INTERNATIONAL LITERACY ASSOCIATION
READING RESEARCH QUARTERLY

Feeling Worlds: Affective Imaginaries and the Making of Democratic Literacy Classrooms

T. Philip Nichols
Baylor University, Waco, Texas, USA

James Joshua Coleman
University of Pennsylvania, Philadelphia, USA

ABSTRACT

The authors examined how the spaces and structures of literacy classrooms were organized, inhabited, and felt by teachers and students in a new project-based high school. The authors attended specifically to the political valence of these feelings: how educators characterized certain spatial arrangements (modular furniture and flexible seating) and curricular structures (asynchronous learning) as feeling democratic, in contrast to an authoritarianism that they associated with other instructional orders. The authors recognized that these descriptors, more than mere metaphors, were expressions of affective attachments that conditioned the classrooms that literacy educators worked to build—what the authors call affective imaginaries. These imaginaries, the authors argue, have material consequences both for how educators shape the world of the literacy classroom and for what practices are sanctioned, celebrated, and undermined therein. The authors drew from a three-year immersive ethnography in an urban public school to explore how educators imagined and shaped democratic literacy classrooms, how students worked within and against these imaginaries, and how resulting frictions impacted literacy learning in these classroom-worlds. Findings center on two interrelated tensions: (1) how infrastructures associated with democratic classrooms, at times, worked against other infrastructures on which students depended for literacy practice; and (2) how these incongruities led to new ways of surveilling students' autonomy in their literacy learning. The authors conclude by considering how these findings might guide literacy educators not only in attending to the ostensive, normative, and performative dimensions of affective imaginaries in classrooms but also in opening alternate imaginaries, better attuned to the equitable flourishing of all students.

It is the middle of August, two weeks before students will return from summer vacation. I [Phil] am seated with teachers from the Innovation School [all names are pseudonyms] in the science lab, one of the few rooms in the building with reliable air conditioning. Over the last week, educators have refined curricular units in preparation for the year ahead. Now, in the final days of summer professional planning, they are translating this work in the design of their physical classroom environments. The principal, Ben, pacing the room, asks teachers to list qualities of their "visionary space," their ideal setting for teaching and learning. "Temperature-controlled," one teacher says, fanning herself with a notebook. The group laughs and begins adding other suggestions. Some name material features: modular furniture and open space. Others give abstract descriptions: student-centered, interactive, and participatory. Together, the teachers determine that the thread that holds their vision together is that the classroom should feel "democratic." Writing the term on a whiteboard, Ben proposes that teachers use this imagined ideal as a guide for the day's planning. "You're not just arranging a classroom," he says, "You're designing the universe your students will learn in this year." (adapted from field note, August 18, 2016)

INTERNATIONAL LITERACY ASSOCIATION

Reading Research Quarterly, 0(0)
pp. 1–21 | doi:10.1002/rrq.305
© 2020 International Literacy Association.

We begin with this snapshot from the Innovation School's summer planning because it makes visible two interrelated themes that we wished to explore in this article. The first involves the physical ordering of the classroom as an act of worldmaking. This idea has been well rehearsed in education research, where scholars have long studied the figured worlds (Bartlett & Holland, 2002) that constitute spaces for learning. Loris Malaguzzi, founder of the Reggio Emilia preschool method, famously referred to the child's environment as "the 'third educator'" (Rinaldi, 2006, p. 77), after adults and peers, to denote its instructive capacities and, therefore, to exhort educators to take seriously the work of shaping classroom worlds. Literacy researchers, too, have demonstrated how reading and writing are conditioned by the spatial worlds in which they unfold (Leander & Sheehy, 2004; Mills & Comber, 2015). From this perspective, Ben's charge, that arranging a classroom involves "designing the universe," is not hyperbole but an acknowledgment that the classroom worlds that teachers imagine and shape set the contours for what can be said, done, and learned therein.

The second theme relates to the way that these classroom worlds are not only imagined and built but also felt. The Innovation School teachers populated their visionary classrooms with modular furniture and flexible seating not only for pragmatic purposes but also because they understood these to be components of democratic classrooms. Of course, there is nothing intrinsically egalitarian about modular furniture or a particular arrangement of seats; yet, educators associated such configurations with feeling democratic, and they are not alone. Outside of education, design and architectural theorists have shown how spaces and structures invite affective responses, allowing them to be felt as democratic or authoritarian, safe or dangerous (Flusty, 1994; Martin, 2003). From this perspective, feeling a space is not a metaphor but a real and visceral response, an outgrowth of accrued affective histories that adhere to particular structural aesthetics and practices, in turn conditioning how they are experienced.

We suspect that the Innovation School teachers' affective attachments to certain democratic arrangements are not anomalous but emblematic of wider associations that educators have with classroom spaces and structures. In our work with preservice and practicing teachers, we have heard students speak of arranging desks in circles to nurture democratic environments, and we have seen them bristle at the creeping authoritarianism of classrooms where seats are arranged in rows or where direct instruction prevails. Indeed, we have experienced this pull ourselves: feeling compelled, at times, to apologize for giving even brief contextualizing lectures rather than more participatory, hands-on assignments. Impulses like these suggest that popular wisdom about teaching (e.g., "Be a guide on the side, not a sage on the stage") reflects not only an instructional stance but also an imagined classroom world whose idealized relations cultivate feelings associated with democratic participation.

In writing this article, we were interested in how such affective attachments condition the work of worldmaking in literacy classrooms. We examined how feelings associated with democratic spaces inflect the ways that educators imagine and construct literacy-learning environments and how the classroom worlds that result are used and contested by the students who inhabit them. For our purposes, we were not concerned with genealogical questions of how or why certain classroom configurations come to feel democratic or authoritarian, much less with exposing such affiliations as naive projection or false consciousness. Our aim was to take these feelings seriously by attending to the work they do in forming and animating the aspirational worlds that teachers strive to build—what we call affective imaginaries. These imaginaries, we argue, are not strictly speculative but materialized through practice, guiding the ways that classrooms are structured and curricula organized. In this way, affective imaginaries also delimit what literacy activities are sanctioned, supported, and undermined in the classrooms that they condition.

Our study was guided by two questions:

1. What classroom worlds do affective imaginaries produce?
2. What implications do they hold for equitable literacy education?

We examined these questions using insights drawn from a multiyear ethnography in the Innovation School, tracing how educators imagined and shaped democratic literacy classrooms, how students worked within and against these imaginaries, and how the resulting frictions conditioned the ways literacy was taught and learned in these classroom worlds.

Literacy and Worldmaking

Scholars have long acknowledged the critical role of space and place in literacy education. Comber (2015) argued that place is integral to literacy learning, as built-environments constitute (and are constituted by) identities, histories, and practices that condition textual encounters. Crucially, these environments are not static or fixed; they are open to the reimagining, and thus the restructuring, of material space and its attendant relations. A rich literature on placemaking in literacy studies elucidates how such reimaginings of space can occur and how they might contribute to justice-oriented pedagogies. Kinloch (2010) documented the placemaking practices of Harlem youth who drew on community-specific resources to critique gentrification in their neighborhoods. Similarly, Nxumalo (2019) interrogated the critical relation of place to colonization, calling on posthuman theories and indigenous

onto-epistemologies to reimagine the power of storytelling in everyday encounters with place. Such studies have highlighted the entanglement of the imagination and the material world and how their interplay can open or delimit possibilities for literacy teaching and practice.

Yet, literacy is not only conditioned by spaces but also contributes to those spaces' production. Reading and writing are, themselves, processes of worldmaking (Simon, Nichols, Edwards, & Campano, 2019; Stornaiuolo, 2015), practices that can shape the imagined and material contours of the environments that we inhabit. As Freire and Macedo (1987) suggested, acts of "reading the word and the world" are intimately linked with acts of "writing the world" (p. 32). Similarly, Bishop (1990) reminded us that even from the youngest ages, texts operate as mirrors, windows, and sliding glass doors that influence how we see and experience the worlds in which we live. Literacy, in other words, always involves a recursive arc, where our worlds shape the ways that we encounter texts, which in turn provide resources for imagining other possible worlds and conditioning how we create, interpret, or act within them. Literacy researchers have explored such dynamics of worldmaking in the construction of English curricula (Cain, 1989), the role of identity and agency in embodied play (Holland, Lachicotte, Skinner, & Cain, 1998), and the expansion of intellectual democracy through storytelling (Short, 2012). This literature foregrounds how the material worlds that we share (e.g., classrooms, communities, polities) and the aspirational worlds that we imagine are not easily disentangled from the literacy practices that make available particular orientations to coalitional worldmaking (Campano, 2007; Thomas & Stornaiuolo, 2016).

Feeling Built Worlds, Building Felt Worlds: Affect and Space

Recently, scholars have begun to explore how the worlds that shape (and are shaped by) literacy are not only made and inhabited but also felt (Burnett & Merchant, 2018; Leander & Ehret, 2019). Extending the affective turn in the humanities and social sciences (Clough, 2010), literacy researchers have traced how affect operates in and through literacy practices. Spotlighting affect's embeddedness in space, scholars have mapped affective intensities in literacy events as they unfold in a range of physical locations: from classrooms (Leander & Rowe, 2006) and children's hospitals (Ehret, 2018) to skate parks (Hollett & Hein, 2018) and school makerspaces (Rowsell & Shillitoe, 2019). This scholarship has been instructive for clarifying affect's critical function in literacy learning, drawing attention to overlooked dimensions of the bodies, artifacts, and spaces from which reading and writing emerge. To date, however, this work has centered the circulation of affect in already existing environments and has yet to attend to the ways that environments themselves are formed and conditioned by affect. Our inquiry here addresses this latter phenomenon, examining how spaces are constructed to generate particular affective attachments (in this case, democratic feelings). Our interest, in other words, was less in how built worlds are felt and more in how felt worlds are built.

This orientation builds on scholarship in social geography and architectural history that has considered how built environments come to feel. Theorists have long recognized the critical role of feeling and imagination in the production of space. Lefebvre (1984) linked imagination to the conceived space of planners and technocrats, and feeling to the lived space of everyday praxis. More recent work, however, has suggested that these elements of imagination and feeling are not so easily separated. Anderson (2014) collapsed Lefebvre's distinction between conceived and lived space, arguing that material environments are always shot through with affect: that is, imagined worlds are always felt, and felt worlds are always imagined. Importantly, for Anderson, the affective atmospheres that result also carry normative expectations for how such spaces are to be inhabited. For example, teachers may create aspirational classroom worlds that feel democratic, partly because they hope that such spaces will cultivate students who embody particular norms conventionally associated with democratic subjectivity. This tendency has been examined in architectural history, where Turner (2013) documented the post–World War II U.S. investment in social science research on democratic surrounds—spaces that could be passively pedagogical, shaping their inhabitants to feel more democratic and, therefore, to be less prone to authoritarian control. Similarly, Ogata (2013) showed how many of Turner's historical actors were integral in designing K–12 schools that promoted democratic feelings through hands-on, interactive learning. Such insights suggest that histories of experiential education have always relied on the nurturing of affective attachments to spaces, structures, and practices, as well as to particular norms for democratic participation.

