CRITICAL LITERACY PRACTICES, SOCIAL ACTION PROJECTS, AND THE
READER WHO STRUGGLES IN SCHOOL

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Dissertation Prepared for the Degree of

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

UNIVERSITY OF NORTH TEXAS

December 2011

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This study, conducted at an urban public school, explored the engagements of five, fourth grade, African American students who struggled with reading in school as they participated in critical literacy practices and social action projects with the assumption that critical analysis of written texts and concrete social actions were necessary for student empowerment.

Using Discourse Analysis within a microethnographic framework, participants’ responses were analyzed. Early in the study, participants were hesitant to join in critical conversations about race. Over time, as participants deepened their critical literacy engagements, they divulged lived racism both in their private and public worlds. Specifically, the participants described the tensions and transgressions they experienced as minorities from civil rights curriculum, teachers and other students.

The findings revealed instead of text based analyses, critical literacy practices transformed into the participants’ critical analysis of racism they experienced in their various worlds (home, school, and the larger, outside world) through language (not text). Similarly, the pre-conceived idea of social action projects changed from the creation of concrete products or actions into discussions in which mainstream discourse was interrupted.

Tacit and overt understandings about race, identity and power suggested that the participants assumed multiple and contradictory identities (such as “victim of racism” and “racially prejudiced”) that both empowered and oppressed others in the social
action group. Implications for critical literacy practices include that empowering and liberating pedagogy through ‘risky conversations’ is difficult, transitory and radical within the context of school.
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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

There are many people to thank for all their support, love, and guidance throughout this journey. First, I am deeply grateful to my husband and children, Matthew Crummey, Zoey Crummey and Siobhan Crummey, without whom I would have never started or completed this program. Your patience and support allowed me to spend countless hours studying, writing, and attending classes.

I also am indebted to my committee, Dr. Carol Wickstrom, Dr. Leslie Patterson, Dr. Nancy Anderson and Dr. Mariela Nunez-Janes. I appreciate all your time, support and wisdom as I have gone through this process.

To all my many friends and extended family who helped me finish the dissertation, I’m sure I would not have completed my ‘big book report project’ if you hadn’t sacrificed your time and expertise. This includes my parents, my sister Megan Bauer, and my good friends and cheerleaders, Tamica McClarty, Dana Brooks, and Charlene Kalinski

Lastly, I am deeply grateful to all my participants, Selma, Hannah, Florence, Stephen and Ian. Thank you for your honesty and your trust in me to share your stories. You have forever changed me as a teacher and researcher and I hope that this study inspires other students and teachers to have the courage to engage in risky and radical conversations.
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CHAPTER 1

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

Researchers posit a discrepancy exists between the culture of American schools and the culture of many minority students (Heath, 1983; Delpit, 1995; Delpit, 2002; Kucer, 2005). Schools, created and run by local school districts and state governments, are reflections of larger social and cultural practices of our society (Bowles & Gintis, 2002; Willis, 1977; Apple, 1979). Historically, many American cultural practices involve discrimination and isolation of those in poverty (Heath, 1983; Delpit, 2002). Unfortunately, public schools often reinforce and reproduce these same social inequities by providing the needed cultural capital for academic success to middle class students, while minority students (in particular minority students who struggle in school) are denied the same opportunity (Bowles & Gintis, 2002; Stanovich, 2004). Thus, students whose home environment is culturally most like the school’s environment usually do well academically. In contrast, many minority students with different cultures lag behind (Heath, 1983; Delpit, 1995; Delpit, 2002; Kucer, 2005).

Minority students in elementary school who struggle in reading in school and understanding appropriate grade level texts independently during reading class are particularly vulnerable to a lifetime of academic failure. Research indicates that many of these readers continue to read poorly throughout their school career (Juel, 1988). Exacerbating this phenomena, are the types of interventions mandated by state and local school authorities for readers who struggle, based on findings from the National Reading Panel (NRP). After reviewing thousands of studies (all quantitative in nature), the NRP claimed that explicit phonics instruction was the best intervention for readers
who struggle in school and had the greatest impact on student test scores over all other types of instruction (National Institute of Child Health and Human Development, NICHD, 2000). Subsequently, the legislation of No Child Left Behind encouraged utilizing curriculum programs nationwide in which explicit phonics instruction and fluency has been the focal point of curriculum instruction across the country.

Although many readers who struggle in school-based literacies require remediation in phonics instruction, the way in which these interventions have been implemented can compound reading difficulties. In Allington’s (1980) study of first grade readers, the readers who struggle in school were exposed to less than a third of the words as the average reader. Often only allowed to read aloud, these readers had little time to practice reading connected text silently or independently (Allington, 1980; Stahl, 1998). Complicating matters, many readers who struggle in school have multiple teachers providing phonics instruction, which can vary from teacher to teacher. Such variations can confuse these readers (Stahl, 1998) and inhibit their progress and motivation. In addition, the effectiveness of such programs has been debated (What Works Clearinghouse, 2010). Additionally, many of the pull out, phonics intervention programs provide only one hour of instruction per day, subsequently doing little to help readers who struggle in school improve (Allington, 2007). Moreover, most remediation programs are designed with the “one size fits all” mentality. Indeed for any reader who struggles in school-based literacies, these interventions do not address students as individuals or recognize their varying discourses or cultures (Meyer, 2001). As a result of these school practices, a barrier is created in which minority students from low socioeconomic backgrounds who struggle in school are unable to connect to or access
academic based literacies (Allington, 2007; Delpit, 1995).

In addition to the quality of intervention programs, an ancillary problem for readers who struggle in school (and in particular minority students) is the privileging of mainstream over minority discourses. Bloome posits in Street and Street's (1991) “pedagogization of literacy” that schools often negate minority readers with different social identities (other than mainstream, middle-class) by:

The privileging of written over oral language, the interpretation of “metalinguistic” awareness in terms of specific literacy practices and grammatical terminology; and the neutralizing and objectification of language fix this part that disguises its social and ideological character…[these processes] contribute to the construction of a particular kind of citizen, a particular kind of identity, and a particular concept of nation. (p. 163)

As a result, schools often view minority students as language deficient or lacking the literacy skills or the exposure to be successful in school (Heath, 1983; Delpit, 1995; Delpit, 2002). Such assumptions and misconceptions trickle down insidiously in teachers’ discourses and classroom practices in a way that can be damaging to minority children (Delpit, 2002; Compton-Lily, 2003). Instead of building on students’ rich and varied discourses, experiences, and background knowledge, many minority students are silenced and feel undervalued (Heath, 1983; Delpit, 2002; Kozol, 1991).

In contrast, critical literacy, a theory developed by Freire and Macedo (1987), provides pedagogical implications for all students and in particular those who are oppressed and alienated from social institutions like school. Critical literacy means making sense of the “world” (and our positions in these worlds) through critically analyzing the “word” (language, discourses, texts) and the associated power relationships connected to the “word” as a means to create transformative opportunities for social action.
Unlike traditional, pedagogical approaches of “banking” knowledge and imposing mainstream “knowledge” on students, pedagogy based on critical literacy invites students to utilize texts to analyze power relationships in society and discover the resulting inequities, which can provide the impetus for students to engage in social action and work for social change (if they desire). Not only does this type of pedagogy provide hope to engage students meaningfully, it also can improve and impact academic literacies. Chosen texts and discussions can provide exposure to rich, critical, contextualized language study and analysis, skills necessary for school success (Freire & Macedo, 1987). In addition, the topics are relevant, personal, and connect to the students’ lives. Through pedagogy based on critical literacy students can revolutionize their situations (if they so wish). Further, students from all backgrounds can regain their voice, reconnect to school, and transform their identities into active, engaged, and curious learners (Busching, 1999; Edelsky, 1999).

Although overall the research supports the use of critical literacy practices (Busching, 1999) for adolescents in a review of the literature, very few studies I reviewed looked at the responses of students in the intermediate grades and none looked at fourth grade, minority readers who struggle in reading in school. In addition, the practical application of critical literacy varied greatly. Researchers utilized different definitions and some misinterpretations of critical literacy. Moreover, in a few of the studies, students resisted participating in critical discussions and felt even further alienated (Bartlett, 2005; McKinney, 2004). Specifically in Bartlett’s (2005) two-year ethnographic study, a Brazilian adult literacy program based upon Freire and Macedo’s (1987) definition of critical literacy, employed teachers who instead of inspiring student
empowerment and equality, reproduced social inequities between the middle class teacher and the lower class student in which the teacher retained an egalitarian role and the adult student continued in the role of a second class citizen. Another misinterpretation of critical literacy practices evidenced in the research revealed that many of these studies lack any subsequent social action component, a foundational tenet of critical literacy practices (Freire & Macedo, 1987). A possible reason for the many interpretations or even misinterpretations of critical literacy practices could have been that researchers and teachers in these studies often failed to address the role that identity and power played in the group’s responses (Lewis, Enciso, & Moje, 2007). This lack of attention possibly contributed to student resistance and reproduction of social inequities in the classroom.

In order to improve the practical application of critical literacy, more research is needed with intermediate grade, minority students who struggle with reading in school in which models of critical literacy pedagogy and social actions are applied. Models more closely aligned with Freirean pedagogy could promote more critical discussions, social action and prevent the reproduction of social inequities in the classroom. Further, closer attention to the role the teacher researcher plays in the group’s interactions coupled with a focus on the students’ identities as they relate to power as “knowledge” (Bloome, Carter, Christian, Madrid, Otto, Shuart-Faris, & Smith, 2008) may provide meaningful insights to the subtleties of the application of critical literacy. Thus, findings from such studies could help practitioners better anticipate and understand how best to invite and encourage their students to participate in transformative practices like critical literacy and social action.
Purpose of the Study

Even though there is research to support the use of critical literacy practices with adolescents in middle and high schools (Lien, 2003; McGregor, 2000), there is much less data about critical literacy engagement with students who struggle in reading in the intermediate elementary grades. Specifically, there is little data that describes what happens when fourth grade readers who struggle in school are invited to engage in critical literacy practices and social action projects. In addition, although there are numerous studies documenting students participating in critical literacy practices, many of the studies end with discussions and lack any subsequent student action (Bartlett, 2005; Falk-Ross, 2001; Gharemani-Ghajor, 2005; Nussbaum, 2002; Oreliana, 1994). The aforementioned discrepancies warrant further investigation into the practical application of critical literacy. The purpose of this study was to analyze small group conversations of fourth grade students who struggle with school in reading as they participate in critical literacy practices and social action projects.

Significance of the Study

This study makes four unique contributions to the literature: (1) Intermediate grade students as participants are unique in the research and findings could add to knowledge in the field; (2) Results from this study are valuable to critical pedagogues and practitioners; (3) Microethnographic methods are not widely or typically used in literacy research. Findings could provide valuable methodological data; and (4) Analysis and findings from my responses as a teacher-researcher and participant could benefit critical practitioners and teachers.
Although there are numerous studies documenting students’ use of critical literacy practices, many of the studies end with discussions about inequitable power relationships in society and lack any subsequent student action (Bartlett, 2005; Falk-Ross, 2001; Gharemani-Ghajor, 2005; Nussbaum, 2002; Oreliana, 1994). Although an awareness of inequities is important, awareness is not enough, “when students start to see inequities, critical teachers want them to care about those inequities, to feel the unfairness, to want to do something about it” (Edelsky, 1999, p. 29).

Truly transforming hegemonic, school practices requires students and teachers to engage in courageous and risky conversations that challenge traditional, mainstream knowledge. Although many studies include these types of conversations at the middle and high school levels, there is much less research that addresses the responses of students to these discussions in the intermediate grades. Additionally, beyond identifying inequities inherent in schools, communities, and the larger society, the participants considered subsequent social actions. As a critical pedagogue in this study, additionally, I embraced and encouraged critical conversations. As a result, students had the freedom to respond by resisting, criticizing, or engaging in critical literacy practices and social action projects throughout the study.

This study also makes a significant contribution to the literature because it does not privilege the teacher researchers’ perspective, but (through its use of microethnographic tools), integrates the teachers’ perspective as one participant and attempts to foreground the students’ perspectives. Although a few studies combined students engaging in critical literacy and social action, many of the studies described the events through the teacher’s eyes only. In these studies, the teacher and
researcher’s actions and responses are not necessarily viewed as part of the complex interconnectedness of the group’s interactions. From this perspective, students are objectified and separate from the teacher. Unfortunately, misperceptions, misinterpretations and inaccuracies can result and consequently, what was once intended to be an empowering activity instead results in a reproduction of social inequities (Bartlett, 2005). However, microethnography seeks to understand the participants’ worlds and perspectives. In order to accomplish this perspective, “the researcher must live in the world of the participants as a participant, interacting with group members, observing, and interviewing” (Purcell-Gates in Mallette, & Duke, 2004, p. 96). Additionally, data collection included: student journals, student interviews, audiotaping and transcription of students’ interactions in order to reveal this emic perspective. Lastly, this study is unique because as the teacher-researcher, I observed, analyzed, and considered the interdependent roles that students’ identities and power played in their engagement in critical literacy and social action. This lens required me to consider all responses and their significance related to power within the group, as well as external power responses, such as resistance. Utilizing a critical sociocultural theoretical perspective necessitates the consideration of power and identity. Lewis, Encisco, and Moje (2007) posit that if a researcher acknowledges that privileged “discourse communities” often discriminate due to, “difference[s] such as race, gender, sexual orientation, or economic status…” (p. 17) then one empowers and invites students who are oppressed to see the social injustices of their worlds and move towards social action for change.

This study combined critical literacy practices, social action projects, and looked
at changing identities and power in different contexts using an emic perspective. Findings from this study could add to the growing body of knowledge about critical literacy praxis with younger and more vulnerable populations and influence practitioners, administrators, and others to be more reflective on their practices with minority students who seem to struggle with reading in school. In addition, outcomes from this study could help practitioners better anticipate and understand how to encourage students to engage in critical literacy practices and social action thoughtfully in the elementary classroom. Such engagement could result in students connecting or reconnecting with school, recognizing the value of school-based literacies, and feeling inspired to continue learning, acting, and changing their world.

Framework and Research Questions

When this study began, I focused on the following question: What happens when fourth grade readers who struggle with reading in school and their teacher engage in critical literacy practices and social action projects? However, over the course of the study an additional question evolved.

Evolution of the Research Question

When I started this study, I had no preconceptions of what might happen, what topics we would explore, or the particular conversations or transcripts I might choose to study. Throughout the school year I continued to collect data, write field notes, transcribe our audio recordings, and code openly with no predetermined categories. However, during the last few weeks of the study a conversation about race became the
impetus to some very personal revelations on the part of the participants and me. As this phenomenon occurred, I was also concurrently reading literature about critical race theory. It was during this overlap of theory and practice that I realized that these conversations about race were in fact the most profound interactions of this study and that I needed to fully explore and analyze how race impacted our lived experiences. Therefore, a second question emerged for the data.

1. What happens when fourth grade readers who struggle with reading in school are invited to participate in critical literacy and social action projects with their teacher?

2. What do these engagements reveal about our (the participants') tacit and overt understandings of race, power, and identity?

Definition of Terms

For the purpose of this study the following operational terms are defined:

- **Discourse** - is defined as, “discourse-in-use focuses attention on how people adopt and adapt the language and cultural practices historically available in response to the local, institutional, macro social, and historical situations in which they find themselves” (Bloome and Clark, 2006, p. 209).

- **Critical literacy** - falls under the umbrella of critical pedagogy. Critical literacy is making sense of the “world” (and our positions in these worlds) through critically analyzing the “word” (language, discourses, texts) and the associated power relationships connected to the “word” as a means to create
transformation opportunities for social action. For the purposes of this study, pedagogy that best supported critical literacy practices for students in the intermediate grades is detailed in Lewison, Leland & Harste’s (2008) description, “critical literacy practices encourage students to uses language to question the everyday world, to interrogate the relationship between language and power, to analyze popular culture and media, to understand how power relationships are socially constructed, and to consider actions that can be taken to promote social justice” (p. 3).

In this study, the term critical literacy practices refer not only to the pedagogy of hope (education that empowers students to change their world for the better), but to the nurturing of marginalized readers who are learning how to read.

- **Texts** - is defined as “language in use” (Halliday, M. A. K., & Hasan, 1985, p. 48). This definition includes published literature, oral language and discussions, and student written texts.

- **Social action** - was defined as concrete products or student actions to address a perceived injustice. However, by the end of the study social action became, “…as simple or as grand as interrupting mainstream discourse within the social institution of school” (Luke, 1995, p. 5).

- **Minority reader** – one who struggles in school is a student who is at least four months below grade level according to standardized reading tests or has either repeated a grade or failed the state reading test, the Texas
Assessment of Knowledge and Skills (TAKS). In addition, the definition includes difficulty reading grade appropriate texts independently.

- Minority - refers to any student not of white European descent. This information is based on the particular ethnicities identified on the school enrollment form for each student participant.

- Identity - is an individual’s perception of oneself as it relates to particular contexts. Identity, “is fluid, socially and linguistically mediated construct, one that takes into account the different positions that individuals enact or perform in particular settings within a given set of social, economic, and historical relations” (Lewis, Enciso, & Moje, 2007, p. 4). Lewis et al. (2007) state, “identity is generative and creative” (p. 4). Additionally, identities and roles are used synonymously in this study and can contain both functional roles and deeper expressions of who the participants were in a particular context.

- Agency - “the strategic making and remaking of selves within structures of power” (Lewis et al., 2007, p. 4). In this definition, agency is the movement to reposition oneself to change identities in reference to different contexts.

- Power - “the processes that structure relationships among people” (Bloome et al., 2005, p. 162). Power permeates all facets of human activities and interactions by all peoples. This is due to the competition and drive to have control over various “resources, tools, or identities” (Lewis et al., 2007, p. 6) and power plays out, “through micropractices…. [in which] systems and regimes are produced and reproduced” [Foucault, 1977, p. 17]. In relation to school, power is defined as “knowledge” that “may shift based on one
situation or another” (Bloome et al., 2005, p. 174).

- Events - “a bounded series of actions and reactions that people make in response to each other at the level of face to face interaction or simply people act and react to each other” (Bloome, 2005, p. 6). Events have five key principles:
  - The “basic unit of analysis” is not an individual but a group, “acting and reacting to each other” (Bloome et al., 2008, p. 7).
  - “People respond and react upon each other. This could be presumed actions in the future and no action itself is an action, also” (Bloome, et.al, 2005, p. 7).
  - These actions and responses are not always linear. Reactions in groups can be in tandem or delayed (Bloome et al., 2005).
  - These responses can be either individual or a succession of actions (Bloome et al., 2008).
  - Meaning comes from these actions and responses, not from separate outsider psychological analysis and must not be viewed in this way (Bloome et al., 2008).

- Literacy event - is one type of unit of analysis “in which written language plays a nontrivial role” (Bloome et al., 2008, p. 5).

- School-based literacy practice - In the context of school, literacy practices include reading, writing, listening, and discussing texts at school.
Summary

Elementary minority students who struggle in reading are at great risk for academic failure (Juel, 1988). According to the research, critical literacy offers hope to motivate and engage older students especially those who struggle academically (Falk-Ross, 2001; Comber, Thomson, & Wells, 2001), but there is little research that looks at the responses of fourth grade, minority students who struggle in reading. Additionally, some of the research that claims to focus on critical literacy practice fails to align with Friere’s critical literacy pedagogy in that it disregards the role student identity and power play in student responses. This study explored these issues bringing them to the forefront utilizing a microethnographic lens and discourse analysis to analyze the responses of fourth grade, minority students who struggle in reading as they engage in critical literacy practices and social action projects. Findings from this research will contribute to critical literacy theory and praxis.

Organization of the Research Report

This research is organized into six chapters. Chapter 1 provides the background, identifies the problem and the professional significance of the study and provides a basic description of the methodology. Chapter 2 provides the theoretical foundations of the study including: sociocultural theory, critical pedagogy, critical sociocultural theory, critical race theory, critical discourse analysis theory, and critical literacy. Additionally, Chapter 2 includes a review of the literature analyzing the related, current studies and contextualizes the need for this study.

Chapter 3 provides the background of the study including a description of an
earlier pilot study and the unexpected findings. The next section explains the criteria for the selection of the participants followed by descriptions of each student. In addition, I include and detail my background and role as both the white teacher and researcher.

Chapter 4 extensively describes the rigors and the sequential and recursive steps of the methodology (microethnography) and discourse analysis. Subsequent sections present the findings through the delineation of three critical phases ending with an overview of the key findings.

Chapter 5 reports the findings of the study, which are organized into three phases and the final chapter, Chapter 6, discusses the implications of the findings and offers suggestions for future research in the area of critical literacy. Ideas for practitioners are suggested and the chapter ends with some final thoughts and reflections about the study.
CHAPTER 2
LITERATURE REVIEW

The purpose of this study was to invite fourth grade students who struggle with reading in school to engage in critical literacy practices and social action projects in a small critical literacy group and to analyze the group’s responses (including my own). Additionally, I wanted to know how lived racial experiences (both private and public) affected our (all the participants including the teacher-researcher) positions of identity and power.

In order to understand the theoretical underpinnings of this study, this chapter discusses an interdisciplinary theoretical framework: sociocultural theory, critical pedagogy, critical sociocultural theory, critical race theory, critical discourse theory, and critical literacy. The last section is a review of the current research of critical literacy application in the classroom, suggesting possible areas for further research.

Sociocultural theory begins this theoretical discussion, because I am most interested in education through this lens. One of the primary tenets includes the idea that all learning is socially situated (Vygotsky, 1986) and largely influenced by larger cultural, political, and social factors. All subsequent critical theories described are related to critical pedagogy and critical educational theory, which posit (in part) that learning within social institutions (in particular public schools) often favors the powerful students with the most cultural capital. Thus, the nation has witnessed the reproduction of social inequities through low test scores, increasing truancy rates, and high minority drop-outs. Those with the most resources receive the greatest benefits. This reality contrasts starkly from the espoused schooling goals of the educational traditionalists,
namely the democratization and emancipation of the poor through education (Giroux, 1988). In order to truly revolutionize the system and create education that promotes equality for all, both the teacher and student must explore and reflect about these inequities inherent in schools, communities, and the larger society. Critical pedagogy contends that critical conversations and subsequent social actions offer transformative opportunities for all students. I acknowledge these inequities and align myself with the principles of critical pedagogy, thusly considering myself a critical pedagogue.

Critical sociocultural theory combines the primary tenets of sociocultural theory (learning is social and grounded in historical and cultural contexts) but with an even more critical eye toward how both the micro and macro influences (those of society, politics, and culture) shape people’s power, identity, and agency in situ (Lewis, Enciso, & Moje, 2007). Critical race theory illuminates racism endemic in many schools and seeks to eradicate racism through transformative pedagogy. Critical race theory is particularly important in this study due to the fact that all five of the participants were African American. Moreover, participants discussed the effects of racism in school in several key transcripts. Similarly, critical discourse analysis (CDA) recognizes the inequities (and racism) evident in everyday language and texts in schools, which privilege mainstream discourse over other discourses. Critical discourse analysis also provided one of the primary methodological tools, discourse analysis, detailed in Chapter 4 and utilized in order to analyze the participants’ conversations. The final and most important theory serving to ground this study is critical literacy, which means making sense of the “world” (and our positions in these worlds) through critically analyzing the “word” (language, discourses, texts) and the associated power.
relationships connected to the “word” as a means to create transformative opportunities for social action. Critical literacy practices in a school context can provide the foundation, the guidance, and the practical application to transform education (in particular literacy instruction) from oppressive to emancipatory. To further understand the application of critical literacy, the second section will expand upon critical literacy and look at critical literacy practices, including a review of relevant studies in the research and end with a close look at identity, agency, and power as a means of analyzing complex classroom interactions (Lewis et al., 2007). This review of both the theory and research supports the uniqueness of this study and the need for more studies of children engaging in critical literacy practices positioned across an interdisciplinary theoretical framework.

Sociocultural Theory of Literacy

Literacy theory is approached differently by different disciplines. Cognitive psychologists espouse literacy as primarily a function in which all the important elements necessary to become literate lie in the individual’s brain processes (Kucer, 2005). From that perspective, reading is a cognitive process in which the brain sorts, recognizes, and comprehends words in context to construct meaning (Kucer, 2005; Adams 1990; Smith 1973; Rumelhart, & McClelland, 1980). The orthographic processor recognizes the print, the phonological processor connects the print to sounds, the context processor assigns meaning and the semantic processor connects the ideas together to comprehend the text (Adams, 1990; Halliday, 1974; Goodman, 1998). Recognizing that letters have sounds, sounds make up words, words make up
sentences, and sentences make up paragraphs are the mechanical processes foregrounded by these scholars. Linguists posit literacy is a linguistic activity where individuals through years of exposure and experience come to learn the rules and generalizations of a particular language orally and in written text. Linguists focus on the natural processes of producing and understanding oral and written language and emphasize the alphabetic principle, morphological, and structural characteristics for instructions (Kucer, 2005). Developmental theorists, however, recognize the cognitive, linguistic, and sociocultural dimensions of literacy, but consider how an individual’s development affects acquisition of these areas of literacy. For example, a student who struggles in school-based literacies might be considered or labeled as (through common hegemonic school practices) an incapable reader. In contrast, a developmental theorist might view a student’s difficulties as, “the child’s narrow range of developed linguistic, cognitive, and sociocultural strategies and the limited settings in which he or she can proficiently apply these strategies” (Kucer, 2005, p. 250). It is the “lack of experience” in these areas that affects learners’ literacy growth, not an inherent deficiency of the learner. From this perspective, literacy growth is not finite; instead developmental theorists contend that an individual is continually developing throughout one’s lifetime experiences with literacy (Kucer, 2005).

While these various perspectives have merit, the types of literacy research associated with these disciplines typically involve a scientific, objective, and positivistic approach. According to these perspectives, “valid” knowledge is neutral, unbiased, and primarily indisputable and does not acknowledge the influence of issues like power, agency, or identity. Further, current sanctioned curriculum models nationally and
locally are based primarily on the findings of this kind of quantitative educational research.

In particular, the research founded by the National Reading Panel (NRP) has served as the measuring stick against which all curricula are measured. Dr. Donald N. Langenberg, professor of physics and national reading panels’ chairperson declared after reviewing thousands of “scientific” studies (all quantitative in nature) that explicit phonics instruction had the greatest impact on student test scores over all other types of instruction (National Institute of Child Health and Development, NICHD, 2000). Many researchers and teachers questioned Langenberg’s conclusions and the validity of the claims made by the national reading panel. Prominent reading researcher, Goodman (1998) rejected the NRP’s label of “scientific” claiming the term implied the research was absolute and infallible, when in fact all qualitative research was disregarded and many dissenting studies were eliminated from the review (Allington, 2002; Goodman, 1998). Giroux (1988) posits this positivistic view of:

Knowledge is external to the individual and is imposed upon him or her. As something external, knowledge is divorced from human meaning and intersubjective exchange. It is no longer seen as something to be questioned, analyzed and negotiated. Instead it becomes something to manage and mastered. (p. 14)

In contrast, a sociocultural theory of literacy contends that all individuals are socially situated (Gee, 1996), and that the development of language and literacy (and curriculum) is directly influenced by multiple group membership and discourses. A combination of ideas from Kantianism, Marxism, feminism and critical theory from the Frankfurt School, sociocultural theory recognizes the role of individuals, their interactions and the social, political, and cultural influences on these interactions
Vygotsky (1986), the father of sociocultural theory, posits that individuals learning language cannot be studied in isolation or with only a unilinear developmental model like Piaget’s, but need to be looked at from the social context from which the individuals interact. Thus, from this perspective, literacy is not a neutral skill learned in isolation but is socially situated and dependent upon the many social factors and influences present. Moreover in relation to school, how students interact and respond to the teachers, the school environment and culture impacts their acquisition of school-based literacies.

Thus, sociocultural theory acknowledges these multiple dimensions—the learner, their understanding of the world and construction of knowledge within the social, cultural and political influences. Similarly, these components are inherently present in the creation, participation, and production of literacy. Instead of viewing literacy as uni-dimensional, the sociocultural perspective acknowledges the multifaceted complexities of language, text, discourses, and the many differences and combinations present in public schools (Gee, 1996; Street, 2001). Sociocultural theorists reject the idea of one literacy. Consequently, like sunlight hitting a prism, the sociocultural view refracts the reified definition literacy into literacy practices, literacy events, and literacy performances (Kucer, 2005). As a result, literacy transforms into multiple “literacies” (Street, 2001). All of these components of literacy are socially situated and greatly vary according to the social context and participants. However, sociocultural methodology provides the lens and tools to uncover multiple “literacies.” Further, these methodologies can highlight the role the participants, the context, and their interactions played in these literacies.
Sociocultural research has illuminated serious issues in the education of minority students. In particular, three anthropologists interested in sociocultural aspects of education: Willis (1977), Ogbu (1995), and Heath (1983) conducted sociocultural research through case studies and ethnographies, which helped provide some of the theoretical underpinnings of this study. All three anthropologists explored the academic experiences of minorities in westernized public education. Of all three studies, Heath (1983) is most relevant to this study because it also looked at school and home literacy practices and many of the participants were African American. Regarding literacy, the ethnography conducted by Heath (1983) revealed the ways in which African American students in Trackton, a working class, African American community, utilized language and literacy differently at home in comparison to the use of language and literacy at school. This discrepancy negatively contributed to the academic performance of the African American students in school. Most of the students were reported as performing significantly below grade level in the early grades. In contrast to the school-based activity of reading texts independently, African Americans participants from Trackton read texts as a shared experience and this information in turn was interpreted and performed orally by the group. As a result, new meanings emerged from the shared experiences of the group. Heath (1983) explains, “There is a pattern of movement away from the form and formality of the written sources” (p. 203). In fact Heath (1983) reported that “in general, reading alone, unless one is very old and religious, marks an individual as someone who cannot make it socially” (p. 191). In stark contrast the school culture encouraged reading alone, individual interpretation, and greater involvement with written texts at school and at home. Consequently, the cultural mismatch in this
context created a clear disadvantage for the African American students from Trackton. This finding from Heath’s (1983) study helped educators rethink assumptions about minority students, their home literacy practices, and their school performance.

Sociocultural studies like Heath’s have been instrumental in questioning the epistemology of schools, revealing the hypocrisy of schools that claim democratic ideals, yet, in reality, reproduce social inequities (Heath, 1983; Ogbu, 1995; Willis, 1977). These sociocultural studies have revealed the underlying tacit rules governing production of language and print in our society and the political ramifications for these rules (Gee, 1996).

**Critical Pedagogy, the Critical Pedagogue, and Research**

Silvers, Shorey, and Crafton (2010) note that, “It is important to note that we three researchers bring a critical, social justice perspective to the data analysis, intentionally focusing on issues of power, equity, justice, and equal access in regard to gender, race, and class” (p. 386).

Like sociocultural theory, critical pedagogy recognizes the role cultural and society play in the education of individuals. Both sociocultural theory and cultural pedagogy acknowledge the social reproduction of inequities from schooling and the hypocrisies associated between the espoused goals of public education and the academic outcomes for many urban, minority students. Predominately a combination of the work of Paulo Freire and Henry Giroux in the 1970s, critical pedagogy in addition to simply identifying injustice offers hope for changing teaching and learning in schools and provides the impetus for action and criticality. Giroux (1988) believes that educators

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must commit themselves to “…radical pedagogical work [that] proposes that education is a form of political intervention in the world and is capable of creating the possibilities for social transformation” (p. xxvii). Further Giroux (1988) contends “within the discourse of liberation theology, Freire fashions a powerful antidote to the cynicism and despair of many left radical critics” (p. 113). Thus, the purpose of critical pedagogy is “to empower students to intervene in their own self-formation and to transform the oppressive features of the wider society that make such an intervention necessary” (McLaren, xvi in Giroux, 1988).

Critical pedagogy practice begins through teachers resisting the traditional, packaged curriculum and instead focusing on the students’ concerns, interests, and experiences and, “making it problematic and critical, by interrogating such experience for its hidden assumptions” (McLaren, xiv, in Giroux, 1988). Consequently, teachers and students create situations of democratic struggle in the school context; fighting the dominant practice of assuming the provided curriculum (and knowledge) is neutral. Conversations of inquiry into relevant issues acknowledge teachers and students as individuals and intellectuals and empower students and teachers to envision emancipatory avenues for change.

Giroux’s view of the teacher contrasts starkly with that of a technocrat, simply imparting a set of neutral skills to students. Instead, Giroux (1988) insists teachers should act as, “transformative intellectuals” (p. 125). This term recognizes the teacher as an individual who is committed to encouraging students’ optimism in overcoming injustices and creating a more democratic society for all (Giroux, 1988). Specifically, a critical pedagogue is committed to:
Utilizing forms of pedagogy that embody political interests that are emancipatory in nature; that is, using forms of pedagogy that treat students as critical agents; make knowledge problematic; utilize critical and affirming dialogue; and make the case for struggling for a qualitatively better world for all people. (p. 127)

I see myself as a critical pedagogue, aligning my work with that of critical pedagogy in the hopes of providing liberating education that is filled with possibilities not limitations and failures. Giroux (1988) states it best, “transformative intellectuals need to develop a discourse that unites the language of critique with the language of possibility, so that social educators recognize that they can make changes” (p. 128). As a critical pedagogue, I am most interested in issues of social justice as it relates, to race, class, and culture.

Critical Sociocultural Theory

Although sociocultural theory attends to how the participants interact in cultural contexts and the social practices involved in membership in different communities (Lewis et al., 2007), this perspective sometimes fails to include a specific awareness of micro and macro processes and influences at play in these events. For example, in Smith’s (1997) case study of teenage girls in a book club, the girls became actively engaged in critical literacy practices, but how the participants’ responses and identities related to macro influences such as culture, class, race, and political positioning are not discussed. Inattention to these issues could be construed as similarity or homogeneity between the students.

Lewis et al. (2007) posit critical sociocultural theory better addresses the deficits of sociocultural theory by including an analysis of human behavior, thinking, language, and interactions by those who have been marginalized or disenfranchised and how
social, cultural, and political influences affect their identity, agency, and power. Critical sociocultural theory involves "a focus that attends closely to matters of power and agency in ways that are not usually foregrounded in sociocultural research" (p. 6). Thus, through using the lens of critical sociocultural theory, the participants’ identities can be looked at in the light of larger influences, including the influence of the researcher. Lewis et al. (2007) asserts "We believe it is important for sociocultural researchers to better understand the way that performances of social identity are cloaked in the fabric or power and ideology and economics" (p. 8).

The Role of Identity

Identity, according to critical sociocultural theory, fluctuates and shifts according to the community of practice and the larger social, political, and economic systems (Lewis et al., 2007). Therefore, students define and re-create their identities in communities of practice (as in small group discussions). Identifying with the group, according to Lewis et al. (2007) and Gee (1996) is critical to learning because “deep participatory learning involves not only the stuff of a discipline-science content, for example - but also how to think and act like a scientist, even if one does not enter the profession of science" (Lewis et al., 2007, p. 19). Learners must be given the freedom and space to change identities, talk and engage in different discourses and, "remake their identities and their discursive toolkits and their relationships on the basis of new ideas, practices or discourses learned through their participation in a learning activity" (Lewis et al., 2007, p. 20).
The Role of Power

Like identity, power inherently resides in any and all human interactions. In relation to school, power is “knowledge” that “may shift based on one situation or another” (Bloome, 2008, p. 174). Traditional teaching in elementary schools consists of the teacher as the authoritarian, with all the knowledge and the students as passive receptacles. This traditional model often fails to recognize the significance of students’ background knowledge, particularly minority students. Thus, if a students’ knowledge is not recognized as valuable, he or she will have no or very little power in school. Consequently, inequitable power relationships occur not only between learners (based upon whether their knowledge is recognized as valuable) but are interwoven and relate to larger social contexts and realities (Bowles & Gintis, 2002). Moreover, limiting students’ background knowledge, ignoring learners’ inquiries and identities inhibits deeper learning (Lindfors, 1999). Acutely aware of problematic nature of traditional schooling, Freire and Macedo (1987), theorists of critical literacy, posited that the teacher and students should instead be equals working on building upon the students' knowledge together and moving ultimately towards empowering oppressed students.

Identity and power are particularly important and require detailed attention when working with students who are having difficulty in school. Because students are often powerless due to their perceived “lack of knowledge,” the ways students position themselves in school can expose the tacit and hegemonic ways in which practitioners, peers, and the students themselves contribute (albeit often unconsciously) to this social hierarchy. Conversely, opportunities to have choice and input in the course of their education offers hope in breaking the cycle of the reproduction of social inequities. This
is especially critical for students who struggle during the intermediate grades due to the fact that they frequently continue to have academic difficulties and ultimately, drop out of high school (Juel, 1988).

Critical Race Theory

Critical race theory (CRT) framework is particularly important in this study because all the participants are African American and much of our discussions centered on race and racism. This theory recognizes the experiences of minority students and “is interested in studying and transforming the relationship among race, racism, and power” (Delgado & Stefancic, 2001, pp. 2-3). Building upon feminism and critical legal studies, critical race theory contends that race is socially constructed (not biological) and that racism is a driving force in the everyday experiences of people of color (Zamudio, Russell, Rios, & Bridgeman, 2010). One place where people of color experience racism everyday is in school. Zamudio et al. (2010) posit, “Mainstream education as one of the many institutions that both historically and contemporarily serve to reproduce unequal power relations and academic outcomes; schools, in particular, have played a powerful role in creating racial inequity” (p. 4).

As described in the introduction, schools often privilege the knowledge of the mainstream middle class. Zamudio et al. (2010) contend, “Schools represent one of the major modes for disseminating the truths or master narratives of the dominant group and in doing so often silence alternative truths or narratives” (p. 5). Understanding how and why schools privilege mainstreams discourse and the effects on students of color is paramount for educators and researchers interested in equity in educations. This lack of
analysis and reflection of school practices can have costly effects as evidenced by the large achievement gap between minority students and their white peers. Students who are best able to internalize and connect to mainstream curriculum are heralded as high achievers. Those who resist or cannot assimilate “master narratives” (dominant discourse or “taken-for-granted truths”) are often separated, put into remedial classes and labeled as ‘slow,” “resistant,” and even worse “unteachable” (Delpit, 1995). Whether overt or tacit, these messages are internalized by minority students who blame themselves for their academic failure (Zamudio et al., 2010; Delpit, 1995). However, according to Zamudio et al. (2010) reflective teachers and:

CRT scholars can begin to provide evidence which pinpoints how white students and students of color are differently treated, especially in terms of policies and practices, as well as how students of color are negatively impacted by race neutral practices. (p. 121)

When teachers and scholars acknowledge racist practices in school, opportunities for transforming these inequities are possible.

Critical Race Theory not only seeks to expose racism in schools but also envisions possibilities for transformative pedagogy. In an effort to connect students of color to curriculum, one of the goals of critical race theorists is to encourage student exposure to alternative knowledge and narratives from people of color (Zamudio et al., 2010). Additionally, students can share their own experiences of racism with their peers as a springboard for critical conversations. Zamudio et al. (2010) recommend, “As a pedagogical tool, naming one’s reality both empowers students of color and disenfranchised students and allows classmates to critically consider perspectives and experiences of reality that may run counter to predominant master narratives they have uncritically accepted” (p. 124).
In this way, race and racism are studied as a lived experience, not as an abstraction common in “master narratives” (Stovall, 2009) and traditional curriculum. Yet critical race theorists don’t just advocate identifying racism, but encourage students to do something about it. Zamudio et al. (2010) promote the tenets of multicultural education, which include not only, awareness of racism and inclusion of alternative narratives but also “agency and activism” (p. 113). Emphasizing the strengths of people of color including the multitude of skills necessary to deal with racism and the cultural and linguistic knowledge of their families, students of color have a unique opportunity to make a difference in their communities (Zamudio et al., 2010). Moreover, through a transformative and critical curriculum (like multicultural education), empowering students of color to care for and work for social justice to positively impact their world is possible.

Critical Discourse Analysis and Critical Language Awareness

Educational traditionalists espouse that language is a set of neutral communication skills to be mastered from the prescribed curriculum (Fairclough, 1999; Bourdieu, & Passeron, 1977). As aforementioned, this perspective fails to recognize the politics of mainstream discourse, which dominate the curriculum and life in public schools. Discourse goes beyond texts and language in this context. In this study, discourse is not only a noun or a verb, but more accurately a living, dialectical process coined by Bloome and Clark (2006) as “discourse-in-use.” Bloome and Clark (2006) posit, “The concept of discourse-in-use focuses attention on how people adopt and adapt the language and cultural practices historically available in response to the local, institutional, macro social, and historical situations in which they find themselves”
Due to the fact that the mainstream produces literacy for the masses, mainstream literacy and discourses are considered normal and "standard" (Gee, 1996) deeming other discourses as inappropriate and different. These tacit messages are present not only in institutional textbooks and curriculum, but also permeate interactions between individuals in schools. Often cloaked as “normal” discourse, individuals and groups (from the mainstream) are not always cognizant of how they discriminate and reinforce intolerance and superiority. Kucer (2005) reflects:

In fact, it is just this lack of explicitness that makes these social frameworks and group norms so powerful; often, the group’s members are unaware of the source of their beliefs and behaviors. This is especially the case when the individual belongs to the society’s dominant group(s). Because the beliefs of dominant groups so permeate society and because the individual may so seldom encounter alternative perspectives, he or she may come to view these beliefs not as socially constructed, but rather as normative or universal. (p. 206)

Dominant cultures in western societies traditionally privilege discourses that are both elite and academic, tied closely to school and demand competency and fluency in “standard English.” Schools reinforce the idea that this mainstream discourse is the norm by emphasizing it as the standard and the “correct” dialectical form of the English language (Gee, 1995; Delpit, 2002). Portrayal of discourse acquisition as easily “given externally to the learner” implies the superiority of one discourse over another and vehemently rejects other types of discourse (Fairclough, 1999). These normative beliefs are often used as a way to discriminate between what is considered appropriate and inappropriate discourses. Speakers of discourses deemed inappropriate, often are excluded from membership into social groups. This phenomenon plays out between mainstream and minority speakers and writers of discourses and text (Bourdieu, & Passeron, 1977; Delpit, 2002; Gee, 1996, Heath, 1983; Kucer, 2005).
Teachers, who are often members of the middle class and use dominant discourse easily and effortlessly, are often unaware of their own judgments towards speakers of non-dominant discourses. Inadvertently judging students based on these tacit rules creates the gap between students and teachers, leaving students feeling alienated and inadequate (Heath, 1983; Delpit, 2002). In addition, schools, politicians, curriculum companies, and administrators produce “grand narratives,” which posit that various literacy pedagogies (if administered correctly) results in better test scores, thus future success (Luke, 1995). However, Luke (1995) contends, “…the particular folk theories built into popular approaches to literacy education should be treated with a degree of sociological skepticism” (p. 25). Unfortunately, traditional educational advocates believe that the efficacy of a literacy program rests on long-term student outcomes, which fail to recognize the complexities of success including all the various forms of capital required (Luke, 1995).

Therefore, making these tacit rules overt and critically looking at the motivation and production of mainstream discourse interrupts insidious messages (Gee, 1996) of superiority and exclusivity. Moreover, studying discourses or using critical discourse analysis (hence CDA) in education allows for students to uncover cultural, political and social influences in school discourses and question knowledge that has been presented as truth. Luke (1995) explains:

…[CDA]…can provide tools for the denaturalization of text, for revealing that the representations of the texts are indeed linguistic and discursive artifacts, artifacts that often hide or disguise their own status and authority through linguistic techniques. In doing so, it can model the possibility of alternative readings and interpretations, particularly those silenced by dominant social institutions that tend to privilege a particular analysis, reading position, or practice as official knowledge. (p. 19)
From this perspective, the mere critical analyses of mainstream discourse “is a political act itself” (Luke, 1995, p. 12). For example, analysis of a social studies textbook for word choice, sentence structure, and tone can reveal subjectivities of the author and interrupt the “common sense” and one-sided perspective given in many descriptions of historical events. Subsequent readings of alternative texts describing the same historical event provide multiple perspectives and fulfill the purpose of CDA, which is an analysis of texts in two ways - “critically and constructively” (Luke, 1995, p. 12). Similar to critical pedagogy, critical race theory, and critical literacy, CDA acknowledges the hegemonic and harmful practices of larger social institutions and individuals, yet offers hope through encouraging the interruption of these practices locally. For example, analyzing the social studies textbook critically and then reading other texts from other individual’s perspectives, allows students to utilize, “strategies for reflecting and rearticulating these discourses in everyday life; this is a viable, practical agenda for critical literacy in the classroom” (Luke, 1995, p. 20). Considering the suggestions made by prominent CDA scholars, I wondered what would happen if we (the participants in study) analyzed and interrupted mainstream hegemonic discourse and also if the students would even want to participate in potentially uncomfortable topics.

