NINTH GRADE STUDENTS’ NEGOTIATION OF AESTHETIC, EFFERENT, AND CRITICAL STANCES IN RESPONSE TO A NOVEL SET IN AFGHANISTAN

Cheryl Taliaferro, B.A., M.A.

Dissertation Prepared for the Degree of

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

UNIVERSITY OF NORTH TEXAS

December 2011

APPROVED:

Janelle Mathis, Major Professor
Mariela Nuñez-Janes, Minor Professor
Leslie Patterson, Committee Member
Nora White, Committee Member
Nancy Nelson, Chair of the Department of Teacher Education and Administration
James D. Meernik, Acting Dean of the Toulouse Graduate School
Taliaferro, Cheryl. *Ninth Grade Students’ Negotiation of Aesthetic, Efferent, and Critical Stances in Response to a Novel Set in Afghanistan*. Doctor of Philosophy (Reading), December 2011, 147 pp., 3 tables, references, 108 titles.

This qualitative, action research study was guided by two primary research questions. First, how do students negotiate aesthetic, efferent, and critical stances when reading a novel set in Afghanistan? Second, how do aesthetic and efferent stances contribute to or hinder the adoption of a critical stance? A large body of research exists that examines student responses to literature, and much of that research is based on the transactional theory of reading. However, it remains unclear how critical literacy fits into this theory. This study describes how one group of high school students’ aesthetic and efferent responses to a novel set in Afghanistan supported their development of critical stances.

Six students enrolled in a ninth-grade English course participated in this study. Data were collected for 13 weeks. Data included two individual interviews with each student, student writing assignments in the form of 6 assigned journal entries and 7 assigned essays, transcriptions of 12 class discussions, field notes, lesson plans, a teacher researcher journal, and research memos. Data were analyzed using the constant comparative method.

Three major findings emerged from this study. First, class discussions provided a context for students to adopt stances that were not evident in their individual written responses to the novel, which were completed prior to the discussions. Second, the discussions provided scaffolding that helped several of the students adopt world-efferent and critical stances. Third, both the aesthetic and the efferent stances contributed to students’ adoption of critical stances.
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

First, I would like to acknowledge and sincerely thank my dissertation committee members, Nora White, Leslie Patterson, and Mariela Nuñez-Janes, and my advisor and chair, Janelle Mathis, for their support and encouragement throughout my journey as a doctoral student. Each contributed to this dissertation in a unique way, and this work would not have been possible without their thoughtful guidance, insights, and mentoring.

I would also like to thank my family for their seemingly endless patience and support as I worked on this dissertation. My parents, Connie and Rudy Kretzmeier, and my grandparents, JoAnn Hall and John D. and Murlene Smith, provided both financial and emotional support for my education and this project, and for both I am truly grateful. My husband Chris and children Madison and Sam gave me the time I needed to work and to write as well as all the love and encouragement I needed to see this dissertation to completion.

Finally, I would like to acknowledge the students who participated in this study. They graciously allowed me to record their words and save their writings, knowing for 13 weeks that everything they said and wrote pertaining to A Thousand Splendid Suns would be studied and potentially shared with others. I deeply appreciate their generosity in participating in this project.
**TABLE OF CONTENTS**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS</td>
<td>iii</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LIST OF TABLES</td>
<td>vii</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CHAPTER 1 INTRODUCTION</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Research Questions</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Methodology</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Definitions of Terms</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assumptions</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Delimitations</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Summary</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CHAPTER 2 REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rosenblatt’s Transactional Theory of Reader Response</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Literature Discussions and Discourse Theories</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>International and Global Literature</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Critical Literacy</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Summary</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CHAPTER 3 METHODOLOGY</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Overall Approach and Rationale</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Research Questions</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Setting</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participants</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Gaining Access to Site or Participant Selection .......................................................... 35
Researcher Biography .................................................................................................. 35
Role of the Researcher ............................................................................................... 36
Selection of Material .................................................................................................. 37
Data Collection Methods .......................................................................................... 39
Interviews .................................................................................................................. 40
  Class Discussions .................................................................................................... 41
  Student Writing ....................................................................................................... 42
  Field Notes, Teacher Researcher Journal and Lesson Plans .................................... 43
Data Analysis Procedures .......................................................................................... 44
  Interviews ............................................................................................................... 45
  Student Writing ...................................................................................................... 46
  Class Discussions .................................................................................................. 49
  Teacher Researcher Journal, Field Notes, and Lesson Plans .................................. 51
Trustworthiness ......................................................................................................... 51
Delimitations ............................................................................................................ 52
Ethical and Political Considerations of the Study ...................................................... 55
  Ethical Considerations ........................................................................................... 55
  Political Considerations ......................................................................................... 55
Summary ................................................................................................................... 56
CHAPTER 4 FINDINGS ............................................................................................... 57
  Discussions: A Context for the Adoption of Stances .............................................. 57
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table Description</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Chapter Discussions that Prompted a New Stance</td>
<td>58</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Stances Evident in Written Responses to Chapters</td>
<td>61</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Stances Evident in Chapter Discussions</td>
<td>63</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Today’s students are growing up in a “flat” world (Friedman, 2005), a world in which many of the physical boundaries that have long separated people around the globe have been virtually erased. Satellite television broadcasts live news stories as well as television shows and movies from around the globe into our homes in a matter of minutes. The Internet enables us to access information about virtually any topic as quickly as we can type a subject into a Google bar. Social network sites like Twitter and Facebook allow us to join online groups to discuss both the ordinary and the extraordinary events of the day with people we’ve never met but who share a common interest. Not only can we watch the unfolding of a revolution halfway around the world in real time on our TVs, but we can simultaneously read about the conditions that gave rise to it on the Internet and actually participate in it ourselves if we choose, using our Twitter and Facebook accounts to give support and encouragement to those revolting or to criticize their actions as they are occurring.

Students today have unprecedented opportunities to connect with people around the world in both simple and complex ways. They can play games on their iPhones and Xbox Live with people from other countries. They can use Skype and Facetime to video chat with people they meet online. They can collaborate on school projects with students from over 200 different countries and territories via ePals. Over 80,000 of these students each year will graduate from high school and decide to participate in a study abroad program in college (US Department of Education, 2011). Many of them who join the US workforce will be employed by one of the U.S. multinational corporations that currently employ 20% of all US workers (Wessel,
Opportunities abound for today’s students to learn more about the world and its inhabitants than generations before even conceived, and the reasons for doing so are more important than ever. However, access to information and sometimes superficial contact with others do not by themselves deepen students’ understandings of the world or of others, and “for all the trumpeted diversity in this nation, few interact across cultures with regularity, with grace, or with significance” (Fecho, 2001, p. 26).

Furthermore, students do not have an innate ability to navigate knowledgably all of the information to which they have access. With so much information at their fingertips, and so many knowledge sources available, they need to be taught how to deliberately and thoughtfully critique their sources of information, to recognize the biases that inherently exist in all texts, and to develop their own viewpoints. Critical literacy educators seek to help students not only identify and analyze biases, but also how to challenge those viewpoints and practices that they believe to be unjust. These educators may teach students to adopt a particular social justice perspective, to “unpack” the ways in which texts work to promote particular biases, or to develop their own personal responses to texts that have social justice themes (Aukerman & Schuldt, 2010). They teach students how to read against texts, to consider a variety of viewpoints, to question the way the world works, and to advocate for social justice.

For several decades, studying multicultural and global literature has been viewed by educators as one means for developing students’ understanding of the world in which they live in meaningful and critical ways. Since the founding of the International Board on Books for Young People (IBBY) in 1953, educators and researchers from more than 70 countries have worked together to promote cultural understanding and peace through the use of international
children’s literature (International Board on Books for Young People, 2011). In a similar vein, in the United States multicultural educators have worked since the Civil Rights Era to prepare students to live in a pluralistic society and to work for social justice (Au, 2009; Gay, 2004; Miner, 2009). Professional organizations such as the American Library Association, the National Council of Teachers of English, and the International Reading Association all promote the use of multicultural and global literature in classrooms to help students learn more about their world, other people, and diverse viewpoints. Literacy researchers have also been studying students’ responses to multicultural and global texts for several decades.

Much of the research that has been conducted about students’ responses to literature is based on Louise Rosenblatt’s transactional theory of reading (Rosenblatt, 1978/1994; Rosenblatt, 1994/2004). According to this theory, as readers engage with a text, they respond to it somewhere on a continuum between the aesthetic and the efferent, with one stance usually taking priority over the other (Rosenblatt, 1978/1994; Rosenblatt, 1994/2004). However, as Cai (2008) demonstrates, some researchers question how critical literacy practices fit along this continuum. Is Rosenblatt’s theory complex enough to account for acts of critical literacy, or do acts of critical literacy constitute an entirely separate type of stance? Cai (2008) believes that critical literacy is accounted for in Rosenblatt’s theory, with the aesthetic stance providing the “seeds of critical reading, which, with guidance from the teacher and through discussion, can lead to critical reading of the text as a social and political construct” (p. 216).

Rosenblatt, in an epilogue to The Reader, the Text, the Poem (1978/1994), was herself critical of an overemphasis on critical interpretations of texts, writing the following:

We are frequently being reminded that no criticism or teaching is ever completely politically “innocent.” True, but should we accept the swing to the indoctrination of an
unqualifiedly negative attitude, which fosters a sense of alienation, of being a powerless victim? And should we permit a simplistic view of “power” to trigger simplistic notions of alternatives and processes of social change? Instead, I argue, let us avowedly inculcate democratic values as the positive criteria for selecting among choices, whether literary or social, whether stemming from the dominant or a minority culture. (Rosenblatt, 1978/1994, pp. 187-188)

Rosenblatt (1978/1994) maintained that her transactional theory of reading does allow for critical readings of texts, as each reader is uniquely shaped to respond to texts by the assumptions that he or she brings to the reading event. However, little is known about how a critical stance operates in conjunction with the aesthetic stance and the efferent stance.

The purpose of this qualitative, action research study was to analyze how six ninth-grade students negotiated aesthetic, efferent, and critical stances as they responded to a novel set in Afghanistan and to analyze how the aesthetic and efferent stances contributed to or hindered the critical stance. This study adds to an existing body of research that examines students’ responses to multicultural and global literature. It also adds to our understanding of how Rosenblatt’s transactional theory of reading fits with critical literacy practices by analyzing how students negotiated aesthetic, efferent, and critical stances when reading a novel set in Afghanistan.

Research Questions

Two primary research questions guided this study:

1. How do students negotiate aesthetic, efferent, and critical stances during the study of a novel set in Afghanistan?

2. How do aesthetic and efferent stances contribute to or hinder the adoption of a critical stance?
Methodology

This study is a qualitative, action research study conducted by a teacher researcher (Burton & Seidl, 2005; Fecho & Allen, 2005). Six ninth-grade students enrolled in World Literature and Composition in an independent school were the participants. I was teacher researcher. During the course of this study, I collected multiple data sources and recursively analyzed them using Corbin and Strauss’s (1990) constant comparative method. Data sources included two individual interviews with each student, student writing assignments in the form of 6 assigned journal entries and 7 assigned essays per student, transcriptions of 12 class discussions about the novel, field notes, lesson plans, a teacher researcher journal, and research memos.

Definitions of Terms

For the purpose of this study, the following words are defined in specific ways:

*Critical literacy*: Critical literacy is language use that challenges the status quo and questions the social construction of the self (Shor, 1997). Students engaging in critical literacy may do any of the following when responding to a text: question the everyday world, interrogate the relationship between language and power, analyze popular culture and media, understand how power relationships are socially constructed, consider actions that can be taken to promote social justice, emphasize complexities of particular problems rather than simplify them, or examine multiple perspectives of an issue (Lewison, Leland, & Harste, 2007; McLaughlin & DeVoogd, 2004).
Global literature: Used synonymously with “international literature,” global literature includes any text that is set in a country other than the United States (Freeman & Lehman, 2001; Hancock, 2008; Lehman, Freeman, & Scharer, 2010; Short, 2011).

Assumptions

This study is based on an assumption that dialogue is a means by which attitudes, beliefs, and knowledge are both revealed and shaped.

Delimitations

1. Because I was the students’ teacher and had previously taught four of the students the year prior to this study, some of the students’ responses may have been designed to please me or help me with my dissertation.

2. The students were aware that they were participating in a study, and four of them had previously participated in a study with me and had their work and comments shared by me at conferences. Some of their comments and work, therefore, may have been designed to make them appear favorably to others if or when their comments and work were shared again.

3. The aesthetic stance in particular is concerned primarily with private meanings that occur inside the reader as he or she transacts with the text. As such, it is impossible to assess fully any reader’s adoption of this stance. In describing how the students in this study adopted a stance as they read, I had to rely on the written and verbal responses that they offered publicly to me. What I refer to in this study as an “aesthetic response” actually refers to a response that I found to be indicative of the student adopting an aesthetic stance, based on particular strategies the student used to create meaning.
from the text. While I recognize that there are, in fact, important differences among a
stance, a strategy, and a response, for this purpose of this study, these are treated as
interchangeable, since I had no way of measuring stance other than through an analysis
of the strategies the students revealed in their responses. Several layers of
interpretation, therefore, lie between the actual adoption of the students’ stances and
my analysis of the responses they offered.

Summary

This qualitative, action research study was designed to answer the following two
questions: How do students negotiate aesthetic, efferent, and critical stances during the study
of a novel set in Afghanistan, and how do aesthetic and efferent stances contribute to or hinder
the adoption of a critical stance? This study adds to an existing body of research that examines
students’ responses to multicultural and global literature. It also adds evidence to a current
conversation about how critical literacy fits within Rosenblatt’s transactional theory of reading.

This chapter introduced the study. In Chapter 2 I review the literature and theories in which this
study was grounded. These topics and theories include Rosenblatt’s transactional theory of
reader response, literature discussions and discourse theories, global literature, and critical
literacy.
CHAPTER 2

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

The purpose of this qualitative, action research study was to analyze how six ninth-grade students negotiated aesthetic, efferent, and critical stances as they responded to a novel set in Afghanistan and to analyze how the aesthetic and efferent stances contributed to or hindered the critical stance. Two research questions guided this study: How do ninth-grade students negotiate aesthetic, efferent, and critical stances when studying a novel set in Afghanistan, and how do the aesthetic and efferent stances contribute to or hinder the adoption of a critical stance? Chapter 1 introduced the study’s purpose, questions, and methodology. This chapter reviews the theories and literature in which the study is grounded.

I begin this chapter with a description of Louise Rosenblatt’s transactional theory of reader response. Next, I explain the role of dialogic literature discussions in the classroom and related theories of discourse, including ideas expressed by Louise Rosenblatt, Paulo Freire and Ira Shor, Mikhail Bakhtin, and James Gee. Then I discuss the history of international and global literature and its current use in classrooms. I conclude by discussing critical literacy and its role in education.

Rosenblatt’s Transactional Theory of Reader Response

Louise Rosenblatt’s transactional theory of reader response draws from many disciplines, including anthropology, education, and literary criticism. It also draws heavily from Rosenblatt’s own experiences teaching English. According to Rosenblatt’s theory, meaning resides neither entirely in the text nor entirely in the reader, but it is created as the two transact with one another. Although Rosenblatt initially used the term “interaction” when she
described this process in the 1938 edition of *Literature as Exploration* (Dressman & Webster, 2001,) in subsequent editions of this work Rosenblatt chose to use the term “transaction” to emphasize the essentiality of both reader and text, in contrast to other theories that make one or the other determinate. *Interaction*, the term generally used, suggests two distinct entities acting on each other, like billiard balls. *Transaction* lacks such mechanistic overtones and permits emphasis on the to-and-fro, spiraling, nonlinear, continuously reciprocal influence of reader and text in the making of meaning. (Rosenblatt, 1938/1995, p. xvi)

The transaction that occurs between a reader and a text results in a unique creation of meaning that Rosenblatt calls the “poem“:

[The poem] happens during a coming-together, a compenetration, of a reader and a text. The reader brings to the text his past experience and present personality. Under the magnetism of the ordered symbols of a text, he marshals his resources and crystallizes out from the stuff of memory, thought, and feeling a new order, a new experience, which he sees as the poem. This becomes part of the ongoing stream of his life experience, to be reflected on from any angle important to him as a human being. (Rosenblatt, 1978/1994, p. 12)

The poem that is created when a reader transacts with a text is influenced by the text itself, the reader’s past experiences, and the reader’s present disposition. The poem, which is particular to this reader’s experience with this particular text at this point in time, in turn becomes a part of the reader’s experiences that will then impact future poems that the reader creates when he or she transacts with new texts.

According to Rosenblatt (1978/1994; 1994/2006), readers approach texts with particular stances lying somewhere on the continuum between efferent and aesthetic. A reader’s stance is determined by his or her purpose in reading the text. The reader’s stance often determines which pieces of the text the reader emphasizes in his or her interpretation.

An aesthetic stance is characterized by a reader focusing on his or her moment-by-moment participation in the reading event (Rosenblatt, 1978/1994). This participation involves
a “distancing from ‘reality’” (Rosenblatt, 1978/1994, p. 31) in which the reader focuses his or her attention on the “associations, feelings, attitudes and ideas” (Rosenblatt, 1978/1994, p. 25) that are aroused by the text. Private meanings are created for the reader as he or she “savors the qualities of the feelings, ideas, situations, scenes, personalities, and emotions that are called forth” (Rosenblatt, 1994/2006, p. 1373) by the text and “participates in the tensions, conflicts, and resolutions of the images, ideas, and scenes as they unfold” (Rosenblatt, 1994/2006, p. 1373).

In contrast, a reader who is reading primarily from an efferent stance directs his or attention outward, focusing on the knowledge that he or she will carry away after the reading event has ended (Rosenblatt, 1978/1994). The reader concentrates on “the information, the concepts, the guides to action” (Rosenblatt, 1978/1994) that are contained within the text. Therefore, an efferent stance is characterized more by creating public meanings than by creating private ones, as the reader “abstract[s] out and analytically structure[s] the ideas, information, directions, or conclusions to be retained, used, or acted on after the reading event” (Rosenblatt, 1994/2006, p. 1373). An efferent reading is factual, analytical, and cognitive rather than affective and sensuous (Rosenblatt, 1994/2006).

In order to assess the aesthetic and efferent stances students adopt when reading a text, Cox and Many (1989) developed an Instrument for Measuring Reader Stance (as cited in Many, 1990/2004). They determined that a student reading from primarily an aesthetic stance makes judgments about characters and ideas presented in the text, create images of the people and events in the text, make personal associations between the text and life, expresses emotions about the text, forms personal impressions about events and characters in the text,
and/or hypothesizes about the situations described in the text. A student reading from a primarily efferent stance, however, focuses on literary analysis and/or factual learning. This student may attend more to the structure of the text, the genre, or specific literary elements like plot, setting, mood, and characters. He or she may focus on the text’s theme or realism and may evaluate the work in terms of its social or historical context.

One of the problems that concerned Rosenblatt about educational practices is that teachers may place too much emphasis on one stance, resulting in students who do not flexibly respond to texts (Rosenblatt, 1994/2006). For example, students who only receive multiple choice questions pertaining to key facts in a text may not learn how to enjoy reading for the pleasurable experience of living vicariously through a fictional character, and they may not learn to appreciate the beauty of literature as a work of art. Therefore, teachers should make a concerted effort to provide students with ample opportunities to respond to texts both efferently and aesthetically.

While Rosenblatt (1938/1995; 1978/1994; 1994/2006) does not ascribe to the idea that there is one single correct way to read a text, she does acknowledge that some interpretations of texts are more correct than others. In other words, misreadings of texts are possible. Misreadings may occur when readers project something from their own lives into a text even when the text does not support that projection. All various interpretations of a text, therefore, must be grounded in the text itself.

Literature Discussions and Discourse Theories

A centerpiece of Rosenblatt’s instructional approach to reading is classroom discussion. One of the problems Rosenblatt identifies concerning the ways in which readers transact with
texts is the problem of misreadings. Both current and future misreadings may be corrected when students engage in meaningful classroom discussions. These discussions can help students come to a better understanding of issues that may be interfering with the ways in which they are interpreting a text and may encourage them to return to the text for closer analysis.

For example, in *Literature as Exploration* (1938/1995), Rosenblatt describes a classroom discussion based on the novel *Anna Karenina*. Despite Tolstoy’s probable intention for the reader to feel some sympathy for Anna, whose husband is cold and distant and who decides to leave her husband after falling in love with another man, one student insisted that nothing about Anna calls for sympathy. This student viewed Anna’s husband as a man who felt deeply but was unable to communicate his feelings. During the classroom discussion, however, the student realized that her interpretation of these characters was influenced by her own experiences with her father, whom she came to identify with Anna’s husband despite there being no textual evidence to support this interpretation. She was therefore allowing her own experiences to interfere with her reading of the text. By engaging in a serious classroom discussion, the student came to understand how others approached this text and decided to revise her own understandings.