Importantly, this process of building felt worlds—of bringing the material world of the classroom into closer alignment with the aesthetics, norms, and practices of an imagined, affect-laden world—has profound implications for educational equity. Literacy scholars have demonstrated the multivalent potential of so-called democratic spaces either to empower students or to render them vulnerable or exposed (Ellsworth, 1992; Lensmire, 2000; Nichols, McGeehan, & Reed, 2019). Delpit (1988), for instance, showed that progressive and student-centered instruction may, at times, serve educators more than students and that such incongruities can exacerbate raced, classed, and gendered formations of difference in schools. Acknowledging these disparities in the histories of democratic classroom

practices, we focused on how educators' affective attachments to particular democratic structures formed and shaped literacy classroom worlds. We were interested, in other words, in how imagined, built, and felt worlds commingle with the lived dynamics of literacy learning and how young people adopt or resist these worlds in ways that render them more durable, or fragile to the point of collapse.

Affective Imaginaries

We propose affective imaginaries as a conceptual and analytic resource to explore how literacy classroom worlds are built and felt. In the humanities and social sciences, imaginaries (Castoriadis, 1987/1998) have emerged as a generative construct for exploring the dynamics and limits of the collective imagination: how groups of actors envision their relation to one another or to particular social worlds. In *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*, for example, Anderson (1983) demonstrated how heterogeneous populations forge themselves into nation-states through collective acts of narrating, recollecting, and forgetting. Similarly, Taylor (2004) extended this analysis to thought patterns that allow individuals to find a "shared sense of legitimacy" (p. 23) within modern conceptions of time and space. Whereas Anderson and Taylor used *imaginaries* to hold together big ideas, such as nationalism and modernity, scholars increasingly have used the term to investigate activities at smaller scales. Appadurai (1990), for instance, suggested that imaginaries should be studied not as monoliths but as fragmentary flows that circulate together, enfolding and contesting one another. This view highlights how imagined worlds never exist in isolation but within a matrix of entangled cosmologies shot through with power differentials. Across fields and disciplines, researchers have adopted this stance, mapping the ways that collective imaginings are performed in relation to competing visions for the social world (e.g., algorithmic imaginaries: Bucher, 2017; sociotechnical imaginaries: Jasanoff & Kim, 2015; Black radical imaginaries: Kelley, 2002). Although different in composition, these imaginaries share a common concern: realizing an aspirational future held within the collective imagination. Imaginaries, then, are never neutral; they are always invested with implicit norms and regulatory strategies meant to bring the physical world of bodies, spaces, artifacts, and practices into closer alignment with the desired world to which they aspire.

In an important sense, these imaginaries are also always already affective. Building on Spinoza's theorizing of affect, Gatens and Lloyd (1999) argued that imaginative acts are fundamentally affect-laden. Similarly, Lennon (2015) suggested that imaginaries give the social world affective texture, conditioning how its inhabitants understand and experience its extant and possible terrains. We agree with these characterizations of affect and the imagination as intimately entangled; however, our theorization of affective imaginaries entails something different. For our purposes, we were less concerned with identifying or locating affect within imaginaries than in following how affect contributes to the formation of imaginaries. In this way, we see affective imaginaries as a resource not for illuminating what or where affect is but for illuminating what affect does—a way of mapping how collectively held and enacted visions of aspirational worlds are dependent on the production, experience, and management of affective attachments. A teacher's desire to create a democratic classroom, for instance, involves not only the coordination of activities, artifacts, structures, and practices with which the teacher associates democratic or participatory feeling but also the production of a normative order: ways of being and feeling democratic that inhabitants of an imagined world are expected to embody and perform. In a sense, forming democratic worlds necessitates forming subjects who hold the same democratic attachments to an imagined world as those individuals with the power to establish its contours. Affective imaginaries are concepts that make legible such processes, while also revealing the ways that those imaginaries are reinforced, resisted, or subverted in practice.

To map these processes, we offer an analytical orientation for articulating the varied and interrelated ways that affective imaginaries animate classroom space. We conceptualize these imaginaries along three dimensions: ostensive, normative, and performative. *Ostensive* refers to the observable components of an affective imaginary. Building on scholars in social geography, this dimension emphasizes how affective attachments are not merely ephemeral but also manifest in the material and aesthetic features of classroom worlds (Anderson, 2014). As such, the presence (and absence) of observable elements holds an important place in theorizing and analyzing the spatialization of affect and the imagination. *Normative* signals how affective imaginaries, like all imaginaries, are concerned with the regulation of space and bodies. As Foucault (1977, 1963/1994) argued, the ordering and arrangement of space always involves both an aspirational ideal for knowing, being, or feeling and a set of disciplinary techniques for ensuring compliance to this norm. Importantly, norms need not be nefarious; indeed, even the production of egalitarian or safe spaces are invested in the management of bodies and practices born of normative expectations. This dimension, then, helps articulate the stated and unstated aspirations that underlie and animate classroom worlds, revealing a system of norms reinforced through disciplinary techniques. Finally, *performative* highlights how affective imaginaries are not

only envisioned or materialized but also enacted. In line with theorists of performativity (Austin, 1962; Butler, 1990), this dimension foregrounds the ways that affective imaginaries do things: the unfolding process through which actors either take up (or ignore) ostensive elements and thus align with (or resist) normative expectations gives rise to both effects and affects. As such, this dimension attends to the alignments and frictions that surface as affective imaginaries are performed and contested in the lived dynamics of classrooms (see Figure 1).

Crucially, these dimensions, taken together, are not linear. As we demonstrate in what follows, there are times when ostensive components and normative expectations may be in conflict or where performative tensions may spark reimaginings of the ostensive or normative order. These dimensions, then, are intended as a flexible resource for making legible the ways that classroom worlds are imagined, built, and felt.

We recognize that this theorizing of affective imaginaries, and our interest in the spatialization of affect in classroom worlds, is not wholly uncontroversial. Outside of literacy studies, there are decades-old debates on the nature of affect, where some, drawing from neurobiology and psychoanalysis, have conceptualized it as strictly preconscious (Massumi, 1995), and others, drawing from the history of science, have suggested that such views are too narrowly focused on cognition (Leys, 2018). Within this spectrum, there are certainly theorists who would take issue with our theorizing, perhaps contending it as too inclusive of materiality or human intention to be commensurable with their preferred ontology of affect. Although we see value in such critiques, our purpose was not to resolve old debates with a totalizing theory of affect or to take sides in scholarly turf wars. We were less concerned with defining or defending what affect is than with expanding resources for studying what affect does, particularly as it relates to the teaching and learning of literacy. Our use of affective imaginaries, then, aligns with a growing pragmatic-contextual tradition (Anderson, 2014) in affect studies, which is attuned to the unfolding work of affect across contexts (e.g., Ahmed, 2004; Ngai, 2004). Such perspectives, we found, open possibilities for moving affect theory from the rarified air of academic study into the lived dynamics of literacy education. We saw this orientation as foregrounding the critical valence of Spinoza's (1994) original definition of affect, by spotlighting "the body's power of acting…[to be] increased or diminished, aided or restrained" (p. 154). Affective imaginaries, in other words, offered us a resource for revealing how teachers' felt attachments to imagined worlds may open or delimit students' power of acting as they brush up against competing conceptions, imaginings, and uses of classroom space.

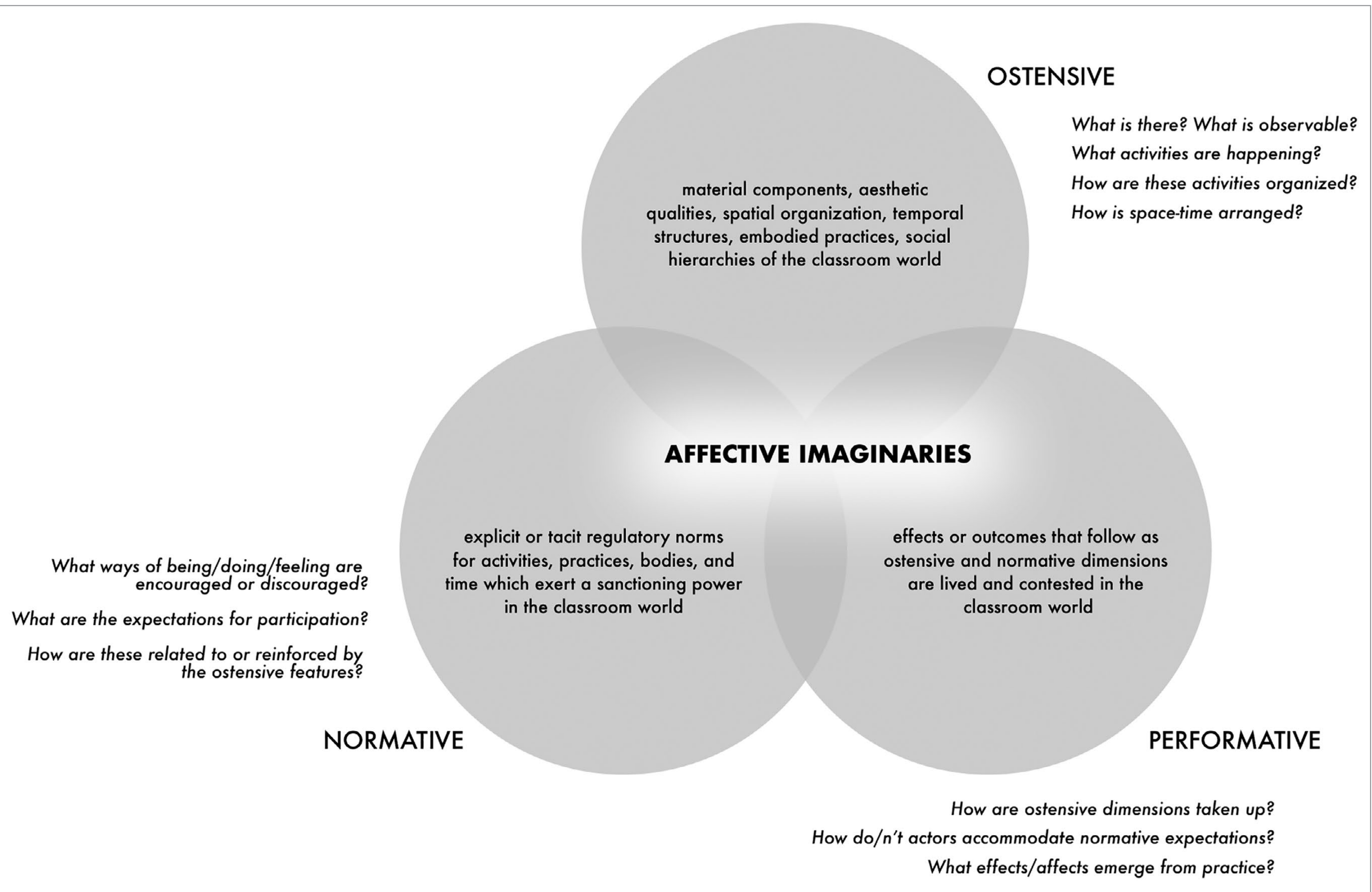
Analyzing Affective Imaginaries Through Ethnographic Inquiry

Research Context and Background

To examine how affective imaginaries shaped classroom worlds and set conditions for literacy teaching and learning, we drew from data generated over three years of ethnographic inquiry (Heath & Street, 2008) in the Innovation School, a nonselective urban public high school in the U.S. Northeast organized around principles of making and design. The school opened in 2014 as part of a district effort to offer asynchronous, project-based learning for students who might be excluded from similar programs due to income, geography, enrollment caps, or past academic performance. As such, the school's demographics reflected those of nearby neighborhood programs: The population was 80% African American, 15% Latinx, and 5% Asian American, Native American, or Caucasian, and all students received free lunch. Many teachers, likewise, had prior experience in working in neighborhood schools, where they felt that the creep of high-stakes testing and austerity measures constrained their ability to create the classrooms that they believed were necessary for students to thrive. For these educators, the Innovation School presented an opportunity to imagine and build classroom worlds otherwise, as spaces that students might experience as democratic and participatory, and to do this visionary work alongside colleagues who shared their sense of how schools should look and feel.

