ELEMENTARY STUDENTS’ CRITICAL EXAMINATION OF CHARACTERS IN CHILDREN’S LITERATURE DEPICTING SOCIAL JUSTICE

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Despite the ruling of *Brown vs. The Board of Education of Topeka*, segregation in schools is still quite visible with suburban schools educating a student body of more than 70% White and urban schools comprised of mostly Black, Hispanic, and Asian students. Ideally, a school should dispel social and structural inequities through curriculum and quality resources, but fallibly, schools continue to be the vehicles to maintaining the status quo. Students who develop critical awareness and cultivate a critical literacy stance can become agents of change toward a more democratic society. In the current study, urban upper-elementary-age students were asked to engage in a critical literacy event by critically examining the power positions of characters in books that depict historical social injustice. The six female participants met in several sessions to read books and a newspaper article, use a critical reader response tool, and then engage in critical conversations about the books’ characters. Their dialogue was recorded and analyzed using a critical discourse qualitative methodology. The findings show that older elementary students are capable of seeing multiple perspectives of an issue and can explain characters’ power from born from privilege and fueled by fear and how a shift in power may occur through solidarity. The findings suggest school curriculum enhanced by media narrows the students’ view of discrimination as being targeted mostly towards African-Americans, but those experiences through literature have the potential to expand the students’ views to include other cultural groups. Subsequently, there is a need for broader teacher preparation using books that enhance students’ views of social injustice.
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CHAPTER 1
INTRODUCTION

Statement of the Problem

Despite the ruling of *Brown v. The Board of Education of Topeka* (1954), segregation in schools is quite visible. Black, Hispanic, and Asian students are the majority population in urban schools. In contrast, the average White student attends suburban schools that are 73% White, 8% Black, 12% Latino, and 4% Asian-American (Bouie, 2014). A school’s culture and curriculum should mirror the increasingly diverse population and offer an equitable opportunity for all to learn. A sanitized instructional setting (Comber, 2001) that nurtures a textbook understanding of issues and knowledge will only continue to segregate students’ thinking and strengthen the foundation of the status quo. Beck (2005) poses an interesting question: How have the same schools that repeat the cycle of structural inequality and injustice become hotbeds for students to grow critical awareness and be agents of change?

Ten years after the start of school desegregation, the Civil Rights Act of 1964 banned discrimination based on race, color, religion, sex, or national origin. One of the products born from the Civil Rights Act was multicultural education. Multicultural education was created partly in response to the changing student population (Blum, 1997; Robinson, 2013). By 1986, the minority student population had grown to 30% of the total United States student population (Blum, 1997). According to Blum the social and economic inequities also fueled the perceived need for multicultural education. Multicultural education was to be the means to help create equity and equality, and equal opportunity of education, for all students (Banks & Banks, 1993).

Multicultural education gained momentum in the 1970s, became a mainstay in the 1980s, and started to be criticized by lawmakers by the 1990’s when they saw it as synonymous with
values education (Blum, 1997). Some suggest schools are a model of structural inequality, thus maintain the status quo of wealth and opportunity (Youdell, 2006). If schools are the vehicle for maintaining the status quo, then lawmakers want more control as to the kinds of values spread through multicultural education. Adopting core standards uniform for all students has become a means in which to control the structure and message of multicultural education.

The 2011 adopted Social Studies standards for third through fifth grade students in Texas features a glimpse of historical events such as slavery, Texas’ fight for independence, and how well-known figures affected communities. Students breeze through the American Revolution, War of 1812, the Civil War, World Wars I and II, and finally the contemporary War on Terror (Texas Education Agency, 2011). Each year students in Grades 3-5 devote three instructional weeks exploring the diversity of their communities using the approved state textbook as their resource (Texas Education Agency, 2011). “Mandated curricula with its sanitized versions of knowledge and history contribute to the reproductions of societal inequalities” (Comber 2001, p. 100). Some teachers enhance their students’ experiences of celebrating diversity and understanding how historical events shaped the world with pieces of multicultural literature or a historical novel generally used as a read aloud. When used in strategic ways, literature can provide a forum for students to see a character’s perspective of the event thus helping to shape their understandings. Despite that literature can provide the reader a more intimate or insider’s view of a culture or historical event, the account depicted in the textbook stills seems to reign higher as the truth in children’s and educators’ eyes because of the positioning of the textbook as the approved version of the truth.

One goal of multicultural education or cultural pluralism, is “simply setting the historical record straight” searching for the truth in how Latinos, African-Americans, Native Americans,
and Asian-Americans are a principal part of our history (Blum, 1997, p. 7). Currently we also recognize the need to be informed about other cultures such as Middle Eastern populations and Muslim cultural groups. Two differing perspectives are for students to see the sameness or differences between cultures in order to create a respect for all cultures (Barry, 1990).

Multicultural children’s literature can be a tool to help students take a critical stance on multiculturalism and a critical eye on looking for sameness and differences between their culture and the culture represented in the book (Perini, 2002). Cai (1998) states that “multicultural literature is an important component of the multicultural education movement and a tool that can be used to achieve its goal: diversity and equity in education” (p. 313).

Readers can engage with multicultural literature at multiple levels whether it is discussing the theme’s relationship to holidays, heroes, and curriculum strands, or a more critical stance of viewing problems or struggles of ethnic groups (Banks, 1989). A social action stance asks the reader not only to view the group’s problem or struggle, but to take action concerning the social problem. The action can be a student reaching out to the community leading to a change or the social action can take the form of a discussion of how this social problem fits into the readers’ lives and understanding of how their community works.

Multicultural children’s literature can provide a context to expand the one-dimensional view of social problems or the facts related to a social justice event found in social studies textbooks. Children’s literature can offer a safe space for a young reader to explore the adult world of a social inequity (Fain, 2008). Many pieces of children’s literature center on a character of the same age as the reader, inviting the reader to connect to the social problem through the character. If finding the truth about how ethnic groups contributed to our country’s history and culture (Blum, 1997) is a goal of multiculturalism, then a reader can construct his truth by
engaging in a critical examination of the characters in a piece of children’s literature that depicts a social problem or event of social justice.

*Using Children’s Literature in the Classroom*

Children’s literature is seen by many as pleasure reading or a source of entertainment. Teachers, on the other hand, see literature as having a two-fold purpose: while entertaining the child can be one purpose, literature may also be an instrument in which to increase the child’s understanding of a topic (Yenika-Agbaw, 1997). Good quality children’s literature, recommended by the literary community, has become a necessity in a language-rich literature-based classroom. A plethora of good literature is essential to aide in reading instruction. More teachers are replacing their recommended basal readers with authentic children’s literature as a significant tool in teaching reading (Tompkins, 2001). Reading aloud has been shown to be important to children’s success in reading (Durkin, 1966; McNair, 2011; Morrow & Gambrell, 2002). Time spent reading aloud to students and the amount of time they read is shown to be significant to students’ success in reading. Children learn about themselves and their place in the world through books (Buchoff, 1995). Rudman (1988) explained readers who appreciate diversity in literature are more likely to value others. Specifically, multicultural children’s literature embodies works that help the reader “celebrate the contributions of people of different genders, races, ethnicities, historical eras, and social classes” (St. Amour, 2003, p. 48). A purpose of using multicultural literature in classrooms is to defy the existing precedence of books representing the dominant culture with books representing a variety of cultures (Bishop, 2003; Cai, 2003; Taxel, 2003; Smolken & Suina, 2003).

Teachers that use multicultural literature create a climate that respects diversity, increases self-esteem, and encourages empathy, while challenging stereotypes (Nieto, 1997; Singer &
Smith, 2003). Literature that represents a culture other than the mainstream culture has been described by Bishop (1992) as a dichotomy of mirrors and windows giving the reader a chance to view a different culture like watching the characters through a window or seeing himself mirrored in a story (Cox & Galda, 1990). Multicultural literature can “provide students with both a window to other cultures and a mirror reflecting their own” (Galda, 1998, p. 2). When readers see themselves in books, they realize they have lives and stories worth reading about (Singer & Smith, 2003). For students who belong to marginalized groups, reading multicultural literature helps them to identify with their own culture while informing other students of other cultures. Christianson (2002) suggested literature that represents a student’s culture may increase the child’s interest in their own language and culture (Glazier & Seo, 2005). Cultural diversity may not always be seen in a positive light by readers in the mainstream culture (Barta & Grindler, 1996). Because multicultural literature focuses on non-White characters and cultures, it has the potential danger of then marginalizing Anglo readers (Glazier & Seo, 2005).

At the time that multicultural education was gaining popularity in the mid-1960s, Larrick (1965) conducted an analysis of children’s books counting the number of books that include minority characters and how they are depicted in the book. At that time less than 5% of children’s literature had any representation of African-American characters. Besides a few authors like Ezra Jack Keats, John Steptoe, and Dorothy Sterling, who represented Black characters in quality pieces of literature, most authors showed Black characters as having animal-like qualities or in contrast hardly Black at all, but only lightly shaded in the illustration. Surprisingly, the number of books published about non-White cultures has not increased much since then with still an average of 11% of the total published children’s books representing cultures other than White in 2014 while the diversity of our young reader population has grown
significantly (Horning, Lindgren, & Schliesman, 2015). Underrepresentation of diversity in character and culture can have adverse consequences suggesting to the young reader from a less-dominant culture that their culture does not matter and to the majority reader that his culture is privileged (Creany, Couch, & Caropreso, 1993).

Elementary-age children use children’s literature as a platform to explore fairness and justice and issues of inequality (Fain, 2008) when the teacher also has adopted a critical stance. “Over time and with some scaffolding from teachers as needed, children confront issues of racism, power, social injustice, and discrimination,” (Moller, 2002, p. 468). Age does not affect students’ abilities to describe characters in stories and their expressions specify either subtle or direct understandings of characters’ power relationships. Roser, Martinez, Fuhrken, and McDonnell (2007) found younger readers look at characters more often from a lens of physical characteristics, such as skin color and gender as well as characters’ actions.

As readers grew older, they described characters from an inside view talking more about feelings and character traits, and changes in the characters throughout the story plot (Roser et al., 2007). Roser et al. added reader’s insights may be directly linked to the students’ instruction and literary familiarities. As older readers have more experiences with great characters that become part of their literary core, it may allow them to dig deeper into the heart and soul of the character to explain the character’s motives related to dialogue and actions. In addition, older readers have access to literature that may have more well-developed characters rather than characters stated within the brief pages of text in a picture book. Older students making connections to those well-developed characters give them more perspective in which to analyze characters within a rich context.
Books featuring themes of social justice increase awareness of social issues in young readers. Harste, Short, and Burke (1998) found rural first graders connected to the issues of homelessness, poverty, and oppression after books depicting these issues were read and discussed in their classroom. Their empathy was observed by their actions such as bringing in more items being collected for those in need, writing about giving all or part of $100 to families in need, and declaring unfairness to those who lose their homes or are forced out of their home due to oppressive acts. After the children listened to many books related to racism, the children begin connecting themes between books citing similar examples from other stories. As the children, who were members of the dominant culture, began to challenge the status quo, their teacher observed their willingness to see multiple perspectives. The first graders began to articulate how story characters from the less-dominant group could be seen as the target of the characters of the dominant group.

Books that represent inequalities can be a touchstone text for children’s questions (Laman, 2006). A book may simmer with its readers for more than one reading and may subsequently become a foundational piece to lead the children into a critical literacy event. The social injustice depicted in a book may lead the students to begin asking questions about other populations and how other equally-oppressed groups were treated. First through third grade students who were accustomed to using critical literacy skills began to ask questions that went beyond the story provided in the text. They wondered what was happening to other marginalized groups while the Jim Crow Laws were being enforced and then challenged. The book, Freedom Summer (Wiles, 2005), had been read earlier in the year and revisited later in the school year (Laman, 2006). The students were now synthesizing its message with other learning related to social justice and forming new wonderings.
Reader response becomes essential when asking children to develop a critical stance of a story. These powerful texts that tell an important story of social justice can be reduced to a set of words and pictures if the reader’s only experience is limited to a receptive listening book session. “It is not the literature alone, but the experiences created in response to the literature that determine the power of the stories” (Mathis, 2001, p. 157). Reader response is the symbiotic relationship between the reader, the literature, and the context for response (Galda, 1998). The response can take the form of a written response, a dialogue, or even an action. Reader response is a result of the transaction the reader has with the text. “The meaning does not reside ready-made in the text or in the reader, but happens or comes into being during the transaction between the reader and the text” (Rosenblatt, 2001, p. 1369). Rosenblatt’s efferent to aesthetic continuum obliges a reader to make choices about his stance while transacting with a text. The reader can move across the continuum between the stances of efferent, or acquiring information, and aesthetic, or “lived-through experiences”, (Hancock, 2008, p. 8) while reading a text.

Beyond an aesthetic and efferent stance, a critical stance asks the reader to understand the triangulation between the reader, the text, and the author’s intent (Freire, 1970; Luke & Freebody, 1997; McLaughlin & De Voogd, 2004). A critical stance requires a reader to analyze and evaluate a message, question its intent, and take action relating its multiple perspectives (McLaughlin, & De Voogd, 2004). Critical literacy can be viewed through these lenses: disrupting the status quo, examining multiple perspectives, concentrating on socio-cultural or socio-political issues while promoting social justice (Lewison, Flint, & Van Sluys, 2002). Critical literacy connects the personal position with the political position (Laman, 2006). A classroom that practices critical literacy is one that emphasizes students’ voices and uses dialogue as a means for students to construct meaning (Beck, 2005).
Critical literacy requires an action or response by the reader. The action can be a discussion or dialogue. Younger readers are so spontaneous in their responses that a teacher must be ready to capture those utterances while reading the book aloud. The discussion can take a more formal approach as well with a teacher being a facilitator and/or a participant leading a discussion with a question or an extension of a child’s spontaneous response. So beyond the reader’s initial or personal transaction with the text, how can a discussion with peers affect the reader’s understanding of the text? Gee (2004) explained that readers construct their understanding using their *identity kit*. In Gee’s notion of an identity kit, he distinguishes discourse (with a lowercase d) as talk and Discourse (with a capital D) as talk underscored by being a member of a socio-cultural group where messages are laden with cultural beliefs and values. When a reader transacts with a text, their membership in a socio-cultural group leads to their constructed understandings. Subsequently when the reader engages in a discussion about the text, both their talking and listening modes are prejudiced by their Discourse. Laman (2006) found discussion as a result of a read-aloud contributed to the students’ community membership, but also induced tension and within that tension is where expansion of the readers’ understandings occurs. Pace (2006) found her adult participants in a literature discussion faced peer pressure within the groups’ social norms thus defeating critical stances resulting in tensions in their Discourse (Gee, 2004). Some participants changed their earlier understandings of the text to align their thinking with the group’s cultural norms consequently supporting the status quo (Pace, 2006).

**Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of the current qualitative study was to gain insight to how young readers perceive the roles of characters in children’s literature that illustrates historical events of social
justice. Through a reader response strategy enhanced by a group discussion, the readers will have opportunities to evaluate characters’ positions of power. In texts portraying social justice, some studies (Fain, 2008) indicate young readers often let the perpetrators off the hook and were easy to forgive them and write off their intentions as simply making poor choices. Fain (2008) suggests one should “continue to explore ways to help children construct a deeper understanding of the power issues within their talk” (p. 207). With this study, the current researcher hopes to provide a framework (Christensen, 2009) for young readers to use to begin analytically dissecting the characters and their actions in a piece of literature that represents a historical event of social injustice. Through this framework, it may give the young readers the tools to construct deeper understandings of positions of power as Fain (2008) recommends.

A subsequent purpose of the current study was to invite the students to extend their critical stance to contemporary issues that are taking shape in our extended community in our area of the state represented in two newspaper articles. Rather than see the issue through characters in a book, the students had the opportunity to practice their critical stance by identifying the perspectives and motivations of the stakeholders within the issue and the positions of power.

Bolgatz (2005) proposed children need more avenues to talk about critical issues. With the current study, the researcher provided the young participants a setting to discuss a critical issue that is more contemporary, happening in a rural area near their urban setting. The researcher questioned if the participants would be able to see the relationship between power and maintaining the status quo, as well as, how the participants’ critical literacy experiences with literature affect their critical perspectives when exploring the contemporary local issue.
Research Question

As a teacher of elementary-age students, I often observe my students connecting to characters in stories read together. The students seem to step-in (Christianson, 2002) and live through the characters. Curriculum demands allow only a brief amount of instructional time to dive deeply into character’s actions and the motives that drive that character’s decisions. As a teacher researcher, I have wondered how my students see the characters beyond the traditional Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills (TEKS)-driven character traits questions. How do my students see power distributed in the characters’ position in the stories? Do my students ever begin to examine their positions of power in their own lives by living through the story? As a result of these questions, the goal of the current study was to give voice to the students, value their thinking, and ask them to think about multiple perspectives surrounding an issue. My professional wonderings lead me to my research question: What are urban elementary-age students’ perceptions of characters’ roles in regards to positions of power within books reflecting issues and events of historical social injustice, as well as, a contemporary local event with the potential of social injustice?

Definition of Terms

*Critical Literacy:* a stance toward text that questions the social, political, and economic forces that shape a readers’ consciousness (Beck, 2005; Freire, 1970; Soares & Wood, 2010).

*Culture:* the values, traditions, and social relationships, and the lens in which to view the world created by a group of people that share a common language, social class, and/or religion (Nieto, 2000).

* Discrimination: * the practice of repudiating a group’s privileges, rights, and opportunities that is accessible to other groups (Nieto, 2000).
Multicultural Education: A reform movement in education intended to “transform society and to ensure greater voice, power, equity, and social justice for marginalized cultures” (Cai, 2003, p. 275).

Multicultural Literature: literature that represents relationships between cultural groups; literature that may or may not be written by a member of the cultural group it represents; books written in non-Western cultures that may represent non-Western cultures; literature used as a “crucial tool” in a multicultural curriculum (Bishop, 2003; Cai, 2003).

Reader Response: the transaction between the reader and the text that results in a personal, reflective response by the reader (Rosenblatt, 1978.)

Social Justice: establishing an unprejudiced society by valuing diversity and challenging unjust actions (Robinson, 2013); equal access to liberty, rights, and opportunities for all (Rawls, 2001).

Status Quo: the present situation or condition.

Summary

If social justice requires action and that action can begin with an awareness and discussion, then it is essential to begin nurturing this awareness with young students. The urban students, who themselves are caught in a system of institutionalized structural inequality established to maintain the status quo, are perhaps the more unlikely agents of change. Yet knowledge and awareness are power. Empowering these young urban readers with awareness of how social justice is embedded in our communities is the spur to grassroots change. Young readers can confront social justice through the safe spaces of children’s literature. “Authentic and safe spaces for children are critical as children learn to critically discuss and unravel tensions about their ideas, bias, and opinions connected to issues of social justice” (Fain, 2008 p. 207).
Asking students to dig deeper and analyze characters’ roles and the actions and decisions of those characters opens a window into the students’ perspectives about the event of social justice represented in the book and perhaps provides a mirror in which they look at themselves in relation to the event (Bishop, 1992). Asking students to take a critical/reflective posture towards a book’s characters is very much like a candle and a mirror (Moreillon, 2003) in that the candle brightens a culture other than one’s own while serving as a mirror to reflect on a person’s culture and how he or she functions within that cultural world. Considering a character’s actions in the context of the cultural system in which they exist requires readers to construct a truth about the character or issue (Galda & Beach, 2001). A reader’s critical stance of a book character will require the reader to contemplate the context of the book and the socio-cultural system in which the character is a member.
CHAPTER 2
REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

Overview

The purpose of the current qualitative study was to gain insight to how young readers perceive the roles of characters in children’s literature that illustrates historical events of social justice. This study was grounded in the belief that readers transact with a text through a critical lens creating their own unique truths which are revealed through a reader response event. By using the safe space of a piece of children’s literature and centering on the motives and actions of characters, young readers can think critically and expose considerations of multiple perspectives in order to understand the mature themes of racism, oppression, and inequality.

The review begins with a discussion of the transactional theory of reader response based on the seminal work of Rosenblatt (1978) describing how readers transact with a text in a stance determined by the readers’ intentions, needs, and wants. Meaning-making, rather than decoding words, is the core of the transactional theory of reader response. The purpose set in the current study of reading and discussing chosen texts is a meaning-making act; therefore discussion of this theory is foundational.

A third stance, a critical stance, is a lens in which the students will evaluate the motives and actions of a book’s characters. The researcher asked students to use a template where the participants determined the characters who possessed positions of power within a historical event of social justice. In doing so, the students were invited to adopt a critical perspective of the characters. Therefore, critical literacy is a significant discussion in this literature review. Both critical pedagogy and practice of critical literacy in classrooms is defined. In most of the literature review, the researcher describes studies involving elementary-age students, some in an
urban setting similar to participants in the current study. The role of the teacher/participant observer in a critical literacy event is also defined. Students empowered as problem-solvers and problem-positors are explored in their classroom critical literacy incidents.

Students’ voices and dialogue are central to the critical literacy event in the current study. Understanding how a small group discussion can expand the students’ worldviews, modify their views to conform to the majority or loudest voice, or even silence them is important to the current study. In the literature review, the researcher explains the power of dialogue through the views of Freire (1970), Bakhtin (1981), and Gee (1999). The discussion reveals how dialogue can be transformational or, in contrast, oppressive. The related literature upholds the notion that dialogue can be the action in the critical literacy cycle that specifies action as its final step.

After analyzing young readers’ voices in critical literacy events, earlier studies indicate a need for more and different opportunities to explore critical issues (Bolgatz, 2005). Several studies indicated young readers were capable of seeing multiple perspectives but were quick to allow the positions of power to remain as the status quo rather than challenge the notion of a world where oppressive acts are not acceptable and the oppressors should be held accountable. Focusing on these two ideas is what makes the current study an important addition to the field of critical literacy. The results of the current study can offer a different opportunity for elementary-age students to view acts of racism, oppression, and inequality by students engaging in evaluating the actions and motives of characters. In addition, a discussion forum where they are expected to explain their thinking can potentially reveal how they position themselves in a world where they do not claim membership in the cultural group with power.