Critical Literacy

Like critical pedagogy, critical literacy seeks to empower the oppressed through education and activities such as, questioning common knowledge to reveal tacit theories of domination or cultural superiority in mainstream discourse to inspire social action. Critical literacy falls under the umbrella of critical pedagogy and means making
sense of the “world” (and our positions in these worlds) through critically analyzing the “word” (language, discourses, texts) and the associated power relationships connected to the “word” as a means to create transformative opportunities for social action. Critical literacy practices, recommended by Freire and Macedo (1987), specifically utilize the tools of literacy to catalyze these new understandings through texts, readings, writings and dialogue. Giroux (1988) traces the beginnings of critical literacy to an Italian social theorist, Antonio Gramsci, who asserted literacy has a dual purpose, “as both the mastery of specific skills and particular forms of knowledge…” He further posits that “[literacy is a] precondition for social and cultural emancipation” (Giroux, 1988, p. 2). However, the foundation of critical literacy theory in the United States (U. S.) grew out of the discussions between Freire and Macedo (1987) documented in, Literacy: Reading the Word and the World. Giroux (1988) explains that Freire’s critique of the failed literacy program in Guinea-Bissau, in conjunction with his dialogue and queries into the intersection between culture, politics, and literacy education with Macedo, “[became] an act of producing meaning and not merely reiteration or recording of previously stated theoretical positions; as a result, crucial new theoretical formulations and connections emerge regarding literacy, politics, and empowerment” (p. 9).

In this seminal work, Freire and Macedo (1987) posit learning to read is not just “mechanically memorizing vowel sounds, as in the exercise ‘ba-be-bi-bo-bu, la-le-li-lo-lu…’ as if learners have nothing to bring to the learning” (p. 35). Phonetic knowledge is only one part of literacy, the words and the knowledge, the other. Only the student can make meaning of the language (Freire & Macedo, 1987). Freire and Macedo (1987) state “words should be laden with the meaning of the people’s existential experience not
the teacher’s experience” (p. 35). Moreover, the critical pedagogue aware of these necessary conditions seeks to help students make these personal language connections. For example, in the United States Freire and Macedo (1987) described what emancipatory education for African Americans might look like,

The successful usage of the students’ cultural universe requires respect and legitimation of students’ discourses, which is their own linguistic codes, which are different but never inferior…In the case of black Americans, for example, educators must respect Black English. It is possible to codify and decodify with the same ease as standard American English. The difference is that black Americans will find it infinitely easier to codify and decodify the dialect of their own authorship. The legitimation of Black English as an educational tool does not, however, preclude the need to acquire proficiency in the linguistic code of the dominant group. (p. 127)

In order to achieve emancipation, students must not only learn about their own language, backgrounds and cultures but also the dominant codes of literacy in order to have the tools to change their world and personal situations for the better (Freire & Macedo, 1987).

In an effort to attain the goals of transformative pedagogy, the curriculum must allow not only for connection to students’ histories and discourses, but for open ended dialogue and questions in which the answers are unknown (Freire & Macedo, 1987). Thus, the role of the teacher is not that of knowledge giver or that of an authoritarian but as a guide, inquirer and participant. Moreover, Freire and Macedo (1987) encourage educators to nurture the students’ creativity individually and within their social context and “to doubt” knowledge presented as factual or as the truth. Exposing “subjectivities” allows students to question myths told by the mainstream culture such as, racism ended after the victories of civil rights movement. Debunking cultural myths such as these illuminate’s tacit theories that damage and disempower marginalized people.
Since Freire and Macedo’s (1987) development of critical literacy theory, researchers and theorists have applied these Freirean tenets and practices in North American classrooms. Due to the fact Freirean pedagogy changes according to the social context and participants, researchers have developed different definitions of critical literacy and ideas about critical literacy practices. Lensmire (1994) utilized critical literacy practices to reconsider the use of “Writer’s Workshop” in his third grade classroom. “Writer’s Workshop” intends to empower students and foster ownership through following their own interests and topics. However Lensmire (1994) discovered that writer’s workshop often yielded formulaic writing, and at times his students even dominated and oppressed each others’ self expression. Thus, Lensmire (1994) redefined critical literacy practices in relation to writing instruction to focus on, “student voices” and “the private exploration and ordering of experience in the expression of a unique self, and the sense of greater public participation” (p. 14). As a result, Lensmire encouraged critical conversations, writings about the students’ concerns and perceived injustices, and social action, which gave purpose to their writing and resulted in greater student participation. Another researcher and critical pedagogue, Comber (1999) redefined critical literacy practices due to the fact that Friere’s work was based on his experiences teaching an adult literacy program. Thus, the following definition of critical literacy grew from her work with young children:

Critical literacy makes children’s interests central, because it involved discussing with children how texts work and how they work in the world. It is in children’s collective interests to know that texts are questionable, they are put together in particular ways by particular people hoping for particular effects and they have particular consequences for their readers, producers, and users. Such an approach does not treat children as infants but with respect and expectation. (p. 9)
While all these definitions and various practices have merit, for the purposes of this study, Lewison, Leland and Harste’s (2008) definition of critical literacy practices is most appropriate for this study because it is grounded in their work with intermediate grade students:

Critical literacy practices encourage students to use language to question the everyday world, to interrogate the relationship between language and power, to analyze popular culture and media, to understand how power relationships are socially constructed, and to consider actions that can be taken to promote social justice. (p. 3)

In particular, the term “language” fits this study because it provides the flexibility for the participants as struggling readers to engage in critical literacy practices in a variety of ways including oral and written language, not just exclusively texts. In addition, the phrase “to analyze popular culture and media” suits the younger students, whom participate and have experience with the cultural images, stereotypes, and themes pervasive in our society verses the adult topics (such as oppressive governments) Freire pursued with his adult students. Thus, the understandings and meaning of critical literacy and critical literacy practices varied according to context and participants.

A closer look at the practical application of critical literacy in the classroom is documented in the following section in order to both understand how students and researchers responded to and utilized critical literacy practices in different classrooms.

Review of Critical Literacy Research in the Classroom

According to Freire and Macedo (1987), critical pedagogues in an effort to disrupt dominant, mainstream ideologies, invite their students to engage in critical literacy
practices and social action while teaching literacy skills in tandem. As aforementioned, these practices may vary according to context and participants. In order to better understand critical literacy practices in different contexts, this section reviews the research of the practical application of critical literacy in the classroom. Several outcomes differed but a few similarities emerged. Findings from the critical literacy studies reviewed included three themes: (1) Increased student interaction; (2) Increased critical language awareness; (3) A growing interest and involvement with social action. These studies support the use of critical literacy practices in the classroom and make a compelling case for its application. However, inconsistencies and misinterpretations of critical literacy theory and practices in the studies present issues to consider for practitioners and researchers and suggest the need for more research in this area. Additionally, there were no studies in the research that involved critical literacy practices with minority fourth graders who struggle in reading.

*Increased Student Interaction*

One of the most common findings in the research was the increase of student engagement in group discussions and dialogue. In Nussbaum’s (2002) case study of seven, sixth-grade minority learners, four limited English students who previously had very little interaction in discussions increasingly participated in thoughtful and critical conversations about the dominant culture. Through the analysis of four conversations, two of the students almost doubled their amount of verbal interaction by the last session. In addition, one student, Mario by the fourth session increased his question complexity using more “why” questions and his comments appeared more relevant than his earlier remarks.
Similarly, in Lien’s (2003) three-year ethnographic study in an urban middle school, recently immigrated Asian-American students who previously did not speak in classroom discussions began to participate when a Vietnamese unit involving critical literacy practices was introduced. One student, Maya who was always silent, told her life story and the horrors of war she and her family endured. In a heartbreaking confession, she revealed her mother and sister starved to death during their escape to Thailand. Maya’s class sympathized with her loss and shared their stories of lost loved ones. By the end of the lesson, “the curriculum unit had brought the various groups of students closer,” and, “ Thus created a sense that the immigrant students were no longer quiet and invisible to this team” (Lien, 2003, p. 40).

In Falk-Ross’ (2001) action research study of four inner city university students in a developmental reading class, teachers and learners engaged in critical literacy conversations using Ella Price’s Journal (cited in Bryant, 1997). A fictional narrative, Ella Price’s Journal (1972) describes a young woman’s experience attending her first year of university and the difficulties she encountered such as racism, sexism, and issues of morality. Participants identified commonalities between themselves and the struggles of Ella. Social disparity, sexual equality, and moral issues were the springboard for weekly group discussions. Documentation through the use of field notes and audiotapes and subsequent analysis of the inquiry cycle utilized indicated learners became more active in conversations, questioning, and written feedback. In the beginning, students were hesitant to participate, perhaps due in part to the fact that they were just struggling to get their ideas down on paper, researchers surmised. However, as they continued with the unit and started working on I-search projects (the culminating, written research
project), the learners increasingly began to contribute and analyze each other’s text more critically, commenting on deeper structural elements.

In Smith’s (1997) case study, eight, racially diverse, sixth grade girls participated in an after school book club focusing on feminist issues and correlated their own experiences to the central characters. Although in the beginning some of the girls saw the club as “nerdy” and others had never spent much time discussing books, engagement, interest, and personal insight grew over time. One student, Allison, described herself as a person who didn’t usually talk or participate in school even though she received good grades. By means of transcripts of audiotapes, Allison by the tenth session frequently added to the conversations becoming the second highest contributor. In addition, findings overall suggest that the book club became a site where the students could determine their own agenda and openly discuss their racial identities and issues.

Similar to Smith’s (1997) study, Silvers et al. (2010) narrative inquiry study with a small group of racially diverse six and seven year olds discussed concerns about issues surrounding Hurricane Katrina. Although in the beginning the group was small, over time the group’s enthusiasm and questions spilled over into the regular classroom consisting of 25 first graders. Galvanized by the small group’s efforts, soon the whole class became involved in discussing, researching, and problem solving ways to help the victims of Hurricane Katrina. In addition, students took on multiple identities (such as responsible and generous citizens), responded in multimodal ways, and enjoyed participating in meaningful social actions.
Critical Analysis of Language Increased

A second theme emerged from several of the studies; students became more critical when analyzing discourse. Freire and Macedo (1987) assert this critical awareness is necessary for understanding ourselves in relation to society and thereby recognizing the inequities of our world. In Smith's (1997) case study, one of the eight participants, Luann, an African-American student in a predominantly white middle school shares the difficulty of switching roles and language from school to home while analyzing a character in Maison at Blue Hill (Woodson, 2002) who is called an “oreo.” Luann discusses the term “oreo” and reveals to the group that she can empathize with the main character because she feels the pressure to fit in at a white school. This analysis of the term “oreo” and the subsequent discussion about the consequences of using different discourses socially suggests Luann took a critical stance. Luann demonstrates the ability to examine herself, her situation, and the rationale of her circumstances indicating that she has adopted what Freire and Macedo (1987) call a “critical attitude” (p. 68). They believe that a critical attitude can inspire students to engage in political action to change injustices for themselves and in society.

In Falk-Ross’ (2001) action research study, four college students in a remedial reading class received instruction about how to critically read texts and use comprehension and writing strategies in tandem. Over the course of a semester, researchers observed a marked change in the students’ analysis and awareness of language. As aforementioned, when discussing either whole group readings or each other’s writing, participants began to look at the subtext or underlying meaning more critically and make personal connections. For example, when giving writing feedback to
their peers about their research projects, students began to give more insightful and deeper structure type of suggestions. One student even discussed his choice of grammar in his paper and commented that his choice made the paper seem more powerful and authoritative. Students also showed critical language awareness during the development of their I-search projects. One African-American student chose to research the issue of standard English and the Black vernacular. In his analysis, he observed that many Americans born and raised in the U. S. do not speak standard English. He concluded that all people who do not speak standard English well should work together to improve their language usage if necessary. Moreover, all the participants by the end of the class were better able to differentiate between their vernacular and standard English and had acquired tools to switch when necessary.

**Critical Thinking Skills Increased**

Several of the studies suggested learners developed not only critical language awareness but they also improved critical thinking skills when justifying a position (Silvers et al., 2010; Falk-Ross, 2001; Nussbaum, 2002). In Ghahremani-Ghajar’s (2005) ethnographic study with 30, 16-year old, high school Iranian students, interactive journal writing between the teacher and student resulted in a shift in student writing. Students who originally were writing only with a descriptive stance over the course of a year began to write more critically and even moved to a more creative stance by suggesting solutions to problems. The researchers hypothesized the learners had actually found their voice. Through post interviews, learners claimed that the journal writing allowed self-expression not normally experienced in other classes. In addition,
students who normally were apathetic about school and reading (learners from a culturally non-dominant background) started to participate in class in a more meaningful way.

Similarly in Falk-Ross’ (2001) study, non-dominant language learners over the course of a college semester increased both their interactions and the complexity of their talk with dominant language speakers. Additionally, the quality of the students’ arguments increased due to the fact that the learners provided more support for their positions. Moreover, the arguments became increasingly critical as the students questioned each other’s positions more frequently. Learners from the culturally dominant background also deepened their analytical skills as they became aware of the power and abuse of language in texts. As a result, these learners began to see texts through multiple perspectives. Finally, all the student participants developed skills in which they could easily locate the “hidden agenda” in many texts.

A Call to Action

Not only did students engage in conversations about injustices and discover “hidden agendas” in texts, according to the research, some students were inspired to do something about it. According to Freire and Macedo (1987), recognizing injustice in and of itself is not an action to change the problem. The action outside of the text is the goal; a concrete result of an effort to make the world a better place. Behrman (2006) explains, “Taking social action requires students to become involved as members of a larger community” beyond the classroom and an important, “outcome of social action is to move students’ real-life concerns beyond classroom walls” (Behrman, 2005, p. 485).
According to Lewison et al. (2008) critical literacy practices in this study is defined as:

Practices [that] encourage students to uses language to question the everyday world, to interrogate the relationship between language and power, to analyze popular culture and media, to understand how power relationships are socially constructed, and to consider actions that can be taken to promote social justice. (p. 3)

A critical element of critical literacy, moving to action, emerged in two of the studies reviewed. In McGregor’s (2000) narrative account with high school students in a predominantly middle-class, Australian area, the teacher-researcher encouraged and supported the creation of a social justice group. Members of the group surveyed the students in their school about problems they had in school and found the students had some common areas of concern, primarily faculty members treating students disrespectfully. Members of the social justice group agreed political action was warranted and the students began questioning the teachers and administration about their attitudes towards the learners. Additionally, the students critically analyzed a memo from the staff they considered slanderous, implying students were stealing. In an attempt to find support for this injustice, members of the group went back to the school handbook and noticed the word respect was used when discussing the expected teacher behavior with students. When the students questioned the administration about the discrepancy between their actions and the handbook, punitive measures against group members emerged, consequently the group disbanded. Regardless of the actions of the administration, the researcher claimed that due to the active involvement in the social justice group, students learned to become better critical readers and writers (McGregor, 2000).
The second study documents a critical literacy project with the most developed example of social action. In Powell, Cantrell, and Adams (2001) project, fourth grade students requested to learn more about Black Mountain, the highest peak in Kentucky, after the teacher explained there were plans for it to be strip-mined. After studying the issues critically and from all perspectives, the fourth grade class decided to fight the proposed plans and began organizing field trips, fundraising for their cause, interviewing various stakeholders, and collaborating with activists. Upon discovering strip mining was already occurring and contamination of local water sources had resulted, the students launched a massive campaign to stop the mining companies. Activities included contacting the press, writing to politicians, organizing a protest rally, raising thousands of dollars for their cause, and submitting a 10 page proposal to the Director of Permits of the Department for Surface Reclamation and Enforcement requesting the agency contemplate other options. As a result of all their efforts, 18,915 acres on Black Mountain were protected from strip mining and designated as a conservation area.

Misinterpretations of Critical Literacy

Application and interpretation of critical literacy varied greatly, however in two of the reviewed studies teachers and researchers inadvertently reproduced social inequities instead of empowering the participants. One reason this occurred was due to the fact that the teachers had an incomplete understanding of critical literacy. In Bartlett’s (2005) two-year ethnographic study, a Brazilian adult literacy program based upon Freire and Macedo’s (1987) definition of critical literacy employed teachers who,
“...tended to be familiar with only a small segment of Freire’s (1970) early opus, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*. Very few of the teachers, other than those at the university, had read more than a chapter from one of Freire’s books” (Bartlett, 2005, p. 8). One result of this lack of understanding was teachers unknowingly implemented lessons positing their own cultural bias and actually perpetuated cultural stereotypes. In the program non government organization (NGO) teachers practicing “Freirean” pedagogy worked on teacher and student relationships. Teachers claimed to have cultivated friendships in order to eliminate classism and power inequities, but upon closer analysis students revealed outside of class that the social barriers were present outside of the school context. And even though democratic ideals were claimed as the goal, the reality was that the classroom, the teacher, and the students remained socially stratified. Freire referred to this dichotomy between ideals and practice as an exercise in discourse rhetoric (Freire & Macedo, 1987). In addition, critical analysis of texts and discussions regarding sociocultural issues about class and race was absent from the curriculum. As a result, teachers made assumptions about students’ experiences and knowledge based upon cultural and class biases (Bartlett, 2005). Consequently curriculum choices were limited and the classes offered little to the students.

The study by McFarland, Dowdey, and Davis (1999) is another example of claiming “Freirean” pedagogy, but upon closer analysis the teachers ignored many of the tenets of critical literacy. In fact, the judgments made by the author/teacher about the developmental reading students in her charge illuminate her true theoretical framework,

A deep fog of passivity and apathy covered the room. Many of its occupants hid behind caps and coats as they slipped low in their chairs. Few eyes ascended
avoiding any direct eye contact. Distinct groups emerged. Two males sat in the front with no contact, no comments, and no ambition… Next to him sat a student who wanted to become a counselor. Her frequent outbursts interrupted class. (Bartlett, 2005, p. 4)

McFarland et al. (1999) espouses utilizing critical literacy practices, but fails to analyze or understand any of the students’ discourse or experiences and prefers to judge a student as having ‘no ambition’ or disruptive. Operating in a “deficit theory of learning,” the belief students from minority discourses lack cultural capital, the teacher’s descriptions and word choices reveal her real attitude towards her students. (p. 3)

The educator who believes students are culturally incompetent or deficient, according to Freire and Macedo (1987) is not interested in emancipatory education. In addition, the researchers/teachers fail to understand the power struggles between minority and mainstream discourse, and as a result end up perpetuating the status quo as evidenced by the student drop-out rate (Giroux, 1988). McFarland et al. (1999) neglect to look at her prejudices, biases, or sociocultural identity as a factor in teaching. Again no text was analyzed critically to reveal power inequities, resulting in what Freire and Macedo (1987) claim actually silences students’ voices. These theoretical understandings (known or unknown) directly affected the outcomes. The teachers and researchers with false misconceptions about critical literacy theory and practices subsequently claimed conclusions that were erroneous. Even when researchers had a firm grasp of critical literacy theory, the very nature of the teacher and students as political beings made it impossible to identify or eliminate all the biases in the classroom.

Bartlett’s (2005) two-year ethnographic study looking at Brazilian teachers utilizing critical literacy practices in their adult literacy classes showed how difficult it is
to eradicate classism and language bias in the classroom, especially when the teachers only possessed a very superficial understanding of critical literacy theory and practices. Other researchers’ understanding of critical literacy practices involves simply the use of multicultural text with a few “critical” discussions. The researchers made the claim that critical literacy practices weren’t very effective; however, due to their poor classroom practices, the aforementioned conclusion appears erroneous. As a result, these studies were eliminated for this review of literature.

Despite the misinterpretations, and wide variety of implementations of critical literacy practices, several patterns emerged: minority students’ participation and interest increased; students developed a critical awareness about the nature of language and power in texts; students felt a call to action to change injustices; and lastly, students broadened their view of “others” in the world.

Summary

Findings from the aforementioned sections make a compelling case for utilizing critical literacy practices in the classroom. Most of the studies reported positive outcomes including increased student participation, critical language awareness, social action, and a broadened understanding of others views.

Although students were invited to participate in some elementary classrooms, the majority of the studies occurred with older children and adults. Moreover, only a few of the studies specifically invited more vulnerable students to academic failure - the struggling reader. In addition in two of the studies, the fundamental tenets of critical literacy were misinterpreted. Some researchers viewed critical literacy practices as a
watered down version of multicultural education. Other teacher-researchers stereotyped their students and failed to acknowledge the students’ identities and background knowledge. This study sought to address a gap in the research, and the responses of minority fourth grade elementary students who struggle to read as they are invited to engage in critical literacy practices incorporating social action. Additionally, I wanted to know how lived racial experiences (both private and public) affected our (all the participants including the teacher-researcher) positions of identity and power?

In addition, this study examined the dynamics of identity and power inherent in any social interaction, but seldom studied among young students. Thus, this study makes a unique contribution to the field.
CHAPTER 3
CONTEXT OF THE STUDY

Introduction

In this study, my original and primary purpose was to document my conversations with 5, fourth grade, African American students, who struggle with reading in school as we engaged in critical literacy practices and social action projects. However, during the last few weeks of my data collection phase, a pivotal conversation about race became the impetus to foreground a secondary purpose, which was to analyze these engagements for our (the participants) tacit and overt understandings of race, power, and identity.

In order to understand these engagements and the participants involved, this chapter provides a rich description of the context and the people in the study. This includes: the background of the study, the participants (their backgrounds including the academic and personal, and the development of our relationships), me, as a White teacher and the teacher-researcher, the context of our group including the physical arrangement of our classroom, and the development of our topics over the course of the year, including the organization of the three critical phases. In addition, this chapter details my decision-making process based on my interactions with the students and their responses.

Background of the Study

Although documentation began during fall of the 2009-2010 school year, the beginning of this study actually started when I first began working and developing a
relationship with three of the five students in 2007-2008. During that time, I tutored Stephen, Ian, and Florence individually as the master reading teacher providing remedial reading instruction for forty-five minutes daily. The following school year 2008-2009, I moved positions and taught third grade science and social studies, subsequently, I had the opportunity to work with all of the participants two hours daily. The fourth year (2009-2010), I moved up to fourth grade with their class and taught reading and writing, conducted this study and acted as the facilitator and teacher-researcher for the group.

Readers who Struggle in School

Readers who struggle in school were both the inspiration for this study and the impetus for me to return to graduate school. Over the years, realizing that fourth grade readers who struggle in school often do not graduate from high school (Allington, 1996), I utilized a plethora of recommended interventions from the district. These interventions were usually comprised of explicit phonics instruction and multiple readings of decodable books. Unfortunately, during graduate school, I later discovered in the research (Allington, 2007) that some of these interventions actually push a reader who struggles in school further behind.

Readers who struggle in school are typically placed in “lower” reading groups than their peers. These groups are commonly subjected to lessons with low-level tasks and questions and include more drill type activities. As a result, readers who struggle in school are often exposed to fewer words, while the higher groups are exposed to more words (Delpit, 1995; Stanovich, 2004). This phenomenon can result in the “rich-get
richer” for students in high reading groups and the “poor get poorer” or the “Matthew effect” for students in lower reading groups (Allington, 1980; Stanovich, 2004). As a result, readers who struggle in school continue to fall behind their peers, which can lead to a loss of hope, interest, and motivation.

_Discovering Critical Literacy_

It wasn’t until I discovered the work of Paulo Freire and the tenets of critical literacy that I considered using literacy as a way to empower students to change their world for the better. Critical literacy pedagogy developed by Freire and Macedo (1987), means making sense of the “world” (and our positions in these worlds) through critically analyzing the “word” (language, discourses, texts) and the associated power relationships connected to the “word” as a means to create transformative opportunities for social action. Implications for critical literacy practices in education include foregrounding local knowledge and community issues/injustices while teaching literacy skills in tandem. Thus, starting with the third grade social studies unit about slavery in the fall of 2005, I started asking my third graders questions like these: Whose perspective is left out of this historical event? Why? Who benefits from this version of the “truth?” In the 2006 school year, one of my students who struggled with reading in school, an African American male who was often resistant in class, became so enthusiastic with our discussions that he started to question everything in any historical event we studied. In addition, he started going to the library and reading about famous abolitionists like Frederick Douglass. The following year, when he was in fourth grade, he still would visit with me and share news about his last readings about African
Americans involved with social justice. Due to this struggling reader’s response, I decided to continue to implement critical literacy whenever possible in our social studies discussions and readings.

*Complexity of Critical Literacy: Race and Resistance in the Classroom*

Over the next year, I continued to use critical literacy in my classroom and decided to try a similar activity using the social studies textbook with a small group of fifth graders who were struggling with reading in the spring of 2007. Prior to this lesson, I had met with the students eight times working on various reading strategies to prepare for the upcoming state reading test. Experiencing some apathy, I decided to try something different for our next meeting to create interest and conversation. So, I had the students (two African American boys, one African American girl and one Hispanic girl) count the number of people of color and the number of white people in the fifth grade social studies textbook. Knowing there was a large discrepancy between the two groups with many more Whites, I had anticipated that students would be surprised and that perhaps we could write the publisher of the textbook and request that they include more people of color. However, the activity did not go as planned. While counting, Vance kept asking, “Is this going to be scary?” Ignoring his comments, the other students continued busily counting while I reassured him it wasn’t scary. I then asked him quizzically, “Why, is this scary?” Vance didn’t answer the question but continued to repeat his question over and over. Perplexed by Vance’s behavior, the students and I kept questioning Vance. Intuitively, I sensed he was fearful, but we proceeded with the lesson.
As we continued on to do the letter writing, Vance appeared to become even more disconcerted. He kept saying, “I don’t feel very comfortable writing this.” Increasingly agitated, he started rocking in his chair, tapping his pencil and eventually he put his head down on the table. The rest of the participants (including myself) kept questioning him as to why he didn’t want to participate. It wasn’t until a subsequent encounter, days later that Vance shared why he didn’t want to write the letter. He explained that he had recently watched a program about the racist group, the Ku Klux Klan or (KKK). Fearful of retaliation, Vance was worried that hate groups like the KKK would terrorize us if we protested the textbook’s content. As a white female of privilege, I had never considered these fears or resistance as a possible outcome. In addition, I realized that I had naively attempted to push him to take on the role of “social activist” even though he repeatedly refused my invitation. These identity issues and my need to understand the practical application of critical literacy became the impetus to study these topics more thoroughly in this study. The complexity of my students’ responses to critical literacy throughout the years warranted the need for further investigation.

Purposeful Sampling of Participants

Importance of Selecting ‘Readers who Struggle’ in School

My students’ responses to critical literacy (in particular those students who struggle with school-based reading) over the years were the impetus for this study. Students who struggle with reading during elementary school are particularly vulnerable to continued academic failure (Juel, 1988). Students who experience, “the combination of lack of practice, deficient decoding skills, and difficult materials results in unrewarding
early reading experiences that lead to less involvement in reading-related activities” (Stanovich, 2004, p. 458). For these readers who struggle in school, more energy is spent on simply decoding and recognizing words and thus, comprehension of text is compromised. Stanovich (2004) explains, “[i]f reading for meaning is hindered, unrewarding reading experiences multiply, and practice is avoided or merely tolerated without real cognitive involvement. The downward spiral continues- and has further consequences” (p. 458). Thus, readers who struggle in school are in the greatest need of inspiration and motivation in order to persevere through tasks that do not come easy to them.

In fact, most fourth grade students who read below grade level will not graduate from high school (Allington, 1996). As discussed in Chapter 2 in the review of the literature, critical literacy practices (in certain contexts) empower and engage readers (Busching, 1999; Edelsky, 1999). Participation in this type of pedagogy can lead to greater student participation in academic discussions and engagement in social action. Such activities can illuminate the connection between literacy and individual power allowing readers who struggle in school to reconnect to literacy activities in a meaningful way. Thus, students who struggle in reading may have the most to gain from critical literacy projects, which can empower and motivate.

**Criteria for and Selection of ‘Readers who Struggle**

This sense of urgency to help readers who struggle became the impetus for this study and participant selection. Students initially selected for this study met the qualification of reader who struggles in school-based on one of the two determined criteria. The first requirement was that students had to be classified as “in danger” of
failing the fifth grade Texas Assessment of Knowledge and Skills (TAKS) test based on projections (also called the TPM) from Howard’s District’s Office of Institutional Research. The TAKS is a state test given yearly from third grade through high school in Reading and Math (and other subjects, which vary based on grade level) to determine a student’s mastery of the Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills (TEKS), which are the state’s expectations of what students should learn in each grade level. The projection for failure or TPM was based on a combination of the student’s performance on the third grade reading TAKS test administered May of 2009 and the overall school performance on TAKS. The fourth grade class in 2009 consisted of 50 students of which 18 were African American, 11 were Hispanic American, and 20 were White and 1 Asian American. Projections indicated that there were five students who currently were not performing on grade level (or not on the college ready track) and in danger of failing the fifth grade TAKS reading test. All five were invited to be participants in this study.

In addition to the district’s classification, further assessments for this study’s purposes were utilized to determine whether a student was a “reader who struggles” including the developmental reading assessment (Pearson, 1997), the Standardized Test and Reporting (STAR) reading assessment (Renaissance, 2011), and fourth grade, TAKS Reading released tests from prior years. The Developmental Reading Assessment includes a running record, which is an observation of a student’s reading behaviors. The running record provides information for future instruction and their approximate reading level. Results from the Developmental Reading Assessment (DRA) indicated that most of the students read significantly below grade level. The STAR assessment (Renaissance, 2011) is a “computer-adaptive assessment” that
utilizes cloze passages requiring students to determine the appropriate vocabulary to fill in the blank. Results of the STAR suggested that all of the student participants scored below grade level in the fall of 2009, Hannah (who joined the group in February 2010) fared the best with 3.7 (third grade and seven months). If students were reading four months below grade level in any of the second set of criteria, for the purposes of this study they were considered a “reader who struggles.”

Five students initially qualified: Tina, Florence, Stephen, Selma, and Ian. After the students were identified, parental and student consent forms were distributed in conjunction with full and open explanation of the study’s purposes and goals. In addition, all parties were told participation is voluntary and students may quit at any point in the study. All five agreed to participate however in January, Tina transferred and Hannah replaced her. Tables 1 and 2 include identifiers collected from their school profile and reading assessments.

Table 1

*Participants’ School-based Identifiers*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Ethnicity</th>
<th>Special Ed</th>
<th>Retained</th>
<th>Economically Disadvantaged</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Selma</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>African American</td>
<td>No, but dyslexic</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stephen</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>African American</td>
<td>Yes, and dyslexic</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ian</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>African American</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hannah</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>African American</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Florence</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>African American</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 2

Results of Reading Assessments

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant</th>
<th>TAKS 2009 (3rd grade)</th>
<th>TPM</th>
<th>Pass TAKS Release</th>
<th>STAR</th>
<th>DRA</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Selma</td>
<td>2217 Pass</td>
<td>Projected Failure</td>
<td>Pass</td>
<td>2.7</td>
<td>3rd grade (38)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stephen</td>
<td>2300* Pass</td>
<td>Projected Failure</td>
<td>Fail</td>
<td>1.2</td>
<td>1st grade (5)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ian</td>
<td>2249* Pass</td>
<td>Projected Failure</td>
<td>Fail</td>
<td>1.3</td>
<td>1st grade (11)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hannah</td>
<td>2408 Pass</td>
<td>Projected Pass</td>
<td>Pass</td>
<td>3.7</td>
<td>4th grade (40)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Florence</td>
<td>2194 Pass</td>
<td>Projected Failure</td>
<td>Fail</td>
<td>2.8</td>
<td>2nd grade (30)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* Indicates results on a modified assessment

Identifying Racial Affiliation

Due to the fact that understandings about race were foregrounded in this study, I believe that it is important to address how racial affiliations were determined at this point. As detailed in the chart above, all five were identified (according to the school and parents) as “African American.” Throughout this study, additionally, I primarily used the term “African American” in reference to a student participants’ racial identity for lack of a better term. Other times (although rarely), I used the word “Black,” due to the implied inclusivity of the term, as recommended by Beverly Tatum (1997) in, *Why are all the Black kids Sitting Together in the Cafeteria?* However, it is important to note that in this study there was no consensus regarding these racial terms. Further discussions and findings about these identifiers are discussed in Chapters 5 and 6.
In the school year 2009-2010, Hannah was a ten-year old, African American girl whom I knew for almost two years. She joined our group during the spring semester after Tina, another participant, transferred to another school making it impossible for her to continue in the study. Since the study’s inception, Hannah asked me weekly if she could join the group. Although I knew that she would be a great asset, I did not allow her to join the group because she did not qualify in the area of performing as a struggling reader at that time. After Tina left, Hannah asked to join the group more frequently. As I got to know Hannah even better, I realized that Hannah had personal struggles that were inhibiting her academic progress. I reconsidered my earlier decision, and allowed Hannah to join the group in February of 2010.

Academic Performance

Hannah transferred into my class in the spring of 2009 from another local public school. In order to assess her academic knowledge at that time, Hannah was given a series of assessments (like the DRA). All of her results indicated that she was performing on grade level academically. Additionally, Hannah’s results on the third grade state reading assessment, the TAKS, was 2408, which was high enough to
achieve the commended level. Commended scores, according to the state, indicated that a student was on the path for college readiness.

In the fourth grade she was given several assessments throughout the year. In the beginning of the year, Hannah’s assessments indicated that she read at the fourth grade level. However, later in the year on the STAR assessment, Hannah scored 3.7. The results (according to the creators of STAR) indicated she had a reading grade equivalency of third grade and seven months. This score suggested that Hannah was behind in vocabulary and fluency, both areas that were not extensively tested on the TAKS. When she took the STAR (mid-year) a student on this level should have scored 4.5, fourth grade and five months. Therefore at that time, Hannah was approximately eight months below her peers. However, over all she scored significantly higher on multiple assessments than the other participants in this study.

Personal Background and Teacher Observations

When Hannah arrived at our school in third grade, my initial impression was that she was soft-spoken and shy and that she very much wanted to please her teachers. As I got to know her, I realized that beneath her shy exterior, she was very much her own person, strong and confident in her own opinions. Although in classroom discussions she often supported my point of view when discussing interpretations of historical events, several times she argued a different point of view unapologetically. Many times she politely disagreed with her peers and me, regardless of his or her stature in the class. Despite the possible repercussions, Hannah stuck to her guns and offered no apology for her opinions. She also held no grudges against anyone who disagreed with
her and in fact she rarely complained about other students. Some of the greatest gifts Hannah possessed were an inquisitive and critical mind and the strength to stand up for her convictions as evidenced through our many interactions.

In fourth grade, Hannah completed most of her class work and school assignments in all subjects with ease. She often went above and beyond what was expected by bringing in related research from the Internet about social studies and science topics. Her behavior and work in class and school gave little indication of how much she was going through personally. However, as the year progressed, I became aware that Hannah was no stranger to physical and emotional catastrophes. Originally from New Orleans, Hannah fled with her family (her mother, sister, and grandmother) from the Hurricane Katrina disaster in 2005. During a lesson about weather and natural catastrophes, Hannah opened up and described in class the panic with which her family hastily left the city during the hurricane and the subsequent obstacles her family had suffered in the search for financial and emotional stability.

Soon after this event, Hannah began sharing her concerns with me regularly. Arriving early in the mornings, she usually stopped by my room to inform me about her latest news, good or bad. However in fourth grade, her personal problems began to affect her academically. She quit doing much of her homework and outside book report projects, especially after the Christmas vacation. I met with her frequently and counseled her about keeping up her grades. After several private conferences, Hannah shared with me that while she was on vacation in New Orleans, a close relative had been sexually assaulted by another one of her family members. This event tore the extended family apart, forcing relatives to take sides. Hannah’s grandmother did not
share Hannah’s family’s perspective about the event and subsequently forced Hannah, her sister, and her mother to move out of the apartment they were sharing. With the family in crisis, Hannah was preoccupied with worry about her family. These ongoing problems and the even more recent trauma with the assault of a family member, forced the family to rely on other relatives in ways that strained familial relationships. As a result, these problems catalyzed multiple moves and harsh living conditions. Additionally, Hannah told me that she didn’t have enough to eat at home. Fortunately, the school and staff stepped in and provided food for the family temporarily. Eventually Hannah’s grandmother reconciled with Hannah’s mother and subsequently provided some financial assistance.

Due to all the tumultuous changes Hannah had recently experienced at that time, I realized that by allowing her to join the group not only would the group benefit from her unique perspective, but Hannah could process some of the complicated personal issues she had experienced over the last two years.

Florence

I like lunch group reading because it is mostly about the WORLD…and [we can] make it a better place. In the lunch group we write things that happen, really. [Post-interview]

Academic Performance

At the time of the study, Florence was a ten-year old African American female. For more than two years before the study, I worked with Florence. The first time we met, she was in second grade. Academically, Florence was enthusiastic and motivated, but struggled throughout her years in elementary school. In reading, Florence decoded text
accurately and her fluency (the rate of words decoded per minute and her prosody) was considered on grade level. However, her teacher at the time observed that she struggled with comprehension. As the master reading teacher at the time, I administered a running record and discovered that she often retold the story inaccurately leaving out key events. In addition, she also had trouble identifying the lesson or theme; further indicating comprehension was an issue. By the second semester, the teacher at the time decided to request testing Florence for a reading disability. Although the results indicated that she had difficulty quickly processing oral and written information, Florence did not meet the qualifications for a learning disability.

The following year, in third grade, I taught her science and social studies and tutored her to prepare for the reading TAKS. Although she did pass the third grade reading TAKS, it was at one of the lowest possible passing scores, 2194 (2100 was the minimum score) and her DRA score was 30, almost a full year below grade level. Thus, in fourth grade, Florence was still well below her peers in reading based on the criteria above and subsequently, she was invited to participate in the group.

Personal Background and Teacher Observations

Beyond how the school and various academic assessments categorized Florence, additionally, she had many personal struggles interfered with her academic progress. Although, she was often delightful, appeared happy and very concerned (sometimes overly) with pleasing others, Florence also suffered from depression and was taking anti-depressant medication and participated in regular counseling. She sometimes appeared “moody” seeming happy and sunny one minute and sad or angry
the next. Often times, peer relationship issues were the trigger for her abrupt changes in mood and she sometimes made poor decisions based on the influence of some of her peers. In one of our lunch meetings, Florence revealed, “Like when somebody talks about me, I just feel lonely, and I don’t like myself.” [Lunch discussion, 5/24/2010]

Similarly, she also sought the approval of her teachers, and normally followed the classroom rules and the directions given, unless she was influenced by her peers to resist and/or misbehave.

Florence’s mother also was aware of her behavior at school and complained that increasingly Florence argued with her at home. In one of our conversations in the group, Florence explained how her mother shouted angrily at her sister while straightening her sister’s hair. Florence responded to her mother, “Girl, you got to calm down with that screaming.” Infuriating her mother further, Florence’s mother shouted at Florence, “Get ya’ll ugly self and fat self out of here and come on!” [Lunch conversation, 5/24/2010]

During parent conferences, Florence’s mother stated that she didn’t know what to do about her conduct. However, Florence confided in me several times over the years how hurt and disappointed she was by her mother’s comments. Although Florence’s mother also received counseling services (mandated by the state), she continued to struggle with anger management. Exacerbating and contributing to Florence’s troubles, her father was incarcerated and her mother was raising Florence and her sister all by herself, with few or little resources (Florence qualifies as economically disadvantaged according to lunch forms completed at the beginning of the year). Many times Florence lacked school supplies and properly fitted uniform clothes and shoes. The
conglomeration of all these complicating factors influenced Florence’s social and academic progress.

Stephen

[Reading] It makes me feel upset, sometimes when you don’t know a word and you should. Sometimes, I feel happy when you know a word finally you were stuck on. [Pre-interview]

Academic Performance

Stephen, a ten-year old African American male, struggled with school-based reading and writing since he first began formal schooling. In August 2008, I started working with him in second grade when I was the Master Reading Teacher for the school. Daily, during the first semester, I pulled him out during his reading and language arts block and worked with him in leveled books using Guided Reading (Fountas & Pinnell, 1996). Although he made some progress, it was very slow and by the end of the year he was still well below grade level. His difficulties continued through third grade and subsequently he was referred for testing for special education. District evaluations determined Stephen qualified for both dyslexia and learning disabled services in reading and writing. In fourth grade, he received a passing score of 2300 on the Texas Assessment of Knowledge and Skills-Modified) TAKS-M (a modified version of the state test), which tests students a year below grade level. On the STAR reading assessment (a Renaissance Learning product, which also makes Accelerated Reader), Stephen scored a 1.2, indicating that he read on a first grade, two month’s level. Like all the participants in this study, he also was classified as economically disadvantaged.
Personal Background and Teacher Observations

Throughout the two and a half years I worked with Stephen, he usually posed questions that made me think. He measured his words carefully before speaking, and he appeared mature beyond his years. One time at recess, one of his friends, Ian, who is also a participant, was upset because he had to sit out during recess to complete his homework. When Ian angrily stomped over to the picnic table, Stephen followed him and put his hand on his shoulder and encouragingly said, “Man, just be glad that you’re alive!” Several of the teachers overheard this conversation and remarked on Stephen’s positive attitude about life. He often had a very sunny disposition and seemed to enjoy discussions during small group reading and writing. Additionally, he was unfailingly honest and always admitted his mistakes despite the consequences.

However, due to his continual academic struggles with reading and writing over the years, I had noticed some subtle signs of discouragement and frustration. Although Stephen received modifications for reading assignments, he often did not complete his work and had to be prompted multiple times to produce anything in writing. Additionally, he rarely finished any homework and did not read nightly as assigned. Moreover during independent reading, he often avoided the task by spending the majority of the time looking for a book. It seemed as if he had given up hope of succeeding academically.

Selma

But I ain’t African….My momma did not come from Africa. I don’t want to be called all Black… [Transcript, 5-21]
Academic Performance

At the time of the study, Selma was a ten year-old African American female, almost eleven. Similar to Florence, Stephen, and Ian, I met her when she was in second grade. However, Selma was not considered a reader who struggled in second grade (even though she had been retained in first), so I didn’t work with her extensively in second grade like Florence, Stephen, and Ian.

In third grade, Selma was a student in my third grade science and social studies class. While reading in the content areas with her, I noticed that she struggled with decoding and fluency in grade level texts. When given enough background information, she was able to piece information together well enough to figure out the main points of the text. Unfortunately, it took her so long to decode and process academic texts on grade level; she often became frustrated with this type of reading. This frustration continued through the fall semester of 2008; consequently, the third grade reading teacher and I referred her for dyslexia testing. She qualified as dyslexic in approximately February of 2009. As a result, she was provided with accommodations for TAKS including a two-day testing period (versus one-day) in which questions and proper nouns were read to her. Selma passed the third grade TAKS reading test with a score of 2217. At the time of the study, Selma took the STAR reading assessment and scored a grade equivalency of 2.7 (second grade, seven months) on the STAR reading assessment, more than a full year below level in vocabulary and fluency.

Personal Background and Teacher Observations

It is difficult to describe Selma and the complexity and contradictions of her personality. A strong willed and outspoken girl, I found it both difficult and delightful to
work with her. Often a powerful leader among her peers, her close friends, like Florence, were submissive and agreeable to most of Selma's suggestions and ideas. At times she appeared kind, sympathetic, and generous with her peers, and other times she seemed cruel to the point of bullying. The same behavior was true as a student. At times, she was totally engaged and excited about learning, and other times she seemed resistant, argumentative, and defiant. Another contradiction Selma possessed is that although she appeared quite confident most of the time, towards the end of the study she spoke disparagingly about herself and other African Americans, “whites have abilities that we don’t” [Lunch conversations, 5-20]. In fact, one of my inter-raters commented many of her remarks seemed to indicate negative feelings about herself. Due to her keen awareness of injustice in her world she was quick to identify contradictions in larger systems. She easily discovered underlying political motives throughout current events and history and is one of the few students that challenged information presented as “facts.” She naturally questioned why people did what they did and uncovered their hidden motives. This may be due in part to the fact that Selma had many personal connections to family members with hidden agendas.

Perhaps one of the reasons Selma was so aware of ulterior motives of people in power was the fact that Selma's mother and father often appeared to act inconsistently. Her parents, who often talked about being responsible during conferences, rarely followed through with any help with homework, projects, supplies or other basic necessities. One clear example of this occurred in the fall 2009 semester. Selma's glasses broke over the summer of 2009, and they were not replaced until February of 2010 even though our school nurse made repeated eye appointments for free glasses.
It wasn’t until I called Selma’s father and used the word “neglect” in our conversation that her glasses appeared ten days later. In addition, Selma shared that she felt slighted by her mother due to her perception of her mother’s favoritism of her older brother. In one instance in second grade, Selma commented that she wished she were dead. This sparked a crisis intervention by the counselor and principal. Despite this event, little in Selma’s parents’ behavior changed, at least according to Selma’s reports about home.