Our research team began working with Ben, the principal, even before teachers had been hired or the district had assigned the school a location—when the asynchronous learning model was just diagrams and sketches in the small notebook that Ben carried with him. At the time, only the core components of the school were established: It would include three interdisciplinary makerspaces focused on media production, community organizing, and industrial arts, and these spaces would serve both as stand-alone classes and as resources that students could draw on to complete projects in content area courses. To facilitate learning across these spaces, students would be assessed by their competencies rather than conventional grades. Beyond these elements, Ben kept the model open-ended so teachers, once hired, could collectively imagine how the classroom worlds of the school might be shaped. Documenting this unfolding process—successes, challenges, frictions, and epiphanies—became the basis of the university–school partnership from which this present inquiry emerged. Working with teachers and administrators, research team members followed as the school model was formed, implemented, and revised through practice. Provisional insights from the study were shared with teachers, who then had the option to fold them into their future planning. In addition to the teachers and principal, the project also enrolled

FIGURE 1
Dimensions of Affective Imaginaries, and the Questions That They Address



45 students from the first two cohorts (a quarter of each class) to participate in periodic interviews that would allow the team to follow their pathways through the school model over time.

Researcher Role and Positionality

As in most longitudinal partnerships, our roles varied over the course of the study. Phil managed the project, overseeing a team of 12–15 undergraduate and graduate students and organizing data collection and analysis with team members, teachers, and students; Josh was part of the research team. However, these roles often took on added dimensions based on the shifting needs of school partners. At times, we were observers, attending faculty meetings and professional workshops; at other times, we facilitated such sessions, sharing emergent insights from the larger study; and at still other times, we served as co-instructors, aiding teachers and supporting students through unit activities. Crucially, these roles were not all that required negotiation: As white, cis male researchers and former classroom teachers, our positionality in the site was a source of ongoing reflection. Through memo writing and conversations with team members and partners, we continually examined how we and our work were positioned in the matrix of domination (Collins, 1990) that reproduces racial, colonial, and economic injustice. Such considerations, of course, did not absolve us of our positions or privileges; these were and remain indelibly implicated in the empirical record. However, they were vital to the process of forming and sustaining ethical relations with our community partners (Campano, Ghiso, & Welch, 2017). Engaging in this process, alongside teachers and students, allowed us to interact in capacities that made visible dynamics that might have been missed by more detached modes of observational research. In other words, our adaptive roles and reflexive deliberations afforded us opportunities to experience the incongruities and alignments as teachers and students imagined and shaped the shared worlds of their literacy classrooms.

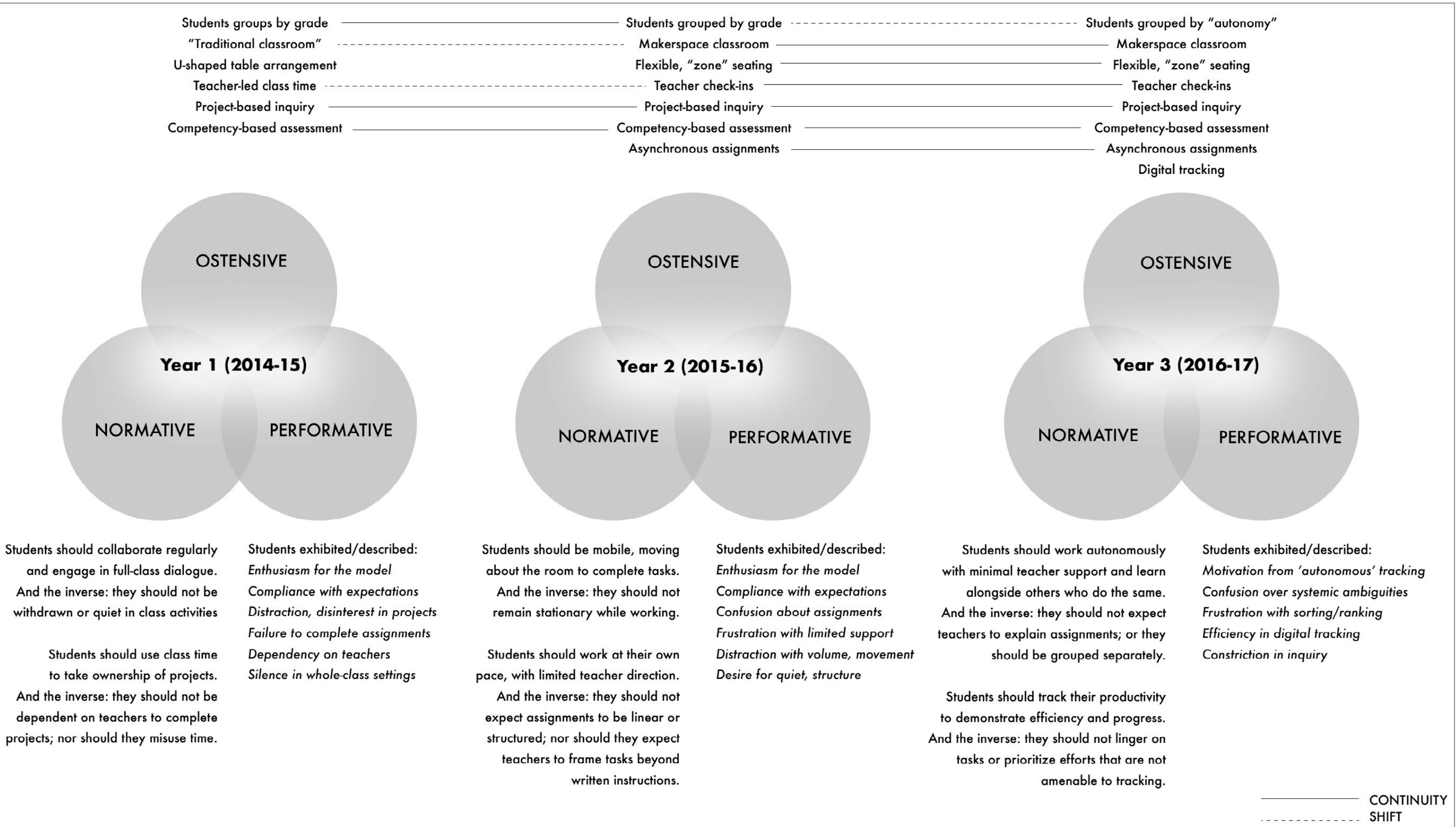
Mapping Affective Imaginaries: Situational and Comparative Analysis

Our analysis centered on data generated in spaces associated with the Innovation School's humanities program, from the spring of 2014 to the close of the 2016–2017 academic year. During this time, we visited the school two or three days per week, collecting data as part of the larger research partnership and providing literacy support for students in and outside the humanities classroom. Over the duration of the project, we documented our participation with teachers and students through field notes and memos; audio recordings of classroom activities, faculty meetings, and lesson-planning sessions; and photographs and physical copies of student- and teacher-produced artifacts. We also recorded interviews with teachers and students at the conclusion of significant units (e.g., those spanning multiple weeks or addressing current events) and at the end of each academic year. These conversational interviews lasted between 30 and 90 minutes and covered a range of topics related to successes and challenges in the humanities classrooms (see the Appendix for a table of data sources).

Analyzing this material to shed light on the work of affective imaginaries in the literacy classroom was not so straightforward. Within the larger partnership, the research team relied on more conventional analytic methods, from iterative coding (Stornaiuolo & Nichols, 2018) and practitioner inquiry (Nichols et al., 2019) to spatial mapping (Stornaiuolo, Nichols, & Vasudevan, 2018). However, even as these procedures clarified features of teaching and learning, we became frustrated with their inadequacies for exploring more recalcitrant elements animating classroom activities—most notably, the mediation of affect as feeling. Throughout the study, teachers regularly expressed their felt experiences of classroom spaces and voiced those feelings that they hoped their classrooms would cultivate. Beyond the felt, democratic spaces that educators aspired to create, students too discussed feelings of autonomy, freedom, and annoyance as they inhabited these classroom worlds. In field notes, researchers described feelings of "flow," "friction," and "tension" when students aligned with or contested teachers' imagined order for the space. Over time, we began to recognize these intractable elements, of affect and imagination, as doing decisive work in shaping the social terrain of the literacy classrooms. It was in trying to make these dynamics legible that we came to theorize them as affective imaginaries.

Our analysis, then, took a hybrid form, pairing mapping techniques common in situational analysis (Clarke, Freise, & Washburn, 2018) with comparative methods used in previous studies of imaginaries (Jasanoff & Kim, 2015; Lennon, 2015). As a poststructural procedure, situational mapping involves clustering data conceptually, rather than through a circumscribed process of iterative coding. For our purposes, this meant returning to the data set and reading it diffractively (Barad, 2007) through our emergent frame for affective imaginaries and, in turn, rereading this frame in light of the data. As Taguchi (2012) suggested, such diffractive readings make intelligible "other possible realities of data" (p. 267)—in this case, their relations to the affective imaginaries at work in the Innovation School's literacy classrooms. Because the most substantive shifts in the classroom order occurred during summer planning, we repeated this process for each year, mapping the ostensive, normative, and performative dimensions of each classroom world and tracing the continuities and breaks from year to year (for an overview of these shifts, see Figure 2). As Jasanoff (2015) suggested, such comparative approaches are indispensable for unearthing latent current and contradictions in and between imaginaries. These features formed the basis of our findings.