In the current study, the researcher used children’s literature that represents historical events of social justice in the United States. The researcher explains the struggle within the field
of children’s literature to define cultural authenticity and the criteria in which to measure. The field is divided as to which view is superior: an insider versus an outsider’s view of a culture and authenticity. The tension around authenticity issues is coupled with the publisher’s focus on marketability of a book.

*Transactional Theory of Reader Response*

Meaning-making or, more specifically in reading, comprehension does not solely rest on the text or the reader, but rather the transaction that occurs between the text and the reader. But neither the text nor the reader is an empty shell before a transaction occurs. Each brings a whole lifetime of lived experiences to the transaction. “Perception of the world is always through the medium of individual human beings transacting with their worlds” (Rosenblatt, 2001, p. 1384). The author of the story brings his lived experiences to the text and the reader brings all of his lived experiences to the text and when the two transact, it creates a new meaning or a new truth for the reader which most likely does not match the author’s truth memorialized through the text. The same text will have as many meanings as it does readers each imposing their own lived-through experiences with the text. Text remains marks or signs on a paper until a reader transacts with it. Readers’ real-world experiences are what make the text come alive.

Rosenblatt’s seminal work in 1938 *Literature as Exploration* followed by her 1978 publication *The Reader, The Text, The Poem: The Transactional Theory of the Literacy Work* is what changed our paradigm in how readers make meaning and how children learn to read. It shifted educators’ attention from thinking that reading is correctly decoding chunks of words to making meaning by engaging in a reciprocal act between the reader and the text (Dressman & Webster, 2001). Teachers then started stretching their instructional focus covering decoding and comprehension forming a more balanced approach.
Rosenblatt (2001) described readers as being in a “stream of consciousness” (p. 1370) where the reader is deliberately making choices regarding the text with which they wish to transact. In other words, a reader may read all of the symbols and words on the page, but purposefully chooses in which frame or stance to connect. Rosenblatt (2001) linked this act of choosing to the idea of “selective attention” put forth by William James (p. 1370). A reader focuses on or selects a message from the text which serves the reader’s purpose. A reader determines a purpose for reading, such as gaining information, and makes that his purpose in reading, highlighting the text that will give him information at the forefront, and the other messages from the text as secondary. The interconnectedness of the purpose and selective attention then becomes a reader’s stance (Rosenblatt, 2001).

The reader’s stance towards a text is not static; rather it is fluid with the reader moving back and forth between stances throughout a text. Rosenblatt (2001) described this movement as a continuum where the reader moves between an efferent stance and an aesthetic stance (p. 1372). This continuum is not strictly to describe the reader, but the writer as well. Simply stated, a reader’s/writer’s efferent stance may be to communicate or gain information and could be described as cognitive or factual (Hancock, 2008) where the aesthetic stance is intended to connect to the reader’s/writer’s lived experiences linking thoughts and feelings describing it as more affective or emotional. Some layman generalize these stances associating an efferent stance with informational texts and an aesthetic stance with reading literature, but Rosenblatt (2001) contended readers move between these stances within any text. Many (1990) found “stance and level of understanding is not text specific” (p. 925).

Cox and Many (1989) attempted to measure the relationship between a reader’s stance and his understanding of the text. The authors measured the written responses of junior high
students after reading three realistic short stories. The students’ responses were coded for stance ranging from mostly efferent stance to mostly aesthetic stance with a mixed efferent-aesthetic stance in the middle (Cox & Many, 1989). Then the students’ written responses were coded for level of understanding the short story describing their understanding as literal, some interpretation, understanding specific story events, and generalized belief about life. Their findings from an empirical position show that most responses, 44%, were either mostly to primarily aesthetic and the students’ understanding was rated higher while using the aesthetic stance. The students, who adopted an efferent stance transacting with the short stories, wrote responses that indicated the student responding to story elements and author’s intent or purpose. One in five students showed a mixed efferent-aesthetic stance in their responses supporting Rosenblatt’s idea that readers move on the continuum. Cox and Many (1989) suggest teachers who use a “ping-pong” (p. 26) style of questioning after students read any text may be sending a message to the reader that reading is about retaining important information. Their research points to the idea of greater understanding if the reader responds according to the stance(s) they used while transacting with the text, especially the aesthetic stance where the reader can relate more on their lived experiences.

Reader response as part of the transactional theory begins with the transaction which Rosenblatt (2004) refers to as the “evocation” (p. 1376). The evocation, being part of the stream of consciousness, affects the readers’ next meaning-making act when the reader may connect the thought to prior knowledge, or reject it as not matching any experience, or even begin to question its message. It is at that point that response begins. The reader may express the response at that time or during a “second stream of reactions” (p. 1377) that happens after the reading in a more interpretive response.
Characterization is one of the most important elements to affect meaning-making of narrative texts. The more central the character to the plot, the most important it is to understand that character (Lukens, 1998). Donald Graves (1999), a leading lecturer of writing instruction, believes that character helps drive a plot. He commented that as educators teaching students to write, teachers focus on the plot, but if teachers emphasize the character, then teachers center on the reader. Characters are contextualized in the plot and setting and cannot be separated in order to be analyzed. Roser et.al. (2007) states, “We consider character as a player-whose decisions, actions, desires, and dilemmas shape plot, and just might invite readers to think deeply about ethics, and moral choices” (p. 548).

**Critical Literacy**

Shannon (1991) explained critical literacy manifests into a critical view of reality that “challenges the injustices and inequalities of the status quo by asking the question, ‘Why are things the way they are?’” (p. 518). Foundationally a critical view is one that embodies the idea that all groups are not created equal, rather they are defined and segregated by social, economic, and political systems. These systems have given some groups privilege or influence. One of the origins of critical pedagogy is the Frankfurt school of social critical theory that starts with the position that people journey through a world of unequal power relationships (Beck, 2005). Power relationships should be identified and questioned. “Responsible members of a democracy are informed and question what they read, see, and hear” (Rozansky & Santos, 2009, p. 178). Critical pedagogy in the classroom helps students develop an awareness of the power within social, economic, and political systems, and how they can affect change in how they view these power relationships (Creighton, 1997).
When critical pedagogy embeds into education, then it results in critical literacy. Critical literacy is a stance, much like an efferent or aesthetic stance. It is a position that we want readers to assume while reading that will lead to a transaction that marries their tasks of reading the words and reading the world (Freire, 1970). “Learners critically examine their positioning within their world and evaluate the realities of the world” (Fain, 2008, p. 201). Critical literacy asks students to critically view the text and illustrations from multiple perspectives, such as the author’s point of view or a character’s point of view (Giroux, 1988) in an attempt to understand the power relationships (Hull, 1993), then ultimately to be expressed by the reader, thus hearing the reader’s voice. Critical literacy asks students to scrutinize their belief systems while looking with multiple perspectives, or many sides, of a text or an issue in a text. Students must first consider the author’s intended idea in light of their own value system. The idea that is generated is the transaction in a critical stance. Rosenblatt (1978) names the product of the transaction between the reader and the text as the poem. Therefore, the reader creates his own unique poem born from his culturally-embedded meaning.

Allan Luke suggests a critical literacy methodology begins by substituting traditional teacher-student roles or interactions with an approach that features students and teachers “talking, reading, and writing learners’ histories and experiences, background knowledge, and world views” (as cited in Jongsma, 1991, p. 519). J. H. James and McVay (2009) tapped into young students’ histories, experiences, and background knowledge when they asked first graders to compare the students’ versions of Thanksgiving to the histories of the First Thanksgiving by adding information from multiple sources.

J. H. James and McVay (2009) asked the children what they knew about Thanksgiving and what they wanted to know. The majority of first graders wanted to know more about what
An essential first step is allowing students to connect to their own personal experiences and question the reality presented in the book while constructing their new meaning or truth. J. H. James and McVay (2009) provided the young readers many books as resources and an adult to help read the books.

The children while recording and sharing information found a discrepancy of the Pilgrims eating either pumpkins or pumpkin pies (J. H. James & McVay, 2009). When prompted to respond to the discrepancy, they clarified it with an explanation that was not supported in any text. Although they were curious about the discrepancy, they easily attached a reason from their lives and decided to still include both contrasting pieces of information in their published class list. Although young readers are capable of seeing more than one side to an event, the data indicated they were quick to explain a discrepancy in the text as a misstep rather than looking from an author’s point of view of possibly including more mainstream foods in the book.

Because history is memorialized in a language or sign system that serves the dominant group, then the history may have a slant to it (Beck, 2005).

In a critical literacy classroom, students’ voices and dialogue are tools used to construct meanings from texts. Shannon (1991) suggested a critical literacy stance can be both a weapon and a tool. As a weapon it is the constant reminder of the systems of inequality, yet in contrast, critical literacy as a tool allows participants a glimpse that a change towards a more democratic society is possible. Students’ multiple perspectives and voices are crucial to that change. If learning is viewed as a social construct (Vygotsky, 1980), then dialogue becomes center to learning. Students’ dialogue is an extension of who they are and what they believe as their truths.
Bourke (2008) used traditional fairy tales as his medium to lead first graders into critical literacy. The children familiar with the story of “The Three Billy Goats Gruff” offered typical first grade answers in noting character traits and feelings of the goats and the troll. When the researcher asked the children “how the troll is feeling,” the action catapulted the students into a critical stance (Bourke, 2008, p. 306). Not often do educators ask how the bad guy is feeling and what has prompted the actions of the bad guy. The question had made the children uncomfortable as it was asking them to make a departure from a well-known story, thus a tension developed. A tension is where the construction of the new understanding occurs (Laman, 2006).

In a subsequent reading, a student questioned why the parent goats would send a baby goat first across a dangerous bridge stating “I wouldn’t do that” (Bourke, 2008, p. 306). The student had expressed an empathetic thought putting him into the story. Bourke (2008) states, “The critical reader not only renegotiates texts but also the world in which he or she is situated” (p. 305). The first graders taking the lead of the student’s inquiry began rewriting the texts of several fairy tales to mirror their own lives and belief systems. Their reconstituted versions revealed their understandings of power relationships and how those relationships can shift. As educators we often see that shift in power or roles in a fractured fairy tale. Despite the first graders steady hold of dichotomies such as good and bad and dark and white and beliefs such as rules are rules, the students were able to challenge and change the power structures within the tale.

In critical literacy, students are invited to identify, question, and challenge power relationships. Students place themselves in the text and represent their understanding of themselves within their worlds through their responses. Third grade students who read a few short stories depicting student-teacher relationships initially reacted to the obvious oppression
exhibited by the teacher (Rozansky & Santos, 2009). But when asked to use a type of drama as their response to the literature, their dialogue about how the roles should be depicted revealed multiple perspectives.

The students began to discuss why the teacher was treating the main character that way and what the character in the story was doing to provoke her (Rozansky & Santos, 2009). They empathized with the teacher connecting to times when conflict occurred in their classrooms or at home and how the adult in the assumed power role reacted to the antagonist. Their final representation of the stories through drama reflected their discussion with multiple perspectives of the teacher/oppressor’s motives portrayed. Bezemer and Kress (2008) described this change in the mode of the message from a text to a dramatic representation as a translation or transduction.

The students represented meaning from the short story in two ways, the script of the drama and the visual setting of the drama. So in this setting, the dialogue set in this social situation was paramount to the students’ critical literacy event in that without the dialogue of how to represent the characters’ roles, the students would have left the literature experience with a one-sided view. Freire (1970) adds that dialogue involves a cycle of reflection and action with the intent of changing the injustice.

Freire (1970) maintains dialogue is a tangible way to express one’s knowing in the context of social and political settings. Dialogue can be transformational when ideas are shared between the members of the dialogue as they gain insights of who they are in their worlds. In the dialogue itself, power is shifted between members as they not only learn about how they fit into their worlds, but also how they fit in the dialogic exchange. Bakhtin (1981) proposed a person’s dialogue is laden with their personal experiences and that hearing and transacting with another’s
view adds to a person’s new worldview. Bakhtin (1981) suggested three categories of dialogue: authoritative, persuasive, and a third being independent and discriminate thinking that is a product of a “separation between internally persuasive discourse and authoritarian enforced discourse” (p. 345). Today, one would associate independent and discriminate thinking as critical literacy (Pace, 2006). Therefore, when students can interact with each other in discussing their views of a piece of literature, then that discussion is adding to each member’s new worldviews.

First and second graders, who learn in an urban setting, were asked to engage in literature circles featuring writings depicting racism, inequalities, and social injustice. Literature circles are small groups of students who choose to discuss a common book. The discussion may be initially started by a prompt, but is fueled by the continuum of responses. Fain (2008) became a participant observer (Schensul, Schensul, & LeCompte, 1999) in a literature circle with urban first and second graders; the majority was Hispanic. The young students’ discussion about a term wetback in the book Friends from the Other Side/Amigos del otro lado (Anzaldua, 1995) spawned a variety of perceptions of what is a wetback. The young readers voiced their understandings of the term wetback as “someone who’s not to other people; or they are wet; or they don’t take a shower” (Fain, 2008, p. 204). The group discussion along with the researcher’s comments helped clarify the meaning and historical context of the term as some of the children had earlier expressed some misconceptions (Fain, 2008).

After the group seemed to settle on a working definition of the term, then students began making personal connections to the term sharing times when they have witnessed or been the recipient of the term wetback (Fain, 2008). The discussion about the term wetback situated within the students’ personal experiences helped all to expand their worldview as Bakhtin (1981)
suggested. Clarifying the term wetback by connecting it to personal experiences fueled the subsequent conversation linking racism to immigration (Fain, 2008). The young readers were able to talk about racism in the context of immigration. Their discussion illustrated how some immigrants have a darker skin color than members of the dominant culture. The children were able to tell how in the story people, who were immigrants, were treated different specifically because of their skin color. Those discussions helped expand the worldview of the participants.

Students cannot only add to the group member’s views, but can also influence their understanding enough to change the participants' analyses (Knoeller, 1998). Similar to a jury deliberating until they have a unanimous decision, a discussion group can steer the overall concluding message about a text that then reflects the thinking of the group’s majority (Pace, 2008). Sometimes voices that challenged the status quo won dominance over the voices that were more mainstreamed as those voices who represent resistance to the status quo spoke louder. Several studies with middle school students or older found that introducing critical issues, such as gender, race, and discrimination, may be too uncomfortable to discuss leaving the participants feeling vulnerable (Alverman, Commeyras, Young, Randall, & Hinson, 1997; Beach, 1997; DeBlase, 2003; Finders, 1997; Lensmere, 1998; Sumara, 1996). Rather than speak up, the students choose to remain silent and accept the majority voice. “Students are not passive participants; they face intense peer pressure and enact multiple identities in classrooms” (Pace, 2006, p. 584).

DeBlase (2003) and Townsend and Pace (2005) particularly looked at adolescent girls and adult women participating in literature discussion groups. DeBlase (2003) found the culture of the instructional environment may have resulted in the passive interaction the adolescent girls had with the literature and more specifically critically challenging gender roles. The girls were
caught in the classroom culture that did not value the voice different from the teacher’s culture; therefore it required the students to be selective in how they contextualized their responses.

For instance, in a classroom where the instructor saw themes as the main reason to discuss the play *Driving Miss Daisy*, a student responded to an example of gender inequality in the context of the bible (Delpit, 2002). The instructor had earlier chastised a student who voiced a less conventional response, so the next student constricted her response to a more teacher-accepted context. “Since language is one of the most intimate expressions of identity, indeed, ‘the skin that we speak’ then to reject a person’s language can only feel as if we are rejecting him” (Delpit, 2002, p. 47). In this teacher’s view of literature discussion, responses had a “safe” quality (p. 291) that mirrored the dominant culture’s discourse.

The teacher, when interviewed, explained that one of her goals was to model what is appropriate according to the dominant culture’s norms (Delpit, 2002). She felt that the girls did not have good models of *appropriate* discourse in their homes, and so it was her place as a teacher to set boundaries as to what was appropriate. The instructor seemed to ignore that the themes of the literature could inform and transform her students. She saw the piece of literature as a piece of knowledge that her students should acquire in order to move about in the mainstream culture.

Fain (2008) warns that educators need to push students towards global thinking without becoming oppressors in instructional settings. The teacher did not believe the literature itself would empower the students, but knowing of the literature and being able to discuss it using norms and beliefs that mirrored her own is what would empower the students (Delpit, 2002, p. 293). Gee (1999) suggested patterns of discourse can norm dialogic events and eventually norm thinking to the social center of the group. Gee stated when a “pattern a mind recognizes strays
too far from those used in a given discourse, the social practices of the discourse seek to re-norm that mind (p. 104).

Multiple perspectives are born from diverse ideas offered by many voices in a discussion (Enciso, 1997). Young readers, first and second graders, were able to look at oppression from multiple perspectives (Fain, 2008). When reading books that depicted oppression, those students did not see the oppressors as villains who had racially-motivated intentions, but rather characters who had made poor choices. Fain’s (2008) subjects were able to connect the oppression represented in the books to real-life events in their young lives. They were also able to communicate that in the future, they did not want to participate in acts of oppression.

When first graders rewrote events in a traditional fairy tale, they adopted a critical stance imposing their views of power, position, dichotomy, and challenging traditional roles and culturally-based rules (Bourke, 2008). The young readers gained a perspective by using a *stepping in* (Christensen, 2004) strategy of assuming the perspective of a character in the story in order to write their revised version of the fairy tale. Good characters “cause us to occupy their world a bit longer” (Roser et. al., 2007, p. 548). Characters help readers comprehend story plots, themes, morals, and lessons, which result in better understanding. The children inferred the power given to a character because of position was represented in the character’s actions and dialogue. The young readers could easily recognize how an illustration could represent the dichotomy of good or bad or evil and just. They never challenged the notion that illustrations may influence the reader’s interpretation, but rather accepted it as a cultural norm, thus reinforcing stereotypes connected to dominant culture, or the status quo.

The researcher intends to show the perspective of older elementary-age students. Where younger readers were easy to accept the actions of the perpetrators as a result of poor choices and
the books features as simply a given in the construction of the book, an older reader may have a more critical perspective as to the characters’ motives and intent of the authors and illustrator’s products.

*A Teacher’s Role in Critical Literacy*

A teacher’s role, whether it be observer or participatory, is important in keeping the discussion authentic and allowing for multiple voices rather than one loud centric voice. Teachers may consider small-group rather than whole-class discussions. Some mention that single-gender or groupings that match discussion styles may be productive. There are no proven methodologies that can ensure an environment of critical literacy.

One key tenet is for the teacher to adopt his or her own critical stance in order to model thinking critically and to understand how to keep the authentic discussion alive and moving forward. As mentioned before with the adolescent girls in DeBlase’s work (2003), the teacher did not herself think critically and in turn became an oppressor in that instructional setting. Text selection is central to a critical literacy event. “The role of the teacher is not to represent identities but to create a space where students can represent themselves and see themselves represented within the books in our classroom” (Dudley-Marling, 2003, p. 315). Teachers must provide access to texts that invite a critical stance.

Transferring the speaking gauntlet from the teacher to the students or sharing the floor is tentative depending on the age of the students, the text, and their background understanding or lived-experiences with the issue (McLaughlin & De Voogd, 2004). Some critical literacy advocates have lists of suggested questions inviting students to look with multiple perspectives or assume a critical stance (McLaughlin & De Voogd, 2004; Bean & Moni, 2003). These questions may be helpful especially if the teacher and the children are new to critical literacy.
Becoming critically aware and emerging into a critical literacy stance is developmental and starts with being reflective. Teachers may ask their students to use a “text to self, text to text, text to world” model (McLaughlin & De Voogd, 2004, p. 58). What may work with one group or one setting may not be guaranteed to work with all groups or settings. Freire (1998) advises, “It is impossible to export pedagogical practices without reinventing them” (p. 11). One of the vital dimensions of critical literacy is its nature to adapt and assimilate to the group of learners.

**Students as Problem-Solvers and Problem-Posers**

Students who assume a critical stance learn to become open-minded, active readers who begin viewing texts from a critical standpoint. Students and teachers together can transform their classroom by employing problem-posing and problem-solving strategies (Creighton, 1997; Freire, 1998; McLaughlin & De Voogd, 2004; Rozansky & Santos, 2009; Simpson, 1996). Problem-posing differs from problem-solving in that when problem-posing, the readers are questioning the author’s perspective of an issue; when problem-solving, readers are reacting to the issue itself. When problem-posing, students may ask “Whose voices are missing?” or “What might a different ending be?” When problem-solving, students may ask questions such as “What action could you take?” “How could you make this event different?”

A group of fifth graders read a selection about Andrew Jackson and his accomplishments (McLaughlin & De Voogd, 2004). The children discovered slavery and relocation of Native Americans were issues during his presidency. The students asked questions about the Native American perspective being absent from the selection. They concluded the very people marginalized by his policies, Native Americans and African Americans, were the same population that did not have the right to vote. Their critical analysis led to a subsequent
discussion about how Jackson’s treatment of those people could have been directly related to their inability to have a voting voice and how later elections were influenced by groups of people who finally had voting powers.

When students problem-solve, their critical stance looks directly at the issue. Comber, Thomson, and Wells (2001) engaged second and third grade students in looking at a problem identified by local government situated in their community that resulted in taking action. The students were situated in a neighborhood that was caught between urban renewal and government-funded housing. Their neighborhood, which lies beside some wetlands, had once been a prospering factory-driven community that fell to economic downturns which led to high-unemployment and high government-subsidized living. An urban renewal project took shape to revitalize the neighborhood and expand the use of wetlands as a park. The children at first became problem-posing when they voiced concern about the aesthetic view of their neighborhood by pointing to the decay of the trees, broken lighting, and poor drainage. The students took action initially by confronting city officials about the decay with letters and faxes. Their teacher, having some knowledge about the over-shadowing urban renewal project, secured physical plans from the planning commission. The children got a first-hand view of how many of their homes were to be destroyed in the name of revival.

