederick Von Schiller Elementary School	60640	1
2007-2008	610162	Frederick Von Schiller Elementary School	60644	1
2007-2008	610162	Frederick Von Schiller Elementary School	60647	3
2007-2008	610162	Frederick Von Schiller Elementary School	60651	6
2007-2008	610162	Frederick Von Schiller Elementary School	60660	1

**Table 11:** Zip code data for student attendance Schiller, 2007-2008

SCHOOL_YEAR	SCHOOL_ID	SCHOOL_NAME	ZIP	COUNT
2010-2011	610534	Skinner North Classical Elementary School	60601	3
2010-2011	610534	Skinner North Classical Elementary School	60605	3
2010-2011	610534	Skinner North Classical Elementary School	60607	6
2010-2011	610534	Skinner North Classical Elementary School	60608	4
2010-2011	610534	Skinner North Classical Elementary School	60609	2
2010-2011	610534	Skinner North Classical Elementary School	60610	2
2010-2011	610534	Skinner North Classical Elementary School	60611	1
2010-2011	610534	Skinner North Classical Elementary School	60612	5
2010-2011	610534	Skinner North Classical Elementary School	60613	4
2010-2011	610534	Skinner North Classical Elementary School	60614	7
2010-2011	610534	Skinner North Classical Elementary School	60615	4
2010-2011	610534	Skinner North Classical Elementary School	60616	12
2010-2011	610534	Skinner North Classical Elementary School	60618	11
2010-2011	610534	Skinner North Classical Elementary School	60619	2
2010-2011	610534	Skinner North Classical Elementary School	60620	3
2010-2011	610534	Skinner North Classical Elementary School	60622	6
2010-2011	610534	Skinner North Classical Elementary School	60623	5
2010-2011	610534	Skinner North Classical Elementary School	60624	1
2010-2011	610534	Skinner North Classical Elementary School	60625	8
2010-2011	610534	Skinner North Classical Elementary School	60626	4
2010-2011	610534	Skinner North Classical Elementary School	60628	4
2010-2011	610534	Skinner North Classical Elementary School	60630	4
2010-2011	610534	Skinner North Classical Elementary School	60631	1
2010-2011	610534	Skinner North Classical Elementary School	60634	4
2010-2011	610534	Skinner North Classical Elementary School	60637	2
2010-2011	610534	Skinner North Classical Elementary School	60639	1
2010-2011	610534	Skinner North Classical Elementary School	60640	6
2010-2011	610534	Skinner North Classical Elementary School	60641	4
2010-2011	610534	Skinner North Classical Elementary School	60642	2
2010-2011	610534	Skinner North Classical Elementary School	60643	1
2010-2011	610534	Skinner North Classical Elementary School	60644	1
2010-2011	610534	Skinner North Classical Elementary School	60645	7
2010-2011	610534	Skinner North Classical Elementary School	60646	2
2010-2011	610534	Skinner North Classical Elementary School	60647	6
2010-2011	610534	Skinner North Classical Elementary School	60649	2
2010-2011	610534	Skinner North Classical Elementary School	60651	2
2010-2011	610534	Skinner North Classical Elementary School	60652	1
2010-2011	610534	Skinner North Classical Elementary School	60653	8
2010-2011	610534	Skinner North Classical Elementary School	60654	2
2010-2011	610534	Skinner North Classical Elementary School	60657	1
2010-2011	610534	Skinner North Classical Elementary School	60659	4
2010-2011	610534	Skinner North Classical Elementary School	60660	6

2010-2011	610534	Skinner North Classical Elementary School	60661	1
2010-2011	610534	Skinner North Classical Elementary School	60707	2
2019-2020	610534	SKINNER NORTH	60601	4
2019-2020	610534	SKINNER NORTH	60602	1
2019-2020	610534	SKINNER NORTH	60605	19
2019-2020	610534	SKINNER NORTH	60606	1
2019-2020	610534	SKINNER NORTH	60607	29
2019-2020	610534	SKINNER NORTH	60608	29
2019-2020	610534	SKINNER NORTH	60609	12
2019-2020	610534	SKINNER NORTH	60610	24
2019-2020	610534	SKINNER NORTH	60611	19
2019-2020	610534	SKINNER NORTH	60612	8
2019-2020	610534	SKINNER NORTH	60613	13
2019-2020	610534	SKINNER NORTH	60614	61
2019-2020	610534	SKINNER NORTH	60615	8
2019-2020	610534	SKINNER NORTH	60616	21
2019-2020	610534	SKINNER NORTH	60617	1
2019-2020	610534	SKINNER NORTH	60618	36
2019-2020	610534	SKINNER NORTH	60619	1
2019-2020	610534	SKINNER NORTH	60620	2
2019-2020	610534	SKINNER NORTH	60621	4
2019-2020	610534	SKINNER NORTH	60622	20
2019-2020	610534	SKINNER NORTH	60623	1
2019-2020	610534	SKINNER NORTH	60624	1
2019-2020	610534	SKINNER NORTH	60625	10
2019-2020	610534	SKINNER NORTH	60626	8
2019-2020	610534	SKINNER NORTH	60628	1
2019-2020	610534	SKINNER NORTH	60629	1
2019-2020	610534	SKINNER NORTH	60630	11
2019-2020	610534	SKINNER NORTH	60631	1
2019-2020	610534	SKINNER NORTH	60632	6
2019-2020	610534	SKINNER NORTH	60634	10
2019-2020	610534	SKINNER NORTH	60637	7
2019-2020	610534	SKINNER NORTH	60638	1
2019-2020	610534	SKINNER NORTH	60639	1
2019-2020	610534	SKINNER NORTH	60640	22
2019-2020	610534	SKINNER NORTH	60641	14
2019-2020	610534	SKINNER NORTH	60642	14
2019-2020	610534	SKINNER NORTH	60643	1
2019-2020	610534	SKINNER NORTH	60644	1
2019-2020	610534	SKINNER NORTH	60645	6
2019-2020	610534	SKINNER NORTH	60646	4
2019-2020	610534	SKINNER NORTH	60647	20

2019-2020	610534	SKINNER NORTH	60649	6
2019-2020	610534	SKINNER NORTH	60651	2
2019-2020	610534	SKINNER NORTH	60653	16
2019-2020	610534	SKINNER NORTH	60654	6
2019-2020	610534	SKINNER NORTH	60656	2
2019-2020	610534	SKINNER NORTH	60657	35
2019-2020	610534	SKINNER NORTH	60659	1
2019-2020	610534	SKINNER NORTH	60660	10
2019-2020	610534	SKINNER NORTH	60661	3
2019-2020	610534	SKINNER NORTH	60707	2

**Table 12:** Zip code data for student attendance Skinner North, 2010-2011 and 2019-2020

## APPENDIX E: PROCEDURES

Data collection occurred during Phase One, Two, Three, and Four. Data analysis occurred in various places throughout the five phases and during the writing of the final dissertation (Creswell, 2013, p. 75, p. 239). In Phase One, data was analyzed for the selection of schools based on trends and patterns identified mainly around race and class from longitudinal quantitative data in the context of my relationship to the school. In Phase Two, after selecting the schools to study, there was an ongoing analysis of data during the “digging” (Grant et al., 2016) process that iteratively informed the historical research. For example, I uncovered incomplete or conflicting data around the schools, as my narration around Schiller School in the introduction and Chapter Four illustrated. By informally analyzing data as I went, my digging was steered in particular directions, such as to certain news sources or sites with images related to the school.

Data analysis happened more explicitly in Phase Three through the art-making process. The data collected about each school was read and selections made from the texts and images to be included in the art. This became a coding process similar to what Miles et al. (2020) describe as descriptive coding (p. 121) and sequential analysis (p. 247). The unit of data was the narratives found in the data, defined as stories told to characterize the school and/or school community in a particular way before, during, or after the school closing process. The data analysis happened both during the review of the data at large, during the selection for excerpts to be included in the art, and during the actual artmaking as the compositions develop independently and as a portfolio (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Hoffman Davis, 1997, p. 60, p. 193). Per Fine (2006), the analysis shifted between the individual case level and a structural critique.

In Phases Four and Five, the data collection and data analysis constituted an iterative process, where I drew from the stories I gathered to that point and analyzed through my art-making process to engage with the community. The relationships I built, the stories I heard, the space I held with people connected to the schools was not designed to extract further explicit data to analyze. When I wrote the portraits, I was continually analyzing the data collected in a way refuses a deficit-based perspective and foregrounds the cultural community wealth in the stories that my participants shared.

Additionally, I wove contextual and reflective data throughout the narratives. I also attended to the *saying* and not just what was said (Simon & Eppert, 1997).

Table 13 below details what I did in each phase and a Gantt chart of my working plan to illustrate the overlapping and iterative relationship between the phases (Figure 38).

Phase	What I did
<b>Phase One: Choosing the Schools</b> <b>Getting reacquainted with the schools</b> <b>Longitudinal Data Analysis</b> <b>Personal Reflection</b>	<p>I narrowed my study to Andersen and Schiller.</p> <p>I used online databases from Chicago Public Schools to research the demographic data of Andersen and Schiller, looking for trends over time. I compiled the data for all the years available for each school (total of 13 years for the language, income, and IEP data; 23 years for the racial/ethnic surveys) to get a context of enrollment trends compared to the district.</p>
<b>Phase Two: Gathering the Stories</b> <b>Paying attention to the hauntings</b> <b>Document Analysis</b> <b>Historical Artifact Analysis</b>	<p>I engaged in Google searches, data base searches, and site visits to find the traces left behind of the schools that were closed. This included logging hundreds of site photos, bookmarking online news articles about the schools and their closings, and finding my own artifacts in my personal spaces.</p> <p>After finding online records relevant to the schools, I visited two archives to access photos or stories about the schools: UIC Library Special Collections and the Chicago History Museum's Abakanowicz Research Center. I took notes and photos of records.</p> <p>I obtained records and hearing transcripts from the closing process from CPS through a FOIA request. I also submitted another FOIA request for demographic data that was not available online from the district.</p> <p>I obtained a spreadsheet of staff members employed by the district from CTU for the 2008-2009 school year.</p>
<b>Phase Three: Re-Examining through Art</b> <b>Recasting the stories through art (portraits-as-process)</b> <b>Thematic Analysis</b> <b>Artmaking</b>	<p>I used the data gathered in Phase Two—images and texts—and made selections for visual art pieces. I modified the data for compositional needs (scale, size, balance, contrast), then created collages based on themes and stories that took my attention. I selected some single-image</p>

	<p>photographs as art pieces. I annotated the artwork to make meaning and to process a larger, contextual perspective. This stage was driven by my “artist eye” and by a desire to explore artistic ways to recast the stories of the schools. This can be categorized as thematic coding of the documents and images gathered. I identified 7 codes/categories of data.</p> <p>I used Google Maps to explore various scales of maps of where the schools are located to understand the density of the neighborhoods and to understand the relationship between the neighborhood and the city. The maps were also recast into art pieces.</p> <p>I annotated the artwork.</p>
<p><b>Phase Four: Circling Back through Conversation</b>  <b>Conversation with people connected to the schools</b>  <b>Collective Remembering</b>  <b>Art as Catalyst</b></p>	<p>I did online searches for the names I found in the records and archives for people connected to Andersen and Schiller. I sent recruitment material to anyone with a viable online presence through email or social media. I posted hard-copies of my recruitment flyers in the neighborhoods where the schools were and in the College of Education at UIC. I posted my recruitment flyers on Twitter, Facebook, and LinkedIn.</p> <p>I had research conversations with 12 people, two of whom were generally connected to school closures but not to the two schools specifically; 5 people were connected to Andersen and 5 people were connected to Schiller<sup>85</sup>. One of the conversations included 3 participants and me as a group conversation; the rest were individual conversations.</p> <p>I audio-recorded the conversations.</p> <p>I followed up with participants with a link if they remembered anything after our conversation.</p>
<p><b>Phase Five: Re-Presenting through Portraiture</b>  <b>Crafting the Final Portraits (portraits-as-product)</b>  <b>Thematic Analysis</b>  <b>Narrative Writing</b></p>	<p>I used Otter.ai for initial transcriptions and cleaned up the transcriptions myself. I removed identifications and used pseudonyms created on a master list.</p>

<sup>85</sup> See Appendix C for data sources, including total number of people researched for recruitment.