FIGURE 2
Overview of Comparative Mapping Across Affective Imaginaries



Representation and (In)Commensurability

Importantly, our approach to analyzing affective imaginaries through ethnographic inquiry is not without limitations. Some might note, for example, that our interpretive mapping in Figure 2 could give the appearance that the classroom worlds that we were studying were relatively stable: that ostensive features begat normative expectations, which begat performative dynamics—all holding steady until the classrooms were reconfigured the next summer. In fact, each year, these dimensions were interdependent, agonistic, and shot through with contingencies. Indeed, implicit in the "performative" layer of our diagram is an understanding that affective imaginaries always coexist and compete with other imaginaries circulating in the pluriverse of the classroom (cf. Nichols & O'Sullivan, 2019). Our representations, then, are not intended as totalizing accounts. They are more akin to core samples in geological studies—stationary fragments that clarify, however partially, the living processes unfolding in different conditions.

As we suggested, some too might wonder about the commensurability of our analysis with particular theories of affect. For many theorists, not all (see Leys, 2018), affect surges through preconscious intensities (Massumi, 1995) and immaterial forces (Blackman, 2012)—registers not easily amenable to qualitative mapping or comparison (cf. St. Pierre, 2016). Although we are sympathetic to such perspectives, our interest was in the ways that affect and the imagination were made legible, even tangible, through their public enactment in classrooms. In other words, although affect may very well be preconscious or immaterial, it is not only, or always, these things. Our approach, then, followed the pragmatic-contextual tradition in affect studies (Anderson, 2014), sidestepping debates centrally focused on the ontology of affect. In this way, our findings are meant to be demonstrative not definitive, elucidating the work of affective imaginaries in literacy classrooms with humble awareness that alternate conceptions of affect might yield differing interpretations and insights.

Findings

In mapping and comparing teachers' affective imaginaries for the literacy classroom over the Innovation School's first three years, two overarching findings emerged: (1) Tensions in the performative dynamics of teachers' classroom imaginaries were often interpreted not as incongruities between their ostensive and normative orders but as a failure of individual students to adopt teachers' affective attachments to democratic spaces and structures, and (2) efforts to regulate students' literacy practices to bring them in line with teachers' affective imaginaries often overlooked the ways that students leveraged ostensive elements of the classrooms for democratic purposes divergent from those that educators anticipated. We explore each of these findings in this section.

Democratic Spaces or Democratic Students? Incongruities in Affective Imaginaries

Making the Democratic Imaginary

From their earliest planning meetings, educators at the Innovation School expressed a desire for their classroom worlds to feel democratic. The summer before the school opened, teachers spent two weeks outlining policies, procedures, and arrangements that might convey to students that these spaces were student-centered, participatory, and egalitarian. Teachers sketched and refined hypothetical designs using sticky notes and butcher paper, weighing each contribution by asking whether it would enable students to be "self-directed" or to "take control of their learning" (field note, July 8, 2014). By the start of the year, these plans gave shape to the ostensive elements of teachers' democratic imaginaries. Sam, an experienced African American educator and the sole humanities teacher in the first year, requested tables rather than desks and arranged them into a U shape around the perimeter of the room. Inside this U shape, he clustered a pair of tables so he could sit amid the students while teaching or hold conferences with individuals and groups as they worked on project-based literacy assignments (see Figure 3). According to Sam, this configuration would feel "more democratic" than the rows of desks that students would likely have encountered in their middle school classrooms: It would allow students to see and engage with one another across the

FIGURE 3
First Day of School Classroom Setup, From the Bottom Edge of the U-Shaped Table Arrangement

room, and it would flatten the teacher–student power differential by locating Sam among the students rather than at the front of the class (field note, September 8, 2014).

Importantly, this ostensive ordering, realized through the arrangement of material and aesthetic features of the classroom world, was bound up with implicit normative dimensions of that space, ones intended to cultivate dispositions that aligned with the school's democratic imaginary. It was not that Sam, or other teachers, expected U-shaped table arrangements, by themselves, to produce democratic classroom worlds or students but, rather, that these elements would regulate the movements and positions of bodies in ways that might nurture democratic relations in and between students. Ordering space, in other words, reflected already ordered normative expectations, constructing a framework of intelligibility through which certain actions, outcomes, and even affectivity itself become sanctionable as either in or out of alignment with the imagined classroom. The presence of tables, for example, would invite opportunities for collaborative work in close proximity, which in turn could condition students to look beyond themselves or their own abilities when completing literacy activities. Likewise, the U-shaped arrangement carried in train an ideal vision of classroom communication: By facing one another rather than the front of the room, students might, in time, come to hold lively, self-directed conversations that were not dependent on teacher facilitation. Such expectations also implied their obverse: It was not only that students were to leverage the ostensive elements of the classroom to be more independent and autonomous learners but also that they were to be less dependent on the instruction and direction of the teacher. In other words, the democratic imaginary of the literacy classroom assumed that students would acculturate to those democratic norms to which educators held affective attachments: autonomy, independence, and collaboration.

However, the performative dimension of these imaginaries—the ways that they were enacted in the lived dynamics of the classroom—surfaced very different energies, flows, and dispositions than those envisioned in teacher planning meetings. From the first days of school, the classroom pulsed with varied and uneven intensities. Some students entered the room with bursts of laughter, jostling and play fighting, and then, sitting at the far end of the U shape, they reignited these scuffles throughout class. Others entered silently, taking the first available seat and placing their heads on the table, or putting in earbuds to listen to music. Still others sat quietly in clusters, occasionally pulling out phones to text or take selfies, or opening their Chromebooks to browse Reddit or play games. Sam greeted students as they entered and directed their attention to "Do Now" activities listed on the whiteboard, which were intended to frame the day's inquiry; however, because many students ignored these instructions, Sam circulated to break up conversations and encourage students to focus.

Some days, it took 20–30 minutes (nearly half the class period) before enough students understood and completed these introductory assignments for Sam to begin the day's lesson. Over time, the asymmetry between the anticipated and actual dynamics of the classroom weighed on Sam. One day, when these frictions were particularly pronounced, he told the class that he could not introduce a new collaborative project until he had everyone's attention. When students resisted, he walked to the front of the room and sat on the floor with his head lowered, a moment which researchers in the room described as feeling "tense," "chaotic," and "uncomfortable" (field notes, September 24, 2014). He remained in this position until the class was quiet enough for him to continue—nearly the entire period. Realizing that there would be no time for the planned lesson, Sam asked students to complete an exit slip, writing three sentences about what they were going to do to make the classroom a better place (field note, September 24, 2014). Although they did not always manifest in this way, such tensions between an aspirational world realized through ostensive and normative classroom features and the performative dimension realized in student actions persisted throughout the year.

Incongruities in the Imaginary

Although it is possible to read such frictions as outgrowths of student disengagement or disobedience, in an important sense, they were also nurtured by incongruities in the ostensive and normative dimensions of the classroom imaginary. The same U-shaped tables that were meant to be enrolled in lively classroom deliberations also enabled students to engage in other forms of lively activity, forms more aligned with students' imagined sense of the space than those the teacher projected. Intended to promote a democratic feel, these ostensive features did exactly that: Enlivening high-intensity affectivity registered as laughter, expanded movement, and even roughhousing that was, indeed, collaborative yet did not align with the educator's normative expectations of that space. Likewise, the project-based assignments and their attendant "Do Now" activities were meant to encourage students to work diligently and autonomously with limited direction. However, without explanation as to the purpose of such assignments, some students reverted to other interests, which were not aligned to the endorsed norms of the classroom's democratic affective order—a matrix of acceptable affective responses sanctioned by the affective imaginary at play: Students could talk but only so loudly; they could laugh but only so much; they could express their disinterest or frustration but only to a certain extent. This was evident, even at the time: In a reflective memo written the day of Sam's silent withdrawal, Phil (first author) noted,

> Students are told that their classroom *is* democratic, but also that they need to reflect on how they can *become* more democratic. The word "democratic" seems to be doing a lot of work: expressing an ideal (teacher-defined? school-defined?) state, and highlighting where students fall short of this ideal. Whatever does not align—including being confused about an assignment or distracted by peers—can be read as "undemocratic" and in need of correction. (memo, September 24, 2014)

The inconsistencies in the ostensive and normative dimensions of the classroom, then, were experienced differently by students as they were performed. In year-end interviews, some students celebrated the open-endedness of their literacy assignments and the decentered role of the teacher (e.g., "We're free to do what we want….The teacher doesn't bother us when we're doing what we love"; interview, June 11, 2015). However, other students expressed frustration at the lack of teacher direction in understanding the expectations of competency-based activities (e.g., "It gave us too much freedom. The teacher was there, but they didn't do anything"; interview, June 11, 2015).

Importantly, these disparate experiences were not read by teachers as asymmetries in the ostensive and normative expectations of the classroom, that is, as misalignments between the material and aesthetic features of their realized classrooms and the aspirational norms of their democratic imaginaries. Instead, teachers understood these responses as some students straining to shed their attachments to more authoritarian modes of schooling. Between years 1 and 2, educators expressed concerns that their classrooms might be reinforcing such attachments: Even as they decentered their own roles and encouraged student autonomy in their project-based literacy assignments, there was still residue of older, factory-style schooling that could be preventing students from embracing the democratic possibilities of the new model. For these educators, such residue was a kind of affective accrual, clinging to the ostensive features of the school (Ahmed, 2004) and delimiting students' capacities to feel the democratic charges that teachers had envisioned for their classroom worlds.

