

# LEARNER AGENCY: CHOICE AS A PATH TO CREATIVITY

Casey Andrews  
Jeremy Seitzer / CCT 630  
CE 2 W-I-P / 6 November 2017



# Specific Context for this CE Exploration

- English 12 classroom
- Elective: Literature as Art
- 28 students, most of whom self-selected this elective
- Technology-focused pilot school in BPS

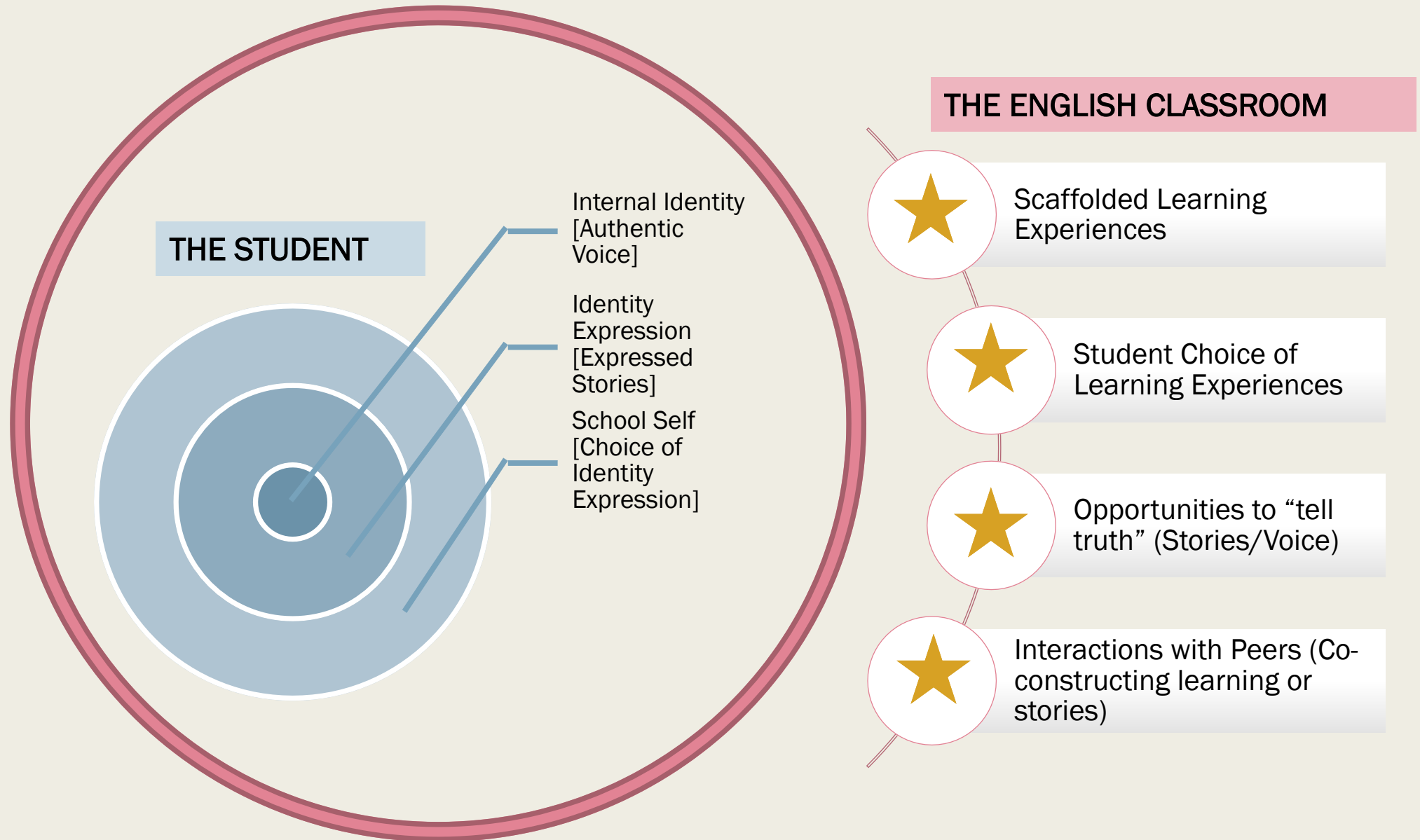
# Learner Agency

- Part of broader school shift to “personalized learning”
- “Learner Agency involves the availability of **meaningful choice** and the learner’s wherewithal for exercising that choice such that they develop into **responsible owners of their own learning**” (Education Reimagined Pioneer Lab)
- How does someone exercise **meaningful choice**?
- How does **ownership** impact the process and product of a **learning experience**?

# Stories, Voice, Scaffolding

- “When I said that poetry first touched me at my grandparents’ house, I meant that I felt there for the first time an **unyielding curiosity**, a solitary need to look for the truth. This has become a metaphor for writing poetry that has stayed with me all my life.” (Heard xviii).
- “The **silence** that surrounds **telling the truth** and expressing emotion [in schools] is pervasive. Poetry is one way to shatter this silence.” (Heard xx).
- **Scaffolding** is needed to support students to tell the truth via writing or other creative means
- How does a teacher support students to **choose** to be curious? To tell a **story**? To develop their **voice**?