	<p>I identified 12 more codes while I listened to the audio recordings while transcribing; some were thematic in nature, some were related to methods. I created a code book. I then coded the transcripts using the 7 codes from the artmaking in Phase Three as an a priori list and then included these 12 new ones as well.</p> <p>I then grouped the codes into Concepts, Methods, Findings, and Stories through concept mapping with paper and tape and then transferred it to Atlas.ti<sup>86</sup>. I looked at quantitative data from the coding to verify what was taking my attention. I made decisions about what stories would be told based on the coding, what the participants told me, the literature I had read, and my theoretical and conceptual groundings.</p> <p>I isolated stories from my conversations that were taking my attention through repetitive resonance or because of the particularity. I pulled meaningful quotes using the coding as a guide. I drafted dialogue and narration to recast the data into vignettes. I cut the vignettes and quotes apart and reorganized them by theme and sequencing (twice)<sup>87</sup>, using form from the literary world to shape the written portraits. I revised the written portraits after editing.</p> <p>I had colleagues and my advisor read the written portraits and give feedback. I organized the art as an introduction, a break between the written portraits, and as a conclusion to the portraits, focusing on storytelling and sequencing.</p> <p>I shared the written portraits and coordinating artwork sections with the participants, inviting them to have another conversation with me.</p>
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**Table 13:** Methods and Procedures by Phase

<sup>86</sup> For coding see Figure 40, Table 14, Figure 42, Table 15.

<sup>87</sup> For organizing, see Figures 39, 43, 44, 45, 46.

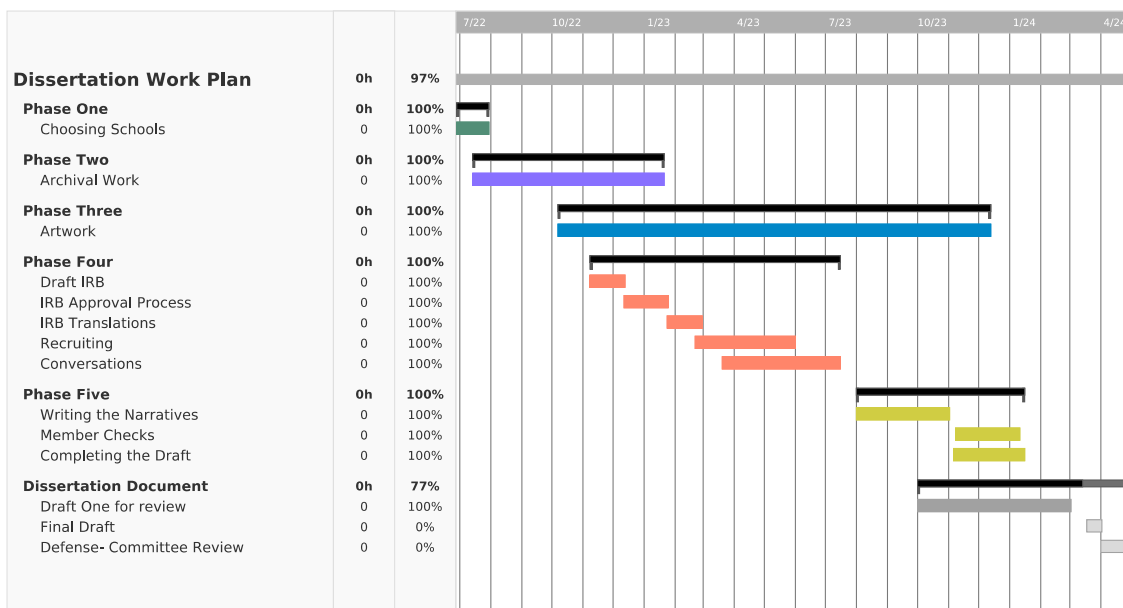


Figure 37: Gantt Chart of Work Plan

\*note that in Phase Three: Artwork, the actual timeframes of artmaking (post pilot project) were 12/19/22 to 3/30/23 and 10/19/23 to 12/12/23.

## Coding

I employed a coding process during the artmaking and the narrative writing, detailed below. Much of the process was organic and iterative. The coding process certainly led me to the narrative writing and the realization that I had portraits of remembering, not portraits of the school, while I would not say that the coding provided a direct throughway to the end product. It served as an organizing process that led me to crucial, pivotal points in the project (which underscores the nonlinearity of this work and the embracing the unknown as already discussed in the chapters and methods section).

I derived a process for creating the collage-versions of the palimpsest portraits during my pilot study that was detailed in my proposal, which led me to some preliminary “findings” that shaped this larger research design. I followed a similar process in making subsequent plates focused on single images and then created a plan to do another session of portraits using mostly text and maps. The coding process

below details the process of digging into the 438 pages of data from the transcripts, reports, and maps that I had from my FOIA requests to CPS.

To start, I skimmed through the documents to re-orient myself with the documents. During my pilot study, I had made a list of ‘themes’ that I found in how the district was framing things or the stories they told and the ways in which the community members framed things or the stories they told about the school (Schiller was not part of the pilot). I wrote then about what struck me most, and I went back to those early write ups from 2021 and this became my starting point for analyzing the documents and images for the artmaking.

I knew that, in the transcripts, there were stories told by the district that were deficit-based, selectively contextualized, and centered mostly on the enrollment trends at the school level. There were stories told by the community that described the school as a family, were emotion-based, and highlighted the income level, special education population, and Mexican American heritage of the student body.

I also remembered that there were “sides” being argued at the public hearings and that the phrase, “in the best interest of the children” was used multiple times by both sides. Two years later, that phrase was strong in my memory.

I re-read through all the transcripts and meeting records—the new ones I had obtained since my proposal was approved and the ones I had obtained for my pilot study—reconciling them with my data index. I flagged or highlighted parts that seemed significant. I looked for repetition, patterns and themes that took my attention using a highlighter and sticky-flags, making notes on hardcopies. This resembled both ground-up (inductive) and top-down (deductive) coding (Miles et al., 2020, p. 137). I was looking for things to come up from the data and take my attention, while I also was familiar with these documents and the themes that were in them from the literature, my experiences, and having memories of what was in some of the Andersen documents from Spring 2021 during my pilot study. I was entering this process with thoughts, views, and ideas about what would be there.

This may trouble those of you who must have an operating definition of the codes or want to hear more explicitly how I judged what to highlight or flag. This is hard to say. Leaning into my original

notion of what took my attention with the signs on the sides of the buildings, I let things take my attention. I did capture some district wording and claims but tried to keep 90% of my attention on the community's voice in alignment with Yosso's community cultural wealth theory (Yosso, 2005).

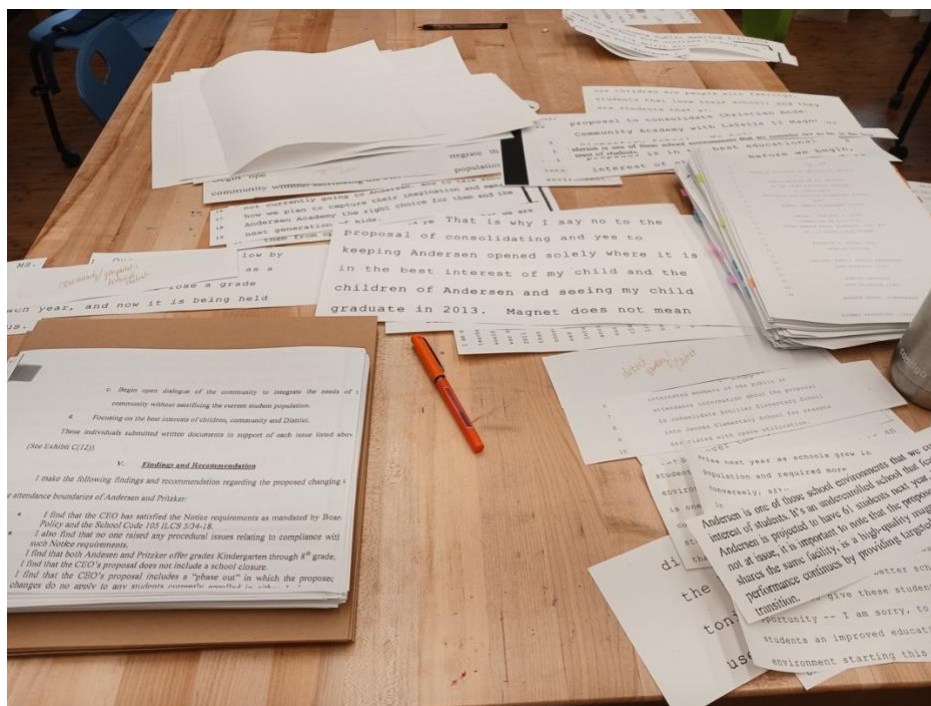
Hundreds of pages in hand, I headed to the copier at FedEx/Kinkos with my highlighted/flagged transcripts. I copied those sections, blowing some of them up, capturing them on a copied version to be used in the artwork. I made 287 copies, some not usable as I trialed and errored with what I wanted to capture. I culled only a few things I had highlighted that I no longer thought fit the aim of my project.

Then I headed to my art space. I went through each copy, cutting out the excerpts that were taking my attention from the piles. I cut out the names of those who were speaking.

I started to make piles of the text excerpts, trying to come up with phrases or labels, codes if you will. The categories that developed became my first list of codes (Table 14).

I noticed a new pattern during this pass through of the "please conclude" and how that district directive punctuated the stories being told by the community. I had not noticed this before and made a note to come back to this when I code the transcripts. At this point, I kept the schools separated but noted how interesting it was (and that I should consider doing otherwise in another pass through) that the "please conclude" and the "in the best interest" overlaps so much and was thinking of the particular speaking to the universal. I labeled the piles and put them away until I was ready to make the art. I kept all my scraps as well.

After having sorted and coded the stories I found (I was not sure if the unit was actually a story at this point—these were images, phrases, text excerpts) as I categorized them, I attended to each pile and I cut apart portions that looked like they would work for the artwork. One downside of this method is that I cannot reproduce any collection of what I gathered in the piles as it is all based on hard copies—I have no digitized copies of what went into the piles. My original was a PDF which is hard to manipulate into usable, digitally sortable data. This means I cannot accurately go back to the portions I labeled and sorted because I pulled some for the art and used the cut-up parts already for the art. I did keep one original hard copy of what I flagged and highlighted to start, before I copied and cut parts up.

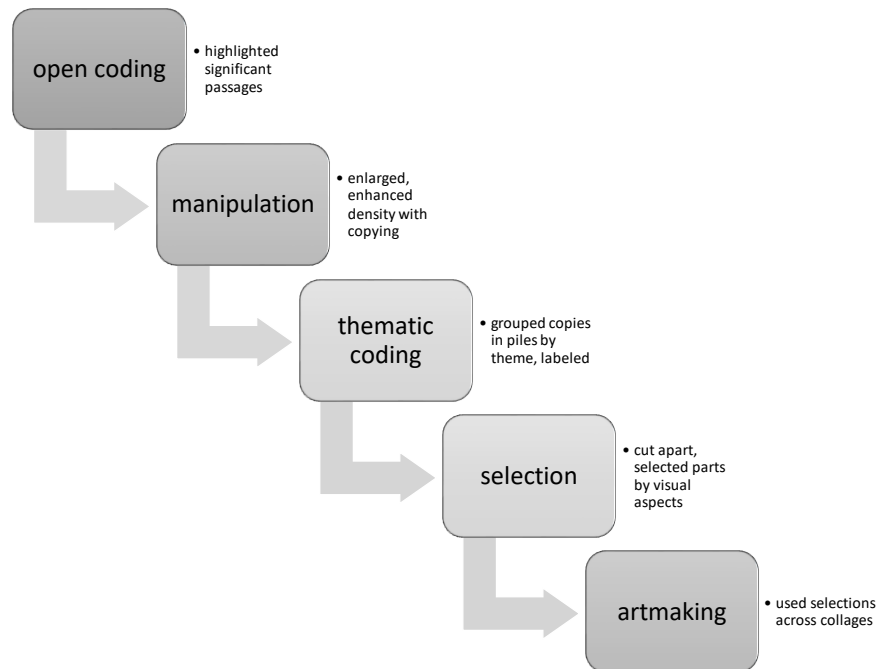


**Figure 38:** Labeling piles with thematic codes

As a note here—operationalizing what I was coding for felt antithetical to the essence of this work. At this point, I dumped this idea into a memo to analyze later, to look in the literature of arts-based methods of how others deal with this.