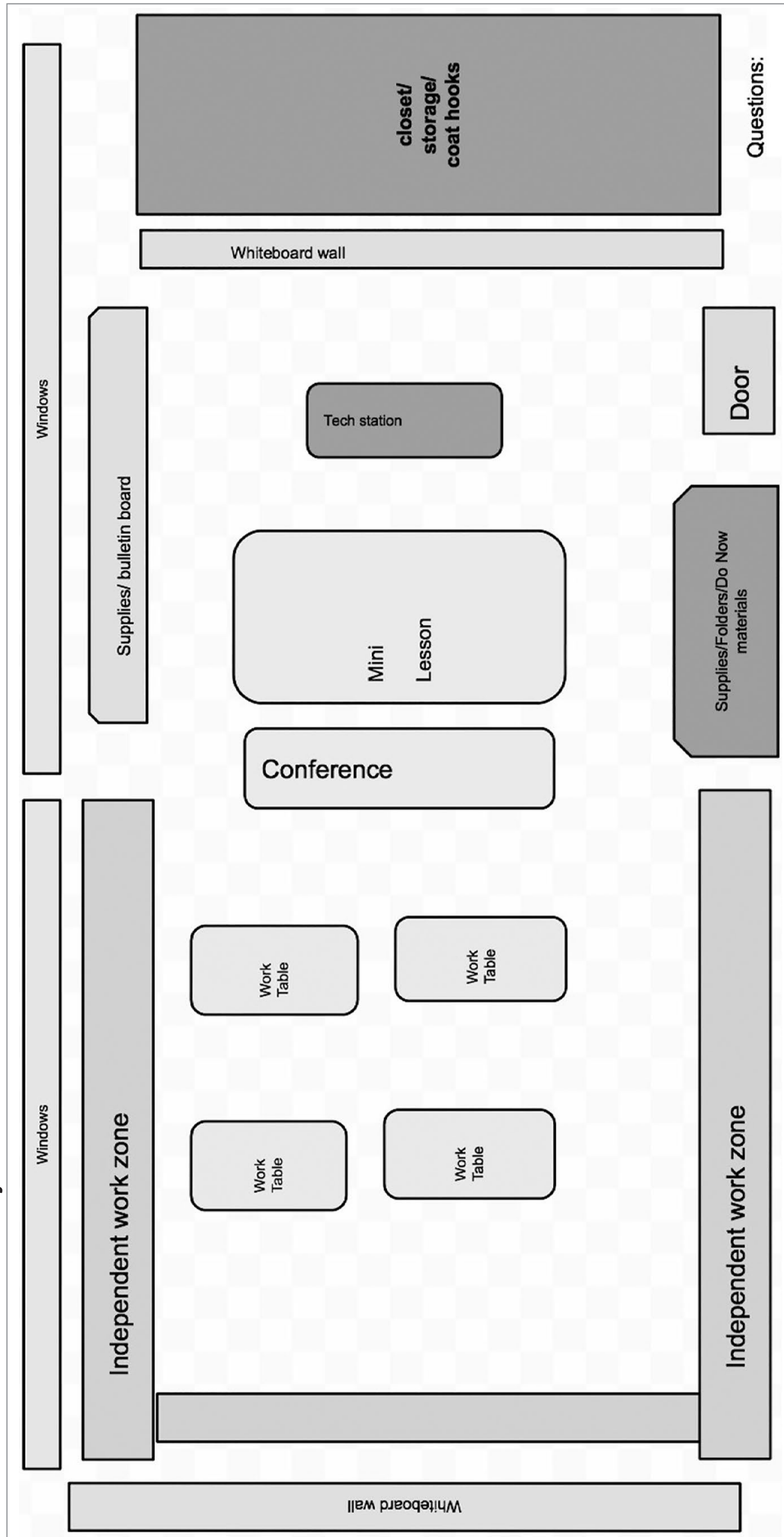
Reimagining Democratic Space

As such, during summer planning between the school's first and second years, teachers restructured their core classes to be asynchronous learning environments, arranged in the image of the school's makerspaces. The humanities curriculum was now organized into unit "playlists" that students could complete at their own pace. Playlist assignments included detailed written instructions so students could move through them without waiting for the teacher to explain the task. This freed teachers from delivering instruction in any formal sense. Instead, they divided their time using informal conferring: check-ins (30–60-second daily updates with each student), tune-ups (3–5-minute meetings about targeted errors or problems), minilessons (10–15-minute group lessons related to content area skills), and conferences (10-minute one-on-one meetings about individual progress). Each week, in lieu of lesson plans, teachers created a chart to ensure that they met with students in at least two of these settings. To facilitate this transition, teachers also altered the spatial order, replacing the U-shaped table arrangement with designated zones for independent and collaborative work and for minilessons and conferences (see Figure 4). Shifting these ostensive features helped support the normative expectations of the space: that students would move freely about the room, working at their own pace with minimal need for teacher direction.

Once again, the performative dimension of these spaces made legible frictions in teachers' imagined and experienced affective order. On a typical day in the year 2 classroom world, students entered sporadically and dispersed to different places in the room. There was little regard for the discrete purposes of designated zones intended to accommodate various working styles: Students worked collaboratively in independent spaces and independently in collaborative spaces. This was less concerning for educators, however, than the many students who continued to use the time and space for other purposes: talking and texting with friends, watching YouTube videos, or even sleeping. When Sam or the other humanities teachers nudged students to "stay on task" during daily check-ins, some responded that they were "working at their own pace" and, therefore, doing exactly what had been asked of them. Others said that they preferred to work at home and use class time for socializing, also something that, technically, aligned with the stated expectations for asynchronous learning (memo, January 12, 2017).

However, the movements of these students throughout the room, and the volume generated by their activities, also created challenges for those who were interested in using class time to work through the literacy competencies in their playlists. One student, Selena, found it so difficult to concentrate that she regularly retreated to the school's science classroom, which had a small closet with some natural lighting where she could focus on making sense of the written instructions for her literacy projects. Similarly, other students found quiet refuges throughout the school where they could hide away and complete assignments: in hallways, empty classrooms, and even the main office (memo, October 12, 2015). In other words, the same ostensive elements that allowed students to work asynchronously and move throughout the room, engaging in talk and affective expressions of joy or frustration openly, also inhibited some students from meeting the normative expectations of the classroom world. This was true of the spatial environment as a whole (e.g., the open plan, modular seating) and of the ostensive features of literacy instruction taking place: The

FIGURE 4
Teacher-Produced Model for the Asynchronous Classroom



dense written instructions on assignments that allowed teachers to sidestep formal instruction placed a burden on students to do close reading before they could start an activity, all in an environment that was not always hospitable to such reading practices.

Positioning the Democratic Student

Crucially, in the second year as in the first, such asymmetries were understood less as contradictions in the ostensive and normative dimensions of teachers' affective imaginaries and more as outgrowths of individual students' performance. As Christopher, one of the humanities teachers, put it, "One of the challenges I've found is that…there are kids doing awesome, interesting things and really investing themselves and really diving in every day, and there are kids doing the opposite every day" (interview, June 21, 2016). This idea was echoed in summer professional planning after the second year, when Ben described the persistent challenge not as reconciling internal tensions in the imagined model of the school but as gradually reorienting students to be less dependent on their attachments to more authoritarian education:

> Not everybody is ready to run a marathon on day 1. Not everybody is ready to let go of what they think learning is on day 1.…Undoing eight years of acculturation doesn't happen overnight. When we encounter resistance, it's not disrespect. We're disrupting their view of the world. (audio recording, August 18, 2016)

Such statements located the principal challenge of the classroom imaginary not in incongruities between the realized and imagined dimensions of the space, as our argument suggests, but in individual students who failed to accommodate themselves to its unstated norms for democratic participation.

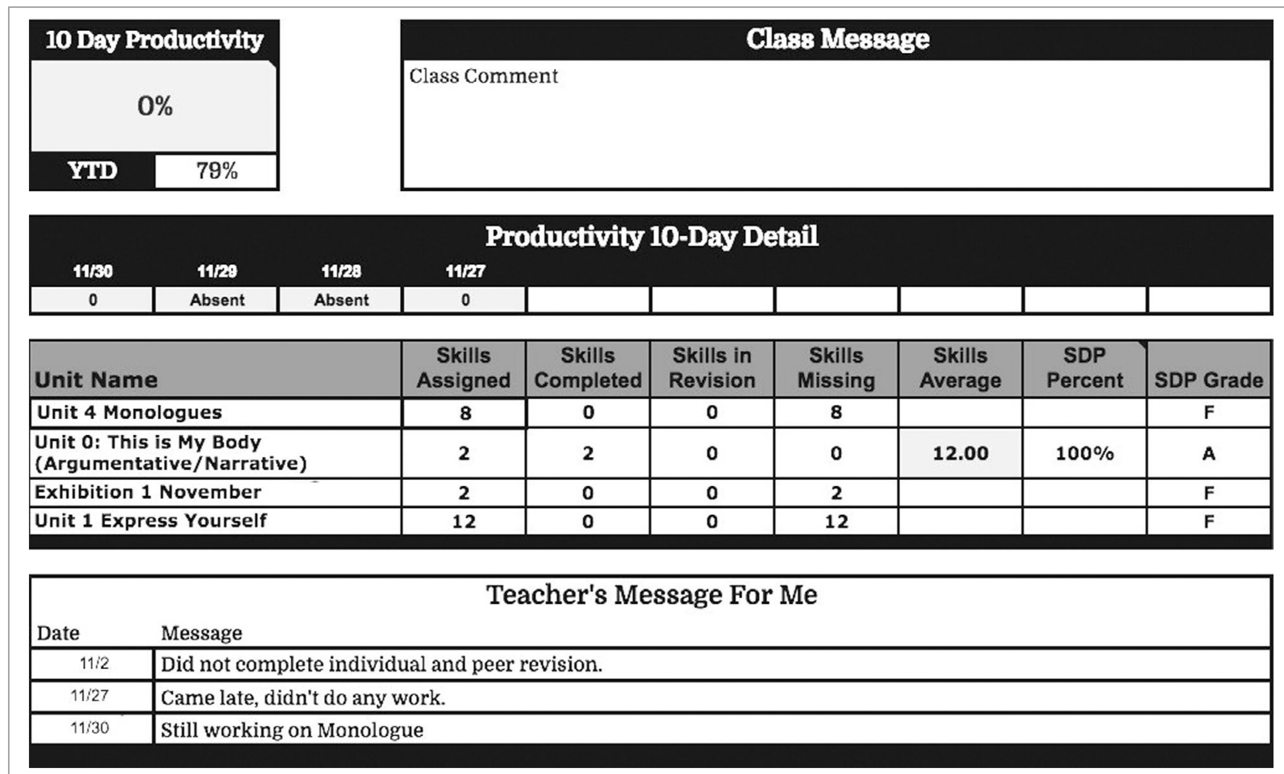
As the contours of this imaginary calcified, over time and through practice, literacy instruction increasingly came to be less focused on supporting students' in reading, writing, speaking, and listening and more committed to cultivating attachments to particular dispositions and feelings associated with a democratic model of learning. Pluriversal, this model resisted easy definition, creating competing spatial orders of literacy classrooms in which the imagined democratic classrooms that students and educators held vied for validation. Such contestations were, however, inherently uneven, as teachers' affective imaginaries disproportionately regulated the performative aspects of student life, a form of biopolitical control which sanctioned only certain actions, assessments, and affects. This was most clearly evinced in the transition to the third year, when teachers addressed the difficulties in years 1 and 2 by creating a tiered system for grouping students not by grade level but in three levels of autonomy: (1) semiautonomous, which retained the class structure of year 2; (2) teacher-supported, which revived synchronous elements from year 1; and (3) teacher-directed, which reverted to a traditional direct instruction model (field note, August 18, 2016). Even as these designations were narrated to students as rooted in learning support not ability, they were immediately understood to be hierarchical. Students regularly spoke of "moving up" toward semiautonomy and "moving down" toward teacher-directedness (memo, June 9, 2017). In this way, to preserve the coherence and continuity of the affective imaginary, tensions from the model's performative dimensions gave rise to new ostensive and normative orders (i.e., systems of assessment) whereby students were sorted not by their literacy skills or abilities but by their capacity to align with particular affective attachments to democratic spaces, structures, and practices.