The primary characteristics of the types of discussions Rosenblatt describes is that they are both dialogic and student-centered. They afford students a true voice and an opportunity to question, to interpret, to support, to defend, to disagree, and to argue. Rosenblatt (1938/1995) states,

A free exchange of ideas will lead each student to scrutinize his own sense of the literary work in the light of others’ opinions. The very fact that other students stress aspects
that he may have ignored or report a different impression will suggest that perhaps he had not done justice to the text. He will turn to it again to point out the elements that evoked his response and to see what can justify the other students’ responses. (p. 104)

Shor and Freire (1987) also maintain that dialogic discussions that are student-centered are the key to learning. They describe the dialogic process as liberatory, as students have a voice in their own learning and thus actively participate in the formation of their education and their selves.

Rosenblatt’s description of the ways in which discussion can impact students’ understandings of texts can be explained, in part, by Mikhail Bakhtin’s philosophy of language and his literary criticism. Bakhtin (2006a) describes novels themselves as “multi-languaged,” having emerged from a polyglot world in which new relationships were and are being forged between language and its object. He notes that we all “live in a world of others’ words” (2006b, p. 141) and that we spend our lives trying to understand ourselves and others by exploring the constantly blurring boundaries between others’ words and our own. He maintains that all understanding is imbued with evaluation and that it is impossible to understand literature in isolation from the cultural forces that produced both the author and the reader; nor can literature be separated from previous or future cultures (Bakhtin 2006b; Bakhtin 2006e).

According to Bakhtin (2006c), when analyzing meaning, one should consider utterances to be the proper unit of analysis. Utterances are comprised of words, and the word, whether written or spoken, is “a drama in which three characters participate” (2006d, p. 122): the author/speaker, the listener, and those voices the author/speaker heard in the word before he used it. Additionally, authors address their utterances to two audiences: an addressee, whose understanding the author immediately seeks, and a superaddressee, defined possibly as “God,
absolute truth, the court of dispassionate human conscience, the people, the court of history, science, and so forth” (2006d, p. 126). He therefore describes the search for meaning as a dialogic process: “a meaning only reveals its depths once it has encountered and come into contact with another, foreign meaning; they engage in a kind of dialogue, which surmounts the closedness and one-sidedness of these particular meanings” (2006e, p. 7). Engaging in dialogic discussion is the closest human beings can ever come to understanding some type of truth.

Similar to both Rosenblatt and Bakhtin, Gee maintains that meaning in language is not static, but rather it is dependent upon particular contexts. Gee (2001/2006) identifies two primary functions of language in his sociocognitive perspective: situated action and perspective taking. For Gee, meaning in language is not abstract; rather, it’s closely tied to people’s experiences and is therefore situated in the particular. These experiences are stored in the brain, almost like videotapes. As we have new experiences, the videotapes in our brains help inform our understandings of our new experiences, and these videotapes may be edited as our understandings change. Meanings of words and sentences are thus always situated to particular contexts that include “our purposes, values, and intended courses of action and interaction” (p. 118). Language, therefore, is “not about conveying neutral or objective information; rather, it is about communicating perspectives on experience and action in the world, often in contrast to alternative and competing perspectives” (p. 119). Gee views language’s very existence as a way of enabling people to understand the same concepts in different ways. Through both dialogue and interaction, students may learn to distance themselves from their already-established perspectives and simulate the perspectives of others.
Gee (2001/2006) also notes that a wide variety of discourse communities exist that have different rules about how its members should use language and behave. These various discourses may be embedded in each other and may mix or blend. People are socialized into these various discourse communities throughout their lives. Cultural models that they acquire inform them about what counts as normal and natural and what counts as inappropriate and deviant in their discourses. These judgments are thoroughly value-laden and both come out of and inform social practices. As students engage in dialogic discussions within the classroom, what they say, what they do not say, and how they choose to express themselves will all be informed by the dominant discourse of the classroom as well as other discourse communities in which the students participate.

**International and Global Literature**

This study explored the stances that students adopted when responding to a novel set in Afghanistan and so was also influenced by the field of international and global literature. The term *international literature* in its narrowest sense refers to books originally published outside of the United States for children living within the country of publication (Hancock, 2008; Tunnell & Jacobs, 2000; Freeman & Lehman, 2001; Short, 2011), although this definition has expanded in recent years, as will be discussed. International literature has been embraced by some educators as a way of teaching peace and acceptance to students and a means for promoting intercultural understanding. In its beginnings, the international children’s literature movement was heavily influenced by the work of two women: Jella Lepman and Mildred L. Batchelder (Freeman & Lehman, 2001; Lehman, Freeman, & Scharer, 2010).
Jella Lepman was a German Jew who fled Germany during World War II. After the war, she advocated for the use of children’s literature as a tool to promote intercultural understanding, with the hope that this type of understanding would encourage positive relations among people of different cultures and prevent another Holocaust from occurring (Freeman & Lehman, 2001; International Youth Library, n.d.). Lepman founded the International Youth Library (IYL) in Munich, Germany, in 1948 and the International Board on Books for Young People (IBBY), headquartered in Basel, Switzerland, in 1953. The IYL is currently the largest library of international children’s and youth books in the world, housing approximately 580,000 books written in over 130 languages (International Youth Library, n.d.).

The International Board on Books for Young People is a professional organization that currently consists of 70 national chapters (International Board on Books for Young People, 2011), including the United States Board on Books for Young People. These national chapters work together to promote IBBY’s mission to increase international understanding through children’s literature, to help children gain access to quality books, to encourage the publication of quality books worldwide, to provide training and support for people who work with children’s books, and to encourage research and scholarly writing about children’s literature (International Board on Books for Young People, 2011).

Another pioneer in the field, Mildred Batchelder promoted the publishing of international literature in the United States (Freeman & Lehman, 2001; Lehman, Freeman, & Scharer, 2010). Batchelder worked as a librarian in Omaha, Nebraska, and Evanston, Illinios, before joining the staff of the American Library Association (ALA) in 1936. She worked for ALA for over 30 years, promoting the translation of children’s literature, leading the School and
Children’s Library Division, and serving as executive secretary of the Children’s Services Division and the Young Adult Services Division. Her career was devoted "to eliminat[ing] barriers to understanding between people of different cultures, races, nations, and languages" through international literature (Association of Library Service to Children, 2011). In 1966, ALA established the Mildred L. Batchelder Award, which is awarded annually to a United States publisher for an outstanding children’s book originally written in a foreign language and published in a foreign country and subsequently translated into English and published in the United States.

In the years since Lepman and Batchelder began their work promoting international literature, technological advances have changed the field. Authors have become more mobile, sometimes living and working in multiple countries, and changes in the nature of the publishing industry have led many authors to seek publication of their books first in the United States rather than in their home countries (Short, 2011). As a result, some scholars have found it appropriate to expand the definition of international literature. The term *global literature* is now used interchangeably with *international literature* and includes a wider range of texts that are set in countries other than the United States (Freeman & Lehman, 2001; Hancock, 2008; Lehman, Freeman, & Scharer, 2010; Short, 2011). These texts may include books published in foreign countries in foreign languages, books written by immigrants who reside in the United States but write about their home countries, and books written by American citizens who were born and reared in the United States but have either visited or extensively researched the countries that are featured in their books (Short, 2011).
As globalization plays an increasingly important role in shaping individual, national, and cultural identities (Appadurai, 1996; Friedman, 2005), both the content and the skills that students study in schools should prepare them to work and live within international contexts. To help meet this end, language arts standards developed by the National Council of Teacher of English and the International Reading Association (2011) require that students read a wide variety of texts in order to build a better understanding of others as well as themselves. Research reveals, however, that a disconnect exists between these goals and actual practice.

In spite of existing standards, school curricula continue to be dominated by literature that represents white, middle class values (Glazier & Seo, 2005). Modern curricula remain similar to that of a century ago, and “ideologically, the curriculum in both [social studies and language arts] rests most comfortably on historically dominant groups' perspectives, language, and ways of seeing the world” (Sleeter, 2005, p. 43). In addition, metaphors commonly used to teach students about globalization, such as metaphors of the global village and networks of interdependence, are limited and are often invoked to gloss over the power imbalances that exist among different groups of people throughout the world and to deny voice to those who are not members of the dominant group (Sleeter, 2003). Even teachers who embrace the principles of multicultural education and who want to infuse their classes with texts that represent a wider range of voices sometimes struggle to do so, reporting that they are unsure about how to use these texts to help students make thoughtful connections to people from different cultural groups (Gay, 2004; Short, n.d.).
Teachers and schools need to provide students with more opportunities to engage with global literature. Global literature can provide students with a safe and inexpensive means of exploring and examining the broader world around them:

Literature invites readers to immerse themselves into story worlds to gain insights about how people live, feel, and think around the world – to develop emotional connections and empathy as well as knowledge. These connections go beyond the surface knowledge of food, dance, clothing, folklore, and facts about a country to the values and beliefs that lie at the core of each culture. (Short, 2011, p. 130)

In examining the difference between the surface level and deeper levels of global books and considering the potential that these books have for educating students, it’s helpful to consider Banks’ (1994) classification of multicultural education into four hierarchical levels and to apply those levels to the use of global literature in the classroom. The first level is the “contributions approach”; it involves using literature to teach isolated lessons about the contributions made by specific cultures. This approach typically focuses on the holidays, heroes, and customs of a culture. Level two is the “additive approach,” in which themes, concepts, and content of global literature are in the curriculum, but they remain isolated from other content. The “transformative approach” is the third level, in which students explore the relationships that exist between the dominant culture and a nondominant culture by examining problems and ideas presented in global literature from the viewpoint of the nondominant culture. The highest level is the “decision-making and social action approach.” Teachers who use this method empower their students by having them suggest solutions for problems raised in global literature that are experienced by nondominant cultures and then act in some way to help effect their solutions.
Multicultural educators as well as proponents of global literature share many of the same beliefs and goals. Both believe that one goal of education should be to empower students to advocate for greater social justice, and both believe that texts studied by students in school should represent a wide variety of voices. The dialogue that occurs about these texts is integral to furthering students’ intercultural understandings. Teachers and students should have time in the classroom devoted to safely discussing and questioning sensitive issues that they encounter in texts (Bean & Valerio, 1999; Dressel, 2005; Glazier & Seo, 2005; Ketter & Buter, 2004; Louie, 2005; Poole, 2005). Glazier and Seo (2005) lament that “silence about certain issues is often a salient characteristic of schools and classrooms” (p. 687). Issues surrounding culture, race, and inequalities, which are often raised by global literature, can often be uncomfortable to address, but students need the opportunity to examine these ideas. Students need a safe place to express their ideas, have those ideas challenged, and then modify them. Global literature can serve as an impetus that sparks discussion about sensitive ideas and issues, and dialogic discussions can provide the opportunity for students to clarify and refine their ideas and understandings.

Critical Literacy

As an instructional approach, critical literacy grew out of the work of Paulo Freire. Freire viewed education as inherently political, and his critical pedagogy was designed to help students question and challenge oppression. In this sense, education and literacy are closely tied to issues of social justice. Critical pedagogy is student-centered and contrasts sharply with the banking pedagogy of education that views students as empty vessels waiting to be filled with knowledge. In Freire’s view, literacy is about critically reading both the word and the
Critical literacy theorists view texts as social, cultural, and political constructions (Freire & Macedo, 1987; Jones & Enriquez, 2009; McLaughlin & DeVoogd, 2004). As such, texts do not have one static meaning; rather, they can mean different things to different people. Furthermore, texts are not limited to written documents; they may include any form of communication, such as movies, television shows, advertisements, or dialogue (Jones & Enriquez, 2009; McLaughlin & DeVoogd, 2004). Proponents of critical literacy encourage students to explore the power issues that exist in texts (Freire & Macedo, 1987; Jones & Enriquez, 2009; McLaughlin & DeVoogd, 2004). They also teach students to read against the text, to look for what the text omits and for contradictions within the text (McLaughlin & DeVoogd, 2004). They want students to question texts, to discuss different meanings of texts, and to examine how authors of texts attempt to influence readers. A critical reading of a text is an inherently reflexive activity that encourages students to recognize and question their own assumptions (Freire & Macedo, 1987; McLaughlin & DeVoogd, 2004). In learning to engage with a text critically, students will become empowered to challenge the assumptions made in texts and to reconsider their own responses to the texts (Freire & Macedo, 1987; Shor & Freire, 1987).

Multiple examples exist of scholarly work and research that focuses on literature and is grounded in the ideas of critical literacy. Some of that work focuses on the texts themselves. For example, Fox and Short (2003) examined different perspectives and issues involved in
assessing authenticity in multicultural and international literature. Lamme and Fu (2001), McNair (2003), and Duckett and Knox (2001) conducted content analyses of specific pieces of children’s literature, critiquing the cultural authenticity of the texts as well as the intentional and unintentional messages the texts send about the cultures presented.

Other researchers have focused on readers’ responses to multicultural and international texts. Lewis, Ketter, and Fabos (2001) described students discussing different points of view about the integration of Little Rock High School. They also described the ways in which the White rural teachers in one school resisted teaching multicultural literature and the ways in which they enacted Whiteness in their literature discussions by focusing on universal elements in the stories rather than exploring cultural differences. Fecho (2001) details the way he used multiple texts to help high school students engage in discussions about racial divisions in their school. Trousdale and McMillan (2003) conducted a longitudinal study in which they analyzed one girl’s responses to both feminist and patriarchal fairytales at ages eight and twelve.

McLaughlin and DeVoogd (2004) suggest four principles that are common to all instruction grounded in critical literacy. First, critical literacy is intimately connected to issues of power, and it “promotes reflection, transformation, and action” (p. 54). Second, it emphasizes the complexities of particular problems rather than relying on an essentialist approach to simplify issues. Third, the particular techniques used to promote critical literacy vary and are dependent upon the particular contexts in which they are used. Critical literacy does not “work the same way in all contexts all the time” (p. 54). Fourth, critical literacy involves examining multiple perspectives of issues.
Lewison, Leland, and Harste (2007) write that several different behaviors can define a critical stance. Students may question the everyday world around them, interrogate the relationship between language and power, analyze popular culture and media, examine how power relationships are socially constructed, and/or consider actions that can be taken to promote social justice.

Summary

In this chapter, I discussed theories and research that informed the development of this study. I began by explaining Rosenblatt’s transactional theory of reader response. I then discussed the role of dialogic literature discussions in the classroom and related theories of discourse. These included ideas supported the writings of Louise Rosenblatt, Paulo Freire and Ira Shor, Mikhail Bakhtin, and James Gee. I gave a brief history of international and global literature and explained some of its current uses in classrooms. Lastly, I discussed critical literacy and ways in which it has been studied and observed occurring in classrooms.

In the next chapter I will explain the methodology of this qualitative study, which had a two-fold purpose. The purpose of this qualitative, action research study was to analyze how six ninth-grade students negotiated aesthetic, efferent, and critical stances as they responded to a novel set in Afghanistan and to analyze how the aesthetic and efferent stances contributed to or hindered the critical stance.
CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

This study examined the aesthetic, efferent, and critical stances taken by ninth-grade students studying a novel set in Afghanistan. The purpose of this qualitative, action research study was to analyze how six ninth-grade students negotiated aesthetic, efferent, and critical stances as they responded to a novel set in Afghanistan and to analyze how the aesthetic and efferent stances contributed to or hindered the critical stance.

Chapter 1 introduced this study by explaining its purpose, its significance, the research questions, the definitions of terms, the study's assumptions, and its limitations. Chapter 2 reviewed the literature and theories in which this study was grounded. These topics and theories included Rosenblatt’s transactional theory of reader response, literature discussions and discourse theories, global literature, and critical literacy. This chapter explains the methodology used in this study.

To begin, I describe the overall approach and rationale for the study. I then identify the research questions and describe the setting and the participants. I explain how I gained access to the site and selected the participants, as well as how I selected the novel that was read by the students. Then I give a biography of the researcher and explain the role of the researcher in this study. Next, I describe the data collection methods and the data analysis procedures that I used. I then explain the trustworthiness of this study as well as its limitations. I conclude with ethical and political considerations of the study.
Overall Approach and Rationale

This study is a qualitative, action research study conducted by a teacher researcher (Burton & Seidl, 2005; Fecho & Allen, 2005). Action research studies conducted by teacher researchers hold potential for generating insider knowledge useful for educators in a manner that does not disrupt the classroom nor reduce the complexity of the teaching and learning ecology, but instead captures theories of practice and stories of teaching and learning as they occur in real time in real classrooms. Such research offers practicing classroom teachers rich information for improving their own teaching as well as provides valuable theoretical and practical knowledge to the education community in general. (Burton & Seidl, 2005, p. 206)

As the teacher researcher, I drew on the methodological traditions of ethnographic research in my close interactions with my student participants in the natural setting of our shared classroom (Geertz, 1973; Green, Nixon, & Zahrlick, 2005; Malinowski, 1922/1950; Marshall & Rossman, 2006; Purcell-Gates, 2004; Spindler & Spindler, 1997b). I gathered a variety of data sources, including individual pre- and post-interviews with my students, transcripts of class discussions, student journal entries, student essays, a teacher/researcher journal, lesson plans and research memos. In a recursive, inductive manner, I analyzed how the students negotiated aesthetic, efferent, and critical stances when studying a novel set in Afghanistan as well as how the aesthetic and efferent stances contributed to or hindered the adoption of a critical stance.

Research Questions

Two primary research questions guided the development of this study:

1. How do students negotiate aesthetic, efferent, and critical stances during the study of a novel set in Afghanistan?
2. How do aesthetic and efferent stances contribute to or hinder the adoption of a critical stance?

Setting

This study was conducted at an independent, coeducational school located in a suburban town in Texas that is home to two state universities. I had worked at this school as both a middle school and an upper school teacher for thirteen years. Approximately 200 students were enrolled in the school, which served students from 13 months through twelfth grade, and the average class size was 10. The school was founded in 1957 by a small group of local families and a British educator who modeled the school after British boarding schools. Throughout the 1970s and 1980s, the founding headmaster made several trips to the Middle East to recruit boarding students, whose education was paid for by Saudi Aramco. This recruitment led to a diverse student population, consisting of an array of international students as well as local Texans. As a result of financial declines in the oil industry and the first Gulf War, the school closed its boarding program and its upper school in 1991. The upper school re-opened in 2003, and while it no longer was home to international boarding students, it did retain a commitment to international studies and a culturally diverse student population.

The school was not affiliated with any religious group and accepted students with a wide range of academic skills and abilities. Since it did not have any endowments or a stable source of outside financial support, the school was tuition-driven. Therefore, most of the students came from middle or upper income families.

The specific class selected for this study was World Literature and Composition. This was the school’s required ninth-grade English course. The upper school used a modified block
schedule, and this particular class met for 90 minutes on Mondays and Wednesdays and for 45 minutes on Fridays. The classroom in which the six students enrolled in this course met contained a large conference table and chairs rather than individual desks. The students and I sat together at this table during all of our class meetings. The classroom was connected to a wireless network so that the students and I could access information online through our personal laptops as needed.

Typically, each class period on Monday and Wednesday opened with some vocabulary or grammar work. We then would move into a literature discussion about the assigned reading that the students had completed for homework. When the discussion was finished, the students would begin their homework assignment, which typically consisted of two or three chapters to read and a writing assignment that took the form of either a journal entry or an essay about the assigned reading. On Fridays the students would complete vocabulary quizzes or tests and use the remainder of class to read or write.

Most of the students in this class were familiar and comfortable with the practice of engaging in class discussions. Beginning in eighth grade, they had regularly participated in Harkness discussions about literature in my classroom. As their eighth-grade literature teacher, I gave them explicit instruction about different types of questions that facilitate literature discussions and required them to write out the questions they wanted to address during class discussions prior to those discussions. When they came to class, they all wrote their questions on the white board, selected a facilitator for the day’s discussion, and then worked their way through the questions on the board. I also modeled both questioning and responding for them during the class discussions, positioning myself as a participant alongside them during these
discussions. As they became more comfortable with the discussion process and began spontaneously directing the discussions in unique ways based on one another’s comments and responses rather than simply based on the questions written on the board, I stopped requiring them to write out their questions before class and simply asked them to come to class prepared to discuss. In the ninth grade, their history teacher also utilized Harkness discussions in his classroom.

As I engaged in class discussions alongside the students and as I developed various assignments for them to complete throughout the eighth and ninth grade, I attended to the aesthetic, the efferent, and the critical stances. I encouraged personal responses to and conversations about the texts we studied in class, and I sought to help the students see the connections between the works we read and the historical, social, and cultural forces that influenced the writers who produced those works. I also encouraged and explicitly taught traditional literary analysis, connecting that analysis back to the meaning of the text. In addition, I encouraged students to consider social justice issues as they read and focused on multiple understandings of events that unfold in texts, the ways in which understandings of texts are shaped by readers’ own cultural backgrounds and histories, and how issues raised in texts connect to the world in which the students lives. Most of the texts I selected for my classes to read involve some type of social justice issues.