After having selected pieces and parts that would work for the art pieces, I created the collages and other art pieces using the image transfer process described earlier in the palimpsest portraiture section. Any planning I did around the art pieces was conditional on how the process unfolded, I felt like this part was the “true experiment” of this project. I often had a general idea or gist of what might unfold and then made decisions along the way as the process unfolded. It was a very organic process that required much patience and leaning into the “not knowing” aspect the entire way (Fisher & Fortnum, 2013).

Figure 40 offers a summary of how the text documents were treated after obtaining the transcripts of the hearings and records for Schiller and Andersen.



**Figure 39:** Summary of treatment of text documents

Table 14 details the codes identified during the thematic coding process above.

Community geospatial or historical context
District wording or context <sup>88</sup>
Ghosts and hauntings
“In the best interest of the children”
“Please conclude”
Signaling named by community
Suggestions/solutions from community

**Table 14:** Codes identified during thematic coding

A very significant thing to note here is that I did not identify a code explicitly named “community cultural wealth” because the other themes were strong and the general idea of community cultural wealth was not as explicitly present. I certainly can, at another time, use Yosso’s six types of community cultural

<sup>88</sup> identified because so glaring, obtuse, or for later comparison, although my theoretical approach was to foreground the community’s voice, not the district’s.

wealth (Patton et al., 2023) and code for those in the transcripts but in the context of school community members fighting for the schools in two-minute increments, the testimonies and records led me to the codes above and I followed that path. There is evidence of community cultural wealth in the archives and that is revealed in the conversations in Phase Four. I felt that using Yosso's theory was more valuable to use as a way to inform the research design and my approach to collecting stories rather than simply identifying points in the transcripts where there was community cultural wealth evident. It is more important to guide the research as a refusal of the deficit view in this way rather than say, "Here it is, and here..." because of course it is there.

### **Recruitment and Conversations**

I used conversations as a nested method within the larger methodology of portraiture within Phase Four. The purpose of Phase Four was to circle back to the school communities through conversation, using the art created in Phase Three as a catalyst, as part of the overarching portraiture approach of this project. The conversations with people connected to the schools was important theoretically, ethically, and methodologically. By circling back to the people reflected in the artifacts and data collected, and recast in the art, I invited folks who were connected to the schools to reflect, re-think, re-examine, and re-consider with me, to collectively remember the schools by paying attention to hauntings and engaging with the ghosts of the schools through the palimpsests left behind.

Neoliberal discourse has informed the lingering dominant narrative of inevitability and commonsenseness around closing schools (McWilliams & Kitzmiller, 2019, p. 8; Syeed, 2019). This results in an apparent erasure of school communities once the school is closed—the dominant narrative lingers in the public psyche while the stories documenting the harm and loss by the school community members is discarded (Ayala & Galletta, 2012). This phase provided an opportunity to revisit voices and experiences from people connected to the schools that were masked, hidden, but not erased. Their stories lingered in the artifacts and helped to paint a portrait of the schools that is bigger than the closing of it. Phase Four provided a process to circle back to the folks involved whose voices and experiences were not valued in the process. I circled back to the community members and not district personnel because of my

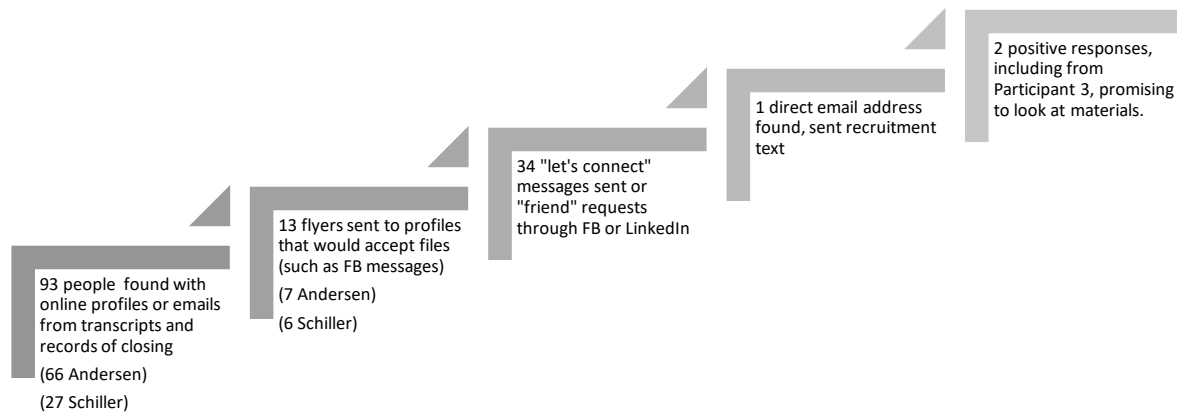
focus on the community cultural wealth (Yosso, 2005) and critical bifocality (Fine, 2016; Weis & Fine, 2012) that calls into question, and works to disrupt, the power dynamics at play when schools are closed.

After obtaining approval from the UIC Institutional Review Board (IRB), I launched my recruitment using a variety of paths. I posted recruitment flyers in the blocks outside each school, at nearby public transport stops, and at nearby parks. I also posted flyers in the College of Education at UIC. I had the study posted on the College of Education newsletter (which did net one connection to a participant by a friend who saw it there). I also posted the flyers on my own social media accounts: Facebook (of which I created one solely for my art and research), Twitter, and LinkedIn, along with the recruitment text. I also created a website (<https://schoolconversations.wixsite.com/closed-schools>) that gave potential participants more information about the project and had a link to the consent documents. Participants told me that they used this website to vet my intentions and to judge if they wanted to participant or not; this was a very valuable tool. To invite easier contact, I invented an email alias: [schoolconversations@uic.edu](mailto:schoolconversations@uic.edu) and a Google phone number to put on the recruitment materials. I did not use the Google number but ended up sharing my cell number.

I made spreadsheets of people listed in the transcripts and records, noting their affiliation and any other distinguishing information for each school. I then worked over several months to find these people, first looking for valid online profiles through social media sites (Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, LinkedIn) and inserted their name or versions of their name into the Google search engine to find a path through which I could reach them. I added the search term “Chicago” or “Chicago teacher” depending on their affiliation to the schools. LinkedIn messages proved to be the most effective path; in fact, I did not net any direct connections through any other social media. Once I found what seemed to be a person connected to the school, I sent them the recruitment texts and/or the flyers as a PDF attachment. An example of my initial returns from these searches are detailed in Figure 41, while this iterative process continued throughout the entire recruiting period, along with snowball sampling that led to conversations with twelve participants—five from each school and two that were not connected to any school but were conversations about school closure using my artwork (see Table 2). For the first round of recruitment, I



did not reach out to teachers if I found them actively teaching with an email on a CPS school website because I had so many leads to follow and tabled those until the second round.



**Figure 40:** First round of recruitment

Figure 41 shows the details of the first round of online research for people connected to schools, using names and “Chicago” and/or “Chicago teacher”.

The second round of recruitment included reaching out to Chicago Teachers’ Union for a list of teachers at both schools for the 2008-2009 school year and the National Public Housing Museum for a list of emails for the presidents of the various public housing groups that serve as the Central Advisory Council for the Chicago Housing Authority (Schiller was serving families in public housing nearby and I also heard the president of the Cabrini Green Advisory Council speak at an event and mention that he had gone to school in the neighborhood. I never reached him.) I also went back to the teacher contacts I found during the first round of searching and sent a recruitment message through whatever avenue was available (a contact page through a school website or directly to an email address).

Things to note: it was easier to find teachers who were still teaching and principals and elected officials, as they seemed to be still in the area, working in similar fields with a public persona. I was unable to reach any parents (one parent was listed in the hearing records for Schiller and 16 parents listed in the Andersen, none of which led to credible online profiles for contacts or they did not respond to my

outreach; see Appendix E for Limitations). I found some students who were still in Chicago through FB profiles. Early and quick responses indicated that my recruitment material was well designed and that there were stories people wanted to share with me and have told more broadly. I was very surprised that LinkedIn netted so many contacts or responses; it seemed valuable that I could be connected to other UIC and CPS folks through my own professional profile. The physical posting of flyers in the neighborhoods netted no responses. LinkedIn also allowed me to send a sentence or two with my connection request, through which I shared my website.

I kept a recruitment log with activities noted of what responses I got and what follow-ups were needed. Recruitment started at the end of February 2023 and has been left open for any further conversations that might develop through August 2024.

Once I had conversations scheduled with people, I leaned heavily on my theoretical framework and decision to have conversations instead of interviews<sup>89</sup> because of the value I place on conversations and the stories that get told during conversations, as well as the connections that are made through sharing stories. When I asked them about what they remembered about the schools, I asked for stories of community strengths or what were some strengths that they remembered about the school community. The *collective remembering* that I was hoping for took shape before my eyes during the group conversation detailed next, but also became the overall body of conversations that were had. We all collectively remembered the schools through the conversations we had with each other. I do not think I could say the same if I had designed this as a more traditional interview process.

An aim of the project was to convene groups of people to talk about the schools together (preferably with conversations segregated by school). This proved very cumbersome to organize and did not account for folks who had moved out of the city. Some folks also preferred to talk with me one-on-one. The three folks who participated in the group conversation, Participants 1, 2, & 3, were willing and

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<sup>89</sup> After much thought and at the request of the IRB, I billed the process as an interview or a focus group to align more clearly with research practices but also tried to lace the recruitment material with a tone that invited conversations. There is a tension between making this seem less “researchy” when the IRB’s aim is to be sure folks know that they are participating in research.

eager to gather overall, and lasted through the multiple communications needed to agree on a common place and time without knowing each other prior. I must commend them for their dedication to the conversation. The remembering was rich and emotional, filling two hours before I intentionally shifted it to closure to honor their time. The images and artwork were woven throughout the sharing. I hosted the conversation in the Make Good Lab at UIC's College of Education after foregoing the meeting rooms at public libraries due to the 3-month wait time for a reservation. I provided breakfast and parking passes. This was the first conversation I had with anyone from either school and it came about relatively quickly.

I audio recorded the conversations per my IRB approved guidelines and uploaded the audio to the Otter.ai site, where that online program created initial transcripts of each conversation.

I responded to a call from a reporter in Chicago about having experienced a school closure and plugged my project in the response. The reporter came and spoke with me in my art space for over an hour and a half, sharing recruitment methods as well as personal stories and memories. She was working toward a piece to coincide with the 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the massive school closings in 2013 in Chicago.

The next two conversations were with teachers at Andersen over the phone. I was unable to use the artwork in these conversations and the engagement was much less overall. Without an in-person presence, the connection over the phone is more distant and required me to think through how to direct the conversation in a variety of ways that was repeated in the phone conversations I had with folks connected to Schiller as well. These moves looked like inserting my own storytelling around teaching, parenting, or my experience with school closure to relate or empathize. This was also a way for me to build trust and credibility with the participants and to really make it a conversation versus me asking questions and recording answers. When the conversation would lull or the participants were giving one-word answers, I would take some time to add a tidbit about something I could reflect on that was related and this tended to spark more responses from the participants. The art was a missing value in the phone conversations.

Four months into my recruitment, I reached folks connected to Schiller that resulted in a scheduled conversation. Only one person was available to talk in-person and the other four were over the

phone. I was unable to have a group conversation with anyone from Schiller. Although I was able to describe for them how I was making and using art, they were unable to see the images and did not engage with the visuals.