Regulating Democratic Performance

In the classroom world of the school's second year, as teachers mobilized their affective imaginaries to shift toward an asynchronous classroom structure, they also realized that this might require resources for monitoring students' newfound freedoms. Even as they imagined spaces where students could learn at their own pace, teachers also knew that these worlds were not easily separated from the external pressures of other social worlds, such as district and school accountability and college admissions standards. Teachers acknowledged, in other words, that their ideal of self-paced, independent learning needed to be counterbalanced by regulatory procedures to ensure that students' democratic performances would meet outside benchmarks for success. Teachers' varied structures for conferring with students—check-ins, tune-ups, minilessons, and conferences—provided one means of monitoring individual progress. However, by the end of the second year, less than half of the students had completed even half of the humanities competencies needed to satisfy district requirements for advancing to the next grade (field note, June 21, 2016). Entering the third year, then, educators decided that more robust managerial strategies were necessary. One of these involved their new tiered classroom structure of organizing students by level of autonomy. The other involved introducing a new feature into the classroom's ostensive order, a digital tracker: an online spreadsheet in which students' asynchronous progress through units could be monitored, sending alerts when they were on track or failing to make efficient progress (see Figure 5).

As implied by its name, the digital tracker animated a normative expectation: Students were tracked based on their ability to align with particular metrics for productivity in the classroom. Participating in democratic activities came to mean that students were not only to be mobile and self-directed, with minimal dependence on a teacher, but also able to employ managerial techniques to ensure that they

FIGURE 5
Example of the Digital Tracker, Instituted in Year 3



10 Day Productivity	
0%	
YTD	79%

Class Message

Class Comment

Productivity 10-Day Detail

11/30	11/29	11/28	11/27						
0	Absent	Absent	0						

Unit Name	Skills Assigned	Skills Completed	Skills in Revision	Skills Missing	Skills Average	SDP Percent	SDP Grade
Unit 4 Monologues	8	0	0	8			F
Unit 0: This is My Body (Argumentative/Narrative)	2	2	0	0	12.00	100%	A
Exhibition 1 November	2	0	0	2			F
Unit 1 Express Yourself	12	0	0	12			F

Teacher's Message For Me

Date	Message
11/2	Did not complete individual and peer revision.
11/27	Came late, didn't do any work.
11/30	Still working on Monologue

were making efficient use of time. Not surprisingly, the performative dimension of the imaginary that surfaced in year 3 highlighted students' affective responses to the layering of these ostensive and normative elements differently. For some, particularly those who had successfully accommodated themselves to the asynchronous format the year prior, the tracker provided transparency, allowing them to see which competencies they had completed and which they still needed to address. Such norms provide inroads for autonomous learning, tempering secondary affects related to anxiety, worry, and the perceived loss of control, at least for some students (Ngai, 2004). For instance, Crystal checked the tracker each morning to plan how she would use her asynchronous class time that day. Doing so promoted a felt sense of agency as she gained control over her schedule and her learning (field note, April 5, 2017).

For other students, however, the tracker had the opposite effect, producing a feeling of anxiety. This was especially so for those who had fallen behind in a given unit or had difficulty in making sense of the complex written instructions accompanying each assignment. These students found little comfort in the steady reminders that they were not working fast enough. Additionally, many students found the knowledge that their activities were being surveilled and measured to feel paralyzing in moments when they were stuck or confused. The normative dimensions of this tracker, then, resulted in complex confluence of affectivity, of spiked and ambient intensities that, for some, resulted in paralysis—a state of suspension seemingly antithetical to the normative features of a democratic classroom hallmarked by increased autonomy. This was compounded by the fact that the tracker was digital and accessible to students outside of the classroom: It regulated them and their affectivity beyond the classroom walls. For example, Elijah described turning in some late assignments one school day and then refreshing the tracker over and over that night to see if his teachers had input his competencies so he would no longer be offtrack (field note, April 5, 2017).

Such student experiences with the tracker made legible certain contradictions and ironies in the classroom world. Putting aside the paradox of cultivating democratic autonomy through apparatuses of surveillance and control, the performative dimensions of the space highlighted how the ostensive and normative features of classroom worlds produce affects that condition students' power of acting (Spinoza, 1994). Whereas for Crystal, the tracker cultivated feelings of contentment and self-agency, increasing her power to act and inclining her toward positive attachments to this democratic imaginary, for other students, the same ostensive features cultivated different relations, an affective atmosphere (Anderson, 2014) of

frustration, anxiety, and worry that constrained student movement, even beyond the material walls of the classrooms. For these students, the resulting affective relations formed negative attachments to regulatory features of a democratic classroom that, in turn, produced effects, and affects, within that aspirational world that, arguably, diminished their power to act.

Kiara and Miguel

Importantly, these regulatory strategies also made it more difficult for students attempting to enact sanctioned democratic norms to be recognized and for their actions to be legitimized in the classroom world. Because the digital tracker was calibrated to specific, discrete literacy skills and competencies, it only measured and rewarded those activities amenable to such modes of calculation. Other democratic practices, then, often went overlooked. One of the clearest examples of this was the case of Kiara and Miguel, two semiautonomous students who decided to collaborate on a film project during a humanities unit on the subject of religious freedom. Kiara, a young African American woman who had recently converted to Islam, saw the project-based unit as an opportunity to talk about Muslim identity in the context of the Trump Administration's then-recent travel ban. When she approached Miguel, her classmate and a young Puerto Rican filmmaker, with the idea of making a collaborative movie, he was already halfway finished with a final essay for the unit, but he decided the film would be more meaningful and important to make. In his words,

> [Kiara] was like, "We need to shoot a video about Muslim identity," and I was in the middle of writing my paper. But I was like, "Let's do it." But then again, I was also like, "Damn, this would have been easier if I were to just write the essay." (interview, June 7, 2017)

After storyboarding the project, Kiara and Miguel revised their plan to ensure that it would line up with the competencies required for the unit. They then began to film, interviewing Muslim students and teachers to represent a variety of perspectives on the meaning of Islam and the interrelations of faith and politics in the age of Trump. Miguel edited the footage into a seven-minute movie that interspersed their interviews with clips from news broadcasts related to the travel ban, juxtaposing rhetoric of Islamophobia with personal narratives about faith, family, justice, and peace (see Figure 6). Both Kiara and Miguel expressed how proud they were of their finished product not only because of its technical sophistication but also because it was personally meaningful. Working within the normative expectations of a semiautonomous student, Kiara explained that making the film cultivated certain affective states, confidence and pride, that for her functioned as an expression of the normative dimension of that democratic classroom world: sharing her faith and identity was felt as an articulation of democracy itself. Similarly, Miguel, who was not a Muslim, described how

FIGURE 6
Stills From Kiara and Miguel's Video

formative the process was for him: “I learned so much from making the video….Without it, I wouldn’t have knowledge about Muslims or learned about their oppression” (interview, June 7, 2017).

In many respects, the process that Kiara and Miguel engaged in to complete their project was exactly the sort that teachers had envisioned taking place in their democratic imaginaries. The students had leveraged the ostensive elements of space and curriculum and the flexibility of the project-based assignments to create something personally meaningful and politically relevant. Indeed, as Miguel indicated, he had even made his workload more difficult to do so, abandoning a half-completed essay to storyboard, write, shoot, and edit alongside Kiara. The two students had also taken pains to align the film with the competencies required for the unit, molding their ideas to the normative expectations of teachers, the school, and the district. Yet, in the end, their project received only partial credit. Although they had addressed the competencies in the abstract, their decision to make a video rather than write an essay meant that their project did not perfectly align with certain isolated skills that comprised the competencies. Also, because these were what the digital tracker was structured on, the automated system registered their project as incomplete, leaving Kiara and Miguel with the option to edit their video substantially, write an elaborate accompanying essay, or accept an incomplete for the unit. Out of frustration and protest, they kept the film as it was, taking the incomplete and severely impacting their final grades for their junior year.

Cases like Kiara and Miguel’s were not an aberration, leaving many students skeptical as to whether it was worth the extra effort to do anything more than write straightforward essays to meet the unit guidelines. In other words, the same ostensive order that created the conditions that allowed for creative projects like Kiara and Miguel’s also constrained that work by making it illegible for assessment. Importantly, this contradiction meant that students like Kiara and Miguel met their own normative classroom expectations but failed to meet those of their teachers.

Contradictions in the space’s ostensive features also bore out in contradictions in its normative order, as material, aesthetic, and normative features of the classroom world encouraged students to take up a specific democratic ideal, to take ownership of projects, work collaboratively, and operate autonomously from teachers. Yet, when students took up that affective imaginary, it often failed to translate to the register of assessment, in this case, to the digital tracker. Crucially, this was not a passive issue: It bore material consequences for Kiara and Miguel, who in the following year, would have to send colleges their transcripts that bore the marks of this incongruity. This highlights an important way that affective imaginaries are bound up with matters of educational equity. The frictions and contradictions of affective imaginaries do not hold equal weight for all people or in all contexts. For those in underresourced districts or from nondominant backgrounds, tensions resulting from affective imaginaries have potential for reproducing systemic inequalities, even if they were first intended to ameliorate such injustices. The regulation of classroom worlds, in other words, can often work to diminish students’ capacities to move, act, and thrive in the worlds beyond the classroom. As Kara and Miguel’s case illustrated, even justice-oriented affective imaginaries can perpetuate inequity through its realization in classroom worlds.

Discussion

Affective imaginaries play powerful roles in ordering and regulating the spaces, bodies, and practices of literacy classroom worlds. As we showed, these imaginaries may generate new possibilities for moving and doing, feeling and being, but the same configurations that open such potentials may likewise constrain, delimit, or delegitimize them. They are, in this sense, instances of what Berlant (2011) called cruel optimism—resources honed for hopeful aspirations (e.g., bridging educational divides, cultivating democratic relations) that may, at the same time, inhibit or elide the very acts of self-agency and empowerment that they are intended to generate in spaces of literacy learning. In taking a pragmatic-contextual approach (Anderson, 2014) to theorizing these imaginaries, we elucidated how the layered dimensions of these spaces work together to do things: to shape the physical contours of literacy classrooms; to discipline bodies, feelings, and practices; and to adjudicate which enactments of the space are sanctioned and which are deviant. In this way, affective imaginaries provide a frame for articulating the braided relations of affect, imagination, and power as they unfold in literacy classrooms. In what follows, we discuss the three dimensions that we focused on—ostensive, normative, and performative—to examine how their role in the spatialization of affect can draw attention to critical implications for literacy research and practice.