The history teacher who taught these students in sixth, seventh, and eighth grades also incorporated critical literacy practices into his classroom, although he did not use that term and had not formally studied the works of critical literacy theorists. He had been teaching for over twenty-five years, attended Woodstock in his youth, participated in peaceful protests against
the development of nuclear energy as an adult, and in many ways embodied the perspective of a social activist concerned with justice and peace. He explicitly taught the students to question authority, to use their voices to speak out against injustices, and to consider multiple viewpoints. For example, when he taught American history, he had his students read and analyze texts written (or spoken) by Native Americans as well as Americans of European descent; when he taught about the Texas Revolution, he had his students consider the perspective of Mexicans whose land the Americans “stole”; and he regularly assigned persuasive essays for the students to write in order to express and develop their personal opinions about important issues. He was also the head of the middle school, and as such he encouraged other teachers to create similar educational experiences for the students and made sure that the entire climate of the middle school was one in which it was safe and acceptable for students to voice their opinions and take action when they wanted change to occur.

Additionally, students in both the middle school and the upper school participated in several division-wide service projects each year designed to improve the world in some way, sometimes at the local level and sometimes at the global level, depending on the students’ interests and concerns. The culture of the school these students attended was one that supported personal connections to educational topics, critical thinking, and social action. The students in my classroom, with the exception of the one student who had just enrolled in the school, were accustomed to participating in class discussions and to transacting with texts in multiple ways in order to create personal meanings and to deepen their understandings of the larger world in which they lived.
Participants

All six of the ninth-grade students enrolled in World Literature and Composition were invited to participate in this study, and all accepted. Since my teaching duties spanned several grade levels, I had developed a rapport with most of the students who were participating in this study. I had taught four of the students the previous year as eighth-graders, and during that time all four of them had participated in a separate qualitative study conducted by a university professor and me. One of the students had just begun attending the school that fall, so I had taught her for one semester prior to this study. Another student had just enrolled in the school when the study began; he and his family were close friends with a student in the class and her parents. I was familiar with most of the students’ personal backgrounds, their prior learning experiences with international literature and the Middle East, and their interests both inside and outside of school.

In order to protect individual student privacy, the students selected pseudonyms by which they are referred throughout this dissertation. When I asked them in class to select these pseudonyms, they decided as a group that they would like their names to be connected in some way. After some discussion, they decided to adopt the names of characters from the television cartoon *The Rugrats*: Lil, Phil, Dil, Angelica, Cynthia, and Tommy. Their decision to choose their pseudonyms based on a television show that they all enjoyed was one indication of the close bond that most of these students shared.

Economically, socially, and academically, the students were a fairly homogenous group. All six students were from middle or upper income families, and most of their parents were college-educated, with several having advanced degrees. Also, all of the students lived in
traditional two-parent households. While variation in academic achievement among the
students was evident, in general they all made rather good grades, and none of them had a
diagnosed learning difference.

The four female and two male students were fairly diverse, however, in terms of their
families’ cultural backgrounds and their own background knowledge about Afghanistan, as
revealed in individual interviews conducted prior to reading the novel. More detailed
descriptions of each student follow.

Phil was a Caucasian female. Her father was raised as a Mennonite in the Midwestern
United States, and he worked as both a practicing lawyer and a law professor. He also served on
the school’s Board of Trustees. Her mother was raised locally and had been one of the school’s
first students. After graduating from the upper school, she continued her education, earning a
graduate degree and studying at several universities outside of the United States, including
Oxford. She was employed as a writer by one of the local universities. Phil had two older
brothers, the oldest of whom had recently become a Marine.

Phil stated in her initial interview that her parents had been reading about and
discussing Afghanistan at home a lot since her brother had joined the Marines, partially
because they wanted to understand what he might experience if deployed there. She told me
that her mother had read A Thousand Splendid Suns, the novel that the students were going to
read for this study, and told her that it was good but depressing; her father had replied that
everything about Afghanistan was depressing. Of all the students, Phil had the most extensive
background knowledge. She talked easily for almost 10 minutes about the events leading to the
war in Afghanistan, Afghanistan’s role in the opium trade, and the problems that soldiers and
local residents faced there. However, she also expressed some skepticism about her knowledge sources, stating that she didn’t fully trust what her brother told her. She also revealed her own biases about Afghanistan and the American military when she made the following comments about her brother:

Well, but, one thing that I don’t trust about him though is that he thinks everybody over there is bad and that we should just blow the, like a lot of the Marines and like a lot of the army and stuff think that we should just blow the entire place up because it's like everybody there is bad. That's not true. I don't think that's true. I don't. I mean, he thinks that (1.1) like he's kind of in that mindset, which is what they, which is what the army puts their soldiers in because they want them to believe that so they don't go in there trying to like pick out the innocent ones cause they can't, they can't you know be afraid that they're going to kill an innocent person over there cause it's more, there's so many (.8) there's more who are bad over there than are good.

Phil clearly had a personal connection to the topic we would be studying, and she had already begun to think critically about some of the issues that the novel raises.

Cynthia was the other female Caucasian student participating in the study. Cynthia had lived in Texas her entire life. Her father owned his own business, and her mother stayed at home. Cynthia’s pre-interview was short, lasting just under 2 minutes. She told me that she had learned a little bit about Islam in her history class and knew that Muslims prayed several times each day, but otherwise she didn’t know anything about Afghanistan or the Middle East. She said that she did not watch or read the news, and she never heard her parents talk about Afghanistan or a war there. She said that she knew the culture of the Afghani people was different from her own, but she couldn’t say anything specific about how it might be different.

A third female participating in the study was Angelica. Angelica’s father was from Japan and worked in the computer industry, specializing in Internet security. Her mother was a Caucasian from Alabama who worked as an elementary language arts teacher at the school.
Angelica had a close relationship with her grandparents in Japan as well as her Alabaman relatives, was learning to speak and write Japanese and to practice Buddhism, and at times jokingly adopted a deep Southern accent when she spoke. Like Cynthia, Angelica professed to know little about Afghanistan, and her pre-interview was also short, lasting 2.5 minutes. She had learned a little bit about Islam in history class. She was aware that a war was being fought in Afghanistan, but she didn’t know much about it, saying, “I don't really pay attention too much to that kind of stuff.” She also said she had not heard her parents talking about any events taking place in the Middle East.

Lil, a student of both Mexican and Iranian descent, was the fourth female in the class. She discussed visiting relatives in Mexico at least once a year. Both her father and her mother worked as professors at one of the local universities. Lil told me during her pre-interview that her mother’s father was an Iranian who had been exiled approximately fifty years earlier for practicing the Baha’i Faith. At some point during his exile, he had traveled through Afghanistan, but she had not talked with him much about this experience. Like Angelica and Cynthia, she said that she did not know much about the area. She had learned a little bit about Islam in history class and had cousins who were Muslim, but she did not feel like she knew much about the religion. She said that her father watched the news “all the time,” but laughingly admitted that she didn’t pay attention to him when he talked about the news, so she didn’t know much about the war. Her pre-interview was also short, lasting just under 2 minutes.

One of the two males in the class was Dil, whose parents immigrated to the United States from China as adults. His father was employed as a professor at a nearby university. His mother worked in information technology services at the same university. Dil was born in the
United States but had visited relatives in China and had a strong connection to his Chinese background linguistically and culturally. For several years he had attended a Chinese school on Sundays, and he could read, write, and speak both English and Chinese. Like Phil, Dil spoke rather easily about his knowledge of Afghanistan during his pre-interview, talking for just over 7 minutes. He knew that the US and Afghanistan were at war and knew some basic facts about Al-Qaeda. He talked about some current events, but frequently mixed-up the specifics, such as confusing recent protests over Ahmadinejad’s re-election as President of Iran with election events in Afghanistan. He could identify more details about Islam than his classmates, and he knew that the Shi’a and Sunni were two different sects. He revealed that he obtained his information several different ways, including listening to people around him and watching or reading the news, all of which he viewed as credible but possibly biased sources. He also revealed some of his personal conceptions when he said, “Nowadays when you hear the word Afghanistan, although it’s horrible, the word ‘terrorism’ ((laughter)) comes to mind.”

The second male in the group was Tommy, who was born in Canada to a Caucasian British father and a Caucasian Canadian mother. His father worked as a professor at a nearby university. His mother passed away when Tommy was young, and for several years he had been reared by his father and stepmother, a Caucasian female who worked as an attorney for one of the local universities. Tommy revealed in his pre-interview that he had an interest in and some knowledge of the Middle East. For pleasure, he had read modern adult spy novels written by Brad Thor. He knew that Islamist extremist groups, such as the Taliban and Wahhabists, operated in the Middle East, and he knew a little bit about Islam, both from studying it in school and from the novels he had read. He described the majority of the people living in Afghanistan
as “really poor.” He also knew that Afghanistan had a president, but like Dil he confused some of his information, identifying the president of Afghanistan as Musharraf (the president of Pakistan). He said that he watched the news and believed both it and the novels he had read to be credible sources, but he did not talk to his family about current events. Like the majority of his classmates, his pre-interview was short, lasting just over 2.5 minutes.

Gaining Access to Site or Participant Selection

At the time of this study, I was employed as a middle school literature teacher as well as an upper school English teacher and academic advisor at the school in which the study was conducted. Having worked in this school for 13 years, I had an established relationship with the school, the students, and the parents. The head of the upper school as well as the chairman of the school board granted permission for this study to be conducted, through my formal application.

Researcher Biography

Much of the coursework that led to my BA in Politics from the University of Dallas explored the nature of man and man’s attempt to impose social and political order on his world. When I decided to become a teacher, I became certified to teach both social studies and language arts. Although I began my teaching career as a history teacher, for 13 years I had been teaching English and literature to middle school and upper school students at the independent school where this study was conducted. I believe it is important to show students the connections between various disciplines and have often combined the teaching of social studies and literature in my classrooms.
As part of the coursework that led to my MA in Reading from Texas Woman’s University, I read the work of Louise Rosenblatt. Her transactional theory of reader response greatly impacted my work as a teacher. I began to allow more time and opportunities for students to express authentic responses to the texts we studied in class, hoping they would thus develop a deeper understanding of both the texts they were reading and themselves as readers.

When I took a class on the Politics of Literacy as a doctoral student in Reading, I became aware of the concept of critical literacy, an instructional approach that connects politics, history, and language. I then began to view multicultural and global literature as a vehicle for doing much more than just teaching students about other cultures. I began to see it as a means of helping students explore their own lives, cultures, and world, with the ultimate goal being to help them consider ways to redress political and social inequalities.

This study represents my first attempt to study the specific relationship that exists between students reading a global text and the three stances that they might adopt while reading it: the aesthetic, the efferent, and the critical. A deeper understanding of how students negotiate these stances, as well as a clearer understanding of the relationship that exists among these stances, may help us develop additional ways to foster a critical literacy stance in students.

Role of the Researcher

I was a participant-observer (Marshall & Rossman, 2006; Spindler & Spindler, 1997a) throughout the course of this study. The particular role I had as a participant-observer was that of teacher-researcher (Burton & Seidl, 2005; Fecho & Allen, 2005). This role is characterized by
an *emic* perspective. During this study, I engaged in purposeful reflection that placed theorizing at its center.

As the teacher for this class, I planned the educational unit, selecting materials for study and assigning readings and other work. Therefore, I could not be a full participant in the class in the same way that my students were (Spindler & Spindler, 1997a). However, when class discussions occurred, I assumed the role of learner alongside my students, and I often found that my own interpretation of the novel expanded or changed entirely as a result of the conversations that occurred about the text. Furthermore, the observations that I made during my classes and the reflective practices that characterized both my research and my teaching positioned me as learner throughout this study.

**Selection of Material**

The global novel chosen for this study was *A Thousand Splendid Suns* by Khaled Hosseini. This novel was published in 2007. Since this study was an action research study, the novel was selected in order to fill an existing need at the school. The readings for the ninth-grade World Literature and Composition course were coordinated with the ninth-grade World History course, and one of the goals previously identified by both the history teacher and me was to place more emphasis on the Middle East and Islam. We recognized that at this time, Muslims were largely stereotyped by Americans as terrorists and religious fanatics, but “these stereotypes are the result of ignorance and educational neglect and can be corrected by improving education” (Moore, 2007, p. 133). Modern Middle Eastern literature had been found to help students “replace stereotypes, transform worldviews, develop personal connections, humanize Islam and Muslim people, and learn about Arabs, Turks, Kurds, Persians, and
Pushtans” (Webb, 2009, p. 80); therefore, the inclusion of a Middle Eastern novel in the existing English curriculum was designed, in part, to help combat stereotypes that some of the students may have had or been exposed to and to help them navigate the world with grace and knowledge.

The majority of the works selected for study in the English courses at the school were drawn from authors recommended by the College Board for inclusion in Advanced Placement (AP) English Literature and Composition as well as AP English Language and Composition, both of which these ninth-grade students were required to take in their junior and senior years. At the time of this study, Khaled Hosseini was one of the only Middle Eastern authors recommended by the College Board, and his novel *The Kite Runner* had appeared on several AP English Literature and Composition exams. His works had also been recommended by several other teachers as well as by Allen Webb (2009).

*A Thousand Splendid Suns* focuses on the lives of two Afghan women and is set in Afghanistan in the period encompassing the 1960s to 2003. These two women, Mariam and Laila, are born into different social circumstances. Mariam is an illegitimate child raised by a single mother and is therefore devoid of virtually all political and social rights. Laila, on the other hand, is raised by progressive, educated parents who view women as equal to men. Due to a variety of circumstances brought about by the various wars in which Afghanistan is involved during this time period, Mariam and Laila both become unhappily married to the same abusive man who demands complete subservience from them both. Mariam and Laila themselves are voices for two different viewpoints within Afghani culture. In addition, several of the main characters in the novel represent different ethnic and religious groups, such as the
Tajik and the Pashtun as well as Sunni Muslims and Shia Muslims. The diversity of the characters and the political unrest described in the novel provide opportunities for critical discussions about Afghanistan, perceptions of the country and its people, and America’s role in shaping Afghanistan’s politics.

It was important that the novel selected for this study was culturally accurate and authentic. One of the most important criteria in establishing cultural authenticity is the author’s ability to understand the perspective of the people from the culture he or she wrote about (Cai 2003). Therefore, I relied on the background of the author to establish cultural accuracy and authenticity. Kahlil Hosseini was born in Afghanistan and spent his childhood in Kabul, where A Thousand Splendid Suns is set. When he was 15, his family was granted political asylum and moved to the United States, where Hosseini completed his education and currently resides. As an adult, he re-visited Afghanistan, was named a goodwill envoy to the United Nations Refugee Agency in 2006, and in 2007 established a humanitarian foundation to provide economic and educational assistance to Afghans both in Afghanistan and in the United States.

Data Collection Methods

Information for this study was acquired from a variety of data sources. Data collection was ongoing throughout the course of the study. I maintained a record that detailed specific information about all data sources (such as date created, focus of piece of data, and dates data were entered into NVivo 8 and coded) throughout the course of the study (Marshall & Rossman, 2006). Those data sources included individual interviews with students, student writing assignments, transcripts of class discussions, research memos, lesson plans, field notes, and a teacher researcher journal.
I used the qualitative data analysis software program NVivo 8 to organize my data and facilitate coding. I had previously used this software for two other studies. One of the studies I conducted independently as part of my doctoral coursework, utilizing a grant I had received from the Texas Association for the Improvement of Reading for that study. The second study was one on which I worked with a university professor as a graduate research assistant.

Interviews

Two individual interviews were conducted with each student: the first prior to the study and the second at the study’s conclusion. Both of the interviews were semistructured; I asked the students some pre-determined open-form questions but let the specific direction of the interview be determined by the students’ individual responses (Gall, Gall, & Borg, 2003). The purpose of the first interview was to learn more (Frank, 1999), both about the students’ existing background knowledge of Afghanistan as well as the stances that they might be predisposed to take when first reading the novel, based on their past experiences and understandings. During the second interview, I sought to clarify my understandings and interpretations of the stances the students adopted during the course of the study and to triangulate the information obtained with information from my other data sources (Purcell-Gates, 2004). The specific questions I developed to guide both of these interviews can be found in Appendix A.

The interviews were conducted during the students’ regular English class time. The students were given an assignment to complete in the classroom, and as they worked, individual students left the room to be interviewed by me in a nearby study room that was empty at the time. When one student interview was completed, that student returned to the
classroom and asked a classmate to leave to be interviewed. Each interview was recorded with a digital audio recorder. The audio files were uploaded into NVivo 8.

Class Discussions

A teacher-created version of Harkness discussions was a regular part of the upper school English courses at the school. The Harkness discussion method, developed at Phillips Exeter Academy, emphasizes participatory, co-operative student learning. Students sitting around an oval table are responsible for the day’s discussion, guided by the teacher as needed. In this World Literature and Composition course, students came to each discussion prepared with questions about and quotes from the section of the novel they read for homework. As the students discussed the reading, I sat at the table with them, taking notes pertaining to the discussion. I participated in the discussion when the students asked directly for my help or when I felt like the discussion would benefit from my asking an open-ended question or offering a piece of information to extend their current thinking.

During this study, the students participated in 12 Harkness discussions, ranging in length from 22 to 67 minutes. The average length of the discussions was 47 minutes. A digital audio recorder sat on the table for each discussion, recording the conversation. Lil and Phil were each absent for one class discussion; Tommy was absent for two discussions. Angelica, Cynthia, and Dil were present for all 12 discussions. All of the students participated in all of the discussions for which they were present. At the end of each discussion, the audio file was uploaded into NVivo 8.
Student Writing

Once a week during the course of the study, students completed journal entries related to the chapters of the novel they had been assigned to read for homework. The purpose behind this assignment was for the students to write in order to help them think (Routman, 2000). The prompt for the journal writing was the same each week until the students finished reading the book: “What are your thoughts, comments, or reactions to the events that occur in these chapters?” The final journal entry that the students wrote upon finishing the novel asked them to evaluate the novel as a whole. Students were assigned a total of six journal entries during this study. Phil, Dil, and Cynthia completed all six journal entries. Angelica and Lil each completed five of the journal entries, and Tommy completed four of them.

In addition, once a week students were required to compose one to two page essays that were more formal in nature. Like the journal entries, these essays were completed after the students read the chapters they were assigned for homework and before they participated in the class discussions. These writings required students to analyze or evaluate characters and events in the novel. In these essays, students used direct quotes from the novel to support their analyses and evaluations. The goal of these formal writing assignments was for students to communicate (Routman, 2000) their developing thoughts and ideas about the novel directly to me and to continue developing their writing skills, which was also a focus of the class. Students were assigned a total of seven essays to write during this study. Angelica, Cynthia, Phil, and Dil completed all seven of the essays. Lil and Tommy both completed six of the essays.
The prompts that the students were given for both the journal entries and the essays were written in such a way as to allow the students to respond from an aesthetic, efferent, and/or critical stance. Students were assigned the following prompts:

1. Characterize Mariam and her parents.
2. Characterize Rasheed.
4. Analyze how political events may or may not be impacting the lives of the characters.
5. Analyze and/or evaluate Mariam and Laila’s developing relationship.
6. Analyze and/or evaluate the author’s portrayal of Afghanistan.
7. Analyze and/or evaluate any of the events that occur in chapters 43-47.

The students emailed both their journal entries and their essays to me as Word documents. I then uploaded these assignments to NVivo 8 for analysis.

Field Notes, Teacher Researcher Journal and Lesson Plans

Throughout the study, I maintained field notes, a teacher researcher journal, and lesson plans. Lesson plans were written in a standard lesson plan book. I handwrote field notes during class in a spiral notebook designated for that purpose. These took the form of general narrative notes (Burton & Seidl, 2005) that detailed what was done or observed. These notes were then transcribed into a Word document, which served as a teacher researcher journal and contained a separate section for what Carini (1979) termed “reflective observations” (as cited in Burton & Seidl, 2005). These reflective observations included my interpretations of what was done or observed.
Data Analysis Procedures

Data analysis was ongoing throughout the course of the study. As I collected data, I uploaded it into NVivo 8 and began to analyze it, starting with the interviews and written assignments that the students completed and then moving to transcripts of class discussions. I created research memos within NVivo 8 that documented my thoughts and actions throughout the process of analysis. The preliminary analysis informed the direction of the study as it progressed. For example, I developed prompts for students’ essays that were based on this early analysis.

NVivo 8 uses a hierarchical system of nodes to facilitate the organization of coding categories. The user can create tree nodes, which consist of a parent node, or a general coding category, that is broken down further into child nodes, or more specific codes that fit within the parent node. Codes that stand alone, or do not exist within a larger category, are called free nodes. During the initial coding stage, I used the free node feature of NVivo8 to create a code for each specific strategy that students used in their writings and discussions to create meaning from the text, such as describing plot, inferring character motivation, analyzing imagery, or making a text to world connection.

In addition, a tree node was created for speakers, which contained a separate node for each student participating in the study. Each student’s oral responses were coded at the speaker level to make it easier to analyze individual student responses.

