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# Safe Spaces: Jazale's Art Studio

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By Madison Williams

One of the key concepts constantly re-emerging throughout our study of Composition and Rhetoric this semester, is the idea of creating **safe spaces** outside of institutionalized oppression where people outside of the "normative standards" imposed by society can feel liberated to express themselves, live life on their own terms, and embrace their multifaceted identities. The concept of creating safe spaces (or similarly, "safer spaces") is championed as an essential literacy practice in Eric Darnell Pritchard's *Fashioning Lives: Black Queers and the Politics of Literacy*.

The term "safe space" may be generally defined (*based on our readings, my own perspective, and Google's definition*) as a **place or environment in which a person or group of people can feel comfortable and confident that they will not be exposed to discrimination, criticism, harassment, or any other emotional or physical harm**. This concept is sometimes referred to using alternative terms, or altered to fit a specific situation, in some of the readings we've done, but can always be traced back to the same fundamental basis.

Safe spaces are essential to the formation of identity and understanding oneself in the relation to society as well as achieving educational success, maintaining relationships, and effectively communicating. In a diverse and multicultural city like Milwaukee, safe spaces are found in individualized locations. One prime example of a safe space supporting its community, located in Milwaukee's Bronzeville neighborhood, is Jazale's Art Studio.

## History & Development

Bronzeville is one of many once thriving Milwaukee neighborhoods that have been negatively affected by segregation and economic instability throughout the course of the city's history. However, Milwaukee's Bronzeville neighborhood has finally begun the process of revitalization and redevelopment with the support of local businesses, organizations, community members, and, perhaps most notably, artists. In an innovative effort to help redevelop the Bronzeville area, a new program called HomeWorks: Bronzeville is working to renovate properties to create living and workspaces for local artists to own ([Daykin](#)).

One of the local artists at the forefront of this effort was Vedale Hill, who is the art director at Jazale's Art Studio. Hill was looking for a new studio space to own instead of rent, and "wanted to be in a neighborhood that supports artists of color" (Daykin). This venture eventually led to the development of the city's Art and Resource Community (ARCH) program, which "provides no-interest loans for the redevelopment of tax foreclosed properties into art studios, live/work spaces and community resource centers" (Daykin) on the condition that the artists' talent

benefits the community. Hill was the first artist to receive an ARCH loan, which allowed him to open Jazale's Art Studio.

## Empowering the Community

For the Bronzeville community, Jazale's is far more than just an art gallery due to the after-school programs, summer art opportunities, and youth mentoring it provides urban youth in the area. This commitment to community can be seen in their [mission statement](#), which affirms: "Jazale's Art Studio promotes arts and education in our community by providing children with instruction and exposure to a diverse range of arts, along with homework help. With encouragement and modeling, we assist children in expressing themselves creatively while developing pride in their neighborhood... and strive to promote academic excellence."

Jazale's Art Studio serves as a safe space outside of the institutional oppressions faced by the community's urban youth who are often marginalized members of society due to their race, background, and/or class status. It is a place where **restorative literacies** take place, "a concept that projects literacy as integral to people's everyday lives and their production, consumption, and reception of writing and other cultural productions" (Pritchard 37), which promotes identity formation, pride, and self-love.

Jazale's could also be seen as an extracurricular site, which "refers to sites of literacy learning and practice that occur out of formal settings, such as the school" (Pritchard 81), as the community's youth comes together to create art, do homework, and share experiences with those around them. Safe spaces promote success, positive identity formation, self-love, and affirmation for the disadvantaged youth suffering from social constraints outside of their power. Jazale's Art Studio serves as a fantastic example of how the safe spaces can be created specifically their community and sets the standard for surrounding Milwaukee communities to work toward.

Jazale's is also reminiscent of MANOS, grassroots educational mentoring program featured in [Brokering Tareas: Mexican Immigrant Families Translanguaging Homework Literacies](#) by Steven Alvarez. MANOS provides members of the Mexican community in New York City's Foraker Street neighborhood a social context outside of the pressures for assimilation in language and culture, outside of the gaze of the public school system, and outside of institutionalized oppression (Alvarez 33-34). Jazale's appears to do much of the same important work done by MANOS, as both provide their community's youth encouragement, homework help, and a space to express themselves in positive ways.

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*For more information about Jazale's Art Studio and its programs, check out their [Facebook page](#).*

*To read the full article "Artists Helping Redevelop Milwaukee's Bronzeville Area Homes" written by Tom Daykin for the Milwaukee Journal Sentinel, [click here](#).*