

Cultural Wealth as Community-Rooted Care: Inside of the Media Arts Academy

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Abstract— *This article examines Community Cultural Wealth as an intervention framework within the Media Arts Academy (MAA), a six-week summer youth employment and media production program grounded in critical consciousness and social change. Centered on the Village Value framework, MAA positions youth as vital contributors to an interdependent learning community. The article analyzes the program's response to behavioral disruptions that threatened collective productivity. Rather than employing exclusionary discipline, the Academy implemented an asset-based intervention grounded in Tara J. Yosso's (2008) Community Cultural Wealth framework. Leveraging community-based cultural assets restored cohesion, strengthened self-regulation, and enabled full participation in media production. The article demonstrates how Community Cultural Wealth can serve as a restorative, practice-based model for transforming behavioral challenges into opportunities for leadership and collective growth. Community Cultural Wealth served as a viable framework for restorative intervention within youth development and arts-based education contexts. It argues that community-rooted, asset-centered approaches can transform behavioral crises into opportunities for leadership development, self-efficacy, and liberatory practice.*

I. INTRODUCTION

Critical Race Theory (CRT) asserts that racism is “normal, not aberrant, in American society” and is embedded within social institutions and structures (Delgado & Stefancic, 2017). Emerging from this tradition, Tara J. Yosso's Community Cultural Wealth (CCW) framework offers a proactive challenge to deficit interpretations of behavior in educational settings. Rather than locating pathology within Communities of Color, CCW highlights the array of cultural knowledge, skills, networks, and adaptive strategies cultivated through lived experience in racially stratified contexts (Yosso, 2005).

II. ORIGINS OF AN ASSET-BASED INTERVENTION

In 1973, as a recent high school graduate, I became a beneficiary of the Comprehensive Employment and

Training Act (CETA), signed into law by Richard Nixon on December 28, 1973 (Pub. L. 93-203). Through CETA, I was employed by the Pomona Unified School District to lead an afterschool Introduction to Gymnastics class for fifth- and sixth-grade girls.

During the first week, one student lingered at the classroom doorway, observing but refusing to enter. When she eventually joined, her participation quickly escalated into disruptive behavior. As a novice youth leader, I faced a potential power struggle. Instead, I invited her to the front of the class and offered her the role of co-instructor. The shift was immediate and sustained. Disruption transformed into leadership. Within days, teachers who had previously struggled with her behavior observed her confidently co-leading the class. When asked how I succeeded where traditional discipline had failed, my response was simple: beneath her disruption, I saw leadership capacity. Rather than contesting her authority, I redirected her energy into

structured responsibility. This formative experience—long before I encountered CRT or Community Cultural Wealth—revealed a foundational insight: behavioral disruption is often misread leadership energy. When institutions default to deficit interpretations, they miss embedded assets. When youth are repositioned rather than punished, transformation occurs.

That early insight did not remain a personal pedagogical reflection; it became the foundation for future intentional program design. What began as an instinctive decision to reposition perceived disruption into leadership revealed itself years later in the form of an aspect inside of a structured model in which asset activation, collective responsibility, and youth agency combine as parts of an intervention.

III. THE STORY: COMMUNITY-ROOTED CARE

The Media Arts Academy (MAA) curriculum (Warfield, 2010) integrates lessons of racism in the English language, anti-bias education goals (Derman-Sparks & Edwards, 2010), social change theory, media literacy, responsible filmmaking and collaborative production. Students research social justice topics, select production roles, and collectively create media tools for social change.

Central to the curriculum is *Village Value*, a framework that positions each participant as essential to a collective learning community. Students cultivate:

- **Aspirational Wealth** through envisioning equitable futures
- **Linguistic Wealth** through multilingual storytelling
- **Navigational Wealth** by managing complex relational and production processes
- **Resistance Wealth** by producing media that challenges inequity
- **Social and Familial Wealth** through partnerships and community engagement

During one six-week summer employment cycle, escalating behavioral disruptions by a participant threatened program stability. Rather than resorting to removal, the program activated Community Cultural Wealth as an intervention framework. Community service providers were engaged onsite. An Individualized Leadership Plan was developed. Family members participated in the intervention process. Through this coordinated approach, the student successfully redirected his behavior, completed the program, and co-produced media addressing social inequities.

The intervention accessed Social, Aspirational, Navigational, Familial, and Resistant capital simultaneously. Importantly, Resistance Wealth manifested not only in the student's media production, but in the program's refusal to default to exclusionary discipline. In the next section takeaways from Community-Rooted Care inside of the Cultural Wealth Model are framed inside of Critical Race Theory as applied to reversing deficit model perceptions, redirecting resistance, educators' responsibility to learn how to read their classrooms, intentionality around classrooms as healing environments, and moving beyond graduation into cultivation.

IV. INTENTION TO EMPOWER REVERSES THE PERCEIVED DEFICIT

Educational systems frequently interpret disruption through a deficit framework shaped by dominant interpretations of cultural capital rooted in Pierre Bourdieu's theory (Bourdieu, 1986). CRT scholars argue that such interpretations obscure the strengths present within marginalized communities (Ladson-Billings, 1995). An intention to empower shifts the inquiry. Instead of asking, "How do we stop this behavior?" practitioners ask, "What strength is being expressed ineffectively?" Within CCW (Yosso, 2005), disruption may reflect misdirected resistant capital or underdeveloped navigational capital—not deficiency. Empowerment is structured repositioning. Youth are assigned visible responsibility. Leadership replaces liability.