After the intial coding was completed, I reexamined all of the responses and, using the tree node function in NVívo 8, began sorting all of the existing coded responses into nodes designated as “aesthetic,” “critical,” and “efferent.” In order to help me designate each type of
specific response as primarily one stance, I created a matrix that listed characteristics of aesthetic, critical, and efferent responses. The characteristics of aesthetic and efferent responses were drawn from the writings of Rosenblatt (1978/1994, 1994/2004) as well as Many (1990/2004) and Cox and Many’s (1989) Instrument for Measuring Reader Stance on an Efferent to Aesthetic Continuum (as cited in Many, 1990/2004). The characteristics of critical literacy responses were drawn from the writings of Lewison, Leland, and Harste (2007) and McLaughlin and DeVoogd (2004). The complete set of codes developed for the study are listed in Appendix B.

As I was performing this second stage of coding, I noticed that the efferent responses from the students fell into two distinct categories that I wanted to keep separate for the purpose of this study. Therefore, I separated efferent responses into the following two groups: literary-efferent, which indicates the attention to plot and focus on literary analysis that are commonly a focus of English classrooms, and world-efferent, which indicates a focus on factual information and perceptions of the world outside of the text.

Interviews

The audio recordings of the two interviews that the students completed were uploaded into NVivo8. The first interview was used to provide more information about the participants’ existing background knowledge. Information obtained from the second interview, which was conducted at the conclusion of the study, was used for triangulation of data (Johnson, 1997; Krefting, 1991), along with the students’ writing assignments, class discussions, field notes, teacher researcher journal, and lesson plans.
Student Writing

As student writing was completed, I imported the Word documents into NVivo 8 and began coding. I used Corbin and Strauss’s (1990) constant comparative method when coding the journal entries and the essays. I spent the weeks that the study was being conducted doing open coding (Corbin & Strauss, 1990; Patten, 2005) of the entries. My initial coding categories were “based on how the students were approaching, responding to, and thinking about the novel” (from research memo). The following codes were created as free nodes during the initial coding of the journals and essays:

- analyzing an archetype or symbol
- discussing characters’ feelings and development
- critiquing cultural practices
- critiquing the author
- demonstrating cross cultural empathy
- analyzing cultural differences
- noting cultural similarities
- stating enjoyment of the novel
- analyzing foreshadowing
- stating a fact that was learned
- making predictions
- making philosophical statements
- revealing personal feelings
- making a text to text comparison
making a text to self comparison
analyzing lack of power and choices
analyzing irony
analyzing foils
analyzing imagery
inferring character motivation.

Because the node for inferring character motivation quickly became quite large, I decided to create a tree node and try to “tease out what the students saw as motivating factors” (from research memo) in the characters’ lives. The following child nodes were created under the parent node character motivation:

acceptance
economics
emotional scars
family obligations
fear
gender beliefs
guilt (causing)
guilt (feeling)
honor
hope
ignorance
jealousy
love
mental instability
religious beliefs
power and control
loss
personal safety
selfishness
shame.

As I later began coding the class discussions, several new codes were added to the list. Each time I added a new code for the data, I recoded all of the essays and journal entries, looking for evidence of the newly created code.

After initial coding of all data sources was completed, I began axial coding in order to refine the coding categories (Corbin & Strauss, 1990; Patten, 2005) and to categorize each response as aesthetic, efferent, and/or critical. The efferent category was further divided into literary-efferent and world-efferent.

Using NVivo 8, I created one chart for each student and each stance (aesthetic, literary-efferent, world-efferent, and critical) that showed the percentage of each writing assignment that was coded at that particular stance. For example, one chart shows the percentage of each essay and journal entry written by Dil that was coded as literary-efferent. Using the information from these 24 charts, I created a master chart in Word that showed the stances adopted by each student in each written assignment (see Table 2, page 57). I then compared this
information to the information obtained from class discussions, looking for patterns and themes.

Class Discussions

The digital recordings of the Harkness class discussions were downloaded into NVivo 8. Utilizing the transcribing feature of the software, I typed a written transcript of each discussion. A simple version of Jeffersonian Protocol was used to transcribe these discussions. As I transcribed each discussion, I wrote notes about possible coding developments and issues in a research memo.

As with the student writings, I used Corbin and Strauss’s (1990) constant comparative method in order to code the discussions. When all of the transcriptions were completed, I began open coding (Corbin & Strauss, 1990; Patten, 2005) of the discussions. The codes that I developed during the initial coding of the students’ journal entries and essays were applied to the class discussions, but several new codes emerged as well. During the initial coding of the discussions, I created free nodes for the following codes:

- asking questions
- analyzing word choice
- exploring alternatives
- reading ahead
- adopting the persona of a character by using first-person speech
- making a text to world comparison
- analyzing syntax
- analyzing point of view
analyzing other literary terms

discussing the political background.

Under the parent node for inferring character motivation, I added the following child nodes:
lust
habit
revenge
compassion.

I also used the autocode feature of NVivo 8 to create a tree node for speakers. Within the parent node called speaker, child nodes were created with each student’s name. Each student’s individual comments during each class discussion were then placed within his or her child node.

After all of the discussions were coded using open coding, I reviewed the transcriptions again and begin axial coding in order to refine the coding categories (Corbin & Strauss, 1990; Patten, 2005) and categorize responses as aesthetic, efferent (which was further broken down into literary-efferent and world-efferent), and/or critical.

Using NVivo 8, I created a chart for each class discussion that showed the number of responses coded as aesthetic, efferent, and critical in each discussion. I then made additional charts that showed the same information, but with the efferent category broken apart into literary-efferent and world-efferent. I used these charts to ascertain patterns across discussions about which stances the students were most likely and least likely to adopt.

In addition, I conducted a coding query for each student and each stance (aesthetic, literary-efferent, world-efferent, and critical) that showed the number of responses made in
each discussion that were coded at that particular stance. For example, one such coding query indicated the number of times Dil made a comment that was coded as aesthetic during each class discussion. Using the information obtained from these 24 coding queries, I created a master chart in Word that indicated the stances that students adopted during each class discussion (see Table 3, page 58). I compared this information to the information I had about the stances that were evident in their individual writings, looking for patterns and themes.

Teacher Researcher Journal, Field Notes, and Lesson Plans

Throughout the course of the study, I maintained a teacher researcher journal, observational field notes, and lesson plans. As I analyzed the data, I also created research memos. These data sources, along with the students’ writings, class discussions, and post-interviews, were used for triangulation of data (Johnson, 1997; Krefting, 1991).

Trustworthiness

I spent 13 weeks collecting data for this study. Because I had taught most of these students when they were in middle school, I had an existing rapport with most of them as well as an understanding of their educational backgrounds and the culture of their school. The 13 weeks that I spent collecting the data that pertained specifically to this study constituted a prolonged field experience, which increased the trustworthiness of the study (Johnson, 1997; Krefting, 1991).

I maintained a teacher researcher journal and research memos in order to document my thinking processes and the decisions I made throughout the study. The time that I spent writing in this journal and creating these memos were a specific, focused time for reflexivity (Johnson, 1997; Krefting, 1991).
Trustworthiness was also established through triangulation. Multiple data sources, including 12 class discussions, 13 pieces of assigned writing per student, field notes, a teacher researcher journal, lesson plans, research memos, and pre- and post-study interviews with each student, allowed for triangulation in order to verify the conclusions that I drew (Johnson, 1997; Krefting, 1991).

In addition, peer examination increased the trustworthiness of the research (Krefting, 1991). A fellow doctoral student who is familiar with qualitative research techniques as well as reader response theories and critical literacy frequently discussed my research with me. She looked at my developing codes as well as some of my coded data at the beginning of my analysis, asking questions and making suggestions about the way the coding was developing. We attended several professional research conferences together during the time I was analyzing the data, and during each one she attended research presentations with me that focused on reader response to global literature or critical literacy. During and after those conferences, we discussed how the information we learned from the presentations pertained to my data analysis. As I wrote sections of my dissertation, she read my findings and gave me feedback about those as well. My advisor also regularly reviewed the study and provided additional suggestions and insights throughout the course of its development.

Delimitations

This study has the following delimitations:

1. As previously mentioned, I had already developed a positive relationship with most of these students, and they were aware that I was conducting this study for my dissertation. Some of the responses they gave may therefore have been designed to
please me or to help me write what they thought would be a good dissertation and thus graduate. One student, Phil, even joked about the opposite of this scenario at the beginning of the study, stating that I should give her good grades and help her graduate high school or she might “mess up” my study, and I wouldn’t graduate. I asked her how she could “mess up” my study, and she said she wasn’t sure but would think about it. I then pointed out that there wasn’t a way any of them could mess this up or make it better, since I was just describing the types of responses that they had to the novel; it didn’t matter what those responses were. However, at least some of the students clearly had the idea that their responses were important to my work, and it remains possible that this idea may have influenced some of their comments.

2. The students were also aware that their discussions were being recorded and that their responses would be shared with others; therefore, some of the students may have formed their comments to present themselves in ways that they perceived would be favorable. Four of these students had participated in a study with me the previous year, and I had shared with them the contents of a conference presentation based on that study. They liked that their own words and work were being shared with others; therefore, they may have shaped some of their responses for this study to make themselves look good when this study was shared. Prior to the first class discussion, Dil stated that he was a little worried about saying something that somebody might view as being racist, so I spent some time talking to him and his classmates about that concern. I assured them that I thought highly of all of them and would not take anything they said out of context to make them look bad. They told me that they trusted me in this regard,
but it’s possible that they were still concerned. However, as the discussions progressed, the students forgot that they were being recorded and settled into their familiar routine of having a literature discussion. At one point, they even discussed this phenomenon of forgetting about the audio recorder. However, their awareness of being part of a study was not completely erased. At the beginning of his post-interview, Dil said he was going to use “big vocabulary,” then worked the word “adumbrated” into his first answer, laughing as he said it. He then told me, though, that it was too difficult to keep up that level of vocabulary use and began to talk to me as he normally did.

3. The aesthetic stance in particular is concerned primarily with private meanings that occur inside the reader as he or she transacts with the text. As such, it is impossible to assess fully any reader’s adoption of this stance. In describing how the students in this study adopted a stance as they read, I had to rely on the written and verbal responses that they offered publicly to me. What I refer to in this study as an “aesthetic response” actually refers to a response that I found to be indicative of the student adopting an aesthetic stance, based on particular strategies the student used to create meaning from the text. While I recognize that there are, in fact, important differences among a stance, a strategy, and a response, for this purpose of this study, these are treated as interchangeable, since I had no way of measuring stance other than through an analysis of the strategies the students revealed in their responses. Several layers of interpretation, therefore, lie between the actual adoption of the students’ stances and my analysis of the responses they offered.
Ethical and Political Considerations of the Study

Ethical Considerations

As with any work that takes place within an educational setting, the possibility existed that some students might feel embarrassed or uncomfortable in discussing some of the topics suggested by their assigned readings. Because this study required discussions about specific cultures and religious groups that are often presented as enemies of our country, it was almost inevitable that sensitive discussions about cultures and religions would occur. However, it is through these types of sensitive discussions that students are likely to grow and learn (Fecho, 2001). I worked with these students for several months prior to this study to establish my classroom as a safe place where all kinds of topics can be discussed. This established safe environment therefore minimized the risk of embarrassment or discomfort. In addition, I ensured the confidentiality of all the students who participated in this study by referring to them by pseudonyms.

Political Considerations

At the time of this study, the United States had been at war with Afghanistan for over eight years. This war was prompted by the 9/11 attacks on New York City, which occurred when these students were in first grade. While the 9/11 attacks were conducted by the terrorist organization Al-Qaeda rather than an individual country, then President George W. Bush announced in a Presidential address to the nation, “We will make no distinction between the terrorists who committed these acts and those who harbor them” (Bush, 2001). Because Afghanistan was a training ground for members of Al-Qaeda, the United States launched a military campaign, Operation Enduring Freedom, against the country on October 7, 2001. At the
time this study began, 947 US troops had been killed as a result of Operation Enduring Freedom (iCasualties, 2009) and 4772 wounded (iCasualties, 2009). When and how to end the prolonged presence of United States’ troops in Afghanistan was a cause of great debate among United States’ citizens and politicians. For most of the time that the students in this study had been alive, people of Middle Eastern descent and Muslims had been widely vilified in the United States. This climate created the need for the inclusion of the novel in the curriculum, and it impacted the responses that the students made to the novel.

Summary

This chapter presented the methodology for this qualitative, action research study. As a teacher researcher, I drew on a long history of ethnographic research traditions to collect data that would help answer the following two research questions: How do students negotiate aesthetic, efferent, and critical stances during the study of a novel set in Afghanistan, and how do the aesthetic and efferent stances contribute to or hinder the adoption of a critical stance? Data collected included two individual interviews with each student, student writing assignments in the form of six assigned journal entries and seven assigned essays, transcriptions of 12 class discussions, field notes, lesson plans, a teacher researcher journal, and research memos. All data was uploaded to NVivo 8 to facilitate data collection and analysis. Data analysis was ongoing throughout the study as I used the constant comparison method to code the data. I will present the findings from this study in the next chapter.
CHAPTER 4

FINDINGS

The purpose of this qualitative, action research study was to analyze how six ninth-grade students negotiated aesthetic, efferent, and critical stances as they responded to a novel set in Afghanistan and to analyze how the aesthetic and efferent stances contributed to or hindered the critical stance. The previous chapter detailed the methodology for this study. The following two research questions guided the study’s development: How do students negotiate aesthetic, efferent, and critical stances during the study of a novel set in Afghanistan? How do the aesthetic and efferent stances contribute to or hinder the adoption of a critical stance?

This chapter presents the findings of this study. I first describe two closely-related findings that answer the first question asked: How do students negotiate aesthetic, efferent, and critical stances while studying a novel set in Afghanistan. I then describe a third finding which answers the second question: How do the aesthetic and efferent stances contribute to or hinder the adoption of a critical stance?

Discussions: A Context for the Adoption of Stances

The first finding of this study is that class discussions provided a context in which students adopted stances that they had not taken in their personal writings about the chapters. All of the students made comments during some class discussions that evidenced their adopting a particular stance that was not evident in the papers they had written prior to the discussions. While this is true of all of the stances analyzed during this study, it occurred most frequently with the world-efferent stance and the critical stance, as shown in Table 1.
Table 1

*Chapter Discussions That Provided a Context for the Adoption of a New Stance*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Angelica</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aesthetic</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>English efferent</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>World efferent</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Critical</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cynthia</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aesthetic</td>
<td></td>
<td>x</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>x</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>English efferent</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>World efferent</td>
<td></td>
<td>x</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Critical</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dil</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aesthetic</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>English efferent</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>World efferent</td>
<td></td>
<td>x</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Critical</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lil</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aesthetic</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>English efferent</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>World efferent</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Critical</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Phil</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aesthetic</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>English efferent</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>World efferent</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Critical</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tommy</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aesthetic</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>x</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>English efferent</td>
<td></td>
<td>x</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>World efferent</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Critical</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
As students built on comments and questions raised by one another and me during these class discussions, they began to attend more to the historical and political events that served as the novel’s backdrop, and they helped each other think about the power struggles and stereotypes that arose out of those historical and political events.

Closely related to this first finding is the second finding of the study that these students needed more scaffolding to adopt the world-efferent stance and the critical stance than they needed to adopt aesthetic and literary-efferent stances. As seen in their written work, these stances were not as readily adopted by students on their own (see Table 2). The students primarily adopted aesthetic and literary-efferent stances when responding on their own to the novel. During class discussions, the critical and world-efferent stances were more often adopted, which is probably a result of scaffolding from the teacher as well as from one another (see Table 3). The written and verbal responses of two students are explored in more depth below to illustrate these findings further.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Angelica</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aesthetic</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Literary-efferent</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>World-efferent</td>
<td></td>
<td>x</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Critical</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cynthia</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aesthetic</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Literary-efferent</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>World-efferent</td>
<td></td>
<td>x</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Critical</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dil</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aesthetic</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Literary-efferent</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>World-efferent</td>
<td></td>
<td>x</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Critical</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lil</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aesthetic</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Literary-efferent</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>World-efferent</td>
<td></td>
<td>x</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Critical</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Phil</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aesthetic</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Literary-efferent</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>World-efferent</td>
<td></td>
<td>x</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Critical</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tommy</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aesthetic</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Literary-efferent</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>World-efferent</td>
<td></td>
<td>x</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Critical</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student stances</td>
<td>1-4</td>
<td>5-7</td>
<td>8-11</td>
<td>12-15</td>
<td>16-18</td>
<td>19-21</td>
<td>22-26</td>
<td>27-31</td>
<td>32-35</td>
<td>36-42</td>
<td>43-47</td>
<td>48-52</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>----------------</td>
<td>-----</td>
<td>-----</td>
<td>------</td>
<td>-------</td>
<td>-------</td>
<td>-------</td>
<td>-------</td>
<td>-------</td>
<td>-------</td>
<td>-------</td>
<td>-------</td>
<td>-------</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Angelica</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aesthetic</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Literary-efferent</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>World-efferent</td>
<td>x</td>
<td></td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Critical</td>
<td></td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cynthia</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aesthetic</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Literary-efferent</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>World-efferent</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Critical</td>
<td></td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dil</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aesthetic</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Literary-efferent</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>World-efferent</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Critical</td>
<td></td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lil</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aesthetic</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Literary-efferent</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>World-efferent</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Critical</td>
<td></td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Phil</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aesthetic</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Literary-efferent</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>World-efferent</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Critical</td>
<td></td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tommy</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aesthetic</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Literary-efferent</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>World-efferent</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Critical</td>
<td></td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Phil and the “Family Vacation”

As seen in the chart “Stances Evident in Writing,” all of Phil’s written responses to the chapters demonstrated that she was taking both an aesthetic and a literary-efferent stance when reading. These were clearly stances that she was comfortable adopting as she read the novel, and they were stances she was familiar with from her prior academic experiences in English class. She was less likely, however, to adopt a world-efferent stance or a critical stance on her own, especially when she first began the novel. Class discussions and scaffolding may have aided in her developing a stronger world-efferent stance as she read.

Only three of the first six papers Phil wrote contained evidence of a world-efferent stance. During all of the class discussions, however, she made comments that demonstrated that she was adopting a world-efferent stance at times, and during the second half of the novel, all of her papers contained evidence of her adopting a world-efferent stance. Part of this change in stances may be explained by a comment that Phil made during a class discussion about chapters 19-21, which roughly marked the halfway point in our study of the book and was the point at which Phil began showing evidence of taking a world-efferent stance during all of her papers.

Chapters 19-21 are set in the late 1980s. In chapter 21, Babi, a progressive and well-educated father, takes his daughter Laila and her friend Tariq on a daytrip to visit the two Bamiyan Buddhas, ancient stone statues carved into sandstone cliffs approximately 2000 years ago. One of these statues was, until it was destroyed by the Taliban in 2001, the tallest Buddha statue in the world, measuring 165 feet in height. Throughout the trip, Laila and Tariq learn about the long and rich history of Afghanistan, as Babi and their hired driver teach them about
the Red City, a fortress built approximately 900 years ago; invasions by Genghis Khan, Genghis Khan’s grandson, Macedonians, Sassanians, Arabs, Mongols, and Soviets; and the Buddhist monks who lived at Bamiyan until they were overtaken by Islamic Arabs in the ninth century. Laila adds her own observations about the people and things she sees in rural Afghanistan during their travel, such as rice paddies and barley fields, Koochi nomads in black tents, Hazara boys, and burned-out Soviet tanks and helicopters, as well as the things she pictures having been there in the past, such as caravans travelling along the Silk Road.

As the students discussed this scene, they considered different possibilities for why Babi takes the children on this trip, which is difficult for him to afford. Angelica stated she believed it was because the place had sentimental value for Babi. She then said she also thought she remembered Babi saying he was trying to teach the children a lesson that he thought was important, but she couldn’t remember what it was and would look for it in the book.

Angelica: Well, cause that’s where, isn’t it cause that’s where he used to take Mammy? Like those were the good times for him, so he just thinks that’s somewhere she should see at least once in her lifetime cause it’s like cause he says that’s like the true importance of things is how the earth is and something like that.

Mrs. T: What was that about?

Angelica: Like um he says something like that really teaches her that it’s something important. I forgot what it was. I’ll find it.

Tommy and Phil offered that Babi may have planned the trip because he feels guilty that his wife, who appears to suffer from severe depression, is not a good mother to Laila. They
suggested that he may want to take Laila and her friend on this trip to make himself and Laila feel like their family is normal.

Phil: Maybe he wants to remind himself of how it was before.

Tommy: And like Mammy could never take them to do that so he feels like he should and give them the experience.

Mrs. T: Okay. And why is that experience important to him?

Tommy: Because the children need like some idea of what a motherly bonding thing would be.

Mrs. T: Okay.

Tommy: And that's what she would do.

These initial comments indicate that the students were reading primarily from aesthetic stances as they tried to determine what feelings and experiences may have motivated Babi to take this trip.

The students discussed the emotional aspects of the trip until Dil said, “He was contributing to her education.” I asked the students to explore that idea further, and for the first time they began to discuss specific facts about the world that the children were learning during the trip. Angelica read the following excerpt from the book that is spoken by Babi to the children: "I want you to remember about being up here, the silence, the peace of it. I want you to experience it. But I also want you to see the country's heritage, children, to learn of its great past. You see, some things I can teach you, some you learn from books, but there are other things that, well, you just have to see and feel." The students then shifted their stances from the aesthetic to the efferent as they began to offer their interpretations of the quote. Phil, in
her interpretation of the quote, focused on a life lesson. Her comment, in turn, seemed to prompt Tommy to offer an historical fact that may have contributed to Babi wanting to take the trip.