The students became problem-solvers when they took further action, by submitting their own ideas of how the neighborhood could be redesigned achieving all of the urban-renewal goals with less destruction (Comber, Thomson, & Wells, 2001). They submitted drawn plans, invited speakers to their school, and engaged city leaders in planning discussions. Janks (1999) advised using a curriculum with a critical literacy connection; “young people need to learn to use a range
of semiotic and representational resources for meaning-making and social change” (Comber et al., 2001, p. 453).

A curriculum that allows children to recognize, confirm, and challenge their beliefs, is a curriculum that can promote democracy, equity, and shared power (Cooper & White, 2006; Giroux, 1987; Shannon, 1995). Burns (2004) invited her first graders to develop an awareness of their belief systems by entering the political arena during the 2000 presidential elections. She acknowledges that her students’ beliefs are an extension of their families’ and communities’ beliefs, but hoped that their critical stance would help expand their worldwide view. Burns situated the curriculum’s mandatory oral and written literacy development in the context of presidential candidates’ platforms. The students brought home to school when they began their journey with parents helping them define one issue or opinion of the two main candidates, Bush and Gore.

After sharing and publishing the issues in the classroom, the students adopted the critical stance by the teacher asking the “what-ifs” (Burns, 2004, p. 60) of each issue if the issue came to fruition. That challenge asked the students to look at the candidates in a different way citing the positive and negative outcomes of the issue and in turn the candidate’s platform. Their action, which is an essential piece of critical literacy, involved discussion, reading, and writing. Burns observed children considering new possibilities away from their original views as they examined their belief system and found they recognized good outcomes from the issues presented by both candidates. Hearing their classmates’ voices, they reaffirmed some of their beliefs and expanded their views leaving them in a conundrum of which candidate they believe in more. The students documented this critical stance in their writing and group discussion followed by their writing.
the candidates and later the elected president. Critical literacy is meant to provide the stage for citizens to bring informed change.

*The Texts in Critical Literacy*

The goal of multicultural education is to create educational equality and “give voice and substance to struggles against oppression and develop the vision and the power of our future citizens to forge a more just society” (Sleeter, 1991, p. 22). Multicultural literature is a tool to achieve the goal of multicultural education. Literature plays a central part in multicultural education, social justice, and reforming the kind of thinking that results in stereotypes (Fox & Short, 2003). Rosenblatt (1995) advocates multicultural literature is a device necessary to nurture the voices needed in a democracy.

Books can make a difference in dismissing prejudice with stories that help us imagine and to live the lives of others (Rochman, 2003). If a piece of literature has that kind of transforming power, then the book has been scrutinized through the lens of cultural authenticity. When the reader transacts with the text, he is transacting with the story’s symbols, illustrations, and the life experiences that the author brings to the story (Rosenblatt, 1978).

Who the authors are and what life experiences the authors share through the story are questions asked when considering cultural authenticity. Much of the debate over cultural authenticity centers on the perspective of the author or more precisely is the author an insider or outsider of the culture depicted in the story. The question is a simple one, but when put in the context of the literary world is influenced by the prevailing crux of multicultural education itself-power.

Some authors write about their own culture as a way to build solidarity for their culture. They hope that their books defy stereotypes while augmenting the positivistic view for readers of
that culture plus expanding the view of readers outside that culture. “One book doesn’t carry the
whole ethnic group experience” (Rochman, 2003, p. 105), so a collection of books representing a
culture may be a better indicator of authenticity. As Bishop (2003) notes “recurring themes,
textual features, and underlying ideologies” (p. 30) are present and make the text set unique to
that culture. Critics proclaim that good stories are told from the inside out (Lasky, 2003).

In contrast, authors who write outside of their culture aim to construct awareness of
cultural differences that may exist between the author, the reader, and the characters. This
intention of the outsider is what seems to be under scrutiny. Writers that represent a culture
different than their own should be ready to accept their boundaries of experience and knowledge.
Author Jacqueline Woodson (2003) asserts that if authors only wrote about their own
experiences, then all books would be autobiographies. Authors who write with either an insider
or outsider view aim for communicating universal themes such as love and hatred, success and
failure, and power and powerlessness.

Lasky (2003) sees the demand of authenticity of an outsider’s point of view as restrictive
in nature censoring any author from writing about any topic he desires. Lasky goes on to say
that if a book’s merit is to be determined by a cultural match between the author and the
protagonist, then that same ethnic match must be demanded of the editors and publishers who
manage the book, which is unrealistic. Cultural authenticity in children’s literature is defined by
Bishop (2003) as “the success with which a writer is able to reflect the cultural perspectives of
the people whom he or she is writing about and make readers from the inside group believe that
he or she knows what’s going on” (p. 35).

The question of a book’s cultural authenticity extends to its illustrations as well. Who is
qualified to represent an author’s message in a socially situated mode? Does the illustrator need
to be a member of the cultural group depicted in the book in order for the illustrations to be considered authentic? Susan Guevara (2003), the illustrator of two of Gary Soto’s books about Chato the Latino cat, says that she is often asked to illustrate books representing the Hispanic culture. She is seen as Hispanic despite the fact she identifies herself as bicultural with her Hispanic origin presiding on her paternal side.

Guevara (2003) states that earlier in her career she was often asked to “tone down the depiction of non-Anglo cultures” (p. 50) by modifying facial features, skin color, and artifacts that may draw the reader’s attention to a specific set of cultural norms in an effort for the book to be more marketable to a wider audience. Some familiar with Guevara’s illustrations in Soto’s Chato books would challenge her intention to underline Latino stereotypes by the way the cats may look like East Los Angeles gang members and Chato’s house may look like a home full of Hispanic iconic figures.

In an effort not to reinforce stereotypes in text or illustrations, a postcolonial theory scrutinized ideas that privilege Western cultural practices and in turn illuminate the voices of marginalized groups by challenging the historical exemplification of socio-cultural groups. Yenika-Agbaw (2003) found after a text analysis of books representing western Africa culture, that books published post-colonization continue to depict African characters and culture as primitive and barbaric or, in contrast, romantic and natural.

As Rosenblatt (2001) describes the transaction the reader has with the text as an evocation that results in the reader’s poem, transacting with the illustrations can be part of the reader’s construction of a new meaning or new truth. Illustrators’ interpretations of the text are adding to the reader’s construction of meaning by the changing semiotics or sign systems that are socially situated (Goldstone, 1999). The reader is changing his position of just a passive
consumer of a good picture book to a producer of new meaning as a result of transacting with the
text and the illustration. Similar to selective attention, suggested by William James (1890), as a
deliberate practice of the reader to select what chunks of text on which to focus and with which
to transact (Rosenblatt, 2001), Goldstone (1999) suggests the reader decides what part of the
illustration to include or exclude in order to make meaning.

The text and the image are a social construct, thus social norms determine how the image
will be portrayed by the artist and interpreted by the reader. Bezemer and Kress (2008) describe
the demands of an illustrator when trying to transduct or move “the written description into the
mode of image” (p. 176). The illustrator has to consider the author’s intended meaning in the
context of the social setting such as how to position the characters and what angle and distance to
reveal along with color and texture or medium. A meaning is “realized or articulated through the
representational means available in a particular culture and its society” (Kress, 2004, p. 443).

Summary

The review of the related literature informed the researcher that a reader constructing a
new truth is complex. The reader as a member of a socio-cultural group transacts with a text and
its illustrations which are also a product of a member of a socio-cultural group in a condition that
also has a socio-cultural context. A new meaning that is unique only to the reader is the product.
The critical literacy studies revealed young readers are capable of seeing multiple perspectives,
but may lack the sophistication and lived experiences to ask why it is that way. The studies
illustrated how important discussion as a reader response can be as an action in a critical literacy
context. Discussion can expand a reader’s worldview or center it to the group’s consensus. The
readings suggested how important the teacher’s role can be in a critical literacy event in selecting
texts, commencing discussion, suggesting looking at events from more than one view.
Many of the studies in this literature review were situated in classrooms. The current study, although not positioned in a classroom, occurred in a setting that had the elements in a classroom. A classroom goes beyond the physical setting of a typical room in a school and instead is comprised of relationships between the teacher and students and among students. The relationships were the center for the current research setting. It was the researcher’s assumption that the relationships between the teacher and students and among students may mirror relationships in a traditional classroom setting relative to mutual trust and respect. Therefore, the researcher believes the events depicted in the related literature will still support the setting for data collection in the current study.

With the current study, the researcher hopes to offer another path for young readers to explore critical literacy (Bolgatz, 2005) and a chance to dig deeper and discuss positions of power within an issue (Fain, 2008). Although similar to a study where first graders used Christianson’s (2009) Acting for Justice template to analyze fairy tale characters’ positions of power (Bourke, 2008), in the current study the researcher engaged older elementary age students and analyzed characters within historical and contemporary events of social justice. The researcher in the current study asked students to first examine characters’ roles in the safe spaces of children’s literature and then apply their critical lens to more contemporary local issues reported in the media.

When asking students to look critically at characters embedded in a story depicting social justice assigning who is in power and who is the oppressed, students are creating their unique truth of an issue. The review of related literature supports the complexity of the task the young students assumed recognizing their own belief system and then stepping beyond their thinking to create a new truth stemming from multiple perspectives of the group discussion. As social
justice does not live in the past, but continues to be an enduring struggle, the students analyzed contemporary issues. Two contemporary local issues were the subject, rather than literature, for the students potentially to become problem-posers (Rozansky & Santos, 2009) looking for whose voice is represented and whose voice is silent.
“Critical literacy comes from a critical view of reality” (Shannon, 1991, p. 518). Social, economic, political, and language conditions privilege some groups of students while oppressing others. Schools are systems of structural inequalities that maintain the status quo by continuing to privilege some while oppressing others. As an educator in an urban school district where most of my students are not members of the dominant group, I ask myself daily how I can affect the status quo. By asking my students to identify events of social injustice and taking action through discussion while constructing their new truth, I am asking my students to be agents of change aiming for a more democratic society. The purpose of the current qualitative study was to gain insight to how young readers perceive the roles of characters in children’s literature that illustrates historical events of social justice. My goal was to answer the question: What are urban elementary-age students’ perceptions of characters’ roles in regards to positions of power within books reflecting issues and events of historical social injustice, as well as, a contemporary local event with the potential of social injustice?

Previous Work

A few years ago, I asked my third-grade students to look at values of characters depicted in the setting of international children’s literature. I was interested in how universal the values of my students are when compared with the values of people in other countries portrayed in children’s literature. After reading aloud international literature, I asked my students to identify what was important to the international protagonists and what evidence from the story supported their claims. The children also wrote about how the characters’ values were connected to their lives. They were able to recognize values that matched their own and beliefs from their value system that were missing in the books. In their writing, they made personal connections that
revealed some universality in their values. My interest in their powerful responses was the
impetus for the research at hand.

Research Design

Prior to beginning the current study, the UNT Institutional Review Board approved the
use of human subject in the study (see Appendix A for the approval letter). Consent forms were
signed by the participants’ parents as well as the participants prior to conducting the study (see
Appendix B for the informed consents).

Participants

The students that participated in this study were previous students in my third grade, so as
to avoid coercion. I am an elementary teacher at a public school in an urban school district. In
this study, I worked with one fourth grade student, one sixth grade student, and four fifth grade
students. Except for the fourth-grader and sixth-grader, the fifth graders have been in class
together for several years and feel comfortable working together. The fourth grade student is a
pseudo-cousin to a fifth-grade participant and the sixth-grade student has worked with some of
the other participants within an extra-curricular group. I chose to only ask girls to participate
because my observation at school has been that the fourth and fifth grade girls are laughing and
giggling when near their male classmates. I would prefer to eliminate as many distractions as
possible. Also after reading some related research about agency, identity, and girls, I question if
having boys present would change the group’s dynamic making some girls feel uncomfortable or
respond differently because boys are present in such an intimate small group setting. Orenstein
(1994) observed in heterogeneous classrooms that boys dominated the verbal responses shouting
out answers, often wrong answers where girls seldom raised their hands and often only when the
answer was correct. Sadker and Sadker (1986) found that girls, when in classrooms with boys,
are less likely to receive feedback and even have their ideas recognized or remembered by the group. Tannen (1990) discovered that girls are more likely to begin their statements with an apology and are less likely to sound committed to their answer using utterances that undermine their meanings.

All of the students who participated live within a few square miles of our school. Our school is unique in that it serves students from two cities with a major highway dividing them. Three of the participants are bilingual and bi-cultural; two of the participants are mono-lingual English and identify themselves as pseudo-cousins whose parents emigrated from Ghana together. One of the participants has a Spanish surname from her father, but she lives with her Anglo mother, grandfather, and uncle and self-identifies as White. All but one of the students has consistent passing grades and all but one student has passed the third-grade STAAR reading test. Two of the students left our neighborhood school for fourth grade to attend a magnet school in our district, but still reside near the school. Two of the participants are in a Talented and Gifted program. One student receives special education services through an inclusion model. One student is part of a Destination Imagination team who advanced to the national arena for competition. All of the participants plan to go to college and as fourth graders engaged in a project where they researched potential colleges and created digital presentations. All of the participants attend schools where more than 90% of the students qualify for free or reduced lunch, although through a grant all students in the urban school district receive free breakfast served in the classroom and free lunch served at school, as well as, free dinner if they stay for afterschool tutoring.

To protect the participants’ identity, I have chosen pseudonyms to replace their actual names. Melissa is a fifth grade student whose family immigrated to the United States from
Ghana before she was born. Her two older siblings were born in Ghana and were also students in my third grade classroom as her family has occupied the same house adjacent to the neighborhood school for several years. Melissa’s older siblings entered the magnet school system in the urban school district and Melissa has expressed an interest in doing so as well. Melissa prides herself in being a good student, always completing her homework, and doing her best at school. She often adds to her learning by extending research on a topic or taking an assignment to the next level. As a student she had a strong voice in the classroom always expressing her opinion, but in a respectful manner allowing others to share first and then either agreeing or respectively disagreeing.

Lily, whose family immigrated to the United States with Melissa’s family, identified herself as Melissa’s cousin. Lily’s family does not reside in our school neighborhood, but attends the school through a yearly transfer so that the children from Melissa and Lily’s families can be together and be cared for by both mothers and fathers arranging their work schedules in order to care for the children after school. Lily was born in the United States like her older sister, but her older brother was born in Ghana. I also had the pleasure of having Lily’s older siblings as third grade students. Lily’s older siblings have also seen success in the urban school district with her brother winning a district-wide oratory contest and her older sister being a district finalist in the same oratory contest. Lily is more of an exhibitionist than her pseudo-cousin Melissa often creating classroom events in order to capture the attention or gain control of the floor during a discussion. Although Lily loves learning and gaining knowledge, she is a bit less meticulous in her studies than her family would like her to be.

Selena is the youngest girl in a family of three girls cared for with a loving and supportive father and mother. Her parents are immigrants from Mexico and are more
comfortable speaking in Spanish, although they understand and read in English. All three girls were born in the United States and have resided in our school neighborhood for most of their lives. Her two older siblings were also students in my third grade class. The girls are bilingual Spanish and English speakers and bicultural in self-identifying as having two cultures Mexican and the United States. They celebrate traditional Mexican events, such as quinceneras, Diez y seis, dia de los muertos, Three Kings Day, and Mother’s Day in Mexico. Her father’s love of music, especially playing the guitar, is a significant part of their family life. Selena loves everything about school, although literacy is not her strongest content area. Her effort in all of her subjects is more than expected, but she still struggles with reading and writing. She is more comfortable communicating her ideas orally and enjoys engaging in class discussions.

Maricarly is a fifth grade student whose parents grew up in our school neighborhood and remained there to raise their family. Maricarly’s grandparents are from Mexico, but her parents were born in the United States. She is mostly an English speaker around her peers, but when a classmate needs clarification in Spanish she communicates to that student in Spanish. She is the older of two girls with her little sister being four years younger. Her maternal grandmother cares for both girls after school and lives at her house. Maricarly is a quiet and reserved, mature young lady. She excels in school and loves a more project-based approach where her leadership qualities surface leading a small group in a task. In the classroom, she loved being the reporter for the group. In group discussions, she is likely to listen to several speakers first before sharing her thoughts. She was often the student who could lead the class discussion to a deeper level or towards a new perspective.

Melanie and Maricarly, whose mothers were childhood friends, are neighbors and good friends as well. Melanie lives with her mother, her maternal uncle and grandfather in the house
in which her mother grew up. Melanie, who has a Hispanic surname, identifies herself as White as her mother, uncle, and grandfather are White. She is a mono-English speaker and identifies with the White urban culture of her neighborhood. The school she attends has less than 5% White students, so most of her friends are a blend of diverse cultures. She is an excellent student always doing what is expected of her. She is planning on going to college and completed a college-related project last year expressing an interest in a local university, although she has not yet committed to what she would like to study. She has a quiet demeanor like her mother. Her mother is a strong young woman who wants her daughter to excel and be happy in school and in life. Her mother, who has flexible working hours, often accompanied us on field trips and participated in school events. Melanie has a dry sense of humor and inserted it into a conversation when appropriate. She loved participating in class discussions, but her quiet way often allowed her time to think about what other people were saying before she added to the conversation. She is very popular at school with both boys and girls and is unaware of her natural beauty which, at times, makes boys and sometimes girls a bit intimidated.

Paloma is a sixth grade student attending a local middle school. She is bilingual speaking English and Spanish and bicultural identifying with both the Mexican and White culture in her neighborhood. Her mother grew up in the neighborhood and has decided to raise her family close to her childhood home. Paloma had a very close relationship to her maternal grandmother. As my student, she talked about and often wrote about her memories of her grandmother who had recently passed away. Her grandmother had greatly influenced Paloma’s identification with her Mexican culture. She mostly spoke English at school, but would communicate in Spanish to dominant Spanish speakers at school. She is the older of two girls with her younger sister being three years younger. Her mother remarried while she was in my class and she identifies her step-
father as her father as he represents a loving, caring relationship with Paloma and her younger sister. Her mother is active in the school despite having a demanding full-time job, always attends school functions, and even serves on the PTA Board. Paloma enjoyed engaging in class discussions and often assumed the less popular point of view. She was not afraid of speaking from multiple perspectives and valued voice and opinion over being the same as her friends. She is a very hard worker at school and would attack her weak content area by coming before school for extra help and participating in after-school tutoring. She is quite successful in middle school and has joined the ROTC program as a way to help offset some later college expenses.

*The Researcher*

I have always been connected to literature either as a reader or a teacher. As a child, my home was full of books and my father often took me to our public library. My father was an insatiable reader reading at least one or more books per week. I remember being an elementary school student in the 1960s with my parents allowing me to purchase books from a school book club and how excited I would be when the books arrived. Many members of my family were involved in the aviation industry including my father who was an aeronautics engineer, my great-uncles who helped establish the aviation company in my hometown, and my grandfather who flew his plane to neighboring valleys to deliver mail. During World War II, my family built several small airports in Florida and trained RAF pilots. So naturally one of my favorite books as a child was *Ann Can Fly*.

When I was a beginning teacher, a whole-language movement became a popular philosophy with children’s literature being center to that way of thinking, so my school district emphasized using books in the classroom. I had not had much experience in college using children’s literature as a teaching tool, but I embraced a literature-based program quite naturally.
I soon began to grow an impressive collection of children’s books to use in instruction and also for children to use to advance their literacy. It was then that I saw the power of a book in that it can model or explain any concept in my curriculum; I found a book for any topic I wanted to teach.

I was born and raised in a small town in the Appalachian Mountains in central Pennsylvania. There was a Teacher’s Normal School established in the early 1800s which has now become a small university in the public university system. There are several teachers in my family so teaching seemed expected of me. As a high school student, I volunteered in my aunt’s second-grade classroom as part of my community service. I loved sitting at her kitchen table at night and weekends and talking about school. She was once nominated as Pennsylvania Teacher of the Year and participated in many research settings at the University of Pittsburgh and Pennsylvania State University, as well as our local college.

My parents were liberal democrats where many dinner conversations were devoted to the social injustice events occurring in the United States from the time I could understand the dialogue’s messages to the present. Although by the 1960s my community had become more of a melting pot of second and third generation European immigrant populations, I was aware of the settlement of my town with ethnic groups occupying specific neighborhoods that my mother referred to as wards. My family is the essence of the American dream of hard work can help a person rise from meager means to successful businesses.

I had never experienced the kind of racism occurring in the southern states, but my mother often shared with me her experiences visiting our family in Florida during World War II. She would tell me how uncomfortable she felt as a child having to skip ahead of Black families in line at the local store. She saw the segregated restaurants, bathrooms, and water fountains. It
confused and saddened her to see people treated that way. My aunts and uncles she was staying with would tell her that she should not question the way things were done because they were all *Yankees* and having difficulties of their own fitting in. She also shared with me that her grandparents, German immigrants who owned a grocery store in our hometown, stopped speaking German in the store when WWII erupted and reserved that language for only in their home.

I had less than 200 students in my high school graduating class with only one African-American student and a few international students as their parents were connected to our local college. The majority of our population was Anglo and Catholic or Protestant. A nearby city, Williamsport, had a more diverse population with housing projects built to house a large Puerto Rican population offering affordable housing away from Philadelphia. I completed my student teaching assignments in Williamsport which was my first encounter teaching students from diverse backgrounds.

When I moved to Texas upon graduating from college, I was interested in teaching in an urban area as a result of my positive student teaching experience. I have taught in an urban school district for 32 years in three elementary schools. I have witnessed a transformation in two of my schools as starting with a predominately White, middle class student population change to a predominately Hispanic, high-poverty population. In my second year of teaching, my principal asked for volunteers to teach classes of all English-as-a-second-language learners and pursue ESL certification. Since then, I have always taught ESL and general education in first through third grades.

I attended for college credit a reading academy sponsored by my school district. I decided to continue my studies in the field of reading education and earned my master’s degree
along with my Texas certification as a Master Reading Teacher and Reading Specialist. I served two schools as a classroom teacher and a Master Reading Teacher establishing a Literacy Room, training teachers, and occasionally assessing other teacher’s students in an effort to help teach the children better.