Ian

[Haiti was my favorite project] Because it was kind of sad when we heard about Haiti. People were starving. And they didn’t have nothing and their house was gone and broke. [Post-interview]

Academic Performance

At the time of the study, Ian was a ten-year old African American (as classified by the school) male who had attended Howard elementary since kindergarten. He struggled throughout his academic career and in first grade was retained. In second grade, the district diagnostician identified Ian as learning disabled. Therefore, he qualified for special education services. Ian struggled in reading grade level, academic texts. Problems with decoding, fluency, and reading comprehension made it extremely difficult for Ian to understand much of the reading material in fourth grade independently. His DRA score at the beginning of the 2009-2010 school year was 11, which is approximately mid-first-grade level. On the reading TAKS in the third grade, Ian scored 2249 on the modified test for special education students, which was a high enough score to pass. However during the time of this study, Ian was still classified as a struggling reader due to both his DRA and his qualification for Special Education. Like
Stephen, he often avoided activities that involved reading and writing. During Ian’s pre-interview, I asked him about reading at home, he replied, “at home I am not happy [reading] because I don’t get to watch enough T.V.” Due to the combination of all these factors, he was asked and agreed to participate in this study.

Personal Background and Teacher Observations

Ian and I got to know each other when he was in second grade. In August 2008, I started working with him when I was the Master Reading Teacher for the school. Daily during the first semester, I pulled him out during his language arts block and worked with him in leveled books using Guided Reading (Fountas & Pinnell, 1996). Although he made some progress, it was very slow and by the end of the year he was still below grade level. Despite his slow progress in tutoring, working with him was enjoyable, and he often shared many personal connections with the stories we read together. I got to know his family and his friends and Ian was always eager to talk to me about his latest news. Additionally, he was well liked by his other teachers and has many friends.

Like Florence, Ian was often concerned with pleasing others, both teachers and peers. Subsequently, he made a great effort to finish his work. But often he appeared uncomfortable when I tried to push him in his written responses to explain or elaborate in greater detail. When I did provide feedback that required some revision or extra effort, he sometimes would get frustrated to the point that he was overcome with anger. Typically after a few minutes, however, he would calm down and continue working. In addition at times (although rarely), these behaviors manifested into physical aggression such as hitting his desk or slamming his chair against his desk.
Over the three years, I observed that in conversations about unfamiliar or academic topics Ian tried to make personal connections that at times steered the conversation away from our topic. For example, in our small reading group in the regular classroom, he often told personal stories about his sister and family instead of reading. Many times I requested that he remember to stay on topic. Unfortunately, Ian rarely listened to my redirection, and at times I felt frustrated with this behavior. Additionally like Stephen, Ian avoided most academic tasks. During independent reading, he often spent so much time trying to find a book that he spent very little time actually reading.

White Teacher

Due to the fact that all of the participants were African American and that the pivotal discussions occurred when we discussed race, my background and racial experiences were essential to understanding the context of this study. However, race is a complicated topic and evokes mixed emotions. At times, during my conversations with the participants, I felt unsure how to respond. Sometimes I recognized a student’s insecurities and at other times I offered platitudes of racial equality in today’s world. Mica Pollock, an anthropologist who studied “race talk” in Columbus, a California high school, found that speakers’ (students, parents, teachers, and administrators) conversations about race imply that, “race doesn’t matter, but it does” (Pollock, 2004, p. 43). This paradox, Pollock contends, inhibits important conversations that need to take place in order to create more equitable schools and learning environments. Pollock (2004) explains,
improving “race relations” at Columbus would require that Columbus people replace both silence and easy summative statements of race’s relevance or irrelevance with more critical and time-consuming debate on the very complex question of how, exactly, race mattered to various institutional relationships.

(p. 47)

Unfortunately without these discussions and critical analysis of the role of race, larger institutions such as schools emphasize White values and discourses as “normal.” Never questioning this point of view devalues other races and cultures as foreign and “other.” Tatum (1997) explains,

Cultural racism, the cultural images and messages that affirm the assumed superiority of Whites and the assumed inferiority of people of color, is like smog in the air. Sometimes it is so thick that it is visible, other times it is less apparent, but always, day in and day out, we are breathing it in. None of us would introduce ourselves as “smog-breathers” (and most of us don’t want to be described as prejudiced), but if we live in a smoggy place, how can we avoid breathing the air? (p. 6)

This environment affects us all negatively both consciously and subconsciously. Clearly, as a White teacher working with children of color, I don’t want to breathe in smog or worse yet contribute to any child’s sense of racial inferiority. However, smog is elusive, sometimes invisible and I am sure over the years I have made mistakes. But to deny my behavior or have no compassion for myself or hope for change, further fuels the destruction of racism. Like Tatum (1997), I believe the best weapons against racism, are awareness and action. And despite my mistakes, I am inspired by Tatum’s (1997) words, “If we wait for perfection, we will never break the silence; the cycle of racism will continue uninterrupted” (p. 205). Thus as uneasy as I feel, I owe my student participants the same honesty and vulnerability they gave freely during our discussions. I hope that
my portrayal of myself is accurate, yet like the other participants there are contradictions in my story of self. I know about the inequities of this world and see myself as someone who has advocated for racial equality, yet clearly I have unknowingly benefited from being White and also, have been exposed to the smog of racism. My own daughter, a White, seven-year old second grader, came home from school recently after discussing slavery in class during Black history month and stated, “I don't like being White.” When I asked her why, she said, “Because we did bad things to Black people.” For my own children and the children in this study, I felt compelled to discuss race openly and end the silence that negatively impacts us all. Although topics about race can be both complicated and inflammatory, issues surrounding it undeniably permeate our thoughts, actions, and identities both individually and collectively.

Childhood

The majority of my life as a child and adolescent was spent in a predominantly White community with little or no contact with people from different backgrounds. My views about race mirrored my family’s views since the Civil Rights Movement equality had been achieved although Affirmative Action was still needed for some. As liberal Democrats and Irish Catholics, my family admired John F. Kennedy and his fight against segregation. I knew much less about Martin Luther King, Jr. and the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) and their role in overthrowing Jim Crow laws. Oblivious to the ongoing struggles and strengths of minority communities in the United States (U. S.), I passed through school without thinking critically about race. I believed what was presented to me from textbooks and teachers...
never noticing the voices of peoples left out of key historical events or current issues.
My general understanding from school was that racism was a thing of the past and that our country and people had moved on to the promise land, a melting pot where we are all equal and are given the same opportunities. It wasn’t until I moved overseas as an adult that my racial discourse was interrupted.

Peace Corps

My misconceptions about racial issues were exposed when I joined the Peace Corps in 1992. My assignment was teaching English as a Second Language to middle school, African students in a small remote village in Namibia. When I first arrived in the village of Ohalushu, I met my “adopted” family who gave me a room in the privileged brick house for adults on their large family farm. Although my room was comfortable and the family was kind and helpful, I felt completely out of place. I looked different, dressed differently, spoke a different language and was from a very different culture. The thought of staying two years as an outsider was overwhelming in the beginning and I longed for home. For the first time in my life, I began to consider how difficult it must be for African American students in predominantly White schools, or for recent Mexican immigrants to the U. S. who feel the pressure to learn a new language and discourse so that they can assimilate quickly into White American culture.

After my initial culture shock, I began to settle in. Fortunately, my African family and students were very patient and treated me very well. However, the outside community reacted differently to my presence. Discussions during my pre-service training in the weeks before I started at my site had prepared me to expect some
unprepared for the attention and the extent of the isolation I would experience publicly. As a White American, I was assigned a different, elevated status, almost like Hollywood royalty. This was especially welcoming considering that Namibia had just recently gained its independence from South Africa in 1990, and some still harbored resentments and anger towards White Afrikaners and Whites in general. Regardless of the history and my status, it was the first time in my life I was considered “other” and the experience was uncomfortable. I was stared at, followed, and my hair and skin were touched when I traveled by mini-bus, and in rare instances, elderly villagers scolded and shouted at me in the local language, Oshikwanyama. Strangers asked me if I had money, gifts or if I knew Michael Jackson. When I made a telephone call on the post office pay phone (once every few weeks) in the closest town Ondangwa, a small crowd of twenty or so would gather and move in closer (nonchalantly) to overhear my conversation and my American English. In all, I was rarely victimized or treated poorly.

Fortunately, after a few months, some of the more extreme attention dissipated, but I was struck on the day I left the village (except for my family and students) that I arrived as a tourist and left as a tourist, with people still staring, pointing and wondering why I was there. Experiencing life as “other” evoked visceral feelings that profoundly changed how I view the minority experience. I still reflect back on these days when I consider how minority students must feel in school. The lessons I learned during this time shaped and changed me as a person and as a teacher. My views about race were forever changed.
Teacher

When I returned state side, I decided to continue teaching and working with students who were in greatest need. I applied to and was accepted to the Urban Teacher Corps program at DePaul University in Chicago, which was an alternative certification program combined with a Masters of Elementary Education. I worked at some of the most challenging elementary schools in the city. Again I was the minority in my school with almost 99% of my students identified as African American. Hired as a second grade teacher, I was given the responsibility of helping 32 students (all but one or two reading two years below grade level) to pass a second grade state reading assessment.

Although my students were eager to learn, I was unsure where to begin. The textbook was inadequate to address their needs and although I used alternative resources, I felt like I was unable to unlock some of my student’s potential. In particular, I remember after one of my students was tested for special education services, the psychologists shared the Intelligence Quotient (IQ) results claiming he scored in the low 70’s. I remember arguing with the psychologist that he was much smarter than the test results indicated and for once I considered that the tests were biased.

Feeling poorly equipped for helping my students, I sought mentor teachers for ideas, attended related workshops, and consistently consulted teacher journals and curriculum guides for interventions. At the end of the year, although most made some progress they continued to perform below grade level on the state assessment. Dissatisfied with my students’ results, I sought better explanations and resources.
Graduate School

Graduate school opened my eyes to the racial inequities in school and the role and the consequences privileged mainstream discourses have on minority students. Exposure to authors such as Jonathan Kozol, Lisa Delpit, and Paulo Freire and Donald Macedo made me realize that as a representative and product of school and a member of the mainstream that my assessments about students’ progress were based on the school’s criteria, which can be unfair and biased. As a result, I have tried to locate bias in assessments as well as be more sensitive to the feelings as “other” minority students (or any students with differences) may have in school. Despite these major flaws and challenges, I believe that White teachers must be aware and take action against racism in order to provide an education that emancipates. In addition, educators must help students to make connections between literacy practices and individual power. Fostering these connections has required me to continually study, research, and reflect about my own practice, activities that I believe are essential to improving as a White educator working with minority students (and every student) and eliminating the smog of racism.

Teacher as Researcher

A participatory classroom offers chances to hear the largely silent voices of students from which teachers learn how to integrate subject matter into existing knowledge. (Shor, 1992, p. 54)

My role in the study was twofold: teacher-researcher, and participant. As a researcher, I observed the student participants, listened, took notes, and recorded conversations. I also reflected upon the students’ responses and brought in related
texts of interest. For example, when Florence brought up the event at the apartments in which her sister made the comment that she wished she was White; I brought in the study about African American girls preferring white dolls over African American dolls. Also, I brought in texts about Haiti and articles about endangered animals because the students were interested in these topics. In addition, I also acted as the teacher when I enforced the rules or took on the role of the expert when I provided the appropriate background information to understand difficult texts or defined unknown vocabulary.

In addition to acting as a teacher-researcher, I also was a participant. Knowing these students for years, their histories, their personalities, I saw the complexities of them as children and human beings. As a participant I would make comments, offer my opinion or ask provocative questions to encourage the students to think critically. Due to the fact that this study is grounded in sociocultural theory and the methodology utilizes microethnographic tools (discourse analysis), I saw my presence as an insider in the group and my comments as equally as important as those of the other participants. As Chapter 5 demonstrates, like the other participants, I took on many identities, took over the floor at times, and showed many contradictions.

Although I was insider in some aspects, in other ways I was an outsider. I am not African American nor can I fully understand what it means to be a minority. In addition, I have never struggled financially the way these students and their families have. As a result, one African-American teacher and one fellow African American university scholar reviewed my findings in order to provide trustworthiness for study. Both offered their insights and helped clarify and illuminate my students’ perspectives. Chapter 5 discusses their feedback and review of the data analysis in further detail.
Summary of Participants

The beginnings of the idea for this study emerged from the smaller pilot studies I conducted in my early years as a doctoral student. In retrospect, I realize that I acted with great naiveté as I initiated discussions about such complex and emotionally charged topics as race. Although I made mistakes, my relationships with many of the students survived these misunderstandings and heightened my awareness of unexpected outcomes. The knowledge I gained from this experience taught me that I could not pressure any participant to engage in these discussions, social actions or assume any identity (like a social activist) if they were unsure or hesitant. In order to truly engage, learners required the utmost sensitivity and understanding of each child’s own unique situation and background.

Self-reflection about these events made me rethink how to proceed with critical literacy and social action more thoughtfully. In the beginning of this study, I indeed still harbored other preconceived notions about how this project might progress. One of these misconceptions included my definitions of critical literacy and social action. My first definition of critical literacy included the analyses of “texts.” Texts, in my opinion, required a written text authored by an outsider often a professional writer, like a reporter or an author. Therefore, in the beginning I envisioned the students reading “texts” and analyzing line-by-line for bias, statements made in which other people, like them, were stereotyped or their voices and perspectives were consistently and suspiciously absent. As in my reified and traditional definition of “text,” I also had a similar one-dimensional view of what constituted as a social action. In particular, I believed that social action should include a tangible product or public showing. Moreover, I believed it was
necessary for a manifestation of an outside action beyond the school. If the goal was for students to realize their individual power, then I thought that it was necessary for them to contact those with power locally (beyond school) so that they could see how to make changes in their community (if deemed necessary by the student). My greatest motivation at the time was the study by Powell, Cantrell, and Adams, (2001) in which teachers and students worked together to stop the strip mining of Black Mountain in Kentucky. This outside action significantly impacted the people of the community inspiring activism and resistance against larger capitalistic and economic forces. Through galvanizing politicians and local leaders, the students’ efforts resulted in the creation of a park reserve to protect the acreage slotted for strip mining. Armed with both of these definitions of “texts” and “social actions,” I set out to “do” critical literacy with “texts” with an end result of a “social action” product. However, these preconceived notions changed and demanded redefining over the course of the study.

Context of the Study

This section of the chapter situates the study by describing the physical space, the topics, how we established the rules, and the overall decision-making process.

*The Physical Space*

The student participants came from different fourth grade sections and met in my fourth grade classroom during their lunch. Although the students’ lunch times varied, we were mostly able to meet and discuss topics for at least 20 minutes. In the beginning, the students and I sat on my 5’ by 8’ rug towards the front entrance of my classroom.
This however, did not last for long due to the fact that I felt it contributed to the chaos of the group dynamics. As a result after meeting for approximately two weeks in October on the rug, I decided to move the group back towards the rear of the classroom and have all participants sit at my kidney bean shaped table (Figure 1).

![Figure 1. Diagram of seating placement during meetings.](image)

Even though this move helped change some of the dynamics, I still felt that it was very difficult to manage in this context. Although I told them that I wanted the group to decide how to run things, I felt that when I tried that the first few weeks all of our conversations deteriorated into silliness and shouting contests.

The Rules

Empowerment does not mean students can do whatever they want in a Classroom. (Shor, 1992, p. 16)

When I first met with the participants in September, I was nervous about both the dynamics of the group and my role as a participant. Over the years teaching students
from a wide variety of backgrounds, I had found a need to present myself as in charge, an authority figure, establishing clear yet respectful boundaries between child and adult starting on the first day. However, after reading Freire and Macedo (1987) work, I had the impression that the teacher should act as a guide, tapping into both the students’ needs and interests within a democratic, anti-egalitarian framework. And although Freire had worked with the adult learner, I strived to reach this utopian model with my fourth graders, letting go of the teacher as authoritarian and the traditional role of teacher and student.

Although I started with this teacher-as-facilitator model, this changed once the group began meeting in early October, after I had conducted all of the pre-interviews. Our first meeting place was on my carpet placed close to the windows at the front of my classroom. Initially, I thought if we all sat on the floor this would not only symbolically represent me (the teacher) as a peer, but foster intimacy among the group members. Unfortunately, the desired effect of the teacher as a peer actually added to the chaotic atmosphere of the group’s dynamics. Instead of cooperative discussion with equitable turn taking, students began shouting over each other, so much so that I often had to take control of the group to prevent complaints from neighboring classrooms. Field notes from 10-26-09 stated, “Difficult to settle the students down,” and, “[I’m] concerned about controlling the group and keeping them focused; some silliness from Stephen and Ian.” In addition, we couldn’t seem to decide on topics and several students attempted to capture the group’s attention through shouting loud jokes or telling humorous stories.

By the end of October, I decided that I had to intervene if I wanted to accomplish the goals of the study. After reflecting upon the field notes, I also realized that the
group’s dynamic made me feel uncomfortable, probably much more than the other participants. Thus, I made the executive decision and relocated the group to the kidney bean shaped table at the back of the classroom. This immediately helped calm the group and for a while, this change seemed sufficient enough to focus the group. However other issues developed, one of which was the choice of topic or who should control the floor. As a result, I had all the students write down rules they thought were important to facilitate orderly and democratic discussions. After the students generated the ideas, we discussed and voted on the rules we felt were most important. These became the rules of our group:

- No horsing or playing around
- Unless you are tardy, come to group
- No interrupting
- No complaining
- Decide by voting
- Stay on topic
- Use inside voices and respectful talk

After instituting the rules, the students’ conversations (in general) were more focused and productive. Selma confirmed the necessity of the rules in her post interview,

... But the one thing she DOES do in the lunch group is when we get off topic when De’Angelo and Devin get off topic and talk to each other, she’ll remind us about the rules. Like we made up the rules and we have to follow them [Transcript 5-27].

Equally important, I felt more comfortable and able to act as a facilitator than authoritarian trying to control the group.
The Topics and Social Actions

The teacher brings lesson plans, learning methods, personal experience, and academic knowledge to class but negotiates the curriculum with the students and begins with their language, themes, and understandings. (Shor, 1992, p. 16)

Educator, social activist, co-author and colleague of Paulo Freire, Ira Shor suggests three possible types of “thematic options” for encouraging critical thinking: generative, topical, and academic themes. Generative themes come from the students’ backgrounds, experiences, and culture and, “express problematic conditions of daily life,” (Shor, 1992, p. 55). Both the topical and the academic themes come from the teacher and consist of larger issues such as international crises or global problems. The teacher introduces the theme, poses the problem, and attempts to negotiate the curriculum democratically with the students. Shor (1992) contends that all three have the possibility for student empowerment, however for topical and academic themes, “The risk is that outside themes brought in by the teacher will change democratic relations into unilateral authority, replacing mutual inquiry with one-way teacher-talk,” (p. 56). In previous years, I have presented topical themes to my students in an effort to create and encourage critical conversations to inspire social action. However, in earlier pilot studies (mentioned in the background of the study section), some students resisted or were disinterested in our discussions and/or the topics. Shor (1992) explains:

The syllabus deployed by the teacher gives students a prolonged encounter with structured knowledge and social authority. However, it is the students who decide to what extent they will take part in the syllabus and allow it to form them. Many students do not like the knowledge process or roles set out for them in class. In reaction, they drop out or withdraw into passivity or silence in the classroom. Some become self-educated; some sabotage the curriculum by misbehaving. (p. 14)
In an effort to engage all the participants, I wanted to follow the students’ lead and use generative themes in this study. As Freire and Macedo (1987) assert, “The teacher cannot put it together for the student; that is the student’s creative task” (p. 35). I hoped that if the students chose the topics, they would likely be more invested, enthusiastic, and committed.

**Examples of Students Engaged in Critical Literacy Practices**

When I first met with all the participants in the group, I told the students that our mission was to find solutions to problems they identified in the school, the greater community, and the world. This would involve reading, writing, researching, discussing and committing to social actions in order to change things in their community for the better. In order to inspire students to think creatively, I read examples of other students around the world who have made a difference in their communities. Two books in particular were very helpful in providing illustrations of young and successful social activists around the world, *It’s Our World, Too: Young People Who Are Making a Difference How They Do It and How You Can, Too* by Philip Hoose and *The Kid’s Guide to Social Action* by Barbara Lewis. In particular, I shared stories of African Americans and other minority students who were leaders of change so that the students could see themselves as activists. Selma in particular was impressed by Dwaina Brook’s story in *It’s Our World, Too: Young People Who Are Making a Difference How They Do It and How You Can, Too* by Philip Hoose. An elementary student and African American, Dwaina noticed many people in line at a local soup kitchen and decided to do something about the problem. Beginning at home, Dwaina made sandwiches and took
them to her local shelter. When she informed some of her friends, they asked if they could help. Excited about the opportunity, Dwaina organized a sandwich-making group at her house that grew over time. Over several years, Dwaina and her friends ended up providing thousands of meals for needy people in the area.

Inspired by Dwaina’s story, Selma, Hannah, and Florence all seemed interested in helping the homeless. Hannah was most interested because she was from New Orleans and said that there were many people there who needed our help. Ian and Stephen, on the other hand, were more interested in helping endangered animals through the World Wildlife Fund. So, I told the students that we would continue to research our topics and that after we had studied the issues, the two groups could either work on their separate topics, or they could vote and choose one topic they wanted to study. They chose to work separately.

Reading Texts and Social Action Projects with the Group

After several sessions of students researching their topics on the computers in my room, I realized that there were two problems-- the students had a great deal of difficulty navigating the internet without my help, which in turn led to the second problem, off task behavior. As a result, I told the students that after reading about the different topics, they would have to vote and decide which one they wanted to pursue further. Subsequently, I started to bring in research from the internet. This research presented its own problem because, although I made copies for the students, the reading levels were typically too difficult. In the beginning, the students did try to read on their own, but quickly enough the students were understandably lost and asking for help and explanations. From this developed our protocol of my reading almost all the
research and explaining any new terminology. When I did find a few articles that were on-level, most of the group still typically avoided looking back in the text and asked me questions instead. Therefore due to a multitude of reasons, I decided that we had to work on one project at a time.

After a sufficient amount of time looking at the research, I asked the students to vote and prioritize their topics. Helping endangered animals was first, followed by homelessness, then vandalism and theft. At first, the group worked easily together. Students wrote letters to Sarah Palin about the killing of wolves and seemed excited about sending the letters to Alaska. As a group, we decided to move along and work on homelessness. However at the last minute, Selma decided that she wanted to do something about the vandalism she had seen around the school [Field notes, 10-28].

Selma seems to influence the others. She was originally for helping the Homeless in New Orleans, then in front of the group she suddenly changes her mind and said vandalism was more important to her because she had seen what vandals had done where she lived [Field notes, 10-28].

Just as quickly, Hannah changed her mind and said that she had just returned from New Orleans and that, “There weren’t as many homeless she saw, so maybe we don’t need to worry about this” [Field notes10-28]. As a result, all the girls decided to scrap the homeless topic and work on vandalism.

The topic of vandalism continued through the month of November and December. The students started writing letters, but the boys had difficulty completing the project. Most of the time, the boys asked me how to spell words and appeared frustrated getting their ideas down on paper. Stephen commented, “My hands hurt”
[Field notes, 12-14]. Thus, I decided to compose a group letter and I had the students dictate their ideas to me and then add their signature at the end.

After vandalism, our next topic became helping people in Haiti. Again, the same pattern emerged with Selma’s interests dominating the group’s topics. Instead of working on homelessness, Selma brought up the topic of Haiti because she had just watched a program about the earthquake disaster. Similar to prior events, the students in the group switched their preference and decided that they wanted to help out people in Haiti instead.

It was during these discussions about racial issues surrounding Haiti that the students made personal connections about race. Florence’s comment about her sister’s statement that she wished that she was White was one of the most poignant statements made at that time. I thought that if Florence’s sister made comments like this maybe other group members had feelings about race they hadn’t ever expressed in our group. As a result, I introduced the related research of a doll study (Edney, 2006). In this study, a group of African American girls in New York were asked to choose the pretty doll and were given the choice of an African American and White doll (Edney, 2006). Overwhelmingly, the African American children picked the White doll. I brought this the article about this study to the group to discuss the findings. This study and the conversations about race became the focus of this study.

The student participants eagerly engaged in this topic and looked at race problems more critically than prior events. A flurry of conversation erupted from our discussions and the students made many personal connections. Thus, I analyzed all transcripts and interactional events related to race when answering the research
questions. Although toward the end of the study, the group did acquire a speaker from the Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (SPCA) to inform the fourth grade about animal abuse and neglect in the area (another social action related to the boys’ animal concerns), the conversations about race engaged all the participants in a way that the other topics did not. Therefore, all discussions including race warranted further investigation and became the focal point of the study.

Summary

In a review of the literature, much of the research supports critical literacy practices in school. However, most of the research primarily was conducted in middle and high schools. Therefore, more research is needed with students in the intermediate grades, and in particular those most vulnerable to academic failure, students who struggle in school.

Thus, the purpose of this qualitative study was to see what happens when I (as the language arts teacher) and five, fourth grade, African American students, who struggle in learning how to read grade level texts engage in critical literacy practices and social action projects in a small group. Additionally, I analyzed these engagements for our (the participants’) tacit and overt understandings of race, power, and identity, due to the fact that many of our most significant conversations were about race.

This chapter’s purpose was to provide a rich background of the participants and myself and to explain the context of the study. It is important to note that at the time of this study, I had known and worked with most of these students for three years. Although I describe each student academically and personally, it was difficult to
summarize our relationships in a page or two. However, Chapter 5 provides more information about the student participants through the analysis of our interactions throughout the year. Additionally, Chapter 4 explicates all the steps involved in the methodology and provides more information about the site of the study and supports over the course of the study, the interactions and discussions about race increased. All the students participated and shared personal connections to racism in the last two phases. Specific patterns in the findings are described in Chapters 5 and 6.
CHAPTER 4

METHODOLOGY

The purpose of this study was to explore what happens when minority students who struggle with reading in school are invited to participate in critical literacies and social action projects in a fourth grade small group. Additionally, realizing the importance of my contribution and involvement in the study, I also wanted to see how my participation (as a White teacher working with African American students) affected the interactions of the group. Therefore, I also investigated the role race, power and identity played in the group’s responses including my own as a participant and teacher-researcher. Analyzing these responses required me to tease out the participants’ subjectivities, both tacit and overt knowledge (including my own), and to examine the participants’ interpretations of events in our small group discussions as well as consider larger, outside influences such as: home, the institution of school, and the outside world.

Thus, over the course of an entire school year (September, 2009 – May, 2010), I met with five participants who struggle in school, three girls and two boys all African-American in a small group and read about topics they were interested in studying and injustices they wanted to change. I recorded and analyzed our discussions. This chapter explains the methodology I used to explore the following research questions:

1. What happens when fourth grade readers who struggle with reading (and their teacher) are invited to participate in critical literacy and social action projects?
2. What do these engagements reveal about our (the participants’) tacit and overt understandings of race, power, and identity?
Additionally this chapter provides the research context of the study. The following topics are addressed: the school context, the methodology including data collection, data analysis, alternative interpretations, trustworthiness and lastly, a summary of this chapter.

The Research Design

Previous experiences with critical literacy and social actions were the basis for my continued interest and exploration in this area. The methods used to analyze this study and the subsequent findings are reported in Chapters 4, 5, and 6. In order to delve into these complex social worlds and look at power and identity, qualitative research and specifically microethnography best suited this study. This methodology allowed me to understand and probe into the participants' worlds with an emic perspective, while using the tools of discourse analysis to unveil multiple meanings.

Rationale for the Design

Qualitative research and, in particular, microethnography best fit the research questions for this study. In order to understand the complexity of the students' responses to critical literacy and social action, it was essential that I discover the participants' subjectivities, tacit knowledge, and interpretations of events. Due to the fact that each research context and situation is unique, interest in study replication, numeric data, predictions, and confirming hypotheses (concerns for quantitative research) was not warranted. In contrast, the goals of qualitative research are to understand “the meaning of human action” (Schwandt, 2007, p. 248). Thus, due to my question and my interests as a researcher, a qualitative study was most appropriate.
Microethnography, like ethnography, requires “firsthand experience” and seeks to understand “particular social or cultural phenomena” (Schwandt, 2007, p. 93). Both methodologies seek to capture the participants’ perspectives, which required the researcher to delve into and make sense of these complex social worlds. Consequently, the researcher must participate and/or interact with members in a natural setting while attending to and analyzing these interactions for meaning. Due to the fact that I have known most of the participants for three years and that the study lasted for the majority of the 2009-2010 school year, I was better able to attain an emic perspective through the development of our relationships over time.

One tool that aided in analyzing our interactions at both the micro (how language and social practices contribute to a particular set of human interactions locally) and macro (outside social, cultural, and political influences or “broader contexts” that contribute to the language and social practices of human interactions) level was discourse analysis, the primary instrument in microethnography. Discourse analysis facilitates finding multiple meanings in lived classroom experiences and, “builds on sociolinguistic ethnography (also called the ethnography of communication)” and looks closely at language and interactions between participants (Bloome, Carter, Christian, Madrid, Otto, Shuart-Faris & Smith, 2008, p, xv). Thus, classroom interactions are not encapsulated, isolated events, but are unique phenomena based on the people, their backgrounds and experiences. Further, this methodology not only looks at language in social situations but also considers the larger social, cultural, and political influences that shape these interactions (Bloome, 1981). This focus, additionally, allowed for insights into how race, power, and identity work within these processes.
Within this micro perspective, the social identities of the participants and the power burgeoning between these identities play a significant role in both the language and interactions during social and literacy events in the classroom (Bloome et al., 2008). From this point of view people are viewed as, “complex, multidimensional actors who together use what is given by culture, language and economic capital to create new meanings…” (Bloome et al., 2008, xvi). Thus, identity is not static, but often constantly changing due to the actions and reactions of others in a particular context. Bloome et al. (2008) explain that the educational researcher conducting microethnography considers participants identities and how these shifts in these identities affect their participation in a group.

Power, as mentioned previously, in a microethnography is seen as “process” not “product.” From this view, power can vary based on the context and participants, and, “is [both] contested and dialogic” (Bloome et al., 2008). Additionally, power is present in any and all social interactions. Within schools, however, power manifests as “knowledge” typically academic in nature. Those participants with “academic” knowledge tend to have the power in a school context (Bloome et al., 2008). Therefore, students who struggle in reading grade level texts in a language arts classroom often feel powerless and often are considered lacking “academic” knowledge in this context. Power and identity analyses for learners who struggle in school are particularly important to understand considering the long-term consequences of academic failure.

Another purpose for choosing microethnography as the methodology was that it complemented the theoretical foundations of the study. The purpose of this connection was to prevent the separation of theory from methods, which can result in “researchers
engaging in unreflected action…” (Bloome et al., 2008, xviii). In contrast, when the theoretical and methodological components are aligned, there is a close and complimentary relationship between the theories in the research about classroom interactions, the method and procedure of discourse analysis and the “implicit theories” of the researcher and participants (Bloome et al., 2008, xviii).

Despite the analytical methodology of examining important roles such as power and identity, the findings from a single microethnographic analysis of the data cannot be considered as the “true” interpretation of a particular literacy or social event. And even though in this study multiple analyses were conducted, the sheer nature and complexity of the events, language, and texts makes it impossible to find the “truth” of the events. Thus, although qualitative research can offer insights into the complexity of human interactions, no research can completely explain all the intricacies of this type of event.

The Research Setting/Profile of the School

This study took place with fourth grade students who attended Howard Elementary (a pseudonym), which is located in an urban school district in the southwestern part of the United States (U. S.). At the time of the study, the district served approximately 160,000 students from diverse populations (64% Hispanic, 29.7% African-American, 5.1% White and 1.1% Asian and American Indian) and spent an estimated $11,000 yearly per pupil (District website, 2007).

I chose this school for three reasons: first, I have worked in this school for 11 years and know the faculty, students, and parents well. Second, the school is conveniently located within a half of mile of my home and third, I was given access by
the principal to conduct the study. Most students attending Howard, at the time of the study, lived in the surrounding neighborhood, although there were approximately 100 transfer students (less than one third of the students) from neighboring schools. Howard’s demographics and size have changed dramatically during the last few years due to a city bond approval, which allowed for new school openings relieving the overcrowding in portables from an additional 200 Howard students bused in from areas as far as ten miles away. Most of the students bused during the 2007-2008 school year were either Hispanic or African-American from economically disadvantaged backgrounds. Of the 350 students, 28% were African American, 32% were Hispanic, 37% were White and a little over 2% were Asian and American Indian. In addition, 57% of the students were economically disadvantaged, fourteen percent were limited English proficient (LEP), and 11% were classified as special education.

At the time of the study, Howard’s test scores had increased significantly over the previous two years. Several factors may have contributed to these changes: a newly appointed, test focused principal, the qualification of several struggling students for Special Education services (who were now exempt from the on-level, state test), and the hard work and effort of teachers and students. Table 3 reflects the participants’ score on the state reading test for third graders, called the Texas Assessment of Knowledge and Skills or (TAKS) administered May 2008-2009.
Table 3

*Texas Assessment of Knowledge and Skills for Third Grade Reading 2008-09*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Students</th>
<th>Enrollment</th>
<th>% Met Standard</th>
<th>% Commended</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>All Students</td>
<td>61</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>68.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>NI</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>72.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>NI</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>65.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Native American</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asian</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>African American</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>57.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hispanic</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>57.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anglo, not Hispanic</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>82.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Econ. Disadvantaged</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>62.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Limited English Proficient</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>*</td>
<td>*</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: *(There were not enough students in this subgroup to count)*  *(NI = No information given; N/A = Not applicable)*

Five years ago, Howard received the state ranking acceptable; meaning between 70-80% of the students (including all subgroups) passed the TAKS test in all subject areas. In the 2006-2007 school year, 90-100% of all the students passed the state test in all subjects changing the school’s state ranking to exemplary. Although according to the rating our school is considered high performing, there are still students (most of whom are minority and poor) who struggle with reading, school year after year and often “fail” the state reading assessments. Additionally, as shown in Table 3, there is still quite a discrepancy between the "commended" performance of the Anglo students and the minority and economically disadvantaged students. Serving as the master reading teacher and language arts teacher over the years, the majority of my time has been
devoted to helping the readers who struggle in school-based literacies. Most of these students by fourth grade, after years of failure (based on state reading assessments) often have little confidence in their academic abilities and as a result, avoid reading written texts in school as much as possible.

In this study, students were selected to participate in a small group based on their meeting the qualifications of a reader who struggles in school. In August 2009, there were 48 total fourth graders, 13 African American, 21 Whites, 13 Hispanics and 1 classified as other. Of all the fourth graders, five students (Tina, Selma, Stephen, Ian, and Florence) met at least one of the following criteria: (1) Failed the third grade reading TAKS in the 2008-2009 school year; (2) Scored below grade level on the DRA (Developmental Reading Assessment); (3) Considered at risk of failing the fifth grade reading TAKS test according to the results of the Texas Projection Measure (TPM) from the 2008-2009 TAKS data. All five students were at varying levels, although all were struggling in school. The two boys, Stephen and Ian were classified as learning disabled and placed in special education and read below the second grade. The other participants read at least at the third grade level. In the spring semester, Hannah replaced Tina because she transferred to another school. And although Hannah did not technically meet the criteria as a reader who struggles, Hannah had her own personal difficulties that inhibited her academic progress. Table 4 reflects the identifiers.
Table 4

Participants’ School-based Identifiers

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Ethnicity</th>
<th>Special Education</th>
<th>Econ. Disadvantaged</th>
<th>STAR Fluency Test</th>
<th>DRA Running Record</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Selma</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>African American</td>
<td>No, but dyslexic</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>2.7</td>
<td>3rd grade (2nd grade and 7 months)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stephen</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>African American</td>
<td>Yes, and dyslexic</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>1.2</td>
<td>1st grade (1st grade and 2 months)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ian</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>African American</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>1.3</td>
<td>1st grade (1st grade and 3 months)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hannah</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>African American</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>3.7</td>
<td>4th grade (3rd grade and 7 months)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Florence</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>African American</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>2.8</td>
<td>2nd grade (2nd grade and 7 months)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Although in the beginning of the fourth grade, Ms. B’s small group met only once a week, students were so enthusiastic they often came more frequently. The group met in my classroom and typically brought their lunches to my back table. Students usually
ate and talked when they first arrived about whatever they wanted to. Next, we worked on the critical literacy and social action projects according to the interests of the students. The meetings were audio taped and students kept journals in order to record their thoughts and responses when necessary. As the researcher/teacher, I also kept a reflexive journal to record my impressions and experiences in order to provide another data source for triangulation.

Gaining Entry

Although I have worked at Howard since the fall of 1999, I still was required to go through all the district procedures from the Evaluation and Accountability Department. I began with a discussion with my principal in which I told her briefly that I was planning to conduct a study with a small group of struggling readers. Initially, (although not explicitly stated) I sensed some hesitation on her part. I assumed that it was likely due to the fact that she was concerned that the study might interfere with my regular instruction. However, once I explained that the study would be conducted during lunch, she seemed reassured that my activities with the students would not disrupt the whole group instruction or the inclusion support for the students in special education. She agreed, and I contacted the School Independent School District Department of Evaluation and Accountability for the necessary protocol for research approval.

In contrast, some of my teacher colleagues reacted a little differently. Concurrently while letting my principal know of my plans, I also notified the teachers on my grade level team and a few other teachers and support staff. Although they seemed to be supportive, I did not elaborate on my plans because I discerned over the years
that some of my colleagues were uncomfortable with my research interests. In particular, conversations about race and some of the research about resulting problems between White teachers and students who are minority or economically disadvantaged appeared to make some of the White teachers very uncomfortable. Furthermore over the years, a few individuals explicitly had made racist remarks or jokes about parents and students.

When the study began and the participants started coming to my room during lunch, some of the teachers gave me disapproving or puzzling looks, which I ignored. Primarily, I wanted to protect my students’ identities but also, I did not want to engage in any uncomfortable conversations about my topic. Thus in general, I spoke about my study very little in school with the exception of one teacher who was my close friend and an African American woman. Throughout the study, I would speak with her about some of the conversations we had in our small group. She provided invaluable insights (discussed in detail in the trustworthiness section) and I could tell that she thought my research was important and relevant.

After these initial discussions, the next step involved completing a research proposal and submitting it to the Research Review Board (RRB), a branch of the Evaluation and Accountability Department, for approval. The Research Review Board expects the research to meet the following qualifications: “direct educational value to the district and not just to the profession of education in general; be minimally disruptive to the educational process; manifest a sound research methodology; and comply with current privacy laws.” After my approval, I completed the University of North Texas Institutional Review Board (UNT IRB) application after two months I received the
approval necessary to start my study (Appendix A). I subsequently notified the principal of the approval and set out to determine possible participants for the study.

Confidentiality

Both the participating school district and the UNT IRB required the strictest confidentiality in order to protect the participants. Pseudonyms were used to identify participants for all collected data including journals, audiotapes, interviews, and artifacts. All identifiable data was only accessible by the principal investigator and was stored in a locked file cabinet. The purpose of the audiotaping was to provide a transcription of the information discussed in the interview and to assure the accuracy of the reporting of that information. My advisor and I were the only individuals who had access to the audiotapes and transcriptions.

In addition, all coding involved pseudonyms for the participants. Identifiable data will be disposed by shredding all printed documents at the end of three years. The file shredder software, Delete Files Permanently, an advanced files shredder that permanently deletes files from PCs, will be used to digitally shred from computer hard drives and other electronic storage devices all files containing identifiable data. In addition, all identifiable data will be destroyed by 05/15/13.

Instruments, Materials and Data Collection Methods

The data collection methods in this study fell in line with the tradition of qualitative research (e.g., Heath, 1983; Compton-Lilly, 2003; Willis, 1997). From the constructivist perspective, knowledge or realities are created according to the participants, their
interactions, and the context. Therefore, I was interested in the naturalistic setting in which people interact and respond to each other. In order to achieve reliability and validity, I provided rich, authentic observations, collected data from a variety of sources, and triangulated the data to confirm emerging patterns and concepts.

Data Collection Timeline and Sources

Data collection began on September 30, 2009 and ended June 1, 2010. Over this period of time, our small group met 49 times and I began taping our discussions October 29, 2009. In total, there were 16 hours and 33 minutes of audiotape. In order to observe and analyze participants’ responses to critical literacy and lived experiences, I used multiple data sources including: audiotapes, fieldnotes, interviews, and student artifacts. In addition, these sources allowed me to triangulate the data in order to confirm or deny emerging patterns and capture students’ responses to critical literacy and social action.

Audiotape

Recordings were the foundation of the data collection phase. They provided documentation for all the interactions and helped me when I needed to remember details while layering the fieldnotes with further observations a second time. I collected over fifty recordings over the course of the year and transcribed them all. Although shy at first, the students soon forgot about the digital recorder and acted normally. I reviewed the recordings nightly and weekly. Audio recordings were also used in the pre
and post interviews. I decided to use recordings instead of videotaping because the audiotaping was less intrusive than videotaping.

Fieldnotes

One of the primary methods used for data collection in ethnography is fieldnotes. Fieldnotes are accounts describing experiences and observations the researcher made while, “participating in an intense and involved manner” (Emerson, Fretz, & Shaw, 1995). The goal of these accounts is to comprehend the member’s viewpoint, which requires regular observation and documentation. For the purpose of this study, I took fieldnotes during our lunch sessions and reviewed these notes daily and weekly. Following Emerson et al. (1995) protocol, I did the following: jotted down informal observations reserved from evaluations initially, then reread the notes later and added more detailed observations and thoughts. Sections on the fieldnotes form included: note-taking, note-making, methodological notes, and pedagogical notes. Note-taking includes as much as possible basic descriptions of the events without judgment or evaluation (Frank, 1999). However, in the note-making section after I sufficiently completed and layered the note-taking section, I began to make some tentative explanations, conclusions or possible connections to our discussion (Frank, 1999). Of course the conclusions were not considered complete until multiple explanations and fieldnotes were explored and analyzed. Additionally in the fieldnotes form, the methodology section included notes about possible ways to look at the fieldnotes including tentative codes (see Appendix B). In the pedagogical section, I wrote notes or considerations that included ideas for the next meeting such as the text introduced was
too difficult, find an alternative for the next meeting. After completing these initial observations, I reviewed them and layered the notes, as needed with multiple perspectives in order to move beyond initial reactions and consider how others might be interpreting the events (Emerson et al., 1995).

**Student Journals**

Throughout many of the studies from the literature review, writing was utilized as a means of self-reflection, communication, and a tool for social action. Several of the studies utilized student journals as a means of both reflecting and responding to the literature read, but also it served as a place to record action plans and other related ideas. In Boomer (2004), students from grade three to grade twelve used the writer’s notebook as a discussion board to write about concerns and problems that needed an answer. In McGregor (2000), high school students used journals as a reflection, describing the various social action experiences and the outcomes of their Social Justice and Equity group formed to find solutions to the inequitable power relationship between students and staff. For younger children Comber, Thomason, and Wells’ (2001), journals acted as a place to brainstorm ideas and problems both through writing and drawing.

Student journals in this study were used similarly for the aforementioned studies. The journals were used as a place for free response and brainstorming ideas for possible social actions. The students also took the journals home and a few students wrote poems about the topics. However, I did observe that several of the students much preferred speaking and thinking verbally over writing down their thoughts.
**Student Interviews**

Students were interviewed individually before and after the study. Originally, these interviews were used to document any changes in students’ responses towards critical literacy and social action projects and literacy in general. Questions addressed regarding the students literacy practices at home and at school and how the small group literacy practices were similar or different compared to the regular English language arts classroom. Specific questions are detailed in Appendix C. All the interviews were conducted individually and privately. In the initial interview, I interviewed all the student participants. In the post interview, I decided to have two other teachers interview the students individually in order to avoid any pressure or influence on the students’ responses due to my presence. The volunteer teachers were trained on how to administer the questions.

**Student Artifacts**

Student artifacts were also used to provide triangulation for patterns evidenced in the other data sources. Artifacts included posters, letters, fliers, or other writings that exhibit, portray, or connected to the critical literacy and social action projects.

**Procedures: Data Analysis**

Purposeful sampling was utilized in the selection of participants in the beginning. Five fourth-grade students were identified to participate who met at least one of the following criteria: (1) Failed the third grade reading TAKS in the 2008-2009 school year; (2) Scored below grade level on the DRA (developmental reading assessment); and
(3) Considered at risk of failing the fifth grade reading TAKS test according to the results of the Texas projection measure (TPM) from the 2008-2009 TAKS data. However, after Tina quit, I allowed Hannah to join the small group. Although she did not meet the criteria as a struggling reader, Hannah had other emotional challenges and asked repeatedly to join the group. Finally, after several requests along with Tina’s departure, I allowed Hannah to join the group.