**Phil:** It's like appreciate life more. So you know when you go like places and you like you just see something really pretty you just learn to appreciate it more, and you're like, “Well, next time I'm not gonna like step on that flower” or something like that. You learn to like take pride in what you have.

**Tommy:** Buddhism used to be like the main religion before Islam. And I guess she couldn't really comprehend that until she goes she goes to see the giant Buddha carvings.

This exchange then led me to ask the students if their parents have ever taken them on trips to historical sites. All of the students answered yes to this question, and they began naming places their families had taken them. We then discussed what these experiences are like for the students as well as their parents.

**Mrs. T:** Um, when you go to those places, do your parents drag you to places and say, “Hey, look, this is impor(h)tant?” heh

**Tommy:** [Yeah.]

**Lil:** [Yeah.]

**Phil:** [Yeah,] and you don’t want to be there.

**Lil:** Except for in Mexico. Cause we go there like twice a year.

**Mrs. T:** That’s why. It’s because they want you to know something about the
world and

Lil: Yeah.

Mrs. T: history and

Tommy: Yeah. They gave me a lecture about the uh Church and Vatican City. St. Edwards, I think. Whatever it’s called. heh

Mrs. T: St. Peter’s?

Tommy: St. Peter’s.

Phil: And then it’s always the worst part of the trip, and then when you get home you’re like, “Oh, that was cool.” ((some laughter from other students)) At least, that’s how it is with me.

The experience of a family vacation is, in many ways, a fitting metaphor for the stances Phil and some of the other students seemed to be adopting as they responded to the book. They were aesthetically involved, having fun and taking interest in the emotional experiences that the book provided while enacting their own particular “family” roles quite well (which, in this case, was the role of English student whose job was to analyze the literary elements of the novel). However, some of the historical and political facts and details that I, like their parents, hoped to foreground for them seemed to be of less interest to the students. They seemed to need someone to prompt them to attend to these details. I thought it significant, though, that Phil was able to speak to this disconnect and expressed that even though she does not enjoy the history lessons as they are occurring, she does appreciate them later. After this discussion, all of her writing demonstrated evidence of her adopting a world-efferent stance at some point when she read, even though it never became the primary stance she adopted.
For example, in the paper she wrote about chapters 22-26, Phil noted,

When Hosseini says, ‘The Mujahideen armed to the teeth but now lacking a common enemy, had found the enemy in each other.’ (Hosseini 172). He is showing the tension that is rapidly growing in the county between the people. People who were once fighting for the same cause are now fighting each other for control of the country.

In a paper she wrote about chapters 36-39, she observed,

However, this all changes when the power shifts and the Taliban control Afghanistan. They instate a lot of rules which control the Afghani peoples daily lives. Most of the rules are directed towards women and not allowing them to work or go outside of their house unless it is an emergency.

In her journal entry for chapters 40-42 she wrote, “[Mariam and Laila] did try to run away before but since the Taliban took over Afghanistan that is impossible.” She also reflected in that journal entry,

Learning about the Muslims that live in Egypt and comparing them to the ones in Afghanistan just shows the extremes there are to religions and how people can interpret a religion differently. However, the religion isn’t the only thing in their lives that happens elsewhere. The abusive marriage happens all over the world.

In her final paper about the novel, she wrote the following observations, which blend her aesthetic and world-efferent stances:

In A Thousand Splendid Suns by Khaled Hosseini he shows Afghanistan before the Taliban takeover, after they takeover, and when they lose power. The way Hosseini portrays Afghanistan is important because he makes sure that the reader understands that Afghanistan as a country and the people are not all bad. Due to the different time periods Hosseini chose to use helps to prevent stereotyping. If he based the book just in the time period when the Taliban were in charge it would continue the stereotypes that a lot of people have on Afghanistan...

Along with Hosseini intertwining the different lifestyles that Laila and Mariam have he brings their two exceptionally different lives together. He does this by having a tragic event [a bombing] happen to Laila’s family. In turn, this event Hosseini uses shows the reader that similar events to 9/11 happen within the country. This is an important concept for people around the world to understand. It is not just the countries other than Afghanistan, for example the USA, that are being affected by the war. The people within the country went to bed every night to bombs blowing up all around them.
Without personal experience it is hard to even imagine the horror that the Afghani people went through. Hosseini captures these horrors extremely well in the book. I would recommend this book to readers. It will help people to not only try and understand the terror they went through but also to learn more about the historical facts that lead to it all.

In all of these written assignments, Phil reflected on historical and political events depicted within the novel. During her final written reflection, Phil revealed the sympathy she felt for the characters and the people they represent (“It’s hard to even imagine the horror the Afghani people went through”) while she referenced historical and political events (bombings, the rise of the Taliban, 9/11) and drew important life lessons from the book (“Afghanistan as a country and the people are not all bad,” events like 9/11 happen to people in Afghanistan).

During our class discussion of chapters 27-31, Phil and Dil reiterated a type of family vacation approach to reading. When the students had finished discussing events in those particular chapters, I told them that I wanted them to work together to research some of the people and historical events mentioned in the novel and create a timeline of these events. The students began skimming through chapters 1-31 and creating a list of people and events to include, such as King Shah, Daoud Khan, the Soviet invasion, the rise of warlords, Moussad, Dostum, Rabbani, Najibullah, and Hekmatyar. As they were compiling this list, Phil and Dil discussed how much factual information they had been ignoring when they read:

Phil: I never realized they gave us this much information.

Mrs. T: Oh, good. See, that’s part of why I wanted y’all to go through this is because I kind of got the feeling that y’all were just kind of-

Dil: going through the plot and not the history that's driving the characters along.
Both students realized that they had been glossing over some of the pertinent historical information provided by the author. A few moments later, Phil showed me another example of how she had been skimming past some of the content, saying, “Yeah, see I skipped that entire paragraph ([at the top of p.160]) because it was a bunch of information and I really didn’t want to read a bunch of people’s names, so I just skipped it.”

During her post-interview, Phil indicated that she enjoyed the book, exclaiming, “I want to read it again!” She said that she felt like she learned a lot about the governments of Afghanistan and the way people live there and that the activities that helped her learn the most were the Harkness discussions and the timeline. “We learned a lot of history during Harkness,” she maintained. These comments were consistent with her earlier observations about family vacations and reading for historical facts and indicate that the world-efferent stance, which involves reading for factual knowledge, is one that students are less likely to adopt on their own; however, it can be fostered through class discussions and scaffolding.

*Dil, Power, and Perspective*

Like Phil, Dil seemed quite comfortable responding to the novel both aesthetically and from a literary-efferent stance. Each of the papers he wrote and each of the class discussions in which he participated contained both aesthetic and literary-efferent responses (see “Stances Evident in Writing” and “Stances Evident in Class Discussions”). In contrast, only 7 of Dil’s 13 papers contained responses that were coded as world-efferent, and only 6 of 13 papers contained critical responses (see “Stances Evident in Writing”). It appears as though, like Phil, Dil was less comfortable adopting these two stances. However, during all class discussions, Dil made remarks indicative of a world-efferent stance, and he responded critically during all but
one class discussion. This difference indicates that the class discussions may have prompted him to adopt world-efferent and critical stances. The examples below will explore some of the times in which class discussions seemed to encourage a critical response from Dil. All of these responses, in some way, focused on issues involving power or perspective.

The first time that a class discussion prompted Dil to respond critically occurred during our initial discussion of chapters 1-4. In these chapters, the reader is introduced to three of the novel’s main characters: Jalil, Nana, and Mariam. Jalil is a wealthy, married businessman who years ago had an affair with his servant, Nana. When Nana became pregnant, Jalil helped her move to an isolated, rural location where she now lives in shame and poverty with their illegitimate ten-year-old daughter, Mariam. Jalil visits Mariam once a week and helps support them both financially, but Mariam and Nana’s lives are depicted as being rather bleak and miserable. Dil’s journal entry for these chapters contained comments that were both aesthetic and literary-efferent. He described the main characters, made predications, and asked questions about why the characters behave in particular ways.

The questions that Dil raised in his journal writing demonstrated that, while he understood the plotline and could analyze the techniques the author was using to develop the plotline, he did not fully understand the social factors that influenced the characters. When discussing Nana, Dil wrote the following:

But, why is Nana so cruel superficially? Whether or not it’s all Jalil’s fault is still a matter left unresolved but it seems that Nana has been scarred eternally. For example, Nana is very emotional when Mariam tells Mullah Faizullah that she, Mariam, wants to go to school. Nana says, “There is nothing out there for her. Nothing but rejection and heartache. I know, akhund sahib. I know” (Hosseini 19).
Dil recognized that Nana has been deeply hurt, but he did not appear to understand the source of her pain. Similarly, when analyzing Jalil, Dil wrote,

> Although Nana is exceedingly pessimistic at times, Jalil balances Mariam’s life out with his visits every Thursday. He even “[brings] her small presents” (Hosseini 23) occasionally. From this the reader gets an image of a decent father, but if this is so, why doesn’t Jalil bring them both in? He has the money.

Dil did not seem to grasp that the society in which these characters live will not allow a prominent married man to publicly support his illegitimate child and has only scorn for this child and her sinful mother.

Rather than seeking answers to his questions about these characters by exploring the mechanisms of the society in which they live, Dil turned to what was more comfortable for him: literary analysis. He interpreted the opening chapters of the novel as an allusion to the Garden of Eden, writing the following:

> Living a life in a secluded house with Nana must be hard and “around Jalil, Mariam did not feel at all like a *harami*” (Hosseini 5). Though, curiosity starts getting to her as the reader can perceive when Mariam asks to go to school and starts thinking of going to Jalil’s house. And suddenly, *A Thousand Splendid Suns* morphs into the story of the Garden of Eden.

> This beginning of Mariam’s curiosity foreshadows Mariam’s learning of the truth about her parents, the outside world, and her fall from innocence. As the reader, I theorize that Nana and Jalil are protecting Mariam from the outside world. They don’t want her to taste the forbidden fruit.

In offering a rather traditional literary analysis of these chapters, one rooted in a classic Biblical allusion, Dil appeared to me to be interpreting these characters in ways that were inconsistent with the author’s intentions. Rather than viewing Mariam’s difficult childhood as an unfair and unjust circumstance of her being born into a society that oppresses illegitimate children and single mothers, Dil viewed Mariam’s isolation as a form of Paradise. Furthermore, he concluded that Nana and Jalil are both actively trying to shelter Mariam against an outside, worldly evil
rather than viewing them as two parents helpless against the mores and dictates of their own society.

During our class discussion of these chapters, the students as a group expressed confusion about the characters’ situation. When they began discussing Nana, who is often bitter and argumentative and sometimes cruel to Mariam, one student expressed that she believed Nana was insane, prompting Lil to say, “I think that the experiences she's had in life have probably made her the way she is.” The students continued to discuss some of Nana’s behaviors, including her blaming at various times Jalil, Jalil’s wives, and Mariam for her present circumstances. Hoping to prompt them to recognize that larger societal forces may play a role in Mariam and Nana’s poverty and oppression, I asked them who they felt was to blame for the poor circumstances in which Mariam and Nana were living. It was at this point that some of the students’ confusion became evident:

Mrs. T: Who do y’all think is responsible for the situation, if you had to choose?
Lil: [I don’t know]
Cynthia: [Well, do we] know if she did anything?
Mrs. T: Well, what did she do?
Phil: I don’t think we understand what she did.
Cynthia: Well, her father was a stone engraver or something, so they didn’t like her right off the bat, the other wives didn’t, because she was in a lower class.
Cynthia was the first to recognize that a class difference might be part of the problem, and the students spent the next five minutes discussing the circumstances of Nana’s life that led her to become a single mother.

During this discussion, Dil seemed to reach a new understanding of the forces at work in Nana’s life.

Mrs. T: Why is illegitimacy such an issue here for these characters, do you think?

Phil: Because they can’t have any of the money or anything like that because they weren’t married.

Dil: Because it was an honor system or something like that.

Mrs. T: Yeah, in what way?

Dil: Well, I guess you’d be looked down upon.

Phil: Oh, being, oh, being a single mother is worse than being like a servant.

In this exchange, Dil demonstrated that he was beginning to see that societal forces, such as an honor system, were playing a role in determining the outcome of these characters’ lives.

For the next six minutes, the students discussed the unfairness of the double standard that allows Jalil, the child’s father, to continue living a comfortable, respectable lifestyle while Nana and Mariam are ostracized; they also tried to understand how this double standard influences Nana and Mariam’s lives. During this time, Dil continued to make comments that indicated he was thinking critically about the factors that were limiting these women’s lives.

Mrs. T: So she ends up becoming this servant and now she has this illegitimate child, and now what can she do for herself? What options does this woman have?
Dil: Not much. She’s lower class. She’s a woman.

Tommy: She can move to a different country. But she doesn’t want to.

Phil: She could move to America.

Tommy: Yeah.

Mrs. T: How could she do that?

Cynthia: Run away.

Phil: Be illegal.

Tommy: I think she likes Afghanistan, though, because she’s like really conservative with her views...

Lil: I wouldn’t want to be a part of the country I’m in.

Phil: Yeah, I would just leave...

Dil: If you have all these options, you, she’s, then you might as well just go with one of them. But she’s staying, so

Throughout this discussion, the students sought to understand why Nana doesn’t simply leave the country where she is oppressed. Dil pointed out that Nana’s identity as a lower class woman within this particular society might leave her powerless. When his classmates suggested that they would leave the country if they were in her position, he seemed to become a little frustrated, pointing out that if she truly had other options, she might take one of them, but the fact that she doesn’t should indicate that she doesn’t have many choices in life. Questions and comments offered by me and his classmates seemed to help lead Dil to this understanding.

This understanding seemed to stay with Dil as he read the next chapters on his own. In chapters 5 through 7, Nana commits suicide, leaving Mariam with no one to care for her other
than Jalil. Jalil and his wives take Mariam into their home for a few days and then announce that she is to be married to a man much older than she who lives several hundred miles away.

When writing about these events in his journal, Dil explained,

Jalil and his wives find a way for Mariam to leave the house and never return. By finding a suitor who lives in a city not near Herat, the Khans can finally get rid of Mariam. In this context, what Jalil and his wives are doing appear to be cruel and heartless, but Afghanistan has its own culture. And from what the reader has read, illegitimate children are a humongous shame to the man and his entire family. Mariam must marry this man about thirty years her superior and start a utterly different life.

Dil recognized that the characters in the novel are operating from a belief system different from his own, and he viewed that belief system as something that profoundly impacts the lives of the main characters. This understanding directly influenced the way he viewed the characters in the book, as he noted, “what Jalil and his wives are doing appear to be cruel and heartless, but Afghanistan has its own culture.”

Another example of Dil seemingly being prodded into a critical stance during our class discussions occurred with the reading of chapters 8 through 11. In these chapters, Mariam begins her married life with Rasheed. In Dil’s written response to these chapters, he focused on characterizing Rasheed as a rather aggressive, traditional male and concluded by again referencing the Garden of Eden:

In the past, Mariam’s mistakes were all forgive (her breaking Nana’s tea set for instance), but now, Mariam will be punished with force if she screws something up. Relating back to the Garden of Eden motif, Mariam is not in paradise, or at least her sanctuary, anymore; she’s on her own. And from the way the reader sees it; her life is going to suck.

Dil’s written response clearly shows he was reading from a literary-efferent stance as he continued his literary analysis of the chapter with his interpretation of a Garden of Eden motif, and it also indicates an aesthetic stance as he predicts that Mariam's life “is going to suck.”
However, during the class discussion about these chapters, Dil’s responses became critical when he acknowledged that Rasheed’s behaviors, which Dil personally viewed as negative, were informed by a different belief system than his own.

During one part of the class discussion, I asked the students what they thought about the end of the assigned reading. In this closing scene, Rasheed and Mariam have sex for the first time. It is clearly something that Mariam does not want to do and does not enjoy, but other than initially croaking, “‘I can’t’” (Hosseini, 2007, p. 76), Mariam does not really resist. In discussing this scene, the students tried to decide whether or not Mariam has been raped:

Mrs. T: What did you think about that ending, when he decides that they’re going to have sex?

Phil: I think he should have waited a little bit until she was more ready.

Angelica: Well, at least they didn’t, or I don’t know, they were, it’s after they bonded ((Dil laughs)) or something, or at least what she thought of as [bonding].

Lil: [That’s true.]

Angelica: Cause he takes her to the town, even though he just talks to friends and everything, but they bond, and then “hey, it’s time.” ((group laughter))

Dil: Oh, boy! ((laughter))

Phil: He could have waited a little, like, they could have bonded [more].

Lil: [No], I think the fact she said “I can’t,” he should have listened to that.

Phil: Yeah. (2.1)
Dil: But he’s like this big, forty-five year old man ((Angelica laughs)) and she’s this fifteen year old girl. Oh, god. ((laughter))

Phil: Yeah, and then he just leaves.

Dil: So, yeah, he pretty much has like total power in the house, so that could be bad.

Cynthia: Yeah, the fact that he didn’t say anything more than that, cause she’s obviously scared,

Dil: ((coughs)) Abuse.

Mrs. T: So, do you see him as an abusive husband, Dil?

Dil: Yeah, I definitely see him as abusive.

Cynthia: [He could be.] That’s considered to be. I mean, if you say like, cause she did not want to do that, and he went ahead and did it anyway.

Lil: That’s considered rape.

Cynthia: Right, which is abuse.

Phil: Even if you’re in a relationship with a person, you have the right to say no.

Mrs. T: Yeah.

Dil: Even in their culture, too?

Tommy: No.

Throughout this conversation, Dil clearly responded to the situation in an aesthetic way, indicating both his disgust (“But he’s like this big, forty-five year old man ((Angelica laughs)) and she’s this fifteen year old girl. Oh, god”) and his disapproval of the Rasheed (“Yeah, I definitely
see him as abusive”). However, as he and his classmates discussed the situation further and began to explore the idea of what constitutes rape, Dil was the first to move outside of his personal belief system and explore the idea from the point of view of Rasheed, marking his move from an aesthetic to a critical stance.

After Dil raised his question regarding Rasheed’s cultural beliefs about sex in marriage, I asked the students to explore it further:

Mrs. T: Does he, does- do you think that [Rasheed] views it as wrong?
Dil: No cause he even says afterwards
Phil: It’s what Allah wants you to do.
Cynthia: It’s what, yeah.
Dil: No, it’s like ((reads from book)) “‘There’s no shame in this, Mariam,’ he said, slurring a little. ‘It’s what married people do. It’s what the prophet himself and his wives did. There is no shame.’”

In this exchange, Dil read against his own aesthetic response to the scene and expressed an understanding that Rasheed did not consider what he did to be rape but probably believed that he was fulfilling his religious or cultural obligations by having sex with Mariam, even if it was not what she wanted to do.

Throughout the study of the novel, Dil included remarks that indicated that he was independently reading from a critical stance in just fewer than half of his writings; however, in all but one of the class discussions a critical stance was evident. The majority of the critical comments Dil made focused either on a character’s lack of power within society or on differences between and within cultural groups.
In his written responses to the novel, Dil seemed to be experimenting with adopting a critical stance. In his first five responses, he adopted a critical stance three times. A critical stance was completely absent in his four written responses covering chapters 19-35. It then returned for three of the final four written responses. The first of these responses covered a section of the novel in which Dil’s favorite character, Zaman, is introduced. It is possible that Dil’s strong aesthetic connection to this character, along with the practice he’d had making critical responses during all of the previous class discussions, contributed to the critical stance he adopted in evaluating Zaman.

In these chapters, Mariam’s abusive husband, who has lost his job since the Taliban came to power and is now struggling financially, forces Mariam and his second wife Laila to take their only daughter, Aziza, to an orphanage. Zaman is the man who runs the orphanage, which is dilapidated, underfunded, and overcrowded. Dil responded to the scene from a strongly aesthetic stance, but in doing so he also noted that Zaman is a Pashtun, a member of the ruling class in Afghanistan of which the Taliban is comprised. In his journal, Dil wrote the following about Zaman:

Although he is a male Pashtun, he knows that what’s going on with the Taliban is wrong. This man has a profession where more “business” represents the degradation of society. This man will make sure that everyone has food, clothes, and education when he says so.

With the giving up of Aziza, the novel has reached another low point. The foreshadowing has finally shifted directions from being totally dismal. These new aspirations arise with Zaman. Zaman, in this dark moment, is the ray of hope from the thousand splendid suns that hide behind Kabul’s dark walls.

In this journal entry, Dil not only recognized that variation exists within cultural groups, but he also lionized a member of a cultural group that was responsible for a great deal of oppression, choosing instead to evaluate this man based on his personal merits.
This stance continued in the class discussion about the novel:

Dil: Yeah. Zaman is a Pashtun, and he's a good Pashtun.

Mrs. T: He is.

Dil: It's just that the Taliban happen to be Pashtuns.