A few years later, I decided to return to the same university to earn my doctorate degree. I immediately met a fellow doctoral student who influenced the path I would take. Her research interest was established in critical literacy. I had never heard of critical literacy and could not even understand it the first time she explained it. Through extensive conversations and sharing other classes with her as well as attending her dissertation defense, I was able to construct my deeper understanding of critical literacy which helped me see that it was the way I view my teaching environment. Therefore, my wonderings began to combine my love of children’s literature and my understanding of critical literacy.

The Texts

I have chosen a text set of books that illustrates social injustice in a historical context. All of the books exemplify an event of injustice that is well-documented. All of the books represent a protagonist that rises above his circumstances to overcome the act of oppression. All but one of the books represents the events during the Civil Rights Movement that the children have been privy to through their social studies curriculum. Although their social studies curriculum features the notable figures or heroes of the abolition of slavery and, 100 years later, the Civil Rights Movement, they may not be as familiar with the pivotal events that drove the crusade. The students may not be acquainted with the *Mendez vs. Westminster School District* and the Greensboro Sit-ins. Some educators wonder if young children should be interacting with books that portray such adult themes or historical contexts, but Laman (2006) believes “children
routinely experience exclusion, bullying, academic tracking, and racial and linguistic prejudice” (p. 204).

In considering cultural authenticity and criteria that define a book as an exemplary book, I was aided by the many children’s books awards that have identified exceptional literature. Some of the authors are insiders to the culture about which they write and some would be considered outsiders although they have some connection to the event that they represent in their work. Most of the authors writing from an outsider perspective have spent time in the setting of the story. The same description could be made in considering the artists. All of these books are considered picture books where the pictures aide in the meaning-making of the story. “In a picture book, the words of the text and the sequence of the illustrations contribute equally to opportunities they provide for constructing meaning” (Sipe, 1998, p. 66).

White Socks Only written by Evelyn Coleman; illustrated by Tyrone Geter; Albert Whitman Company, Chicago, 1996

A little girl in rural pre-Civil Rights Act Mississippi ventured off alone into town wearing her best clothes including white socks. When she saw a water fountain with a sign Whites Only, she took off her shoes before getting a drink thinking that the sign was referring to her white socks. Members of the Black community rallied around her safety when a White man was planning to punish her. The book was a 1996 Notable Book for Children.

Sit-in How Four Friends Stood Up by Sitting Down written by Andrea Davis Pinkney; illustrated by Brian Pinkney; Little, Brown and Company, New York, 2010

This book is a third-person account of the February 1, 1960 sit-in by four students from a local college at the Woolworth lunch counter in Greensboro, North Carolina as part of a series of rallies, marches, and peaceful protests sparked by a visit by Dr. Martin Luther King. The book
tells a factual account of the events and is supported by a timeline detailing the Civil Rights Movement. This book was honored as a New York Times Bestseller, 2011 winner of the Flora Stieglitz Stauss Award for Nonfiction, 2011 winner of Carter G. Woodson Award, 2011 honoree of Jane Addams Children’s Book Award, 2011 Notable Social Studies Trade Book for Young People.

*Freedom Summer* written by Deborah Wiles; illustrated by Jerome Lagarrigue; Aladdin Paperbacks, New York, 2005

Joe, a White boy, and John Henry, an African-American boy are friends and spend time together during the summer as John Henry’s mother works as a domestic worker in Joe’s house. A law passed forbidding segregation of public places and the town pool was then available to everyone. The boys already loved swimming together in the area ponds, but now can swim together in the public pool. The day before the pool was to open to the public, the town decided to fill in the pool with tar and cement making it impossible for anyone to swim. This book was honored as a California Young Reader Medal Nominee, A Children’s Literature Choice Book, a Library Talk Editor’s Pick, and Ezra Jack Keats Book Award, and the Coretta Scott King Award John Steptoe New Talent Award.

*Separate is Never Equal: Sylvia Mendez and Her Family’s Fight for Desegregation* written and illustrated by Duncan Tonatiuh; Abrams Books for Young Readers, New York, 2014

Sylvia Mendez was an elementary-age child who was an American citizen of a Hispanic family in California in the mid-1940s. Her family moved to a school in Westminster, California. She was denied enrollment in the local public school and told to go the “Mexican School” while her Mexican-national lighter-skinned cousin was permitted to enroll in the local school. Her father filed a lawsuit, *Mendez v. Westminster School District* that eventually led to ending
desegregation in California schools seven years before the landmark *Brown v. the Board of Education in Topeka, Kansas* that eradicated school segregation across the nation. The author/illustrator was a winner of the Pura Belpre Award for an earlier book.

I chose a book to use as a model to demonstrate the *Acting for Justice* template. The book, *Thank You, Mr. Falker* is familiar for the participants having read it to them several times when they were students in my classroom.

*Thank You, Mr. Falker* written and illustrated by Patricia Polacco; Philomel Books, New York, 1998

The author tells her story as a young elementary-age student who excels at drawing and painting, but has difficulty reading, therefore, is teased by classmates. A new teacher appears at her school and helps her overcome her reading disability. This book won the Parents’ Choice Award in 1998 and the South Carolina Children’s Book Award in 2001. The author/illustrator has won many other awards for her children’s books.

I have chosen a newspaper article describing a contemporary issue of social injustice in a small town situated near the participants’ community. Although the article was written to appeal to a more adult reader, I believed the length and simple explanation of the issues was appropriate for the participants. It was necessary for the group to read it together and engage in a question and answer period before, during, and after reading to account for any misconceptions and to clarify any questions to support their understandings.

*Residents at Farmersville meeting greet Muslim cemetery plan with distrust.* Hundley, W.


Residents of Farmersville, Texas attend a town hall meeting to discuss the issue of their city council granting permission for zoning for a Muslim cemetery. A growing Muslim
community in Collin County is looking for a large parcel of land to develop into a cemetery. The residents of Farmersville (which does not have a large Muslim population) are concerned about traditional Muslim burial practices not aligning with Texas law that governs burial. The bigger issue seems to be that the Farmersville residents are wondering how this cemetery may change their community.

*Framework for Data Collection*

I read aloud the books and the article to the participants. I asked the participants to use a reader response tool promoting critical reading by considering the roles of the characters in the story. After recording their thoughts on the template, the participants brought the template to the discussion and used it as a framework for expressing their perceptions about the characters’ roles. The reader response template is one that Linda Christensen (2009) shares in her book, *Teaching for Joy and Justice*. The critical reader response template is entitled *Acting for Justice* where readers identify story characters as being targets, allies, bystanders, and/or perpetrators. The template is in Figure.

*Figure.* Acting for justice template.
Christenson (2009), who works mostly with high school and college-age students, uses this critical reader response strategy after reading stories that describe social injustice. She hopes her students can see that sometimes characters can play more than one role in different parts of the story meaning these labels can be fluid. Laman (2006) used the Acting for Justice template with a group of first through third-graders after reading the book *Freedom Summer*.

Christensen (2009) mentions in her book that she borrowed the terms “target, perpetrator, ally, and bystander” (p.85) from the British Columbia Teachers Union. Christenson describes how she defines the terms before her students begin using the Acting for Justice Chart, but that the definition of the terms expands as her students use the terms more. According to Christensen, allies are people who stand up for someone when they face injustice. The target is the person or group who is the target of injustice. The perpetrator is the person, group of people, or even a law that commits the act of injustice. The bystander is the person who observes the act of injustice, but who does nothing to intervene or stop the injustice. I used the book *Thank you, Mr. Falker* (Polacco, 1998) as a practice selection that we read together as a way to contextualize the meanings of the terms on the Acting for Justice Template and to model the expectation of the participants. When the participants took their Acting for Justice templates to the group discussion, then I digitally voice recorded their dialogue.

*The Setting*

I first met with the potential participants and their parents in the hotel that would become the setting for the data collection. I reviewed all of the research design, documents, and literature with the parents first and then the students and parents together. The data collection occurred shortly after the initial meeting on five evenings from 5:30-8:00 in a small conference room in a nationally-franchised hotel about two miles from the participants’ school.
neighborhood during the two-week winter break and first week in January. The hotel has been quite involved with my school becoming a donor about two years ago. The hotel hosts back-to-school brunches, offers free nights to stay as gifts, and purchases resources that are not in our school budget. As a teacher researcher, they agreed to allow me the use of one of their conference rooms for free, if I paid for food and drinks for the participants during the evening meal time. The conference room had a large table and 15 chairs. The acoustics in the room were designed for audio and video taping, so it allowed recording the group discussion an easy task with little acoustical interference. I engaged the services of a friend who helped me greet the students, ate dinner with us, and remained in the lobby each evening until the girls left acting as an extra adult in case a participant needed to leave the conference room. Each evening, I greeted the students in the lobby as their parents dropped them off and accompanied them to the conference room. At the beginning of the first session while the girls were eating, I explained our task and began sharing the book to serve as a model for the process. I used a portable dry erase board to model our expectations and understandings. I provided the Acting for Justice templates, pencils/pens, and children’s literature. At the end of each session, I accompanied the students back to the lobby and waited for each student to be picked up by their parents.

Rationale for the Design

Educational settings are “communicative events” (Rogers, 2011, p. 1) in which communication or discourse constructs the students’ social worlds through many sign or semiotic systems. Therefore, discourse analysis seems to be a logical design for the current study as the participants are planning to construct their perceptions socially of the characters’ roles in stories. Florio-Ruane and Morrell (2004) describe three features of educational conversation with a cultural context:
1. Jointly constructed by participants
2. A medium for negotiation of meaning by speakers within a particular social context
3. Rule-governed so that all participants understand the expectations, but is genuinely spontaneous. (p. 48)

Critical discourse analysis is a study of language in its relationship to power. Foucault (1981) believed that critical discourse is discourse that produces a new truth in the one speaking it and the one receiving it. Foucault saw participant’s discourse as a result of power relationships. Power is principal to critical discourse events. Critical discourse analysis focuses on the participant constructing new truth as a result of the power and positioning with the setting of the discourse. Therefore, when critical literacy calls for an action to be taken, critical discourse analysts believe participating in the socially and politically-constructed discursive event is in essence taking action (Rogers, 2011). Critical lenses have implications not just as social practices but also in status, solidarity, and distribution of power (Gee, 2005). Critical discourse analysis distinguishes making meaning as an examination of power (Rogers, 2011). Fairclough (2001) suggests that a critical view examines power as: “the power to,” “power over,” and “power behind” (p. 4). Because I am asking my students to become more critically aware which has the potential for the students to become agents of change towards a more democratic society, then their participation in the discussion of books representing social justice is the beginning of the potential action they can take.

Data Collection

I established with the participants that we each have roles and responsibilities. Although I was their teacher, I asked the participants to see me as a member of the group (a participant-observer) rather than a teacher or leader. I specifically asked them to not respond directly to me but to respond to the whole group. I explained that I would be audio-recording our conversation,
taking notes, but would try not to give any verbal or nonverbal signs of approval or no approval to their dialogue as they are used to my teacher role confirming their ideas through cues. I asked the participants to establish some ground rules about our sharing and conversation. Our ground rules included:

1. Listening respectfully.
2. Waiting until the speaker is finished to comment or ask a question.
3. Ask questions respectfully.
4. Do not serve a drink or get more food while someone is speaking.
5. Leave the room together for restroom breaks.

I shared the Acting for Justice template and the author’s definitions of target, ally, perpetrator, and bystander. As we discussed each term, I encouraged students to connect to the term with other words that mean the same or examples from their own lives. I explained that they do not need to write all of the characters in a box nor do all of the boxes need to be completed. Within the context of the practice story, Thank you Mr. Falker, I gave an example where characters can belong to more than one box at different times of the story and that ideas or ways of thinking can be an idea in a box on the template.

I introduced each book by the cover first and allowed the students to respond to the cover and make any connections before I began reading. I read aloud the book, stopping anytime any participant wanted to comment. When the read aloud was complete, I left the floor open for any participant to informally respond verbally to the book. Then I wrote the characters’ names on the dry erase board permanent to the conference room and allowed the participants a quiet time to record their ideas on the Acting for Justice template. Examples of the participants’ templates are in the Appendix C.
In the session where the participants responded to the contemporary community-centered issue rather than the literature, I used a newspaper article as the text. I collected data in the same manner as when I used literature by first introducing the issue depicted in the article allowing time for the participants to make initial responses and ask questions. The participants each had a copy of the article to read chorally. I brought an area map so that they could see where the community was detailed in the article. I introduced the word Muslim explaining that Muslim was a word to describe a group of people who practice the religion of Islam. Only one participant, Paloma, made a connection to two students in our previous third-grade classroom who are Muslim. As we read the article together aloud, I needed to clarify or extend many words and restated information related to the issues in a way that the participants understood. The participants were often asking what a particular word, phrase, or idea meant. I asked the participants to use the Acting for Justice template to identify the positions of the stakeholders featured in the article. I recorded the participants’ discussion about the local issues.

As a teacher-researcher, I participated in the discussion as more of a facilitator role in that I restated parts of the discussion for clarification or extension by posing questions, asking for more information to restate or clarify a participant’s idea or to ask the participants to look at an issue or character in a way in which they had not yet expressed. I strove to keep the talk between the participants authentic in light of their small group discussions and less like a classroom-like discourse (Cazden, 2001) where the participants are looking to the teacher as the center of the dialogue and concerned about grading. Nystrand (1999) found little authentic dialogue as a literature response and proposed a need for more realistic interaction. As a participant-observer, my goal in participating was in keeping the discussion authentic.
After each session, I transcribed the audio recordings of our informal and formal discussions of the literature and articles. I used the Olympus WS-822 Digital Voice Recorder. This device has the capability to connect to any computer for clear voice playback making an optimal environment to transcribe the participants’ conversations.

Data Analysis

Coding is a way to analyze qualitative data. Coding as an analysis tool is the act of labeling “a word or short phrase that symbolically assigns a summative, salient, essence-capturing, and/or evocative attribute for a portion of language-based or visual data” (Saldana, 2013, p. 3). This being a beginning experience for me to code dialogue beyond brief conversations, I took the advice offered to beginners by Saldana to code anything and everything (p. 17). I coded the students’ dialogue looking for patterns that led to categories. The categories were connected to themes. A list of the codes is in Appendix D.

First cycle coding is the initial coding of the dialogue. I manually coded the dialogue employing the coding method of Versus Coding. Versus coding is appropriate for most qualitative studies and is often used in critical discourse analysis. It has been previously used in research where the researcher has taken a side of an issue or for “initiating and facilitating social change” (Saldana, 2013, p. 116). In the current study, it was not the researcher that assumed a side, rather the act of oppression, racism, or inequality depicted in the book that invited readers to take a stand. Saldana suggests Versus Coding can be reduced to three categories: “Stakeholders, Perceptions/Actions, and Issues” (p. 117).

Within my first cycle of coding, I created a codebook or code list as a reference for both me and the readers of my analysis. I continued adding to the codebook as I entered into more cycles of coding each time with a different lens or purpose. I also used a device called an
Analytic Memo which is compared to a journal entry or a blog or a personal observation in your field notes. It was a place where I would think aloud and jot down ideas that were emerging in the data. It became a personal space as a researcher where I reflected on my experience and what was developing in front of me.

Saldana (2013) describes an organization of codes to categories. Codes are structured into larger categories and possibly subcategories. The current study had the potential to support the categories of Oppression, Power, Change, Desire, Discrimination, White Supremacy, Exclusion, and Inclusion. Some possible subcategories that further strengthened the organization were:

- Oppression through physical force.
- Oppression through verbal interactions.
- Oppression through the law or legislation.
- Oppression through fear.
- Power through physical force.
- Power through verbal interactions.
- Power through law or legislation.
- Power through fear.
- Power through myth or legend.
- Discrimination because of skin color.
- Discrimination because of membership in a cultural group.

In my first cycle of coding, I looked for dialogue that represented “Stakeholders, Perceptions/Actions, and Issues” (Saldana, 2013, p. 117). If a participant mentioned how a character who was a stakeholder within the issue perceived the issue or acted toward the conflict,
I coded it with a PS (primary stakeholder) symbol. When a participant described how she perceived the action or issue or made a personal connection to the action or issue, I coded it as PA (perceptions/actions). If a participant made a statement that was directly about the issue, then I coded it as IS (issue). It was after this first cycle of coding did I begin seeing that large chunks of dialogue were not coded and new patterns were emerging.

So in my second reading of the transcripts, I highlighted with different colors, dialogue that directly spoke to the literature and dialogue that told a story outside of the literature. When I looked solely at the participants’ dialogue that extended beyond the book, I started to see three categories: how media influenced their perceptions, when they made a personal connection to their lives, and when they shared what I called a Life Lesson, for example, *all parents want what is best for their children*. So I coded the dialogue that was highlighted to represent ideas beyond the books as M (media-influenced), PE (personal experiences), and LL (life lessons).

In my third reading of the transcripts, I looked for categories that I thought might emerge through their discussion of the characters and their actions in the books: Oppression (O) and Power (P) and Change of Power (C). Although the conflict in the books selected for this study would depict oppression and power, I did not limit this part of the coding to only the dialogue related to the books, but coded the whole transcript. When the girls spoke to oppression, I coded it as subcategories OPF (oppression through physical force), OVI (oppression through verbal interactions), OF (oppression through fear), and OL (oppression through law or legislation). Power had the same subcategories: PPF (power through physical force), PVI (power through verbal interactions), PF (power through fear), and PL (power through law or legislation). There was one particular book, *Separate Is Never Equal*, when the participants described oppression and power with the word discrimination. When they used the word discrimination, I coded it as
discrimination because of skin color (DSC) or discrimination because of cultural group, specifically Mexican (DM).

When I looked for dialogue that indicated a change or shift in the power between characters, I noticed a new subcategory that was incipient through the girls’ conversations. When the girls conversation would indicate they noticed a change or shift in power within the context of the book, they talked about how a change occurred mostly because a group of people bonded together to produce the change. So I began to code dialogue that indicated a change of power (C), as a change of power because of solidarity (CS), or in a few instances, a change of power because of myth or legend (CM), and change of power because of a law or legislation (CL).

A piece of the transcript that still had not been coded represented the participants’ questions as part of their conversation. I used a third color of highlighter to distinguish their questions visually from the other interactions. As I reread their questions, I noticed a few patterns emerging from their questions: questions that were answered by their peers (QAP), questions that were answered by the researcher (QAR), and questions that were never answered (QU). Another observation I made was the immediate need of the question: question asked for clarification (QC) and questions asked as almost an ‘I wonder . . .’ (QW)

In the findings section, I will describe the patterns discovered within these categories within the framework set forth through my research questions. I will report the relationships between power and characters’ position in the text that my participants revealed through their conversations, such as:

- Which character had the power, why did he have it, and how did he use it?
- Why did the perpetrator have the power; what social constructs created that?
• What affect did the perpetrator’s power have on the target that resulted in a change?
• Why did the target initially not have power; what social constructs created that?
• Did the target ever have the power? How did that shift in power occur?
• What role did the ally or bystander play in the shift of power or maintaining the status quo?
• What is revealed about the participants as they explore these issues of oppression and discrimination? Do the participants adopt a critical stance? Are these young readers able to see multiple perspectives?
• Did the participants’ discussion affect their perspective?
• Do the participants use a critical view when discussing contemporary critical issues?

When coding the discussion of the contemporary issues depicted in the newspaper article, I used the same researcher’s lens in respect to how the participants view the stakeholders when compared to how they saw the characters in the books. I considered how the participants identified the target, perpetrator, ally, and bystander (Christensen, 2009). I coded their dialogue regarding the stakeholders, power, and issues tied to the newspaper article in the same manner as I did when coding their dialogue related to the literature. When analyzing this part of the transcript, I questioned how the participants saw the distribution of power between the stakeholders and if they explained the social contexts connected with the stakeholders’ actions. I observed what connections, if any, they expressed between the contexts and experiences of the books and the articles. I questioned and described any impact their experiences analyzing book characters had when analyzing stakeholders in the contemporary issues.

Because the future of the tract of land being considered by the Muslim community has not yet reached a resolution, I was interested if the participants offered possible solutions or
conclusions to the issues. When some participants did suggest a few solutions to the environmental impact concerns, I coded it as a solution (SOL). Using the same lens for examining the discussions between the books and the articles helped the researcher see the impact, if any, of the participants’ critical stance from the books when applied to the contemporary issues.

Readers and texts share an intimate connection to the larger context in which they live. People seek to make meaning with every aspect of who they are and what they are doing; how they use their bodies; use gestures, time, and space, adjust their tone of voice when they speak; choose the words they use, and interact in particular ways with others. (Rogers, 2011, p. 5)

The reader transacts with the text and then constructs a meaning or truth rooted in the rules that govern his membership to his sociocultural group. Readers apply the rules from their own sociocultural framework to the actions and dialogues of stories’ characters looking for a match to their own belief or value system. Readers question character behaviors that do not match their own and may build a resistance (Enciso, 1994; Galda, 1982) which results in varied understandings of a text. Beach (1995) found students from differing socioeconomic groups viewed characters differently but their perspectives matched their own circumstances. Hemphill (1999) also found differences in reader responses that were linked to socioeconomic class. The results showed that middle-class students’ responses aligned more with school-like curriculum-based responses, while working-class students attended more to characters’ actions and motives. Meanings are fixed in a reader’s social, historical, and political background (Rogers, 2011). As a researcher, I analyzed my participants’ dialogue as a window into their constructions of understandings of the story characters, as well as, their own lived worlds (Galda & Beach, 2001).
CHAPTER 4
FINDINGS

Overview of the Chapter

With the current study, the researcher intended to gain entry into the perspectives of urban elementary age girls when asked to examine the characters’ roles in an event of social injustice as found in children’s literature or an article about a contemporary issue. The question that guided this research was: What are urban elementary-age students’ perceptions of characters’ roles in regards to positions of power within books reflecting issues and events of historical social injustice, as well as, a contemporary local event with the potential of social injustice?

In this chapter, the researcher shares the findings describing the students’ perceptions when responding directly to the literature, directly to historical events, as well as, when they make connections between the events depicted in the texts to their own lives. Because each text is its own unique context, the findings from the four pieces of children’s literature and the newspaper article will be reported first. Second, the researcher will describe the more inclusive patterns found in a comprehensive view of the data.