Lastly, the recruitment and research project has led to various people engaging with me, through telling their stories to me as we converse at various places. For example, I saw a lifeguard who used to be at the YMCA at the beach this summer. As we chatted a longer hello, I do not remember how the conversation turned to schools, but he proceeded to tell me his stories about attending a school on the southside of Chicago growing up and then on the northside of the city. He told how he was seen as advanced, gifted as one of many Black students in his class on the southside but on the northside, he was labeled special ed as one of few Black students in the school. I am guessing he is 25 years old. Because of examples like this, I have reflected on future research paths and the last conversation I had for this study is one with a teacher-friend who was interested in the art and wanted to talk about her experience as a teacher at a receiving school in 2013 after Overton was closed. I took my art and had coffee with her in her backyard to talk about school closure. The themes and her remembering were just as powerful as the other conversations I have had.

I followed up with participants on email after the session to invite further thoughts that they could submit through a secure Box link that had a 30-day expiration.

### **Writing the Portraits**

Phase Five is where I synthesized all that I collected, analyzed, created, and experienced in the previous four phases. In this phase, I returned more tightly to the tenets of Lawrence-Lightfoot and Hoffmann Davis's portraiture as laid out in *The Art and Science of Portraiture* (1997), producing written portraits of the participants remembering Andersen and Schiller. I used a narrative voice, modeled after Lawrence Lightfoot's *The Good High School* (1983). I borrowed the form of a braided essay (Miller, 2021) to organize and craft the portraits, where I opened a section with a quote from a participant as an epigraph that either corresponded or contrasted what came next, then a vignette of from our conversation that told a story, and then closed the section with excerpts from my field notes, site visits, and memos. To

open, separate, and close the entire section of these portraits of remembering Andersen and Schiller, I inserted the artwork with heavy annotations to invite further pausing and reflecting by the reader.

To create the written portraits, I turned toward the analysis I did through the art-making and the insight I gain from the community conversations to draft the portraits using a first-person narrative voice. I used my experience and knowledge from my pilot study to inform my refusal of more traditional methods (for further details on the pilot study, see dissertation proposal), as validation for the choices I have made towards the larger aims of this project: to disrupt the discourse around school closings and to argue for alternative research approaches. In my pilot study, I used arts-based methods for an inquiry into one school that had been closed, producing collages through photo-transfer processes with the data I collected. I let go of working toward any explicit findings or claims and allowed the aesthetics to lead my exploration. From that experience, I found a way to honor the stories, re-member the parts in a way that felt less brutal than more traditional research methods and more insightful by using art. I consider my positionality and experiences as part of my researcher identity, and leaning into the arts and away from more traditional research spaces fits my sensibilities well (Choi, 2020).

I chose to foreground the community's stories about their school over the district's when analyzing the data as a form of refusal to further the deficit perspective that often shrouds urban schools, students, and families (Gorski, 2008; Valencia, 2010). Yosso (2005) describes the importance of looking for the strengths within a community, strengths that are often seen as a detriment when presented by the district, such as a heritage language like Spanish. Using community cultural wealth as a lens through which to approach my data collection, the conversations, and analysis aligns well with the focus on goodness when using portraiture.

In designing this research, I chose methods that “capture back,” sit in the nuances, refuse to be neatly defined, as a way of honoring the imperfect portraits of schools that were closed that are left behind from which we can learn as we constantly consider future paths for our school communities. My methodological choices lean into the messiness, the nuances, the imprecision, the process, the margins,

the complexities that are often overlooked or “cleaned up” (Gordon, 2008, p. 41), by more traditional social science research methods.

### ***Further Developing Codes***

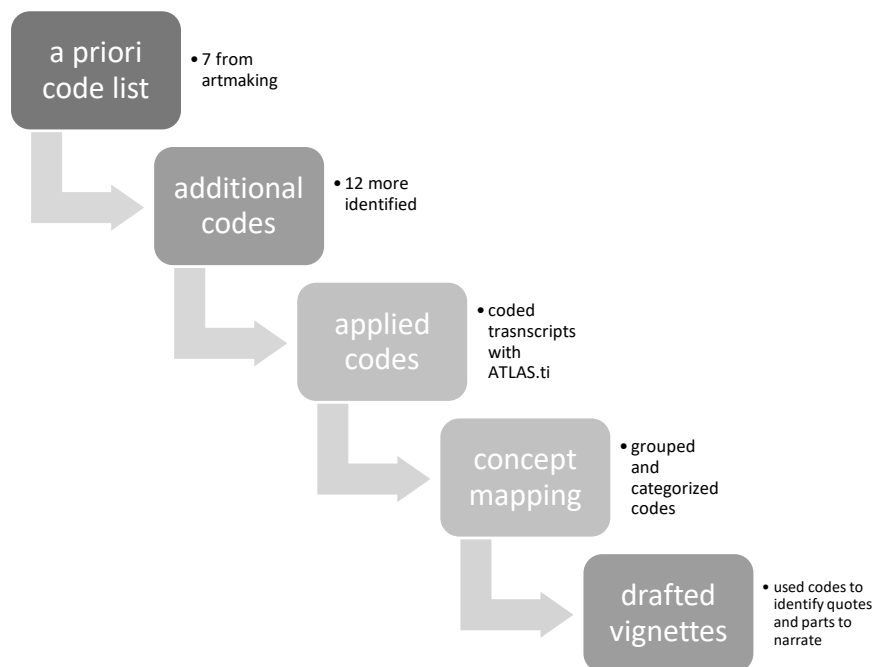
In preparation for drafting and sequencing the written portraits, I engaged in coding to help me organize the data I gathered in the conversations in Phase Four. Using the original seven codes identified during Phase Three, I identified twelve additional codes while I listened to the audio recordings of the conversations I had in Phase Four through the Otter.ai website. It is noted that the codes were informed by a previous thematic analysis of literature on school closure (see dissertation proposal), from my research questions, from thinking about how I might structure the narratives, and from thinking back to the archival documents and what lingered there that I had not identified for art pieces. While I was listening and making notes about these themes for codes, I was simultaneously cleaning up the transcripts and took out any identifying information. I then uploaded the cleaned transcripts to my UIC Box folder.

After making my list of 19 codes (Table 15), I uploaded the cleaned and deidentified transcripts into ATLAS.ti. I also created a code book. I coded each transcript from the conversations using ATLAS.ti. All the while, I looked for resonant themes, refrains, and overlaps with the coding list and would memo about anything that took my attention. Although the data was getting labeled, I did not feel that it was informing my portraiture at this point in any directional way but very strongly had vignettes sitting front of mind from the conversations. For example, the time capsule vignette was so unique, that I knew I would write about that. And the favorite teacher vignette had to be included. There were several stories like this that I did not identify through coding but remembered them so vividly from the conversations that I attended to them first.

I also ran queries about code co-occurrences to try to further steer my attention beyond the memorable stories I knew would be narrated. I had a strong pull toward telling a story of the geospatial and historical knowledge held within the individuals with whom I talked so I looked at the co-occurrences to find relationships between the code frequencies. and found that the geospatial and historical context offerings by the participants was in higher frequency than some of the other types of stories being told.

This further drove a need to categorize the codes conceptually to further identify what stories I wanted to recast in the narratives. I tried a few different ways to categorize the codes but landed on grouping them by what they were representing because there are so many levels to analyze with this project (methods versus concepts versus story content). Feeling restricted in ATLAS.ti, I shifted to paper and tape on my window with much more clarity (Figure 43). I then transferred this mapping into ATLAS.ti as a network (Figure 44). The categories I identified were concepts, methods, stories, and findings.

I then could visually see where further places were to focus my narrated portions or what areas could take more attention later (like the geospatial and historical knowledge will be written up as an addendum to Yosso's community cultural wealth later). Figure 42 details how codes were developed, categorized, and used to create the written portraits.



**Figure 41:** Codes developed for writing portraits

Table 15 details the complete list of codes identified; the codes identified in Phase Three during the artmaking are in *italics* and the plain text representing codes identified while listening to the audio recordings of the conversations in Phase Four.

<i>Community geospatial or historical context</i>
<i>District wording or context</i>
<i>Ghosts and hauntings</i>
<i>“In the best interest of the children”</i>
<i>“Please conclude”</i>
<i>Signaling named by community</i>
<i>Suggestions/solutions from community</i>
Individual story
Collective story
Neighborhood Story
Researcher shared story
Community cultural wealth
Art and images
Desires
Hopes
Already decided
listening
Remembering
Significant no label

**Table 15:** Complete list of codes identified

Figure 43 shows the mapping I used to categorize codes, shown on window with paper and tape (not visible are the categories in the corners, starting at top left moving clockwise: CONCEPTS, METHODS, STORIES, FINDINGS).