Cynthia: [I like that guy.]

Angelica: [Yeah cause he's] just one of the victims of the (situation), and cause he says it makes them look bad and everything.

Dil: Yeah ((reading from book)) "It brings disgrace to the name of my people."

Mrs. T: Definitely. And he, what I think is like really kind of neat is he is also in

*The Kite Runner.*

Cynthia: He is?

Dil: Zaman?

Mrs. T: Yeah.

Dil: YEAH! I told you he was a good gu(h)y.

Cynthia: But like the same here?

Mrs. T: Yeah.

Cynthia: With the orphanage?

Mrs. T: Yeah, with the cracked, yeah, the orphanage is in there and then um Zaman is the only character that's in both books. And the way his eyeglasses are cracked [in one lens]

Dil: [Yeah, one] one lens is chipped and he looks like, you know, oh! That’s great.
Dil obviously liked the character, and he recognized that the character broke stereotype in being a “good Pashtun.” In this exchange, Dil resisted creating cultural stereotypes himself by stating, “It's just that the Taliban happen to be Pashtuns.” He recognized variance within this cultural group, and to him, the cultural identity of the members of the Taliban seemed to be of little importance compared to the ways in which individual members within the Pashto culture behaved as human beings.

Contribution of Aesthetic and Efferent to Critical

The third finding of this study suggests that together both the aesthetic and the efferent contribute to the critical stance. It does not appear to matter whether the efferent stance is what has been termed literary-efferent or world-efferent in this study; in different instances, both contributed to students adopting a critical stance. In particular, a critical stance was promoted by a combination of aesthetic comments in which students revealed their personal feelings or made inferences about character motivation, literary-efferent responses in the form of text to text connections or literary analysis, and world-efferent comments in which students developed philosophical statements or made inquiries intended to increase their knowledge of the world. This finding holds true for both the students’ class discussions and for the students’ individual writing assignments.

Talking Against Standard Literary Interpretations

The following illustration of this finding stems from the class discussion covering chapters 43-47 of the novel. I selected this particular group discussion as an example because it was, by far, the one that contained the most examples of critical comments from the students, and all of the students contributed at least one comment that was critical. The discussion lasted...
one hour and eleven minutes, and it contained 144 comments by students that were coded as indicative of a critical stance. By comparison, the discussion with the next highest number of comments coded as critical lasted one hour and five minutes and contained 69 of these comments. The majority of the discussions (8 out of 12) contained fewer than 20 critical comments. In addition, when the students wrote their individual papers about these chapters, only one student, Cynthia, wrote comments that demonstrated that she was reading these chapters from a critical stance. Therefore, the way in which this particular class discussion developed should provide a clear view of the types of interactions that led students to adopt a critical stance.

The class discussion began with two of the female students, Cynthia and Phil, showing a high level of personal engagement with the chapters:

Mrs. T: Okay, chapters 43 through 47. Tariq came back.

Cynthia: I was so excited!

Angelica: She really was. ((group laughter))

Cynthia: I was. I was telling Angelica. Oh my gosh, it was amazing. The best day ever. ((group laughter))

Phil: I want to marry Tariq.

Cynthia: I do too! ((group laughter))

Cynthia and Phil had developed definite personal feelings for the character Tariq, which were akin to teenage crushes. When I sought to find out why these girls connected so strongly to Tariq, the conversation took its first critical turn:
Mrs. T: Okay, why did Tariq brighten ((loud sound of chair scooting)) ( )? Why are you happy he's back?

Cynthia: He's such a good character, and they needed that brightness in their life. Especially now that Mariam's gone.

Dil: The good Pashtun.

Phil: Yeah, he's like a good [guy].

In this brief exchange, the girls’ revelations about their personal feelings towards Tariq led Dil to assert that Tariq, like Dil’s favorite character Zaman, is a “good Pashtun,” thus indicating that Pashtun people are not a homogeneous group. Cynthia’s introduction of Mariam into the conversation then led to a lengthy conversation about Mariam’s role in the novel and eventually to the critical examination of a traditional symbol employed in literary analysis.

In these chapters, Mariam, who has spent most of her life being oppressed and abused, kills her husband Rasheed. She then almost immediately turns herself into the Taliban, to be executed for her crime, so that Rasheed’s younger wife Laila and her two children can live a better life with Tariq. The students’ aesthetic stances as they hypothesized about character motivation blended with the critical and the literary-efferent as they discussed what Mariam might have been thinking when she decided to turn herself in to authorities (aesthetic), made a text to text connection comparing Mariam to the figure of Sydney Carton from *A Tale of Two Cities* (literary-efferent), and then debated the possible significance of interpreting a Muslim character as a Christ-figure (critical). This excerpt from the discussion begins with a small debate about Mariam’s motivations:

Phil: [And I also think Mariam wanted to die.] Like I honestly think like like
Lil: I don't think she wanted to die. I think she was satisfied though, like in the end.

Cynthia: They said that she was satisfied with her life.

Lil: [Yeah, she ( )]

Phil: [Yeah, she didn't really care] if she died or not. Like if she didn't, it would be okay, but if she did, it wouldn't have mattered.

Lil: Yeah cause it says like ((reading from book)) "She was leaving the world as a woman who had loved and been loved um back. She was leaving it as a friend, a companion, a guardian, a mother, a person of consequence at last. No, it was not so bad, Mariam thought, that she should die this way. Not so bad. This was a legitimate end to a ill- uh to illegitimate beginnings."

In this excerpt, Phil and Lil, responding from a primarily aesthetic stance, placed themselves inside Mariam’s mind and discussed what they believed her thoughts might have been leading up to her confession and subsequent death. Cynthia and Lil offered support of Lil’s initial interpretation that Mariam was satisfied with her life by referencing specific parts of the chapters, thus reinforcing Lil’s aesthetic stance. This exchange then prompted Angelica to share her literary-efferent stance in the form of a text to text connection:

Angelica: Um whenever, I put this in my paper, but I thought whenever Mariam died it kind of reminded me of Carton when uh in A Tale of Two Cities cause you know uh Carton died for people he loved and everything, and then by the end he was already like satisfied cause he knew that there'd
be better things to come, and I think maybe Mariam knew that like Laila was going to be with Tariq and then you know A- Aziza and Zalmai were going to grow up to be good people. So like I just said that it's very similar to A Tale of Two Cities.

The conversation that the other girls had been having, in which they were trying to clarify their understandings of Mariam’s actions, prompted Angelica to offer her own comparison of Mariam to Sydney Carton from A Tale of Two Cities, which the class had read earlier in the year. Angelica’s comment was not totally devoid of an aesthetic stance, though, as she also addressed character motivation by offering her thoughts on what Mariam may have been thinking as well as a prediction that “Aziza and Zalmai were going to grow up to be good people.”

The students continued to discuss various events that occurred within this chapter, but they soon returned to Angelica's text to text connection when Tommy made an inquiry about Mariam’s beliefs:

Tommy: I wonder if she believes that she's going to heaven, or if she like still believes in Islam, though.

Mrs. T: What do y’all think?

Phil: Well, she still she still believes in Islam because if she wouldn't

Dil: Her last

Lil: [Yeah]

Phil: [Her last] she said she said her prayer.
Dil: Yeah, the last thing was ((reading from book)) "O my Lord, forgive and have mercy, for you are the best of the merciful ones." So

Angelica: Oh yeah, that also reminded me of Carton because he also did

Cynthia: Oh, he said his la- yeah.

Angelica: Yeah, so that's another thing. heh

Mrs. T: Yeah.

Cynthia: I didn’t think of those things.

Dil: "There is a better rest I go to now than I have ever known" or something.

Here, the students recognized another similarity between the characters of Mariam and Sydney Carton. Both say a prayer before they are executed, and that prayer reflects the inner peace that they find upon sacrificing their own lives for the benefit of those they love. The students all responded to Tommy’s inquiry from a primarily literary-efferent stance as they clarified Mariam’s religious belief and further explored the text to text connection raised by Angelica. Dil, however, also responded from an aesthetic stance as he used first person speech and adopted the persona of Carton.

Dil then took the text to text connection a step further by including a literary-efferent literary analysis, thus introducing the concept of a Christ-figure into the discussion and leading into what would become the crux of the critical response:

Dil: Death. And redemption is usually, it's like a Christ-figure thing, isn't it?

Right?

Mrs. T: Well,

Dil: Well not like, dying for other people.
Mrs. T: Y- yes. That's usually how we talk about it in literature, is a Christ-figure. Um but it does become interesting when you take it outside of a Christian culture.

Dil’s comment about a Christ-figure immediately following other comments about Mariam’s Muslim faith quickly led to the following exchange:

Mrs. T: Um would you consider Mariam a Christ-figure given that she is not Christian?

Dil: In our eyes, yes.

Dil’s answer to this question took a decidedly critical stance; by saying “in our eyes,” he was acknowledging that two points of view exist about applying this literary symbol to Mariam, and he seemed to be inferring that both views were valid. While it’s not entirely clear who constitutes the “our” Dil was referencing, it definitely included the people in his English class and possibly a much wider group of Christian or Western people.

Dil then continued along this line of thinking, employing a world-efferent stance as he moved his thoughts from the book to the larger world. This shift in stance led to a rather lengthy exchange, characterized almost entirely by a world-efferent stance, in which the students discussed their knowledge about various world religions. The entire conversation, however, also was characterized by a critical stance insofar as the primary impetus for it was to explore the idea of applying the term Christ-like to a Muslim by examining the similarities and differences between and among religions.

Dil: I’m not quite sure if Islam has a [(Christ figure)].

Phil: [Well, did]...Muhammad sacrifice?
Dil: He died peacefully.

Phil: But I mean, in his life though [he must have sacrificed]

Lil: [Well, yeah, well everyone sacrifices]

Dil: sacrifices something

Lil: Yeah.

Phil: Yeah, so he

Lil: Whether it means death or not.

Phil: Like, if we called Mohammad Christ-like

Tommy: Yeah, he had a life of hardships because he tried to start a religion.

Dil: Well, it all ended up going for the best, though. He like he still defeated the guys at Mecca.

Lil: Yeah.

Dil: And stuff like that. And then just a peaceful return to Medina, where he lived for the rest of his years. Happily ever after.

Mrs. T: So do you think from, okay, so from the comparison you are drawing with Mohammad, do you think that that idea of redemption and a Christ-figure, that any kind of sacrifice you make is the same as that? Am I making sense? Does it have to involve a death, or can [it just involve a sacrifice for others]?

In response to my question, Phil offered a philosophical statement, indicative of a world-efferent stance, with which the other students agreed:

Phil: [Well, I don't think any sacrifice] is as powerful as
Dil: Dying.

Phil: you dying for that, that person.

Cynthia: That's the biggest thing that you can give, is your life.

Angelica: Yeah.

Phil: Yeah.

Cynthia: That's basically

Phil: Cause there's nothing more you can give than that. All that you can give is either give life or take away a life to make something better happen.

And so I don't think that any sacrifice equals to that.

The world-efferent stances in the form of philosophical statements evident in this discussion continued even as the subject shifted slightly from the nature of sacrifice to the idea of an afterlife:

Mrs. T: If you believe in an afterlife, does the sacrifice become less important?

Phil: No. Because how do you know there actually is an afterlife?

Dil: It’s all about faith.

Phil: Yeah.

For the next four minutes, the students continued to exhibit world-efferent stances as they discussed different religions’ views of the afterlife and then similarities and differences between Mohammad and Jesus.

When the conversation turned to an analysis of the different ways in which Jesus is viewed by Christians and Muslims, one student, Tommy, expressed difficulty understanding
some of the information. His classmates and I responded to his world-efferent inquiries by adopting critical stances to help explain the positions of people within each faith:

Dil: Mohammad was just a normal person. [Who was supposedly given Allah’s brain. heh]

Phil: [Would he be like, would Mohammad be like] would Mohammad be more of a like disciple, like preaching the religion and not like a a

Dil: An extreme disciple.

Phil: Yeah, not an

Mrs. T: [A prophet.]

Tommy: [I thought that] they viewed Mohammad above Jesus though.

Mrs. T: They do.

Dil: In Islam they do.

Mrs. T: The Christian's don't. That's why I'm saying, so like if you're if you're taking a Christian perspective of things, right?, and talking about Jesus as Christ, then [you're viewing]

Cynthia: [They're different.]

Mrs. T: Jesus as the son of God.

Tommy: But that doesn't make sense though because I thought the son of God would be more important than just a human being.

In this exchange, Tommy seemed to be resisting a critical stance, which, in turn, was actually impeding his world-efferent stance. His trouble understanding efferent facts about the two religions stemmed from his difficulty seeing Jesus as two different entities (human being or son
of God) to two different groups of people (Muslims and Christians). His classmates and I both responded by modeling our own critical stances:

Dil: No, [but in Islam]

Cynthia: [It's who they believe.]

Phil: [But it's who] they worship though.

Tommy: I know, it-

Mrs. T: Are you talking about from a Christian perspective, or from Isla-

Tommy: No, just like for my perspective. Not either religion just

Mrs. T: Okay, from outside either religion?

Tommy: Yeah.

Mrs. T: Okay. So

Tommy: I mean a human being and a son of God.

Phil: But see

Mrs. T: Right, and that's why within Christianity Jesus has such a prominent position.

Dil: Is because he is the son of God.

Mrs. T: Because he is the son of God.

Dil: But in Islam he's not connected to God. He's just [a minor prophet].

Lil: [He's a prophet], and they just call him a prophet. They don't call him

Tommy: Okay.
It appeared that this modeling of a critical stance, which began in response to a world-efferent inquiry by Tommy, ultimately helped Tommy recognize that different viewpoints exist about the nature of Jesus.

The conversation about Islam and Christianity continued for another minute and a half until it returned to the book and the question about interpreting Mariam as a Christ-figure:

Mrs. T: So, and that's kind of why I go back to the idea of like is it okay to put this term Christ-figure on Mariam when it's, and I don't have an answer for it,

Phil: I think they would take it offensively. If like personally

Cynthia: I think they would take it offensively.

Phil: Well, if you said, "Oh you remind me of Jesus."

Here, Phil and Cynthia were adopting a critical stance to reconsider a literary device that they had come to recognize as one that perhaps marginalizes the particular belief system of Muslims. Phil continued by exploring the idea that the literary term itself might be construed differently by people of different faiths:

Phil: By doing that, I think they would be kind of like, because if they don't think of Jesus in the same way Christians do, like in the lower way, then I don't think they would like that very much.

Tommy, who earlier had expressed difficulty in understanding different perspectives about Jesus, then built upon his classmates' critical responses by offering a solution to what he also recognized as a problem posed by a literary term that was developed from a Christian tradition of literary interpretation:

Tommy: I think it would be best to put an archetype on Mariam.
Mrs. T: Yeah, a different type? What would you call it instead?

Tommy: Uh the I'm not sure. I forgot.

Dil: The Mariam figure.

Phil: The hero.

Lil: [Yes. Well, the hero]

Phil: [Like she's she's the one who]

Angelica: [We're just gonna invent] an archetype now. Heh

In proposing that the class “put an archetype on Mariam” instead of referring to her as a Christ-figure, Tommy was adopting a critical stance and recognizing that different religious viewpoints should not be diminished by literary analysis. In response to Tommy’s comment, Angelica offered her own that also suggests a critical stance: “[We're just gonna invent] an archetype now.” This statement, along with Tommy and Dil’s attempts to do just that, might be interpreted as a small step towards social action, as the students recognized that they not only had the authority to usurp a common literary term but made an effort to create a literary term that they viewed as more respectful of a Muslim character and thus more just.

The complex relationship among aesthetic, efferent, and critical responses is evidenced throughout this conversation as students used aesthetic responses concerning their personal feelings and what they perceived to be characters’ motives, literary-efferent responses related to literary terms and to text to text connections, and world-efferent responses that consisted of inquiry for the sake of knowledge and philosophical statements as lead-ins for critical responses to the text.
Imagery, Symbolism, and Self-Defense

During the course of the same class discussion, students also began a literary analysis of imagery and symbolism that evolved into a philosophical query about the nature of self-defense and murder as well as a critical inquiry into the options that women in abusive relationships do or do not have in different cultures. Again, the students' literary-efferent, world-efferent, and aesthetic stances contributed to the development of a critical stance.

This part of the conversation began when Cynthia made an inquiry about the way that Mariam is described the last time Laila sees her:

Cynthia: [There was the there was] the light. Something was up with the light that went across her face.

Mrs. T: Do you want to read that paragraph?

Cynthia: Yeah. I'll find it.

Dil: I don't even remember that. heh

Cynthia: I do...((reading from book)) "Laila held Zal- Zalmai's hand as they walked down the road together. Uh just before they turned the corner, Laila looked back and saw Mariam at the door. Mariam was wearing a white scarf over her head, a dark blue sweater buttoned in the front, and white cotton trousers. A a crest of gray hair had fallen loose over her brow. Uh bars of uh bars of sunlight slashed over or across her face and shoulders. Mariam waved amiably. Um, they turned the corner, and Laila never saw Mariam again."

Mrs. T: [What do y'all think of that image?]
Phil:  [“Bars.” Bars remind me of] jail.

Cynthia:  “Slashed.”

Phil:  Any, I'm like anything that has to do with bars reminds me of jail.

In this initial exchange, Cynthia and Phil both responded to the image of Mariam from a literary-efferent stance, noting the author’s word choice of both “bars” and “slashed.” In addition, Phil responded by interpreting the word “bars” as symbolizing the bars of a jail cell, which is where Mariam will go for killing her husband. Phil’s response also contains an aesthetic element, though, as this association seems to be a personal one.

As the conversation continued, the students discussed this association as well as color symbolism:

Mrs. T:  Okay, well why would an image of jail be particularly appropriate there?

Lil:  [She's going to jail.]

Cynthia:  [Because of what she did.]

Mrs. T:  Right, right. So you've got foreshadowing, right?

Lil:  Um-hmm.

Mrs. T:  What else do you, can you read [into that image]?

Phil:  [All the uh] white um all the white

Dil:  Innocence.

Phil:  Yeah, it means like not really innocence I guess but just kind of like she really isn't innocent.

At this point in the conversation, the student’s literary analysis of imagery and symbolism turned to an analysis of Mariam’s character in which Cynthia and Dil took an aesthetic stance to
discuss character motivation and reveal their personal feelings about both Mariam and her husband Rasheed:

Phil: She's guilty, but like good, like [she did the right thing].

Cynthia: [But she did it for a reason. She didn't do it] out of, she was try-, she did it because she was tired of what he did, and Rasheed was wrong to do what he did and she had a right to because

Dil: Self-defense.

Cynthia: he was a jerk. Heh

Phil: Yeah, and white usually means like peace.

 Literary-efferent comments about imagery and symbolism led to aesthetic comments about Mariam’s goodness and her “right” to kill her abusive husband as a form of self-defense, which in turn led Phil back to an literary-efferent connection that the white Mariam wears in the image being discussed could represent the peace that she found after her husband’s death.

After Phil returned the conversation to color imagery, the discussion continued as an analysis of color symbolism, but this time students carried that symbolism outside of the text, using their world-efferent knowledge of religious symbols to continue to interpret this one image and Mariam’s character:

Mrs. T: Um, what else do you see in the image besides the white?

Dil: The blue.

Phil: Uh [the blue].

Mrs. T: [The blue] which is

Phil: Dark blue.
Mrs. T: Why?

Phil: Water.

Mrs. T: Okay, water, [which is]

Phil: [But not like] not like water near the shore, like deep water, like cause deeper, deep water [is darker]

Dil: [is dark blue]

Phil: like in the ocean, like way far out [like where it's darker]

As she had previously done with the word “bars,” Phil seemed to be taking an aesthetic stance by associating an image selected by the author, in this case “dark blue,” with something familiar to her, deep ocean water.

At this point in the conversation, Dil offered his world-efferent comments about the significance of the color blue in Hinduism:

Dil: [I know these two] religions aren't related, but in Hinduism blue means, they symbolize blue with infinity or something like that. That's why one of the major gods, Vishnu,

Mrs. T: Umm-hmm

Dil: and he was like the center between Shiva, the destroyer of the earth or the destroyer of the universe, and I forgot the other major guy, but he's the creator and Vishnu is preserver, except he's in the middle. I remember in our textbook he was always dark blue and then, yeah.
Dil’s comments not only reflected his world-efferent stance but also reflected a theme that had been discussed earlier in class and that is central to the idea of self-defense: the relationship between destruction and preservation.

The students continued discussing color symbolism, with Cynthia and Angelica offering a different interpretation of the color blue based on their own personal, aesthetic connections, but also revealing literary-efferent stances as they, Phil, and Dil used these connections to discuss foreshadowing and the author’s use of the color gray:

Cynthia: I think of sad. Heh

Angelica: I just think of like when they said deep blue, like the deep trouble she's gonna get in.

Cynthia: That's it, yeah, what I mean.

Mrs. T: Oh, that's good though, right? The sadness too. Um, cause it's related to tears, the water again.

Phil: If it was like a light blue it would be kind of like a baby blue, but since it's a darker blue, it's more of like an older color kind of thing, so that could that could like foreshadow her death in a way because

Cynthia: Gray does.