After listening to the book or newspaper article being read aloud, the participants used a tool, Acting for Justice template (Christensen, 2009), to identify the characters in the book or newspaper article as target, perpetrator, bystander, and ally. They used the tool as a device to explain their view of the characters’ positions in the texts. The template was shown in Figure 1.

I introduced the Acting for Justice template with a children’s book with which all participants were familiar after being students in my classroom, Thank You, Mr. Falker (Palacco, 1998). Every school year, I read an author’s collection of Patricia Palacco books and Thank You,
Mr. Falker would become one of the most-loved pieces. I chose this book as a piece in which to illustrate the meanings of target, perpetrator, bystander, and ally knowing the participants would already be familiar with the book’s characters and have a positive connection with the endearing story of how a teacher helps the author, as an elementary-age student, overcome an obstacle when learning to read. Although it does not represent an event of social injustice, it does represent characters that are a target of ridicule, a perpetrator, an ally, and bystanders, so I was confident that the girls could construct their understandings of the Acting for Justice template terms using this familiar story.

As I read Thank You, Mr. Falker aloud, the participants completed the Acting for Justice template individually while I recorded our thinking on a large mock template. Together we listed the characters on a large dry-erase board in the conference room. We noticed that not all characters belonged on the template, such as the main character’s mother and brother. They were in the story and on our list of characters, but were not a target, perpetrator, ally, or bystander to the ridicule illustrated in the story. One important strategy that I wanted the girls to understand when using the Acting for Justice template was some characters can belong to more than one group or category on the template. I wanted the participants to know they could write a character more than once if they saw that character’s actions connected to more than one role. When demonstrating with the book, Thank You, Mr. Falker, we were not able to find an example of a character that could fall into more than one group, so I made a note to remind the girls before each later experience that it was a possibility.

Together we constructed a shared understanding of the terms on the template as we read the story, stopping often to talk about the role of a character. The characters that were the target, perpetrator, and allies were rather transparent. Constructing a shared definition of a bystander
was not as easy as the other labels as the girls had to confront some vagueness when describing what actions define a bystander. The working definition that we constructed was that a bystander was a person(s) who sees what is happening and chooses to do nothing to stop it. Because bully awareness education has been prominent in schools in the last few years, the girls relied on what they knew about a bystander who witnesses a bully’s actions and chooses to do nothing about it. The participants defined a bystander’s actions as a deliberate choice.

We met five evenings to collect data in a two-week period reading and discussing one book or article each evening. The first evening, we started the session reading *Thank You, Mr. Falker* in order to construct our meaning of the *Acting for Justice* template and read *White Socks Only*. Each subsequent evening we met, we always started by reviewing the mock *Acting for Justice* template we constructed together the first session as a strategy to recall our shared understanding of the terms on the template. After I read each book aloud, the students and I would record the names of the characters on a dry erase presentation board in the conference room. The participants would then complete their *Acting for Justice* template using the list of names as a resource. As stated before, I always reminded the participants that not all characters listed have to be on their template and that some characters may belong to more than one group or square on the template, so they can write them more than once.

*White Socks Only* written by Evelyn Coleman; illustrated by Tyrone Geter; Albert Whitman Company, Chicago, 1996

A little girl in rural pre-Civil Rights Act Mississippi ventured off alone into town wearing her best clothes including white socks. When she saw a water fountain with a sign Whites Only, she took off her shoes before getting a drink thinking that the sign was referring to her white
socks. Members of the Black community rallied around her safety when a White man was planning to punish her.

I introduced the book by having the girls discuss the cover that depicts a young girl in her white socks sipping water from a fountain that displays a Whites Only sign. The participants reacted to the illustration by sharing their prior knowledge of segregated public places. They described a time when Black people and White people could not go to the same schools, eat in the same restaurants, use the same bathrooms, and drink from the same water fountains. They described what segregation looked like, but did not use the word segregation. They demonstrated an understanding that the practice of segregation was part of our history. I explained to them that the main character is an older woman in the beginning of the story telling her story to younger children as a flashback. I alluded that the girl, from a rural Black community, had not often gone to the bigger diverse town where segregation was practiced having never encountered a Whites Only sign, therefore she was unaware of its true meaning. That day she had sneaked off to town by herself dressed in her best clothes including white socks. When she read the Whites Only sign, she had assumed that Whites Only meant white socks only.

**Black vs. White**

In this story, the main character is ready to drink from a Whites Only water fountain when a White man is ready to whip her with his belt. The participants easily recognized the White man as the perpetrator and crowd of White people who had gathered around the water fountain as either the perpetrators or the ally to the White Man.

Melanie: “The White people were just staring.”

Lily: “They (White people) were just saying mean things like ‘get outta here and you don’t belong here.’”
Lily: “There is no reason why the White people did this to our kind, but they just did that.”

Lily: “Do you think that White people started rumors about Black people?”

Melissa: “Yea, but somewhere in the story near the ending, the White man couldn’t whip the people either but some of the White people (pause) but some of the White people were like I’m going to whip you, too.”

Melissa: “Yea, he’s not going to whop them the White people though he I’m going to help. I’m going to whop those people (Black characters) too.”

When discussing the events of the story, the participants did not mention the Jim Crow laws or any justification or that any law influenced the perpetrator’s violent and oppressive acts. It seemed the participants were working under this shared assumption of “that is the way the world was” at that time. I pressed them by asking why the White man and the crowd of White people were yelling at the little girl and the Black people for drinking water. Lily made a broad yet critical connection stating “maybe just because there’s a lot of countries that usually have darkish people and so they might think they (darkish people) will take over it so that means they are trying so hard to keep their world to themselves.”

They described the little Black girl as submitting to the oppression when Melissa asked, “Why didn’t the little girl just tell him why she meant Whites only (referring to the misconception that the little girl was thinking that Whites only meant white socks only) so the man would stop yelling at her?

Selena: “She was probably afraid.”

Melanie: “Yea, yea, she got down on the floor when she got whipped.”

Lily: “It’s because even in the picture the person who made this story he made the man big so he was trying to show the people who read this story that she wouldn’t stand up for herself.”
Solidarity of the Black Characters vs. White Man

The story portrays a group of Black adults in the town repeating the actions of the little girl by taking off their shoes and getting a drink from the Whites Only water fountain. They too had knowingly subjected themselves to the same punishment from the White man. The research participants had a strong voice when describing the Black characters as both the target and the allies to the little girl. The participants devoted much conversation to the solidarity of the Black characters and how their solidarity became a power.

Maricarly: “The other Black people were doing the same thing as the little girl did (drinking from the Whites-only water fountain) and he was like the White man was like I’ll whip all you too and so they were all suffering of what they, she had done.”

Selena: “After the man said ‘I’m going to whop all of you’, the Black woman from the church came up and she did the same thing as her did and the man said ‘I’m going to whup you too.’”

Melissa: “The Black people started doing that because they wanted to stand up and say maybe you might whup me and stuff, but I will still do that because we are supposed to be peaceful and stuff.”

Shift in Power between Characters

The participants could see at first the power belonged to the White man character and the crowd of White people when interacting only with the little Black girl character. They expressed their understanding of a shift in power when, in the story, the Black people mimicked the little girl’s actions by taking off their shoes and drinking from the Whites-only water fountain expecting to be hit by the White man and jeered by the crowd of White people.

Lily: “But that’s the thing. They didn’t say ‘we’re going to stand up’ and then they did the same thing as the little girl.”

Melissa: “And the older people were standing up for the little girl because the older people who cared they know them and they want to stand up for little kids because little kids can help their future and stuff.”
Lily: “They don’t want people to feel like they felt when they were little so they just want to be brave and help the little girl.”

Maricarly mentions: “. . . that made no sense to me like the other Black people came and they didn’t have white socks.”

Selena responds: “I didn’t think that they were thinking what she was thinking that they needed white socks.”

The participants could see that the Black characters’ actions shifted the power from the White man to the Black people, because the White man became frustrated and realized that he could not hit them all nor could he stop them from drinking from the fountain.

Paloma asks: “Why wouldn’t the Black people move while he was whipping them?”

Selena responds: “They were afraid that if they moved they would get whupped even more and if they didn’t move they would get that changed.”

Melissa states: “I think the reason these people were doing it is only to make statements of what do you think should stop.”

**Power Associated with a Myth or Legend**

The participants identified a character in the story known as The Chicken Man as both a target and an ally with a special power. Melanie characterizes him as a target when saying,

“But (I) also think the Chicken Man is also the target because well the man doesn’t say ‘I’m going to whip you’, but he also went up to the little fountain and drank some water for a long time, so I think that he’s also a target because he was actually with the little girl and the Black people.”

Selena: “Plus all the White people were just standing still.”

Researcher: “Why do you think that was? Why do you think that when the Chicken Man came that everyone stopped?”

Selena: “That the Chicken Man would turn them into chickens.”

Melissa: “Everybody just stands back because they do not want to be turned into chickens. They just let him do his thing even though the man was whipping other people even though he whipped the old Black woman he was still afraid of the Chicken Man because he could turn people into chickens.”
The Chicken Man is similar to an element found in some traditional oral African and African-American folklore that contain Hoo-do or Voo-do practice (Ogunleye, 1997). Although the participants did not express any previous experience with a character that could possess and use a power for good or evil, they understood that the community represented in the book knew of the Chicken Man’s perceived power. The Chicken Man’s presence presented an immediate shift in power demonstrated by the submissive actions of the White man and the White people in the crowd to stop their oppressive actions immediately towards the little girl and the other Black people.

*Sit-in How Four Friends Stood Up by Sitting Down* written by Andrea Davis Pinkney; illustrated by Brian Pinkney; Little, Brown and Company, New York, 2010

This book is a third-person account of the February 1, 1960 sit-in by four students from a local college at the Woolworth lunch counter in Greensboro, North Carolina as part of a series of rallies, marches, and peaceful protests sparked by a visit by Dr. Martin Luther King. The book tells a factual account of the events and is supported by a timeline detailing the Civil Rights Movement.

We read this book during our second session. As before, we started our interaction with the book by looking at the cover and taking a picture walk through the part of the book where the students are sitting at the lunch counter. The book shares other civil rights protests and gatherings that occur after the sit-ins in order to develop an understanding of the Civil Rights Movement in history that occurred over a period of time supported with a timeline at the end of the book. We looked at the timeline before we started reading the book. The participants made a connection to the part of the timeline that mentioned Rosa Parks refusing to relinquish her seat on the bus. That was the only event of the Civil Rights Movement depicted on the timeline that
they expressed a prior knowledge. On the timeline, it mentions Presidents John F. Kennedy and Lyndon B. Johnson. Some participants articulated that they knew that President Kennedy was shot in their city a long time ago and that the meeting place for our session was near a highway named after President Johnson, but called LBJ, and that people called President Johnson LBJ. I asked them to remember the book *White Socks Only* from the previous evening and where in this timeline did they think that may have happened. They all thought that *White Socks Only* would have occurred at the beginning of the timeline. As before, after I read the book aloud, we constructed a list of characters and the participants placed the characters on their *Acting for Justice* template.

*Students vs. Perpetrators*

This story begins with the historical event of four Black college students who chose to sit in the Whites Only section of the diner waiting to be served. The research participants immediately identified the Black students and then the White students who later joined the Black students as the targets. The perpetrator in this story was a bit less obvious when compared to the White man in *White Socks Only*. In the story some of the White patrons who did nothing were easily labeled as bystanders who “got scared and did nothing because they didn’t want to get involved in the drama,” stated Maricary. Yet some of the White restaurant patrons were characterized as perpetrators because, “the angry people threw stuff at those people - the target. They threw pepper in their eyes, coffee, and ketchup,” said Melanie.

The participants seemed to only assign the label of perpetrator to a character that exhibited an oppressive action. Later in the story, police responding to several community protests, excluding the restaurant sit-ins, showed aggressive behavior towards the crowd of
protestors and so they, too, were labeled as perpetrators. Lily described the police in the protest as even discriminatory towards White people who were acting as allies to the Black protestors:

Lily: “. . . earlier in the other story that people can add onto a crowd so I think they hurt the White people too because more people will keep on doing that and doing that and the world will be all changing so that’s why they hurt them too to warn other White people if you do this you’re going to get hurt, too.”

The participants did not label all authority figures as perpetrators. They distinguished between the police who entered the restaurant at the request of the manager and the police responding to the later protests. The participants identified the police officers who entered the restaurant as either allies to the students or bystanders to the event as they “. . . said there’s nothing wrong here. They’re not breaking any rules or anything,” said Selena. “They’re not doing anything. They’re just sitting there politely and quietly so there’s nothing to be arrested for. So I think it was nice of him to say that because no other police officer would probably do it,” said Melissa.

*Students vs. the Manager*

The research participants had a lengthy discussion about the role of the manager of the Woolworth lunch counter during the sit-ins. At the beginning of the conversation, some of the participants had labeled the manager as a perpetrator. As other voices were heard, they started to question his role and the power he exhibited:

Selena: “Also the manager because he said (pause) also too because he kicked them out and say . . . and closed the store.”

Melanie: “I respectively disagree with you because um the manager really didn’t do anything he didn’t kick them out like hey you can’t be here and get out of my store but what he did is that he like the restaurant is closed so you may exit he wasn’t actually really mean to them.”
Melissa: “But the only reason he did that was because if he kicked them out he knew they wouldn’t go they would just stand there even if he gave it all his might they would still stand there so he had no choice to close the restaurant down so they could leave finally.”

So the participants were expressing that the students, whom they had labeled as the targets, held the power. Just as in the first story, *White Socks Only*, the participants could see that solidarity was a means to power. As the number of students sitting-in at the segregated lunch counter grew each day, and the police were not willing to remove them, the manager closed the restaurant so that all patrons had to leave the restaurant. The only power the manager had was over the restaurant itself, not the actions occurring within the restaurant.

*Students vs. the Waitress*

The participants were not in agreement as to the role of the waitress who would not serve the students at the segregated lunch counter. Even at the end of the conversation, the students were not ready to commit to her role, but their thinking was affected by the conversation.

Selena: “I would put the waitress as the perpetrator.”

Collectively: “Yea, me too.”

Researcher: “Yea . . . why do you think she was the perpetrator?”

Maricarly: “Because she said Whites Only and get out.”

Melanie: “She just wouldn’t help them.”

Selena: “They didn’t get served ever.”

Melissa: “And somewhere around the ending they had enough of it and she was like mad at them and she was screaming at them and all this other stuff.”

Researcher: “Do you think if she had served them she would have lost her job?”

Collectively: “Yes.”
Researcher: “So does that make her a perpetrator or . . .”

Melissa: “Or a bystander?”

Melanie: “I think it’s a bystander.”

Collectively: “Um . . . I don’t . . . well . . .”

Maricarly: “She did yell at them.”

Melissa: “Both of them.”

Researcher: “So what you’re saying Maricarly is that she was a perpetrator because she yelled at them.”

Maricarly: “Yes.”

Melanie: “But I think she is also a bystander.”

Selena: “I think she’s both of them.”

Melanie: “Yea, I think she’s both of them.”

Researcher: “How is she a bystander?”

Paloma: “Because if she served them she would have lost her job.”

Maricarly: “And she didn’t really force them to get out.”

Selena: “Yea . . . she just didn’t serve them and said Whites Only.”

Lily: “Well, she’s a bystander because she just tells them something. Words can maybe hurt you but she didn’t like say (yell) get out of here. She said White people only. Because it’s her kind too and maybe she will think she’s with them but I think she’s a bystander too because I think everyone in the store with food was like them but I think she wasn’t because I don’t get that would make her people even madder and that would make everybody get in a war and stuff and she didn’t want to start that so I think she’s a bystander. The only things she said was White people only she didn’t say anything else.”

Melanie: “But she yelled it at those people.”
When Lily suggests the waitress may not be serving the students as a way to not incite a negative reaction by the White customers was an example of the waitress, who earlier had not been assigned as having any power, being purposeful in her decision to not serve the students in order to avoid an undesirable event in the restaurant. Lily is implying the waitress had some power to control the situation even if it meant maintaining the status quo as a way to remain peaceful in that context and to keep her job.

Earlier in the review of the related literature, I stated that the students’ voices are critical to forming their understanding of these events of social justice. Conversation creates a change in all participants of the conversation. Sometimes the change is transformational and sometimes oppressive (Bahktin, 1981). The participants’ conversation never returned to the role of the waitress, nor did they ever commit to any change that they initially wrote on their Acting for Justice template. Later in a discussion about another book, *Freedom Summer*, one of the participants references the idea the waitress was just doing her job and that serving the students would place her job in jeopardy. When talking about *Freedom Summer*, the participant uses that example to explain why some Black workers did as their boss instructed them even though it symbolized oppression against Black and White people. That evidenced that this conversation about the role of the waitress did influence their thinking.

The Jim Crow laws were still in force in the community at the time of these sit-ins. The participants still do not mention that a law or policy is part of the social construct that led to the setting of this peaceful protest that resulted to the change of these laws. Just as in the *White Socks Only* book, they seem to be working under the assumption that this was just the way things were at that time. They were deliberate to mention more than once, the police officer, who entered the Woolworth diner, explicitly said the students were not breaking any laws.
The participants have not yet revealed through their conversation that the sit-ins are part of a series of peaceful protests that led to the Civil Rights Act of 1964 or the Voters Rights Act of 1965. Before reading the story, we looked at the Civil Rights timeline at the end of the story, the girls looked at the timelines, and acknowledged they knew of some of these historical events, specifically Rosa Parks’ act of not relinquishing her seat on a bus that led to a peaceful protest of the bus system with the outcome of desegregation on buses.

*Freedom Summer*, written by Deborah Wiles; illustrated by Jerome Lagarrigue; Aladdin Paperbacks, New York, 2005

Joe, a White boy, and John Henry, an African-American boy, are friends and spend time together during the summer as John Henry’s mother works as a domestic worker in Joe’s house. A law passed forbidding segregation of public places and the town pool was then available to everyone. The boys already loved swimming together in the area ponds, but now can swim together in the public pool. The day before the pool was to open to the public, the town decided to fill in the pool with tar and cement making it impossible for anyone to swim.

We read this story during our third session which was also our third consecutive evening to meet. While looking at the cover, we discussed the participants’ experiences with pools. For those participants who live in apartment complexes, they talked about using their apartment complex pool. For those participants who live in homes, all buy a summer pass to the set of pools and water play areas that their community offers. The pools are public, but being residents of that community allows them an inexpensive summer pass to access several pools. We looked at the page in the book depicting a sign to the pool area that said “Members Only.” We discussed what that meant. They associated the Members Only sign to their summer pass to the community pools and having to reside at a particular apartment complex in order to use the pool.
Then Lily remembered a news story from the last summer where a group of teenagers were swimming in a neighborhood pool in which they did not live. The teenagers were celebrating school being out for the summer and were invited to swim in the pool by someone who did live in the neighborhood. Many teenagers who did not live in the neighborhood were at the pool as guests and a resident called the police citing safety concerns about the number of kids at the pool. A cell phone video circulated the local and national news outlets showing a non-resident teenage girl resisting being physically removed from the pool area by a local police officer.

I explained that in this context, the Members Only sign was to signify that the public pool is a pool that the taxpayers in the community pay to have built and maintained. The pool had only been used by a certain group of people and not all people who live in that community were allowed to purchase passes or have access to the pool. Now that the Civil Rights Act of 1964 dictated all people have access to all public places, all people in that community would be using the pool. We looked again at the Civil Rights timeline from the *Sit-in How Four Friends Stood Up by Sitting Down* book, and identified on the Civil Rights Movement timeline that President Kennedy had introduced the idea in 1963, and it was signed into law by President Johnson in 1964. So I explained the setting of this book occurred directly after the law was signed.

**White Residents vs. Civil Rights Act of 1964**

The White residents of the community represented in this book are almost an implied group of characters. Joe, his mom and dad, and a store-owner Mr. Mason are the only visible White characters, yet the research participants made several references to the indirect White residents’ decision to make it impossible for anyone to swim in the pool. Selena said she just did not understand why they filled the pool with tar and cement before we started our discussion after the book was read.
Paloma: “So the White people didn’t like the Black people swimming together in the same place so they said ‘okay we’re going to fill the pool with tar so they won’t have to go since we’re going to have to share.”

Selena: (restated as if to demonstrate to all that she understood) “I think they said we’re going to go swim in the pool today and I think one of the White people convinced the person say ’okay we should put tar in the pool so the colored people can’t get in.”

Researcher: “So you think it was a White person that made that decision?”

Group (collectively): “Yea, yes.”

Paloma: “Like the person who made the laws (I believe she was referring to the laws promoting segregation of the pool), he made the decision.”

Selena: “Like they promised to fill the pool but like another White person broke the promise.”

Melissa: “It’s just racism because still White people don’t want to share things with African-Americans.”

Joe and John Henry vs. Segregation Law

Joe and John Henry are two young boys who spend their time together mostly during the summer when John Henry’s mother works as a domestic worker in Joe’s household. When the boys want to get popsicles, Joe goes into Mr. Mason’s store with its Whites Only sign to buy the popsicles. The research participants readily identified John Henry as a target and Joe as his ally for helping him to buy popsicles in Mr. Mason’s store and for swimming with him in the area pond when they could not swim together in the town’s pool. They also characterize John Henry as a bystander because he seems powerless to change the situation.

Paloma: “The bystander is John Henry because he really can’t do anything and he just watches and Will Rogers (John Henry’s brother who works on the city crew) because I think he is forced to work and he has to fill up the pool with the tar anyways.”

Melanie: “I agree with you because John Henry really can’t do anything and he has to just stand on the side and watch.”
*Freedom Summer* is different than the two previous texts depicting segregation because the assumed targets, John Henry, his brother Will Rogers, and the crew of workers, did not enact change or form solidarity to gain any power to stop the pool from becoming unusable by all. The pool was filled in so that no one could use it and there was no positive resolution. So the participants assigned the label of bystander to anyone who did nothing to stop the pool from being filled with tar and cement. Paloma states, “...and for bystanders, I put his mom, his dad, Mr. Mason, and Will because they didn’t really do anything to stop them from filling up the pool.”