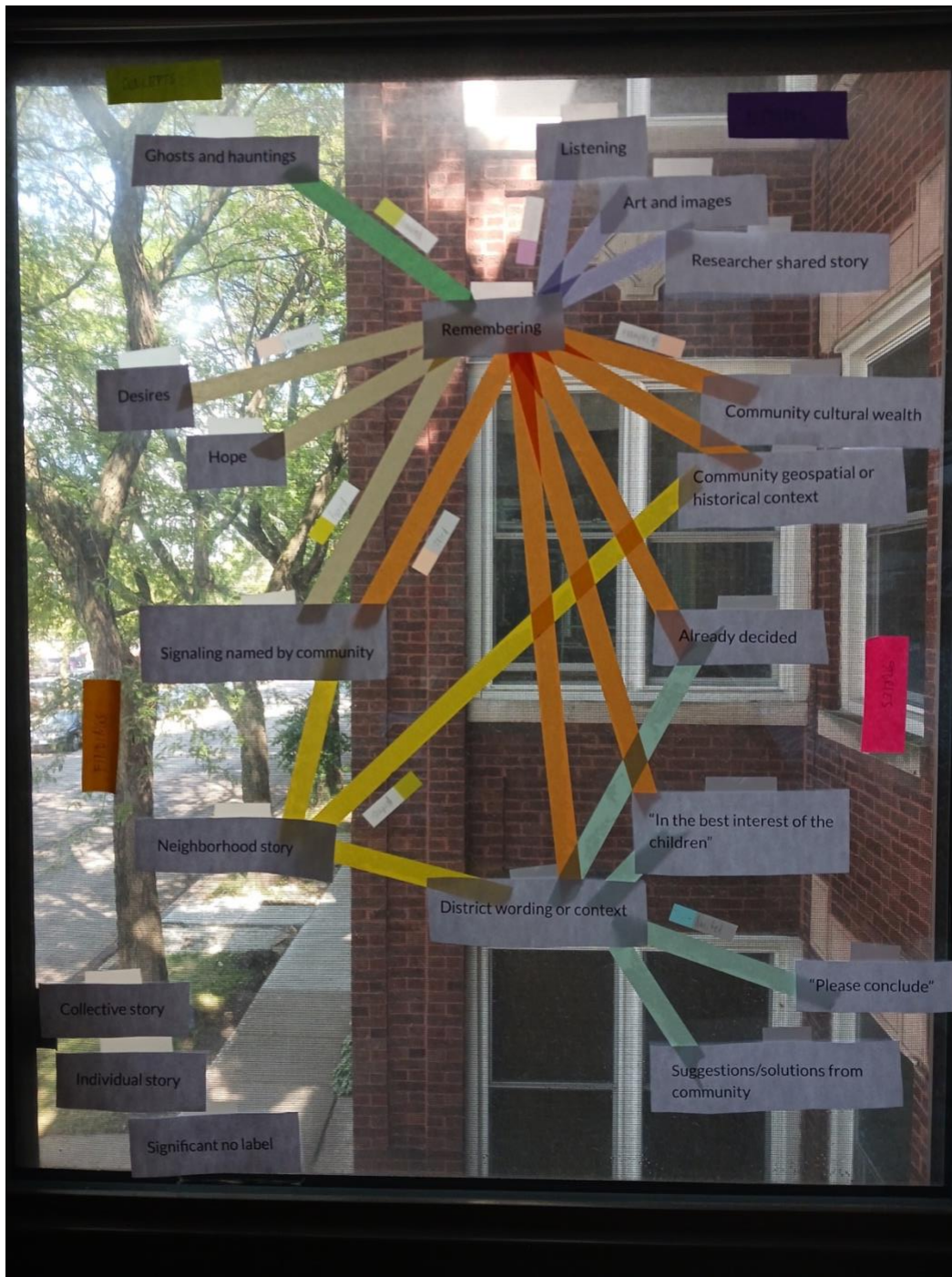
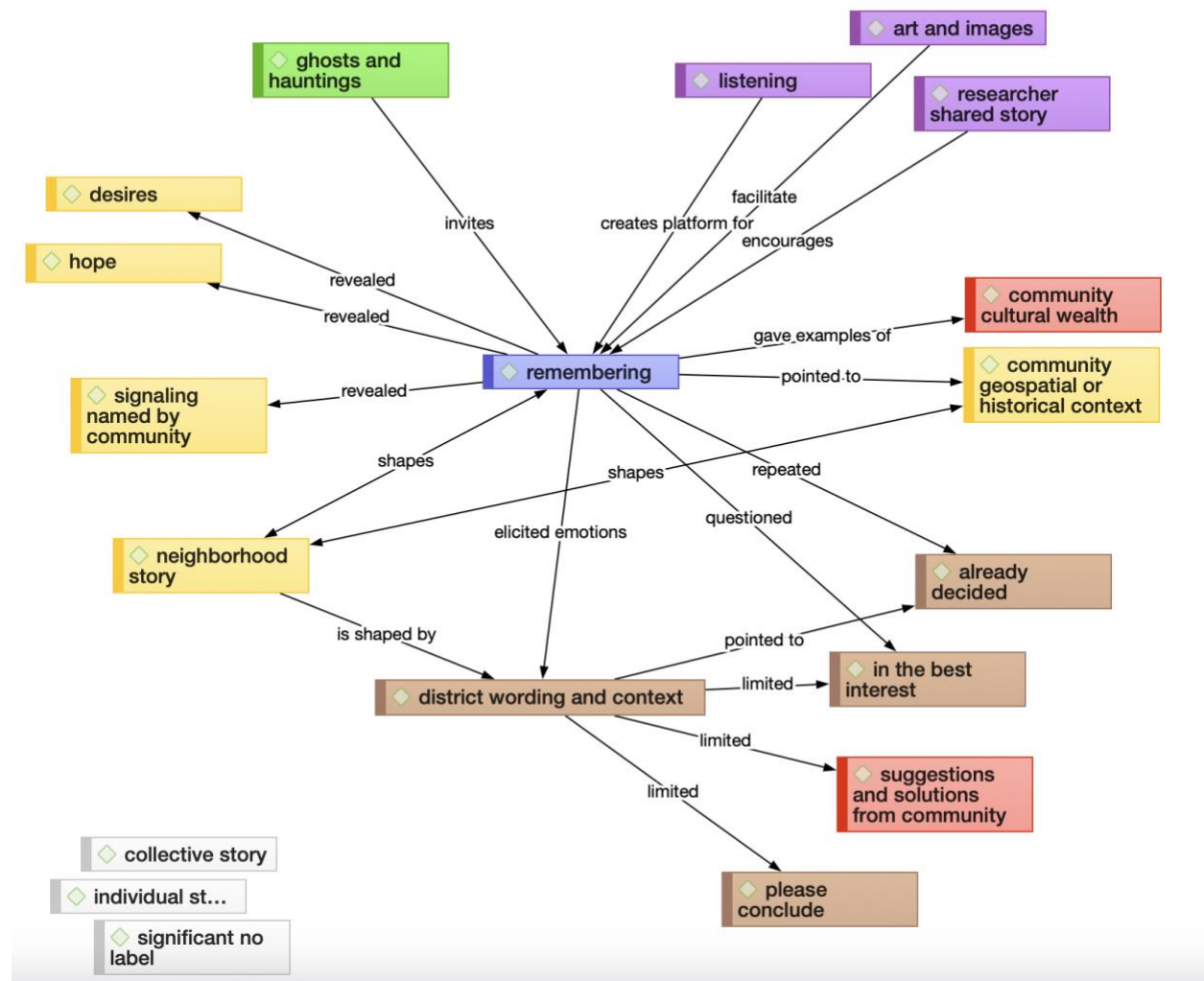


Figure 42: Mapping to categorize codes

Figure 44 shows the mapping from my window transferred into ATLAS as a network, with relationships added.



**Figure 43:** Mapping transferred into Atlas.ti

From the coding and mapping, I was able to zoom into specific moments in my memory for details and quotes while I started to draft the narrative vignettes. I then saw that there were really strong quotations that did not lend themselves to fuller narratives or vignettes but were important nonetheless because of how the participants were theorizing about school closure. While drafting, I also realized that I could not narrate a portrait of the schools, even in a fragmented way, because the data I had was of people remembering the school. This became portraits of remembering, and after listening to the audios and

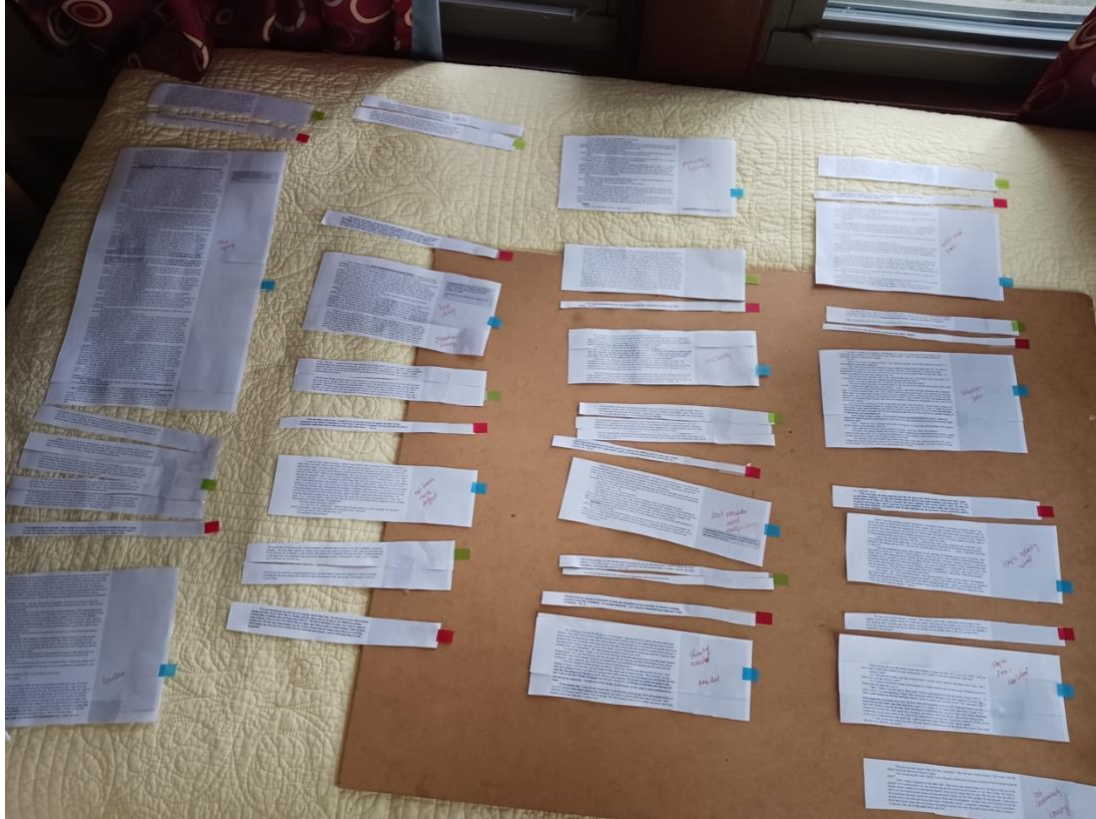
reading the transcripts and coding them, I felt the best path forward for this research storytelling was to pull the veil back on the research conversations from Phase Four, representing accurately but with a writer's voice this time (versus an artist's eye, although that could be argued as well) to smooth out the portrait strokes. The vignettes were easy to identify and re-present, as they were a nugget themselves that told a story. I chose to present the conversations as just that—dialogue as collective remembering.

I just started writing the stories that were front of mind first, like the time capsule one and the favorite teacher one. I also went back to my field notes, site visit memos, and other reflections and isolated parts that complemented the vignettes and quotations from the participants. As I dug through the transcripts for more details and quotations, I found other vignettes that lent themselves well to narration and drafted those. I kept track of other parts, like single quotations, that seemed to tell a story of some sort all on their own. Throughout this time, I would use the codes I applied to find specific places that I needed to go to when I wanted to retrieve specific parts of the conversation and would often stumble upon yet another powerful moment.

Once the vignettes were drafted, the quotations pulled, and the field notes/memos selected, I printed out all the data and cut it apart. I then worked to label what story it was, using one or two words, colored coded the parts (vignettes, quotes, and context) so that I could visually see the balance of text parts. I rearranged the parts to create a pattern of quote/epigraph – vignette – researcher notes/reflection and organized a sequence of that repeated, borrowing form from the literary world and using the braided essay from Miller (2021)<sup>90</sup> (Figures 45, 46).

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<sup>90</sup> In Fall 2023, I took an advanced creative non-fiction writing class in the English Department (ENGL 492) as I have never had formal writing instruction and wanted better tools to develop my writing in preparation for these written portraits. Similar to when I read about portraiture a few years ago and the methodology resonated so well with my sensibilities, while we were reading and studying various forms for essays, the braided essay seemed very appropriate for the way I wanted to recast the stories my participants shared through conversations. Specifically Miller gives an example of a “lyric essay” that uses the braided challah bread as a metaphor for her teaching and her writing, while also using various fragments of writing about the bread, teaching, and writing in a pattern that takes on a braided form. The disparate yet related parts are connected through breaks and overarching content and reflection, using repetition of form and imagery to weave together a beautiful composition. When I realized that Lawrence-Lightfoot's *The Good High School* as a model was too complete and I had such imperfect, scant, and ghostlike tracings of the schools through the rememberings of the people connected to them, the connection

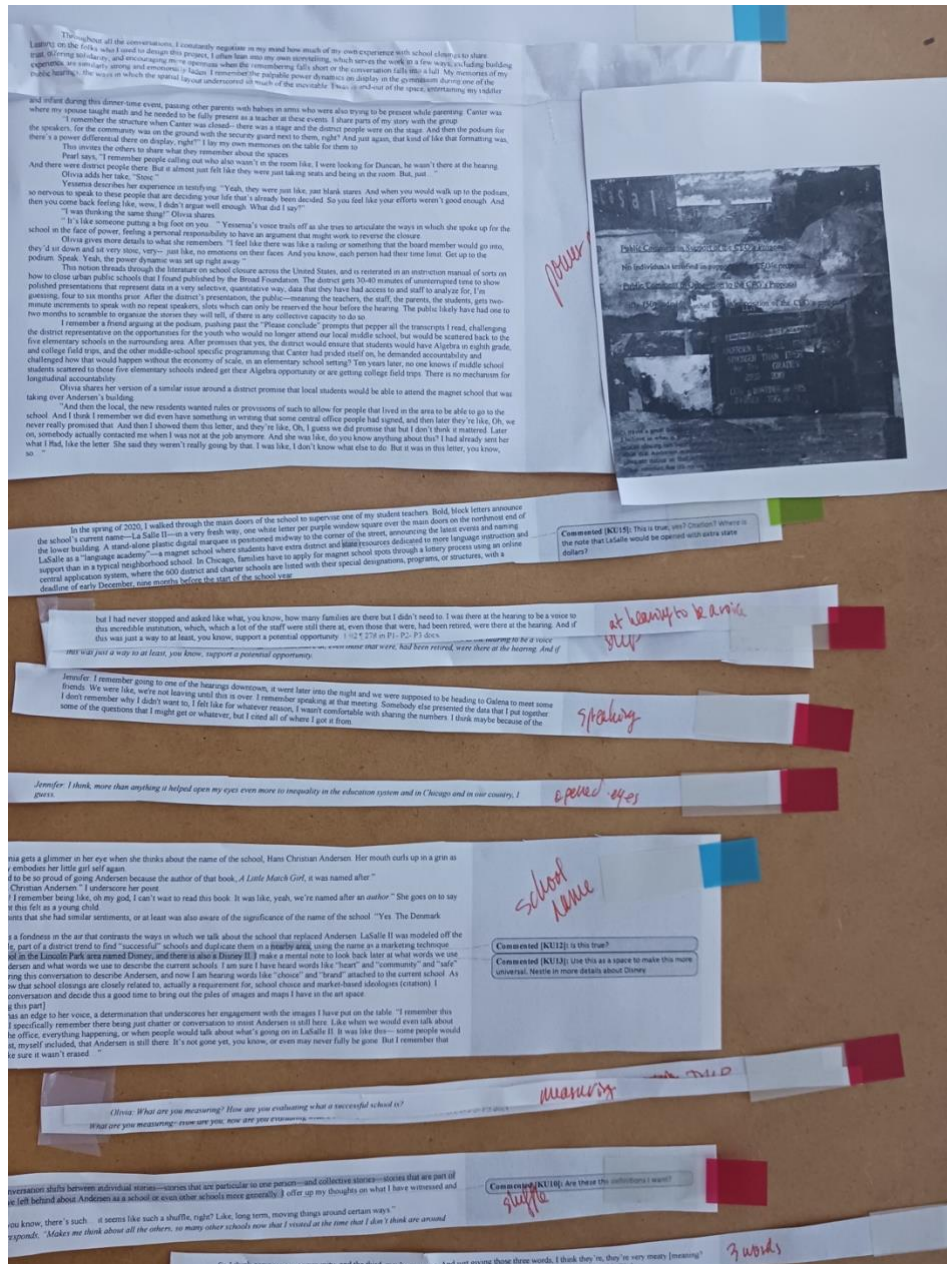


**Figure 44:** Organizing and color-coding the parts of the written portraits

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made through the conversations and art were best re-presented through the braided essay form. Although Miller technically calls this a lyric essay, the braided essay is a better term that I then use.