As the fourth grade reading and writing teacher, I had access to participants meeting the criteria for this study. Purposeful sampling was utilized in the selection of participants.

I sought approval from participants that would provide rich data for the study. Ultimately participants were selected based on their willingness to participate (and their parents/guardians) in the study. Initial contact with potential participants and their parents/guardians was conducted face to face.

During initial contact, potential participants (and their parents/guardians) were given a verbal introduction and overview of the study, its purpose and significance. They were told that the purpose of this research is to examine how readers who struggle in reading respond to critical literacy and social actions (if at all) within the contexts of their multiple worlds in order to bring their voices to the forefront and obtain a better understanding of their language and literacy experiences and needs. Potential participants were told that they could share their perceptions and responses through discussions and interviews throughout the fall 2009 semester.

Participants were told that this study is significant because research about how minority students who struggle in reading respond to the combination of critical literacy
and social action (if at all) at the elementary level is lacking. In addition, little research examines how these responses relate to students’ identity, agency, or power or how these responses translate to other contexts (if at all). Participants shared their perspectives about critical literacy and social action based on their personal experiences. Participants (and their parents/guardians) interested were given consent forms. Informed consent was obtained from all participants (and their parents/guardians) through oral and written explanation of the study, careful explanation that participating in the study was completely voluntary, and disclosure that participants could withdraw from the study at any time, for any reason.

First, as required, I reviewed existing student records of the incoming fourth graders at the beginning of the year. This helped me identify possible participants. I gathered further information from participants about reading levels from the DRA in order to determine the best possible participants.

During the study, students discussed and worked on projects in class and met once or more weekly during lunch in an open format to discuss the critical literacy readings and social action projects. These meetings were audiotaped for the purpose of accurately recording conversations.

Participants who chose to do so recorded their experiences in a reflective journal, which I provided. Participants wrote in whatever format they felt comfortable, and were able to use poems, songs, or other creative means to tell the stories of their language and literacy experiences. Artifacts also included posters, letters, fliers, or other writings.

The procedures I used to lead the participants’ discussions evolved during the first two months of meetings. As recommended by eminent critical literacy scholars like
Freire and Shor (1983), I followed the participants’ lead and subsequently brought in texts that were related, controversial, and provided multiple political perspectives in hopes of sparking the use of critical literacy. In our previous discussions about other topics (like animal cruelty, and school vandalism), I discovered that much of the related text was too difficult for some of the group members, especially the two boys, Stephen and Ian, who read on a first and second grade level, respectively. Although the other participants could decode and comprehend the material, it was clear to me that the group preferred me read and explain the material to them followed by discussing the topic. In fact, whenever I requested that students refer back to the text or read some of the texts, there was a distinct avoidance of this task and instead the participants would switch back to oral discussion again and again. Therefore, after the first two months of small group, the protocol became for me to bring in related texts, provide the necessary background, define unknown words, read and explain the text to the group, and then discuss the material as a group.

Data Analysis

Data sources were analyzed in several different ways. Marshall and Rossman (2007) state analysis usually develops, “into seven phases: (1) Organizing the data and identifying relevant data; (2) Immersion in the data; (3) Generating categories and themes; (4) Coding the data; (5) Offering interpretations through analytic memos; (6) Searching for alternative understandings; and (7) Writing the report or other format for presenting the study” (p. 157).

Organizing the data, the first phase, consists of looking back over the data and categorizing the various data sources either chronologically, or by participants or any
other way that helps the researcher “clean up” the collected information (Marshall & Rossman, 2006). This may include creating charts with needed identifiers (such as participant’s names, dates, locations, etc.) so that the data can easily be located when needed. The second phase, immersion in the data, entails multiple readings of the data. Generating categories and themes, the third phase, involves meticulous study for reoccurring patterns in the participants’ responses. However, it is important that the researcher only consider the patterns identified as tentative and not absolute at this stage (Marshall & Rossman, 2006).

Marshall and Rossman (2006) state the fourth phase, coding the data, “is the formal representation of analytic thinking” (p. 160), and it involves coding the categories and themes. Coding can consist of words and phrases to characterize what is seen in the data. Similar to the themes and categories phase, the initial coding can change based on multiple re-readings. After the coding, writing the analytic memos is the next phase, which they recommend should continue throughout all parts of the study if possible. Analytic memos can consist of “notes, reflective memos, thoughts, and insights and is invaluable for generating the unusual insights that move the analysis from the mundane and obvious to the creative” (Marshall & Rossman, 2006, p. 161).

Following the phases of categories and themes and codes, the researcher can begin to offer interpretations. This is the point in which the researcher merges their interpretations, patterns, codes, and themes in order to make sense of all the data in a cohesive and clear way. Additionally, the researcher must anticipate and seek possible, alternative understandings to her interpretations. This phase is necessary because, “alternative explanations always exist” (Marshall & Rossman, 2006, p. 162). Moreover,
after determining the alternative interpretations, the researcher must provide a convincing argument for why her interpretation is better and more plausible than the alternative version. Consequently, through offering these alternative explanations and providing stronger evidence to support the researcher’s point of view, the findings are strengthened.

The last phase, writing the report (and in the case of a dissertation), is a lengthy process which involves outlining, describing, analyzing, explanations, and new understandings from the data (Patton, 2002 as cited in Marshall & Rossman, 2006). Additionally, the researcher needs to offer implications for future research and theory based on the findings.

In this study, these seven phases Marshall and Rossman (2006) often happened simultaneously and recursively. Figure 2 below details the steps of my data analysis.

A. Pulling all transcripts related to race

B. Categorizing transcripts into Phases 1,2,3, then transcribing and organizing transcripts into message units and interactional units

C. Choosing interactional units about race and racial issues stated or implied in each of the three phases.

D. Open Coding of transcripts

E. Analyzing the chosen interactional units for identity codes tentatively, at first. Then, the codes were refined and solidified.

F. Analyzing the chosen interactional units for power codes tentatively, at first. Over time, the codes were refined and solidified.

G. Identifying patterns across interactional units analyzed for identities in each of the three phases.

H. Identifying patterns across interactional units analyzed for power for each phase

I. Continuing refinement of codes and development of coding dictionary

J. Open coding of fieldnotes, refining and solidifying codes.

K. Simultaneously, writing analytic memos. Triangulated patterns with fieldnotes and memos.

L. Writing the report, responding to the research questions, and sharing the findings.

*Figure 2. Data analysis.*
Organizing the Data

Although I started analyzing data while taking fieldnotes, the beginnings of the organization of the data actually started at the end of the data collection phase. In the last two weeks, the participants discussed race and issues surrounding race in a very personal manner. The student participants admitted that race affected how they felt about themselves in school and was perceived as a reason that made them feel inadequate at academic tasks. This pivotal moment in the transcripts was unlike any other previous discussion about race. Realizing the significance of this moment, I decided to reexamine the previous transcripts in order to trace the progression of our conversations about race over the course of the study. As I followed evolution of the theme of race, I noticed a marked difference before, during, and after the pivotal moment when the students shared their intimate feelings about race and the affects in their various worlds (home, school, and outside or public). Table 5 describes the chosen transcripts and provides justification for including these literacy events in the analysis and the three phases.
Table 5

*Transcripts about Race*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Transcript</th>
<th>Interactional Units</th>
<th>Topic</th>
<th>Analysis Rationale</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ICB (2-09) Transcript 1</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>Discussion about Rush Limbaugh’s point of view about U.S. donations to Haiti</td>
<td>Selma makes a remark about possible racism, others do not acknowledge.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ICB (3-25)-019 Transcript 2</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>Discussions about Haiti, but race did not come up. Racial identity discussion.</td>
<td>Centered on Selma, the discussion is about racial identity and labels.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ICB (5-06) Transcript 3</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>Further discussion about Haiti</td>
<td>Selma makes an implied racist statement about U.S./Haitian immigration policies others do not acknowledge.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ICD (5-12) Transcript 4</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>Selma tells the story about how Florence’s sister wishes she was a White girl.</td>
<td>Selma makes a comment about race. This statement inspires me to introduce the doll study.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ICD (5-12)- Part 2 Transcript 5</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>Stories about how students have felt treated unfairly-no direct allegations</td>
<td>This story is connected to similar descriptions of transgression. Racial undertones implied.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ICD003 (5-20) Transcript 6</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>Teacher introduces the doll study in which African American were asked to pick the “prettiest” dolls. The girls chose the White dolls over the African American dolls.</td>
<td>I introduce the study about the dolls. Selma says that Whites have certain abilities that Blacks don’t.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ICD004 (5-21) Transcript 7</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>Students talk about their feelings of isolation in the classroom and uncomfortable racial conversations in class</td>
<td>These lines center on race and the doll study. The topic of race was an entry into the students’ world that was uniquely personal.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ICD005 (5-24) Transcript 8</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>Students discuss feelings of isolation in predominantly White/Hispanic classroom</td>
<td>Connected to doll study.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ICD009 (5-27) Transcript 9</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>Resistance to social action/I’m not African American discussion</td>
<td>Connected to doll study.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ICC004 (5-28) Transcript 10</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>Conversation about how there are no Black teachers</td>
<td>Connected to doll study.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ICD016 (6-1) Transcript 11</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>Discussion about racial beauty</td>
<td>Connected to doll study.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Organization of the Three Phases

Inspired by the group’s conversations in which the students spoke openly about how they felt about race the last week of the study, I pulled all the transcripts over the entire year in which race was explicitly discussed or implied. Thus, this choice generated one of my larger themes: the role of race. Although I knew intuitively that the conversations about race changed over the course of the year, I decided to explore this change and compare our discussions over time. Thus, I grouped transcripts into three sequential phases: (Phase 1 Transcripts 1 - 3, Phase 2 Transcripts 4 - 6, and Phase 3 Transcripts 7 - 11). I began analyzing Phase 2 because it appeared (based on a broad initial analysis) that the conversations changed distinctly before and after this phase. Phase 2 includes three transcripts: Transcript 4 through 6. Transcript 4 on 5-12 became the catalyst for all the subsequent discussions about race. Selma tells the story of Florence’s sister wishing she could be white. This statement inspired me to tell the students about the doll study in which African American girls chose White dolls over Black dolls because they were “prettier.” By introducing a study I thought the students could relate to, I hoped to encourage more conversation and greater participation. And in comparison, Phase 2 does contain more group interactions about race than Phase 1.

Phase 1 includes transcripts 1 - 3. In this phase, our conversations about race were characteristically less personal than the later phases and related to the students chosen topic of the Haiti disaster. Although in the subsequent analysis of Phase 1 there was more evidentiary support for a more objective stance with regard to race, in transcript 3 on (5-6). When discussing Haiti, Selma made the comment that maybe Limbaugh doesn’t want Haitians to come to the U. S. because, “they don’t look
Mexican.” Although not explicitly stated, I included this transcript in my analysis because Selma implied that racism (the way the refugees look) is a motive for denying Haitian immigration. Transcripts in the later phases about race, however, were more explicit.

In contrast to Phase 1 and Phase 2, Phase 3 contained the most transcripts about race, transcripts 7-11, 37 interactional units in all. Although there were many connections to race, some of the topics were repetitive and mentioned in the other sections. Thus, only 14 parts or interactional units (or connected message units), were included for analysis (Bloome et al., 2008).

Like race, identity and power were also themes evident in the three phases of this study. Although I have given a brief overview of the organization and some initial observations, in the following closer analysis of race, identity, and power, participants take on distinct identities and negotiate power a little differently in each phase. Thus, through organizing the responses chronologically, I was better able to see the development of racial discussions over time.

Generating Categories and Themes

As described in the section organizing the data, three categories were created based on grouping the transcripts chronologically: Phase 1, Phase 2 and Phase 3. Themes, however, were based on the chosen methodology, microethnography and the research questions. This first question was: What happens when a teacher and five fourth grade, African American readers, who struggle in learning how to read grade level texts, are invited to engage in critical literacy practices and social action projects? As I was collecting data, however, I realized that conversations about race were in fact
the most profound interactions of this study and that I needed to fully explore and analyze how race impacted our lived experiences. Therefore, a secondary question evolved: What do these engagements reveal about our (the participants') tacit and overt understandings of race, power, and identity?

Based on the theoretical underpinnings of microethnography, identity and power are inherent in all human interactions. Thus, race, identity, and power all became themes of this study. Additionally, smaller categories and sub-themes became evident during the coding phase. These findings are discussed at length in Chapter 5.

Immersion in the Data

As aforementioned, I categorized the transcripts into three phases, in which the conversations contained explicit or implicit references to race. Phase 1 contains the five transcripts about race prior to what I have coined as the “pivotal event.” Phase 2 encompasses the two pivotal transcripts about Florence’s sister wishing to be White, which appeared to act as a catalyst for further racial conversations in which all the participant’s actively participate. Phase 3 includes four transcripts characterized by a flurry of personal connections and issues centered on race in the transcripts.

After the transcripts were chosen, I coded the transcript similarly to the Bloome et al.'s transcription code (Figure 3). Additionally, each phase and transcript was analyzed for power, identities, and critical literacy practices. In addition, I followed the subsequent protocol with each of the transcripts chosen for analysis.
Step 1: Breaking the Key Transcripts into Message Units

After utilizing the transcription key, I then broke our conversations into message units. Message units in Bloome et al. (2008), based on Green and Wallat (1981), are defined as, “the smallest unit of conversational meaning” and involve, “the use of pausing, stress patterns, intonation patterns, changes in volume and speed of delivery, stylistic changes (e.g., a shift to another voice, such as often occurs during mocking or quoting someone else)” (pp. 18-19). Therefore, message units could be sentence fragments, or even one word with intonation that has meaning to the participants. Table 6 is an example of four message units from transcript ICD003 (5-20):

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Transcription Key</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>*     * = a change in pitch, intonation, or style</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hhhh = drawn out breath, sigh</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bold = said loudly</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>↑ = increase in pitch</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>↓ = decrease in pitch</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>[   ] = overlapping of conversation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vowel+++ = elongated vowel</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(Comments for clarification purpose)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>( . ) = pause</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(…) = 2 second pause or greater</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(Heh, heh) = laughter</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(…): = Unknown Speaker</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>XXXXX = undecipherable</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 3. Transcription key.
Step 2: Determining Interactional Units

Interactional units are comprised of related message units (Bloome et al., 2008). In order to determine interactional units within a larger transcript, I studied the transcripts and looked for boundaries and closures of related message units. Bloome et al. (2008) posits that interactional units cannot be determined by simply applying an outside definition or set framework or by simply studying the “syntax.” Similar to message units, the interactional units could be comprised of only a few message units resulting in a very short interactional unit. For example in Transcript 7, lines 34 through 37, the interactional unit is a short exchange between two students about how they feel when topics like segregation are discussed in the regular classroom. Table 7 is an
interactional unit from Transcript 7.

Table 7

*Interactional Unit from Transcript 7 (5-21)*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Line</th>
<th>Transcript</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>34.</td>
<td>Hannah: Yeah sometimes you’ll feel[</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>35.</td>
<td>Selma: [like I feel left out</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>36.</td>
<td>Hannah: Yeah, cause[</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>37.</td>
<td>Bauer: [You feel left out?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

This required repeatedly listening to the audiotapes and carefully analyzing the transcript. In Line 38, another student changes the direction of the conversation, signaling the end of this particular interactional unit.

**Step 3: Literacy Events or Event**

After the transcripts were organized into message and interactional units, I looked at how all group members and each message unit and interactional unit worked together. If the interactional units were linked to text (Bloome et al., 2008) then it was classified as a literacy event. If the interactional unit was not directly linked to text, then it was classified simply as an event. Due to the cultural practices of the participants, there was often a distinct movement away from text due to various reasons. Thus, interactional units were both a part of literacy events and events.
Step 4: Choosing the Literacy Events or Events within the Transcripts

After I organized and classified the interactional units into various literacy events or events, I chose which of these to include in the analysis. Again, I included all the events that were explicitly or implicitly about race or connected to the topic in some way. Only one of the literacy events about race was not included because the same conversation topic was repeated in an earlier literacy event, therefore, I did not include the same conversation twice.

Coding the Data

Open Coding

After selecting the transcripts about race, determining the message and interactional units in these transcripts, and then classifying interactional units into literacy events and events, I chose literacy events and events that were connected to race to analyze further. In the next phase, I began the coding process. Initially the coding process was open when I analyzed the interactional units related to race. Open coding in this study meant that I simply used explicit names of behaviors or identities that were obvious during an initial reading of the data. As I analyzed line by line, I avoided evaluative labels or “low inference” codes. Emerson et al. (1995) suggests “He (the ethnographer) should read with an eye toward identifying events described in the notes that could themselves become the basis of categorization” (p. 152). This characterized my first step in coding. However, after this first step, a closer analysis was
Identity Analysis and Coding

After the initial open coding of the transcripts about race, I focused on two of the themes: identity and power, and analyzed what happened with regard to these themes in the conversations about race. Identity as defined before is, “fluid, socially and linguistically mediated construct, one that takes into account the different positions that individuals enact or perform in particular settings within a given set of social, economic, and historical relations” (Lewis, Enciso & Moje, 2007, p. 4). According to this definition, a participant’s identity can shift (position or reposition) quickly according to both the local and global context in which she finds herself. Identity also includes how a participant portrays oneself, or how the participant was treated by others. Moreover, a participant can have multiple identities concurrently. Due to the phrase, “individuals enact or perform” additionally, I use the terms “identity” and “role” synonymously. However, in no way do these terms imply that a participant is falsely enacting an identity or even that a participant is always cognizant of these shifts in identities.

In order to systematically analyze for identities, I followed Bloome et al.’s (2008) framework. To begin, I used a column chart and created a section for each message unit, observations of nonverbal behavior, identities signaled in the message units, linguistic evidence for the identities, uptakes across the message units and comments. I first approached the data broadly, using as much as possible obvious descriptions with a reservation of judgment as exemplified in Bloome et al.’s (2008) transcripts analysis.
As I tentatively defined a new identity code based on evidentiary data, I constantly compared new lines that connected in order to accurately locate or refute another incidence of the identity. For example, in the interactional unit in Transcript 5 [5-12] as shown in Table 8, I observed that in this event both Florence and Selma shared accounts of events that happened during recess. As I studied Florence’s message units in this interactional unit, I realized that these events did not happen to her. Instead, each message unit confirms that she witnessed the event and that she then shared or “reported” the events to the entire group; hence, the code of “reporter” (a participant who reports an event to the group). Typically, the participant acted as a witness to the event) was created and confirmed throughout Phases 2 and 3.
### Table 8

**Identity Analysis 5-12**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Message Units</th>
<th>Non-verbal Behavior</th>
<th>Identity Signaled in Message Units</th>
<th>Linguistics Evidence for Description of Identity</th>
<th>Uptake across IU’s</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Florence: because you know the ITBS test ↑↓,</td>
<td></td>
<td>Reporter</td>
<td>Eyewitness to the peer problems</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Valuable group member</td>
<td>Feels confident/comfortable enough to share information</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Florence: yesterday we were out in the field,</td>
<td></td>
<td>Reporter</td>
<td>Eyewitness to the peer problems</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Valuable group member</td>
<td>Feels confident/comfortable enough to share information</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Ian: Oh, yeah</td>
<td>Eyes widen</td>
<td>Corroborator</td>
<td>Confirms events or stories</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Florence: and yesterday</td>
<td></td>
<td>Reporter</td>
<td>Eyewitness to the peer problems</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Valuable group member</td>
<td>Feels confident/comfortable enough to share information</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Florence: he said Dee, Valeria+ and Xavier and somebody else is all racist</td>
<td></td>
<td>Reporter</td>
<td>Eyewitness to the peer problems</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Valuable group member</td>
<td>Feels confident/comfortable enough to share information</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Critical literacy insider</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
However, there were also incidents in which my tentative code for an identity required modifications and refining. One example of code refining occurred with “student using critical literacy.” Initially, I tentatively used the code, “student using critical literacy” because the students were critically analyzing their experiences to reveal injustices and power inequities. I also included in this code examples of students using written texts to critically examine social inequities in which they had no personal connections. As I studied the transcripts, I realized that the code “student using critical literacy” was too broad and that there was a distinct difference in the way which students used critical literacy in the study (Table 9).
Table 9

Analyses of Identities in Transcript 7 (5-21)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Transcripts</th>
<th>Non-verbal Behavior</th>
<th>Identities Signaled in Message Units</th>
<th>Linguistic Evidence</th>
<th>Uptake Across to Interactional Units</th>
<th>Comments</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Bauer: What can people do to make you feel lonely?</td>
<td></td>
<td>Researcher</td>
<td>Questions without evaluation or problem solving.</td>
<td></td>
<td>I know by asking this question the student may want to change the situation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Social Activist</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Hannah: Like it's hard enough for me that I'm the only girl on my table,</td>
<td></td>
<td>Student uses Critical Literacy</td>
<td>Observations of racial differences and impact on her well-being.</td>
<td></td>
<td>Connecting to the other AA students “…only girl”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>African American</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>“It’s hard enough.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Female student</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Student does not use text to identify power inequities but use personal experience.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Alienated./Vulnerable</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Hannah: And it’s harder for me because I’m the only Black one.</td>
<td></td>
<td>Student uses Critical Literacy</td>
<td>Observations of racial differences and impact on her well-being</td>
<td></td>
<td>Connecting to the other AA students “only Black one…”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>American</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Student does not use text to identify power inequities but uses personal experience</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Female student</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Alienated. Vulnerable</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 9 (continued).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Transcripts</th>
<th>Non-verbal Behavior</th>
<th>Identities Signaled in Message Units</th>
<th>Linguistic Evidence</th>
<th>Uptake Across to Interactional Units</th>
<th>Comments</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>4. Bauer: Really</td>
<td></td>
<td>Researcher</td>
<td>Questions without evaluation or problem solving</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Florence: Yeah, I felt like -</td>
<td></td>
<td>Student uses Critical Literacy</td>
<td>Observations of racial differences and impact on her well-being</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Corroborator</td>
<td></td>
<td>&quot;Yeah…&quot;</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>African American</td>
<td></td>
<td>Connecting to the other AA students</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Alienated/Vulnerable</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Hannah: Yes.</td>
<td></td>
<td>Student uses Critical Literacy / Corroborator</td>
<td>Observations of racial differences and impact on her well-being</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. Florence 1: Becas every time,</td>
<td></td>
<td>Student uses Critical Literacy</td>
<td>Observations of racial differences and impact on her well-being</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Corroborator</td>
<td></td>
<td>On her well-being every time</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>African American</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Alienated/Vulnerable</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*(table continues)*
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<thead>
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<th>Uptake Across to Interactional Units</th>
<th>Comments</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>8. Florence: Like today I was counting how many Black people was in our group.</td>
<td>Student uses Critical Literacy</td>
<td>African American Alienated/Vulnerable</td>
<td>Observations of racial differences and impact on her well-being</td>
<td>Student does not use text to identify power inequities but uses personal experiences</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Corroborator</td>
<td></td>
<td>“like today”</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>“how many Black people”</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9. Florence: Only three people, and that’s what I felt lonely about.</td>
<td>Student uses Critical Literacy</td>
<td>African American Alienated/Vulnerable</td>
<td>Observations of racial differences and impact on her well-being</td>
<td>Student does not use text to identify power experience.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Corroborator</td>
<td></td>
<td>I felt lonely about.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Only three people</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
This observation compelled me to further categorize the ways in which students used critical literacy into: "critical literacy observer" and "critical literacy insider." In the excerpt above, the definition evolved into "critical literacy insider" due to the personal nature of the inequity. As I read other interactional units, I both confirmed and refined the code based on more examples of participants’ personal understandings of racial inequities. Therefore, one aspect of “critical literacy insider” includes one who experiences, observes or shares (through language) inequitable local and personal power relationships. This recursive process of analyzing, redefining and subsequently recoding helped strengthen the analysis and provided stronger support for the codes and findings.

In addition, I also studied each message unit for linguistic cues for the participant’s identities. This linguistic lens allowed me to isolate more nuanced changes in identity. Even simple pronoun changes revealed identity changes such as the subtle changing of “I” to “we,” indicating a move from an individual stance to group membership and alliance with social causes.

**Identities Evidenced in the Data**

The following identity codes were most commonly evidenced in the data. The entire list for the codes is located in Appendix D.

**Critical literacy observer** - In this study, I split critical literacy practices into two subcategories one of which is critical literacy insider. This means a person who uses critical literacy as a lens and lives/sees/experiences inequity (inherent, likely a home cultural practice). Further critical literacy insider is one who experiences, observes,
shares (through language) inequitable local and personal power relationships. This category is similar to Lewison, Leland, and Harste (2004) example of one type of critical literacy practice; students who use language to question the power relationships in the “everyday world” (p. 3).

**Critical literacy observer** - One who observes/shares (through language) power relationships and inequity in an academic way in which comments are supported by evidence from written texts or a “factual” source. Often the observer has some emotional distance from the power relationship, like an outsider. This type of critical literacy usually must be taught/modeled in school and is privileged, academic discourse. This type of critical literacy typically does not have a “lived” experience or a personal feel. A white teacher typically uses this. Additionally, a reference or connection to written text is very important in this instance.

**Alienated African American** - Participant who believes that they are an outsider or victim due to race.

**Vulnerable peer** - Participant shows concern how others view them (for example explaining why a group does/doesn’t like them)

**Problem solver teacher** - A teacher trying to solve a problem for the students.

**Valuable group member** - Someone/participant who feels confident enough to share something with the group and expects others to listen.

**Strong and powerful peer** - A participant who makes a strong statement in relation to peers, can include evaluation and judgment. One who sticks to one’s own opinions, despite peer influence/opposition. It may include telling another what to do or questioning another directly.
**Reporter** - A participant who reports what happened in particular events; may have the feel of an objective party witnessing the event.

**Racist** - A message in which the student states/or implies that one race is superior or inferior (This may need further discussion here) Racism is a “system of advantage based on race” It is not only a “personal ideology based on race, but a system involving cultural messages and institutional policies and practices as well as the beliefs and actions of individuals” (Tatum, 1997, p. 7). People of color cannot be racist because they do not systematically benefit from racism, but they can be racially prejudiced, and they can internalize racism.

**Racial prejudiced** - “A preconceived judgment or opinion about race, usually based on limited information” (Tatum, 1997, p. 7).

**Social activist** - A participant who wants to act to change racial injustice, seeks action for social justice or seeks change (with action) for fair treatment for everyone.

**White teacher** - When I make comments that are mainstream in nature, presenting a more neutral curriculum stance, downplaying racial issues; includes such actions as microinvalidations and microaggressions (Zamudio, Russell, Rio, Bridgemann, 2010).

**African American** - A participant who identifies oneself as a member of the AA community

**Label resister** - A student who resists stereotypical or institutional racial labels.

**Label supporter** - A student who accepts institutional labeling of minorities (the status quo).
Storyteller - One who relays information of events in an entertaining way (may imply expectation of audience member's involvement). This may include exaggeration and acting out a story in a way that is meant to entertain others.

Power Analysis

In this study, power is not a “commodity to be acquired” (Bloome et al., 2008). Instead, power is a process and includes “power relations [that] involve both acting on and with” (Bloome et al., 2008). In addition, power also includes caring relations (a view that does not include coerciveness but rather involves “bringing people together for mutual benefit”) and a reflexive stance (a stance where all possible members are considered in these literacy events. In the case of microethnography, power involves not only the stakeholders such as the students, the teachers, the school, the administration, the district, the government and their discursive relationships, but also the educational research that informs this study and the methodological choice of microethnography. Power, according to Bloome et al. (2008) “moves across models or power, dynamics of language in use and the demands of research as a social institution (including the ways in which the researchers are acting in and on their worlds and bridging worlds”) (p. 166). Power in relation to school often equates to knowledge and those who have (or allowed to share this knowledge) often have the floor and attention of the group. Yet power as a process also is shared and flows throughout all the interactions between group members.

In addition in microethnography and discourse analysis, power is also analyzed through the worlds the participants create. Defining these worlds required the same
level of analysis as the identity phase, which included analyzing, redefining and sometimes recoding or identifying a new world. As a result, power analysis in this study involves both micro (simple turn taking, counts and interruptions) and macro (knowledge building, relationships and outside power influences) contexts, and the worlds created.

The protocol for both the power and identity analysis was similar. First, like identity, I looked at the theme of race for evidence of students' understandings of power. Therefore, I used the same interactional units about race in both analyses. To review, here is the protocol I followed to select the interactional units: (1.) I selected the transcripts about race and determined the message and interactional units in these transcripts; (2) I classified interactional units into literacy events and events; (3) Then, I choose literacy events and events that were connected to race to analyze further.

In the beginning (as with identity), I again used a column chart that included a section for each message unit, social interaction, building knowledge, power between students and teachers, power between students, power between students and school as the larger social institution, and comments (which I used to determine the worlds created by the participants) (Bloome et al., 2008). The social interaction - the building knowledge, power between students, the teacher, and the school sections are all related to the definition of “knowledge as power” as described in Bloome et al. (2008). These sections also allowed me to consider who held the floor, who had the knowledge and others’ reactions to the speaker as a means to interpret and build the power codes. Table 10 demonstrates this analysis protocol.
### Table 10

**Analyses of Students’ Tacit and Explicit Understandings about Power in the Conversation about Race**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Message Units</th>
<th>Social Interaction</th>
<th>Building Knowledge</th>
<th>Power between Students and Teacher</th>
<th>Power between Students and Institution</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>6. Selma: But I didn’t go to sleep</td>
<td>Making personal connections.</td>
<td>Knowledge building and shared on teacher’s</td>
<td>Student and teacher share knowledge and power</td>
<td>School as an institution would agree it is not right, but still issues such as these are not specifically addressed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Critical stance</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. Selma: But we had been there for hours driving around,</td>
<td>Making personal connections.</td>
<td>Knowledge building and shared on teacher’s</td>
<td>Student and teacher share knowledge and power</td>
<td>School as an institution would agree it is not right, but still issues such as these are not specifically addressed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Critical stance</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. Selma: And it was this Mexican’s driving in the car,</td>
<td>Making personal connections.</td>
<td>Knowledge building and shared on teacher’s</td>
<td>Student and teacher share knowledge and power</td>
<td>School as an institution would agree it is not right, but still issues such as these are not specifically addressed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Critical stance</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9. Selma: And there were a whole bunch of Black people smoking,</td>
<td>Making personal connections.</td>
<td>Knowledge building and shared on teacher’s</td>
<td>Student and teacher share knowledge and power</td>
<td>School as an institution would agree it is not right, but still issues such as these are not specifically addressed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Critical stance</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10. Selma: And then the Mexican, she had to stop</td>
<td>Making personal connections.</td>
<td>Knowledge building and shared on teacher’s</td>
<td>Student and teacher share knowledge and power</td>
<td>Student as an institution would agree it is not right, but still issues such as these are not specifically addressed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Critical stance</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Table continues*
Table 10 (continued).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Message Units</th>
<th>Social Interaction</th>
<th>Building Knowledge</th>
<th>Power between Students and Teacher</th>
<th>Power between Students and Institution</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>11. Selma because there was a car coming about to hit her,</td>
<td>Making personal connections.</td>
<td>Knowledge building and shared on teacher’s</td>
<td>Student and teacher share knowledge and power</td>
<td>School as an institution would agree it is not right, but still issues such as these are not specifically addressed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Critical stance</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12. Selma: And they said – You and</td>
<td>Making personal connections.</td>
<td>Knowledge building and shared on teacher’s</td>
<td>Student and teacher share knowledge and power</td>
<td>School as an institution would agree it is not right, but still issues such as these are not specifically addressed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Critical stance</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13. Selma: They got out of the car</td>
<td>Making personal connections</td>
<td>Knowledge building and shared on teacher’s</td>
<td>Student and teacher share knowledge and power</td>
<td>School as an institution would agree it is not right, but still issues such as these are not specifically addressed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Critical stance</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14. Selma and started beating on the car+</td>
<td>Making personal connections</td>
<td>Knowledge building and shared on teacher’s</td>
<td>Student and teacher share knowledge and power</td>
<td>School as an institution would agree it is not right, but still issues such as these are not specifically addressed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Critical stance</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15. Bauer: Oh my gosh, that’s scary.</td>
<td>Evaluating the situation</td>
<td>Knowledge evaluated</td>
<td>Teacher makes a judgment as authoritarian and adult, but also as caring power</td>
<td>School as an institution would agree it is not right, but still issues such as these are not specifically addressed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Critical evaluation</td>
<td>Knowledge is from teacher</td>
<td>Teacher acknowledging race as an issue</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Observations and connections</td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(table continues)
Table 10 (continued).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Message Units</th>
<th>Social Interaction</th>
<th>Building Knowledge</th>
<th>Power between Students and Teacher</th>
<th>Power between Students and Institution</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>16. Selma: They were like, “<em>Get out of the car!</em>” “<em>Get out of the car!</em>”</td>
<td>Making personal connections. Critical stance</td>
<td>Knowledge building and shared on teacher’s</td>
<td>Student and teacher share knowledge and power</td>
<td>School as an institution would agree it is not right, but still issues such as these are not specifically addressed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17. Selma: Get out of the car you!3@ Mexican!</td>
<td>Making personal connections. Critical stance</td>
<td>Knowledge building and shared on teacher’s</td>
<td>Student and teacher share knowledge and power</td>
<td>School as an institution would agree it is not right, but still issues such as these are not specifically addressed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18. Selma: I’m going to beat you!”</td>
<td>Making personal connections. Critical stance</td>
<td>Knowledge building and shared on teacher’s</td>
<td>Student and teacher share knowledge and power</td>
<td>School as an institution would agree it is not right, but still issues such as these are not specifically addressed</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Next, similar to the analysis of identity, I first approached the data broadly, using as much as possible obvious descriptions of utterances and behaviors and a reservation of judgment as exemplified in Bloome et al.’s (2008) transcripts analyses. However, when I looked at turn taking, interruptions, and “knowledge as power” it appeared as if the analysis was superficial and required further consideration and depth. Using Bloome et al.’s (2008) microethnographic examples as a model, I discovered that when trying to determine the boundaries of an event (the ideational world, the interactional world, and the textual world), participants connected many other contexts outside of our interaction. Therefore, I decided these other contexts warranted a closer analysis, so I went back to their examples of power analyses for guidance.

As recommended by Bloome et al. (2008) in order to locate these various contexts (or worlds), I asked the following questions as I analyzed the data, “What worlds are the people in the event creating?” and, “What are the social, cultural, and economic consequences of the worlds that have been created for the participants and for others?” Again I created a column chart with sections for the message units, the worlds participants created, and the social, cultural, and economic consequences for these worlds. When I asked these questions and used this chart, I found I accessed a deeper level of analysis. For example, in Phase 2 (Transcript 4 on 5-12), Selma and Ian described several events that occurred on the playground. When looking at the data only through simple frequency counts and turn-taking, Selma dominated the conversation. Some studies could simply conclude that Selma had the power. But when I asked, “What worlds are being created?” Selma in her conversation painted a picture of a chaotic and painful world on the playground (Bloome et al., 2008, p. 174). Instead
of the powerful participant, the content of her description revealed a peer who is vulnerable, unsure, and victimized. Thus, in my first attempt using a frequency chart, I looked at the structure of the interactions. However, by utilizing Bloome's questions as my guide for my second analysis, I was better able to see the myriad ways the participants viewed themselves (and their power or lack of) in various contexts, yet simultaneously uncover the power dynamics within our interactions as a group.

In order to identify the participants’ worlds in the column chart, I carefully studied each message unit and tentatively identified worlds that appeared obvious and easily definable, such as the “world of the playground” when students described events that happened on the playground during recess.

Next, I constantly compared subsequent lines finding either support for the newly created world or accurately locating or refuting an incidence of another world. For example in Phase 2, as I read and listened to Selma’s description of driving around with her aunt, I questioned the importance of this event initially. But as I continued to read her description of what happened when she was at a stoplight, I realized she was describing a random act of violence and her possible view of the outside world. In the next few lines Selma described a group of men getting out of their car and beating on a Mexican American woman’s windshield; Selma’s reaction to these events exposed her own fears of racial violence and her powerlessness in this particular situation. Unexpectedly, this seemingly disconnected event turned out to reveal a part of Selma’s view of the outside world and the volatile role race played in some situations. Further evidentiary support for Selma’s viewpoint included that Selma described vandalism in her apartment complex by random teenage boys hanging around her neighborhood.
Additionally, Selma in the classroom had shared other stories of racial violence she witnessed. Table 11 describes Selma’s view of the outside world.

Table 11

*Subsequent Analyses of Students’ Tacit and Explicit Understandings about Power in the Outside World in One Interactional Unit*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Message Units</th>
<th>What worlds are created?</th>
<th>What are the social, cultural, and economic consequences of the worlds?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>19. Selma: but I didn’t go to sleep,</td>
<td>Selma described the outside world and characterizes this world as chaotic and violent.</td>
<td>In the outside world, there are few rules.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20. Selma: but we had been there for hours driving around,</td>
<td>Selma described the outside world and characterizes this world as chaotic and violent.</td>
<td>In the outside world, there are few rules.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21. Selma: and it was this Mexican’s driving in the car,</td>
<td>Selma described the outside world and characterizes this world as chaotic and violent.</td>
<td>The outside world depicted is one fraught with racial problems, including random violence.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>22. Selma: and there were a whole bunch of Black people smoking,</td>
<td>Selma described the outside world and characterizes this world as chaotic and violent.</td>
<td>The outside world depicted is one fraught with racial problems, including random violence. Additionally, tacit understandings may include drug problems in this world.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>23. Selma: and then the Mexican, she had to stop</td>
<td>Selma described the outside world and characterizes this world as chaotic and violent.</td>
<td>The outside world depicted is one fraught with racial problems, including random violence.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>24. Selma: because there was a car coming about to hit her,</td>
<td>Selma described the outside world and characterizes this world as chaotic and violent.</td>
<td>The outside world depicted is one fraught with racial problems, including random violence.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>25. Selma: and they said – You and</td>
<td>Selma described the outside world and characterizes this world as chaotic and violent.</td>
<td>The outside world depicted is one fraught with racial problems, including random violence.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>26. Selma: they got out of the car</td>
<td>Selma described the outside world and characterizes this world as chaotic and violent.</td>
<td>The outside world depicted is one fraught with racial problems, including random violence.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*(table continues)*
Table 11 (continued).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Message Units</th>
<th>What worlds are created?</th>
<th>What are the social, cultural, and economic consequences of the worlds?</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>27. Selma: and started beating on the car+.</td>
<td>Selma described the outside world and characterizes this world as chaotic and violent.</td>
<td>The outside world depicted is one fraught with racial problems, including random violence.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>28. Bauer: Oh my gosh, that's scary.</td>
<td>Bauer acknowledges world Selma described.</td>
<td>The outside world depicted is one fraught with racial problems, including random violence.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>29. Selma: They were like, &quot;<em>Get out of the car!</em> &quot;*Get out of the car!</td>
<td>Selma describes the outside world and characterizes this world as chaotic and violent.</td>
<td>The outside world depicted is one fraught with racial problems, including random violence. People (including Selma) feel powerless in this situation.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>30. Selma: Get out of the car you!3@ Mexican!</td>
<td>Selma describes the outside world and characterizes this world as chaotic and violent.</td>
<td>The outside world depicted is one fraught with racial problems, including random violence. People (including Selma) feel powerless in this situation.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>31. Selma: I'm going to beat you!&quot;</td>
<td>Selma describes the outside world and characterizes this world as chaotic and violent.</td>
<td>The outside world depicted is one fraught with racial problems, including random violence. People (including Selma) feel powerless in this situation.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

** Worlds Evidenced in the Data **

The following world (or power) codes were generated and used in this phase of coding. These codes show what these students seemed to understand about the various contexts where power was critical to interpersonal dynamics.
Small group world - The dynamics between the participants in the small group. Most of the time power is shared, however at times Selma dominates this world by either controlling the topic or contesting the use of racial identities.

World of the classroom - In this world, participants depict the world of the classroom as lonely, due to the fact there are few African American students in their classes. Additionally, they depict classroom discussions about segregation and slavery as uncomfortable. In this world, the participants appear to feel isolated and at times powerless.

World of school - Similar to the “world of the classroom,” some of the students describe the world of school as difficult socially and academically. All of the participants describe the playground as chaotic and prone to random violence and racism. Also, some students complain that there are not many African American teachers.

World of the text/the world of politics/ the international world - The students in general describe this world less than the others and there was a district movement away from text. But Selma made connections about racism and violence in Haiti. Also, Selma made a connection to unfair laws in Arizona we read about in the larger, whole group classroom. Other students acknowledged some of her comments, and the world of the text influenced the outside world.

World of researcher - This world is created by me and sometimes includes power relations that are inequitable. For example during conversations with the other participants, I make evaluative statements or offer platitudes. Results of these interactions sometimes changed the course of the conversation or silenced participants.
The student participants described this world as harsh and racist at times. Random acts of violence occurred often based on race. Additionally, Stephen states that his mother told him that it’s hard in the outside world because he is African American.

Thus after analyzing for initial codes, I subsequently analyzed for identity and power in message units from larger, interactional units about race in each of the phases. These analyses in conjunction with other data sources helped inform the findings.

**Coding and Interpreting Fieldnotes**

Fieldnotes were coded for identity and power similarly to the transcripts and provided triangulation for the findings. One small difference between the transcripts and fieldnotes was that instead of coding each message unit, I coded each sentence. Table 12 shows an example of coded fieldnotes on 5-27 that supported the identity codes that were evident in the transcripts. The following fieldnotes documented the students’ discussions about whether they noticed or were bothered by the fact that there were very few African American teachers at the school.
### Table 12

**Analysis for Identities in Fieldnotes from (5-27)**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Fieldnotes ICC004</th>
<th>Non-Verbal</th>
<th>Identities Signaled</th>
<th>Linguistic Evidence</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Stephen changed the topic and stated that in other schools he had noticed that there were not many African American teachers.</td>
<td></td>
<td>Critical Literacy Insider</td>
<td>Critical of school system and implies inequitable number of AA teachers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>This led to a discussion about how comfortable the students felt with white and black teachers.</td>
<td></td>
<td>Critical Literacy Insider</td>
<td>Critical of school system and implies inequitable number of AA teachers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I posed the question and was curious if the students how the students would address the question.</td>
<td></td>
<td>Researcher</td>
<td>Asking questions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Florence made some indication that she liked having black teachers around.</td>
<td></td>
<td>Critical Literacy Insider</td>
<td>Critical of school system and implies inequitable number of AA teachers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Critical Literacy Insider</td>
<td>Proud African American</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Selma took a completely different stance.</td>
<td>Status Quo Supporter</td>
<td>Supportive of status quo at the school</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>She said it was easier to work with white teachers.</td>
<td>Expressive head movements to emphasize her point</td>
<td>Status Quo Supporter</td>
<td>Supportive of status quo at the school Rejects “Black teachers”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Status Quo Supporter</td>
<td>Self Hate Prejudiced student</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I did question her, but I am not sure that I really got down to the heart of the matter.</td>
<td></td>
<td>Researcher</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Like the identity analyses, Selma showed prejudice against other African Americans, hence the identity of “self-hater” (code created by inter-rater) and “prejudiced student.” Additionally, the code “researcher” was an identity that appeared across the different data sources; most of the time when I asked questions I coded my identity as “researcher.” Similarly, the identity, “critical literacy insider” surfaced.
repeatedly in both the fieldnotes and transcripts. This identity signified that the participant experienced, observed or shared (through language) inequitable local and personal power relationships. Subsequently, analyses from the fieldnotes provided support for the findings in other data sources.

Offering Interpretations through Analytic Memos

While coding the transcripts and observing recurrent patterns, I kept analytic and theoretical memos to document any developing ideas. To inform these memos, I looked at both the coded interactional units and my fieldnotes (that were coded using the same process as identity and power analyses) and then considered possible theoretical connections to some of these initial findings. Emerson et al. (1995) explain this process:

To capture these ruminations, reflections, and insights and make them available for further thought and analysis, field researchers pursue several kinds of analytical writing that stand in stark contrast to the descriptive writing we have emphasized to this point. As a result of this writings, the researcher can bring a more probing glance to further observations and descriptive writings and consequently become more selective and in depth in her descriptions. (p. 10)

Analytic memos also corroborated the codes and findings. The following analytic memo from Transcript 4 on 5-12 is an example:

The next event triggers the comment that starts the flurry of conversation about race. After the students share all this information and describe their inner social worlds, I pipe up with comments about race and how people should not judge others based on skin color. These statements continue for many message units. During this time, I primarily make evaluative statements and I have the power/knowledge. In some contexts, especially when referring to microaggressions experienced by the participants, my statements appear to be microinvalidations- where I lessen their experience, not acknowledging the pain of their experiences. In addition, my statements are aligned with the larger social institution of school and the placations of superficial curriculum units that deny racial tensions today.
This same pattern occurs in 5-20, where although there is painful sharing by the students about feelings of inadequacy, I again offer platitudes about the many accomplishments of African Americans.