*Joe’s Family vs. Segregation*

The participants viewed Joe, and Joe’s mom and dad as not participating in segregation because they characterized John Henry’s mom, who was a domestic working in Joe’s house, as almost a friend:

Lily: “...if he(Joe) was not like that (John Henry’s ally), he would treat him rudely and treat him badly and stuff, but he treated him like the same person and he didn’t care about the segregation and his mom and dad didn’t care about the segregation because John Henry’s mom went to their house lots of times.”

The participants also saw it as a positive action when Joe’s parents explained to him about the Civil Rights Act and how that was going to impact their community.

Paloma: “They don’t think like most other people like their skin color. They appreciate African-Americans and so that’s why Mama said together and she probably thinks all people should be treated the same so does dad.”

Melanie: “I think the mom and dad want their son to be happy so they just told him (about the new law that will open the pool to everyone) because I really don’t think he knew that before his parents told him that so I think that the parents just want their son to be happy with his friend and have freedom.”
**Workers vs. Boss**

The crew of workers, who were all Black, was made to fill in the public pool with tar and cement the day before it was to be open to all residents. Many of the research participants identified them as the perpetrators and specifically one of the workers, John Henry’s brother Will Rogers, as a perpetrator. In this context, the participants saw the perpetrators as almost powerless characters as they were only performing job-related duties. The phrases they used to describe the workers were:

- Paloma: “Forced to work.”
- Melissa: “Couldn’t do anything about it.”
- Maricarly: “Bullying Black people because they didn’t want them going into the pool.”
- Lily: “His little brother (John Henry) knew he (Will Rogers) didn’t want to work there, but he was just trying to do that to help his family.”

Melanie connected the actions of the waitress in *Sit-in How Four Friends Stood Up by Sitting Down* to the actions of the workers in Freedom Summer when she stated, “They acted like the waiter when we read that book the waiter she didn’t want to lose her job when she said Whites only and the workers they didn’t say anything because they didn’t want to lose their job.”

Paloma attributed the oppressive act of filling the pool with tar and cement to the issue rather than a character saying, “It’s just segregation and civil rights and how it’s working out.” Lily characterized the workers as feeling sad affirming, “I think the workers felt sad because in a day they can use it (the pool), but they had to put tar in it and why would the boss pick them knowing that they would be sad?”
Sylvia Mendez was an elementary-age child who was an American citizen of a Hispanic family in California in the mid-1940s. Her family moved to a school in Westminster, California. She was denied enrollment in the local public school and told to go the “Mexican School” while her Mexican-national lighter-skinned cousin was permitted to enroll in the local school. Her father filed a lawsuit *Mendez v. Westminster School District* that eventually led to stopping segregation in California schools seven years before the landmark *Brown v. the Board of Education in Topeka, Kansas* that eradicated school segregation across the nation.

We read this book in our fourth session and after a few days had passed since we had last met. I introduced the book by looking at the cover. I explained that we would be reading a book about a true story that happened in California in the 1940s. We again looked at the Civil Right Movement timeline from *Sit-in How Four Friends Stood Up by Sitting Down* and recognized the timeline started after the setting of this story. We discussed this setting was not in what is labeled by some as the southern states and it happened before any of the other stories we had read. Paloma remembered that the characters in *Thank you, Mr. Falker* had moved from Michigan to California. I added that both stories, although about different topics, most likely occurred around the same time. I revealed this book was the same as the others in that it tells the story about people treated differently than others, but this book was about a Hispanic family. The girls’ reactions displayed such surprise that a Hispanic family would be treated differently. There was so much loud high-pitched chatter and simultaneous conversations, that my recording could not capture individual reactions. My field notes indicated the reaction took a few minutes
and I just allowed for the spontaneous response to occur waiting until I continued with my book introduction.

I continued with my introduction by defining the main character and her brother as United States citizens and her aunt and cousins as Mexican Nationals. First we had to define what makes a person a United States citizen and what makes a person a Mexican National. The girls were able to think of many examples of people either in their families or peers or teachers they knew who fit both definitions. A characteristic that we did not include in our discussion was if a Mexican National entered the country legally or illegally. I was expecting a participant to at least mention that because in the past when they were students in my classroom, “having your papers” was a topic that would arise on occasion. We agreed the characters in the book, whether United States or Mexican citizens, were Hispanic and spoke Spanish. As with all of the books, after reading the story, we reviewed the mock Acting for Justice template, wrote a list of characters’ names and recalled the idea that not all characters had to be on the template and that some characters may fall in more than one group. It was especially important to review those parameters as it had been several days since we had met.

The participants characterized the oppressive acts as discrimination more when talking about this book than any of the other books. The girls focused their talk on discrimination specifically because of skin color. They identified the characters that discriminated against Sylvia and her family because of skin color as the secretary who would not allow Sylvia and her brother to enroll in school because of their darker skin color and the boy at school that told Sylvia in the story, “You don’t belong here. Go back to the Mexican school.” Although the boy in the story never mentioned skin color, Melissa stated, “The young White boy, it felt like he made a fool out of Sylvia saying get out of our school. You’re not White, so he made a fool of
her.” She also goes on to say that she thinks that all of the perpetrators in the story “were judging them by their skin color.” Lily characterized the boy as racist when she said, “The White boy was kind of racist because he said you don’t belong here-go back to the Mexican school. If she had said that to him, I think that would have hurt his feelings.” Despite that, racism and discrimination because of skin color were evident in the previous books, but this was the first book the participants used the words discrimination and racism as the issue to describe the characters’ action and the social construct that laid the foundation for the acts of injustice.

In this story, Sylvia’s Aunt Soledad attempts to enroll all four children in their neighborhood school. The school secretary told Aunt Soledad that she could enroll her lighter-skinned children who were Mexican nationals, but that Sylvia and her brother who were darker-skinned American citizens would have to go to the Mexican school in their school district. All of the research participants labeled the school secretary as a perpetrator who discriminated against Sylvia and her brother because of their darker skin when compared to their lighter-skinned cousins. I asked them if they thought that the school secretary was just doing her job and doing what she was told to do similar to the waitress who would not serve the students at the Woolworth lunch counter in the book Sit-in How Four Friends Stood Up by Sitting Down. They did not agree that the school secretary’s actions were similar to the actions of the waitress. They explained that the waitress was following the rules of the Whites Only sign in not serving the Black students and in doing so might lose her job, where the school secretary discriminated against Sylvia and her brother because of their dark skin, not because they were Mexican. They explained that there was no sign in the school that said Whites Only or No Mexicans and so they believed that the secretary alone was making that decision.
Lily: “The school secretary said ‘Sorry she can’t come to this school’.”

Melissa: “Yea, she was the first person who said they couldn’t come to that school. I don’t know why she said that because it wasn’t like there was a sign or something that said Whites Only.”

Researcher: “Do you think she was like the waitress who might lose her job if she let them come to that school?”

Paloma: “No, I think she made the decision all by herself. The picture shows her sitting there all by herself and I just think she doesn’t like Mexican people who are dark-skinned and she didn’t want them at her school.”

Melissa: “But really Mexicans are the same like us but from a different country.”

The participants did not like that the school secretary was willing to enroll Sylvia’s lighter-skin cousins, even though they were Mexican, so they described her discrimination as founded in skin-color not ethnicity and not out of a need to keep her job, but in order to be selective. Paloma does connect the school secretary’s decision to a culture in the school district of separating Mexican students from other students when she said, “My perpetrator was . . . the superintendent ‘cause when Sylvia’s dad tried to ask, he didn’t give him an answer and said that’s what goes.”

Mr. Kent is a character in the book that represents the Westminster School District in court. He testifies that Mexican children in school are dirty and have poor hygiene and that their hygienic practices at home pose a threat to the general population at the mainstream school. The participants characterized his description of Mexican students as “mean and nasty” and connected his testimony to a motive.

Selena: “. . . and Mr. Kent because he was saying mean and nasty things about Mexican kids so they wouldn’t come to that school.”

Melissa: “Mr. Kent was saying big lies about them that weren’t even true so he was trying to make sure his side won so he wouldn’t have to see Mexicans again.”
Characters that Demonstrated Positions of Power

In the book, the main character’s aunt, Aunt Soledad, was the person who attempted to enroll her two children along with Sylvia and her brother into the neighborhood school. The school secretary was willing to enroll Aunt Soledad’s two lighter-skinned children, but not Sylvia and her brother who were darker-skinned. Aunt Soledad refused to enroll any of the children and, in turn, shared her experience with Sylvia’s parents. The participants saw Aunt Soledad’s actions as a character that had power over the secretary’s oppressive act.

Paloma: “The aunt (listed as an ally) because she could have let her children go to the school and not let her nephew and niece, but she didn’t and told her father.”
Selena: “Aunt Soledad, I think she’s also it (an ally) because she was trying to help the mom put in the stuff and she told the parents about it and if she hadn’t told them, then they wouldn’t notice and they would probably think their kids can go there.”

Lily: “For the ally, I put Aunt Soledad because if she hadn’t told her dad then this would have never happened.”

Melissa: “Aunt Soledad is also an ally because she took the kids to the school and if she hadn’t taken them then they wouldn’t have realized that they needed to fight for it so they can get what’s right.”

In the book, there was a truck driver who advised Sylvia’s father to seek legal counsel because he had heard about a lawyer who represented people seeking justice for unfair treatment. Despite that he had a small role in the book, the truck driver’s role was seen by all of the participants as pivotal for this social justice event to move forward. They all listed the truck driver as an ally on their Acting for Justice template, and explained that he helped Sylvia’s father to seek help.

Selena: “Well, I think the truck driver (was an ally) because he’s the one who told them about the lawyer. Because he heard that about if you go to the Mexican school and you can’t sign up your children at the school you wanted to, here’s a man that he can help you do that because he’s done a lawsuit and he can probably help you.”

Paloma: “. . . and the truck driver (was an ally) because he helped Sylvia’s dad figure out and told him the idea of getting other parents to sign” (Sylvia’s father’s petition).
Maricarly: “And then the ally is . . . the truck driver because he was the one who told them to do the lawsuit. So if he wasn’t in the story, they wouldn’t have had the idea to go to court and so they would still be going to their Mexican school.”

Sylvia’s father was identified by all of the participants as a character who was a target of discrimination, but who also demonstrated power to take action for a change. After learning his children were not permitted to enroll in their neighborhood school because of their skin color, he started a petition for other parents, whose children had been denied enrollment, to sign.

Melanie: “Sylvia’s dad did all of the court . . . like they went to court because they tried to put their children into the White school but other people don’t want them. The dad did a petition so they could go to that school.”

Lily: “I put the parents (as a target) because the parents wanted their kids to have a good future. So if they put their kids in another school it affects their students’ future because the parents want something good for their children.”

_Bystander Because of Oppression_

In the book’s events, it describes of group of parents whose children were also denied access to the neighborhood school. Sylvia’s father designs a petition that he will later take to the Westminster County School administration as a step towards changing the discriminatory policy. According to the book, many parents would not sign the petition. The participants characterized that group of parents as bystanders on the Acting for Justice template because the group’s shared definition of a bystander was someone who did nothing or took no action during the event of social injustice. Yet, when the girls explained their reasons for listing those parents as bystanders, they described the parents as being targets of oppression. They describe them as people who were afraid to sign the petition, rather than people who were apathetic to the issue.

Selena: “The bystanders were the parents who couldn’t sign because they were afraid to lose their jobs.”

Paloma: “My bystanders were the parents that he asked because they wanted to vote, but they didn’t want to get in trouble so they watched and stood on the side while they (Sylvia’s parents) did everything.”
I asked the participants why the parents were “afraid to lose their jobs” or who would they be “in trouble” with? The girls explained that they think that those Mexican parents worked for White people and if the White people found out that they signed the petition, they could lose their jobs.

After the participants critically engaged with the books that depict historical events of injustice, I was interested if they could apply a critical eye to a more contemporary issue happening in a rural community within 30 miles of their urban neighborhood. On our last evening, I introduced a newspaper article that explains a conflict between some residents of a rural community and the Muslim community in the same county.

*The Newspaper Article*

*Residents at Farmersville meeting greet Muslim cemetery plan with distrust.* Hundley, W.  

Residents of Farmersville, Texas attend a town hall meeting to discuss the issue of their city council granting permission for zoning for a Muslim cemetery. A growing Muslim community in Collin County is looking for a large parcel of land to develop into a cemetery. The residents of Farmersville (which does not have a large Muslim population) are concerned about traditional Muslim burial practices not being aligned with Texas law that governs burial. The bigger issue seems to be that the Farmersville residents are wondering how this cemetery may change their community.

As a group we read the article together stopping often to clarify any words or ideas that they were not sure of. While we read, we also paraphrased the information into chunks of ideas for easier understanding and the participants often made connections to then confirm their understandings. They established that the reporter is just giving the facts of the issue and the highlights of the town hall meeting and not taking sides. After reading the article, we used the
same method of reviewing the mock *Acting for Justice* template established in the first session, listing the peoples’ names and the participants placing those people on their template prior to the discussion.

**Environmental Concerns**

The research participants could empathize with the Farmersville residents’ concerns about the environmental impact the Muslim cemetery could have on their rural farmland community. According to the article, one of the fears of the community is the Muslim population will not prepare their dead properly in accordance with state laws. That could have a negative impact on the soil and the water supply. The article states, “Because Muslims don’t embalm their dead and state law does not require embalming, some residents have said they worry the cemetery would pollute the water system” (Hundley, 2015, p. 3).

Selena: “Like they have the farms and horses and you never know when their animals could get sick and the food will be poisoned when it comes out of the animals and those people from Farmersville would die.”

Lily: “And if we have cows that eat the grass with the bad soil it could affect them and they could get diseases from the cows that could spread to the farmers and then spread to everyone.”

Paloma: “They did not want the cemetery because they thought it would pollute the water and that their farms, their animals would start dying and their crops would start getting poisonous.”

**Expansion of the Muslim Community**

The article states, “Some residents also were concerned that the cemetery is the first step to the building of a mosque or school on the site” (Hundley, 2015, p. 3). The participants focused part of their conversation on the residents’ fears the Muslim community would do more than just build a cemetery with the land and may possibly ask for more land.

Melanie: “Like if they’re going to start that there is going to be more stuff that they’re going to want. That they’re going to take over the town.”
Lily: “. . . because if he keeps on saying that maybe all of those fancy things (the article mentioned building ponds, restrooms, a gazebo, and a wooded area as part of the cemetery) that they are putting in then maybe they’ll want more land to do more things.”

Melanie: “You never know when they’re splitting the land up that and then they’re making more space. Then they need more space so you never know like when the mayor will give them more space and then they’ll take over the town.”

Paloma: “And so they thought that the land could be for a school or a Muslim church or to expand the Muslim church.”

Lily: “So maybe they’re not even telling the truth about what they’re doing.”

The article quotes one of speakers attacking the Muslim belief system as documented in the Quran, “But some of the residents remained unconvinced, with one speaker going so far as to say that the Quran teaches Muslims that they can lie—even under oath” (Hundley, 2015, p. 3).

The participants used that part of the article often when explaining that the Muslim people were the target and that some of the Farmersville residents were the perpetrators.

Selena: “Because she said we don’t trust Muslim people that is why I think she is the perpetrator because she’s not really accepting the idea.”

Melissa: “She (a Farmersville resident) was actually looking for ways to not do what the Muslim people wanted to do with the field. She really didn’t want to do what the Muslim people wanted to do she just wanted to do what was good for the community.”

Lily: “She was saying that this (pollute the water system and build more Muslim related buildings) might happen if they do what they say they’re going to do.”

Melanie: “Basically what she is saying is that the Muslims they’re just going over there to take over the town. They’re just lying. They think that Rashid (a spokesman at the meeting representing the Muslim community) is just lying because the bible was teaching them to lie.”

Then the girls’ conversation directed towards the perpetrators’ actions being motivated by a cultural discrimination.

Lily: “I don’t know why she’s saying that because if you try some other people’s cultures can really help America. Lots of people from lots of different countries are coming to America and if they want them to feel welcome they have to try a few things.”

Selena: “I just don’t get it anymore because first it was Blacks and Whites. A long time ago we learned in Social Studies that people were being judged by their religion and
some of them even got kicked out of town for that. And now they’re bringing what happened a long time ago to the 21st century."

Paloma: “It’s just going to keep on if we don’t accept the fact that this is what is has to be because if not we’re not going to get anywhere. Like both of you all said, it went to the skin color and now the religion.”

Maricarly: “What’s next? Hairstyle?

The participants demonstrated that they were able to stretch beyond the stories of historical social injustice and engage in critical conversations about a current issue. Their conversation reflected a critical practice of being able to see all concerns wrapped around this issue. They were able to step into the people in the two communities and understand their views.

Paloma: “And put yourself in their shoes . . . what if you were the Muslims and you would want to keep that piece of land . . . and put yourself in their shoes . . . the most quiet, the most helpful, the most smart, most intelligent people say, ‘well she’s like that because of her skin color’ and it’s our responsibility to keep that to ourselves and yet sometimes bring it out to say.”

Themes Emerging from the Data

**Critical Conversations are a Critical Literacy Event**

A critical stance requires a reader to analyze and evaluate a message, question its intent, and take action relating its multiple perspectives (McLaughlin & De Voogd, 2004). In this study the critical event began when they heard the story and began considering what to write on the Acting for Justice template. The *Acting for Justice* template was a tool the participants used to organize their analysis, but the critical stance was articulated during their explanations and conversations. The event continued when they were challenged to position their initial idea within the discussion explaining and sometimes defending their ideas. When the participants explained why they saw a character’s actions as a target, a perpetrator, a bystander, and an ally is when the critical stance grew into a critical conversation. In their dialogue, I saw the
interconnectedness of their personal view with their political view (Laman, 2006). Their personal and political views are an outcome of their identity.

*Solidarity is Power*

The participants associated characters with power when characters were part of a cohesive group with a shared belief system working towards a unifying goal. In *White Socks Only*, the oppressive acts directed towards the young Black girl and then the Black adults seemed to gain momentum when a crowd of White people started cheering on the physical and verbal threats from the White man. In *Sit-in How Four Friends Stood Up by Sitting Down*, the White patrons of the diner coupled with the manager and waitress together at first had the power not to allow change in their diner. Later in that story, the large crowd of peaceful demonstrators seemed to gain momentum over the police assigned to keep order. The participants identified the police, who were trying to tame the demonstrators, begin to act as a group in using physical force, and even seemed to target White demonstrators more to invoke their power in order to dissuade more White protestors from joining. In *Freedom Summer*, the participants identified a group of assumed White people who decided to fill the pool in so that no one could use it. In *Separate is Never Equal*, the participants identified the group of school employees, the secretary, the superintendent, and later the plaintiff representing the school district as a group who was discriminating against dark-skinned Mexican children. While discussing the newspaper article, the participants identified the group of Farmersville residents as demonstrating power by having the loudest voices in the meeting and the ones making the derogatory remarks towards the Muslim community.

In contrast, the participants identified a shift in power from the characters they identified as perpetrators to the characters they identified as targets when the targets formed solidarity. In
White Socks Only, the Black adults who supported the little girl by mimicking her actions led to the White man becoming frustrated realizing that he could not stop them from using the Whites Only water fountain. In Sit-in How Four Friends Stood Up by Sitting Down, the growing number of students sitting at the lunch counter in Greensboro, NC led to more demonstrations in other cities which eventually led to change. In Separate is Never Equal, the Hispanic community formed a unified group by signing a petition, seeking legal advice, and pursuing a legal action against a powerful school district in order to stop segregation. Although as adults we can see power exhibited by the character John Henry in Freedom Summer when, after the Whites Only sign was removed, he entered the local Mom and Pop market to buy popsicles for he and his friend Joe, my research participants did not mention that as a display of power.

Fear Means Powerlessness

In our first session as we were defining the terms of the Acting for Justice template, the participants defined a bystander as a person(s) who sees what is happening and chooses to do nothing to stop it. As the stories unfolded, the participants would label a character as a bystander because he chose to do nothing either as a way to maintain the status quo or from apathy. But in a few instances, the participants identified a character as a bystander out of fear of losing their job or retaliation for challenging the status quo. In Sit-in How Four Friends Stood Up by Sitting Down, the research participants toggled between calling the waitress a bystander and a perpetrator. When they explained her status as a bystander, they explained that she may have been fearful of losing her job if she had served the students. One participant explained that she may have been fearful of how the other customers may react if she served the students. So fear may have led to powerlessness because she may not have had any power to change the practice of segregation.
In *Freedom Summer*, most of the participants saw the work crew whose job it was to fill in the public pool with tar and cement as powerless again from fear of losing their jobs. The work crew comprised of Black workers who were the subject of the segregated act of not sharing a swimming pool, were the very people made to reinforce the act of segregation making it impossible for anyone to swim in the pool. In *Separate is Never Equal*, the participants identified some of the parents of Mexican students as bystanders because they would not sign Mr. Mendez’s petition against the school district. They explained that they believe the reason the parents would not sign the petition is because they feared for their jobs. The participants assumed the Mexican parents worked in jobs supported by the White community.

*Prior Knowledge Shapes Their Critical Understandings of Historical Events*

The research findings suggest my participants saw life in a part of the United States prior to the Civil Rights Act of 1964 as an accepted practice of oppression, discrimination, and mistreatment of African-American citizens. They characterized the setting and actions in the books, *White Socks Only*, *Freedom Summer*, and *Sit-in How Four Friends Stood Up by Sitting Down* as that was just the way the world was at that time. They made no mention of the Jim Crow laws as a social construct to explain the actions of the books’ characters. They seemed to understand the 20th century treatment of African American people was connected to the treatment of that population when they were slaves in the 18th and 19th century.

Lily: “Not all White people treated them badly. There’s some people said now this is not right. There are people like us who doesn’t care about the color . . . some White Christian person who would give them food and hide them in the basement to like pay for them and hide them in the basement and when someone’s coming they say let’s go.”

She was connecting to what she knew about the Underground Railroad.