Research on relational and restorative discipline confirms that such approaches reduce exclusionary outcomes while strengthening accountability (Gregory & Fergus, 2017). Intention precedes transformation. Seeing leadership where others see liability is a theoretically grounded intervention strategy. Research on relational and restorative discipline confirms that such approaches reduce exclusionary outcomes while strengthening accountability (Gregory & Fergus, 2017). Intention precedes transformation. Seeing leadership where others see liability is a theoretically grounded intervention strategy.

V. TRANSFORMING RESISTANCE INTO CONTRIBUTION

Resistance is frequently misinterpreted as defiance. CRT reframes it as agency shaped by lived experiences of inequity (Solórzano & Delgado Bernal, 2001). Through CCW, resistance becomes capital rather than pathology.

Operationally, transformation involves:

1. **Reframing** resistance as communicative

2. **Repositioning** youth into accountable leadership roles
3. **Embedding supports** that activate aspirational, navigational, social, linguistic, familial, and resistant capital

Boundaries remain firm. What shifts is the locus of authority—from adult dominance to relational accountability.

VI. RESPONSIBLE EDUCATORS LEARN TO “READ” THE CLASSROOM

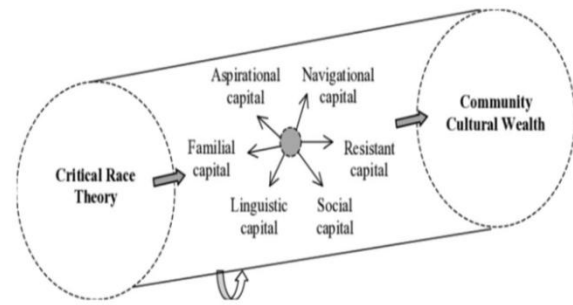
To “read” the classroom is to interpret behavior as relational data rather than isolated misconduct. Patterns of withdrawal, interruption, or challenge signal identity negotiation, belonging, or agency. When educators assess function rather than fault, intervention becomes strategic rather than reactive. Research supports relational and restorative approaches that strengthen accountability while reducing exclusion (Gregory & Fergus, 2017). Contribution replaces compliance as the organizing principle.

VII. CLASSROOMS AS HEALING ENVIRONMENTS

Healing classrooms prioritize safety, trust, and relational accountability. Trauma-informed research underscores the importance of predictability and connection for student growth (Brunzell, Stokes, & Waters, 2016). By activating Community Cultural Wealth, classrooms shift from corrective to generative spaces. Academic, social, and emotional development become interdependent outcomes of intentional design.

VIII. CULTIVATING TRANSFORMATION VS. GRADUATION AS A TARGET

Graduation metrics alone cannot capture educational purpose. A transformational approach measures success by agency, navigational capacity, and sustained contribution. Culturally sustaining pedagogies affirm that equity requires building from community strengths rather than conditioning success on assimilation (Paris & Alim, 2017). Graduation becomes a milestone. Transformation becomes the enduring outcome.



Note. A Kaleidoscope of Community Cultural Wealth [Adapted from Villalpando and Solórzano (2005) and Yosso (2005, 2006)]. From “‘This Is No Slum!’ A Critical Race Theory Analysis of Community Cultural Wealth in Culture Clash’s Chavez Ravine” by T. Yosso & D. Garcia, 2007, *Aztlan: A Journal of Chicano Studies*, 32(1), 155 (<https://doi.org/10.1525/azt.2007.32.1.145>). Copyright 2007 by T. Yosso.

Fig.1. Community Cultural Wealth Model

IX. DISCUSSION

The Media Arts Academy story demonstrates that behavioral challenges in youth programs are often expressions of untapped capacity rather than inherent deficits. By applying the Community Cultural Wealth framework, the program redirected misaligned energy into leadership, collaboration, and meaningful contribution. This approach illustrates how asset-based interventions can transform disruption into opportunity, highlighting the importance of repositioning youth, activating multiple forms of cultural capital, and designing intentional, relationally accountable learning environments. Framed within Critical Race Theory, these practices challenge deficit-based interpretations, emphasize the value of resistance as a form of agency, and shift the focus from compliance and graduation to holistic transformation and empowerment. Recent research supports reframing youth development and educational practice through asset-based lenses that counter deficit interpretations and center cultural strengths. Park, Choi, Lee, and Shin (2025) advocate for the application of Tara J. Yosso’s Community Cultural Wealth (CCW) framework in sport-based youth development, emphasizing that conventional deficit models depict youth as “problematic or at-risk,” whereas CCW recognizes aspirational, linguistic, familial, social, navigational, and resistant capital as foundational assets in resilience and identity formation (Park et al., 2025). Studies in formal schooling demonstrate similar dynamics, showing that when teachers intentionally cultivate the CCW of Black students in cognitively demanding classrooms, engagement and persistence increase (Menzies, Schunn, & Stein, 2024). Research on familial capital further illustrates how students and families actively leverage existing cultural resources to navigate and persist through challenging educational programs (Vegas Lewis, Taughrin, & Iantosca, 2025). Additionally, latent class analysis of CCW profiles among

biology majors at a Hispanic-serving institution highlights the role of cultural wealth in supporting academic outcomes beyond traditional predictors (Author, 2025). Collectively, this literature reinforces the present article's claim that deficit framings obscure students' inherent strengths and that practices rooted in Community Cultural Wealth and Critical Race Theory provide frameworks for transforming behavioral challenges into opportunities for growth, agency, and equitable engagement in educational contexts.

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