These analytic memos were based upon the initial transcript codes. Instead of detailed observations only (like the fieldnotes), these notes connected multiple transcripts and posited a theoretical link of microaggressions and microinvalidations in my responses and the other participants (Zamudio et al., 2010) thus, informing the participants' tacit understandings of race, power, and identity. Both my coding results and the analytic memos connected ideas and sub-themes across the interactions and corroborated the findings.

Identifying Patterns across Phases

In order to identify patterns across Phases 1, 2, and 3, I grouped the analyzed interactional units about race according to the assigned phase and by theme: identity and power. Next, within each transcript, I reread and verified all the previous steps: determining message units, interactional units, identity codes, and worlds. In particular, I verified and checked that my coding was accurate and matched the definitions created throughout the analysis. This required some fine tuning, reworking and redefining a few definitions. All the definitions came from the secondary analyses according to the themes. The open coding in the beginning, however, proved too broad and did not inform the definitions. After this step for each group of transcripts (as described above), I created a frequency chart to easily identify any recurrent patterns in the participants' responses (including my own). I also considered the responses of the participants and
the importance that a particular event had on our conversations.

Next, when analyzing identity again I reread how different utterances indicated participants’ identity and considered the context (topic, interactions of participants, when identities changed, or contradictory identities were appropriated etc.) in which these identities were assumed. Sometimes, this resulted in recoding or redefining as needed. I also noted when assumed identities ceased and contradictory roles were taken on.

The power analysis basically followed the same protocol. However, I analyzed power in three ways. First, I looked at how the participants interacted while noting turn-taking, interruptions, and other utterances and then I used Bloome et al.’s (2008) column chart on power and knowledge. Lastly, I examined the data for evidence of the participants’ worlds they created, for example: the world of text, the world of small group, the world of school, the home world, the larger outside world and considered the consequences of theses worlds.

Then, I created a chart and tallied the number of times a particular world was described. After identifying the most frequently described contexts, I pieced together, through multiple utterances, a reflection of these worlds according to the group members. Also similar to the identity analysis, I considered the overall importance of the world to the group by studying their responses (the emotionality, the length of time we discussed the world) and how it contributed to understanding the students’ lived experiences. Additionally, I created analytic memos corresponding to these documented patterns,

In addition to looking across the phases, I reread each “literacy event or event” and wrote analytic memos for each transcript. After I completed these notes, I grouped
the notes together according to their phase (one, two, or three) and theme (identity or power) and then compared them to identify similarities, differences and anomalies. Then, I created columns in a chart in order to help me see patterns across the phases. I also revisited and used fieldnotes, transcripts, and memos to confirm or negate what I discovered in the charts. Additionally, for visual representation of these steps, a cross phase analysis chart (Figure 2) outlines the data analysis procedures.

Considering Alternative Interpretations

I considered, recorded, and selected from alternative interpretations during the analysis process. In addition, the feedback from peer reviewers suggested alternative interpretations for consideration. As I coded the data, I used the constant comparative method in order to continually check or reconsider any initial interpretations or codes and made changes accordingly. Often this required me to listen to the audiotapes multiple times or reexamine the transcripts. Additionally, my fieldnotes were used as a source of comparison for my codes. I used fieldnotes (which I also coded) to substantiate or refute tentative codes. Despite the fact that I had audio recordings and transcripts, at times it was difficult to interpret comments, interactions or silence through only these data sources. Fieldnotes shed light on nonverbal behavior and tensions not evident in the transcripts. For example, the fieldnotes documented Selma’s domination of the group and the tension during the time when the other students changed their choice of topics to study to suit her. This tension is not evident in the audiotapes. In another example, pre and post interviews proved helpful in providing some of the background information about some of the participants’ literacy practices at school and
home. Beyond this, most of the pre and post interviews were not used. In fact, I found in most of the interviews the students appeared to try and give the “right” answer or the answer they thought I would want. For example, all the participants claimed to read and write at home for a considerable length of time. However during more informal conversations outside this study, various participants admitted they read very little. Similarly, the students' artifacts, including their journals, provided little insight into the research question. In fact, there was a distinct movement away from writing from the group in general.

In addition to data triangulation, I also consulted with two colleagues, both African American women, and asked them to look at my findings and give me feedback. Their feedback was particularly important considering that I am a White teacher working with African American students. Although I have known most of the students for years, I am not a person of color and cannot provide an emic perspective in regards to race. Both of my colleagues provided insightful feedback that I had not previously considered.

My first colleague, Theordora Powers (a pseudonym), is a reading specialist in a local, suburban district and fellow doctoral student. When we met, we used the collaborative data analysis protocol (Appendix E), which helped in providing thoughtful and thorough feedback for my codes. Theordora came up with similar codes for four of the critical transcripts I chose across the three phases. In particular, I showed her the interactional units in which Selma denied the label of African American. Theordora characterized Selma’s responses as “self-hatred.” When she read the comments Selma made about school being easier for White students, she stated that Selma’s remarks not only revealed “self hatred” but Theordora thought that she would not have made the
same comments if I was a Black teacher. In addition, she wondered if the students made comments like these in order to please me. Although, I had never considered this as a possibility, I did reread the transcripts and reflected on this alternative explanation. However, throughout the study Selma comfortably argued and contradicted me many times during our discussions, in the larger classroom context, and over the three years since I have known her. Pleasing me, I believe has never been a high priority for Selma, something I greatly admire about her. Therefore, I believe that Selma’s statements were sincere at the time and that she was not concerned with pleasing me. However, it could be possible the other students felt some pressure to make similar connections to Selma’s racial injustices due to peer pressure or to receive more attention from me.

My second colleague, Deana Bond, is a third grade reading and language arts teacher at my school. She worked with all of these students during the 2007-2008 school year (although I did not reveal the names of the participants). As with Theodora Powers, we used the same data analysis protocol, however her feedback was different. Deana didn’t agree that the students were trying to please me. Instead, she believed that the students may have never articulated some of these feelings before and that they must have felt very safe to confide these feelings to me. She believes that their confidences are a credit to the open and caring environment created in our small group. In addition, she confirmed that her own children had many of the same uncomfortable feelings when historical topics about race were discussed in the classroom. She encouraged me to continue discussing topics like slavery or segregation with my students but suggested I preface these discussions with sharing my experience in Namibia, describing how I felt as a minority in a different culture.
Although each of my colleagues’ responses was different, I considered their feedback and alternative interpretations in Chapters 4 and 5. This feedback contributed to the trustworthiness of my study, especially considering that I am a White teacher writing about and attempting to describe the behavior, feelings, and actions of children of color.

Trustworthiness

Trustworthiness in qualitative research has its own criteria, different than the term validity used in quantitative research. According to Guba’s (1981) model, trustworthiness relies on the following criteria: credibility, transferability, dependability, and conformability.

Credibility, according to Guba is perhaps the most important of the four; if achieved, the researcher has convincingly “established confidence in the truth of the findings for the subjects or informants, and the context in which the study was undertaken” (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p. 290). Therefore, the researcher in this context needs to show multiple perspectives and realities and be true to the participants’ perspectives. In order to ensure credibility, I carefully documented and followed up on reoccurring patterns and themes. The patterns and themes are confirmed through the triangulation of multiple data sources like the student and teacher fieldnotes, interviews, and audiotapes. I also consulted committee members and a fellow doctoral student and African American teacher and a third grade African American teacher from my school, who worked with these children in third grade. Both of their feedback and confirmation of some of my findings contributed to the credibility to the study. This is especially
important considering the fact that I am a White teacher writing about African American students’ discussions about race.

In addition, since this study followed students through an entire school year, the foundation of trusting relationships was well established in a natural setting and subsequently yielded authentic data.

Transferability in qualitative research means that the findings from the study could apply to a similar context with similar participants. However, anticipating similar results entirely is contrary to the nature of qualitative research. Guba contends, the transferability of study “is more the responsibility of the person wanting to transfer the findings…” (Cited in Krefting, 1991, p. 175) The best way to build confidence is through thick description. As aforementioned in the data collection section, I included fieldnotes, analytic memos, student artifacts, student interviews and audiotapes of our discussions to corroborate my descriptions.

Like transferability, dependability required thick description. Dependability, according to Guba (1981) requires that the natural variability of a qualitative study is reasonably explained. Variability in this study included contradictory statements made by the participants, including myself. However, through the rich description about the participants and the fieldnotes and the theoretical underpinnings of the study, I justified these variances. Therefore, any outlier data is clearly connected and related to the context. Thus, the documentation and description through the transcripts, fieldnotes, student artifacts, and analytic memos provided the necessary information to ensure dependability.
The last of the four criteria, confirmability means that others agree with the researcher’s findings in the study (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Unlike quantitative research in which neutrality is assured, qualitative inquiry necessitates a close and personal view of the researcher, which is addressed earlier in the participant section. Similarly, a close personal view is needed of the participants. My long established relationships with these participants and the amount of time I collected the data adds to this study’s confirmability. Additionally like credibility, the viewpoints of two African American teachers helped to support my findings, which are needed in a study concerning race. Like credibility, confirmability was attained through triangulation methods, researcher reflexivity, and a clear and logical argument, which was built on patterns from thick description.

Writing the Report

The last part of the data analysis involved writing the report. Writing Chapters 3, 4, and 5 took five months and involved multiple revisions based on my own observations and the feedback provided by my committee members. The product from all this effort hopefully provided a clear and understandable rationale and framework of the study for the reader.

Summary Statement of Methodology

Qualitative research and in particular microethnography best teased out the intricacies and complexities of the relationships and interactions that provided answers to the guiding research questions. In particular, the tool of discourse analysis enabled
me to delve into these complex social worlds and look at race, identity, and power thoroughly and unveil multiple meanings. Showing the complexity and contradictions in our meetings was particularly important when considering a concept as highly charged and difficult as race.
CHAPTER 5

FINDINGS

The purpose of this study, in the beginning, was to document what happens when I (as the language arts teacher) and five fourth grade African American students, who struggle in learning how to read grade level texts engage in critical literacy practices and social action projects. During the last few weeks of my data collection phase, however, key discussions about race became the impetus to foreground and analyze these engagements for our (the participants) tacit and overt understandings of race, power, and identity. Due to the fact that the implications for these findings warranted a deeper analysis than some of the other data, 11 transcripts (some with multiple interactions) were chosen in which race was either explicitly discussed or implied.

In order to see the progression of these conversations about race over time, the findings in Chapter 5 are divided into three chronological phases. Each phase begins with the background of the events and the development of the discussions during that phase. Next, I analyzed the participants’ tacit and overt understandings of identity and power during these conversations utilizing the microethnographic tool of discourse analysis. Through the use of discourse analysis, evidentiary support was provided for the emerging codes and themes from the data. At the end of each phase section, I described my role as both participant and teacher-researcher. Lastly, I summarized each phase. At the very end of the chapter, I compared and contrasted identity and power across all the phases and provided an overall summary of the findings.
Introduction

Like studying the tiny dots in a pointillism painting, analyzing and parceling multiple transcripts into smaller units of meaning often blurs the larger picture and inhibits the conception of patterns and the larger image. Slowly, by stepping backwards from the colorful specks in the painting, recognizable images emerge, just as it did during the data analysis phase in this study. Unification of these colorful patterns in a pointillism painting often reveals a rich and varied landscape. Similarly, when studying and looking at the larger connected interactional units, codes surfaced and patterns of codes became evident across the phases. Moreover, as these patterns were identified, I was able to see how our interactions were interconnected, revealing a colorful picture of the participants’ complex understandings and worlds over time.

This chapter follows the same structure, a close analysis of identity and power, and then a movement outwards to discover the larger meanings of the study.

Organization of the Three Phases

As stated in Chapter 3, the data was organized into three phases. The group’s conversations about race were the impetus for pulling all the race related transcripts over the entire year. The transcripts were grouped into three sequential phases. Phase 1 includes transcripts 1 through 3 (2-9-10, 3-25-10, and 5-6) in which there are 17 interactional units where race is explicitly discussed. Phase 2 (aptly named because these conversations occurred in the middle of the study) includes transcripts 4 through 6 (5-12 Part 1, 5-12 Part 2, and 5-20). These transcripts together contain 35 interactional units altogether. A pivotal transactional event occurs in 5-12, in which Selma reveals
that Florence’s sister said she wished she were White. As a result, I introduced the doll study in which African American girls chose White dolls over Black dolls because they were “prettier.” This study inspired more open discussions about race. Thus, Phases 2 and 3 do contain more group interactions than Phase 1. Phase 3 has transcripts 7 through 11 (5-21, 5-24, 5-27, 5-28, 6-1, respectively). There were at least 37 interactional units connected to race, but only 35 interactional units were included for analysis. The defining characteristic of Phase 3 was the flurry of conversations that occurred where all the participants, at different points are actively engaged in the discussions and made many personal connections.

In the following sections, a closer analysis of identity and power revealed the participants’ tacit and overt beliefs about the role of race in different contexts. In addition, participants took on distinct identities and negotiated power a little differently in each phase. Organizing the phases chronologically allowed me to see the deepening of the racial discussions over time.

Phase 1: Background

In Phase 1, the conversations were centered on the topics of relief aid for Haiti, Haitian refugee immigration, and racial identity. At the time of the study, these topics arose because of the recent, tragic earthquake that occurred in Haiti on January 12, 2010. Originally, Selma brought up the topic during our group meeting and the other participants suddenly appeared interested in learning and discussing this issue more in depth. However prior to this event, the students had agreed to study the issue of homelessness (Hannah’s idea). But through Selma’s influence, the female participants
changed their minds and agreed to prioritize Haiti over homelessness. Due to the fact that the girls had the majority, the boys’ choice (raising awareness and money for local animal shelters) was overruled.

I knew that some students’ voices were silenced with this ‘democratic’ process of voting. However when I attempted to help the student participants follow their own research interests, the students were off task, noisy and unable to independently research their topics. Therefore, I decided to have the whole group choose one generative topic to pursue so that I could maintain order and keep the students focused. Subsequently, I brought in controversial texts that were related to the chosen issue in order to spark critical analysis and critical literacy practices.

**Difficulty and Avoidance of Texts**

In our previous discussions about other topics (like animal cruelty, and school vandalism), I discovered that most of the related text was too difficult for some of the group members, especially the two boys, Stephen and Ian, who read on first and second-grade levels, respectively. Although the other participants could decode and comprehend the material, it was clear to me that the group preferred me to read and explain the material to them and then discuss the topic. In fact, whenever I requested that students refer back to the text or read some part of the text, there was a distinct avoidance of this task, and instead the participants switched back to oral discussion again and again. Therefore, after the first two months of meetings with the social action group, the protocol became for me to bring in related texts, provide the necessary background, define unknown words, read and explain the text to the group, and then
discuss the material as a group. Reasons for these evolved literacy practices could include both text difficulty and the students privileging the spoken word over the written word, similar to the literacy practices of the Trackton participants in Heath (1983).

_Haiti and Immigration_

Before we discussed these particular topics, I read several related articles to the group, one supporting increasing Haitian aid from the United States (U. S.), the other article giving Rush Limbaugh’s perspective of ceasing aid to Haiti. In addition, I read one article that compared the pro-immigration policies of Canada to the restrictive policies of the U. S. My hope was that by providing multiple views utilizing critical literacy as a model, participants would consider possible underlying motives and consider how these policies have impact them and people they know. Three literacy events based on these texts ensued. Two explicitly discussed Haiti, and the third was tangentially related in which Selma questions the terms “American” and “African American.”

Not surprisingly, the two related literacy events directly about Haiti shared the most similarities. Perhaps, what was most notable, as a participant, was the comfortable ease in which all the group members interacted and took on different identities. The power was shared somewhat equally among the participants, and the participants agreed (although I did not comment) that Limbaugh’s comments seemed heartless and selfish. Thus, identities predominantly were fluid and the power had an overall shared feeling. However, there were also tensions over the use of the racial label, “African-American” between Selma and two other participants, Hannah and Stephen.
Phase 1: Identities

Definition

In order to better understand the interactions in this study, the transcripts were analyzed for the participants’ identities. Unlike other views of identity in which it is thought of as fixed and unchanging, constructivists like Bucholz, Liang, and Sutton (1999) believe that identity is, “fluid, social, and linguistically mediated construct, one that takes into account the different positions that individuals enact or perform in particular settings within a given set of social, economic, and historical relations” and can be “generative and creative” (cited in Lewis, Encisco, and Moje, 2007, p. 4).

Personhood or identity is created and defined by both social and cultural constructs. Bloome, Carter, Christian, Madrid, Otto, Shuart-Faris, and Smith (2008) state participants in events not only are “defining language [but] also personhood” (p. 3). Bloome et al. (2008) contend there are three tenets of personhood: (1) People are actively involved “in and on” their worlds; (2) People position themselves socially, culturally, and historically within these worlds; and (3) People are not separate from these worlds and, “there is no separation of people from what they do” (p. 3). In addition, how a researcher defines personhood and language and literacy events directly impacts a researcher’s findings (Willis, 1977). These definitions influence the coding of the data and subsequent findings and the choices for presentation of the findings.
Critical Literacy Observer and Critical Literacy Insider

In Phase 1, more than in the subsequent phases students’ critical literacy practices involved using written texts. This type of critical literacy practice is most closely aligned with my first definition of critical literacy, which was stated in the background section. In general, the students made less personal connections than in subsequent phases. Four of the participants, Selma, Hannah, Florence, and Stephen, however, appeared comfortable taking on the role of “assertive student” (one who speaks and shares their opinions) and “critical literacy observer” (one who engages in critical literacy practices as an outsider) and then later a few participants acted as a “critical literacy insider” which means one who engages in critical literacy practices and lives/sees/experiences the inequity personally (the full definition for these codes are illustrated in the Coding Dictionary in Appendix F). Ian, however, rarely participated in the interactional units chosen from Phase 1. For example, in transcript 2-9 (Table 13) the following literacy event transpires.

Table 13

Excerpt from 2-9 (transcript 1)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Transcript</th>
<th>Non-verbal</th>
<th>Identities Signaled</th>
<th>Linguistic Evidence</th>
<th>Uptake Across MU</th>
<th>Comments</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

(table continues)
Table 13 (continued).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Transcript</th>
<th>Non-verbal</th>
<th>Identities Signaled</th>
<th>Linguistic Evidence</th>
<th>Uptake Across MU</th>
<th>Comments</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>118. Selma: [I, I have [a prediction.</td>
<td></td>
<td>Critical literacy observer Assertive student</td>
<td>Student academic language “prediction” Taking the floor</td>
<td></td>
<td>Selma has an opinion</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>119. Hannah: [He+’s mean.</td>
<td></td>
<td>Critical literacy observer Assertive student</td>
<td>“He’s mean.”</td>
<td></td>
<td>Hannah asserts herself</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>120. Bauer: Okay.</td>
<td>Tone</td>
<td>Researcher</td>
<td>Both validating and encouraging-implied in tone</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>121. Selma: Probably because you know Obama’s a <em>Democrat</em> (said quickly)</td>
<td></td>
<td>Critical literacy observer</td>
<td>Academic vocabulary-“Democrat”</td>
<td></td>
<td>Critically analyzing motives as an outsider</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>122. Selma: and he’s a <em>Republican</em> (said quickly)</td>
<td></td>
<td>Critical literacy observer</td>
<td>Vocabulary-“Republican”</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>123. Bauer: Uh-huh.</td>
<td>Tone</td>
<td>Researcher</td>
<td>Both validating and encouraging-implied in tone</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(table continues)
This event centers on Rush Limbaugh’s controversial comments in which he states that he didn’t want the U. S. to provide any further support to Haiti than in prior years. Selma and Hannah both appeared to dislike Limbaugh’s statements. Hannah states in line 119 that he is “mean” and later on stated that Republicans are “selfish.” Both of Hannah’s and Selma’s comments indicated that she can apply her own value system on larger social and political events and critically examine the human
consequences. In this literacy event, Hannah showed no hesitancy or concern about the consequences of these comments, possibly signifying the ease and security she felt in the group. Selma took it a step further in line 126 stating that maybe Limbaugh didn’t like “colored people.” Selma’s statement was significant because it was the first in which race was explicitly raised in terms of inequity. Equally as interesting was the fact that the other participants did not acknowledge her statement by directly responding to her. Bloome et al. (2008) claims, that if the other group members in an interaction do not acknowledge a statement it is not accepted as part of the group’s knowledge. The other participants’ silence may indicate that they felt uncomfortable.

Even though the other students did not acknowledge her statement, Selma made a serious accusation of racism and takes the position of “critical literacy observer,” “assertive student” and “African American student” (indicated by either explicitly accepting this label or implicitly through language and register) more often than any other participant. Although there was not a post member check with these participants, one of the reasons for the other’s silence may have been that they were not comfortable with the topic, unsure of my response especially because I am White and the teacher or they felt unsure how to behave in a democratically run group. In addition, they may have never considered race as a possible reason for anti-immigration policies. However, the latter is unlikely due to the fact that in Phase 3 the participants shared that race is an issue in school that affects how they feel in general about their abilities. As discussed in the review of the literature, schools often label students who struggle with reading in schools as remedial thus, forcing students to internalize the belief that they have “lower abilities” than Whites. Such beliefs inhibit students from attaining desirable identities,
such as capable scientist, writer, and mathematician.

In the next set of interactional units about Haiti, students responded critically and most were “pro-immigration” (self-explanatory, see Appendix D) except Selma, who vacillated between “pro-immigration” in the beginning and then was “anti-immigration” after she was presented with both sides of the argument. My frequency of identities included “critical literacy observer” and “researcher,” respectively.

Selma spoke the most. She most frequently took on the identity of “critical literacy observer,” “assertive student” (by taking the floor unapologetically), and “African American student.” Only one time did she act as “storyteller” when she imagined how Limbaugh would feel if he was Haitian during the earthquake. Selma sympathized with the Haitian’s plight and appeared frustrated with Limbaugh’s stance.

Racial Identities

From all the transcripts and interactional units in Phase 1, the most provocative of the three literacy events was the discussion about racial identity. Our conversation began with a discussion about pro and anti immigration feelings (described in text) about Haitian refugees. I had just read an example from an Internet blog where someone had expressed anti-immigration feelings and had asked the group if they thought all Americans felt the same way. Selma quickly jumped in and denied that she was “American” and steered the conversation in a different direction related to race. In lines 1 and 3, Selma resists the racial label of “African American” and positions herself into the “assertive student” role, which means that the participant takes the floor unapologetically. Her combative tone coupled with her persistent manner while arguing signaled that Selma moved into the role of “strong peer” and “fighter” in lines 5 and 6.
This change in identity reflected her bravery or stubbornness to stick to an unpopular opinion with the peer group. Stephen retorted and told Selma that she was African American. In the argument that ensues, two new identities appear, Selma took on the role as “label resistant,” (one who resists racial labels), while Hannah and Stephen took on “label supporter” (one who accepts racial labels). These identities were signified in the transactional unit in Table 14 below in Transcript 2 on 3-25.

Table 14

Excerpt from 3-25 (Transcript 2)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Transcript</th>
<th>Non-verbal</th>
<th>Identities Signaled</th>
<th>Linguistic Evidence</th>
<th>Uptake Across MU</th>
<th>Comments</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Selma: My mo+mma+ did NOT come from A+frica.</td>
<td>Head moves side to side</td>
<td>Label Resister Assertive student Strong peer Fighter Critical literacy insider</td>
<td>“My momma” switching dialect to her vernacular. The emphasis and volume on NOT</td>
<td>Selma dominates the floor</td>
<td>Selma is emphatic in this statement suggesting strong feelings</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Hannah: Ancestors would be like you <em>great, great, great, great, great, great</em>- (said quickly/ quietly)</td>
<td>AA Strong peer Assertive student Label Supporter</td>
<td>“Ancestors would be like your great…”</td>
<td>Hannah stands up to Selma</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Selma: I’m not ↑African↓.</td>
<td>Tone and emphasis indicate how serious she felt</td>
<td>Label resister Assertive student Strong peer Fighter</td>
<td></td>
<td>Selma is emphatic in this statement suggesting strong feelings</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(table continues)
Table 14 (continued).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Transcript</th>
<th>Non-verbal</th>
<th>Identities Signaled</th>
<th>Linguistic Evidence</th>
<th>Uptake Across MU</th>
<th>Comments</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>4. Bauer: Some people would rather be called Black than African American.</td>
<td>Expert teacher</td>
<td>White teacher Mainstream statement</td>
<td>Attempt at peace-making</td>
<td>I also am trying to move along my agenda with the assignment</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Selma: I don’t want to be called all Bla+ck(down),</td>
<td>Tone</td>
<td>Label Resister Assertive student</td>
<td>Emphasis, volume, and tone</td>
<td>Selma refers to herself as “Black” in later transcripts. Inter-rater suggested the identity of self-hater</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Selma: but I’m not African American.</td>
<td>Fighter</td>
<td>Strong peer Assertive student</td>
<td>Emphasis and volume</td>
<td>Cont. to control conversation Inter-rater suggested the identity of self-hater</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. Bauer: Then what would you like to be called?</td>
<td>Researcher</td>
<td>Asking Questions</td>
<td></td>
<td>I feel frustrated at this point</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. Just Selma?</td>
<td>Researcher</td>
<td>Asking Questions</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9. Selma: <em>New Orleans</em>.</td>
<td>Label Resister</td>
<td>Assertive Student Fighter Strong Peer</td>
<td></td>
<td>Selma makes a sarcastic comment here. This demonstrates the ease she feels in this group.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
My Role

The student participants continued to argue and I jumped in trying to placate the students and stating, “You’re all American.” Selma ignored my attempts and asserted, “But I ain’t African” [lunch conversations, 3-25]. In an effort to diffuse the emotionality of the situation, I attempted to act as an “expert” and tried to provide the historical background to explain why the term “African” is used in the label “African American.” In this interactional unit, what followed is a series of bantering back and forth in which Stephen, Hannah, and I supported the practice of the larger social institution (school) of identifying students racially.

Summary of Identity Analysis, Phase 1

Although there are less interactional units in this phase than the others, identities assumed in this time period foreshadow the many of the identities to follow in subsequent phases. Of all the participants, Selma made the most controversial statements and overtly criticized the practice of racial labeling. Although the other participants supported the label of “African American,” no other participants made comments about race or racism. Most of the identities connected to academic critical literacy practices and racial identity supporter or resister.

Phase 1: Power

Power in this study was not a stagnant fixed commodity, but fluid and easily changed based on the situation, people and their interactions (Bloome et al., 2008). In the school setting, knowledge is privileged, thus those who have the knowledge have
the power. It is not one group or individual that has all the power in situ, but a, "set of relations among people and social institutions that may shift based on one situation or another" (Bloome et al., 2008, p. 162). Therefore, power was not fixed, stagnant or “accumulated” in this study.

**Worlds Revealed Power Relations**

Power was looked at three ways in this study and answered by three questions: Who controlled the floor? Who had the knowledge? What worlds were the participants creating and to what effect? To answer these questions, I utilized simple frequency charts to document the speakers, two column chart analyses for power and participants’ worlds (as seen below) and observations of overall patterns. However, the last question, looking at the worlds participants created, illuminated the role of power on multiple levels (Bloome et al., 2008, p.174). As recommended by Bloome et al. (2008), in order to locate these various contexts, I asked the following specific questions as I analyzed the data, “What worlds are the people in the event creating?” and, “What are the social, cultural, and economic consequences of the worlds that have been created for the participants and for others?” (p. 174).

In the literacy events in Phase 1, through their descriptions, the participants shared several different worlds: the group world, the world of the text, the world of politics, and the international world, and the world of the school. All three were inextricably connected and evidenced in our interactions. Attention to these worlds provided a richer, more thorough description of the role of power in this study versus the typical power analysis in much of the research in which power is focused on turn taking.
and interruptions. These types of analyses usually provide a relatively superficial analysis of power (Bloome et al., 2008). Moreover, the microethnographic approach to the analysis of identity and power also can foreground outside influences of power that may overt. For example, influences such as the school board, the State Education Agency in curriculum or personal and tacit influences, like parents and siblings feelings about school that may play a hidden role in the participants’ interactions.

The Group World

The group world (the world we, the participants, created together during our meetings) in Phase 1 of the transcript analysis contained the least contested interactions over knowledge. In most of the interactions, the students supported, acknowledged and added to each other’s statements. Although there were times in which other participants notably did not contribute (like Ian and Florence during the argument over the term “African American”), as a participant there was a general sense of shared power during the literacy events. However, several students were silent, which did warrant notice. This is discussed further in Phases 2 and 3.

Prior to the chosen events in Phase 1, in the first transcript of 2-9, I had the power when I read and paraphrased the text. Although my relationship to the larger institution was somewhat compliant and typical due to my role as expert teacher “banking knowledge” (Freire & Macedo, 1987) in the students’ head, the topic was radical because it questioned traditional social studies pedagogy by questioning the motives of the U. S. government. Between the other participants, however, the power was generally shared, at least among those who vocalized their opinions. Although as in
the other transcripts, Selma did take the floor more than her peers, suggesting her dominance over the other participants. However, in this phase, she did allow the other students the opportunity to speak and did not interrupt as often as she did in other phases. Further support for shared power was documented in the aforementioned identity chart. Hannah, Selma, and Florence discussed and agreed on the best immigration policies for Haitian refugees. Both Florence and Hannah made supportive comments of Selma’s position. This agreement promoted a general sense of camaraderie. Therefore, although there were moments in which Selma dominated and her knowledge overshadowed her peer’s, more frequently in Phase 1, the students built upon each other’s knowledge. Thus, power was shared more often in Phase 1.

*Racial Labeling*

Unlike the two transcripts about Haiti, the transcript on 3-25 demonstrates tensions between participants as they argued about racial labeling. As the transcript illustrates, the way in which Selma refused the racial label of African American suggested a distinct tension not present in the previous interactional units about Haiti. To illustrate, the following interactional unit in Transcript 2 on 3-25 reveals the power struggle between participants, shown in Table 15. Additionally, the title for the first column, Transcript MU, means the transcript message units. And the last column, Uptakes across IU, means the big understandings evidenced from the whole interactional unit.
Table 15

Excerpt from 3-25 (Transcript 2)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Transcript MU</th>
<th>Social Interaction</th>
<th>Building Knowledge</th>
<th>Power between Teacher/Student</th>
<th>Power between Students</th>
<th>Power between Students and Social Institute</th>
<th>Uptakes across IU's</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Stephen: You're African American.</td>
<td>Arguing/Questioning</td>
<td>Building background knowledge of student and racial issues</td>
<td>Student has knowledge and power</td>
<td>Power struggle</td>
<td>Supporting institutional definitions</td>
<td>Group World described School practice of labeling</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Selma: No I ai+n't.</td>
<td>Response and argument Speaks loudly</td>
<td>Building background knowledge of student and racial issues</td>
<td>Student has knowledge and power</td>
<td>Equal</td>
<td>Questioning typical institutional definitions</td>
<td>Resistance to school practice</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Stephen: Uh-huh</td>
<td>Arguing/Questioning</td>
<td>Building background knowledge of student and racial issues</td>
<td>Student has knowledge and power</td>
<td>Power struggle</td>
<td>Supporting institutional definitions</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Bauer: You're all American.</td>
<td>Evaluative statement</td>
<td>Adding to political issues</td>
<td>Teacher has power Peace-making</td>
<td>Supporting institutional definitions</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Selma: But I ai+n't Africa+n.</td>
<td>Response and argument Speaks loudly</td>
<td>Building background knowledge of student and racial issues</td>
<td>Student has knowledge and power</td>
<td>More power than others about herself</td>
<td>Questioning typical institutional definitions</td>
<td>Resistance to school practice</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(table continues)
Table 15 (continued).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Transcript MU</th>
<th>Social Interact</th>
<th>Building Knowledge</th>
<th>Power between Teacher/Student</th>
<th>Power between Students</th>
<th>Power between Students and Social Institute</th>
<th>Uptakes across IU's</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>6. Hannah: (Heh, heh) Yeah you are.</td>
<td>Arguing/Questioning</td>
<td>Building background knowledge of student and racial issues</td>
<td>Student has knowledge and power over Selma</td>
<td>Power struggle</td>
<td>Supporting institutional definitions</td>
<td>World of group described Practice of race labels</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. Bauer: What that means is you had ancestors a [lo+ng time ago –</td>
<td>Supporting other students’ arguments</td>
<td>Providing historical racial info</td>
<td>Teacher has knowledge and power</td>
<td></td>
<td>Supporting institutional definitions</td>
<td>Support for labels using academic and historical knowledge</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. Hannah: They came from A++frica</td>
<td>Arguing/Questioning</td>
<td>Building background knowledge of student and racial issues</td>
<td>Student has knowledge and power</td>
<td>Power struggle</td>
<td>Supporting institutional definitions</td>
<td>Support for labels using academic and historical knowledge</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9. Selma: My mo+mma+ did not come from Africa.</td>
<td>Response and argument</td>
<td>Building background knowledge of student and racial issues Denial of AA identity Self-hater</td>
<td>Student has knowledge and power</td>
<td>More power than others about herself</td>
<td>Questioning typical institutional definitions</td>
<td>Resistance Group world dynamics</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*(table continues)*
Table 15 (continued).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Transcript MU</th>
<th>Social Interact</th>
<th>Building Knowledge</th>
<th>Power between Teacher/Student</th>
<th>Power between Students</th>
<th>Power between Students and Social Institute</th>
<th>Uptakes across IU’s</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>10. Hannah: Ancestors would be like your [great, great, great, great, great – <em>(said quickly/quietly)</em>]</td>
<td>Arguing/Questioning</td>
<td>Building background knowledge of student and racial issues</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11. Selma: I'm not African.</td>
<td>Response and argument</td>
<td>Building background knowledge of student and racial issues</td>
<td></td>
<td>Denial of AA identity</td>
<td>Self-hater</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12. Bauer: Some people would rather be called Black than African American.</td>
<td>Supporting other students’ arguments</td>
<td>Providing historical racial info</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*(table continues)*
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Transcript MU</th>
<th>Social Interact</th>
<th>Building Knowledge</th>
<th>Power between Teacher/Student</th>
<th>Power between Students</th>
<th>Power between Students and Social Institute</th>
<th>Uptakes across IU’s</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| 13. Selma:  
*I don't want to be called all Black*, | Response and argument | Building background knowledge of student and racial issues | Student has knowledge and power | More power than others about herself | Questioning typical institutional definitions |                   |
|               | Speaks loudly |                    |                             |                        |                                             |                   |
| 14. Selma:  
But I'm not African American. | Response and argument | Building background knowledge of student and racial issues | Student has knowledge and power | More power than others about herself | Questioning typical institutional definitions |                   |
|               |                |                    |                             |                        |                                             |                   |
| 15. Bauer:  
*Then what... would you like to be called?*  
(frustrated, impatient tone) | Question | Selma has the power | Reluctantly redefines Selma racially |                        |                                             |                   |
| 16. Just Selma? | Question | Selma has the power |                             |                        | Topic resistant to school institution |                   |
| 17. Selma:  
*New Orleans.*  
*(said in cutesy way)* | Statement | Building background knowledge of student and racial issues | Student has knowledge and power | More power than others about herself | Questioning typical institutional definitions |                   |
Message units 8 and 9 specifically show the tension between Hannah and Selma. In both units, words were bolded because the participants emphasized the words by increasing their volume. Both girls argued their position and stood firmly entrenched in their beliefs. As a participant, my corresponding fieldnotes also indicated the tensions between participants in this interactional unit. In addition, every participant’s attempt to persuade Selma to accept the African American label received a quick and irritated response. Towards the end of the interactional unit, Selma argued with me more directly. In line 13, Selma stated that she is not Black (raising her voice). Frustrated by this point, I sarcastically replied, (although it is difficult to describe using transcription code) “What do you want to be called?” Selma glibly responded, “New Orleans.” My response reveals the tension I felt at that time. My frustration was two-fold. First, I felt as if Selma was dominating and controlling the conversation and I was frustrated that she refused to conform to label and let the topic go. Ironically, although my intentions were to interrupt mainstream discourse and epistemology with our discussion, in fact I reinforced everything I wanted to change. In the end, Selma held most of the power with her personal beliefs and asserted this knowledge despite the many attempts by the other participants to persuade her to accept and acknowledge the institutionalized practice of racial labeling.

The World of the Text, the World of Politics and the International World

The World of the Text

All three worlds: the World of the Text, the World of Politics and the International World, and the World of School were explored throughout the discussion about Haiti.
The World of the Text began with me reading several related articles to the group; one supported increasing Haitian aid from the U. S. (www.whitehouse.gov), and the other article gave Rush Limbaugh’s perspective of ceasing aid to Haiti. In addition, I read one article that compared the pro-immigration policies of Canada to the more restrictive policies of the U. S. I hoped that by providing multiple views and modeling critical literacy practices, participants would consider possible underlying motives and consider how these policies may have impacted them and people they know. However, it is important to note that although the student participants requested these topics, they were completely reliant on me to read, explain and provide connections from the text.

The World of Politics and the International World

After I read these articles, Selma turned the conversation towards race and the World of Politics. This is evident when Selma asked me, “Who is Rush Limbaugh: Is he White or African?” I told her that he was White and no participant acknowledged this statement or responded. However, Hannah added that she thought that Limbaugh’s comments seemed heartless and selfish in lines 119 and 127 [Lunch conversations, 3-25]. In these lines, Hannah demonstrated the understanding that political leaders’ actions may hurt others and be considered selfish. In lines 121, 122, and 127 [Lunch conversations, 3-25], Florence and Selma both proposed that political affiliation played a role in how Limbaugh reacted to the outpouring of generosity to Haiti from President Obama’s administration. Very quickly, However, Selma redirected the conversation in line 126, when she suggested that Rush Limbaugh did not like “colored people.” This statement was unique, as previously mentioned in the identity section because no one
had expressed this sentiment in prior discussions. In addition, it illuminated Selma’s perceptions of the larger international world. These worlds, according to Hannah, Florence, and Selma could be unjust, unfair, and callous. However, Selma asserted another possible contributing factor, racist politicians. Although the other participants during this phase did not acknowledge her statement, in the subsequent phases participants supported her opinion.

The World of School

Racial labeling: In this particular world, there was an intersection between the group, the text and the school world. Across all three worlds in Phase 1, there was a passionate discussion between Selma and the other participants (myself included) about the use of the term “African American.” This discussion stemmed from the text because the label came from our conversations and readings about Haiti. This interactional unit was also a part of the group because the relationships between the participants and their identities were directly tied to this conversation. However, this discussion also introduced the School World.

In the transactional unit of 3-25, the school world created was one in which students were categorized by race and where race played a large role in how students felt about themselves in an academic setting. Due to the fact that racial labeling was a social practice of the school, the participants understood that race was important to the school. Enrollment forms, lunch forms for free and reduced lunch, and many other types of paperwork required parents and students to identify themselves racially reinforcing racial labels. This forced categorization feeds into comparisons and questions about the
importance of race. Pollock (2004) contends, “The biggest paradox of race is that race
groups are genetic fictions but social realities” (p. 214). Unfortunately these social
realities both hurt and help students. Funding based on categorizations (racial and
socioeconomic status) designed to make schooling more equitable can actually promote
stereotyping and harmful misuse (Pollock, 2004). Similar conversations repeatedly
resurfaced in Phase 3.

Summary of Power Analysis, Phase 1

Throughout the Phase 1 when I simply looked at who controlled the floor, Selma
often dominated our conversations. However, when I used Bloome’s model of power for
my analysis, I realized that most of the participants’ (including myself) built upon each
other’s knowledge and therefore, power was distributed more evenly across the
interactional units. In two incidents, however, students argued over “knowledge” and the
power was challenged and not shared.

A second finding was that In Phase 1, the participants made less personal
connections than in the later phases. In fact, two participants, Ian and Stephen, said
very little during our conversations about politics. This may have been due to the fact
that the students had less background knowledge to share related to our topic, the Haiti
earthquake disaster. Another reason may have been that they weren’t comfortable
participating in controversial and critical conversations at this point in the study.
Regardless of the reasons, the participants were less engaged during this phase.
Therefore in Phase 1, there was less insight into the participants’ personal worlds and
less interactional units about race. Moreover, critical literacy practices appeared more
academic than in subsequent phases.

One interactional unit about the racial label, African American, proved to be the most hotly contested “knowledge” or power. Selma refused to accept the label or identity of “African American” explaining that her mother didn’t come from Africa. Stephen and Hannah disagreed with her and told her that her ancestors were from Africa. Although Stephen and Hannah provided a convincing argument, Selma would not agree. Looking at the larger implications, Selma refused to allow the school (or other students) to label her, a common school practice. Out of all the participants in this phase, Selma was the most willing to look critically at political and social practices in school and in the government and ask questions. Additionally, she made the overt statement that Rush Limbaugh didn’t want to help Haiti because he didn’t like colored people. Other participants in this phase kept a more neutral stance refusing to acknowledge Selma’s radical statements.

Phase 2

In this phase, the student accounts depicted peer victimization that led to a movement towards the participants sharing personal racial experiences, some overtly stated and others implied. These two transcripts marked a notable transition from Phase 1 in which most participants appeared less personally invested (except Selma) or less willing to participate in topics about race to more active participation and connections to racial issues. In addition, these connections illuminated how race relations dominate their different worlds.
Phase 2: Background

In the first transcript (Transcript 4 on 5-12-10), the following events are analyzed. The first interactional event began with Selma and Ian telling their story of their victimization by other children (not African American) on the playground. In the next two interactional units, Selma described the incident in which Lee (an African American male) calls other students’ racist and Ian described how he was kicked out of a tetherball game. The participants implied that race may have been a factor for these injustices due to the fact that this story was brought up in tandem to the other stories that directly deal with racism. After the students shared these stories, I lectured the group about how people should not make judgments based on people’s skin color. As soon as I finished, Ian repeated his story again but did not explicitly say he felt that the cause of his mistreatment had anything to do with race. Selma then took over the conversation and told the story about Florence’s sister telling a group of kids in her apartment building that she wished that she was White. Subsequently, I made text-to-text connections (in an effort to model academic critical literacy practices) and encouraged students to talk about racial concerns explaining that if they don’t speak out, racism continues. I used the Arizona immigration laws, a topic we had discussed during social studies with the whole class as an example. In the final transactional unit, Selma described the story of an African American group of men terrorizing a Mexican woman in a car and her feelings and reactions about what she witnessed.

In Transcript 6 on 5-20, the following literacy events were analyzed. First, I read and paraphrased the doll study, in which African American girls in the 1960s were asked to pick the prettiest doll (they were given a choice of African American or White
dolls), and overwhelmingly the girls chose the White dolls. This study was recreated (informally by a middle school student) in the last two years with the same results. In the interactional units analyzed in 5-20, I asked the students what they thought about this study and Hannah stated that “the girls must not like themselves.” Selma confessed that she wished she was White sometimes and Florence agreed. Selma then commented that Whites have more abilities than “us” meaning African Americans. Due to the fact that the following interactional units were not primarily about race, I did not analyze these units. However, there were one or two random comments with some connection that required mentioning. These statements included the students talking about how straighter hair is better than kinky hair and the importance of lighter and darker shades of skin color. Selma stated that “if you have darker skin you are made of fun of more than a lighter skinned person.”

Phase 2: Identities

What appeared to be most notable about the 5-12 and the 5-20 transcripts were the frequency and ease with which the participants spoke about racial issues. Some of the topics were controversial and participants took opposing sides in some of the interactional units. For example, Selma, in 5-12 took on the role of a reporter explaining racial incidents connected that she and other participants deemed as unfair. But in 5-20, she spoke disparagingly of African Americans when she prejudicially claimed that African Americans don’t have the same abilities as Whites. As a result, contradictory identity roles were assumed.
Redefining Critical Literacy Practices

Most of the students acted as “reporter” in the transcript of 5-12, describing the transgressions they experienced from other students in the larger classes. Everyone except Stephen reported the unjust incidents on the playground. The text became almost inconsequential. I knew, however, that students were critically analyzing these personal transgressions but my understanding of critical literacy practices (especially in school) did not fit. So, I redefined and delineated the observed critical literacy practices with special attention to the way students were critical. Within the identity of “reporter,” these same students also acted as a “critical literacy insider” defined as students who use “language to question the power relationships in the everyday world” (Lewison, Leland, Harste, 2008). Thus, critical literacy is split into some subcategories: “critical literacy insider” which means a person who uses critical literacy as a lens and lives/sees/experiences inequity (inherent, likely a home cultural practice), and a “critical literacy observer” which means a student or teacher whose critical literacy practices are closely related to written text; often it is more formal in nature and required an outside political and social perspective. A critical literacy observer often has some emotional distance as an onlooker or acting more as an observer/outsider in nature. Selma and the others acted as a “critical literacy insider” most often describing and questioning unfair actions and power relationships locally.