**Figure 45:** Detail of organizing and color-coding parts of written portraits

I then transferred the sequencing and selections I made with the cut-up sections back into the document draft to reflect the changes. I used formatting tools, like bold and italic fonts, to indicate to the reader that these were different entities. After reading through the written portrait for each school, I cut up the draft again and repeated further sequencing and selecting of the parts. I then did another round of editing the narrations before submitting them to a colleague and my advisor for feedback.

After completing the narrative written portraits, I shared the final draft of the portraits with the participants to offer an additional conversation after they had read the draft of the written portrait. I also worked from a broader perspective to organize the artwork as a frame of sorts around the written portraits, situating them before, between, and after as a result of a few attempts of other options, such as nesting the palimpsest portraits within the narration and situating them as a separate chapter entirely.

Throughout all phases, I memoed or reflected in writing about what was taking my attention or other quandaries; had meetings with my advisor, committee members, and colleagues; and had conversations with various people I encountered about school closure.

## APPENDIX F: PROMISES AND LIMITATIONS

This study is unconventional in its approach, product, and aims. The promises are laid out throughout this document and are explicitly summarized below around equity and justice, the arts and aesthetics, audience, and future research. The limitations detailed are organized by participant demographics, recruitment, related trauma and reverberations of this work, and the exclusive histories of art spaces.

### Promises

This project has been supported by entities that have equity and justice embedded in their missions. This recognition and the engagement I have had from participants brings a promise that this research can become part of the work already being done in Chicago to work toward equity and justice in education.

The arts have often been a space that addresses critical social issues and invites reconsiderations. Using the arts and aesthetic approaches for this project provided multiple avenues of access for the analysis and reconsiderations to rest within the reader/viewer. This promises to lessen the barrier or gap between academia and the general public. Executed in a social context of great political divisiveness, the artistic approaches carefully set the stage for conversations, allowing me to present an alternative discourse that works to upend the logic that school closures are the best solution for the social issues we see manifesting in schools. The promise of this work is that it leans into the storytelling that is so powerful, not only in delivering a story, but in pushing into the micro spaces where the stories we tell about schools shape how folks engage with educational policy (for example, parents' perceptions of neighborhoods and thus schools, and how they gather their information to choose schools).

An artistic or aesthetic approach also offers a salve to the historical trauma experienced through school closure, something that conventional qualitative and quantitative research stories often do not offer. It is a promise of care associated with work.

In broader educational research spaces, I often find myself searching for two little corners where work like this is being done, corners with critical researchers and corners with arts-leaning researchers. If

this work gets published and elicits conversations like I hope, then it also promises to work against the marginalization of critical, arts-based research.

There is the promise for this work to impact or disrupt the dominant narrative around school closure because of the way it targets a broader audience. The narrative vignettes and related parts braided together are compelling and invite the reader to make meaning around the stories, offering an approach and product that has not been offered with other research. The preliminary feedback I have received has been positive and encouraging about how it could reach the public, organizers, practitioners, and policymakers.

Finally, another promise of this work is the future research it will invite. Individually, I already could build an entire five-year-plus research agenda (or more) from the lines of inquiry that have been bound out of this work or inspired through additional curiosity and potential collaborations. By offering these portraits and my methods to the field through publications, I also can bring all the work that has informed and inspired this project forward to other researchers who are interested in these approaches or topics.

## **Limitations**

There are many aspects to this work that could be argued as a limitation, depending on one's epistemological and theoretical positions. Arguments such as any arts-leaning approaches include "bias" or "subjectivity" or that this work is not "scientific enough" are not valid limitations with how this study was thought up or designed from my own research positionality, as that discussion falls more into a justification argument. I feel I have made a solid justification for this work through my proposal and with this document as a whole. The limitations below are ones that I have identified as a short-coming aspect of the work that is an asterisk of sorts. This discussion of limitations also extends to include considerations that may not be a limit of the study, but hover as a negative aspect to the work that I feel needs acknowledgment.

A clear limitation of this work is that I did not talk with any parent from either school. The portraits of remembering, although already collaged and fragmented, are incomplete without stories from



parents. I did attempt to reach parents (included in figure on Table 1) and would have preferred to continue my recruitment efforts with special attention to connecting specifically with parents. This may be addressed with future research.

Another limitation was my recruitment protocol. Although the processes I used to find folks connected to the schools worked for securing conversations with the participants I found, by starting with finding individuals who have credible online profiles, I excluded any participants that are not technologically savvy or on social media platforms. In our society of everything being online, I was not able to feasibly design another way to reach out to potential participants. If I were to address this limitation, I would spend more time trying to find the lineage of community engagement spaces, attend community meetings or events, to find moments to connect with people offline. This, however, has ethical considerations that I would need to think through, such as being a recruiting researcher inserting myself as an outsider to community spaces.

Relatedly, my approach to finding online profiles as a starting point was limited in a few ways—the social media platforms I am familiar with or part of may be targeted to a certain middle-class, White professional demographic. I also ran into quite a few names that were common, and without noteworthy details, I was unable to decipher if the person's profile online was connected to the individual listed in the records. Due to the scope of the whole project, I noted this on my recruitment efforts spreadsheet and moved on to someone else on the list.

This work was explicitly advertised as working toward racial justice on my recruitment material. This was not a limitation and was a necessary statement for my funder (IRRPP) and for my research stance as a critical researcher. Because of this, I am sure some participants were more willing to participate. The limitation that comes with that is that I did not recruit any participants who offered a counterstory to the counterstories I was searching out. This is consistent with my theoretical and conceptual frameworks—I searched out stories that were about community cultural wealth and from the community perspective. The limitation comes in that I did not talk with community members who offered a view of the schools that were less-than-supportive. I can draw conclusions by that lack of participant,

which might be seen as a limitation per my proposal defense, but this is not a limitation for the study in how it was designed. Mahr and Csibra (2020) unpack this through thinking about testimonies that support what one believes than details that might contrast that.

Mahr and Csibra (2018) argued that one way in which such a bias manifests is through “recollective my-side bias.” Episodic-memory construction is more likely to confirm and support our prior beliefs than to contradict them. However, this might not be the only source of architectural bias in episodic memory. Episodes are neither retrieved nor communicated as atomized particles but as narratives. Testimony is not only given as a series of propositions but also narrativized in a way that makes it more likely for the audience to draw certain inferences over others. (p. 437)

The limitation lies in this pondering: What did I miss by designing my conversations as I did, instead of more interview-like? By sharing my own stories and providing prompts that urged certain stories, what did I bound out?

Whenever someone’s story is documented for a broader audience, there is an effect from the documentation<sup>91</sup>. Trauma can be triggered; momentum of the documenting can be contrasted with a let-down or abandoned feeling can follow. One limitation of this work is how I made people feel about sharing their stories or what they experienced before or after our interactions. I think about folks who did not respond to my recruitment efforts and if they did not respond because of the trauma attached to their experiences.

Historically, art spaces have been exclusive and at times harmful to populations that are not White and wealthy, much like some histories in the medical world. Gallery spaces have been damaging to some artists and images can be taken up in ways that were not intended (Allweiss et al., 2015). The art

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<sup>91</sup> See <https://www.theguardian.com/film/2023/feb/12/the-staircase-margie-ratliff-documentary-subject-hoop-dreams-square-wolf-pack>

shapes within this work have the potential to engage in unintended ways and that is a limitation of this study.

There are additional reverberations of this work that I am not aware of, that may lead to engagement in the work in ways in which are counter to my aims. I am wondering how these stories might be co-opted to argue for closure or choice, a limitation that I am still thinking about.

## APPENDIX G: FUTURE INQUIRIES

There are several lines of research that I anticipate pursuing, post-dissertation that I summarize below. This is to note the future implications of this dissertation and to acknowledge efforts to bound the work to what is presented in the main body.

### **Secondary Ripples**

There is a significant amount of data that points to important primary and secondary “ripples” that come with school closure, as some of my conversations were with people who were deeply affected but were not primarily connected with a school as a parent, student, or staff member. To me, primary ripples are well researched, often stories told through the media or other research entities, answering questions such as “Where did the students go after the school closed?” Or “Did students from schools that were closed attend better schools in the end?” Secondary ripples, however, do not seem to be as well documented and may possibly be secondarily qualified through the space of time or through degrees of connection. Secondary ripples become evident through conversations with and stories from people who were not directly attached to schools that were closed as an employee or family/student but have been haunted by a school closing significantly.

For examples, a reporter I talked to who covered school closings years ago described the experience as being “seared in her brain,” something she’d never forget. A fellow doctoral student at the university described the emotional kick to the gut when she went back to create a scholarship at her grade school and only then realized it had been closed years before, the loyalty she felt to the school that would be betrayed if she simply extended the scholarship offer to another school. She said the current students in the building certainly could have used her gift, but “that wasn’t my school anymore,” so it didn’t feel right. And a teacher who started teaching at a receiving school the year after Overton closed told me that it is definitely a haunting. She remembers the rightful anger brought into the school by families and staff from the school that was closed and how that lingered in the space throughout the year after Overton closed. She described the 50 schools closed in Chicago as taking away 50 “anchors” in the neighborhoods

all at once. She vividly remembers the furniture from the school that was closed being dumped in a large pile in the gym, to be sorted through.

I think it was like an analogy. I talked about it with another teacher. Like, during the year, it was an analogy, dump the stuff in the gym, dumped the kids at the school. It felt like it was the same thing. Wow. The same thing. It felt like that. Just dump the stuff, dump the kids. Like, I felt like that's how it was kind of done. Yeah, that's why that image was so strong for me...

I anticipate a future research call for conversations about school closure with folks who are part of this “secondary ripple.”

### **Methods Inquiry**

My arts-based methods deserve a meta inquiry of their own. The ways in which my artwork has solicited conversations with people who were not connected to the schools but connected geographically to the spaces after the closings has been fascinating. The art has served as a conduit for historicizing the sites and invites people to talk about school closure more generally.

### **Generative Space Inquiry**

Additionally, the maker's space in which I created the art has been significant as a generative space for my own meaning-making and for the conversations I have had. I would like to do research on how space interplays with conversation and meaning making.