Phil: Yeah, like the gray.

Dil: Yeah, the gray strand of hair that fell across her face.

The students continued to discuss color imagery and its connection to the concept of innocence as well as religious imagery for four more minutes, connecting the colors blue and white to
Moses, Jesus, and the Virgin Mary. As the discussion continued, the students followed a similar pattern of blending aesthetic, literary-efferent, and world-efferent responses.

Eventually, all of these ideas seemed to lead to the critical dimension of the discussion, as Dil offered the following hypothesis:

Dil: I think that if Laila and maybe even some of the kids, if it wouldn't mortify them that much, if they testified before like an American court system uh that they would have been proven innocent [that it was in self-defense].

Phil: [If they had] killed him still?

Dil: Yeah, that it would have been self-defense.

At this point, Dil shifted stances as he moved from literary analysis and world facts to a critical assertion that the concept of self-defense varies by culture and that, if the book’s characters lived in the United States rather than in Afghanistan, the outcome for Mariam would have been different.

Phil quickly challenged this assertion, though, reminding the students of a documentary she’d watched and mentioned to the class during a previous discussion. In doing so, Phil took both an efferent and a critical stance by using a text to text comparison to illustrate that the justice system in the United States shares similarities with the one in Afghanistan in that both can deal unjustly with a wife who kills her husband:

Phil: Well, like we talked about this earlier like um when I brought up that thing when I was watching that show about that uh woman who was married to that guy and they had a lot of kids and she like ended up
killing him because he was beating her for like years and years and years.

[She still]

Cynthia: [Yeah her and] her son ganged up on him.

Phil: She still went to jail even though it was self-defense, and that was the same, and the lawyer even said that it was self-defense. It was like she [was on the verge of dying literally].

Lil: [Yeah, but he tried killing her?]

Phil: Yeah, she, yeah, he would take her out to fields though and would point guns at her and tell her "I'm gonna kill you. I'm gonna kill you" and would like play little games like he was gonna kill her like and like she knew that he was going to eventually and yet [she still went to jail for]

Lil: [Yeah but he still wasn't trying], was he trying at the second whenever she killed him though?

Phil: No. [Because she wouldn't have been able]

Lil: [Then it's different.] Because he was he was suffo- suffocating her whenever [Mariam killed him].

Dil: [Yeah self-defense is] more like in the moment [if they're trying to kill you, you can kill, you can defend yourself].

Lil: [Yeah, it's not like you can kill them randomly.]

At this point, the conversation took a decidedly philosophical turn as the students began discussing the difference between self-defense and murder. Dil and Lil defined self-defense as something that occurs “in the moment”; therefore, a woman who kills an abusive husband who
is not posing a direct threat to her at the moment of the killing is not acting in self-defense. Phil clearly disagreed with this assessment.

Phil: But it is right, though, if somebody's been uh beating you for years and years and years and the only time you really can do anything about it is when they're sleeping because they're so much stronger than you and when, technically, should that be counted as self-defense when it's been for so long?

Phil’s response to this philosophical argument indicates that she was taking a critical stance in addition to the world-efferent stance as she asserted that a person who is abused for long periods of time may be powerless to stop the abuse at the moment it is occurring, and may therefore be justified in fighting back at a moment when the abuser is powerless. In asserting her viewpoint, Phil also seemed to be implying that domestic abuse is deeply tied to issues of physical and emotional power differences, and that those differences and thus the abuse itself do not cease to exist in the absence of an immediate physical threat.

Lil and Cynthia responded to Phil’s question by taking philosophical as well as aesthetic stances, as they agreed with the idea that this type of action should be considered self-defense. Lil also adopted a critical stance as she recognized that a discrepancy exists between what is lawful and what is right.

Lil: Yeah, I think it should, but it isn't.
Cynthia: I'd count it as self-defense still.
Dil: Yeah, but
Lil: But it isn't, under the law, like [I wouldn't like that. It should be, but it's
Building on these comments, Cynthia, Lil, Dil and Phil continued their critical and philosophical inquiries into the legal nature of self-defense by further exploring Phil’s text to text comparison. Dil’s and Phil’s comments also contained evidence of an aesthetic stance as they adopted first-person speech to explain what they thought people involved in these situations might say.

Dil: [Cause I guess they have, they probably have that] they probably already have that as a problem where they've found like people could you know beat the system. heh You know, say that alright, I’m saying that it could also help because they have like in that case maybe one or two witnesses, but in this one you have four. These kids know that, yeah, he does this to them and us and [“my dad has his moments”].

Phil: [Well in that case they had] they had like six because they had so many children together, and all the children knew, and all the children tried to defend against their mom.

Dil: Well, did they testify in court?

Phil: They testified and everything.

Dil: Well, I guess, like I said it’s in the moment.

Phil: Yeah, so I guess it would have been different because it was in the moment.
Mrs. T: Why do you think that America makes that distinction, or American courts make that distinction about it needing to be in the moment to be self-defense?

Cynthia: Cause then it's murder, I guess.

Phil: Because it's kind of like if somebody punches you one time and then y-and then two weeks later you go and kill them and it's like "Oh, they punched me. It's self-defense" but it was two weeks ago [it's just kind of like]

Lil: [So it's not self-defense because you were] away from them.

Phil: Yeah, it's just kind of like that. But if it happened that day, though, if like she was beat that day and then it was like [that night]

Dil: [In that] moment.

Phil: Like if it wasn't in that moment but it was that night when she killed him [after he]

Dil: [I'm not quite] sure about that either.

Lil: [No no, I don't think even that. Because if he was about to kill her then]

Phil: [Then it's just kind of like well, yeah, obviously, cause she went to jail so obviously] but

Mrs. T: Well, I think one of the big differences too is in the United States the assumption is if you're in that kind of relationship, you can leave. You do have other resources, so if it's not in the moment, instead of like taking a
gun and shooting him when he's asleep, pack a suitcase and you know go to a shelter or find some help. Run away. Um but

Phil: Which she tried to do so many times, and yet he would always find her, and that's why [that's why]

Cynthia: [Which is why] you don't run away here either. I mean, it's a different time, like it's a different country and stuff, and it's probably a lot harder to run away, [but still, you can't run away].

Lil: [Yeah, cause you'll get beat.]

Phil: Yeah, and like that's why she killed him, and she said "I knew I was probably going to go to jail for it. I wasn't for sure," and she goes, "but I knew that the only way for us and our kids for me and my kids to actually be safe is if he is dead."

Cynthia: Which is what Mariam did.

The students discussing this issue were highly engaged in the topic, as evidenced by their numerous overlapping comments; students did not consistently wait for one another to finish making a statement before jumping in with their own ideas. In addition, two of the students – Dil and Phil – adopted the personas of people impacted by abusive relationships and spoke in first-person to illustrate what those people might say, think, or feel. Therefore, this primarily philosophical world-efferent discussion about the nature of self-defense was also characterized by students' aesthetic stances.

Throughout the discussion comments indicative of a critical stance were also evident, as Cynthia, Phil and Lil pointed out that any woman in an abusive relationship, regardless of where
she lives, can suffer from a lack of power and control that extends beyond the immediate incidents of abuse she experiences. Such women lack viable options for leaving their relationships because their lives are constantly in danger, and for some of these women, murdering the abuser may be an act of self-defense, even if legal systems do not acknowledge it as such.

This piece of the students’ conversation initially was sparked by a literary-efferent inquiry pertaining to the author’s use of imagery and its related symbolism. The students’ analysis of the images and colors used to describe Mariam the last time Laila sees her led some of the students to an understanding that Mariam killing Rasheed was not necessarily bad or wrong, even though it was illegal. The students then spiraled out from the events in the book as one wondered about how different the outcome of the abusive situation might have been if the characters lived in the United States and another made a text to text connection between the novel and a documentary that took place in the United States. Students’ critical stances throughout this conversation appeared to be influenced by their aesthetic stances, as revealed through personal feelings and inferences about character motivation, as well as their literary-efferent stances, pertaining particularly to literary analysis of imagery and symbolism and to text to text to text connections, and their world-efferent stances in the form of philosophical statements and factual information about world religions and legal systems.

*The Complexity of Power*

The finding that the world-efferent, literary-efferent, and aesthetic stances all contributed to the critical stance holds true for the students’ individual writing assignments as well as their class discussions. Many of the critical comments that students made in their
writing focused on power issues and the ways in which those played out both within the context of the novel and in real life. In general, the students did not simply read the book in terms of familiar dichotomies, such as “us and them,” “men and women,” “Middle Eastern and Western,” or “Muslim and Christian.” In her journal entry for chapters 31 through 35, Lil addressed this idea directly, writing,

> They speak of America in this book as something great and distant, and we speak of Afghanistan as something different that is in a constant state of war, and overall a scary place with bad people. It’s important to eliminate misconceptions such as these…I also think that the author has shown the bond and relationship between people in a way that makes the reader feel as though they understand the characters in a deep sense. This is another reason why I enjoy reading the book, because I think that it allows the reader to relate to the story, which also shows that people are people no matter where they live in the world. They go through pain, they have relationships with each other, and live their lives.

In general, the students in this study viewed the characters within the book and the real people who those characters might represent as complex human beings whose actions and statuses are influenced by a variety of factors within their individual lives. This complexity was revealed in their individual writings, and it was closely associated with both aesthetic and efferent stances.

For example, Afghanistan is described in the novel as a male-dominated country. However, some of the students read against this depiction and recognized that power is neither absolute nor static; rather, people may exert power in some areas while remaining relatively powerless in others. Angelica wrote about this situation in her journal entry for chapters 5 through 7. In these chapters, Mariam goes to live with her wealthy and prominent father, Jalil, after her mother Nana’s death, but shortly after she arrives in his home, he and his wives arrange for her to marry a man who lives hundreds of miles away. Angelica wrote much of her
journal entry from an aesthetic stance in which she hypothesized about character motivation and revealed her personal feelings about the situation. However, she also evidenced a critical stance when she characterized Jalil as powerless against his wives in this particular situation and both Jalil and Nana as being controlled by the dictates of the society in which they live:

I think it’s really sad how the decision making of families are so harsh, Jalil is so shameful of what having an illegitimate daughter will do harm to his reputation, even though he loves her, and because of shame he goes along with his wives to make Miriam get out as soon as possible. It also proves how some people don’t even like their culture because of how some things will bring them shame, like having an illegitimate child. Just because of having that shame, nana wanted to live in the middle of nowhere so she wouldn’t have to deal with people’s judging.

In addition to reading from an aesthetic stance and revealing her personal feelings (“I think it’s really sad”), Angelica read from a critical stance and wrote about how feelings of shame imposed on people by their own cultures work as a controlling force in people’s lives. Neither Nana, a lower class woman with an illegitimate child, nor Jalil, an upper class businessman, can fully escape this pressure, although Nana attempts to do so by choosing to live in isolation.

Cynthia’s journal entry regarding these chapters was similar to Angelica’s, as she also worked from an aesthetic stance in which she revealed her personal feelings and made inferences about character motivation, which seemed to help her develop a critical stance.

Cynthia wrote the following about Jalil and his family:

I think he feels that in order to keep his wives happy, that he must obey them; he is overruled. He cares for his daughter but, the others do not. Mariam’s sister even says, “My mother says you’re not really my sister like you say you are” (Hosseini 42). If the women are talking about Mariam like this, than they obviously don’t care. Mariam doesn’t deserve this though. She cannot help the way she was raised, or the fact that her mother has died. But since the women have basically gotten rid of her due to the marriage, Mariam cannot fight back.
Cynthia’s personal feelings were evident in this entry when she maintained, “Mariam doesn’t deserve this.” Like Angelica, she viewed Jalil and Mariam as victims of both Jalil’s wives and society’s rules about illegitimate children. The powerlessness she attributed to Jalil and Mariam can be seen in her comments “he must obey them” and “Mariam cannot fight back.”

Dil made a similar critical observation about controlling influences in his journal entry for chapters 12 through 15, but his critical response developed more out of an efferent text to text comparison that drew on his personal knowledge of religion and the Bible as well as an efferent philosophical statement. In these chapters, Mariam begins to be physically abused by her husband Rasheed. Dil wrote in his journal, “God did say to Eve that her husband would prevail or rule over her. Well in A Thousand Splendid Suns Rasheed is definitely coming out on top.” In his assertion, Dil connected part of the book of Genesis to the novel in discussing Rasheed’s power over Mariam. Rather than blaming this abusive situation entirely on Rasheed, Dil looked to other forces that contributed to Mariam’s situation, writing “Mariam goes through all of this oppression and grief because of her birth as a harami. After just the first section of this four-section novel, a motif has already arisen: life isn’t fair. Mariam’s own culture and religion are destroying her life.”

Dil was reading from a critical stance when he maintained that Mariam’s “oppression and grief” were caused by “her birth as a harami” and that her “culture and religion are destroying her life.” His philosophical statement that “life isn’t fair” indicates that he was also applying some of these examples to real life outside of the novel. Even though his primary stances in this writing were efferent and critical, his journal entry was not completely devoid of an aesthetic stance. Dil’s final sentence revealed that he was connecting to the story on an
emotional level and enjoying it: “Human nature must really be evil because I, as the reader, cannot wait to see what happens next.”

Although the students saw Mariam as a definite example of the unjust oppression of a lower class and low-status woman, they did not generalize that all women within Afghanistan were oppressed. Rather, they acknowledged individual variations within and among families regarding how women should be viewed and treated. Some of the students viewed Rasheed’s wives as powerful within their own household, and several of them also viewed the character of Laila, when she is first introduced in the novel, as an example of a young woman with many rights and privileges and a bright future in front of her. As Lil worked from a literary-efferent stance to develop character descriptions of Mariam and Laila in her paper for chapters 16 through 18, she arrived at the following philosophical conclusion, which also demonstrates both a world-efferent and a critical stance: “In my opinion, it is important to remember that just because someone lives in a certain place, it does not mean that they lead the same lifestyles...everyone is different, and there is a lot of diversity and such in one city.”

Laila is presented in the novel as a contrast to Mariam. Laila excels in school and has well-educated parents who encourage her to work towards a career and intend to allow her to choose her own husband. Lil attributed the differences between the two young women to the opportunities that each either had or lacked as a result of their particular social statuses and family upbringings. As Lil explained in her paper,

Mariam had not been fortunate enough to have the opportunities in life, which Laila has. She was not able to attend school, because her mother was scared for her. She was not able to have friends, or even capable of making them, because she was kept away in a kolba, far from everyone else. She did not have much of a father figure her whole life, especially one that cared for her and her well-being, such as Laila did.
In this paper, Lil wrote from an aesthetic stance as she discussed character motivation while also developing a critical stance in recognizing that individual opportunities in life differ greatly from one person to the next, and those individual differences can play an important role in influencing the outcome of one’s life. At the end of her paper, Lil returned to a world-efferent stance evidenced by a philosophical statement: “Although, everyone must face hardship in their lives, for some there is more, or less than others.”

Summary

This qualitative study sought to answer the following two research questions: How do students negotiate aesthetic, efferent, and critical stances during the study of a novel set in Afghanistan, and how do the aesthetic and efferent stances contribute to or hinder the adoption of a critical stance? In answer to the first question, two findings emerged. Students quite comfortably adopted aesthetic and literary-efferent stances when they read and responded to the novel on their own. They were less likely, however, to adopt a world-efferent stance or a critical stance independently. The first finding of this study was that class discussions prompted students to adopt stances that they did not take on their own when reading. The second was that the scaffolding provided by class discussions helped the students adopt world-efferent and critical stances.

Regarding the study’s second question, both the aesthetic and the efferent stances were found to contribute to the development of a critical stance. Particularly helpful were aesthetic responses in which students inferred character motivation or revealed their personal feelings about the text, literary-efferent responses in which the students analyzed literary devices or made text to text connections, and world-efferent responses that took the form of
philosophical statements or inquiry intended to increase factual knowledge. These types of responses did not by themselves evoke critical responses; rather, they worked together to help the students take critical stances. In the next chapter, I will discuss the implications of these findings.
CHAPTER 5
DISCUSSION

This qualitative study examined six ninth-grade students’ responses to a novel set in Afghanistan. Two research questions guided the study: How do students negotiate aesthetic, efferent, and critical stances when reading a novel set in Afghanistan, and how do the aesthetic and efferent stances contribute to or hinder the development of a critical stance? Three findings developed from the course of this study and were discussed in the previous chapter.

The first two findings addressed the question of how students negotiated aesthetic, efferent, and critical stances when reading a novel set in Afghanistan. The first finding was that class discussions prompted students to adopt stances that they had not taken in their personal writings about the chapters. The second finding was that these students needed more scaffolding to adopt the world-efferent stance and the critical stance than they needed to adopt the aesthetic and literary-efferent stances.

The third finding of this study addressed the ways in which the aesthetic and efferent stances contributed to or hindered the adoption of a critical stance. Together, both the aesthetic and the efferent contributed to the critical stance. In particular, a critical stance was promoted by aesthetic comments about the reader’s personal feelings and inferences about character motivation, literary-efferent responses in the form of text to text connections and literary analysis, and world-efferent comments in the form of both philosophical statements and inquiry intended to increase factual knowledge.
This chapter discusses the implications of these findings. I will begin with a discussion of how critical literacy complicates Rosenblatt’s transactional theory of reading. I will then discuss the implications for classrooms. Then, implications for research will be addressed.

Transactional and Critical Theories

The second research question posed in this study asked how students’ adoption of aesthetic and efferent stances contributed to or hindered their adoption of a critical stance as they read a novel set in Afghanistan. Previous researchers have suggested revisions to Rosenblatt’s theory.

Hunt and Vipond (1984) suggested an expansion from the two aesthetic and efferent stances to three stances, which they termed “information-driven,” “story-driven,” and “point-driven.” As their names suggest, “information-driven” readings focus on learning facts while “story-driven” readings focus on plot and characters. Hunt and Vipond (1984) defined “point-driven” readings as beginning with the understanding that a text has an author who is trying to make a point. Point-driven reading, then, is concerned with discovering the “socially and culturally shared values and beliefs” (Hunt & Vipond, 1984, p. 263) that the narrator conveys. Hunt and Vipond (1991) later renamed “point-driven” readings to “dialogic” readings. In a similar complication of Rosenblatt’s theory, the findings discussed in chapter 4 of this dissertation reveal that the relationship between the aesthetic, efferent, and critical stances is complex, and Rosenblatt’s transactional theory of reader response is complicated by critical theory.
Rosenblatt began her work in the 1930s, and her theory was developed, in part, to encourage a pedagogy that would prepare students to uphold democratic principles and ideals.

Rosenblatt (2005) described this period in history as

a time when our democratic way of life was being subjected to external threats from antidemocratic, totalitarian forces, which were in turn being made the excuse for internal practices limiting our democratic freedoms. Traditional teaching methods, passed on from generation to generation, were, I felt, producing shallow and unquestioning readers who passively accepted the authority of the printed word. (p. ix)

Her description of both the political and the educational climate of the 1930s could just as easily apply to political and educational practices in the United States in 2011. Rosenblatt spoke about these renewed educational problems in an interview in 1999:

My belief in the importance of the schools in a democracy has not only evolved but increased over the years. In 1938, democracy was being threatened by forces and ideologies from outside. Today, I believe it is again seriously threatened, this time mainly by converging forces from within. From local schools to state standards to Supreme Court cases, education has become an arena for this ideological struggle. Special interest groups have been organized to achieve domination of local school boards; topics such as methods of teaching reading or allocation of funds to research have become political issues at all levels. At the risk of sounding pompous, I have said that my efforts to expound my theory have been fueled by the belief that it serves the purpose of education for democracy. (Rosenblatt, 1999/2005, pp. xxxii-xxxiii)

In this regard, Rosenblatt’s work shares some commonalities with the work of critical literacy theorists and educators. In general, all view education and literacy as a necessary means for establishing and maintaining a free society.

However, Rosenblatt’s theory and writings do not fully embrace the ideals of social justice and social action that are the centerpieces of critical literacy, and revisions made to the five different editions of *Literature as Exploration* during 57 years of its publication “indicate a sharp reduction in concern for the relationship between literary response and social action” (Dressman & Webster, 2001, p. 126). Perhaps this is why critical responses from students do
not fall neatly on the aesthetic-efferent continuum that Rosenblatt described. Proponents of critical literacy do not all advocate for democracy as it is practiced in the United States. Paulo Freire, the Brazilian educator upon whose work much of critical literacy pedagogy is based, was heavily influenced by Marxism, as were other prominent North American critical literacy theorists, such as Peter MacLaren and Henry Giroux. It is possible that Rosenblatt’s stated purpose in developing her theory actually served to limit its application.

Thinking in terms of only the efferent and the aesthetic does not do justice to the critical responses that students in this study offered during the course of reading *A Thousand Splendid Suns*. These critical responses seemed, themselves, to be the result of a unique type of transaction between the efferent and the aesthetic. As students combined particular types of aesthetic and efferent responses, a new, critical response was sometimes created, much as a small burst might occur when various chemicals are combined. Just as different combinations of chemicals can produce that burst, so different combinations of aesthetic and efferent responses produced critical comments from the students. Furthermore, the critical comments that were made did not represent a simple combination of the aesthetic and efferent; rather, they were a unique, wholly transformed understanding of the text and the world.