The Ostensive Dimension

Attending to the ostensive dimension of affective imaginaries invites reflection on what material and aesthetic features are included or excluded from consideration in the shaping and realizing of felt classroom worlds. As our findings demonstrate, teachers held affective attachments to particular forms of democratic practice, which, once enacted, could compromise students’ abilities to effectively make use of these spaces. The autonomy produced by decentering the role of the teacher, for example, also ensured that students who needed additional support to

navigate the asynchronous curriculum would be without certain infrastructures on which they relied (e.g., whole-class routines, teacher instructions). In this sense, democratic practices could actually be exclusionary, unless impacted students had the motivation and resources to find feasible workarounds to these challenges, like Selena did in seeking out a quiet work space in the science classroom. This raises questions, however, about whether the resulting spaces that made such demands on students were any more democratic than the synchronous classrooms of the year prior. Although not autonomous, the first-year classrooms provided basic supports that, for some students, promoted more egalitarian participation than later ostensive additions that were explicitly coded as democratic. A telling example of this tension is latent in our opening vignette, when a teacher jokingly listed "temperature-controlled" as a feature of an ideal, visionary classroom. Although this was intended (and taken) as tongue-in-cheek, it is also striking that other ostensive features (e.g., modular furniture, one-to-one laptops) would be more obvious components of democratic classrooms than less glitzy, but still vital, classroom infrastructures. Indeed, it was this same disconnect that allowed the district's wider experiments with innovative schooling to unfold in buildings with unworking heating and cooling, inconsistent internet access, temperamental plumbing, and unsafe drinking water (cf. Nichols, in press).

All of this suggests that ostensive features, from the most mundane to the most ornate, must be considered for the affordances that they invite, for how they shape the ways in which felt worlds are built, their material and aesthetic features, and for how they might contribute to systemic inequities and the uneven distribution of resources in schools. Anchored to a given affective imaginary, these ostensive features of classroom worlds establish conditions of possibility for literacy learning: what arrangements, resources, technologies, and aesthetics are present or absent, accessible or inaccessible—all of which holds material consequences for the students who will inhabit them.

The Normative Dimension

Our orientation also suggests the importance of making visible and articulating the normative expectations that, latent and often overlooked, influence spatial orderings of literacy classrooms both through and beyond the classrooms' ostensive features. In making these expectations legible, we are able to question whether they hold up to the pursuit of educational justice. Even the most taken-for-granted practices carry norms worth interrogating, as they tacitly shape the practices, actions, and even affectivity of educators and students in literacy classrooms. As we illustrated, an ostensive configuration of tables and chairs in a U shape are embedded with a wide array of norms, including when, how, and for how long to sit; what one might do while sitting (e.g., schoolwork, talking); and even how one should feel while sitting (i.e., comfortable, open to interaction, content). Yet, importantly, attending to the normative dimensions also spotlights how endorsed norms imply their obverse. The desire for democratic classrooms, for instance, may also be animated by teachers' fears of authoritarianism, either their students' susceptibility to questionable authorities or their own capacities to wield or misuse power. Theorists of affect have called attention to such tensions, interrogating how anticipatory futures, forged collectively and individually, promote affective states of uneasiness, which may influence the ways that we construct space. In other words, we often build in fear of futures that we hope never to realize (cf. Massumi, 2015). This suggests that attention to affective imaginaries might provide language and resources for interrogating how educators' own feelings, desires, and anxieties may be entangled with those that they are hoping to nurture in students, as well as those that they are hoping to prevent.

Such a perspective brings the affective to bear on earlier and ongoing literacy scholarship that has demonstrated the importance of recognizing the tacit and stated norms in spaces of literacy learning and for whom those norms function. For example, scholars have shown how attempts to cultivate egalitarian or empowering practices in writers' workshops sometimes encourage students to perform vulnerability or resilience in ways that can serve educators' affective desires more than students (e.g., Ellsworth, 1992; Nichols et al., 2019). Such performances, although couched in democratic language, carry uneven consequences when they are demanded of students from nondominant communities. Shaping the literate lives of youth of color, queer youth, trans youth, those with disabilities, and all intersections thereof, norms exert great force over the spatialization of classrooms, creating a matrix of intelligibility through which the performative aspects of classroom worlds are assessed. Attention to the normative dimensions of affective imaginaries, then, extends such concerns beyond literacy practices to the design, organization, and choreography of spaces where literacy is taught, practiced, and learned, providing a resource for tracing how classroom worlds are anchored in expectations that may delimit or promote educational equity and justice.

The Performative Dimension

The final dimension of our orientation, performative dynamics of affective imaginaries, sheds light on the contested nature of classroom worlds. The case of Kiara and Miguel, for example, highlights how students might make use of certain ostensive elements in ways that meet normative expectations of a given affective imaginary, yet

they remain unsanctioned and illegitimate due, in part, to internal frictions and contradictions. However, even as the school did not affirm Kiara and Miguel's way of worldmaking, we found their response to this incident instructive. In the months after they received partial credit, Kiara and Miguel sought opportunities to present their film, which led to them sharing their work at a local high school. In an interview, they described a moment during this event when they noticed a young Muslim woman in the audience, wiping away tears as she watched. Kiara and Miguel discussed the charge of emotion they felt when, after the screening, audience members approached them to share greetings and words of thanks. Kiara suggested that these reactions reinforced, for her, that she and Miguel had made the right decision to create a personal, political film rather than limiting their work to the narrow measures of the digital tracker:

> It's just us giving you a piece of us that, you know, a book can't give you, a paper can't give you. We're giving it to you live, through the lens. We're letting you see how we feel. We're letting you see our lives, and we're telling you our lives, our truth. (interview, June 7, 2017)

Anchored to a different imaginary, these young people pursued a vision of the democratic as they both imagined and felt it, and in doing so, they created an affective experience that circulated these feelings to other, more receptive audiences unconditioned by the normative expectations of democratic schooling.

Attending to the performative dimension of affective imaginaries invites speculation as to how we might make classroom worlds differently: how students and teachers might imagine space together, orienting its feel and, so too, those ostensive and normative features that structure the performative dynamics of literacy practices and learning. By recognizing the pluriversal nature of affective imaginaries as they vie for realization in literacy classrooms, students and teachers might raise to awareness and decide on shared norms, co-constructing their own democratic imaginary that fuses teacher and student affective attachments to aspirational ways of educating. Importantly, it is easy to see how imaginaries, when taken for granted as ready-made, ignore the ways that even democratic imaginings of the world carry legacies of race, class, gender, and ability that are experienced and felt as unjust. Normative dynamics do not impact the ostensive order evenly, and for those historically disempowered, these dynamics produce vulnerabilities that are not always recognized. As the case of Kiara and Miguel showed, despite the willingness for "letting you see how we feel," the ways that students' practices are regulated or delegitimized could inhibit students from doing so in the future, even in school spaces imagined and built to feel democratic.

Taken together, our tridimensional orientation toward analyzing affective imaginaries as they structure spaces of literacy learning emphasizes the stakes of overlooking the connection between affect and the imagination as it relates to critical approaches to literacy scholarship. Affective imaginaries powerfully shape worldmaking practices, yet the impacts of these worlds, what they sanction as success or as failure, holds imbalanced consequences for teachers and students. When tensions arose regarding Kiara and Miguel's deployment of democratic ideals aligned to their prescribed semiautonomous competencies, it was the students who had to absorb the consequences. Teachers, meanwhile, remained arbiters of that realization process, of preserving certain visions of democratic imaginaries through ostensive and normative dynamics that often failed to acknowledge nonsanctioned forms of participation. Although some of the occurrences that we described are idiosyncratic to the particular structures of the Innovation School, similar attempts to realize democratic imaginaries echo across U.S. classrooms. It exists in demands for more democratic or participatory arrangements: that desks not be in rows, that classrooms be open and flexibly configured, that teachers avoid direct instruction. Tethered to an ideal democratic imaginary, such classroom features are, in themselves, neither inherently enriching nor liberatory. It would be comforting were this the case, such that any move taken in the name of democracy might increase students' power of acting (Spinoza, 1994), but the spatialization of classrooms is always anchored to some affective imaginary, to an aspirational classroom that both delimits and affords certain affective and performative possibilities.

Attention to affective imaginaries in this way gestures toward much-needed inroads for rethinking our affective attachments to aspirational educational models, once we recognize their incapacity to meet the needs of students. Although affective imaginaries calcify within consciousness over time, accruing semantic and discursive density that renders them more durable, this does not mean that said imaginaries cannot be altered. As Lennon (2015) described, "the task of revolutionary change and that of creating an alternative social order is not…that of dispensing with imaginaries, but of *providing alternative ones*" (p. 83). Worldmaking together, teachers and students can transform even the most fastidiously held imaginary by first becoming aware of its ostensive, normative, and performative features. Such awareness is not, however, easily attained. Reflection is, as Castoriadis (1987/1998) advised, key in this process of recognition, and through intentional reflection together, teachers and students might harness affective imaginaries as an analytical orientation for rendering visible the taken-for-granted norms structuring shared spaces of learning. We contend that such reflection might, in turn, open the social terrain to radical reimagining, to reconfiguring

historically sedimented aspirations to be more just, based on the pragmatic needs and contexts in question.

Reimagining the feeling of classroom worlds together, teachers and students might collectively negotiate the contours of shared spaces of literacy learning. It is in such moments that teachers and students might begin to draw on shared values, life histories, and felt experiences to restructure affective imaginaries in support of alternative, more just worlds. A form of counterstorytelling or even restorying (Thomas & Stornaiuolo, 2016), such collaboration, coincidentally quite democratic in nature, can unseat those dominant imaginaries that have risen to the level of uncontested truth, often in the form of best practices or ideal educational models of U.S. education. With newly imagined worlds to challenge old truths, students and teachers are also open to new affective attachments and, thus, to "*different* ways of inhabiting our world and living affectively and effectively within it" (Lennon, 2015, p. 90). By no means a panacea, creating shared, alternate imaginaries will not, wholesale, solve inequity in schooling, but it surfaces affective textures created by such inequities that often go overlooked in U.S. classrooms. Attending to affective imaginaries as they become instantiated in space makes visible how felt worlds are built, while also providing pathways for disrupting normative expectations embedded in the ostensive, normative, and performative dimensions of those classroom worlds.

NOTES

This research was supported by a National Academy of Education/Spencer Foundation Dissertation Fellowship. We are grateful to Amy Stornaiuolo for facilitating the university partnership with the Innovation School and to Kelly Johnston for conversations, readings, and feedback throughout this article's evolution.

REFERENCES

Ahmed, S. (2004). *The cultural politics of emotion*. Edinburgh, UK: Edinburgh University Press.

Anderson, B. (1983). *Imagined communities: Reflections on the origin and spread of nationalism*. London, UK: Verso.

Anderson, B. (2014). *Encountering affect: Capacities, apparatuses, conditions*. Burlington, VT: Ashgate.

Appadurai, A. (1990). Disjuncture and difference in the global cultural economy. *Public Culture*, *2*(2), 1–24. https://doi.org/10.1215/08992363-2-2-1

Austin, J.L. (1962). *How to do things with words*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

Barad, K. (2007). *Meeting the universe halfway: Quantum physics and the entanglement of matter and meaning*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press.