Selma and Ian all acted as “corroborator,” “alienated or vulnerable peer” and “African American.” This was especially true when both students shared their different stories of when they felt mistreated. Hannah and Florence also fit into the “corroborator” and “African American” identity, but Hannah had an identity the others did not and that
was “good samaritan.” This occurred when Hannah described herself intervening when the other boys were treating Ian unjustly. Florence and Selma assumed the identity of an “apartment dweller” when they were “storytellers” and described the scenario in which Florence’s sister says she wished she was White. This story became the impetus for the introduction of the doll study and all the subsequent conversations in Phase 3 as shown in Table 16.

Table 16

*Excerpt from 5-12 (Transcript 4)*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Transcript</th>
<th>Non-verbal</th>
<th>Identities Signaled</th>
<th>Linguistic Evidence</th>
<th>Update Across MU</th>
<th>Comments</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>116. Selma: And all those White girls were skipping around,</td>
<td>Animated expression</td>
<td>African American community member from apartments</td>
<td>Group from apartments (all African-American)</td>
<td>Selma likes to tell stories</td>
<td>Selma is trying to be humorous</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Said in a humorous way</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Storyteller Reporter</td>
<td>Q explains what happens</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>117. Selma: and she was like, “<em>I wish I could be a White girl.</em>”</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(in a proper mainstream accent)</td>
<td>African American community member from apartments</td>
<td>Group from apartments (all African-American)</td>
<td>Said in a humorous way</td>
<td></td>
<td>This is a significant statement. One that inspires me to introduce the doll study.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Storyteller Reporter</td>
<td></td>
<td>Q explains what happens</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>118. Ta’moria: Oh my Go+d.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>African American community member from apartments</td>
<td>Group from apartments (all African-American)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 16 (continued).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Transcript</th>
<th>Non-verbal</th>
<th>Identities Signaled</th>
<th>Linguistic Evidence</th>
<th>Update Across MU</th>
<th>Comments</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>120. Ta’moria: We said, “What?”</td>
<td>Laughingly said</td>
<td>African American community member from apartments</td>
<td>Group from apartments (all African-American) Said in a humorous way</td>
<td>Q explains what happens</td>
<td>All the participants laughed at this comment</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Selma, Florence, and Hannah all took on the roles of “empathizer” when they were reporting the wrongs against other participants. Although not explicitly stated, the empathy was present in the speaker’s tone.

But of all the identities assumed by the participants, perhaps the most significant and conflicted roles occurred in the transcript of 5-20. After I explained and shared the doll study, Selma corroborated Florence’s sister’s desire to be White as described in the following transcripts on 5-20 (Table 17).
Table 17

*Excerpt from 5-20 (Transcript 6)*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Transcript</th>
<th>Non-verbal</th>
<th>Identities Signaled</th>
<th>Linguistic Evidence</th>
<th>Update Across MU</th>
<th>Comments</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Bauer: What does that say what she thinks about herself</td>
<td>Tone implies expectation of an answer</td>
<td>Researcher Critical literacy observer Social activist</td>
<td>Analyzing power Requesting discussion is a type of action</td>
<td></td>
<td>The story had previously been seen as humorous. Now it has an even more serious tone.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Bauer: If she’s doing that↑?</td>
<td>Tone implies expectation of an answer</td>
<td>Analyzing power Requesting discussion is a type of action</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>I want the students to think about her comment more deeply than when it was first told.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Hannah: She don’t like herself.</td>
<td></td>
<td>Critical literacy observer African American</td>
<td>Criticism Dialect</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Bauer: She doesn’t like herself↑.</td>
<td></td>
<td>Researcher Critical literacy observer Social activist</td>
<td>I am bringing up connections and guiding the direction of the conversation in order to ask questions Analyzing power Requesting discussion is a type of action</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Bauer: And so what do you think about</td>
<td></td>
<td>Researcher Critical literacy observer Social activist</td>
<td>I am bringing up connections and guiding the direction of the conversation in order to ask questions Analyzing power Requesting discussion is a type of action</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*(table continues)*
Table 17 (continued).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Transcript</th>
<th>Non-verbal</th>
<th>Identities Signaled</th>
<th>Linguistic Evidence</th>
<th>Update Across MU</th>
<th>Comments</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>6. Bauer: And Destinie said the same thing when she was watching television and said, “I wished I was White,”</td>
<td>Researcher</td>
<td>Critical literacy observer Social activist</td>
<td>I am bringing up connections and guiding the direction of the conversation in order to ask questions Analyzing power Requesting discussion is a type of action</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. Bauer: What do you think about that?</td>
<td>Researcher</td>
<td>Critical literacy observer Social activist</td>
<td>I am bringing up connections and guiding the direction of the conversation in order to ask questions Analyzing power Requesting discussion is a type of action</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. Selma: Sometimes, I wished I was White.</td>
<td>Selma readily jumped in with this comment</td>
<td>African American Critical literacy insider Self hater</td>
<td>Said from AA’s perspective Said from insiders view of inequity</td>
<td></td>
<td>It seemed to me as if this was said in earnest and that she had thought about this beforehand.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10: Bauer: Why?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>(table continues)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 17 (continued).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Transcript</th>
<th>Non-verbal</th>
<th>Identities Signaled</th>
<th>Linguistic Evidence</th>
<th>Update Across MU</th>
<th>Comments</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>11. Selma: White people have more abilities over us.</td>
<td></td>
<td>African American</td>
<td>Said from AA’s perspective</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Critical literacy insider</td>
<td>Said from insiders view of inequity</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Self hater</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Racist</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12. Bauer: What?</td>
<td>Authoritarian Teacher</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>I felt shocked by this comment</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Critical literacy insider</td>
<td>Said from insiders view of inequity</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Self hater</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Racist</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14. Bauer: “Why do you think that”? (said softly)</td>
<td>Researcher</td>
<td>Critical literacy observer</td>
<td>I am asking questions</td>
<td>I ask the question but don’t allow the students enough time to respond.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Question is from a critical stance</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15. Bauer: There’s a lot of African Americans who have achieved a lot.</td>
<td>White teacher</td>
<td></td>
<td>I silence the topic by this statement and support the status quo curriculum</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Problem Solver</td>
<td>Caring power-an attempt to fix these feelings</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16. Selma: Yeah, my mom said [inaudible]</td>
<td>Proud African American</td>
<td></td>
<td>She totally changes her identity and stance here</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Critical literacy insider</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(table continues)
### My Role

I also took on several identities during my monologues about racism, but the most common role assumed was “critical literacy observer” and “White teacher.” Specifically, I told the students that it was wrong to judge people on their skin color, which was a microinvalidation of the participants’ experience. Thus, I acted as a “White teacher” [Lunch discussion, 5-12]. These comments presented a more neutral curriculum stance, and downplayed racial issues. Despite my support of some common moral platitudes, during other interactional units I also acted as a Freirean teacher when I assumed the roles of “empathizer” and “problem solver.” These three identities mostly occurred during the same lectures mentioned earlier and when I probed the students for their responses. Additionally, I was cognizant of assuming the role of “empathizer” and “problem solver” but “White teacher” was a tacit identity.
Summary of Identity Analysis, Phase 2

Across all four events in Phase 2, all the students except for Ian assumed multiple roles. Selma assumed the most roles, then Hannah and Stephen, next Florence, but Ian was not vocal during these particular literacy events. In the first transcript, race was still not quite as personal as it was in the second transcript. Although student participants described personal transgressions by other students, the explicit references to racism or connections to racial issues were connected to other students. However after analyzing the transcripts and listening to the audiotapes, it is evident these other events surrounding the actual term “racism” were race-related incidents in the participants’ perspective as well.

Phase 2: Power

The World of School

Victimization

In the first transactional event of Phase 2 (Transcript 4 on 5-12), Selma shared her victimization story by her peers. During Transcript 4, most of the social interactions vacillated between Selma’s and the other students’ storytelling and reporting. In contrast, I usually questioned or offered an evaluative, yet supportive statement. The knowledge building began with building the background of Selma’s personal experiences. After the other students corroborated her experiences, the topic changed into a discussion about how students interacted with each other in less supervised situations. In this depiction, participants described a world where they were at times
victimized (both verbally and physically) and words like “racist” were used frequently. After racism was brought up by Selma all of the subsequent discussions added to the groups racial and victimization knowledge. Thorough analysis revealed that the students clearly described a world where random acts of cruelty occurred often on the playground and in the gym. The following transaction in Table 18 illuminates this world.
Table 18

Excerpt from 5-12 (Transcript 4)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Transcript MU</th>
<th>Social Interaction</th>
<th>Building Knowledge</th>
<th>Power between teacher/student</th>
<th>Power between students</th>
<th>Power between students and social institute</th>
<th>Uptake across message units</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>127. Bauer: What do you mean?</td>
<td>Questioning</td>
<td>Researcher wants knowledge</td>
<td>Students have the power</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Possibly supporting Selma’s belief of mistreatment by White students</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>128. Bauer: They’re giving you a hard time,</td>
<td>Statement/Evaluation of situation</td>
<td>Researcher wants knowledge</td>
<td>Students have the power</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Possibly supporting Selma’s belief of mistreatment by White students</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>129. Bauer: is that what you’re thinking?</td>
<td>Questioning</td>
<td>Researcher wants knowledge</td>
<td>Students have the power</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Possibly supporting Selma’s belief of mistreatment by White students</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>130. Selma: Yeah,</td>
<td>Confirming</td>
<td>The teacher and Selma share an understanding</td>
<td>Shared power</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td></td>
<td>Possibly supporting Selma’s belief of mistreatment by White students</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>131. Selma: it’s like once a day</td>
<td>Reporting</td>
<td>Q has knowledge</td>
<td>Shared power</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td></td>
<td>Possibly supporting Selma’s belief of mistreatment by White students</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>132. Selma: when Elias is calling Valeria racist</td>
<td>Reporting</td>
<td>Eyewitness to the peer problems</td>
<td>Shared-shared floor</td>
<td>Peers can torture each other and try to have control over each other</td>
<td></td>
<td>School allows racist things in school or school is oblivious</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Feels confident/comfortable enough to share information Reporting injustices</td>
<td>Teachers are irrelevant to group of peers</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>The school is a reflection of racial problems outside of school Q has experienced</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Teachers and administrators appeared (according to the participants) to be absent, oblivious or emotionally removed from these problems.

In the last transactional event in 5-12, Ian described his mistreatment by other boys who were not African American. Although not stated directly, the fact that he brought this event up in connection with all of our previous discussions about racism led me to consider that Ian and the others, who corroborated his story, perceived race (possibly a tacit understanding) as a factor in his mistreatment. One interesting point is that although Ian started the conversation, Selma and Hannah took over the floor reporting their observations of the event. This indicated that there was a shared sense of power and knowledge building between the students. However, due to the fact that I had not witnessed the event, the students were the experts and we did not share the knowledge. Nevertheless, there was an overall sense of camaraderie between us during their explanation. This may have been due to the freedom and openness of the group or the development of our relationships with each other over time. But this last event reinforced the earlier descriptions of the World of School in which chaos and victimization were feelings that the participants experience daily.

Group World

Feeling of Inadequacy

Students’ feelings of inadequacy were also evident in the transcript from 5-20 when the students (Selma and Florence) stated that “sometimes they wished that they were White.” At this juncture, power as knowledge appeared more equally distributed
than it did during other interactions, perhaps due to the fact that students revealed and bonded over a deep insecurity. In addition, in the subsequent message unit Selma candidly stated “White people have more abilities over us” [line 280 in transcript 5-20]. However, even though the power was shared among the participants in this event, these statements indicated a feeling of powerlessness and hopelessness in school.

Similarly to the review of the literature, the participants, like other students across the nation, have been placed into remedial programs that do not acknowledge them as individuals or validate their personal knowledge. Therefore it is understandable; Selma questions her intelligence and “abilities.” Moreover, these feelings of alienation can impede students’ confidence and therefore their identities and power in school and contribute to continued academic failure (Juel, 1988).

The World of the White Teacher-Researcher

The next event triggered the comment that started the flurry of conversations about race. After the students shared all this information and described their inner social worlds, I interrupted the conversation with comments about race and how people shouldn’t judge others based on skin color. These statements continued for many message units. During this time, I primarily made evaluative statements, which demonstrated that I had the power and knowledge. In some contexts, my statements appeared to be microinvalidations, where I lessened their experience, not acknowledging the depth of these painful experiences (Sue, Capodilupo, Torino, Bucceri, Holder, Nadal & Esquilin, 2007). This also occurred in 5-20, although most of my knowledge came from the interpretation and the reading of the doll study. However,
my statements in later interactional units were aligned with the larger social practices of many schools that offered superficial curriculum units about racial issues. This was particularly evident when I offered platitudes about the many accomplishments of African Americans as an attempt to make the participants feel better.

Resistence

Although in my early comments, I took on the identity of “White teacher,” later in the discussion I acted as a “critical literacy observer.” These identities suggest the complexity of living successfully in and navigating through the world of an elitist social institution that prizes academic discourse. These identities, additionally, demonstrated the ongoing conflict I felt during this study as a White educator working with students of color. However, like Bloome et al. (2008) suggest, these comments are interpreted differently, power as caring compassion. For example, later in this event, I did make a connection to our previous readings about Mexican-Americans and immigration laws in Arizona. In this particular connection I validated that racial issues are a problem currently in the larger, outside world. This statement was actually more indicative of the caring relations model of power discussed in Bloome et al. (2008). When Selma asserted, “White people have more abilities over us” [line 280 in transcript 5-20], I stepped in and assumed power (but in a caring manner) and simultaneously derailed the conversation completely. I felt uncomfortable and was unsure how to fix the situation, so I changed the topic. In fact, after my contradictory statement about the achievements of African Americans, Selma then dropped the previous conversation strand and allowed the discussion to move in the direction I proposed. As a participant
and researcher, I felt like I was in a dichotomous position of trying to encourage critical conversations, yet at the same time wanting to solve the participants’ problems (and not knowing how) and to make the situation better. Additionally, I was uneasy because as the White teacher, I was afraid that sometimes (albeit unknowingly) I could have contributed to their feelings of inadequacy. Despite my ineptitude during parts of our conversations, ultimately I wanted to help and offer hope.

The Outside World/Adult World

In one of the last interactional units in Transcript 5-12, Selma described a racist attack by a group of “Black” men on an unsuspecting Mexican woman. In her description, Selma was horrified by the attack and frightened that she and her Aunt may be attacked next. The knowledge and power was Selma’s, but her topic related to my prior conversation, so again there was some sense of sharing and connection. This information also built upon the shared knowledge about racial issues. However, this racial information was outside of school, unlike the prior events discussed. Between peers, Selma had the knowledge and the power and her topic would contradict much of the “knowledge” in schools about the nation’s current state of race relations. The outside world she described was a frightening world, where racial violence is palpable and random, not completely unlike the world of school discussed earlier.

The World of Text, the World of Politics and the International World

Text in Phase 2 was a powerful vehicle for discussions, personal confessions, and awareness of inequalities historically and in polarized current events. References to
three texts occurred in this phase: a newspaper article about Arizona Senate Bill 1070, accounts of children who survived the Holocaust, and the doll study in which African American girls chose White dolls over Black dolls when asked to choose the “pretty” one.

The first text reference occurred when I made the connection to Arizona laws (SB 1070 which requires Arizonians to carry legal documents to prove residency [Transcript 5-12] in relation to my lecture about the consequences of allowing racial prejudice. Previously in whole group class discussions, several of the Hispanic students brought up concerns about the anti-illegal alien law that recently had been approved by Arizona legislators. We discussed this issue at length and I had hoped that when I made this connection the participants would see how racism exists today. Selma acknowledged this connection when she added her own text-to-text connection about religious persecution during the Holocaust (from our book study, *Survivors: True Stories of Children in the Holocaust*, Zullo & Bovsun, 2004), a unit of study for the whole class, completed in the prior month. Most remarkable about this connection was that it was one of the few times that a student participant made an actual text-to-text connection. In addition, this connection changed the power dynamics by allowing the students to act as the expert. Consequently, other students then shared stories that appeared to tacitly have connections to racial prejudice. Selma, at the end of the lunch session on 5-12, told the story about the racial attack she witnessed. This story helped solidify the group knowledge about racial prejudice in multiple worlds.

On 5-20, there was a literacy event with several connected interactional units that followed a similar pattern to the power analysis transcript on 5-12. I introduced the doll
study in order to inspire the participants’ dialogue about race. What surprised me the most was the earnest confidences of some of the participants. These intimacies revealed vulnerability, which contributed to the overall feeling of shared power in the group. However, overwhelmed by their statements, I again offered platitudes and dominated the discussion. Although the conversation did not return to the earlier strand, the students went on to describe personal insecurities. Overall in this literacy event, power was shared between the participants except for one of conversations with the group. In addition, the text provided a catalyst to some of our most significant interactional units.

Summary of Power Analysis, Phase 2

Power was looked at three different ways in the study: Who has the floor? Who has the knowledge? What worlds do the participants describe and how are they positioned in these worlds? In Phase 2, Selma and I often held the floor more than the other participants. However, knowledge didn’t simply reside just with us. In fact, in most of our conversations, knowledge (and thus, power) was shared within our social action group. Ironically, this shared knowledge was predominately about how the student participants felt mistreated and powerless on the playground. Moreover, tacit understandings about these playground incidents in the World of School included that racism was a reason for their victimization and that the playground was a chaotic and violent place.

Similarly within the Classroom World, the participants’ overt understandings were that their power or “knowledge” was lacking. This was evidenced by Selma’s comment
that African Americans had less “abilities” (and thus, power) than Whites. This comment and others indicated that the participants felt powerless in many different situations in school.

My understandings about race and power are noteworthy in Phase 2. When a controversial statement was made by two of the participants (in which they said that they wished they were White), I usurped the students’ power (or knowledge) and controlled the conversation because I felt uncomfortable. The conversations felt radical within the school context and I was unsure how respond to their statements or how to comfort them.

Many identities shifted and flourished in this phase. Due to the vulnerability and victimization reported in these various contexts, the power was more equitable across the interactional units. Students felt comfortable enough to share painful events and described their suffering to the whole group. Although in earlier transcripts, participants had described incidents where they felt they were treated unfairly, this is the first time that these discussions were overtly connected to race. Of all the participants, Selma took the floor the most and other students corroborated her experience.

Phase 3: Background

In Phase 3, a total of five transcripts were analyzed: 5-21, 5-24, 5-27, 5-28, and 6-1. On 5-21, the lunch discussion began with me revisiting the doll study. Florence told the group that her mother would never choose the Black dolls over the White dolls because the Black dolls’ eyes were ugly and that the people who create the dolls, “make them ugly” [Transcript 5-21, line 17]. Florence said she and her sister actually
liked both the Black and White dolls (although, her tone in this statement was said in a very artificial manner) [Fieldnotes, 5-21]. Selma then took over the conversation reporting that her brother stated he sometimes, “wished he was White” [Transcript 5-21, line 27]. She also said that she felt uncomfortable and left out in whole group class discussions when other students brought up how Whites and Blacks are different. Hannah confirmed this statement and added that, “I wonder what my life would be and what would be different if I was White?” [Transcript 5-2, line 38]. Florence then acted as a “storyteller” and told the group how her sister was the only African American in her class and how unfair she and her mother thought the situation was.

Later after our discussion, the students worked on a worksheet called a “literature response cube” designed to inspire critical thinking about the study, a chance to explain their feelings in writing (if they wanted) and to think of possible actions to bring about a change.

The transcript on 5-24, Transcript 9, continued the discussion of the doll study. Florence shared her “Literature Response Cube” with the group. As a connection to one of the sections, Florence stated that her sister told her that she thinks she’s ugly (the same sister who said that she wished she was White). Ian then concurred that he also felt ugly and shared how his sister often criticized his appearance, and she said, “You don’t look good with your hair that way” [Transcript 5-24, line 30]. Florence responded to Ian’s comment by telling her own story about a time when her mother was angry with both her sister and her, and her mother shouted at Florence, “Get ya’ll ugly self and fat self and come on!” [Transcript 5-24, line 43]. Although Florence was laughing throughout her entire story it left me feeling sad for Florence. I knew her troubled past
with her mother and of the many hurtful and damaging comments her mother had made over the years. As Selma tried to change the topic, I steered the conversation back to their writing responses and their feelings of inadequacy. Selma said that Florence should share her writing, and so she did. In the section titled, “What questions do you still have about race?” she said in a very soft, hurt tone, “Why didn’t White people like Black people, back then?” [Transcript 5-24, line 56], Nobody responded. I wasn’t sure what to say and I didn’t think an academic response would be adequate or appropriate. I said nothing this time. She then read the last section entitled, “What can we do?” Florence suggested we have a Black parade. This started a lengthy debate over this topic involving most of the participants. Most notable was Selma’s adamant opinion that she did not want a parade or any public announcement.

Transcript 9 on 5-27 continued the social action discussion started at the end of transcript 5-24. As an introduction, I reviewed our previous discussion about ideas to help African Americans in the school feel better about themselves. As soon as I uttered the words, “African American” Selma repeated, “African, African” two times in a tired and frustrated voice. This statement started a second discussion about racial labels, in which Hannah and Stephen both stated that they don’t like the term “Black.” After they made their point, we settled on the term “African American.” However Selma sat in silence and I knew she did not agree with our label. And in this particular event, Selma was silenced. Next, we discussed the Black parade idea. I argued against it because I knew that the administration and some teachers would likely not approve. Additionally, this idea felt radical and I was uncomfortable with the repercussions of an event of this type within the context of our school. Therefore, I encouraged the other social action
projects mentioned previously. Again, Selma argued strongly against a parade and party and in fact, belittled Florence’s ideas to the group, “It doesn’t have to be for Blacks, it could be for light skin, or dark skin; it could be for Mexicans for all I care” [line 25]. The conversation turned when Hannah stated that everyone comes from immigrants. As a result, Selma retorted, “I’m from New Orleans, Louisiana,” [line 30] and this led to more arguments about who is and is not African American. After all this bickering, the student participants finally decided on making a poster of famous African Americans. During all the quarrelling, Florence was silent and unable to plead her case. Selma and I had interceded and stifled her idea. Sadly, resigned that her parade was not to be, Florence acquiesced, “Let’s just go ahead and make the poster” [line 43].

In Transcript 10 on 5-28, all the participants had started to work on the African American poster mentioned in transcript 5-27. Stephen randomly queried, “You know what I never really see at other schools, Black teachers” [Transcript 5-28, Lines 1-3]. Hannah agreed with this statement and stated that most of her teachers from her previous schools were White and Mexican. In an attempt to control the situation, I defended our school and let them know that our school had just hired an African American librarian. Florence confirmed my statement and added that many of our cafeteria ladies were African American. Selma then explained that she preferred to work with White teachers because in her own words, “All Blacks will be cussing and stuff.” Totally shocked and perplexed by her assertion I responded, “Not here at Howard, we have nice teachers,” [5-28, line 33-34] ending the uncomfortable conversation. Within the school, Selma’s statements felt racist and radical and I was unsure how to respond, so I silenced Selma.
Like 5-28, Transcript 11 on 6-1 is centered on the creation of the African American poster. In order to facilitate the process, I brought in pictures of a wide variety of famous African Americans. While gluing pictures on the board, Ian commented that Selma looked like Queen Latifah. Selma seemed unhappy by his comment and I stepped in and told Ian that Selma didn’t like that. Although Ian justified his comment by praising Queen Latifah’s beauty by stating that she was, “the juice,” Selma made it clear that she didn’t like the comparison. Florence concurred with me and claimed, “You don’t look nothing like [her]…” and then asserted, “She’s light” [line 11]. Although Selma retorted that she didn’t care in the second event in the transcript, she explained (after I asked a question about skin color) that when someone is darker, people make fun of you like Florence did earlier.

Phase 3: Identities

Three of the most frequent identities assumed by participants were “African American” (a participant who identifies oneself, either explicitly or implicitly, as a member of the African American community) “Critical Literacy Insider” (one who experiences, observes, and shares through language, inequitable local and personal power relationships. Characteristics include passionate feelings and statements), and “alienated African American” (participant believes that they are an outsider or victim to a group due to race). The complexity of the use of these identities was evidenced throughout the entire data, but even more so in Phase 3. Sometimes it was used as a source of pride related to family history, other times as a platform for an expert spokesperson or witness, or as a factor in alienation from other classmates. And for a
few (according to an inter-rater), the association was filled with self-loathing and racism. In addition, sometimes students reacted to other student’s identities by choosing opposing roles or at other times students took on similar roles. These delicate identity dances may have been due to a developing critical awareness or hierarchical peer relationships or a combination of both. In transcript 5-27 (Table 19), Stephen and Hannah assumed the identity of “label resistant,” when in the past they were supporters of other racial labels. In this interactional unit, Stephen and Hannah embraced resistance, which may be due to Selma’s influence and her initial comment.

Table 19

**Excerpt from 5-27 (Transcript 9)**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Transcript</th>
<th>Non-verbal</th>
<th>Identities Signaled</th>
<th>Linguistic Evidence</th>
<th>Update Across MU</th>
<th>Comments</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Bauer: So the main thing today</td>
<td>Authoritarian teacher</td>
<td>Deciding what is important</td>
<td>Directing/controlling the discussion</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Bauer: Is what we are going to do to make African Americans feel better at this school?</td>
<td>Authoritarian teacher, Researcher, Social Activist</td>
<td>Guiding the topic, Posing a question, Giving students the choice</td>
<td>I was trying to move students to a social action.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Selma: African, African</td>
<td>Rolling eyes, Label resister, Critical literacy insider</td>
<td>Repeated word and tone implies dissatisfaction with label</td>
<td>Selma consistently baulked at these racial labels</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*(table continues)*
Table 19 (continued).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Transcript</th>
<th>Non-verbal</th>
<th>Identities Signaled</th>
<th>Linguistic Evidence</th>
<th>Update Across MU</th>
<th>Comments</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>4. Bauer: African American,</td>
<td></td>
<td>Racial label supporter</td>
<td>Repeated word and tone</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Bauer: Do you want to say Black?</td>
<td></td>
<td>Researcher</td>
<td>Asking questions</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Stephen: Well I really don’t,</td>
<td>Tone</td>
<td>Label resister to “Black” Critical literacy insider African American</td>
<td>Tone implies dissatisfaction with label</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. Stephen: It’s kind of sensitive.</td>
<td></td>
<td>Label resister to “Black” Critical literacy insider African American</td>
<td>Tone implies dissatisfaction with label</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. Hannah: It kind of bothers me when people say Black,</td>
<td></td>
<td>Label resister Critical literacy insider African American</td>
<td>Tone implies dissatisfaction with label</td>
<td></td>
<td>Both students to not like the term “Black”</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(table continues)
In line three Selma stayed consistent, showing her distaste of the racial label “African American” by rolling her eyes and her frustrated tone. Her silence in the subsequent discussion about the term “Black” was likely a resistance to this label as well as her earlier comments about labels. However, in transcript 5-21, Selma herself referred to herself as “Black” revealing the contradictory feelings Selma has about her

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Transcript</th>
<th>Non-verbal</th>
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<th>Update Across MU</th>
<th>Comments</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>9. Hannah: a little bit.</td>
<td></td>
<td>Label resister Critical literacy insider African American Polite student</td>
<td>Tone implies dissatisfaction with label earlier Backs off more politely resisting label</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10. Bauer: You like African American</td>
<td>Researcher</td>
<td>Asking questions</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12. Hannah: That’s better.</td>
<td>Label resister African American</td>
<td>Denies one/accepts other Backs off more politely resisting label</td>
<td></td>
<td>Implies dissatisfaction with label</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
racial identity. The complexity of emotions surrounding racial identity was echoed in other researchers’ work with American students. Mica Pollock (2004), an educational anthropologist in California claims when asking her students questions about race, “students were both boxed into “racial” categorizations, and exploding out of such boxes all the time” (p. 19). Hannah and Stephen followed similar suit when they rejected the term “Black.” Hannah stated, “It kind of bothers me” and Stephen explained, “It’s kind of sensitive.” Both of these comments also indicated that they took on the role of “critical literacy insider” and “label resister” of the term “Black” although somewhat tentatively. Words like “kind of” and the phrase that it bothered Hannah “a little bit” are “mitigating devices” (Gee, 1996, p. 178), which lessens the strength of their statements. In contrast, Selma unabashedly stated her opinion throughout all three phases with little regard for what other participants thought (including me).

In the transcript below 5-21, the third most frequent identity appeared, “alienated African American.” This discussion evolved out of the group’s conversation about the doll study. Selma started the transactional unit with statement that she felt left out during class discussions when we discussed how Blacks and Whites were different, especially because she was the “only Black person in the class” [Transcript 5-21, line 29]. Other students in the group confirmed the same feelings as shown in Table 20.
Table 20

Excerpt from 5-21 (Transcript 7)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Transcript</th>
<th>Non-verbal</th>
<th>Identities Signaled</th>
<th>Linguistic Evidence</th>
<th>Update Across MU</th>
<th>Comments</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1.Hannah: Yeah sometimes you'll feel[</td>
<td>Alienated African American Minority student</td>
<td>“You’ll feel” Connecting to Selma’s earlier experience</td>
<td>Hannah also confirms this feeling</td>
<td>Several students positioned as Alienated African American</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.Selma: [like I feel left out</td>
<td>Alienated African American</td>
<td>“I feel left out”</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.Hannah: Yeah, cause[</td>
<td>Alienated African American</td>
<td>Yeah</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.Bauer: [You feel left out?</td>
<td>Researcher Teacher who empathizes Teacher positions herself as learner</td>
<td>Asking questions Soft tone-concern implied</td>
<td>Teacher/researcher positions herself as empathetic interviewer often in the IU</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.Hannah: Every time we talk about Blacks and Whites <em>I feel like what my life would be, what would be different if I was whi+te↑</em>(said softly)</td>
<td>Tilts her head</td>
<td>Alienated African American Critical literacy insider</td>
<td>I feel like what would my life be What would be different if I was whi+te↑</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(table continues)
Table 20 (continued).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Transcript</th>
<th>Non-verbal</th>
<th>Identities Signaled</th>
<th>Linguistic Evidence</th>
<th>Update Across MU</th>
<th>Comments</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>7.Hannah: Or a different color? And then, what (.) instead of no+w.</td>
<td>Positions herself as outsider/alienated from other Whiter students (this often includes Hispanics) African American student Critical literacy insider</td>
<td>What would be different if I was whi+te instead of no+w or a different color?</td>
<td>Hannah expresses the wish of changing her identity</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8.Bauer: right. What [<em>would it be like</em>]? (said softly)</td>
<td>Researcher Teacher who empathizes Critical literacy academic</td>
<td>Asking questions Soft tone-concern implied</td>
<td>Teacher positions herself as learner several time</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In the transcript 5-21 as shown in Table 20, Hannah and Selma both assumed the role of “alienated African American.” This identity connotes a participant who believes that he or she is treated as an outsider or victim to a group due to one’s race. Both girls explained that they felt “left out” when we had discussions in class about race, so much so that Hannah wondered if her life would be different if she was White. Thus, conversations I meant to be informative and empowering actually had the opposite effect. Instead, two students, Selma and Hannah felt even more isolated and alone.
Other identities surfaced as well, although less frequently. Students assumed family member identities like “brother,” “sister,” “daughter,” and “son” when discussing personal connections. Several students like Ian, Stephen, and Hannah acted as the “polite student” in their interactions with me and the other participants, based on actions one responded in an acceptable or polite way acknowledging the rules of the school and the teacher as authoritarian or leader.

Lastly, of the top identities utilized, students acted as “social activist.” However, social activism appeared to be as controversial as racial labels. In the study, students participated in a variety of projects: letter writing to the principal, starting a clothing drive for Haitians after the earthquake, and creating a poster filled with African American heroes. I had hoped that the students would agree and unite around these projects. However, all these activities felt forced and teacher-led despite the fact that all of the ideas came from the students. Thus in this social action group, social action projects meant to empower not only failed but oppressed and silenced one participant. Similarly to the conversations about racial labels, students positioned themselves in various and opposing ways. As a result, contradictory identities manifested when our discussions turned to social action as shown in Table 21.
Table 21

Excerpt from 5-27 (Transcript 9)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Transcript</th>
<th>Non-verbal</th>
<th>Identities Signaled</th>
<th>Linguistic Evidence</th>
<th>Update Across MU</th>
<th>Comments</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>9. Bauer: Did we decide that we could put up[</td>
<td></td>
<td>Social Activist</td>
<td>“Put up”</td>
<td></td>
<td>This means helping to hang the posters</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10. Ian: some posters?</td>
<td></td>
<td>Social Activist</td>
<td>“Posters”</td>
<td>Ian had already agreed with this social action</td>
<td>Posters recognize the accomplishments of African Americans</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11. Bauer: of African Americans who did some great things. [Like a big poster.</td>
<td></td>
<td>Social Activist</td>
<td>“Did some great things”</td>
<td></td>
<td>Shows support of poster activity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12. Hannah: [<em>I know</em></td>
<td>Excited tone</td>
<td>Social Activist</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13. Bauer: Do you want me to bring it up in regular class</td>
<td></td>
<td>Social Activist</td>
<td>“Bring it up”</td>
<td>Conversations about AA</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14. Bauer: Just to talk about just to say?</td>
<td></td>
<td>Social Activist</td>
<td>“Just to say”</td>
<td>Conversations about AA</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15. Hannah: Yeah!</td>
<td></td>
<td>Social Activist</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16. Florence: Or we could do it on announcements</td>
<td></td>
<td>Social Activist</td>
<td>“It”</td>
<td>Refers to publicly sharing info about African Americans</td>
<td>Florence appears more inclined to have a public social action</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17. Selma: NO!</td>
<td>Rolling her eyes</td>
<td>Resister to social action</td>
<td>Selma was first to reject the parade idea and know the public announcements</td>
<td>Selma does not seem to want any public attention for the social action</td>
<td>(table continues)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

209
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Transcript</th>
<th>Non-verbal</th>
<th>Identities Signaled</th>
<th>Linguistic Evidence</th>
<th>Update Across MU</th>
<th>Comments</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>18. Group members: NO!</td>
<td></td>
<td>Followers</td>
<td></td>
<td>Other group members appear to follow Selma’s lead</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Resisters to social action</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19. Bauer: Announce--ments, we don’t need</td>
<td></td>
<td>Submissive teacher</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20. Selma: [That’s unnecessary.</td>
<td></td>
<td>Minority student resistant to social action</td>
<td>The use of “unnecessary”</td>
<td>Selma disapproves</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21. Selma: That’s extremely unnecessary.</td>
<td></td>
<td>Minority student resistant to social action</td>
<td>The use of “unnecessary” “extremely” indicates power of her conviction</td>
<td>Selma is emphatic this is not a social action she supports</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>22. Selma: Extremely unnecessary.</td>
<td>Laying her head down</td>
<td>Minority student resistant to social action</td>
<td>The use of “unnecessary” “extremely” indicates power of her conviction</td>
<td>Same as above</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Florence and Hannah both acted as a “social activist” with all their many suggestions for social action projects. Florence had many ideas, but desired the most public social actions projects. Similarly, Hannah wanted to involve other students in fourth grade by initiating conversations about accomplished African Americans in
history. Unfortunately, Selma and I discouraged some of these ideas probably because we both anticipated negative repercussions from other students and administrators. Additionally, out of the entire student participant’s, Selma, more than the others positioned herself both as “supporter” and “resister” of the proposed social action projects. Moreover, her resistance may have had a direct impact on the other students’ choices, which is suggested by their sudden rejection of these more public social action projects. As discussed in Chapter 3, Selma’s influence previously had changed the group’s topic of choice.

My Role

My assumed identities in Phase 3 were as contradictory as Selma’s. Based on a frequency count chart six identities were most utilized: “White teacher,” “authoritarian teacher,” “researcher,” “empathizer,” “critical literacy insider” and “social activist.” White teacher included comments that were main stream in nature, presenting a more neutral curriculum stance, and downplaying racial issues. This definition included such actions as microinvalidations (Sue et al., 2007). “Authoritarian teacher” is an identity I took charge of by controlling or directing the conversation, reprimanding, or demanding information from the students. In direct opposition of “White teacher” and “authoritarian teacher” were the identities of “empathizer” and “social activist.” “Empathizer” was one who empathizes with another and “social activist” was a participant who wanted to act to change racial injustice, sought action for social justice or desired change (with action) for fair treatment for everyone. Table 22 reflects the dichotomies that were present.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Transcript</th>
<th>Non-verbal</th>
<th>Identities Signaled</th>
<th>Linguistic Evidence</th>
<th>Update Across MU</th>
<th>Comments</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>187. Florence: we should have a Black parade next year or even before the last day of school. (said in monotone voice)</td>
<td></td>
<td>Polite student Social activist</td>
<td>Complying with teacher’s request but monotone may show a dislike of compliance-request of the teacher “We should have a Black parade.”</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>188. Bauer: I like that idea.—</td>
<td></td>
<td>Social activist</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>189. Bauer: I don’t know how I’d do a parade.</td>
<td></td>
<td>Social activist White teacher</td>
<td>Supportive of an activity I was unsure whether my principal would approve of this activity—who is conservative and mainstream/discouraging here I knew I’d be in for a battle</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*(table continues)*
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Transcript</th>
<th>Non-verbal</th>
<th>Identities Signaled</th>
<th>Linguistic Evidence</th>
<th>Update Across MU</th>
<th>Comments</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>190. Bauer: I think it would be neat</td>
<td>Social activist</td>
<td>White teacher</td>
<td>Supportive of an activity</td>
<td>I was unsure whether my principal would approve of - who is conservative and mainstream/ discouraging here I knew I’d be in for a battle</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>191. Bauer: or like a po+ster or a party.</td>
<td>Social activist</td>
<td>White teacher</td>
<td>Supportive of an activity Po+ster indicates an emphasis and possibly encouragement of this activity over others</td>
<td>I was unsure whether my principal would approve of a Black parade- who is conservative and mainstream/ discouraging here I knew I’d be in for a battle</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>192. [Crosstalk]</td>
<td>Social activist</td>
<td>White teacher</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>(table continues)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Transcript</td>
<td>Non-verbal</td>
<td>Identities Signaled</td>
<td>Linguistic Evidence</td>
<td>Update Across MU</td>
<td>Comments</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>------------</td>
<td>------------</td>
<td>---------------------</td>
<td>---------------------</td>
<td>------------------</td>
<td>----------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>193. Stephen: If we do the poster.</td>
<td>Social activist</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>194. Stephen: A party?</td>
<td>Social activist</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>195.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>196. Stephen: Like a Black party?</td>
<td>Social activist</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>197. Bauer: Well, I don’t know how we’re gonna get that organized between now and then.</td>
<td>Social activist White teacher</td>
<td>I want to do something but an activity that is practical and will be approved by admin and I knew we probably would not have time</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>198. Bauer: Let me think about it, okay?</td>
<td>Social activist White teacher</td>
<td>I want to do something but an activity that is practical and will be approved by admin and I knew we probably would not have time</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In contrast, the transactional unit below from transcript 5-21 (Table 23) showed me as an “empathizer” when I shared with the student participants how I experienced a similar feeling of isolation and otherness when I lived as a minority in Namibia.
Table 23

Excerpt from 5-21 (Transcript 7)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Transcript</th>
<th>Non-verbal</th>
<th>Identities Signaled</th>
<th>Linguistic Evidence</th>
<th>Update Across MU</th>
<th>Comments</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>57. Bauer: You know when I went to Africa, I was the only White person in the whole village [that worked there.</td>
<td>Peace Corps Volunteer as minority Empathizer</td>
<td>I went to Africa</td>
<td>Teacher brings Minority identity to group in order to still be a group member</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>58. Florence:</td>
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<tr>
<td>59. Bauer: [And that was the first time I got the feeling of what would be like to be</td>
<td>Peace Corps Volunteer as minority Critical literacy insider</td>
<td>“The first time I got the feeling of what would be like to be [”</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>60. Selma:</td>
<td>African American Student positions herself as student who is alienated African American Critical literacy insider Empathizer Reporter</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(table continues)
Table 23 (continued).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Transcript</th>
<th>Non-verbal</th>
<th>Identities Signaled</th>
<th>Linguistic Evidence</th>
<th>Update Across MU</th>
<th>Comments</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>61. Bauer: Ye↑ah↓ to be different.</td>
<td>Reporter or storyteller with similar experience</td>
<td>Ye↑ah↓ to be different</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Group member with similar experiences</td>
<td>Tone implies empathy</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Empathizer</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>62. Bauer: from e+very+boby.</td>
<td>Reporter or storyteller with similar experience</td>
<td>Tone implies understanding of experience</td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td>Critical literacy insider</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Empathizer</td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>63. Selma: It ain't, it ain't, and [It's not fu + n. It's de+initely not fu+n</td>
<td>Leaning back in her chair</td>
<td>African American</td>
<td>Comment, “It’s not easy.” shows alienation</td>
<td>Selma validates teacher’s identity</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Critical literacy insider</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Alienated AA</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Reporter</td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>64. Bauer: [It's isn't eas+y, it isn't easy</td>
<td>Reporter or storyteller with similar experience</td>
<td>Repetition of Selma’s statement</td>
<td>“It isn’t easy…”</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Teacher who empathizes</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Critical literacy insider</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 23 (continued).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Transcript</th>
<th>Non-verbal</th>
<th>Identities Signaled</th>
<th>Linguistic Evidence</th>
<th>Update Across MU</th>
<th>Comments</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>61. Bauer: I felt like people were always staring at me wondering what I was going to do++. [And what’s different about me++, I look different.</td>
<td>Reporter</td>
<td>Teacher who empathizes</td>
<td>Critical literacy insider</td>
<td>what’s different about me++, I look different.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Phase 3: Power

Classroom World

Phase 3, compared to Phases 1 and 2, revealed the most information about how the participants felt about themselves in the larger classroom group, the topics of conversation during whole group, classroom discussions and the assigned book reports.

Uncomfortable Topics

One of the difficulties that most of the participants shared was how awkward they felt when topics such as segregation were discussed with the whole class. In the transcript below on 5-21, Selma and Hannah described these feelings (Table 24).

Table 24
Excerpt from 5-21 (Transcript 7)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Transcript</th>
<th>Social Interaction</th>
<th>Building Knowledge</th>
<th>Power between Students and Teachers</th>
<th>Power between Students</th>
<th>Power between Students and Social Institution</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>23. Hanna: Yeah sometimes you’ll feel</td>
<td>Picks up on Selma’s comments</td>
<td>Reveals the Classroom World</td>
<td>The repetition/emphasis adds strong emotion</td>
<td>Shared- both are in agreement and both have share the knowledge</td>
<td>A typical topic for school Students express resistance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>24. Selma: I feel left out</td>
<td>Continues topic</td>
<td>Adds affective dimension to knowledge</td>
<td>Students have power/knowledge but an overall shared feeling</td>
<td>Shared- both are in agreement and both have share the knowledge</td>
<td>A typical topic for school Students express resistance</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
This was both the first time a student had expressed these emotions and the first time I considered how uncomfortable these topics were to my African American students. I was further surprised when Selma wanted to know why her Hispanic friend sometimes talked about differences between Whites and Blacks in her book reports (books about segregation) to the whole group and how she didn’t like it. The underlying message in this statement was that her friend was either inconsiderate, prejudiced or both. Hannah, in the next line, quickly agreed with this feeling. Thus, topics and assignments that were intended to be empowering, actually were oppressive and alienating. In Tatum’s (1997) book, *Why Are All the Black Kids Sitting Together in the Cafeteria?* Similarly, strong feelings surfaced when racial topics were discussed in class:

Too often I hear from young African-American students the embarrassment they have felt in school when the topic of slavery was discussed; ironically one of the few ways that the Black experience is included in their school curriculum…They often squirm uncomfortably as they feel the eyes of White children looking to see their reaction. Students were not the only ones who felt uncomfortable. In Tatum’s (1997) book, teachers also felt uncomfortable discussing such horrible atrocities as lynching and other violence against African Americans.

In addition, participants also voiced feeling isolated and disconnected from school due to the lack of African Americans in their classes. Florence said, “I felt alone in class today” [Transcript, 5-24, line 179]. Hannah concurred, “Like it’s hard enough for me that I’m the only girl on my table, and it’s harder for me because I’m the only Black one” [Transcript, 5-24, line 189]. Selma also stated “I felt yesterday because it’s like
everybody was being mean to me. I try to be so nice” [Transcript, 5-24, line 90]. Three of the five participants (Selma, Hannah, and Florence) all described the classroom at times to be an uncomfortable and lonely place where they feel victimized by their peers because of their race.