Also important in the discussion of the students’ responses to this text is the role that culture played as a mediating factor in these students’ development of stances. Rosenblatt’s understanding of culture was influenced by the work of anthropologists. Margaret Mead was her roommate at Barnard College, and in her early writings, Rosenblatt (1946/2005) referenced the work of Ruth Benedict, Franz Boas, Ralph Linton, Bronislaw Malinowski, Margaret Mead, and Robert H. Lowie (p. 52). Rosenblatt advocated for the study of foreign literature,
maintaining “We know that literature is not a mere mirror of life. Literature is itself an integral part of a culture and has its own complex relationship to the rest of the cultural setting” (p. 54).

Rosenblatt (1946/2005) viewed foreign literature as a way to build bridges across cultures and to recognize the common traits and behaviors that human beings share:

For literature, which permits us to enter emotionally into other lives, can be viewed always as the expression of human beings who, in no matter how different the ways, are, like us, seeking the basic human satisfactions, experiencing the beauties and rigors of the natural world, meeting or resisting the demands of the society about them, and striving to live their vision of what is important and desirable in life. (1946/2005, p. 53)

Despite her stated goal of using foreign literature to increase intercultural understanding, Rosenblatt placed a greater emphasis on the individual as opposed to the culture, as she also wrote, “The concept of the interplay of cultural elements may thus help us to liberate ourselves from too rigid national or cultural categorizations and may permit us to look at individuals within our own and other cultures as individuals” (Rosenblatt, 1946/2005, p. 57). In this way, Rosenblatt was writing in a vein similar to Abu-Lughod (1991), who believed that the very concept of culture sustains and perpetuates the belief that cultures are “identifiable as discrete, different, and separate from our own” (p. 146) and worried about people’s desires to generalize about cultures. Dressman and Webster (2001) found that subsequent editions of Literature as Exploration “reduced discussion of the influence of social environmental factors on individuals readers’ development...suggest[ing] to us an image of readers and of reading more influenced by personal life events than by the societal and historical norms that were frequently mentioned in Exploration’s first edition” (p. 130). Again, an emphasis on the individual over society and culture may account for some of the students’ critical responses not
fitting easily within Rosenblatt’s transactional theory, as critical responses are, by nature, closely tied to conceptions and enactment of culture.

Culture was a mediating factor in the ways in which these students created meaning from the text, as well as in their adoption of stances. Students readily adopted aesthetic and literary-efferent stances because that is how they had been acculturated into English class. These students were expected to engage with the text personally and to do literary analysis, as these were the stances that had been promoted most often in their previous English classes.

The students’ cultural backgrounds also played a role in their adoption of stances. Phil’s brother was in the Marines and expected to be deployed to Afghanistan, so she approached the text from an aesthetic stance even before beginning it. Additionally, four of the six students participating in this study were from nondominant cultural backgrounds. One was not a United States citizen, and the other three had parents who were born in countries other than the United States. It was beyond the scope of this study to examine how each student’s cultural background contributed to the stances adopted when reading the text, but each student’s cultural background – both as first-generation or immigrant students and as English students in a private school in the Southwest – certainly impacted the ways in which they understood the events described in the novel. Furthermore, the culture of the school itself, as well as my identity as a White, middle class teacher in a PhD program in which I was studying critical literacy methods, must also have impacted the stances that the students adopted.

While Rosenblatt’s transactional theory of reader response places importance on the reader’s personal background and experiences in the meaning-making process, in doing so, it necessarily deemphasizes the role of culture as a mediating force in this process. This emphasis
on the individual over the group as well may result in an inherent tension between the transactional theory of reading and critical literacy. This tension may account for why critical responses to texts have complicated Rosenblatt’s theory.

Implications for Classrooms

Class Discussions

One of the findings of this study was that class discussions provided a context for students to adopt both world-efferent and critical stances. Therefore, one implication of this research is that teachers should build time into their class schedules for students to have dialogic discussions about the literary texts they are studying, particularly when teachers are using these texts to increase students’ factual knowledge about the world and to foster critical literacy.

Multiple theorists and researchers have already written about the need for student-centered class discussions to occur around commonly read texts in order to increase student learning. Literacy researchers have shown when students have the opportunity to engage in discussions about texts, positive academic results can occur in areas such as reading comprehension (Santoro, Chard, Howard, & Baker, 2008; Smolkin & Donovan, 2001, 2003), vocabulary acquisition (Beck & McKeown, 2001; Santoro et al., 2008), content area knowledge (Albright, 2002; Heisey & Kucan, 2010; Pentimonti, Zucker, Justice, & Kaderavek, 2010; Varelas & Pappas, 2006), and critical thinking skills (McGee & Schickedanz, 2007; Pantaleo, 2004, 2007; Ranker, 2007). Researchers have also shown that these discussions can result in positive gains in other ways as well, as the discussions about the texts help students make sense of their world and their own identities (Beach, Parks, Thein, & Lensmire, 2003; Dutro, 2003; Glazier &
Seo, 2005; Smith, 2000, 2005) and help them develop intertextual thinking (Albright & Taliaferro, 2009). However, some secondary teachers find it difficult to allot the time needed for these discussions in their classrooms or to justify student-centered discussions to administrators. Nystrand (2006), having observed hundreds of diverse eighth- and ninth-grade American English Language Arts classrooms over several years, found that on average students spent less than a minute a day participating in discussions.

Two decades ago, Shor and Freire (1987) wrote that opportunities for students to engage in dialogic class discussions were linked to social class: “The right to have a small discussion begins as a class privilege. The more elite the student, the more likely that he or she will have a personalized, discussion contact with the professor or teacher” (p. 12). This phenomena can partially be explained by the role that schools play as constructors of social class, actively working to reproduce in its students the attitudes, behaviors, and skills that are most valued by the social class to which the students already belong (Connell, Dowsett, Kessler, & Ashenden, 2000). According to Bourdieu (1990), education is the means by which cultural capital is transferred from one generation to the next. For the elite, exercising the power to voice one’s thoughts and opinions is a symbolic form of capital, whether that power is exercised in a classroom or a boardroom. Therefore, schools that serve higher income students in the United States are likely to place more emphasis on students voicing their own thoughts and opinions than schools that serve lower income students. Although the extent to which Shor and Freire’s (1987) connection between social class and dialogical discussions in school remains intact today has not been quantified, the opportunity to engage in authentic discussions is not given to all students in all schools.
Increased demands placed on teachers and students as a result of high-stakes standardized testing have meant fewer opportunities for authentic class discussions in some schools. Teachers employed by schools whose students have performed poorly on required standardized tests have less time and less freedom to deviate from locally mandated curriculum, which at times includes completely scripted programs for teachers and students to follow (Delpit and White-Bradley, 2003; Kozol, 2006). Dialogic discussions, though, are an effective way to increase students’ knowledge, as this study shows. These discussions provide the scaffolding that some students need to read an international novel from a world-efferent stance and a critical stance.

Discussions have been highlighted as a centerpiece of instruction at least since the time of ancient Greece, when Socrates sought to educate the Athenian youth through an open-ended questioning strategy and dialogue that later came to be known as the Socratic method. Discussions that provide an opportunity for students to think deeply and critically and to explore a variety of viewpoints concerning what is true, what is good, and what is just are vital to the work that educators at all levels should be doing. These types of discussions need to be placed at the center of our curriculum today, for they speak to the very purpose of education itself – shaping students into adults who can solve complex problems, transact with the world around them in positive ways, and live purposeful lives.

Scaffolding for World-Efferent and Critical Stances

One finding from this study was that class discussions provided an opportunity for scaffolding that some students needed in order to respond to the novel from world-efferent and critical stances. Some students who did not respond to the text using these stances, as
evidenced by their individual writing assignments, did use comments from others during class discussions to develop these stances. In this sense, scaffolding is not construed as occurring in a dyadic relationship, in which one expert or authority figure constructs all of the scaffolding deemed necessary for the student to learn, as was implied when the term first came into prominent use (Dyson, 2000/2004; Shabani, Khatib, & Ebadi, 2010; Sherin, Reiser, & Edelson, 2004). Rather, it implies an activity that is dialogic in nature and in which several players may work together to construct the scaffolding that helps another learn.

In this study, the students and I created scaffolds for one another as we worked together to create meaning from the novel. Each participant brought to the class discussions a unique set of personal experiences that shaped his or her developing interpretation of the text. As these personal experiences and literary interpretations were shared, individuals developed new understandings of both the text and the world. Comments made by others sparked some students to adopt world-efferent and critical stances during these discussions as they re-considered their developing interpretations of the text. Some of these comments also gave rise to additional questions about Afghanistan and the political, social, and economic history of Afghans.

Often, teachers will begin a unit that focuses on an international text by providing all of the background information that they believe the students may need to place the text in its appropriate historical context. However, Rosenblatt (1938/1995) discouraged teachers from spending too much time frontloading this background information, insisting that background information “will have value only when the student feels the need of it and when it is assimilated into the student’s experience of particular literary works” (p. 117). The findings
from this study support Rosenblatt’s assertion, especially as the metaphor of a family vacation emerged, in which students compared their acquiring factual knowledge about a novel’s historical and political background to learning educational information while on vacation with their parents. The acquisition and discussion of background knowledge should occur at various times throughout the reading of the novel, with students and the teacher collectively determining what specific pieces of information are needed to enhance their understanding of both the novel and the world.

Promoting the Critical Stance

Another finding of this study was that specific types of aesthetic and efferent responses were more likely to prompt a critical stance than others: aesthetic responses in which students made inferences about character motivation and revealed their personal feelings; literary-efferent responses that invoked text to text connections and analysis of imagery and symbolism; and world-efferent responses in which students shared philosophical statements and made inquiries about factual knowledge. One classroom implication of this finding is that, as teachers promote and guide classroom discussions about a global novel, they should encourage students to consider these particular types of responses. Conducting a follow-up to several studies examining discourse events in diverse eighth- and ninth-grade classrooms, Nystrand (2006) and colleagues found that open-ended teacher questions and uptake, as well as student questions, significantly increased the probability that dialogic discussions would occur. Teachers incorporating discussions in their classrooms could frame open-ended questions around the specific types of aesthetic and efferent responses that were most likely to evoke a critical stance.
However, it is highly unlikely that asking questions like “Why do you think the character did that?” or “How did you feel about that scene?” will alone promote a critical stance. Rather, the interplay among particular aesthetic and efferent responses creates conditions that are conducive to some students adopting a critical stance. In this study, some students evidenced a personal, aesthetic involvement with characters and events in the novel, related those characters and events to real-world situations, and then examined larger issues of power, inequality, and cross-cultural understanding that were suggested by the novel. Both the aesthetic and efferent stances were vital to this development.

Teachers seeking to increase the possibility that some of their students may adopt a critical stance when reading global literature should therefore attend to both the aesthetic and the efferent stances, allowing time and opportunity for students to express genuine personal responses and to place those responses within the context of the real world. Therefore, a teacher might ask, “Why do you think the character reacted that way?” and then extend that question to “What do you think this says about the ways in which human beings behave?” This combination of questions encourages students to respond first from an aesthetic stance by inferring character motivation and then from an efferent stance, building on that aesthetic response to make a philosophical hypothesis about the larger world that could then lead them into a critical stance. Discussion of character motivation in particular encouraged the students to develop critical stances as they considered what Laura Nader (2000) terms “controlling processes,” or the invisible forces that influence how people behave on a daily basis. Prompting students to identify and discuss these forces first in a novel and then in their own lives can also be an effective way for teachers to promote a critical stance.
One unexpected finding of this study was that students forged a connection between literary analysis and a critical stance. Literary analysis can often be perceived by students as an activity that is done for the sake of itself, without relevance or connection to real life (Newkirk, 2002; Smith & Wilhelm, 2002). However, the students participating in this study did not view literary analysis as solely an academic, esoteric activity. It is important to mention at this time that the students in this study had prior experiences with literary analysis that focused primarily on meaning-making. Students did not receive worksheets or assignments that asked them to identify examples of various literary techniques in texts. Rather, students were asked to consider, both in class discussions and in extended pieces of writing, not only what devices an author was using but also what effect those devices had on the meaning of the text. Given these prior experiences, perhaps it is not surprising that some of the students used their familiarity with literary analysis to develop critical stances. It is also notable that imagery and symbolism were the two literary techniques that most frequently led students to a critical stance. Analyzing imagery and symbolism, as it was typically practiced in this classroom, was similar to answering an open-ended question in that multiple responses were considered and valued. Under these conditions, literary analysis, coupled with aesthetic responses, can also provide a pathway for developing a critical stance.

Implications for Research

Breaking Apart the Literary-Efferent and the World-Efferent

When I began the part of my data analysis in which I categorized student responses as aesthetic, efferent, and critical, I realized an inherent difficulty in gleaning information about student responses based on the efferent classification. The efferent stance includes a variety of
responses in which students “do” English class by clarifying plot, analyzing literary techniques, and making text to text connections between works assigned and studied in English class. This part of the efferent stance is a dominant discourse (Gee, 2006) that students learn to use in language arts classes from the early grades. As such, it represents something different than the worldly, factual information-seeking that also characterizes the efferent stance. I therefore found it necessary to divide the efferent stance into two categories: literary-efferent, to represent the stance that is typically evoked in English classes by teachers and that students learn is a part of the classroom discourse, and world-efferent, to reflect information-seeking about the broader world. Other researchers seeking to analyze the efferent stance in student responses may likewise find it helpful to consider these two categories as distinct.

If I had not made this distinction, the results of this study would have been different. Because of the students’ familiarity with “doing” English class, the efferent stance was the predominant stance that students used in discussions and papers. Looking at all efferent responses together initially obscured the fact that the world-efferent stance was one of the least used and one of the stances that students needed support to develop.

Relationship of Stances to Measures of Student Achievement

A further line of research suggested by this study involves determining if a relationship exists between a student’s ability to read from all three stances and traditional measures of student achievement. Are there specific benefits to promoting all of the stances that can be used to help justify the time spent in class to develop all of these stances? The ability to read an international novel from aesthetic and critical stances is certainly not commonly found listed among educational standards, and neither stance is commonly assessed by the standardized
tests that are currently driving much of the instruction in high school classrooms. A correlational study examining the relationship between students’ development of these stances and the reading measurements that are valued so highly in our current educational climate would add to our understanding of why these stances are important and how they function as a part of students’ overall literacy development.

In addition to exploring the relationship between the stances and traditional measures of student achievement, further research is also needed to examine the relationship between students’ reading from a critical stance and nontraditional measurements of achievement. For example, does the development of a critical literacy stance impact students’ college and career choices, philanthropic work, or volunteerism? Critical literacy is intimately tied to ideas of social justice and empowerment. It would therefore seem that students who have been given many opportunities in school to read from a critical stance and have had that stance fostered by their teachers might be more likely to act in ways that are consistent with social justice principles. They might be more likely to continue their education beyond high school, to pursue careers that will enable them to help others, to be actively involved in political work, or to volunteer their time and/or money to organizations that seek to effect social change. Does critical literacy live up to its goal of helping students become more empowered and advocate for a better, more just world? Longitudinal data collected for studies that will identify the development of critical stances in students and then compare that information to the work that students do beyond high school would help answer this question.
Summary

This qualitative study answered two questions: How do students negotiate aesthetic, efferent, and critical stances during the study of a novel set in Afghanistan, and how do the aesthetic and efferent stances contribute to or hinder the adoption of a critical stance? Three main findings answer these questions.

In answer to the first research question, the first finding was that class discussions prompted students to adopt stances that they had not taken in their personal writings about the chapters. Closely connected to this first finding was the second finding that these students needed more scaffolding to adopt the world-efferent stance and the critical stance. Both of these findings point to the benefit of devoting class time to dialogic discussions that will help students develop these stances. These findings also reveal the importance of the teacher and students working together to develop background knowledge throughout the study of a novel rather than the teacher frontloading all of the background knowledge at the start of the unit.

The third finding of the study, which addressed the second research question, was that both aesthetic and efferent stances contribute to the development of the critical stance. Aesthetic responses in which students made inferences about character motivation and revealed their personal feelings, literary-efferent responses that invoked text to text connections and analysis of imagery and symbolism, and world-efferent responses in which students shared philosophical statements and made inquiries about factual knowledge most frequently led to the adoption of a critical stance. Teachers guiding class discussions should ask students open-ended questions that align with these aesthetic and efferent categories.
This study adds to an existing body of research about students’ aesthetic, efferent, and critical responses to texts by describing the ways in which six ninth-grade students negotiated all three stances during their study of a novel set in Afghanistan. It also adds to our existing knowledge about these stances by describing specific ways in which aesthetic and efferent stances contributed to the students’ development of a critical stance. In order to help justify the class time that teachers need to use to help students further develop a critical stance, more research should be conducted that investigates whether or not any correlations exist between specific academic achievements, such higher reader comprehension scores, and reading from a critical stance. In addition, long-term non-academic benefits of reading from a critical stance should also be explored, such as whether a correlation exists between students’ reading from a critical stance and their later college and career choices, philanthropic work, and volunteerism.
APPENDIX A

INTERVIEW SCRIPTS
Interview Scripts

Students were interviewed individually prior to and at the conclusion of this study. The interviews were semi-structured and open-ended. The basic questions that guided the interviews were as follows:

Pre-Study Interview
1. What do you know about Afghanistan (or the Middle East, if not much is known about Afghanistan)?
2. Where have you learned what you know?
3. Do you trust those sources? Why or why not?

Post-Study Interview
1. What are your final thoughts about the book and studying it in class?
2. Did you like the book? Why or why not?
3. Did you learn anything from the book? If so, what?
4. Do you think that the way the author depicted Afghanistan was accurate?
5. Would you recommend that other students read this book?
6. Were there any activities that we did in class that were particularly helpful to you?
APPENDIX B

RESEARCH CODES
### Appendix B

**Research Codes Used to Categorize Students’ Responses**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Parent node</th>
<th>Child node</th>
<th>Additional child node</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Aesthetic</td>
<td>Adopting the persona of a character</td>
<td>Acceptance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Demonstrating cross-cultural empathy</td>
<td>Economics</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Exploring alternatives</td>
<td>Emotional scars</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Inferring character motivation</td>
<td>Family obligations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Fear</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Gender beliefs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Guilt (causing)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Guilt (feeling)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Honor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Hope</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Ignorance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Jealousy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Loss</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Love</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Personal safety</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Power and control</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Selfishness</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Shame</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Making predictions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Making a text to self connection</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Revealing personal feelings</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Reading ahead</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Stating enjoyment of the novel</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Critical</td>
<td>Analyzing cultural differences</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Analyzing lack of power and choices</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Critiquing cultural practices</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Demonstrating cross-cultural empathy</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Noting cultural similarities</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Literary-efferent</td>
<td>Asking questions about the text</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Analyzing an archetype or symbol</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Analyzing foils</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Analyzing foreshadowing</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Analyzing imagery</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Analyzing other literary terms</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Analyzing point of view</td>
<td>Discussing characters’ feelings or development</td>
<td>Making a text to text comparison</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-------------------------</td>
<td>-----------------------------------------------</td>
<td>----------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Analyzing syntax</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Analyzing word choice</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Critiquing the author</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>World-efferent</th>
<th>Asking questions about the world</th>
<th>Stating a fact that was learned</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Demonstrating cross-cultural empathy</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Discussing the political background</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Making philosophical statements</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Making a text to world comparison</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

| Speakers                | Angelica                                       |                                  |
|                        | Cynthia                                        |                                  |
|                        | Dil                                            |                                  |
|                        | Lil                                            |                                  |
|                        | Phil                                           |                                  |
|                        | Tommy                                          |                                  |
REFERENCES


Aukerman, M., & Schuldt, L. C. (2010, November). *Dialogic text discussion as a site for critical literacy*. Paper presented at the meeting of the National Reading Conference/Literacy Research Association, Fort Worth, TX.


Bakhtin, M. M. (2006e). Response to a question from the Novy Mir editorial staff. In C. Emerson & M. Holquist (Eds.), Speech genres & other late essays (pp. 1-9). Austin, TX: University of Texas Press.


Fecho, B., & Allen, J. B. (2005). Teacher inquiry into literacy, social justice, and power. In J. Flood, D. Lapp, J. R. Squire, & J. M. Jensen (Eds.), *Methods of research on teaching the


http://icasualties.org/OEF/Index.aspx


http://www.ibby.org/index.php?id=266

139


doi:10.1598/RT.63.8.4


doi:10.1598/RT.61.4.2


(Reprinted from *College English*, 7(8), pp. 459-466, 1946)


United States Department of Education. (2011). U.S. study abroad programs. Retrieved from [http://www2.ed.gov/about/offices/list/ous/international/usnei/international/edlite-study-abroad.html](http://www2.ed.gov/about/offices/list/ous/international/usnei/international/edlite-study-abroad.html)


Retrieved from

http://online.wsj.com/article/SB10001424052748704821704576270783611823972.htm