Bartlett, L., & Holland, D. (2002). Theorizing the space of literacy practices. *Ways of Knowing Journal*, *2*(1), 10–22.

Berlant, L. (2011). *Cruel optimism*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press.

Bishop, R.S. (1990). Mirrors, windows, and sliding glass doors. *Perspectives: Choosing and Using Books for the Classroom*, *6*(3), ix–xi.

Blackman, L. (2012). *Immaterial bodies: Affect, embodiment, mediation*. Los Angeles, CA: Sage.

Bucher, T. (2017). The algorithmic imaginary: Exploring the ordinary affects of Facebook algorithms. *Information Communication and Society*, *20*(1), 30–44. https://doi.org/10.1080/1369118X.2016.1154086

Burnett, C., & Merchant, G. (2018). Affective encounters: Enchantment and the possibilities of reading for pleasure. *Literacy*, *52*(2), 62–69. https://doi.org/10.1111/lit.12144

Butler, J. (1990). *Gender trouble: Feminism and the subversion of identity*. New York, NY: Routledge.

Cain, B.N. (1989). With worldmaking, planning models matter. *English Education*, *21*(1), 5–29.

Campano, G. (2007). *Immigrant students and literacy: Reading, writing, and remembering*. New York, NY: Teachers College Press.

Campano, G., Ghiso, M.P., & Welch, B. (2017). *Partnering with immigrant communities: Action through literacy*. New York, NY: Teachers College Record.

Castoriadis, C. (1998). *The imaginary institution of society* (K. Blamey, Trans.). Cambridge, MA: MIT Press. (Original work published 1987)

Clarke, A., Freise, C., & Washburn, R. (2018). *Situational analysis: Grounded theory after the interpretive turn*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Clough, P.T. (2010). *The affective turn: Theorizing the social*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press.

Collins, P.H. (1990). *Black feminist thought: Knowledge, consciousness, and the politics of empowerment*. New York, NY: Routledge.

Comber, B. (2015). *Literacy, place, and pedagogies of possibilities*. New York, NY: Routledge.

Delpit, L. (1988). The silenced dialogue: Power and pedagogy in educating other people's children. *Harvard Educational Review*, *58*(3), 280–299. https://doi.org/10.17763/haer.58.3.c43481778r528qw4

Ehret, C. (2018). Moments of teaching and learning in a children's hospital: Affects, textures, and temporalities. *Anthropology & Education Quarterly*, *49*(1), 53–71. https://doi.org/10.1111/aeq.12232

Ellsworth, E. (1992). Why doesn't this feel empowering? Working through repressive myths of critical pedagogy. In C. Luke & J. Gore (Eds.), *Feminisms and critical pedagogy* (pp. 90–119). New York, NY: Routledge.

Flusty, S. (1994). *Building paranoia: The proliferation of interdictory space and the erosion of spatial justice*. West Hollywood, CA: Los Angeles Forum for Architecture and Urban Design.

Foucault, M. (1994). *The birth of the clinic: An archaeology of medical perception* (A.M. Sheridan Smith, Trans.). New York, NY: Vintage. (Original work published 1963)

Foucault, M. (1977). *Discipline and punish: The birth of the prison* (A. Sheridan, Trans.). New York, NY: Vintage.

Freire, P., & Macedo, D. (1987). *Literacy: Reading the word and the world*. New York, NY: Routledge.

Gatens, M., & Lloyd, G. (1999). *Collective imaginings: Spinoza, past and present*. New York, NY: Routledge.

Heath, S.B., & Street, B.V. (with Mills, M.). (2008). *On ethnography: Approaches to language and literacy research*. New York, NY: Teachers College Press.

Holland, D., Lachicotte, W., Jr., Skinner, D., & Cain, C. (1998). *Identity and agency in cultural worlds*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

Hollett, T., & Hein, R. (2018). Affective atmospheres and skatepark sessions: The spatiotemporal contours of interest. *Learning, Culture and Social Interaction*, *23*. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.lcsi.2018.12.001

Jasanoff, S. (2015). Future imperfect: Science, technology, and the imaginations of modernity. In S. Jasanoff & S.-H. Kim (Eds.), *Dreamscapes of modernity: Sociotechnical imaginaries and the fabrication of power* (pp. 1–33). Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press.

Jasanoff, S., & Kim, S.-H. (Eds.). (2015). *Dreamscapes of modernity: Sociotechnical imaginaries and the fabrication of power*. Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press.

Kelley, R. (2002). *Freedom dreams: The Black radical imagination*. Boston, MA: Beacon.
Kinloch, V. (2010). *Harlem on our minds: Place, race, and literacies of urban youth*. New York, NY: Teachers College Press.
Leander, K.M., & Ehret, C. (Eds.). (2019). *Affect in literacy learning and teaching: Pedagogies, politics and coming to know*. New York, NY: Routledge.
Leander, K.M., & Rowe, D.W. (2006). Mapping literacy spaces in motion: A rhizomatic analysis of classroom literacy performance. *Reading Research Quarterly*, *41*(4), 428–460. https://doi.org/10.1598/RRQ.41.4.2
Leander, K.M., & Sheehy, M. (Eds.). (2004). *Spatializing literacy research and practice*. New York, NY: Peter Lang.
Lefebvre, H. (1984). *The production of space* (D. Nicholson-Smith, Trans.). Oxford, UK: Blackwell.
Lennon, K. (2015). *Imagination and the imaginary*. New York, NY: Routledge.
Lensmire, T.J. (2000). *Powerful writing, responsible teaching*. New York, NY: Teachers College Press.
Leys, R. (2018). *The ascent of affect: Genealogy and critique*. Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press.
Martin, R. (2003). *The organizational complex: Architecture, media, and corporate space*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.
Massumi, B. (1995). The autonomy of affect. *Cultural Critique*, *31*, 83–109. https://doi.org/10.2307/1354446
Massumi, B. (2015). *Ontopower: War, powers, and the state of perception*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press.
Mills, K.A., & Comber, B. (2015). Socio-spatial approaches to literacy studies: Rethinking the social constitution and politics of space. In J. Rowsell & K. Pahl (Eds.), *The Routledge handbook of literacy studies* (pp. 91–103). New York, NY: Routledge.
Ngai, S. (2004). *Ugly feelings*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
Nichols, T.P. (in press). Innovation from below: Infrastructure, design, and equity in literacy classroom makerspaces. *Research in the Teaching of English*.
Nichols, T.P., McGeehan, C., & Reed, S. (2019). Composing proximity: Teaching strategic distance to high school writers. *English Journal*, *108*(3), 67–73.
Nichols, T.P., & O'Sullivan, B. (2019). Classroom cosmopolitics: Worldbuilding for mutual flourishing. In K. Lenters & M. McDermott (Eds.), *Affect, embodiment, and place in critical literacy: Assembling theory and practice* (pp. 126–134). New York, NY: Routledge.
Nxumalo, F. (2019). *Decolonizing place in early childhood education*. New York, NY: Routledge.
Ogata, A.F. (2013). *Designing the creative child: Playthings and places in midcentury American*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.
Rinaldi, C. (2006). *In dialogue with Reggio Emilia: Listening, researching and learning*. New York, NY: Routledge.
Rowsell, J., & Shillitoe, M. (2019). The craftivists: Pushing for affective, materially informed pedagogy. *British Journal of Educational Technology*, *50*(4), 1544–1559. https://doi.org/10.1111/bjet.12773
Short, K. (2012). Story as world making. *Language Arts*, *90*(1), 9–17.
Simon, R., Nichols, T.P., Edwards, W., & Campano, G. (2019). "There's really a lot going on here": Toward a cosmopolitics of reader-response. In P.P. Trifonas (Ed.), *Handbook of theory and research in cultural studies and education* (pp. 193–207). New York, NY: Routledge.
Spinoza, B. (1994). *A Spinoza reader: The* Ethics *and other works* (E. Curley, Ed. & Trans.). Princeton, NJ: Princeton University.
Stornaiuolo, A. (2015). Literacy as worldmaking: Multimodality, creativity, and cosmopolitanism. In J. Rowsell & K. Pahl (Eds.), *The Routledge handbook of literacy studies* (pp. 561–571). New York, NY: Routledge.
Stornaiuolo, A., & Nichols, T.P. (2018). Making publics: Mobilizing audiences in high school makerspaces. *Teachers College Record*, *120*(8), 1–38.
Stornaiuolo, A., Nichols, T.P., & Vasudevan, V. (2018). Building spaces for literacy in schools: Mapping the emergence of a literacy makerspace. *English Teaching*, *17*(4), 357–370. https://doi.org/10.1108/ETPC-03-2018-0033
St. Pierre, E. (2016). Untraining educational researchers. *Research in Education*, *96*(1), 6–11. https://doi.org/10.1177/0034523716664581
Taguchi, H.L. (2012). A diffractive and Deleuzian approach to analyzing interview data. *Feminist Theory*, *13*(3), 265–281. https://doi.org/10.1177/1464700112456001
Taylor, C. (2004). *Modern social imaginaries*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press.
Thomas, E.E., & Stornaiuolo, A. (2016). Restorying the self: Bending toward textual justice. *Harvard Educational Review*, *86*(3), 313–338. https://doi.org/10.17763/1943-5045-86.3.313
Turner, F. (2013). *The democratic surround: Multimedia and American liberalism from World War II to the psychedelic Sixties*. Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press.

Submitted March 31, 2019
Final revision received January 16, 2020
Accepted January 17, 2020

T. PHILIP NICHOLS (corresponding author) is an assistant professor in the Department of Curriculum and Instruction at Baylor University, Waco, Texas, USA; email phil_nichols@baylor.edu. He studies how science and technology condition the ways that we practice, teach, and talk about literacy, and the implications for educational equity.

JAMES JOSHUA COLEMAN is a doctoral candidate in the Department of Literacy, Culture, and International Education at the University of Pennsylvania, Philadelphia, USA; email jameco@upenn.edu. His research focuses on the relations among critical literacy, affect theory, queer theory, and children's and young adult literature.

APPENDIX

Data Sources

Data source	Description
Observations	• Typed field notes and memos (43) • Small notebooks of classroom jottings (5) • Recordings from class sessions (approximately 4 hours of fragments) • Recordings from professional development workshops (approximately 16 hours) • Recordings from humanities planning meetings (approximately 4.5 hours)
Interviews	• Interviews with educators (10 total, 60–90 minutes each) • Interviews with students (22 total, 20–60 minutes each)
Artifacts	• Institutional documents (e.g., school policies, teacher-generated classroom designs and procedures, teacher-generated protocols for discipline and student support) • Curricular maps and lessons for humanities classes (3 years) • Student-written assignments and quizzes, in process and complete, with teacher feedback (approximately 70) • Student-made video projects (6)