Arguments about Racial Labels

As in Phase 1, Selma again expressed frustration about racial labels terms used in the classroom, the group, and the school institution. In Transcript 5-27, she showed her distaste of the term “African American” by repeating it after I said it twice and shaking her head [Fieldnotes 5-27]. When I asked her if she would prefer the label “Black,” Stephen and Hannah jumped in and asserted that they did not like this label. Stephen stated, “It’s kind of sensitive.” This marks a change in both Hannah and Stephen, who were supportive of the African American label in Phase 1. Although the label is different, it is possible that in Phase 1, they did not feel comfortable opposing given racial labels. Despite the participants’ protests, both Selma and Stephen in subsequent transcripts readily used these labels. In fact, the very next day, Stephen talked about and used the label “Black teachers” when describing African American teachers and how our school is lacking in this area.

The World of School

Black Teachers

The larger school world, which included Howard, was only directly mentioned
once in the transcript of 5-28. After working on the African American posters as our chosen project for two days, Stephen suddenly made the comment wistfully that he didn’t really see Black teachers. Table 25 is an excerpt from this transactional unit.

Table 25
Excerpt from 5-28 (Transcript 10)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Transcript</th>
<th>Social Interaction</th>
<th>Building Knowledge</th>
<th>Power between Students and Teachers</th>
<th>Power between Students</th>
<th>Power between Students and Social Institution</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Stephen: You know what I never really see at other schools?</td>
<td>Initiates Topic/Question</td>
<td>Seeking confirmation to his knowledge about the lack of AA teachers</td>
<td>Shared knowledge</td>
<td>Equal-looking for confirmation</td>
<td>Student is questioning social and power structures in dominant powers (like schools)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Bauer: No.</td>
<td>Response</td>
<td>Statement is meant to encourage student to share his knowledge</td>
<td>Equal but student has the power with this information</td>
<td>Equal</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Stephen: Black teachers</td>
<td>Statement</td>
<td>Student knowledge but possible inequity between Blacks and Whites</td>
<td>Equal but student has the power with this information</td>
<td>Equal</td>
<td>Student is questioning social and power structures in dominant powers (like schools)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Stephen: You don’t really see Black teachers</td>
<td>Statement/role of expert</td>
<td>Student adding background knowledge and possible inequity between Blacks and Whites</td>
<td>Equal but student has the power with this information</td>
<td>Equal</td>
<td>Student is questioning social and power structures in dominant powers (like schools)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*(table continues)*
Table 25 (continued).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Transcript</th>
<th>Social Interaction</th>
<th>Building Knowledge</th>
<th>Power between Students and Teachers</th>
<th>Power between Students</th>
<th>Power between Students and Social Institution</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>5. Hannah: That's true</td>
<td>Statement / agreeing with Stephen/ adding her expertise</td>
<td>Student adding background knowledge and possible inequity between Blacks and Whites</td>
<td>Equal but student has the power with this information</td>
<td>Equal</td>
<td>Student is questioning social and power structures in dominant powers (like schools)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Bauer: Really?</td>
<td>Question</td>
<td>Question is meant to encourage student to share his knowledge</td>
<td>Equal but student has the power with this information</td>
<td>Equal</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. Hannah: At my old school†, there was only one Black teacher</td>
<td>Statement / refuting the teacher</td>
<td>Student adding background knowledge and possible inequity between Blacks and Whites</td>
<td>Equal but student has the power with this information and stands up to my previous comment</td>
<td>Equal</td>
<td>Student is questioning social and power structures in dominant powers (like schools)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. Bauer: Really↑?</td>
<td>Question/ countering the previous student’s statement</td>
<td>Question is on the one hand meant to encourage the student to share his/her knowledge but also is challenging</td>
<td>Equal but student has the power with this information</td>
<td>Equal</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9. Bauer: We have more Black teachers here</td>
<td>Statement/ expert about present school</td>
<td>Teacher adding background knowledge. It challenges the previous statements by the students</td>
<td>Teacher may supersede students knowledge simply because or her (my) position</td>
<td>Not equal here/ leaning towards the teacher</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Hannah agreed and stated later in the transactional unit, “And then they was mostly Mexican and White.” I then quickly jumped in and argued that Howard has Black teachers. In addition, I pointed out that the school just hired an African American
librarian. Then I asked the group if they felt more comfortable having African American teachers (Table 26).

Table 26

Excerpt from 5-28 (Transcript 10)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Question that is personal and requires the students to take a risk</th>
<th>Teacher asking students about their affective/personal knowledge</th>
<th>Students are expert/students have the power</th>
<th>Equal</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>20. Bauer: Does it make you feel good seeing people who look like you?</td>
<td>Statement that refutes what I thought would be the answer</td>
<td>Student sharing background knowledge</td>
<td>Students are expert/students have the power</td>
<td>Equal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21. Selma: No.</td>
<td>Question/ countering the previous student’s statement</td>
<td>Question is on the one hand meant to encourage the student to share his/her knowledge but also is challenging</td>
<td>Equal but student has the power with this information</td>
<td>Equal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>22. Bauer: Why not?</td>
<td>Statement that refutes what I thought would be the answer</td>
<td>Student sharing background knowledge</td>
<td>Students are expert/students have the power</td>
<td>Equal</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Selma went on to say, “All Black will be cussing and stuff” [Line 33, Transcript, 5-28].

When I asked her if it was more difficult to work with White teachers, she said, “For me it is easier” [Line 35, Transcript 5-28]. Feeling incredulous about her response, I tried to
control the situation and change around what she said by restating her comments into it didn’t matter what a teacher’s skin color is. However, her statements shocked me. Although I knew that Selma at times said things for attention, I perceived that she believed what she was saying. These statements suggested that Selma could internalize and actually recreate racist beliefs of White superiority (Tatum, 1997).

Home World

In Phase 3, participants’ portrait of their interactions at home mirrored issues discussed in the previous phases and worlds. Through several interactional units throughout the transcripts it appeared that problems related to race were discussed with family members.

Racist World

Discussions at home about race and race-related issues came up throughout the transcripts. Some of the discussions with family members included how they felt isolated because there were not many African Americans in their classrooms, how some participants felt that they wanted to be White (Selma’s brother sometimes wishing he was White), and Stephen’s mom told him it’s bad enough that he is Black, but doing poorly in school would make his life even more difficult.

Perhaps, most poignant was Stephen’s discussion with his mother. Table 27 is a transcript of the transactional event.
Table 27

*Excerpt from 5-21 (Transcript 7)*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Transcript</th>
<th>Social Interaction</th>
<th>Building Knowledge</th>
<th>Power between Students and Teachers</th>
<th>Power between Students</th>
<th>Power between Students and Social Institution</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>25.Bauer:</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Okay,</td>
<td>Allowing/Validating turn taking Teacher positions herself as in charge Initiates social interaction</td>
<td>Validates previous knowledge by insisting students say on topic</td>
<td>Teacher acts as authoritarian and takes charge.</td>
<td>Falls into teacher’s traditional role</td>
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<tr>
<td>Stephen,</td>
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<tr>
<td>is it</td>
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<td>something</td>
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<td>on topic?</td>
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<tr>
<td>26.Stephen:</td>
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<tr>
<td><em>Yes</em>.</td>
<td>Takes floor</td>
<td>Build upon student’s personal racial knowledge</td>
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<td>(quietly,</td>
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<td>softly)</td>
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<tr>
<td>27.Bauer:</td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td><em>Okay, tell me what</em>. (rapidly)</td>
<td>Allowing/Validating turn taking Initiates social interaction</td>
<td>Teacher acts as authoritarian and takes charge.</td>
<td>Falls into teacher’s traditional role</td>
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<tr>
<td>28.Stephen:</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>One time</td>
<td>Adding information from background knowledge Build upon student’s personal racial knowledge</td>
<td>Personal knowledge that builds on the other students’ background</td>
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<td>when my</td>
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<td>mom, she</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

*(table continues)*
Table 27 (continued).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Transcript</th>
<th>Social Interaction</th>
<th>Building Knowledge</th>
<th>Power between Students and Teachers</th>
<th>Power between Students</th>
<th>Power between Students and Social Institution</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>29. Stephen: and then all of a sudden she said, “You should be good in school because it’s bad enough that you <em>Black</em>.” (whole statement softly) (Black in soft whisper)</td>
<td>Continue adding information from background knowledge</td>
<td>Build upon student’s personal racial knowledge</td>
<td>Personal knowledge that builds on the other students’ background</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>30. Bauer: <em>She said that</em>? (softly, crack in voice)</td>
<td>Teacher positions herself as a learner</td>
<td>Linking knowledge to family</td>
<td>Sharing and caring of knowledge</td>
<td>Topic and response atypical</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>31. Florence: She said what?</td>
<td>Ta’moria picks up Stephen’s comments Requests clarification</td>
<td>Gives Stephen’s knowledge importance</td>
<td>Power shared</td>
<td>Empathetic listener-power is shared</td>
<td>Topic and response atypical</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>32. Bauer: Who said that, your grandmother?</td>
<td>Teacher positions herself as a learner Requests clarification</td>
<td>Linking knowledge to family</td>
<td>Sharing and caring of knowledge</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>33. Florence: His mom.</td>
<td>Ta’moria picks up Stephen’s comments</td>
<td>Gives Stephen’s knowledge importance</td>
<td></td>
<td>Topic and response atypical</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*(table continues)*
Table 27 (continued).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Transcript</th>
<th>Social Interaction</th>
<th>Building Knowledge</th>
<th>Power between Students and Teachers</th>
<th>Power between Students and Social Institution</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>34. Bauer: <em>His mom</em>? <em>(said softly)</em></td>
<td>Teacher positions herself as a learner</td>
<td>Gives Stephen’s knowledge importance</td>
<td>Repetition shows I thought this knowledge was significant</td>
<td>Topic and response atypical</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>35. Stephen: Well I don’t think she meant in a bad way, but just because.</td>
<td>Defends his mother’s actions</td>
<td>Adding information from background knowledge</td>
<td>All if the personal connections and especially this one show how difficult the students think life is as African American</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>36. Bauer: Did she, did she mean it that maybe life is harder for you?</td>
<td>Teacher positions herself as learner</td>
<td>Linking knowledge to family</td>
<td></td>
<td>Topic and response atypical</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>37. Stephen: Yes.</td>
<td>Confirming</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The power and feeling of his mother's comments are evidenced by the tone he used when telling the story. When he first stated the comment his mother made in line 27, “It’s bad enough that you’re Black,” I was unsure if he was trying to portray his mother as cruel or as protective. Both Florence and I were taken back by that statement and we looked at him carefully to try and register how he felt about his mom’s remarks. I then asked for clarification. It was clear to me [Fieldnotes 5-21] after we asked questions, that he thought his mother was trying to prepare him for the harshness of a racist society as well as to motivate him to do better in school. Similarly one of my inter-
raters, who was an African American teacher at my school, explained that she and her husband had to warn their son that he had to “walk on water” when he drove through certain affluent White neighborhoods in the city in order to prepare him for the possible harassment from the police. Thus, discussions such as these were not unique, and illuminated how racial topics can be a part of these participants’ daily lives.

Reproduction of Racism and Oppression

According to Cross’ (1991) model in Tatum (1997) there are five stages of “Black” racial identity development: pre-encounter, encounter, immersion/emersion, internalization, and internalization-commitment. According to the first stage, the Black child absorbs many of the beliefs and values of the dominant White culture including the idea that it is better to be White. Tatum (1997) explains,

The stereotypes, omissions and distortions that reinforce notions of White superiority are breathed in by Black children as well as White, simply as a function of being socialized in a euro-centric culture. Some Black children may begin to value the role models lifestyles and images of beauty represented by the dominate group more highly than those of their own cultural group. (p. 55)

In addition to internalizing these racist stereotypes, the African-American child can also reproduce these inequities with members of their own race through “internalized oppression” (Tatum, 1997, p. 6). This means that African-Americans take on the role as oppressors acting out many of the beliefs of the dominant culture on their own people.

This “internalized oppression” is exemplified throughout the transcripts in Phase 3 of this study. For example, in transcript 5-24 Ian explained that his sister told him that his hair was ugly and as a result he sleeps with “his fists balled up.” In fact, in a later transcript Ian made a reference to his sister having lighter skin like Queen Latifah. From
this statement on 5-24, it seemed that Ian perceived that his sister was oppressing him because of his hair difference or darker skin. Florence also described her sister on 5-24 as feeling ugly: "She said she told me yesterday that she thinks she is ugly." This statement was made directly after we had read the doll study and discussed African American girls’ choosing the White doll over the Black doll. Ian then commented, "That's how I felt. Because my sisters like she always says you don't look good with your hair that way." Florence nodded her head and agreed. Both Ian and Florence explained the pain of their own and their families' insecurities and feelings of ugliness. These descriptions painted a picture of a world where students at home are feeling inadequate in comparison to others in both their family and the larger White world they find themselves living in.

Lastly, this notion of "internalized oppression" also appeared in a conversation about Selma's brother. Selma described a conversation she had with her mother and brother at home about the doll study from our group. Selma and their mother were talking about school and Selma's brother stated that sometimes he wished that he was White. This statement shows that Selma's brother applied and acted as an oppressor on his own racial identity.

Outside World/ Adult World

Similar to the conflicted world at home, descriptions of the outside world and the society at large also appeared at times to be a hostile environment for African-Americans and the participants. This was evidenced by Stephen’s description of the conversation he had with this mother in which she warned him that he need to do better
in school because,”…it’s bad enough that you're Black” [Transcript 5-21]. This implied that life outside of school (and the larger society) is harsh, judgmental, and racist.

Hostility from the outside world also appeared later in the transcript when I lectured the group about how there are still racial problems in the world. As explained, Martin Luther King, Jr. changed our world and how there is still more work to be done, Selma refuted this statement in line 37. (Table 28)

Table 28
Excerpt from 5-21 (Transcript 7)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Transcript</th>
<th>Social Interaction</th>
<th>Building Knowledge</th>
<th>Power between Students and Teachers</th>
<th>Power between Students</th>
<th>Power between Students and Social Institution</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>38.Bauer: that our, that Martin Luther King’s work is no+t done.</td>
<td>Adding information from study (text) that refutes/negates mainstream curriculum</td>
<td>Teacher connects general, mainstream academic discourse knowledge to students’ personal, background knowledge</td>
<td>Opens the discussion about the outside/larger world.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>39.Selma: <em>He didn’t change no</em>, Well he did change things[ (tone-)]</td>
<td>Refutes/negates mainstream academic knowledge Recants and reproduces common, mainstream knowledge</td>
<td>Adding information from background knowledge</td>
<td>First time Selma (int his transcripts) negates my knowledge or mainstream school curriculum</td>
<td>Shared Selma resists school curriculum</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>40.Bauer: [He di+d change things</td>
<td>Teacher takes the floor Corrects students’ refusal of mainstream knowledge</td>
<td>Reaffirms mainstream academic knowledge</td>
<td>Mainstream curriculum about racial issues present</td>
<td>Supports traditional curriculum</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
In Table 28 Selma implied that the outside world had not changed much from the time of segregation. Thus, Selma believed that Blacks were still treated poorly and unfairly and that Whites still oppressed people of color. What is interesting is that directly after making that statement, she retracted it in the second sentence, “Well he did change things…” Although at the time, I didn’t ask her directly why she reversed her evaluation I perceived she thought I (and the other participants) would not approve of her comment. Selma’s comment was radical. At the time of the study, most of the district and state curriculum portrayed the struggle for equality ending after Martin Luther King’s death, as if racism disappeared magically in the late 1960s. In contrast to the curriculum, three participants (including me) painted an outside world of segregation, hostility, and harsh judgment.

*The World of Text*

Very few references were made directly to the doll study text in Phase 3. Most of the discussions related to the text very quickly moved into personal connections and descriptions of other worlds despite my attempts to redirect the conversation back to the text. This behavior of moving away from written text is particularly evident and supported in both Phases 2 and 3. This desire to move to oral discussions and away from text has also been noted in other research with African American students (Heath, 1983). However, in transcript 5-24, Florence’s responses to the literature cube worksheet (Lewison et al., 2008) contained a comment, a personal connection, and a question about the doll study. Most notable was her question, "Why don't White people like Black people back then?" As an active participant in this discussion, what was most noteworthy was the emotion in her voice when she asked that question. It was clear to
the group (as noted in the field notes from 5-24), that this was very painful to Florence.

As discussed previously, topics relating to race required consideration and sensitivity. Implications for practice based on these findings are discussed in Chapter 6.

International World

The international world also appeared in the transcripts in Phase 3. I created this world (since none of the 5 participants had any personal experience in this area) because I wanted to connect to the students and let them know that I also had experienced life as a minority when I served as a Peace Corps Volunteer in Namibia. Additionally, I wanted them to know that the larger world and in particular Namibia in Southern Africa, people of color were the majority, and White, the minority. I told them I also felt isolated and alone. Selma acknowledged my statements and confirmed by stating “it ain’t easy.” But she quickly let me know that our situations were very different. Table 29 reflects the transactional event documents our discussion.

Table 29

Excerpt from 5-24 (Transcript 8)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Transcript</th>
<th>Social Interaction</th>
<th>Building Knowledge</th>
<th>Power between Students and Teachers</th>
<th>Power between Students</th>
<th>Power between Students and Social Institution</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Selma: how long did you - you were only there for a year?</td>
<td>Challenging statements</td>
<td>Student clarifies the difference between my experience and her and other African American students’ experiences</td>
<td>Equal- student stands ground challenges teacher’s thinking</td>
<td>Questioning social situations/addressing racial issues in class</td>
<td>Bucks system by questioning and discussing these issues</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*(table continues)*
Table 29 (continued).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Transcript</th>
<th>Social Interaction</th>
<th>Building Knowledge</th>
<th>Power between Students and Teachers</th>
<th>Power between Students</th>
<th>Power between Students and Social Institution</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Bauer: Two years.</td>
<td>Responding to question</td>
<td>Teacher shares knowledge/ makes a connection</td>
<td>Equal in this comment</td>
<td></td>
<td>Questioning social situations/addressing racial issues in class</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Bucks system by questioning and discussing these issues</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Selma: Two years↑?</td>
<td>Challenging statements</td>
<td>Student clarifies the difference between my experience and her and other AA students’ experiences</td>
<td>Equal- student stands ground challenges teacher’s thinking</td>
<td></td>
<td>Questioning social situations/addressing racial issues in class</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Bucks system by questioning and discussing these issues</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Selma: We’ve got to live through it [inaudible]↑?</td>
<td>Challenging statements</td>
<td>Student clarifies the difference between my experience and her and other African American students’ experiences</td>
<td>Equal- student stands ground challenges teacher’s thinking</td>
<td></td>
<td>Questioning social situations/addressing racial issues in class</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Bucks system by questioning and discussing these issues</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Selma: It’s like 12 years.</td>
<td>Challenging statements</td>
<td>Student clarifies the difference between my experience and her and other African American students’ experiences</td>
<td>Equal- student stands ground challenges teacher’s thinking</td>
<td></td>
<td>Questioning social situations/addressing racial issues in class</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Bucks system by questioning and discussing these issues</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Selma made it apparent that she understood and realized how difficult life is as a minority, but also informed me that our situations cannot really be compared. According to Selma, living as a minority is a lifetime challenge for her and the other participants. My discomfort and isolation lasted only two years.
The Group World

Shared Power

Out of all the worlds described, the group world appeared to be the place where the student participants had the most freedom and their knowledge was validated. Unlike the other worlds, the students expressed their feelings, shared their knowledge (as power), and received acknowledgement for their vast personal experiences and connections. Thus, overall in many of the interactions there was a shared feeling and camaraderie; however, there were points of struggle. In the beginning, Selma described her mistreatment and her vulnerability by her peers and sought compassion and understanding from the group. This confession of vulnerability appeared to lessen the power tension between her and the other participants (myself included). However, she continued to control the floor and changed the topic when others still wanted to share. She had the power/knowledge over the others often and the balance was less shared because she dominated the discussions. However, there were exceptions. This is especially evident in the transcripts of 5-24. In the beginning of this transcript, Selma uncharacteristically allowed Florence and Stephen to share their personal experiences and questions without interrupting and was supportive of their comments. In fact, the only part of the transcripts where she contested or refuted another participant’s statements occurred during our conversation about my Peace Corps experience (See Table 30).
Table 30

Excerpt from 6-1 (Transcript 11)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Transcript</th>
<th>Social Interaction</th>
<th>Building Knowledge</th>
<th>Power between Students and Teachers</th>
<th>Power between Students</th>
<th>Power between Students and Social Institution</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Florence: I don't think you look like her.....</td>
<td>Agreement with teacher</td>
<td>Building upon personal knowledge and racist practices.</td>
<td>Students have more power</td>
<td>The girls together have more power and override Ian.</td>
<td>This type of knowledge is not typically acknowledged. So they are resisting typical allowable discussions.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Florence: You don't look no+thing like</td>
<td>Strong statement seems beyond supporting the previous statements. Florence agrees with teacher</td>
<td>Building upon personal knowledge and racist practices.</td>
<td>The student here is moving beyond statements made by the teacher. It has a tone that appears to try to hurt.</td>
<td>Florence has more power through this derogatory statement.</td>
<td>This type of knowledge is not typically addressed. So they are resisting typical allowable discussions.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Florence: neither of you.</td>
<td>Strong statement seems beyond support. Florence agrees with teacher</td>
<td>Building upon personal knowledge and racist practices. However, this statement may have more malevolent purpose (to hurt.)</td>
<td>Florence has more power through this derogatory statement and cuts down both student It has a tone that appears to try to hurt.</td>
<td>Florence's more power through this derogatory statement and cuts down both students.</td>
<td>This type of knowledge is not typically addressed. So they are resisting typical allowable discussions.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(table continues)
Table 30 (continued).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Transcript</th>
<th>Social Interaction</th>
<th>Building Knowledge</th>
<th>Power between Students and Teachers</th>
<th>Power between Students</th>
<th>Power between Students and Social Institution</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>4. Florence: the skin</td>
<td>Derogatory-racist statement</td>
<td>Building upon personal knowledge and racist practices about racial beauty</td>
<td>Florence has more power through this derogatory statement and cuts down both student</td>
<td>Florence has more power through this derogatory statement and cuts down both students.</td>
<td>This type of knowledge is not typically addressed. So they are resisting typical allowable discussions.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Puts these students in a lower category</td>
<td>It has a tone that appears to try to hurt.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Florence: She’s li++ght,</td>
<td>Derogatory-perhaps a racist statement</td>
<td>Building upon personal knowledge and racist practices</td>
<td>Florence has more power through this derogatory statement and cuts down both student</td>
<td>Florence has more power through this derogatory statement and cuts down both students.</td>
<td>This type of knowledge is not typically addressed. So they are resisting typical allowable discussions.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Puts these students in a lower category</td>
<td>It has a tone that appears to try to hurt.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Florence: Mmm-uhh</td>
<td>Derogatory-perhaps a racist statement</td>
<td>Building upon personal knowledge and racist practices</td>
<td>Florence has more power through this derogatory statement and cuts down both student</td>
<td>Florence has more power through this derogatory statement and cuts down both students.</td>
<td>This type of knowledge is not typically addressed. So they are resisting typical allowable discussions.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>It has a tone that appears to try to hurt.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. Florence: more light.</td>
<td>Derogatory-perhaps a racist statement</td>
<td>Adds to the knowledge by putting down two students because of their skin color (lightness or darkness)</td>
<td>Florence has more power through this derogatory statement and cuts down both student</td>
<td>Florence has more power through this derogatory statement and cuts down both students.</td>
<td>This type of knowledge is not typically addressed. So they are resisting typical allowable discussions.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Puts these students in a lower category</td>
<td>It has a tone that appears to try to hurt.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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Stephen and Hannah also asserted their power when they posited that they disliked the racial label “Black.” This exchange uniquely showed how comfortable all three felt with me and the other participants to contest our knowledge.

Reproducing Racism

Although power is shared in Phase 3, there was one incident that occurred that reflects an unequal balance of power and a reproduction of “racism” between three participants. In the transcript on 6-1, the students were completing their social action project, an African American “poster” with African American heroes. Due to the limited time constraints of our group, I pre-cut pictures of famous African Americans from my personal magazines. One of the people I cut out for the poster was Queen Latifah. While students were constructing the poster, Ian commented that Selma looked like Queen Latifah and said that she was “juicy.” I knew from the way Selma looked at Ian that she didn’t want to be compared to Queen Latifah. Therefore, right before this
interaction, I told Selma that I didn’t think she looked like her. The preceding interaction documents this interaction.

Florence’s statements recreated the racist practice of racial hierarchy based on lightness or darkness of skin tone. Ironically, Florence in earlier transcripts complained of her mother calling her ugly, yet she hurt Selma in this way. This behavior was characteristic of “internalized oppression” (Tatum, 1997), which states African Americans sometimes recreate racist practices due to internalizing the beliefs of the oppressors. Although Selma responded, “I don’t really care Florence,” I could tell that she was bothered by the tone in her voice. Later on in this transcript, I asked the participants why skin color makes any difference. Finally, at the very end of this session Selma explained, “People will make fun of you when you are darker. Like Florence,” proving that Florence’s statements were injurious. In this particular incident, the power was not shared between the participants.

Summary of Power Analysis, Phase 3

Similar to Phase 2, participants in Phase 3 shared the power as “knowledge” through contributing statements that supported the groups’ understandings about race. Candid comments about how race affected their school experience were shared throughout this phase. Ironically although the power was shared within our social action group, the knowledge that was shared revealed how powerless the students felt in the larger school and the classroom.

Students’ feelings of powerlessness in the school environment revealed that in the larger classroom, the participants were further alienated when the teacher
discussed topics like segregation. These descriptions indicated that these participants (student who struggle with reading in school) do not have power in school and that their knowledge is typically not validated in the larger school context.

In contrast, in our social action group, the student participants were engaged and validating each other’s knowledge so much so that the participants felt comfortable enough to share these painful feelings and lived experiences. The only other world that the participants shared this type of knowledge with others was in the Home World. However, this racism against people of color was internalized by several of student participants and at times, these participants made “racist” remarks about each other’s skin color or tone in order to injure and humiliate. Thus, participants both validated and oppressed each other’s knowledge or power.

Phase 3: Social Action Projects

As discussed in the identity section of Phase 3, social actions were hotly contested in the transcripts. An area that I thought would be empowering for the students turned out to do the opposite. As we began our discussion about possible social actions, Florence had many different ideas including: a Black parade, reading about famous African Americans over the announcements, and creating and displaying posters with famous African Americans. But Selma discouraged this, “All these Black people are African American and they’re supposed to be having a party in the classroom.” Then she went on to say, “It doesn’t have to be for Blacks, it could be for light skin dark skin; it could be for Mexicans for I care.” And finally when Florence described the plan for the announcements Selma said, “That’s unnecessary. That’s
extremely unnecessary” [Transcript 5-27]. It was clear to me that the last thing Selma wanted to do was to make a public announcement as an African American or for African Americans. The other students seemed ambivalent in the beginning, but soon agreed with Selma. In addition, I also discouraged the parade because I thought it would not be approved by the administration at this late date and it would take quite a bit of forethought to plan it. Thus, both Selma and I supported the least controversial and radical idea, making a poster. Finally after all this discussion towards the end of 5-27, Florence dejectedly said, “Let's just go ahead and make the poster (sadly).” Unfortunately, an activity meant to be empowering became a power struggle between participants. Thus, social actions as I had envisioned in the beginning of this study changed drastically.

Across All Three Phases

When this study began, I focused on the following questions: What happens when I (as their language arts teacher) invite fourth grade students to participate in critical literacy practices and social action projects? As the study progressed, a second question evolved: What do these engagements reveal about our (the participants’) tacit and overt understandings about race, identity and power?

Responses to Critical Literacy Invitations

*Increased Interaction and Participation in Race Discussions*

Responses to critical literacy practices increased over the phases. In the beginning, students appeared to be more reserved about discussing race and provided
less personal connections. In fact, compared to Phase 2 and 3, the chosen transactional events of Phase 1 had the least amount of participant interaction. As discussed in the previous section, Phase 1 out of all the phases had the most examples of academic critical literacy. This was most clearly evident in the first transcript (about Haiti aid and immigration) in which Selma asserted that Rush Limbaugh did not like “colored people.” The other participants failed to acknowledge or connect to this statement. But by Phase 3, all the participants had made deep personal connections.

Identity and Power

In any group of students, identity and power play an integral role in the interactions, responses, and learning of the participants (Bloome, et al., 2008; Gee, 2001 in Lewis, et al., 2007) In fact, Gee (2001) contends that evidence of deep learning includes students taking on new and multiple identities. Throughout the three phases, changes occurred in how identity and power were enacted. In summary, the number identities increased, although some contradictory roles surfaced, some tacit and some overt. Overall, students had the agency try different identities and expressed themselves freely. As a result, power, or the knowledge of, when discussing racial concerns and issues was mostly shared, respected, and acknowledged. As Lewis et al. (2007) contend, “Identity, agency, and power are not peripheral to learning; they are central” (p. 46). More detailed analyses are discussed in the following section when answering question two of the study.
Identity across the Phases

**Critical Literacy Observer vs. Critical Literacy Insider**

In the beginning of this study, my definition of critical literacy was the Freirean model of using texts/discourse as a vehicle to understand the power structures between the dominant and non-dominant cultures in order to move towards a social action (Freire and Macedo, 1987). But as I collected data and began my analysis it became clear to me that the students moved away from the texts quickly in our discussions across the phases. However, they did still analyze their situations critically but primarily as it related to personal events. Thus, I decided to differentiate these two types of ways of using critical literacy practices. The way most of the students used critical literacy was as a critical literacy insider, which meant students used real life experiences as a vehicle to analyze larger social practices or other perceived inequities.

In the first Transcript 2-9, the students did use written text to analyze current events in Haiti. After I had read and paraphrased the text, we discussed the issues. However, even though the students had hard copies of the text, some of them asked me for answers instead of directly referring back to the written source. Although I encouraged them to look back in the text, eventually I answered the questions. The students then analyzed the text orally, discussed the topic, and made evaluations. Hannah came to the conclusion that Limbaugh was “mean” [transcript 2-9, 119] and Selma commented after she learned that he was Republican, she asked, “Is he White or Black?” and later stated that “He probably don’t like Obama,” [transcript 2-9, line 125-
126]. Further, Selma stated that racism could be a factor influencing Limbaugh’s perspective in this issue as evidenced in the excerpt from transcript 2-9 in Table 31.

Table 31

*Excerpt from 2-9 (Transcript 1)*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Transcript</th>
<th>Non-Verbal</th>
<th>Identities Signaled</th>
<th>Linguistic Evidence</th>
<th>Uptake Across MU</th>
<th>Comments</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>128. Selma: Or he probably don’t like down people there in Haiti,</td>
<td>Critical literacy observer African American Assertive student</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>129. Selma: or colored people.</td>
<td>Critical literacy observer African American Assertive student</td>
<td>“don’t like down people there”</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In fact, this was the first time Selma and the other participants had explicitly suggested that racism was a powerful force in the world. In this particular example, Selma concluded that the Haitians were marginalized due to the color of their skin. However, the other students did not acknowledge, confirm, or add any personal connections to her statements compared to the discussions in the subsequent phases. In fact, Hannah turned the conversation back to an earlier assertion that political party affiliation was a motivation for Limbaugh’s argument when she added, “or Democrats,” [transcript 3-25, line 126]. All of these comments related to the text and were considered larger political issues and influencing aid about Haiti. This type of critical literacy
(academic critical literacy) was one of the few examples of students using, analyzing, and staying on topic with the written text.

In the second transcript in Phase 1 and all the transcripts in Phase 2 and 3, the participants moved further away from the text. In Phase 2, we read the doll study in which African American girls chose White dolls over African American dolls because they were “prettier.” As before in Phase 1, I read and provided copies of the article for each student participant. And in order to keep the students closely connected to the text, I provided a “student response cube” (Lewison, et al., 2008) worksheet to complete after I shared the study. This worksheet asked the students questions about what they learned from the text, questions they still had, and asked for one personal connection and an anomaly from the text. However, as soon as I read the study I was bombarded with personal connections. Selma said, “Sometimes, I wished I was White,” [transcript 5-20] and the others agreed. Subsequent conversations all were personal connections (except one) and involved confessions about how race affects them in the different worlds that they live in.

These personal (or non textual) connections were unlike my first understandings of critical literacy practices. Originally, I thought critical literacy had to involve direct analysis of written text. Instead, discussions about the student participants’ lived, racist experiences were analyzed. These discussions and analyses were the most common critical literacy practice of the participants. For example on 3-25, the group discussed the immigration policy of Haiti and when I asked them what they thought about Rush Limbaugh’s comments, Selma said she wasn’t American. Stephen retorted that she was African American and Selma quickly moved the discussion to herself and said that she
wasn’t an “African.” So although she didn’t analyze or make direct connections with the text in this interactional unit, Selma questioned racial labels and the use of the term “African American.” She continued to argue in the following message units, “My momma did not come from Africa….I am not African” [transcript 2-9]. Thus, Selma disputed and resisted the institutional practice of racial identification and pushed back strongly against the social practices of racial identification. This type of response to racial labels happened in both Phase 1 and 3, but more student participants responded in this rejection during Phase 3. Thus after analyzing the transcripts, I redefined critical literacy to discern between using written texts and using language (oral) with personal experiences as the “vehicle” to analyze inequities existing between the dominant and non-dominant culture. Therefore, I redefined and categorized critical literacy into academic critical literacy and insider critical literacy. Across the phases, except for a few brief comments connected to text, the participants typically used insider critical literacy.

Multiple Identities

Participants in this study (including myself) took on many different and sometimes contradictory identities, indicating both tacit and overt understandings about their identities (sometimes unbeknownst to the participant). Even from the beginning of the study, students were “reporters” and “assertive students” eager to share their ideas and opinions. However, closer analysis, especially in the later transcripts revealed that during the last week of the study, students began to take on more controversial identities. These identities challenged my authority, the social practices of the school institution, and the outside world.
Most Frequent Identities

Throughout all three phases the two identities that the student participants assumed most regularly were “critical literacy insider” and “African American.” As a participant, what was most remarkable to me (as a White teacher) was the ease in which the students acted as the “critical literacy insider.” A possible reason for this was that the students spoke about racial issues in other contexts and that they had some background experience that supports these connections and critical stance. Support for this in the data was revealed when Selma told the group that her brother said that sometimes he wished that he was White. Similarly, in Phase 2, transcript 5-12 (confirm), Selma shared the story about Florence’s sister wishing she was White. Both of these discussions happened outside of school with either family members or peers. Although it was clear that these episodes were about race, is was unclear whether or not this type of discussion was common or if this type of critical analysis was a cultural practice. Tatum (1997) makes a strong argument in her book, *Why Are All the Black Kids Sitting Together in the Cafeteria?* when she suggests that Black (Tatum’s term) youth search to understand their racial identity at both a younger age and more frequently than their White peers. Furthermore, she suggested that conversations about race are common in African American homes (Tatum, 1997).

Contradictory Identities and Racism Reproduction

Identity was so complex at times. I think Selma and I were the most conflicted and contradictory in our roles. Further, I believe many of these contradictory identities we assumed involved tacit knowledge, unknown even to ourselves. Selma was the
“assertive student” who monopolized much of the conversations, challenged me at several points, resisted other racial labeling but at the same time showed self-loathing and racism towards herself and other African American teachers. I was equally as complicated acting as a social activist at times but then blocked the execution of one social action project because it wouldn’t be approved by the White administration. I encouraged open conversations about race, but when the students shared deep insecurities, I invalidated the intensity of these feelings because I wanted to solve the problem (maybe I felt that it is my role) and I was uncomfortable because I am a part of the mainstream culture, which has oppressed minorities in our society. These understandings were tacit knowledge to me when they occurred and were not revealed until I analyzed the transcripts and reflected upon my actions and motives. Florence was also conflicted. She described victimization by her mother and says that she, like her sister sometimes wished that she was White. However, at the end of the study, Florence teased two other students about their dark skin color claiming that they did not look anything like Queen Latifah because they were too dark. Although Florence knew this comment hurt Selma, I do not think she was aware that she was acting as an “oppressor” and recreating “racism” through her choice of words (Tatum, 1997). Pollock’s (2004) study gives an appropriate analogy of this dichotomy; students are both racially in a box, but at the same time they are busting out. Hating labels but abusing and torturing others with the same labels is an example of both living in and out of the box.
Power across the Phases

Power: The Worlds that were Created

Power changed over the course of the three phases. Power, in this study was looked at in three ways: a very literal way in that who had the floor; who was speaking and who had the knowledge; and lastly, what worlds do the participants create and their position in these worlds. Bloome et al. (2008) explains that power is, “a set of relations among people and social institutions that may shift based in one situation or another,” (p. 174). Power is not accumulated but instead is shared, fluid, and changes in situ.

Similarities

There were many similarities across the three phases. In looking at power, similarity was defined as something that was evidenced in at least two of the three phases. One way I analyzed power was to observe the amount of times and length of time that a participant had the floor. A frequency chart indicated that Selma dominated most of the discussions. Although this is significant, upon closer scrutiny all the participants spoke - and power (in both knowledge and initiating conversations) was often shared. However, it is possible (as discussed in the feedback given by inter-rater Theodora Powers), that students may have made certain comments or refrained from speaking because they wanted to please me or Selma. Due to my past experiences with the student participants I do believe they changed their topic choices based on Selma’s preferences not mine. Additionally, other participants may have remained silent if they disagreed, or made connections or agreed with her statements in order to please her. Further, in some of the arguments about racial identity in the beginning, both
Stephen and Hannah (who were the only two who spoke up and disagreed with Selma) eventually stopped arguing and let Selma have the final word. But it is important to note that although in certain instances participants were submissive or passive, other times these same participants took a stand and disagreed with Selma and me.

Another similarity across the phases includes discussions about racial labels, which was included in the world of school. Racial labeling was hotly contested in Phase 1. Stephen and Hannah were adamant that African American was an appropriate label and chastised Selma for her resistance. However, by the end of this interactional unit Selma maintained her position and had the final word, “I don’t want to be called all Black, but I’m not African American” [Transcript 3-25]. However in Phase 3, instead of arguing, Stephen, Ian, and Selma were united in their rejection of the label “Black.”

The World of the School and the Classroom World were similarly depicted in the phases, in that, the students described events in which they were treated insensitively. On the playground, several of the participants described feelings of isolation, persecution from the larger group, and a sense of powerlessness. Although not explicitly stated, these connections were made just after other conversations about racism, which implied race was a factor in the incident. In addition, students felt that topics related to African American history (in particular slavery and segregation) intended as a source of empowerment had the opposite desired effect. Most of the participants commented that they felt uncomfortable and different, instead of empowered or proud. Lastly, in this context or school world, students made comments that Theodora Powers, one of my inter-raters, deemed as “self-hatred” such as, “I wish I were White,” and “Me, too,” and “Whites have more abilities than us” [Transcript 5-20,
ICD003 lines 5-25]. These comments indicated that in the world of school, the participants felt powerless or inadequate to their White counterparts. After years of receiving both tacit and overt messages of this nature, these students demonstrate how these slights have a detrimental effect of the psyche of the African American students. Further discussion and implications for this issue are elaborated in Chapter 6.

In the textual world, I noted a few similarities. First, text world connections were typically made when I modeled for them or gave some kind of prompting. Only Selma and Hannah made any significant connections to the text. Typical behavior included a distinct moving away from text to the more personal signifying tacit preferences for oral knowledge. When I asked students to refer back to the text, they often did not; instead they asked me questions about the text if they wanted information. This avoidance of text was likely due to the fact that the texts were too difficult and that as struggling readers they were more comfortable and capable speaking and discussing the topics.

Lastly, the participants depicted the outside world and the larger international world, through various overt, personal and text connections, as unfair, racist, harsh, and a place where random, racist acts of violence occur. For example, Selma made the comment that people in Haiti may not receive enough aid because people like Rush Limbaugh, “don’t like down people there in Haiti or colored people” [Transcript 2-9, lines 125-126]. Selma also reported the incident where she saw African American men attack an innocent Mexican American woman’s car simply because of her race. After Selma’s story, Ian also made a connection about a woman who got jumped in his apartments. On a more personal note, Stephen shared a conversation in which his mother told him that it was “…bad enough that you’re Black,” when she tried to motivate him to work
harder in school. Stephen believed that she meant that life (on the outside world) would be exponentially more difficult for someone who was both Black and struggled in school.

Differences

Differences also appeared in the power analysis across the three phases. Most obvious was the increase in direct and personal discussion about race. In Phase 1 Selma was the only one who brought up race, and she considered racism as a possible cause for neglect of the earthquake victims in Haiti. Although in Phase 1 Stephen and Hannah participated in Selma’s discussion about the term “African American,” Selma was the participant who brought this topic up to the group. In addition, in Phase 1 both Florence and Ian did not comment during these particular interactional events. In contrast, during Phases 2 and 3 all the participants participated and made some remarks related to race. There could be several reasons for these phenomena. First, there were more interactional units, and due to the sheer volume of transactional events and increase in conversation, it was more likely that more students participated. The topics in Phase 1 were international and less personal in transcript 2-9, but in Phases 2 and 3, the topics were more personal and connected to the students’ experiences. Another possible reason is that over time the students felt more comfortable talking about race. This may be due in part to the fact that they saw my reaction to Selma’s comments and realized that the group was a safe environment to share personal feelings and thoughts.

Another difference across the phases was the participant’s contradictory views of their own self-image and African Americans in general. These views were most
prevail in relation to the world of the classroom and school. In Phase 2, Selma shared that Florence’s younger sister Destinie (also African American) said she wished she was White. Selma added, “Sometimes, I wished I was White.” Florence agreed, “Yeah,” and then Selma added in relation to school, “White people have more abilities over us.” This negative self image also appeared when Selma made the comment that she preferred to work with White teachers because she thought Black teachers would be “cussing” [Transcript 5-20]. Theodora Powers, one of my inter-raters concluded that these types of comments revealed feelings of self-hate. In contrast, Hannah never said anything derogatory about race but wondered, “I feel like what if my life would be, what would be, what would be different if I was White?” when discussing her feelings of isolation and separateness during whole group lessons about slavery and segregation. And although Selma made many derogatory statements about herself and other African Americans, she later stated, “Yeah, my mom said we [African Americans] mostly invented everything…” [Transcript 5-20, Lines 16-17].

Conclusion

Although much of the research about critical literacy practices in school focuses primarily on students’ responses to critically analyzing written texts, in this study, the conversations about race (not text) were critically analyzed. These discussions revealed the participants’ most intimate worlds and experiences. This level of intimacy and openness did not happen immediately but instead occurred after years of cultivating personal relationships with each of these students. In addition, although these relationships had been established two years prior, the students did not share their
deep concerns until the last week of school and at the very end of the data collection phase. My view of critical literacy evolved similarly, and I realized that it was not something external for these students, it is deeply personal and this awareness of living as “other” in a White world affects the core of who they believe themselves to be as people. In contrast, for an educated, White, middle-class researcher who is a part of mainstream culture, critical literacy awareness and practices must be conscious and pre-meditated, because these practices that can be easily forgotten in educational environments entrenched with historical and endemic hegemony. Equally important for the teacher-researcher was how to approach and utilize critical literacy practices sensitively and diplomatically to offer students true hope for empowerment, liberation and transformation. Further discussions about the implications of these findings are discussed in Chapter 6.
CHAPTER 6

DISCUSSION

If we wait for perfection, we will never break the silence. The cycle of racism will continue uninterrupted. (Tatum, 1997, p. 205)

As a critical pedagogue and practitioner committed to social justice, I believe critical literacy practices are vital to interrupt the racism endemic in school. Although much of the research about critical literacy practices in school suggests possibilities for students’ empowerment (Tatum, 1997), there is little about intermediate students and even less about minority, intermediate readers who struggle in school, a historically vulnerable population to academic failure (Juel, 1988). Thus, in this study, my original and primary purpose was to document what happens when I (as the language arts teacher) and five, fourth grade, African American students, who struggle in learning how to read grade level texts, are invited to engage in critical literacy practices and social action projects in a small group. However, during the last few weeks of my data collection phase, a pivotal conversation about race became the catalyst to foreground race centrally and to analyze what these engagements revealed about our (the participants’) tacit and overt understandings of race, power, and identity.

This chapter provides a review of the findings and discusses the implications for the classroom. Lastly, this chapter ends with ideas for future research and the conclusion section.
Summary of Findings

The findings address three themes that emerged in the analysis of the students’ conversations: race; identity; and power.

Understandings about Race

There were three major understandings about race in the data: 1) Students experienced racism in various contexts; 2) In school, students felt alienated by these experiences; and 3) Participants acted as both victims and transgressors of racism.