# Contextualizing Learner Agency



# Framing Learner Agency / Student Choice: Berlak's "Who Decides"

TYPE OF DECISION	WHO DECIDES			
	Teacher Decides	Child and Teacher Decide Jointly		Child Decides
		Choose from Options	Negotiate	
Whether or not to learn				
What should be learned				
When it should be learned				
How it should be learned				

# Scaffolded Choice in Stories & Voice



## Scaffolded Learning Experiences

- Teacher-directed
- Backwards design for year, unit, week, day
- Takes into account cognitive skills, academic skills, creative thinking



## Student Choice of Learning Experiences

- As often as possible
- Both the why, the how, and the what



## Opportunities to “tell truth”

- Teacher or student-directed
- Central aim of course



## Interactions with Peers

- Scaffold for respectful relationships
- Students should still have choice

# Example of Final Assignment (Process Described Next)

## **Description of Assignment:**

This open-ended assignment challenges you to create something that addresses the question:

*Is decolonization possible?*

Many artists before you have taken up this question (Anzaldúa, Díaz, Girmay, and Kincaid). What will you say to add to the conversation? You might need to use an external source to support your thinking in order to produce an original piece of work.

## **Constraints:**

- Must be turned in by D block on Tuesday, November 21<sup>st</sup> or by email to [candrews3@bostonpublicschools.org](mailto:candrews3@bostonpublicschools.org) by 11:59 PM on the same day
- Must be exclusively your own, original work excepting any cited quotations from external sources
- It must be possible to discern your opinion about the central question by viewing/interacting with your product

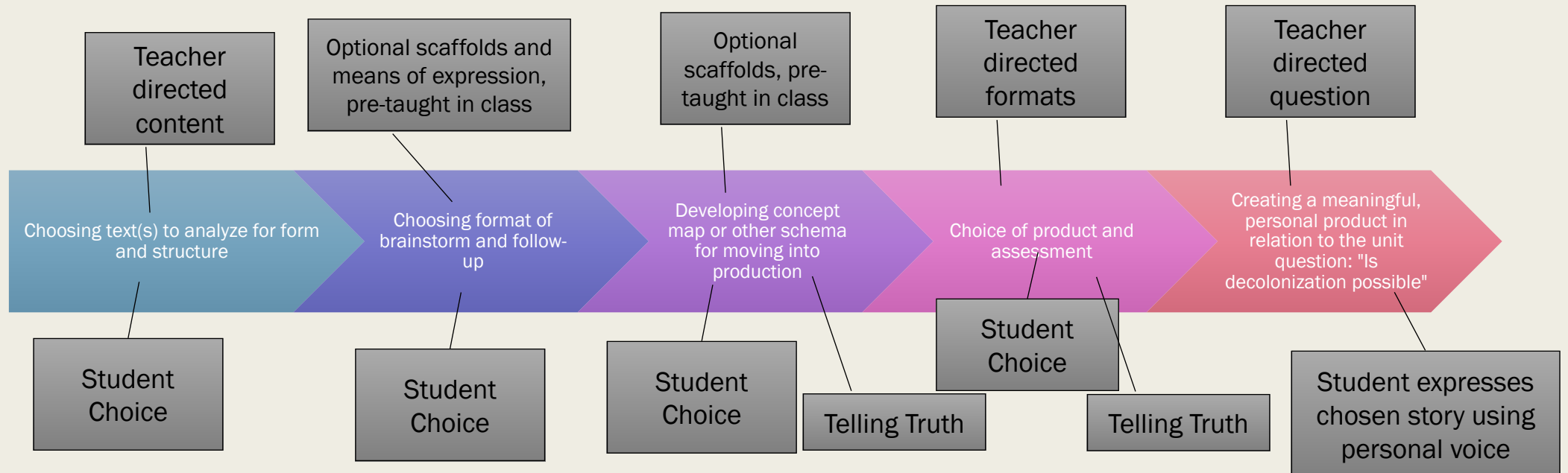
## **Freedom:**

- You can choose any format for this product
  - Some ideas: video, song, poem, rap, book of poems, graphic novel, painting, drawing, short story, novella, essay, photographs, photo-book (think *Dark Archives*), infographic, podcast, concept map, etc.
- You'll have multiple class periods to engage with your creative process without direction from Mrs. Andrews



# Example of a Classroom Activity

- Concluding product for a unit on post-colonial and decolonized literature
- Scaffolded by a series of activities where students choose both entry point of content, means of expression, and next steps
- Centered by question(s) that lead students towards an expression of internal truth
- Choice of interaction with peers as a scaffold towards completing the product



# Next Steps

- Analysis of stages of process
- Student interviews – did each stage effectively give students choice?
- Teacher reflection – did the scaffolds work? How or why not?
- Broadening outward: what are the implications or applications beyond this specific context?

# Sources

- Barlak, Ann; Berlak, Harold; Tushnet Bagenstos, Naida; and Edward R. Mikel. “Teaching and Learning in English Primary Schools” in *The School Review* 83:2. 1975. Print.
- Education Reimagined Pioneer Lab. “Training Pre-Reading.” 2015. Print.
- Heard, Georgia. *For the Good of the Earth and Sun*. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann. 1989. Print.