During the discussion of the *Freedom Summer* book, the girls started a conversation about segregation today:
Lily: “I think segregation is still happening because now some police are hurting usually Black people and the police are supposed to be helping us be safe and making sure we’re safe and stuff. Well right now I feel like they are just trying to start segregation all over again because if they keep on doing this then other White people will start hating and then you know what that means and then the segregation might start all over again.”

Melissa: “Yeah, but guess what? Even if cops are doing that, that is their own fault. Like the cop who did the (inaudible), he got fired for that. Those cops do that for reasons we don’t know. They just do it for peculiar reasons and think it is right, but just so you know they do get punished for doing things like that.”

It seems as if the girls believe that the Civil Rights Act and Martin Luther King’s contributions solved the problem of segregation, and that now has the potential to start again. They do not have the experience in school or through reading or conversations to understand what has happened since the 1960s. Their social studies curriculum does not yet go much beyond the 1960s until they reach middle school. The fourth and fifth grade social studies TEKS, or learning standards, focus on the founding fathers and events that influenced our government today. The only TEKS that mentions anything beyond the 1960s is asking students to analyze the issues of the War on Terror and the 2008 Presidential Elections (Texas Education Agency, 2011). So it is understandable the research participants share an assumption that the Civil Rights Act solved the problem and all people started sharing equal rights, equal treatment, and equal access.

What seems to be missing from their curriculum-based view is the discrimination of other groups of people. When I first introduced the treatment of Hispanic-Americans in the mid-20th century depicted in the book Separate is Never Equal, their reactions were of feeling appalled as memorialized in my field notes. The many voices in the room were high-pitched, loud, and lingering reactions. I had to pause and allow the reactions before I continued with the book introduction. When transacting with this book, the participants’ responses were restricted to only the event in the book and not to any personal experiences or previous knowledge. My field notes
describe how disgusted they seemed when a character in the book, Mr. Kent, described in court his impressions of hygienic practices of Mexican people and how it could affect the dominant culture of the mainstream schools. My participants seemed unaware of discriminatory practices of other groups and did not offer any stories or images seen on media outlets. Paloma mentioned hearing a conversation between her mother and her aunt about some discrimination in the workplace because her aunt is Hispanic. She did not have many details of the story, but did tell us that her aunt called “this guy” a racist.

The participants never shared any personal stories of being a target of discrimination, but saw themselves as either targets or witnesses of bullies. They saw the perpetrators in the books as acting like bullies. They characterized the perpetrators in the Separate is Never Equal book, Mr. Kent, the school secretary, and the White boy on the playground, as acting like bullies. They did not mention bullies when describing the characters to the other books or newspaper article. They did mention bully behavior and what to do when faced with a bully.

Melissa: “If you see someone getting bullied and you’re at school or an alley or something you can find the nearest help anywhere. There are adults all over the place. So if someone is being bullied you can stand up, you can go to an adult or you can just start breaking it up or you’re going to get bullied again.”

Empathy of Diverse Populations

The girls through their dialogue demonstrated a great empathy for diverse populations and how they can sometimes be a target for discrimination, oppression, and racism.

Paloma: “I think we’re just going to have to just all agree on it and say okay this just has to be fair for the people like about different skin colors and different religions because in the end it’s just not going to do anything it’s just keep fighting about the same thing over and over again. So we might as well accept the fact right now that to save your time and be happy.”

Paloma: “People are not perfect, they all have their own things and are different in every way.”
Lily: “But all of them (the lawyers arguing for Sylvia Mendez’s father) wanted something for the Mexicans’ future.”

Melissa: “Some people still wanted White people to have their stuff separated from Black people so that’s why they killed President John F. Kennedy because those people wanted to do anything to stop whatever any president wanted to stop segregation between Black people and White people.”

Lily: “Lots of people from lots of different countries are coming to America and if they want them to feel welcome they have to do a few things what they did because they still have their cultures and they don’t want to change it. Like me and (#1’s) family so like our culture some places where we can get things to keep on doing this but if we change it, we’ll feel uncomfortable.”

Melissa: “Like we’re not supporting our family like supporting the things we didn’t do because my mom said that it breaks her heart that her children don’t know her own language. So that’s why this year we’re going to learn some African language so we can get close to our language so we think if we do other things that are not really our heritage that we are not really celebrating our right heritage.”

Maricarly: “Yea . . . that’s like in my family too . . . cause sometimes we celebrate different holidays but we don’t know a lot of Spanish to talk to our families which is why me and my sister are going to talk more Spanish to my family to understand what they’re saying so we can respond back. Usually almost like a culture . . . my mom wants me to speak more Spanish for our family.”

Most of the girls see themselves as belonging to a diverse population, yet they never described themselves as being a target of oppression, racism, or discrimination. Their personal stories throughout our sessions related to their perspectives of what is happening to other people. Only these few examples above did they reveal that their families want them to participate in their diversity through being bilingual.

*Media Influenced Their Understandings of Events of Social Injustice*

The research participants often connected their feelings about the oppression, discrimination, and power to news events seen on television. Many of the comments they made were related to police and their interactions with Black people. In the year leading up to this data collection, the United States media was dominated by White police officer/Black citizen exchanges portrayed as oppressive by the White police officer and at times, deadly for the Black
citizen who was often a young Black male. The research participants often interjected images they had seen on television of White police officer engaging with young Black people:

Lily: “There was this guy jacking her down and she tried to get free. And then he tried to push her down and she said ‘ow’ because it really hurted her and they said . . .

Maricarly: “And they were crying and begging for her mother.

Selena: “Oh . . . racist . . . my sister . . . today . . . like when we all of got home . . . my sister was like saying that there was these pools like private pools at my apartments and I was like what??? We always go to the pool and I hope nothing happens to us because all of us are mostly the same but some of us are different because by our skin color.”

The girls were describing something they had seen on television the summer of 2015 when a Black girl in a suburban community near us was recorded and distributed on social media and later on the mainstream news channels being restrained by a White police officer after a private pool party had erupted into a large gathering where police were called to the scene. No charges were filed against either the police officer or the girl being restrained as no law had been broken. The police officer immediately resigned from that police department because of threats against him and his family made by people outside the community.

In a contemporary issue described in the newspaper article, the participants read about how the dominant White residents of a rural area were opposing a group of Muslims to purchase a large parcel of land in order to construct a Muslim cemetery. Despite that there had been several Muslim-related negative media accounts, my participants made no connection to the Muslim population except to name a few school peers who are Muslim. In the months leading up to our meetings, radical Muslim people were being held responsible for a shooting in a suburb of our urban area, an attack on Muslim workers at a tire shop in our city, multiple attacks on civilians in Paris, and our governor stating that no Muslim refugees would be permitted to resettle in our state. The very night that we interacted with the newspaper article related to the Muslim community, Melissa shared with me, while we were eating dinner before we started, a
television news story of a police officer attacked in a squad car. I later that night saw the television headline of a radical Muslim who attacked a Philadelphia police officer. My participants were not at all influenced by media outlets related to the Muslim population and yet as previously reported they connected to several media stories related to African-Americans. It reinforces my notion that my participants see discrimination, oppression, and racism as targeting the group in which they have had the most curriculum-based instruction.
CHAPTER 5
DISCUSSION

Blum (1997) suggests the goal of multicultural education is to ask students to construct their own truth about how African-Americans, Hispanic-Americans, Native-Americans, and other immigrant populations have impacted our history and shaped our population, economy, and government. Asking students to adopt a critical stance when examining these topics will engage students in a practice that will help them go deeper than the surface facts and see how power is distributed in the relationships between groups of people. Power used and even misused by groups of people explains historical events and shapes future events.

Children’s literature can be a means to which students can learn about power-bred topics, such as oppression, discrimination, or racism, while in the safe context of facing it through characters’ experiences (Fain, 2008). Students’ transactions with the texts can be represented through a reader response. The reader response when framed into a dialogue can be regarded as the social action seen within the students’ sharing in a critical literacy event.

The purpose of the current study was to describe the perspectives of urban elementary age girls when examining the characters’ roles in books that depict historical social justice, as well as, a contemporary local issue that seems to point to discrimination and racism. The data indicated elementary age girls can engage in critical conversations that reveal how instructional settings aided by images in the media help shape their understandings of historical social injustice, positions of power, and empathy with diverse populations. The data discovered three major themes: 1) critical conversations are an action in a critical literacy event; 2) power is influenced by the social constructs of solidarity and fear; and 3) formal instruction and exposure to media shape perspectives of historical social injustice.
Summary of Findings

Critical Conversations are an Essential Action in a Critical Literacy Event

Critical pedagogy is a theory describing a world of unequal power relationships (Beck, 2005). When critical pedagogy joins together literacy practices with learners then it progresses into a stance called critical literacy. Critical literacy asks students to scrutinize their belief systems while looking with multiple perspectives, or many sides, of a text or an issue in a text. In a critical literacy setting, students’ voices and dialogue are tools used to construct meanings from texts. When learning is viewed as a social construct (Vygotsky, 1980), then dialogue becomes center to learning. Students’ dialogue is an extension of who they are and what they believe as their truths. Learners use language to “construct and deconstruct concepts while interacting with others (Robinson, 2013, p. 43).

Lily demonstrated a critical view through her dialogue when she described why the character of the White man would beat the young Black girl drinking water from the Whites Only water fountain in White Socks Only when she explained that people might think darkish people will take over their world so they are trying to protect their way of life or maintain the status quo. Lily again shared her critical stance when she shared her insight that the police might actually be trying to hurt the White people more during a protest in Sit-in How Four Friends Stood Up by Sitting Down as a warning to other White people not to join the protest supporting the Civil Rights Movement.

Melissa demonstrated a critical stance when she explained that the Black adults who mimicked the little girl’s actions in White Socks Only knowing that they would also be beat did so as a peaceful protest against segregation. Melissa also shared her insight to the students’ strategy in their peaceful protest sitting at the lunch counter in Sit-in How Four Friends Stood Up
by Sitting Down when she clarified that the manager would not be able to get the students to leave “even if he gave it all his might they would still stand there so he had no choice (but) to close the restaurant down so they could finally leave.” She could understand and articulate the motives of two oppressors: Mr. Kent, a representative from the Westminster School District in Separate is Never Equal and Barbara, a resident of Farmersville in the newspaper article. She detailed both of their motives as oppressive and discriminatory so that they would not have to engage with members of the opposing culture when she said, “Mr. Kent was saying big lies about them that weren’t even true so he was trying to make sure his side won so he wouldn’t have to see Mexicans again,” and “She (a Farmersville resident) was actually looking for ways to not do what the Muslim people wanted to do with the field.”

Paloma shared her multiple perspectives when trying to explain to another participant who admitted that she simply did not understand why the town filled in the pool in Freedom Summer when she recognized that White people did not want to swim with Black people and so they were the ones who made the decision to make the pool unusable by all. She was also able to explain the perspective of the mother and father who were clarifying the implication of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 to their young son Joe when she stated, “They don’t think like most other people like their skin color. They appreciate African-Americans and so that’s why Mama said together and she probably thinks all people should be treated the same so does dad.” She later shared her critical view of the secretary’s motives in Separate is Never Equal when she declared that the secretary just did not want dark-skinned Mexican students at her school.

While the participants were using their critical stance to pinpoint which characters had power and what social constructs or historical events helped them to realize power, they were engaging in a subsequent critical practice, critical multicultural analysis.
analysis is “reading power and exposing how power is exercised, circulated, negotiated, and reconstructed” (Botelho & Rudman, 2009, p. 117). Critical multicultural analysis (CMA) views power as a socially constructed paradigm of race, class, culture, and gender. In CMA a reader is asked to simultaneously question “who exercises power and how does it happen” (Foucault, 1995, p. 42). Botelho and Rudman (2009) suggest that while using CMA, readers discern power in characters through a continuum of domination, collusion, resistance, and agency.

The participants identified power born from domination when they described the actions of the White Man and crowd of White people in White Socks Only using their power from privilege of being White in a community that lived by the Jim Crow laws of segregated public spaces. Their actions demonstrated domination over the young Black girl and adult Black residents by physically hurting them for drinking from a Whites Only water fountain.

Collusion as power is defined on the CMA continuum as “internalized oppression or domination that may be conscious or unconscious” (Botelho & Rudman, 2009, p. 118). The participants described power by collusion when they identified the superintendent’s description of Mexicans while testifying in court in the book Separate is Never Equal. The participants understood the superintendent’s appalling description of Mexican’s poor hygienic practices was his attempt to convince the court to continue the segregation of White and Mexican students. The White boy, a student at the mainstream school in Westminster who told Sylvia after the court decision that she should go back to the Mexican school because of her dark skin, was another example of collusion. The oppressors in the story, the school secretary, the superintendent, Mr. Kent, and the White male student all demonstrated actions of an internalized oppression trying to display power over Sylvia and other Mexican students.
Power Is Influenced by the Social Constructs of Solidarity and Fear

One of the questions that I was hoping to answer was to describe elementary-age students’ perceptions of how power is distributed or presumed or gained in characters within a book telling a story of historical social injustice. Although the power demonstrated by the main characters was rather straight-forward, it was the peripheral characters or even the assumed characters whose power the participants critically examined. In all four of the books used in this study, the participants recognized that the White characters initially, at least, had privilege and power because of the nature of the status quo. That given privilege and power was transposed into acts of oppression, segregation, discrimination, and racism.

The girls were able to describe an implicit set of characters in two of the books, *Freedom Summer* and *Separate is Never Equal*. In *Freedom Summer*, the participants described the circumstance of the pool being filled in with tar and cement as a decision of the White people who were in charge of the town’s decisions. They also stated the initial segregation of the pool where only White citizens could be a member was a decision of the White town leaders. In contrast, they characterized the enforcement of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 to end segregation of public places as a broken promise when Selena says, “Like they (White town leaders) promised to fill the pool but like another White person broke the promise.” In *Separate is Never Equal*, the participants again identified a group of White people in the story who they assumed employed as workers the parents of the Mexican students which, in turn, made the parents feel uncomfortable in signing Mr. Mendez’s petition against the school district.

The participants could see that a theme in some of the books was that solidarity led to power. In some examples, solidarity between characters resulted in the initial oppressive acts, but in contrast solidarity born from the targets of racism led to change or overcoming the
oppressive acts. The participants could identify the shift in power from perpetrators to targets when the targets formed solidarity. The participants detailed how the growing numbers of students in multiple lunch counters led to a change in that form of segregation and the outcome was now all people can eat in any part of any restaurant. The participants explained the large group of Black adults stepping up to the Whites Only water fountain for a drink contributed to the water fountain later available to all. In Separate is Never Equal, the participants were able to expound on the idea that more people getting involved in the cause, such as the truck driver, her aunt, other parents, and then lawyers formed a solid force that helped change the practice of segregation in the public school system in California.

When looking at these actions of solidarity through the lens of CMA, the participants were able to recognize agency on the CMA continuum. Agency, in the context of CMA, is the ability to resist, challenge, and change the discourses surrounding an issue (Botelho & Rudman, 2009). Davies (2000) suggested all characters have the capacity to have agency “through imagining not what is, but what might be” (p. 67).

In contrast, the participants could also articulate examples of when fear led to a state of powerlessness. The participants considered a fear of losing their jobs when explaining why the waitress would not serve the students at the lunch counter and why the parents of Mexican students would not sign the petition against the school district. They also knew that if the crew of city workers did not fill in the pool with tar and cement as instructed by their boss, they risked losing their jobs as well. The girls thought the manager and the waitress of the Woolworth lunch counter seemed to be in fear of the other patrons and community members’ reactions if they served the Black students sitting in the mainstream part of the restaurant. The manager, because
of that fear, summoned the police to take action against the students and later closed the restaurant in order not to exhibit any power over the students.

Participants Constructed Their Own Truths Regarding Power

The researcher asked the students to use the Acting for Justice template (Christianson, 2009) to distinguish the books’ characters as a target, perpetrator, ally, or bystander. The research findings suggest the participants did not assign power to a particular character’s label. They did not assume the target was powerless and the perpetrator was always the person with power. They also did not restrict their view of the allies and bystanders as peripheral characters with no power or influence on the event of social justice. Christianson herself mentioned in a professional forum I attended that she purposely did not use the label of victim for target in an effort to avoid assigning a predisposed meaning of powerlessness to a character that was a target.

The participants often recognized a shift of power when the target gained power to overcome the injustice imposed by the perpetrator. The ally, as defined by the participants, was a character who helped either the target or the perpetrator. At times, the participants saw the ally as a person or group of people who had power to be the oppressor and, in contrast, had the power to help the target end the oppressive event and help make a change. Paloma stated, “For anybody it doesn’t matter what side they’re on, they’re both going to have allies because they’re helping each side.” So she could see that both groups of people, perpetrators and targets, had allies. So the participants did not correlate the labels of target, perpetrator, ally, and bystander to characters who did nor did not possess power. “Critical literacy offers tools for students to examine how society exercises power over who they are and what they want to become” (Botelho & Rudman, 2009, p. 7).
Formal Instruction and Exposure to Media Shaped Perspectives of Historical Social Injustice

Stories can describe what is and what ought to be (Taylor, 2000) and students’ perceptions of stories are influenced by identity, family and community values, and media images (Robinson, 2013). After our first few sessions, my participants would mention that they saw the books we were reading together in their teacher’s classroom library or the school’s library and had not noticed them before seeing them as part of my collection. A few of the participants revealed they had browsed some of the titles, but had not read them. After my experiences reading these books with my participants, I feel compelled to advise educators to use books that depict events of social justice with adult guidance in order to maximize the students’ learning. Similar to a PG (parental guidance) rating of a movie, books that depict social justice have an adult-generated topic that younger readers could easily misunderstand or at least not fully understand.

Television media influences how the elementary-age participants connect to racism-related issues. The transcribed conversations collected during our sessions revealed they see many images of news stories portraying oppression of Black people and they connect with them and retell them with great detail. I stop short of saying that the girls are selective in what images seem to stick with them, but they seem to connect with images of oppression of a population in which they have prior knowledge. The data show the participants were previously unaware of racism towards other groups of people besides African-Americans. The girls did not share any stories of television images exposing discriminatory acts against groups other than African-Americans.

Some wonder if elementary-age students are able to understand or even be introduced to issues of social injustice. The age of reader may not be as important as the student’s previous
learning or understandings of these social justice events. My participants who were fourth through sixth graders seemed to have a curriculum-based view narrowed by textbook versions of 19th and 20th century American history. Roser et al. (2007) admit reader’s perceptions may be directly linked to the students’ instruction. When we viewed the timeline in the Sit-in How Four Friends Stood Up by Sitting Down book, the only event on the timeline that they acknowledged to having any previous knowledge was the incident of Rosa Parks not relinquishing her seat on the bus which led to a boycott of the bus service with the outcome of no more segregated bus practices in Montgomery, Alabama.

A more global view of the issues also seems to be absent in my participants’ responses. For example, understanding why the rural community’s mayor support of the Muslim community purchasing land was not mentioned. My participants may not understand that the mayor may have an economic reason for supporting the Muslim community’s membership in his town. Despite that, the article detailed the many residents’ skepticism of the Muslims’ true plans for the land; my participants were not able to see that the town’s city leaders may be welcoming the economic expansion as a means for a broader tax base. Lack of experience, curriculum-based instruction, but also the participants’ age or maturity level may influence their perspectives at this sophisticated level. When you think of a student in the middle of concentric circles with each outer circle representing a larger global view of an issue, my participants’ circles may be currently limited because of their developmental stage.

Piaget (1932) describes children in progressing developmental stages. My participants, ranging from ages 10 to 13, would fall on Paiget’s spectrum in the concrete operational stage to the formal operational stage. Simply explained, persons who are in the concrete operational stage can use logic to problem-solve, but stick to what they can see in front of them and less
what is abstract. When a person is functioning more at the formal operating stage they may be able to use several forms of logic and can begin to manipulate what-if scenarios of more abstract or global ideas. So the absence of more global multiple perspectives may be tied to who the participants are developmentally and less about lack of experience. This transition between the developmental stages could correlate to the research findings that the participants implied the laws changed social constructs. My participants seemed to be working under the shared assumption that the civil rights laws changed the way targeted groups of people were treated and that only recently segregation and discrimination may be resurfacing.

Instructional Implications

*Critical Multicultural Analysis as a Tool*

In 2012, the racial and ethnic diversity of the student population had risen to 45% nationally (Morrell & Morrell, 2012). Nurturing a multicultural perspective should be increasingly central to a present-day classroom teacher’s agenda. Unfortunately, diversity is not equally distributed among the student population creating polarizing educational settings with the majority of the diversity found in urban school districts. Regardless of who is a member of a school community, teachers should adopt a practice of helping students develop a critical stance when interacting with texts.

Critical multicultural analysis is an examination of power within a multicultural book. Botelho suggests that “in picture books, discourses are rendered through words and images to position the reader in particular ways” (Botelho et al., 2014, p. 45). Botelho and Rudman (2009) contributed to the idea of critical multicultural analysis suggesting teachers consider what to read to students and how to read it with students. As a practical classroom application of CMA, Botelho and Rudman (2009) suggest teachers ask students to consider a point of view of a story
and then substitute it with another character’s point of view. Another suggestion offered by the authors is to juxtapose a piece of children’s literature to a real event representing “sociopolitical and historical conditions” (Botelho & Rudman, 2009, p. 122).

A Critical Literacy Tool

Fain (2008) suggested we should “continue to explore ways to help children construct a deeper understanding of the power issues within their talk” (p. 207). The current study offered students a tool as a launching point to begin their critical examination of issues born from power struggles. The Acting for Justice template was, as Fain recommends, a way to help students begin to construct a deeper understanding of the issues of power. Having had all of these participants as students in my elementary-age classroom, I know our previous reader response activities were centered on curriculum-based practices of students identifying the basic story elements of character, setting, problem and solution, theme, moral, or lesson. As their teacher, I would occasionally attempt a critical conversation, asking the students to see multiple perspectives or “put themselves in their shoes.” The class conversations seemed shallow and short-ended. Knowing how essential those critical conversations were in helping my students to develop deeper understandings of an issue I was always searching for a tool to support their admission into a critical conversation. The Acting for Justice template seems to be an effective tool for older elementary students to organize their thinking prior to the discussion and have something that represents their thinking to hold on to during the critical conversation. I did not witness the students looking for affirmation from other group members that they were correct in their thinking, but more looking for members who were like-minded and interrogate those whose thoughts differed.
I expressed my earlier awkward attempts at critical conversations with my students in a classroom setting. I did not have a tool like the Acting for Justice template as a jumping off point for my students to engage in a critical conversation. More resources like this template should be shared with teachers that would like to create a classroom that honors a critical stance. Professional development in how to nurture a student’s critical stance in reading is essential to making any resource or any text become a critical literacy event with readers. Prior to nurturing a student’s critical experience, teachers need to be guided in exploring and developing their own awareness and ability to take a critical stance since they need to know themselves before they can facilitate such for others.