The data clearly indicated that the participants’ tacit and overt understandings about race in this study primarily came from personal, racist experiences or treatments as “other” in both their private and public worlds. During Phase 1, most of the participants did not engage in conversations about race despite the topic’s relevancy. Selma was the only participant who considered racism as a possible motivation for the lack of relief aid for Haiti. Additionally, she had strong feelings against the practice of racial labeling, while two of the other participants were supportive of the practice. Selma rejected the term “African American” vehemently and justified her position by stating, “My momma did NOT come from Africa.” [Transcript, 3-25] Despite Selma’s few passionate remarks, most of the conversations in Phase 1 did not reveal much about the participants’ overt understandings about race, except for the contested practice of racial labeling. Perhaps what was most revealing about the tacit understandings about race was the lack of engagement in these ‘risky’ topics. At this time, participants appeared uncomfortable or hesitant possibly because they were unsure of how I would respond. It also was a possibility that most of these students had never articulated some
of these thoughts, a suggested finding from one of my interraters, Deana Bond.

Regardless of the cause, the avoidance of topic was illustrated when Selma introduced the topic of racism to the group and no other participant acknowledged this remark. Instead, Hannah quickly changed the topic.

However in Phase 2 and 3, all the participants shared overt understandings about race. Everyone, except for Ian, predominantly framed racial experiences as negative or at least sites of struggle. Typically, the participants described race as a motivation for violence (emotionally or physically) in a variety contexts such as, school (on the playground) and the outside world. One important contradiction to the negative accounts was documented in the transcript on 5-20. In one interactional unit after I lectured about equality today, Selma concurred, “Yeah, my mom said we [African Americans] mostly invented everything…” [Transcript 5-20, Lines 16-17] Additionally, I do believe based on my long-standing relationship and interactions with the participants that the other participants also felt pride for many of their cultural practices, African American heritage, and family. This group - however, provided an opportunity to vent, complain, process and share their problems about race and racism in a safe environment.

Tacit understandings included, race was both a lens through which the participants viewed and interpreted much their experiences and a challenge that contributed to many difficult and painful events. Moreover, some of the participants internalized racism to the point that they were in fact acting “racist” towards other participants (also called “internalized oppression”) and made “racist” comments about African American teachers and African Americans in general (Tatum, 1997). Some of
these comments were overt and purposely said to injure. However, I believe Selma and Florence were unaware that their comments could be construed as “racist.” Although not explicitly stated, these conversations revealed that these participants (at this particular time) felt that living, as an African American in these multiple worlds, can be sometimes painful and problematic.

Another understanding about race was that in the context of school, participants’ often felt alienated. Particularly during conversations about race with the larger class, the three girls revealed that they felt uncomfortable when segregation was discussed in the larger class because they believed that other students were staring at them. In addition, all three complained about how lonely they felt in their classrooms because there were too few African Americans. Tacit understandings that were not articulated but implied include that common school practices and the curriculum further segregated and isolated the participants.

Like the other participants, the data revealed that I had contradictory understandings about race. Primarily, my overt understandings were that race relations had improved and I offered my point of view when the other participants expressed sadness about the inequities they felt. In retrospect, I made these statements because I felt uncomfortable and wanted the students to have hope and feel empowered by our discussions. In the later phases, I shared my experience as a minority in Namibia and how difficult it was to feel alienated from the larger group. In these examples, I acted both as the “White teacher” and as an “alienated minority.” These contradictory identities from all of the participants demonstrated the conflict we all felt as we negotiated shared meanings about race.
Understandings about Identities

There were two major understandings about identities in the data: (1) Participants acted as critical literacy insiders, sharing and analyzing lived personal inequities through discussions, (2) The student participants held contradictory identities that did not manifest until the end of the study.

In some disciplines, identity can be thought of as fixed and unchanging, however as a constructivist interested in sociocultural theory, I believe that identity is, “fluid, social, and linguistically mediated construct, one that takes into account the different positions that individuals enact or perform in particular settings within a given set of social, economic, and historical relations” and can be, “generative and creative” (Bucholz, Liang, & Sutton, 1999 cited in Lewis, Enciso, & Moje, 2007, p. 4). From this perspective, a person can have multiple and contradictory identities simultaneously. Additionally, identities can also include how participants portray themselves, or how others treated the participants. Moreover, participants can have multiple and contradictory identities concurrently.

In Phase 1, students’ identities were more closely connected directly to the text we were studying. It was in this phase that I first observed students practicing critical literacy as I first defined it. However, the students’ critical literacy practices evolved over the course of the study with a distinct movement away from the analysis of the written text and towards personal connections almost exclusively. It was within these intimate confessions that the students’ personal knowledge was validated. Consequently, not only did they have the power; they could finally assume capable, knowledgeable identities denied them in the regular classroom and the larger school context. Therefore,
in the beginning of the study, participants practicing critical literacy were defined as participants who used written texts as a vehicle to understand the power structures between the dominant and non-dominant cultures (Freire and Macedo, 1987). However as the study progressed, two distinctly different types of participant identities emerged from the data: “critical literacy insiders” and “critical literacy outsider observers.” Student participants predominately acted as “critical literacy insiders.”

In Phase 1, I primarily observed students act as a “critical literacy observer.” The term “critical literacy observer” means one who uses text as a vehicle to observe or power relationships and inequity in an academic way. Analyses typically made are supported by evidence from written texts. Often the “critical literacy observer” has some emotional distance from the inequity, like an outsider. This type of critical literacy usually must be taught or modeled in school and is privileged, academic discourse. The identity I observed most often in Phase 2 and Phase 3 was “critical literacy insider.” This means the participant used real life experiences as a vehicle to analyze larger social practices or other perceived inequities. Characteristics included passionate feelings and statements. This appeared not to be a learned school practice, but a cultural practice from home or with peers or with a practice that emerged from our group.

Another major finding was that the participants assumed contradictory identities, some tacit and some overt. For example, I was both a “social activist” and also perpetuator of the status quo or “White teacher.” As a “social activist,” I encouraged students to commit to social actions to change perceived wrongs both locally and internationally. Conversely, later in the study I discouraged other social action projects. Specifically I felt that a Black parade might be construed as radical and that my principal
would likely disapprove. At the time, I felt that the repercussions would be too great and decided to end this proposed social action. Thus, in this example, I acted as the “White teacher” wanting to keep the status quo. In addition, Florence acted as an “empathizer” when Ian recounted how he was mistreated on playground (in which racism was implied) and lamented for her sister because she was the only African American in her class. However a few days later, Florence told Selma (When Florence was compared to Queen Latifah), “You don’t look nothing like [her]…” and then asserted, “She’s light.” In this instance, Florence acted as someone who is “racially prejudiced” or “racist” (a tacit understanding) by reinforcing the racist practice of social hierarchy based on lighter or darker colored skin. These contradictory identities suggest how difficult it was for all the participants (including myself) to break out of our habitual behaviors, attitudes and identities within the context of school.

**Understandings about Power**

There were two major understandings about power in the data: (1) Power was shared in the social action group; although there were exceptions and oppressions, (2) The participants felt powerless in their various worlds because of racism.

As with race, participants’ understandings about power developed and grew over time. In this study, power was defined as “knowledge” that “may shift based on one situation or another” (Bloome et al., 2008). Power also involved the use of this knowledge to influence others and how participants positioned their power in various contexts. From this perspective power was looked at in other ways: Who had the floor? Who had the knowledge? What worlds did the participants create? What were their
positions in these worlds? And lastly, what were the social, cultural, and economic consequences of the worlds that have been created for the participants and for others?" (Bloome, 1981, p. 174)

Participants (including myself) generally, built upon each other’s knowledge and therefore, power was distributed more evenly across the transcripts. Due to the fact that we validated and valued personal experiences, all the students had knowledge to share. However at times Selma and I used our knowledge to influence and dominate others. During certain interactional units, students argued over the proposed knowledge until there was a clear winner and loser. Using influence to control the knowledge oppressed some of the participants. This was clearly evident in two instances. First, power struggles occurred when the students argued over the use of the racial label “African American” and “Black,” which ended with Selma winning and Stephen and Hannah losing. Secondly, I oppressed and stopped Selma from explaining her “racist” point of view about “Black teachers” (her term). Therefore in the study, there were moments of empowerment and moments of oppression likely due to the pressures of living and working in a public school, a social institution that is an extension of mainstream culture.

In contrast to the power students had within our social action group, when considering other participants' worlds (school, classroom, home, outside or adult worlds), the participants characterized themselves as powerless. Many of these worlds were described as chaotic, where random racist acts of violence were common. Thus, the participants positioned themselves often as both victims and witnesses to these events. However, it took almost the entire school year for the students to share these painful understandings.
Other Findings, the Evolution of Critical Literacy Practices and Social Action Projects

The research findings revealed that the critical literacy practices and social action projects as originally envisioned changed. Instead of text based analyses, critical literacy practices transformed into the participants’ critical analysis of racism they experienced in their various worlds (home, school, and the larger, outside world) through language (not text). Students moved away from texts in the study. Instead, they preferred to use our discussions as a point for analysis. Thus, the definition of critical literacy evolved into making sense of the “world” (and our positions in these worlds) through critically analyzing the “word” (language, discourses, texts) and the associated power relationships connected to the “word” as a means to create transformative opportunities for social action. Similarly, the pre-conceived idea of social action projects changed from the creation of concrete products or actions into discussions in which mainstream discourse was interrupted.

In the review of the literature, one of the areas of difference between Freire’s emancipatory education model and the models of critical literacy in the United States was the lack of concrete social action. Thus, one of my primary goals was to ensure that all of our discussions led to some form of social action. However as a participant in this study, the actions chosen for our different topics did not inspire the depth of analyses or consideration that our conversations did. Although the students in the post interviews commented that they enjoyed both making the school announcements and organizing the second graders collection of donated goods, these activities did not in and of itself interrupt any dominant discourse. In contrast to the discussions, the social action projects were predictably boring (until the end of the study) and lacked creativity or
consensus. The student participants did not take ownership of the projects and the burden of the organization and effort was mine. As a participant I observed, that the students were much more interested in the discussions than in the details and planning required to complete the projects.

In contrast to the few empowering social actions in the literature, our plans to take social action in Phase 3 actually silenced some of the students. When Florence made suggestions for public social actions such as parades and announcements, the other participants were quick to squelch these ideas (for different reasons). After repeated rejection of her ideas, Florence finally acquiesced and accepted the poster as the chosen social action. Thus, I think the greatest “action” in this study was the articulation of some very personal injustices and insecurities. The social action group provided the rare opportunity and agency for students to assume different identities in a safe environment.

Instructional Implications

After analyzing the findings from this study, there are three instructional practices that teachers can glean from this study: (1) Critical literacy practices and social action projects can be both empowering and oppressive (2) Minority students (especially those students who struggle in school) benefit from small, social action groups like ours in order to discuss and process their school experience; (3) Traditional, historical topics about issues like the Civil Rights Movement can further alienate minority students.
Empowering and Oppressive Critical Literacy Practices

As documented in the review of the critical literacy research, critical literacy practices can vary greatly according to the context, the participants and the teacher. Although the research reviewed supported critical literacy practices as an empowering tool in the classroom, there were few studies in which students resisted. In our social action group, the participants (students who struggle in school) felt empowered because they had the opportunity to meet and discuss their school and personal experiences in a safe and supportive environment. One of the most important components that allowed for our candid responses was the trusting and supportive environment we created together. Even though I had known the participants for years, it wasn’t until I met with them in our social action group regularly, that they shared their lives on such a personal level. Additionally the participants observed over the course of the study that I accepted almost any response as long as it was on topic. From the beginning, Selma disagreed with me and the students knew that I was (generally) open to whatever controversial, inflammatory or personal statement a participant might make.

Other factors that contributed to the openness of the group were that the participants realized that the power was shared between us and that their personal knowledge was as valid as academic knowledge. Beginning with generative themes for topics, students knew that they guided the topics. In addition, they also knew that decisions would be made democratically with the majority of the student participants in charge of the decisions made in the group. Both of these structures foregrounded the importance of students’ role and reinforced their ownership in group’s agenda.
Additionally, my background knowledge about critical pedagogy, critical literacy practices both in theory and the research and critical race theory (Delgado & Stefancic, 2001) served as a resource for understanding the participants’ point of view. I was sensitive to their experiences after reading about other students’ alienation due to traditional school practices in the research. Equally important, I cared about each of them as individuals and wanted to explore alternative pedagogies to facilitate their academic success. Therefore, educators interested in engaging students in critical literacy practices and creating small, social action groups outside of the classroom need the knowledgeable and skills to facilitate (as much as possible) a supportive, candid and democratic environment.

In contrast to the liberating and empowering conversations in our social action group, oppressive actions also occurred. These types of actions were not documented in the review of critical literacy research in the classroom. Activities in the research that were empowering for participants sometimes ended up as sites of struggle in which oppressive actions manifested. Although like the research, students’ critical language awareness increased when we discussed racial labels like “African American” and “Black”, our discussions progressed into arguments that silenced others in the group. Additionally, unlike the reviewed studies in which the participants were engaged in and took ownership of the social action projects (Powell, Cantrell, & Adams, 2001; McGregor, 2000), this study’s participants were not interested or invested in these endeavors. Specifically, when Florence made suggestions for public social actions such as parades and announcements, the other participants argued and ridiculed her suggestions. After repeated rejection of her ideas, Florence finally acquiesced and
accepted the innocuous poster as the chosen social action. Although social action projects as I envisioned did not occur, I realized that the discussion itself was the social action because we interrupted mainstream discourse and engaged in radical conversations atypical for school. Therefore, educators working with social action groups must be prepared for these kinds of conversations.

Minority Students Benefit from Small, Social Action

Benefits from similar, small group discussions with African American students, are supported in the research (Cross, 1991 as cited in Tatum, 1997) In Why are all the Black Kids Sitting Together in the Cafeteria? Tatum (1997) cites a study in which an urban inner city high school implemented a program called SET as an intervention for African American students who had performed poorly academically. SET, Student Efficacy Training, was designed to support African American students and the special set of problems they faced as a minority in predominantly white high school. Students were pulled out daily to discuss, “the issues that hindered their performance-racial encounters, feelings of isolation, test anxiety, homework dilemmas-in the psychological safety of their own group,” (Cross in Tatum (1997, p. 100) Although in the beginning some of the students did not want to participate, in the end “Black” students reported that SET was “good.” Additionally according to teachers, these groups made a difference in the academic performance of the seventh and eighth graders.

Truly transforming traditional school practices requires students and teachers to engage in courageous and risky conversations that challenge traditional, mainstream knowledge. Social action groups for marginalized students can provide a safe place to
discuss their experiences. However, this is not easy. Our conversations in the social action group felt radical and much of what we discussed we kept secret. When I asked students if they wanted to share some of their feelings about school experiences with other teachers and the principal, their initial response was a resounding “No!” This secretive feeling was evidenced by Selma’s statement made during our discussions, “What we say in the group, STAYS in the group” [Transcript 3-25, line 268]. However, despite the personal risk, conversations of this nature are necessary and important if we (as educators) are to reach all students. Social action groups designed like ours can liberate and transform students whose identities and knowledge are often disregarded.

*Traditional Civil Rights Alienate African American Students*

Prior to this study, I believed I was a social activist when I designed and taught engaging lessons about the Civil Rights movement. Assuming that I interrupted mainstream discourse when I shared more resources about segregation and African American heroes like, Martin Luther King with my class, I would extend our discussions and research for weeks or months, much longer than many of peers. After this study, I now realize that my lessons had the opposite effect for my African American students. Tatum (1997) explains that some African American students she interviewed have expressed that they feel singled out and embarrassed during these lessons. Participants in this study echoed this same sentiment. When discussing segregation with the larger class, Hannah stated, “Yeah, sometimes you’ll feel…” and Selma concurred, “like I feel left out” [Transcript, 5-21]

As much as that disappointed me, it is my obligation to know my students’
concerns and to consider how to better teach important historical events like these sensitively.

Based on these findings, teachers need to consider how to present topics about racism carefully and thoughtfully. One of Tatum’s (1997) recommendations is to include information about strong and heroic resisters to slavery, segregation, and racism in order to emphasize the strength of the African Americans community. Additionally, Tatum (1997) posits that these heroes should include racially diverse people in order to provide role models for all students. Otherwise, students can internalize these historic events in a very different manner than was intended. My own daughter came home from school one day at the end of second grade and told me, “I don’t like being White. White people did bad things to Black people.” All of these statements from children indicate the importance of discussing racial issues carefully. Navigating through these topics is not easy, but requires some forethought and planning.

Another implication for instruction is the importance of White teachers (and all teachers) to be conscious of the power of their language when working with diverse populations. Specifically in this study, I made comments that were microinvalidations unknowingly. Microinvalidations are comments that lessen or devalue the experience of minorities. For example in the Transcript on 5-20, after Selma shares that she feels that White people have more abilities than Blacks in school, I made the comment, “There’s a lot of African Americans who have achieved a lot” instead of allowing her to fully share her experience or feelings with the group. Thus it is important for all educators to consider their responses and language when working with minority students who struggle with reading in school.
Implications for Research

Much of the research about critical literacy practices involves studies with middle school and high school students. However, more research is needed with intermediate students (and in particular those students who are struggling in school) and their responses to critical literacy practices. Additionally, research that studies intermediate students with critical literacy practices at the core of the curriculum (not as an addendum) could provide a guide for how to negotiate and revolutionize traditional curriculum into transformative pedagogy.

Findings from this study indicated participants used critical literacy in two distinct ways, as a critical literacy observer (text based connections for analysis by an outsider) and a critical literacy insider (personal connections and language for analysis). One area needing further research is how to bridge the gap between these two types of critical literacy to support students’ academic success. One reason for this gap in this study was that there were no texts at their reading level that addressed these critical topics. Instead, Stephen and Ian only had access to small picture books with colorful, farm animal pictures designed for six year olds. Furthermore, I found that some of the other participants (even though they could read some of the texts and respond in writing) were reluctant to connect the two practices. Most of the participants wanted to talk about their personal experiences and generally moved away from text and writing activities. Lastly, more research is needed about social groups that follow the students over time. More data about the efficacy of these groups could help inform educators how to better support marginalized students.
Conclusion

A concern for social justice, equitability, and my belief that all children should have access to a quality, responsive education led me six years ago to explore the tenets of critical literacy. Nineteen years working with students who struggle in school and provocative authors such as Jonathan Kozol, Michele Fine, Lisa Delpit and Freire and Macedo made me deeply aware of the injustices in our society and public school education. Identifying with the progressive educator and author, Patrick Shannon, I also believe that, “the progressive educational agenda may be set as the development of: (1) The individual and social knowledge necessary to construct a better world; and (2) the moral and political courage to act on that knowledge” (Shannon, 1990).

Although the inadequacies of our school systems can be easily identified, ways to help students who struggle with reading in school is more complex than a group of pre-made, one size fits all package of interventions. Much of these types of intervention strategies employed in schools can exacerbate this failure and further alienate students. Instead of treating students like individuals, they are labeled and put together with little regard or connection to the wealth of their experiences and knowledge. Additionally, rarely are they given any choices or freedom regarding for what to study. Therefore, new ways of thinking and engaging students is desperately needed.

Critical literacy practices offer hope as a means to empower students. Freire and Macedo (1987) espouse the power of critical literacy for emancipation from an oppressive society. As evidenced in this study, the freedom and agency to choose topics and identities combined with the trusting relationship between the participants in our social action group provide a compelling case to reconsider the role of students,
teachers and curriculum. Therefore, students from all backgrounds can regain their voice, reconnect to school, and transform their identities into active, engaged, and curious learners (Busching, 1999; Edelsky, 1999).
APPENDIX A

IRB APPROVAL

INFORMED CONSENT AND CHILD ASSENT FORMS
October 9, 2009

Courtney Bauer
Department of Teacher Education and Administration
University of North Texas

Re: Human Subjects Application No. 09354

Dear Ms. Bauer:

As permitted by federal law and regulations governing the use of human subjects in research projects (45 CFR 46), the UNT Institutional Review Board has reviewed your proposed project titled "Critical Literacy, Social Action, Writing and The Struggling Reader." The risks inherent in this research are minimal, and the potential benefits to the subject outweigh those risks. The submitted protocol is hereby approved for the use of human subjects in this study. Federal Policy 45 CFR 46.109(e) stipulates that IRB approval is for one year only, October 9, 2009 to October 8, 2010.

Enclosed is the consent document with stamped IRB approval. Please copy and use this form only for your study subjects.

It is your responsibility according to U.S. Department of Health and Human Services regulations to submit annual and terminal progress reports to the IRB for this project. The IRB must also review this project prior to any modifications.

Please contact Sheila Bourns, Research Compliance Administrator, or Boyd Herndon, Director of Research Compliance, at extension 3940, if you wish to make changes or need additional information.

Sincerely,

Patricia L. Kaminski, Ph.D.
Associate Professor
Chair, Institutional Review Board

PKsh

CC: Dr. Carol Wickstrom
University of North Texas Institutional Review Board

Informed Consent Form

Before agreeing to your child’s participation in this research study, it is important that you read and understand the following explanation of the purpose, benefits and risks of the study and how it will be conducted.

Title of Study: Critical Literacy, Social Action, Writing and The Struggling Reader

Principal Investigator: Courtney Bauer, a graduate student in the University of North Texas (UNT) Department of Reading.

Purpose of the Study: You are being asked to allow your child to participate in a research study. The purpose of this study is to look at the responses of students who struggle in reading to readings, discussions, and social action projects.

Study Procedures: The first step in the study involves the teacher administering the Developmental Reading Assessment (DRA) to determine your child’s reading level. Next, your child will participate in pre-interviews, readings, discussions and social action projects. The teacher/researcher (Ms. Bauer) will audiotape conversations to ensure accuracy, conduct post-interviews, and analyze this data in order to determine your child’s responses to these activities.

Foreseeable Risks: The potential risks involved in this study are fatigue and physical and emotional discomfort while answering some of the questions during the interview. However if a student feels physical or emotional discomfort while answering some of the questions during the interview, breaks will be given or the student may stop and resume at a later time.

Benefits to the Subjects or Others: This study is not expected to be of any direct benefit to your child, but we hope to learn how students who struggle in reading view themselves as a readers and writers and if any changes occur with a students’ feeling of power, identity, and agency both inside and outside of school. In addition, this study could impact or change this type of reading instruction in order to improve reading interventions for struggling readers.

Procedures for Maintaining Confidentiality of Research Records: Confidentiality will be protected to the extent that is allowed by law. The interviews will take place in the classroom privately (at lunch). A code name, rather than the participant’s real name, will be used on the audiotape and transcription. Only the investigator and her research advisor will have access to the tapes. The tapes, hard copies of the transcriptions, and the computer diskettes containing the transcription text files will be stored in a locked filing cabinet in the investigator’s office.

Identifiable data will be disposed by shredding all printed documents. All identifiable data will be destroyed by 06/15/12. It is anticipated that the results of the study will be published in the investigator’s dissertation, as well as in other research publications. However, no names or other
Questions about the Study: If you have any questions about the study, you may contact Dr. Carol Wohastom, UNT Department of Economics, at telephone number (940) 565-2830.

Review for the Protection of Participants: This research study has been reviewed and approved by the UNT Institutional Review Board (IRB). The UNT IRB can be contacted at (940) 565-2940 with any questions regarding the rights of research participants.

Research Participants' Rights: Your signature below indicates that you have read or have had read to you all of the above and that you consent to all of the following:

- You understand that you do not have to allow your child to take part in this study, and your refusal to allow your child to participate or your decision to withdraw from the study will involve no penalty or loss of rights or benefits. The study personnel may choose to stop your child's participation at any time.
- You understand why this study is being conducted and how it will be performed.
- You understand your rights as the parent/guardian of a research participant and you voluntarily consent to your child's participation in this study.
- You have been told you will receive a copy of this form.

__________________________________________
Printed Name of Parent or Guardian

__________________________________________
Signature of Parent or Guardian

Date

For the Principal Investigator: I certify that I have reviewed the contents of this form with the parent or guardian signing above. I have explained the possible benefits and the potential risks and/or discomforts of this study. It is my opinion that the parent or guardian understood the explanation.

__________________________________________
Signature of Principal Investigator

Date

Office of Research Services
University of North Texas
Last Updated: August 1, 2007
Child Assent Form

You are being asked to be part of a research project being done by the University of North Texas Department of Reading.

This study involves participating in readings, discussions and projects with a small group during class and about ten times during lunch. Ms. Bauer will record your feelings and thoughts about these activities and twice you will be interviewed individually for a total of forty minutes. You will be asked to read, think, answer questions, work with the four other group members, and share your thoughts. If you decide to be apart of this study, please remember you can stop participating any time you want to. No one will be upset with you and your decision to help or not. If you would like to be apart of this study, please write YES or NO in the following empty boxes to show that you understand and agree to how this study will work.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>I am willing to meet during my lunch in order to be a part of this group.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I am willing to answer questions before, during, and after projects I work on with the group.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I understand that Ms. Bauer will record my thoughts, opinions, and feelings about these projects through interviews, notes, and tape recordings.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I understand that I can quit at any time during this project/study and no one will be upset with me.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I understand that participating in this study will have no affect on any of my grades or work in language arts. (This does not count as extra credit towards your grade.)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Printed Name of Child**

**Signature of Child**

**Date**

**Signature of Principal Investigator**

**Date**

Office of Research Services
University of North Texas
Last Updated: August 9, 2007
APPENDIX B

FIELDNOTES
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Fieldnotes Form</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Notetaking - “Descriptions of Scenes”</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Notetaking - “Interpretative Notes”</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Methodological Notes</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Pedagogical Notes</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Future Actions</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
APPENDIX C

PRE AND POST INTERVIEW LITERACY REVIEW QUESTIONS
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category/Type of Questions</th>
<th>Present</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Behavior/experience questions</td>
<td>If I followed you through a typical day how much of the time would you be reading? Writing? If you do read, when? If you do write, when?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Opinion/value questions</td>
<td>Is reading important? (Please explain) Is writing important? (Please explain) If you could change what students read and write about in school would you? If so, how?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Feeling questions</td>
<td>How do you feel about reading? How do you feel about writing?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Knowledge questions</td>
<td>What do students usually read about in school? Why do students read a lot in school? What do students usually write about in school? Why do students write a lot in school?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sensory Questions</td>
<td>If you walked in most classrooms at our school, what would you see and hear?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Demographic Questions</td>
<td>Think about your family members and friends outside of school, what are some reasons they read (if at all)? What are some reasons they write (if at all)?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note: Question types are based on Patton’s (1987) “How to Use Qualitative Methods in Evaluation”*
# Post-Interview Questions

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category/Type of Questions</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Behavior/experience questions</strong></td>
<td>If I followed you through a typical day how much of the time would you be reading?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Writing?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>If you do read, when?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>If you do write, when?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Opinion/value questions</strong></td>
<td>Is reading important? (Please explain)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Is writing important? (Please explain)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>If you could change what students read and write about in school would you? If so, how?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Feeling questions</strong></td>
<td>How do you feel about reading?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>How do you feel about writing?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Knowledge questions</strong></td>
<td>What do students usually read about in school?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Why do students read a lot in school?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>What do students usually write about in school?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Why do students write a lot in school?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Sensory Questions</strong></td>
<td>If you walked in most classrooms at our school, what would you see and hear?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Demographic Questions</strong></td>
<td>Think about your family members and friends outside of school, what are some reasons they read (if at all)?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>What are some reasons they write (if at all)?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note: Question types are based on Patton's (1987) "How to Use Qualitative Methods in Evaluation"*
APPENDIX D

COMPLETE LIST OF INITIAL AND FINAL CODES
Initial Identity Codes

1. **Risk taker**- A student shares personal information that reveals emotional vulnerability.
   
   Ex: Selma says, “My brother wants to be white...” [Transcript, 5-21]

2. **Mother prepares son for outside world**- Stephens’s mother explains the difficulty of his race and struggles in school.
   
   Ex: “It’s bad enough that you’re Black” [Transcript, 5-21]

3. **Teacher as Researcher**- I act as the teacher-researcher when I ask the student participants questions and probe them further to try and understand certain assertions.
   
   Ex.: “What’s wrong with being a White girl?” [Transcript 5-12]

4. **Critical Literacy Practices**- Critical literacy participant looks at and analyzes texts as a vehicle to discover hidden agendas of the mainstream.
   
   Ex: Selma (when discussing reasons for Limbaugh not wanting to spend money to help Haiti)..., “Or he probably don’t like down people there in Haiti.”
   
   Selma: “Probably because you know Obama’s a *Democrat*” [Transcript, 2-9]

5. **Storyteller**- The participant tells a story to the group. The story is presented as factual in nature, but also has an elements of a performance.
   
   Ex: Quintessa, “she hit me in my nose with that Carmex.” [Transcript, 5-12]
6. Assertive peer- An assertive student participant who disagrees with a peer and offers another position.
Ex: Selma, “I don't want to be called all Bla+ck, but I’m not African American.” [Transcript, 3-25]

7. Reporter- A participant who was a witness to events outside the group.
Florence: She told me yesterday that she think she ugly *the end said quietly as a whisper.* [Transcript, 5-24]

8. Authoritarian Teacher- Authoritarian Teacher signifies my role as an authority figure, who takes control of the topic or situation.
Ex: Bauer: When was that? *(said sharply and loudly)* [Transcript, 5-12]

Initial Power Codes
1. World of the Playground- In this world, participants describe events between peers during recess.
   SELMA: and Mary came up and asked me.
   Florence: yesterday in gym* .... And then she was like doing this [Transcript, 5-12]

2. Home World- In this world, participants describe event that take place at home with family members and friends.
   Florence: She said, “Get y’all ugly self and fat self out of here and come on.” *(laughing)* [Transcript, 5-12]
APPENDIX E

COLLABORATIVE DATA ANALYSIS
Based on Steps in the Collaborative Assessment Conference

(Developed by Steve Seidel and Colleagues at Harvard Project Zero, 1988)

Purpose: To give participants the opportunity to look closely at, articulate questions about, and interpret data.

1. Getting Started
   - Facilitator provides needed background without any judgment statements.
   - The participants observe or read the data in silence, perhaps making brief notes about aspects of it that they particularly notice.

2. Describing the Data
   - The facilitator asks the group, “What do you see?”
   - Group members provide answers without making judgments about the ideas communicated in the data. This can be a summary of what the data is about.
   - If a judgment emerges, the facilitator asks for the evidence on which the judgment is based.

3. Asking Questions about the Data
   - The facilitator asks the group, “What questions does this data raise for you?”
   - Group members state any questions they have regarding the data.
   - The presenting teacher makes notes about these questions (but does not answer them yet).

4. Speculating about What the Data Might Tell Us
   - The facilitator asks the group, “What do you think the data means? What significance do you see in this? What big ideas emerge from this slice of data?”
   - Participants, based on their reading or observation of the data, make suggestions about the problems or issues that the data presents.

5. Hearing from the Researcher
   - The researcher provides her perspective on the data, describing what the research team saw in the data, responding to the questions raised, and adding any other information that she feels is important to share with the group.
   - The researcher also comments on anything surprising or unexpected that she heard during the describing, questioning, and speculating phases.
6. Discussing Implications
   • The facilitator invites everyone to share ideas regarding teaching, research, professional development, etc.: “What are the implications from this discussion?”

7. Reflecting on the Collaborative Data Analysis
   • The group reflects together on their experiences of or reactions to the discussion as a whole or to particular parts of it.
APPENDIX F

DATA CODING DICTIONARY
Data Coding Dictionary

The following codes were developed in order to analyze the data for the dissertation study, *Critical Literacy Practices, Social Action Projects and the Reader Who Struggles*.

The data sources include: transcripts of group conversations, fieldnotes, researcher’s analytic and theoretical memos, and school documents (IEPs, participants’ cumulative folders, and TAKS scores).

**Identities**

1. Critical literacy insider. Critical literacy practices in this study are split into subcategories, one of which is critical literacy insider. This means a person who uses critical literacy as a lens and lives/sees/experiences inequity (inherent, likely a home cultural practice). Further critical literacy insider is one who experiences/observes/shares (through language) inequitable local and personal power relationships. This category connects to Lewison, Leland, and Harste (2004) example of one type of critical literacy practice; students who use language to question the power relationships in the “everyday world” (p. 3).

2. Critical literacy observer. One who observes/shares (through language) power relationships and inequity in an academic way in which comments are supported by evidence from written texts or a “factual” source. Often the observer has some emotional distance from the power relationship, like an outsider. This type of critical literacy usually must be taught-modeled in school and is privileged, academic discourse. This type of CL typically does not have
a “lived’ experience or a personal feel. A white teacher typically uses this.

Written text is important here.

3. Alienated African American. Participant that believes that they are an
outsider/victim to a group due to race.

4. Vulnerable peer. Participant shows concern how others view him/her (for
example explaining why a group does/doesn’t like him or her)

5. Alienated peer. An outsider to group/ victim in some way/ unjustly treated.

6. Authoritarian teacher. A role in which I take charge, reprimand, or use an
authoritative voice with the students.

7. Expert teacher. A role where I have the factual knowledge or expertise and
share with students. Also implies that I have the power.

8. Submissive teacher. A teacher that allows students/student to take the lead.


10. Valuable group member. Someone/participant who feels confident enough to
share something with the group and expects others to listen.

11. Strong and powerful peer. A peer who makes a strong statement in relation to
peers can include evaluation and judgment. One who sticks to his/her
opinions, despite peer influence/opposition. It may include telling another
what to do or questioning another directly.

12. Fighter. One who verbally fights with others, combative and argumentative in
tone.
13. Democrat or Obama supporter. Speaker who makes positive or supportive statements about the Democratic Party or the Democratic President, Barack Obama.

14. Reporter. A participant who reports what happened in particular events. May have the feel of an objective party witnessing the event.

15. Engaged audience. A participant that shows active listening, comments, questions, or makes a connection

16. Researcher (teacher/student). When the teacher acts as a researcher, more curious less demanding/for students it is a curiosity, questioning things.

17. “Racist” A message in which the student states/or implies that one race is superior or inferior (This may need further discussion here) Racism is a “system of advantage based on race” It is not only a “personal ideology based on race, but a system involving cultural messages and institutional policies and practices as well as the beliefs and actions of individuals” (Tatum, 1997, p. 7). People of color cannot be racist because they do not systematically benefit from racism, but they can be racially prejudiced, but they can internalize racism.

18. Racial prejudiced. “A preconceived judgment or opinion about race, usually based on limited information” (Tatum, 1997, p. 7).

19. Corroborator. One who confirms that something happened, agrees with or confirms,
20. Social activist. A participant, who wants to act to change racial injustice, seeks action for social justice or seeks change (with action) for fair treatment for everyone.

21. Reporting victimization. Participant shares events in which he/she believes that he/she has been treated unfairly.

22. White teacher. When I make comments that are mainstream in nature, presenting a more neutral curriculum stance, downplaying racial issues. Includes such actions as microinvalidations (Zamudio, et al., 2010).

23. African American. A participant who identifies himself/herself as a member of the AA community

24. Minority Student. A student whose racial identity is in the minority in the larger classroom context.

25. Pro-immigration. A participant who supports immigration into the United States


27. Label resister. A student who resists stereotypical or institutional racial labels.

28. Label supporter. A student who accepts institutional labeling of minorities (the status quo).

29. Apartment member/dweller. One who lives in the lower economic area apartments next to school studied
30. Storyteller. One who relays information of events in an entertaining way (may imply expectation of audience members involvement) May include exaggeration and acting out a story in a way that is meant to entertain others.

31. Good Samaritan. A student that helps injured peer.

32. Witness. One who sees/hears others and reports to the group.

33. Empathizer. One who empathizes with the speaker.

34. Polite student. Interacts/Responds in acceptable/polite way that acknowledges the rules of school and the teacher as authoritarian or leader.

35. Peacemaker. One with words or actions attempts to calm tensions/arguments between others.

36. Teaser/ Rude Peer. A peer who says something that could be construed as hurtful most likely knowingly.

37. Self-hater. One who makes a statement about his/her inferiority in any part of their assumed identity.

38. Resistant student. Student that stands up to others, resists mainstream thinking.

39. Assertive student. A student that takes the floor/ takes a turn unapologetically.

40. Student uses critical literacy. A student that uses language to express awareness of power relationships locally or in the larger society that negatively impacts certain groups.
1. World of the classroom. In this world, participants depict the world of the classroom as lonely, due to the fact there are few African American students in their classes. Additionally, they depict classroom discussions about segregation and slavery as uncomfortable. In this world, the participants appear to feel isolated and at times powerless.

2. World of the Group The dynamics between the participants in the lunch group. Most of the times power is shared, however at times Selma dominates this world by either controlling the topic or contesting the use of racial identities.

3. World of school. Similar to the “world of the classroom”, some of the students describe the world of school as difficult socially and academically. All of the participants describe the playground as chaotic and prone to random violence and racism. Also, some students complain that there are not many African American teachers.

4. World of the text/ the world of politics/ the international world. The students in general describe this world less than the others and there was a distinct movement away from text. But, Selma made connections about racism and violence in Haiti. Also, Selma made a connection to unfair laws in Arizona we read about in the larger, whole group classroom. Other students acknowledged some of her comments, and the world of the text influenced the outside world.
5. World of the Researcher. This world is created by me and sometimes includes power relations that are inequitable. For example during conversations with the other participants, I make evaluative statements or offer platitudes. Results of these interactions sometimes changed the course of the conversation or silenced participants.

6. The Outside/ Adult World. The student participants’ describe this world as harsh and racist at times. Random acts of violence occurred often based on race. Additionally, Stephen states that his mother tells him that it is hard in the outside world because he is African American.

Evidence of Codes

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Code</th>
<th>Evidence</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Critical Literacy Insider</td>
<td>Bauer said, “Do you want to be called Black?” Stephen, “Well I really don’t, it’s kind of sensitive.” Hannah, “It kind of bothers me when people say Black, a little bit.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Critical Literacy Observer</td>
<td>Selma (when discussing reasons for Limbaugh not wanting to spend money to help Haiti) “Or he probably don’t like down people there in Haiti.” Selma:</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
“Probably because you know Obama’s a *Democrat*”

Selma, “He’s probably saying that because he don’t like Obama.”

Alienated African American

Selma, “…like I feel left out.” Hannah, “every time we talk about Blacks and Whites *I feel, I feel like what if my life would be, what would, or a different color? And then, what (.) instead of now.’

Vulnerable Peer

Quintessa, “she hit me in my nose with that Carmex.”

Alienated Peer

Bauer, “They’re giving you a hard time?” Quintessa, “it’s like once a day.”

Authoritarian Teacher

Bauer, “Don’t tease Quintessa. She doesn’t want to look like Queen Latifah. I don’t think she really looks like her.”

Expert Teacher

Bauer, “Some people would rather be called Black than African American.”

Bauer, “there’s are people that are going to walk around and think it’s okay, and they’re going to grow up and have
power, and who knows what they’re going to do.”

Submissive Teacher

Group members, “NO!”

All the students except one did not want to make announcements about famous African American.

Bauer, “Announcements, we don’t need.” (I changed my position.) Selma, “That’s unnecessary.”

Problem Solver Teacher

Bauer, “but you just have to figure out that person, you can’t make judgments.”

Valuable Group Member

Devin, “You don’t really see black teachers.” Niah, “That’s true.” The acknowledgment indicts that the group member is valuable.

Strong and Powerful Peer

Selma, “I don't want to be called all Black, but I'm not African American.”

Fighter

Selma, “Sienna’s a tramp.” This was said after Selma was describing how Sienna threw something at her on the playground.
Democrat or Obama Supporter

Selma, “He’s probably saying that because he don’t like Obama.”

Reporter

Selma, “And Korman come up and ask me and Mary came up and asked me.”

Engaged Audience

Bauer, “Okay” “Yeah”

*I encourage the students to continue and tell the audience (the other participants) their story.*

Researcher

Bauer, “You feel left out?”

Racist or Racially Prejudices

Selma, “All black will be cussing and stuff.”

*Selma shared with the group that she preferred white teachers over black teachers, citing the reason above.*

Corroborator

Hannah, “and it’s harder for me because I’m the only black one.”

Florence, “Yeah, I felt like –“

Hannah, “Yes.”

*A participant that supports another’s assertion.*
Social Activist

Bauer, “That seems like that’s a big thing that we’ve never talked about.”

Bauer, “I need to bring it up to Miss Busy”

Bauer, “like how people might feel left out or how just staying –,”

Bauer, “because when we talk about our Monday meetings”

*Monday meetings are class meeting when students and teachers discuss social/emotional issues and strategies to help students cope with everyday life.*

Reporter of Victimization

Selma, “it’s like once a day.”

Selma, “when Elias is calling Valeria racist.”

White Teacher

Bauer, “each person should be judged by who they are,”

*Teacher gives platitudes or microinvalidations.*

African American

Florence, “Daren said, “Girl, you black, so face it.”

Minority Student

Hannah, “Yeah sometimes you’ll feel[ Selma: [like I feel left out..”
The participants describe their experience in classrooms in which they are minorities.

Pro-Immigration

Selma, “What if that happened to him?”

[Laugh]

Selma, “An earthquake came down and killed all his family.”

Selma, “and he been down there shivering and shaking.”

Selma imagines what Limbaugh would feel like if he had to stay in Haiti.

Anti-Immigration

Selma, “I’m kinda on Limbaugh’s side about that.”

Label Resister

Selma, “I don’t want to be called all Black.”

Label Supporter

Hannah, “Ancestors would be like your *great, great, great, great, great, great*—“

Hannah was trying to explain to Selma that a family member from a long time ago was from Africa. Therefore, she should accept the label.
“Selma And all those White girls were skipping around,”

A group of students who all lived in the same apartment complex were watching the movie, “Bring It On” when they had this conversation.

Selma and it was this Mexican’s driving in the car, and there were a whole bunch of black people smoking.

Hannah, “Cause Coach Green and I said Stop no, somebody can get hurt.”

This is an instance of the student helping other students.

Selma: they got out of the car
Selma: and started beating on the car+.

Bauer: Oh my gosh, that’s scary.

Hannah: It kind of bothers me when people say Black, a little bit.

Selma: I don’t really care Ta’moria.
Ian: She might look like my sister.

Ian was trying to placate both Selma and Florence after Florence had told Selma that she wasn’t “light” like Queen Latifah.
Teaser/ Rude Peer

Florence: I don’t think you look like her.....You don’t look no+thing like neither of you. The skin, the skin, She’s light,

Florence was comparing Queen Latifah to Selma.

Self-hater

Selma, "White people have more abilities over us."

Resistant student

Selma: But I ain't Africa+n.

Assertive student

Selma, “What if that happened to him?”

Student uses critical literacy

Selma, “People will make fun of you when you are darker.”

This was an early code that was delineated into critical literacy insider and critical literacy observer later.

World of the classroom

Hannah: every time we talk about Blacks and Whites *I feel, I feel like what if my life would be, what would, what would different if I was white*(said softly)

Hannah said this in reference to conversations about segregation in the larger classroom.

World of School

Florence: when we were outside yesterday for gym

Florence: yesterday we were out in the
Field,

**World of the Classroom**

Florence: like today I was counting how many black people was in our group.

**World of the Group**

Selma: What we say in the lunch group, stays in the lunch group.

**World of the Researcher**

Bauer, “That is really interesting. What do you think Selma? You think that he’s afraid and that’s really the truth underneath that?”

*The teacher-researcher asks questions.*

**Outside World**

Selma: and it was this Mexican’s driving in the car, and there were a whole bunch of black people smoking, and then the Mexican, she had to stop. They were like, “*Get out of the car!* “*Get out of the car!*”

*Selma describes an event in which there was a woman who was randomly attacked.*
Note: The data sources include: transcripts of participant interviews, reflective notebooks, researcher’s memos, informal conversations, and school documents (IEPs, participants’ cumulative folders, and TAKS scores).

During one of our many political discussions in February, Hannah, a staunch Obama supporter, unabashedly stated (without knowing the other participants’ political leanings) that Rush Limbaugh didn’t agree with Obama about giving more financial support to Haiti because, “I was thinking that he probably, the only reason he doesn’t agree with Obama, like Obama he always want to help people and Republicans probably think only of themselves and not think of other people.” [Discussion about current events, 02/09/10]

Contrary to my first impression, Hannah stood up to Selma boldly and confidently. Selma, an African American female (labeled by the school) disliked the terms, “Black” or “African American” and often argued with me about using these attributes. Tired by Selma’s multiple comments like, “No, I ain’t. But I ain’t African American.”) Hannah, also African American rebutted, “(Laughing) yeah, you are. They (your ancestors) came from Africa,” [Current events discussion, 3/25/10] while most of the other students sat in silence. Even when Selma was noticeable irritated with Hannah’s comments, Hannah continued arguing her point and stood her ground.
REFERENCES