### **School Buildings**

I would like to investigate how the building itself embodies a school. In the book “How Buildings Learn” by Stuart Brand (1995), he chronicles ways in which buildings change and are adapted over their lifespan, bending and being reformed by the contexts around them. I have been fascinated about a connection between the concepts in this book with two things: the palimpsests I found in the buildings where schools were closed throughout the entire city of Chicago and the stories I heard that told how the physical space signaled different things about school closure. My literature review for my dissertation is shaped around stories we tell about schools. I am wondering how school buildings teach us, how the buildings themselves shape and are shaped by the stories we tell about schools, and how buildings hold

stories within their structures over time. What we can learn about shifts in urban neighborhoods through what gets signaled by the school building itself? How do we limit our imaginations for transforming learning spaces into places where students thrive by the buildings we have?

I have thought about how buildings (buildings, houses) remember. They do through inhabitation and synthesis of memories of others, so what does this mean for school buildings? (Davidson, 2009).

### **Additional Participants and Schools**

This project was large in scope and sequence. I ran out of steam, capacity, and time, and made decisions to bound certain parts in places that I would have continued investigating if I had had a research team. For example, I reached no parents in my recruitment. This is discussed in my limitations and deserves more attention. Parents' stories related to school closure are critical and I would like to work longer at more recruitment.

Similarly, there is a consideration to do this same process with more schools to create a collection of portraits of remembering that are geographically peppered around the city. Although the artmaking and photography played a quasi-subordinate role in the project, there is potential to expand the visual artmaking and photography to photo-essay on school closure across the district.

### **Yosso's Community Cultural Wealth**

A key concept that inspired this project was Yosso's (2005) *community cultural wealth*. I went into this work thinking I would find a litany of community cultural wealth based on the six cultural types she names—aspirational, linguistic, familial, social, navigational, and resistance. Although the pivot into portraits of remembering from portraits of the schools is not a limitation, I did not use her framework in such specificity as to the level of these six types. I wonder what that would have looked like to develop a typology around her concept.

Additionally, I would like to make an addendum on Yosso's (2005) community cultural wealth by the geospatial and historical knowledge held within individuals who were connected to the school and neighborhood. Importantly, though, this dimension of history and space and time is also missing from the current conceptualizations of community cultural wealth. The geospatial and historical knowledge from

people connected to the schools has always been there; this is not new knowledge. Scholars have pointed to this fact as well, but those have been top-down stories crafted from scholarly analysis, not ground-up stories from the community.

### **Defining the Community**

What and who is the community? I would like to dig into my data and collect more through using the art and conversations as a heuristic for defining community. This could be done through an analysis of the data I already have.

### **Dichotomy of Openness and Closedness**

There's a dichotomy or a binary (find out the difference) between open and closed. The choices are to keep a school open or close it. It is a binary. But the process and consequences are much more nuanced than a this-or-that or an oppositional position. While the process is very oppositional: do you want this school to stay open or to close? People are forced to pick sides. It's a very strange thing to impose on schools that are complex and complicated.

### **Ewing's Institutional Mourning**

A re-examination of this project using Eve Ewing's institutional mourning as related to collective remembering would be insightful. What can we do to sustain histories and honor stories?

### **School Closures and Spatial Justice**

The idea of school closings as playing a role in spatial justice is an extension of this work that I would like to pursue (Anderson & Daya, 2022). "We suggest that everyday spaces of remembering and, importantly, also, forgetting, interwoven with city- and national-scale events, can expand our understanding of what constitutes urban spatial justice" (Anderson & Daya, 2022, p. 1676). There is a connection of memory justice with spatial justice (Anderson & Daya, 2022, p. 1675)—this matters but I did not have space to connect all of that within this dissertation.

In contemporary global capitalist market integration, large numbers of relatively isolated places are being rendered 'forgotten' by the decisions of differentially empowered actors as identified above. For many with less power, such places do not deserve to be forgotten—they should be

valued for their assets and human meaning. How can the work of geographers, economists and regional scientists be bent towards the project of remembrance? Here, I suggest both ideological and political answers to this question. (Markusen, 2004, p. 2310)

### **A Study of Semantics**

What meaning is made when using different semantics to talk about these school actions where schools no longer exist in the district? *Closed schools* versus *schools that were closed* versus *schools that are closed*. How do the ways we talk about the schools and closure matter?



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## KRISTY ULRICH PAPCZUN

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### Education

- PhD**      **University of Illinois Chicago (UIC), Chicago, IL**  
**College of Education, Department of Curriculum and Instruction**  
**Curriculum Studies**  
Dissertation: *Hauntings, Palimpsests, and Aesthetics: Portraits of Remembering Schools that were Closed*  
Dissertation Committee: Josh Radinsky (chair), Danny Bernard Martin, Nicole Nguyen, Karyn Sandlos, Andrew J. Greenlee  
Aug 2024
- MEd**      **University of Illinois Chicago (UIC), Chicago, IL**  
**Educational Policy Studies, Social Foundations**  
Dec 2017
- BA**      **Northeastern Illinois University (NEIU), Chicago, IL**  
**English/Secondary Education**  
May 2007
- BA**      **Kent State University (KSU), Kent, OH**  
**Fashion Design**  
May 2000

### Licensure/Endorsements

Professional Educators License (PEL)- Teaching License Illinois 6-12, English  
Middle Grades Endorsement for Language Arts, Drama, Social Studies

### Academic Experience – Higher Education

#### **University of Illinois Chicago (UIC)**

#### **Graduate Research Assistant, Department of Curriculum and Instruction**

Aug 2018-Aug

2023

- Supported Clinical Associate Professor, Program Coordinator for BA Urban Education- Elementary Education Program with largest program in the College of Education.
- Assisted with various parts of fieldwork, including development of fieldwork documents, placements for student practicum in public schools during pandemic.
- Created interactive map of 114 student residences for proximity considerations with 18 school sites.
- Designed graphics for decolonizing framework modules, organized content on Blackboard and cumulative grading for fieldwork course.
- Mentored junior-level undergraduate teacher education students in the classroom setting through observations, conferences, and lesson plan feedback.
- Helped with program coordination, including communications with other entities for licensure (ISBE, university entity for state-level licensure requirements, and other program coordinators), coordination of additional endorsements for teacher candidates through grant with Early Childhood Education program.
- Facilitated early stages of teacher education E-Portfolio across departments, including scheduling meetings for team, organizing documents and meeting notes, serving as liaison between teacher education content and technology, directly supervised undergraduate computer science hire for development of online platform.
- Assisted with book publishing, including co-writing book proposal, editing and formatting manuscript, and serving as liaison to publisher.

### **Academic Experience – Higher Education** *(Continued)*

**Graduate Assistant, Department of Educational Psychology**  
2023

Jan 2020-Aug

- Assisted Senior Lecturer, Director of Early Childhood Education Programs to support Pelino Gift (\$2.8 million over 4 years) for Early Childhood Education.
- Scheduled and organized weekly interdisciplinary team meetings; created structure and notes for annual meetings with funder.
- Designed and managed online scholarship application system and related protocol.
- Provided structure, graphics, and writing support for proposal and promotional document.
- Managed collaborative document for annual reports for funder, including drafting narratives, organizing flow, following up with team members, designing overall structure, and copyediting final draft.
- Organized and oversaw initial website development for Early Childhood Education (ECE) collaborative.
- Served as point person for students in elementary licensure program wanting early childhood endorsement in partnership with academic advisor, including structures to fund 60 students for summer courses.

**Graduate Research Assistant, Department of Earth and Environmental Sciences**  
2022

May-Aug 2021, Aug

- Collaborated with Clinical Associate Professor to add qualitative aspect to large NSF grant Geopaths-Impacts.
- Supported *Partnerships to Recruit Geoscience Undergraduates from Urban Chicago* as key research personnel.
- Helped to draft IRB amendment, created interview questions and conducted interviews with participants on Zoom and in-person; transcribed interviews.
- Coded transcripts using NVivo (thematic and descriptive) and will assist with qualitative aspect of subsequent papers from project.

### **Teaching Assistant (TA) Experience – Higher Education**

**University of Illinois Chicago (UIC), Chicago IL**

**Teaching Assistant, Department of Curriculum and Instruction**  
2019

Aug-Dec 2018; Jan-May 2019; Aug-Dec

- Taught undergraduates in the BA Urban Education- Elementary Education Program. Co-taught 34 students (Fall Semester 2018), 36 students (Spring Semester 2019), and solo-taught 42 students (Fall Semester 2019) sections of Introduction to Urban Education: ED 100, (a required 3-hour survey class for all undergraduate teacher education students and university general education course); instructor of record each semester.
- Utilized Blackboard for course content, discussion boards, attendance, announcements, communication.
- Participated in co-planning, co-grading, and meeting with tenured faculty to align syllabi; topics included purpose of schooling, neoliberalism, activism and protest in education, standardization.
- Provided accommodations to individual students throughout course, provided writing coaching on assignments.
- Mentored individual students to transfer into teacher education programs.

**Teaching Assistant, Department of Special Education**

Jan 2020-May 2020

- Taught graduate students as part of instructional team for SPED 572: Special Education Student Teaching with professor/program coordinator for Master of Education in Special Education Program.
- Co-facilitated weekly seminars and small group video viewing sessions of teaching, using edTPA framework as guidance for 27 student teachers.
- Individually mentored and supervised five student teachers at five different Chicago Public Schools through site visits for formal observations and post-observation conferences.
- Scaffolded peer-feedback through video conferencing, providing video feedback through EdThena.
- Maintained extensive email communication with students, cooperating teachers and professor.

### Dissertation Research Experience

- Qualitative research on two schools that were closed, designed as five phases over almost two years.
- Created and adjusted work plans to complete on schedule, presented research at national conferences.
- Indexed 723 data entries over 8 spreadsheets, creating file-naming system, including archival data from two local archives and online research.
- Twelve conversations with participants, audio-recorded, transcribed, thematically coded using Atlas.ti software, developed into narrative written portraits using portraiture methodology.

### Teaching Experience K-12

#### **Chicago Public Schools (CPS), Chicago, IL**

##### **Ray Elementary School**

Jan 2018-June 2019

- Long-Term Substitute Teacher: Pre-K & K

##### **GEAR UP Summer Academy with Northeastern Illinois University & CPS**

- Literature Teacher: 11th, 12th grades (2019) Summers 2011-2019
- Literature Teacher: 7th, 8th grades (2011, 2012, 2013, 2015, 2016)

##### **Bret Harte Elementary School**

Aug 2014- June 2016

- Language Arts Teacher: 6<sup>th</sup>, 7<sup>th</sup>, 8<sup>th</sup> grades
- Homeroom Teacher: 8<sup>th</sup> grade

##### **Michael M. Byrne Elementary School**

July 2007-January 2013

- Language Arts Teacher: 7<sup>th</sup>, 8<sup>th</sup> grades
- Homeroom Teacher: 8<sup>th</sup> grade
- Cooperating Teacher at Byrne for Trinity College Student Teacher (2012)

### Honors/Awards/Fellowships

- **National Art Educators Association (NAEA) Member Exhibition Jury Selection-** *Palimpsest Portrait: Plate 4- We All Live Here*, collage. Oct 2023
- **National Academy of Education (NAEd)/Spencer Dissertation Fellowship Program Award.** April 2023
- **University of Illinois Chicago (UIC) Dean's Scholar Fellowship Award, Graduate College.** May 2023
- **Image of Research Award, University of Illinois Chicago Graduate College-** 1<sup>st</sup> place, *East Façade*, photograph. April 2023
- **Ann Lynn Lopez Schubert Fellowship for Doctoral Studies in Curriculum and Instruction.** March 2023
- **Institute for Research on Race and Public Policy (IRRPP) Dissertation Grant.** Nov 2022
- **Image of Research Award, University of Illinois Chicago Graduate College-** 2<sup>nd</sup> place, *Palimpsest Portrait: Plate 1*, collage. April 2022
- **Invited Artist, Cover Art** for A. J. Fortune, C. N. Mason & E. E. Oberto (Eds.), *Critical perspectives: A multidisciplinary anthology of urban education research* (Vol. 1). Innovations in Instruction (in press). Feb 2022
- **Willow Run Poetry Book Award-** Finalist, *Remembering My Father*. 2019

### Overview of Scholarly Practice

- **My scholarly practice** centers on the social foundations of education, specifically the historical inequities in urban schools, which informs my teaching practice at all levels.
- **My research interests** include how race and class intersect with school policy, namely through school choice and school closures. Always considering the broader geospatial and historical contexts of cities like Chicago, I use arts-based research methods partnered with archival work, within methodologies like portraiture, to look at the stories we tell about schools and neighborhoods.
- **My teaching interests** lie in bringing a critical perspective to the university classroom where we are all unlearning and relearning what we know about schooling.