*Using Literature that Depicts Social Injustice in Instruction*

Although my participant group was a small group of urban girls who shared a common instructional background, their narrow view of historical events may be concerning if we hope that our students will become agents of change. The results of the current study clearly demonstrate that elementary-age students are capable of seeing multiple perspectives of an issue, but I wonder how often that task is asked of them. In some states, a curriculum is test-driven and strictly enforced. In the state in which these participants attend school, core subjects are tested beginning in third grade. Social Studies, although considered a core subject, is not tested until eighth grade for the first time. It has been my observation as an elementary school teacher in a large public school district that although social studies is part of the instructional plan, it is often overlooked as far as time spent teaching it and resources devoted to it because it is tested in eighth grade and not in the elementary setting which traditionally ends at fifth grade.

The data suggested the participants were surprised by texts that shared discrimination of groups other than African-Americans. It seems many schools’ curricula follow a plan of
celebrating the achievements and heroes of many cultural groups including African Americans, but it is the struggle of African-Americans to gain equal rights that is studied most often in the elementary curriculum. Because of this pattern in the curriculum, it is crucial for teachers to find literature as resources to tell the story of many cultural and language groups’ struggles in this country’s history.

The data shows the participants acknowledged seeing and browsing some of the books used in this study, but had not read any of them or even shared an experience reading a piece of children’s literature that shared a similar story of social injustice. Despite that quality children’s literature can provide a context in which to expand the one-dimensional view of social problems or the facts related to a social justice event found in social studies textbooks, I question how often teachers use literature as a resource. Although my teacher education program was in another state, I have had the opportunity to work with pre-service teachers from various universities, as well as, mentor alternatively-certified teacher candidates. Excluding a few exceptions, most teacher candidates I have worked with do not seem to possess much experience with children’s literature. Either they did not have much access to children’s literature as a young student or their teacher preparation program may not have included much exposure to children’s literature as a resource in their instructional plans.

As a project in my doctoral program, I conducted a survey of teachers on my elementary campus measuring how many books they have in their classrooms available for students to read and anecdotaly collected data about how they use literature for instruction. The findings of my survey enhanced with interviews found teachers who attended traditional university-based teacher preparation programs both had more titles of books available for children and used books more often for instruction, but mostly reading instruction. Teachers who had earned certification
through an alternative method has less titles for students to read, used books at times for read-
aloud, but not usually for instruction. Bilingual teachers had fewer titles of books for students to
read than mono-English teachers, but expressed interest in acquiring more titles.

There seems to be a great need for more professional development about the vast
collection of quality children’s literature and more explicitly how to use it. Although the current
study only used four titles, there are many pieces of quality children’s literature that can offer
students a chance to build an understanding that goes deeper than a flat textbook depiction of an
historical event. Teachers of elementary-age children use children’s literature as a resource in
which to explore fairness and justice and issues of inequality (Fain, 2008). “Over time and with
some scaffolding from teachers as needed, children confront issues of racism, power, social
injustice, and discrimination” (Moller, 2002, p. 468).

*Situating a Similar Critical Literacy Event in a Classroom*

The critical literacy event in this study occurred outside of a classroom in a controlled
environment where the participant membership, setting, and methodology was contrived to
satisfy the researcher’s needs. Designing a critical experience for a larger, more diverse group of
readers in a more authentic classroom setting has the possibility to present a few challenges.
Using the Acting for Justice template while reading books or texts that represent social injustice
can produce a rewarding critical experience for readers within a classroom setting provided a set
of criteria are considered.

The teacher first must develop his own critical stance before expecting the same from
learners. Growing a critical stance is a change over time for all learners, teachers and students
alike. McLaughlin and DeVoogd (2004) describe developing a teacher’s critical stance as a
process of theoretical and pedagogical development while engaging in critical experiences. They
propose that once the teacher has adopted a critical stance, then “teaching students to read from a critical stance should be a natural process” (2004, p. 55).

McLaughlin and DeVoogd suggest to teachers that they consider if their students possess the background knowledge necessary to adopt a critical stance towards a particular text or topic. In addition, they outline an instructional framework for teachers as a guide: “explain, demonstrate, guide, practice, and reflect” (2004, p. 56). While using this framework, teachers can be guiding their students’ thinking by asking questions that consider whose voices are represented and which voices are missing. Juxtaposing texts can also be another avenue to help students see multiple perspectives of an issue or event. Bohtelho & Rudman (2009) offer the idea of asking students to look at a text from differing viewpoints, such as first-person or third-person perspectives or multiple characters’ viewpoints.

The body of critical literacy research characterizes many of the critical conversations embedded in a critical literacy event occurring in small group settings. Although a classroom teacher may read a piece of literature or text to the whole class and introduce a potentially critical event to all, most often the teacher organizes learners into smaller groups to engage students in critical interactions. Whole group to small group settings are common in classrooms of students of all ages, so it would be natural for a teacher to capitalize on that design.

The teacher would need to decide on his level of participation ranging from a participant to an observer. If a teacher decides to become a participant, then that teacher needs to consider how to establish a climate of conversation where a student does not seek the teacher’s approval for his contribution. Cazden (2001) describes a typical teacher-student interaction as I-R-E where the teacher initiated a question, the student responds, and the teacher gives feedback or an evaluation. In a critical conversation, peer-to-peer interaction, where students are reacting to
each other rather than the teacher as the moderator, would be essential to making it critical. Therefore, the teacher would have to establish a space where students felt comfortable with that level of interaction within the classroom setting.

In any setting, whether large or small groups, all voices must be heard. Naturally, some voices may appear more dominant than others, but it is vital that no one be silenced or even marginalized. If one of a teacher’s goals is to help students be a part of a more democratic society, then democracy within the group’s conversations must be central in the construct of the critical interactions. Therefore, a teacher should have in place some group norms, most likely co-constructed by the group of readers, to help mediate autonomous interactions. The readers, their membership, and their insights are what will drive the critical event, so a teacher who is planning a critical experience within a realistic classroom setting may need to anticipate what they know about their students coupled with the considerations mentioned in this discussion to optimize the readers’ critical experiences.

Implications for Future Research

Critical Questions

My participants revealed their critical stances through their questions. The questions were not directed to the researcher, but to the group as a natural part of the dialogue. My field notes as well as the transcripts noted the questions were never answered by or responded to by the group, but more lingered in the air. When responding to the White Socks Only book, Maricarly asked, “Do you think White people started rumors about the Black people?” She later added to her thoughts about White people starting rumors about Black people when they were discussing the White man beating the Black people with his belt. She said, “. . . the person who
started the rumor didn’t start the rumor he would be beaten just like the little girl.” Melissa later said, “It’s like in life when rumors get started and all of us are scared.”

When discussing the Freedom Summer book, Lily asked a critical question regarding the Black work crew that was doing their job filling up the pool with tar and cement. She asked, “I think the workers felt sad because in the day they can use it (the pool) but they had to put tar in it and why would the boss pick them knowing that they would be sad? The question just lingered in the air as I do not think the participants had the global understanding of the power struggles to understand the significance of why the workers were Black who had to fill up the pool.

Laman (2006) found that discussion as a result of a read-aloud contributed to an induced tension and within that tension is where expansion of the readers’ understandings occurs. As a researcher, I wonder if the groups’ silence towards directly responding to these critical questions may have created a tension, thus a space where a new understanding was born. Rosenblatt (2004) when describing the reader response theory talks about an evocation as a stream of consciousness. The evocation connects the reader to prior knowledge where the reader either accepts or rejects the idea or even begins to question the idea. Is it possible that the unanswered critical questions are a space where the participants were accepting, rejecting, or questioning its essence?

Student Reflections Related to Participation

One of my participants who identifies herself as White, seemed rather quiet our first two sessions. When the other girls would take a restroom break and leave the room, she seemed to hang behind and want to have a private conversation with me about the book we were exploring that evening. In later sessions she did not exhibit that behavior. As I was reflecting on each session, her behavior made me wonder if she was feeling uncomfortable reading and discussing
characters representing White people being characterized as perpetrators. When I met with the participants and their parents, I made it clear in my presentation that at any time that any participant was uncomfortable, she was permitted to leave the setting as there was a friend of mine acting as a research assistant who would be positioned outside of the conference room. Wondering if the participant was feeling uncomfortable, I slipped it into our discussion as we began each session and they were enjoying dinner with the group as well as the acting research assistant. The participant never exercised her right to leave. As a researcher it made me wonder if that idea should be considered in future research. Should future researchers working with elementary-age readers that participate in a critical examination of social justice events include a piece that allows participants to reflect on their participation?

Using a Critical Stance with Contemporary Stories of Social Injustice

Just as I sought in the current study to offer another path for young readers to explore critical literacy (Bolgatz, 2005) and a chance to dig deeper and discuss positions of power within an issue (Fain, 2008), there is still a need for more opportunities for student readers to look at positions of power. Botelho and Rudman (2009) suggest “power is an under-explored theoretical and social construct” (p. 114). The idea of juxtaposing a text with a contemporary event of social injustice is a valuable critical experience for student readers. As a researcher and teacher, what I find challenging is finding the right text describing a contemporary issue; one written for the elementary reader to understand. In regards to a more contemporary issue, a teacher may need to rely on a newspaper, magazine, or internet article written for an adult reader. When the teacher must translate or restate the prose in which the issue is embedded, then the text or the message of the text can be altered. Finding the text appropriate for the elementary age reader is crucial for the critical event to be substantial. That being said, I believe that a question that could
foster future research might be: In light of the powerful potential of critical multicultural analysis of texts by researchers, how can we continue exploring the use of CMA in classrooms with students?

Conclusion

This study gained insight to the perspectives of urban elementary age girls when looking at characters of books that depict social injustice. These girls whose voices were already strong grew louder, more confident, and more critical through participating in this critical literacy event. These girls who by nature of attending an urban school district are subjected to learning in buildings that are not well maintained lacking proper heat and cooling, in buildings that are housing more students for which it was originally built, lacking enough technology, and being subjected to a curriculum that is more remedial than progressive. Yet these same girls will be our agents of change; they will challenge the status quo. These girls after being asked to explain multiple perspectives or both sides of an issue, I hope, will continue to question and analyze their worlds and continue reading the words while reading the world (Freire, 1970).

My journey through critical literacy is at a beginning stage. The current study was one of the first experiences where I gave up some control and allowed the students to take the reins; a space where the students did more talking than I did. I see that my next step lies in my beliefs described as this study’s instructional implications. I believe that I may be able to impact teachers through sharing this experience and my findings. I am certain that teacher training in critical literacy theory and practice coupled with children’s literature is a need in our field.
APPENDIX A

UNT IRB APPROVAL
December 14, 2015

Supervising Investigator: Dr. Janelle Mathis
Student Investigator: Deanne Paiva
Department of Teacher Education and Administration
University of North Texas

Re: Human Subjects Application No. 15510

Dear Dr. Mathis:

As permitted by federal law and regulations governing the use of human subjects in research projects (45 CFR 46), the UNT Institutional Review Board has reviewed your proposed project titled “Urban Elementary-age Students’ Perceptions of Characters’ Roles within Texts Depicting Historical Social Justice Events.” The risks inherent in this research are minimal, and the potential benefits to the subject outweigh those risks. The submitted protocol is hereby approved for the use of human subjects in this study. Federal Policy 45 CFR 46.109(e) stipulates that IRB approval is for one year only, December 14, 2015 to December 13, 2016.

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

It is your responsibility according to U.S. Department of Health and Human Services regulations to submit annual and terminal progress reports to the IRB for this project. The IRB must also review this project prior to any modifications. If continuing review is not granted before December 13, 2016, IRB approval of this research expires on that date.

Please contact Shelia Bourns, Research Compliance Analyst at extension 4643 if you wish to make changes or need additional information.

Sincerely,

[Redacted]

Chad R. Trulson, Ph.D.
Professor
Department of Criminal Justice
Chair, Institutional Review Board

CT/sb

UNIVERSITY OF NORTH TEXAS
1155 Union Circle #310979 Denton, Texas 76203-5017
940.369.4643 940.369.7486 fax www.research.unt.edu
APPENDIX B

INFORMED CONSENT FORMS – PARTICIPANTS’ PARENTS and PARTICIPANTS
Informed Consent Form

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

Title of Study: Urban elementary-age students’ perceptions of characters’ roles within texts depicting historical social justice events.

Student Investigator: Deanne Paiva, University of North Texas (UNT) Department Teacher Education and Administration.

Supervising Investigator: Janelle Mathis Ph. D., University of North Texas (UNT) Department of Teacher Education and Administration.

Purpose of the Study: You are being asked to allow your child to participate in a research study which involves discussing the characters in children’s literature and newspaper articles that depicts real events of social justice in the United States.

Study Procedures: Your child will be asked to discuss the roles the characters played in the event of social justice depicted in children’s literature that will take about five-six evenings for about 2 or 2 1/2 hours each evening for a total of about 10-12 hours of your child’s time. Your child will complete a discussion tool (attached) and then the researcher will audio-record the group discussion about the book. Please review the attached a list of literature that will be used.

Foreseeable Risks: The potential risks involved in this study are that your child may not be familiar with the events of social justice and may be surprised or even uncomfortable with the unfair treatment of the characters or characters belonging to a specific cultural group. Each book represents the characters overcoming the unfair treatment in a positive way. If a participant becomes uncomfortable or unable to remain in the session, then the participant may leave the session and the student researcher will contact the participant’s parents. An adult peer of the researcher will be present at each session to help facilitate any need beyond the conference room.

Benefits to the Subjects or Others: The project may benefit your child by informing her of historical events of social justice in the safe space of a children’s book and have the opportunity to discuss her feelings about the even: and book characters with peers. Your child may also benefit from reading how a character overcame his/her unfair treatment in a positive way. We also hope to inform the educational community of effective ways in which to use books of historical events of social justice with elementary-age children.

Compensation for Participants: Your child will receive no monetary compensation, but is invited to enjoy dinner provided by the researcher as part of the dinnertime evening setting of the session.

Office of Research Integrity & Compliance
University of North Texas
Last Updated: July 11, 2011

Page 1 of 3
Procedures for Maintaining Confidentiality of Research Records: The researcher will use pseudonyms for all of the participants and will not use the city's name or residential area common to all of the participants. The student researcher will maintain the records related to this study in a locked file at the University of North Texas. The records will be maintained in a secure setting for at least three years from the end of the published study/dissertation being May of 2019.

Questions about the Study: If you have any questions about the study, you may contact Deanne Paiva at 214-577-0490 (mobile) or 972-966-1856 (home) or dpgolions@yahoo.com. You may also contact the faculty investigator Dr. Janelle Mathis at janelle.mathis@unt.edu or 940-565-2754.

Review for the Protection of Participants: This research study has been reviewed and approved by the UNT Institutional Review Board (IRB). The UNT IRB can be contacted at (940) 565-4643 with any questions regarding the rights of research subjects.

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

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

Printed Name of Parent or Guardian

Signature of Parent or Guardian

Date

Office of Research Integrity & Compliance
University of North Texas
Last Updated: July 11, 2011
For the Student Investigator: I certify that I have reviewed the contents of this form with the parent or guardian signing above. I have explained the possible benefits and the potential risks and/or discomforts of the study. It is my opinion that the parent or guardian understood the explanation.

Signature of Student Investigator

Date

APPROVED BY THE UNT IRB
FROM 12/14/15 TO 1/13/16
Child Assent Form

You are being asked to be part of a research project being done by the University of North Texas Department of Teacher Education and Administration in the College of Education.

We will meet about six times in a conference room at the Wyndham Garden Inn at 2645 LBJ Freeway, Dallas, TX 75234.

This study involves listening to books and talking about the characters' roles in those stories.

You will be asked to complete a sheet where you describe the characters' roles and participate in a group discussion that will be recorded that will take about five-six evenings for 2 1/2 hours each for a total of 10-12 hours.

If you decide to be part of this study, please remember you can stop participating any time you want to. You will be permitted to contact your parents at any time during our sessions.

If you would like to be part of this study, please sign your name below.

______________________________
Printed Name of Child

______________________________
Signature of Child

______________________________
Signature of Student Investigator

______________________________
Date

______________________________
Date

Office of Research Integrity & Compliance
University of North Texas
Last Updated: July 11, 2011
APPENDIX C

EXAMPLES OF PARTICIPANTS’ ACTING FOR JUSTICE TEMPLATES
### Acting for Justice

**TARGET** | **ALLY**
---|---
Little Girl | chicken
other Black people | man
Old black women from church

**Bystander** | **Perpetrator**
---|---
Old Black Woman from | White man
white people
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>TARGET</th>
<th>ALLY</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Sylvia</td>
<td>Aunt Soledad</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parents,</td>
<td>Truck Driver</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>brother,</td>
<td>Lawyer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>parents</td>
<td>Parents</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Sylvia Parents</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BYSTANDER</td>
<td>PERPETRATOR</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cousins</td>
<td>white Boy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>school secretary</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>superintendent</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Mr. Kent</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### Acting for Justice

#### TARGET

- 4 friends
- More students

#### ALLY

- Some white students
- JFK: LBJ
- Ella Baker

#### BYSTANDER

- People got scared
- White customers
- Police officer

#### PERPETRATOR

- Police
- Angry people
- Manager
- Waitress
### Acting for Justice

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>TARGET</th>
<th>ALLY</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>John Henry</td>
<td>Joe Eaton</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>BYSTANDER</th>
<th>PERPETRATOR</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Daddy</td>
<td>Workers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maria</td>
<td>Mr. Mason</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Will Rogers</td>
<td>Will Rogers</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Residents at Farmersville meeting greet Muslim cemetery plan with distrust
APPENDIX D
CODING GLOSSARY
Data Analysis Codes

I. First Cycle of Coding

Versus Coding- A coding method that allows the researcher to analyze dialogue that is “discerning the conflicting power issues among constituents and stakeholders (as) an important diagnostic for initiating and facilitating positive social change,” (Saldana, 2013, p116).

Primary Stakeholder (PS) A participant mentions a character who is a stakeholder within the issue or a character’s actions.

   Example: “The white man said ‘don’t you know how to read’ and then ‘I’m going to whip you’”

Perceptions/Actions (PA) A participant described how she perceived the action or issue.

   Example: (After the book describes the White Man as angry and snorting and with a red face) “He deserved that.”

Issue (IS) A participant makes a statement directly related to an issue.

   Example: “The first students are the target and more students are the people trying to stand up for them because those students knew it was wrong for them to not get served.”

II. Second Cycle of Coding

Highlight text in pink that spoke directly to the books or the newspaper article.

Highlight in text in yellow when a participant spoke about ideas outside of the books or newspaper article.

Media-Influenced (M) A participant makes a statement about an image on television, a movie, or any print media.

   Example: “I saw this part when the guy was jacking her down and then he tried to push her.”

Personal Experience (PE) A participant makes a statement that tells a story of a personal experience.

   Example: “My sister was saying that there was these pools like private pools like at my apartments and I was like what? We always go to the pool and I hope nothing happens to us because all of us are mostly the same but some of us are different because by our skin color.”
Life Lessons (LL) A participant makes a statement that seems like a lesson she has heard or learned through life experiences.

Example: “Parents want their kids to have a good future. So if they put their kids in another school it affects their students’ future.

III. Third Cycle of Coding

Oppression (O), Power (P), Change of Power (C)

Oppression through physical force (OPF)

Example: “She was pushed to the ground.”

Oppression by verbal interaction (OVI)

Example: “…when the man said ‘Don’t you know how to read?’…”

Oppression through fear (OF)

Example: “…the parents who couldn’t sign up because they were afraid to lose their jobs.”

Oppression by law or legislation (OL)

Example: “…when his friend could go to the pool he had to stay outside because of his skin color…”

Power through physical force (PPF)

Example: “…when the man said ‘I’m going to whip you’…”

Power by verbal interaction (PVI)

Example: “He (the superintendent) was saying these are the rules Mexicans can’t come to school, so the school secretary was doing the same thing, too.”

Power by fear (PF)

Example: “They were afraid that if they moved they would get whupped even more.”

Power through law or legislation (PL)

Example: “…his parents told him that (the implication of enforcing the new civil rights law) because they want their son to be happy and his friend have freedom.”
Discrimination because of skin color (DSC)

Example: “The young boy saying (to Sylvia) to get out of our school. You’re not white…”

Discrimination because of membership to a cultural group specifically Mexican (DM)

Example: “…and Mr. Kent was saying big lies about them that weren’t even true…so that he wouldn’t have to see Mexicans again.”

Change or shift in power because of solidarity (CS)

Example: “the other people were standing up for the little girl because older people who cared they want to stand up for little kids because little kids can help our future.”

Change or shift in power because of myth or legend (CM)

Example:

Change or shift in power because of law or legislation (CL)

Example: “…then they wouldn’t have realized that they needed to fight for it so they can gets what right.”

IV. Fourth Cycle of Coding

Questions answered by peers (QAP)

Example: “I just don’t understand why they did that (filled the pool with tar and cement)?

Questions answered by the researcher (QAR)

Example: “What does that word mean?”

Questions that were never answered (QU)

Example: “Do you think white people started rumors about black people?”

Questions for Clarification (QC)

Example: “What does embalm mean?”

Questions that asked an “I wonder…?” (QW)

Example: “I think the workers felt sad because in the day they can use it (the pool) but they had to put tar in it and why would the boss pick them knowing that they would be sad?”
REFERENCES


*Journal of Literacy Research, 29*, 73-104.