## **Publications**

**Ulrich Papczun, K.** (2017). *Remembering my father*. CreateSpace/Amazon. 96 pages. Self-published book, a personal memoir written in verse and prose, capturing my most poignant memories of growing up in rural Ohio. Written as a reflection on my father who was institutionalized for seven years after a massive stroke in 2011. Previously available on Amazon: <http://a.co/gIw2MHn>.

Sacay, R., Lee, W., Oberto, E., & **Ulrich Papczun, K.** (in press). Reinventing critical literacies from various educational perspectives. In A. J. Fortune, C. N. Mason & E. E. Oberto (Eds.), *Critical perspectives: A multidisciplinary anthology of urban education research* (Vol. 1). Innovations in Instruction.

**Ulrich Papczun, K.** (in press). School choice in Chicago: A critical perspective. In A. J. Fortune, C. N. Mason & E. E. Oberto (Eds.), *Critical perspectives: A multidisciplinary anthology of urban education research* (Vol. 1). Innovations in Instruction.

## **Invited Presentations**

**Ulrich Papczun, K.** (2024, April 11-14). *‘It’s in many ways haunted me the whole time...’*: Remembering schools that were closed in Chicago [Invited e-Lightening Ed-Talk]. American Educational Research Association (AERA) Annual Meeting, Philadelphia, PA, United States. <https://convention2.allacademic.com/one/aera/aera24/>

**Ulrich Papczun, K.** (2024, April 11-14). *‘It’s in many ways haunted me the whole time...’*: Remembering schools that were closed in Chicago [Invited poster presentation]. In *Promising Scholarship in Education Research: Dissertation Fellows and Their Research* at American Educational Research Association (AERA) Annual Meeting, Philadelphia, PA, United States. <https://convention2.allacademic.com/one/aera/aera24/>

**Ulrich Papczun, K.** (2024, March 6-8). *Portraits of remembering*. [Panel presentation]. National Academy of Education (NAEd) and Spencer Foundation Fellows Spring Retreat, Washington, D.C., United States.

**Ulrich Papczun, K.,** & Garr, S. A. (2021, January 16). *Digging in: Using historical sources to write* [Workshop]. Teachers as Writers Intensive, Northeastern Illinois University/Chicago Center for Access and Success, Chicago, IL, United States.

Larnell, G., Rosario-Moore, A., & **Ulrich Papczun, K.** (2020, November 17). *Navigating Teaching During COVID-19* [Panel presentation]. GSIG Address the Desk event, Chicago, IL, United States. <https://education.uic.edu/events/teaching-during-covid/>

**Papczun, K.,** Gates, S., & Young, D. (2016, October 21). *Whose stories need to be told?* [Workshop]. Young Adult Literature (YAL) GEAR UP Conference, St. Charles, IL, United States.

**Papczun, K.** (2012, February 20). *Navigating Donorschoose.org* [Workshop]. Chicago Teachers’ Center, Chicago, IL, United States.

**Papczun, K.** (2012, October 19). *Killers of mankind: Using the grotesque to engage students in inquiry and design* [Workshop]. Young Adult Literature (YAL) GEAR UP Conference, St. Charles, IL, United States.

**Papczun, K.** (2011, January 22). *Navigating Donorschoose.org* [Workshop]. Chicago Teachers’ Center, Chicago, IL, United States.

**Papczun, K.** (2011, October 21). *Navigating inquiry and exploring non-fiction with Sir Earnest Shackleton and the GEAR UP 4 Summer Academy students* [Workshop]. Young Adult Literature (YAL) GEAR UP Conference, St. Charles, IL, United States.

## **Peer-Reviewed Presentations**

**Ulrich Papczun, K.** (2024, May 15-18). The absent-presence of school closure: Resisting through remembering [Panel presentation]. In **K. Ulrich Papczun (Chair)**, *Critical inquiries into the (bi-)stories of school closings and openings in Chicago*. International Congress of Qualitative Inquiry (ICQI), Urbana-Champaign, IL, United States.

### **Peer-Reviewed Presentations** *(Continued)*

**Ulrich Papczun, K.** (2024, April 11-14). Palimpsest portraits [Artwork series]. In *Artists and artistic inquiry meeting the challenges of our time: Dismantling racial injustice and creating educational opportunities* by Arts-Based Educational Research Special Interest Group (ABER SIG) Pre-Conference at American Educational Research Association (AERA) Annual Meeting, Philadelphia, PA, United States.

Duret, E., & **Ulrich Papczun, K.** (2024, April 4-6). *Illuminating the power of arts-based research for researchers and practitioners* [Session presentation]. National Art Education Association (NAEA) National Convention, Minneapolis, MN, United States.

**Ulrich Papczun, K.** (2023, November 8-12). *Portrait of a Closed School in Chicago* [Roundtable presentation]. American Educational Studies Association (AESA) Annual Meeting, Louisville, KY, United States.

<https://convention2.allacademic.com/one/aesa/aesa23/>

**Ulrich Papczun, K.** (2023, April 13-16). *The need to create: Educational spaces as fundamentally creative* [Paper presentation]. American Educational Research Association (AERA) Annual Meeting, Chicago, IL, United States.

<https://convention2.allacademic.com/one/aera/aera23/>

**Ulrich Papczun, K.** (2022, November 2-6). *A Curriculum of Closure: Shedding Light on Urban School Closures through a Synthesis of Research* [Paper presentation]. American Educational Studies Association (AESA) Annual Conference, Pittsburgh, PA, United States. <http://educationalstudies.org/PDF/2022-AESA-Conference-Program-FINAL-11.2.pdf>

**Ulrich Papczun, K.** (2022, November 2-6). *Creative Approaches to the Academic Writing Process as a Form of Self-Care* [Alternative session- Workshop]. American Educational Studies Association (AESA) Annual Conference, Pittsburgh, PA, United States.

<http://educationalstudies.org/PDF/2022-AESA-Conference-Program-FINAL-11.2.pdf>

**Ulrich Papczun, K.** (2022, February 25). Illuminating the potential of arts-based research methods. In **K. Ulrich Papczun (Chair)**, M. Diaz, C. Owens, & E. Preston, *Illuminating the shadows: Transformative potentials of critical art engagement in education theory and practice* [Symposium]. University of Illinois Chicago College of Education Research Day, Chicago, IL, United States.

<https://education.uic.edu/our-research/annual-research-day/>

**Ulrich Papczun, K.** (2022, February 25). *Giving Attention to Hauntings and Engaging with Ghosts: Portraits of Closed Schools in Chicago* [Roundtable presentation]. University of Illinois Chicago College of Education Research Day, Chicago, IL, United States.

<https://education.uic.edu/our-research/annual-research-day/>

**Ulrich Papczun, K.** (2021, November 3-7). *(In)visibility: A Palimpsest of School Reform* [Paper presentation]. American Educational Studies Association (AESA) Annual Conference, Portland, OR, United States.

<http://educationalstudies.org/PDF/2021-Updated-AESA-conference-program.pdf>

**Ulrich Papczun, K.** (2021, February 12). *From Individual to Collective: A Shift to the Mental Labor of School Choice, A Case Study of How White Middle Class Parents Frame Attending Their Neighborhood Public School in Chicago* [Roundtable presentation]. University of Illinois Chicago College of Education Research Day, Chicago, IL, United States.

**Ulrich Papczun, K.** (2020, February 14). *The mental labor of school choice in Chicago: A case study of families who “choose” their neighborhood public school* [Poster presentation]. University of Illinois Chicago College of Education Research Day, Chicago, IL, United States.

**Ulrich Papczun, K., & Hall, A.** (2019, November 23). *Inquiry for all: Strategies for implementation* [Panel presentation]. National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE) Annual Conference, Baltimore, MD, United States.

Cosey, S., Hall, A., **Papczun, K.**, Pendley, C., & Wallace, M. (2011 November). *Gutenberg’s Status Update: Moving Traditional Literacy into the 21<sup>st</sup> Century* [Panel presentation]. National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE) Annual Conference, Chicago, IL, United States.



### Funding/Grants

- **University of Illinois Chicago Dean's Scholar Fellowship, Graduate College**, \$13,750; Aug 2023-Aug 2024. Funded (May-Aug).
- **National Academy of Education/Spencer Dissertation Fellowship Program Award**, \$27,500; Aug 2023-May 2024. Funded.
- **Institute for Research on Race and Public Policy (IRRPP) Dissertation Grant**, \$2,000; Nov 2022. Funded.
- **Donorschoose.org.**, multiple grants during public school teaching: \$7,900 (2015) and \$12,000 (2016) for Washington, D.C., trip; class set of novels; trip to see the movie *Bully* for 250 youth; various technology devices. 2007-2016. Funded.
- **University of Illinois Chicago Office of the Vice Chancellor for Research, Award for Creative Activity, Co-Investigator** (PI Dr. Nate Phillips)- *Making Good Connections*, \$25,000; Sept 2024-April 2025. Unfunded.
- **Santa Fe Art Institute (SFAI) International Thematic Residency**, July 2024. Unfunded.
- **Curriculum Inquiry Writing Fellowship and Writers' Retreat**, Toronto, Canada; June 19-24, 2023. Unfunded.
- **National Academy of Education/Spencer Dissertation Fellowship Program Award**, \$27,500; June 2022-June 2023. Unfunded.
- Antipode 8<sup>th</sup> **Institute for the Geographies of Justice**, Barcelona, Spain. Spring Semester 2020. Unfunded.
- **University of Illinois Chicago College of Education Dean's Office Collaborative Community Engagement Grant**, \$5,000. Fall Semester 2019. Unfunded.

### Service

#### University of Illinois Chicago (UIC):

- **Understanding Motherhood on Campus Research Project, Community Advisory Board Member**. Dec 2023
- **Graduate College, Department of Curriculum and Instruction Graduate Student Council Representative**. Dec 2023-May 2024
- **College of Education Summer Camp Storybooks, Inquiry, and Art on the Urban Farm, Guest Artist**. June 2023.
- **College of Education Writing Committee Member; Founding Member**. Dec 2022-present
- **College of Education Doctoral Program Steering Committee Student Representative, Sub-committee Member**. Feb 2022-present
- **College of Education Research Day, Volunteer**. Feb 2021
- **Graduate Student Interest Group (GSIG)- Reviewer for Critical perspectives: A multidisciplinary anthology of urban education research** (Vol. 1). July 2019

#### Other:

- **Curtis Tarver, IL State Representative 25th District- Education Advisory Committee Member**. Jan 2019
- **Margarito's Forest: Expressions of Community, Survival and Partnership Exhibition Celebration, Planning Committee Member**. 2018
- **Hyde Park/Kenwood Community Action Council (HPKCAC)- Co-Chair, Co-Secretary, Member**. 2013-2018
- **Jane Averill Community Reading Day- Co-Coordinator, Participant**. 2017-2018
- **Ray Elementary Partnership Committee Member**. 2014-2015

### Professional Affiliations

- **American Educational Research Association (AERA)**. 2018-present  
*Division K: Teaching and Teacher Education; Division L: Educational Policy and Politics; Division G: Social Context of Education; Arts-Based Educational Research SIG*
- **American Educational Studies Association (AESA)**. 2020-present
- **National Art Education Association (NAEA)**. 2023-present
- **American Association of Colleges for Teacher Education (AACTE)**. 2019-2022
- **Graduate Special Interest Groups (GSIG) at University of Illinois at Chicago**. 2018-2022
- **National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE)**. 2007-2023

**Computer/Technical Skills**

- Fluent in MS Word, PowerPoint, Excel; Google Docs, Slides, Forms, Sheets
- High-level usage of Zotero; Google Drive; Box; Blackboard; Zoom
- Working knowledge of Qualtrics, ATLAS.ti and NVivo
- Basic knowledge of Adobe Photoshop and Publisher